Qualifications Frameworks for trust, transparency and diversity – TPG A 2
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Passporting of Qualifications – can the EQF alone suffice?

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...some history...

Way back in October 1994, Malta hosted the Council of Europe's Higher Education and Research Committee's Forum Role Conference. The central theme was "Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications: Challenges for the next Decade"

- The Path to the Lisbon Recognition Convention: The structural recognition standards discussed at the Malta forum directly shaped the drafting of the pivotal Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997)
- For Malta, the establishment of the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (MQRIC) (2002)
- Malta Qualification Framework (MQF) (2007)

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MALTA QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

European Qualification Framework - EQF

Main Purpose

- Improve transparency
- Improve comparability
- Improve portability of qualifications
- Facilitate mobility of learners and workers across Europe

National Qualification Framework - NQF

Main Purpose

- Determine where qualifications sit within the national education system and are typically established through national legislation and regulatory frameworks

How we use the EQF & NQF daily?

EQF:

Principal mechanism through which academic achievements can be understood and compared across jurisdictions

NQF:

Many referenced to the EQF. The structure and level descriptors of these national frameworks are frequently aligned with, and in some cases closely mirror, those of the EQF

Challange:

Can the EQF can be considered a form of academic "passporting" mechanism and whether qualifications referenced to the EQF should enjoy stronger recognition across participating countries than is currently the case?

EQF vs NQF - differences

EQF	NQF
European meta-framework	National framework
8 common reference levels	National levels defined by the country
Facilitates comparison	Classifies qualifications within the country
Does not award qualifications	Qualifications are placed in the framework nationally
European reference point	Domestic legal instrument
Voluntary referencing mechanism	Directly embedded in national governance

Different Legal Regimes – EQF

The **EQF** is established though a Council Recommendation of 23 April 2008, later replaced by (2017/C 189/03) 22 May 2017.

Soft-law instrument - not directly binding

- **EQF** itself does not confer legal recognition.
- Can the **EQF** level alone oblige a university or authority to recognise a qualification?
- It provides a trusted reference point.



Different Legal Regimes - NQF

NQFs derive authority from:

- National laws
- National Referencing Reports
- National qualification authorities



Direct legal effect

Territorial Jurisdiction

EQF:

- Operates across anticipating European, Near East - 41countries. Includes EU Member States plus several EEA, candidate and partner countries.
- The **EQF** currently supports cooperation among more than 40 European countries.

NQF:

- Applies only within the territory of the specific country.
- Managed by national authorities.
- Determines national level placement and qualification status
- Extra territorial effect is not binding or enforceable

Limitations

- Both the **EQF** and **NQF** fundamentally considered as tool for **referencing, not recognition** (transnationally)
- **EQF** vs **QF-EHEA:**

EQF:

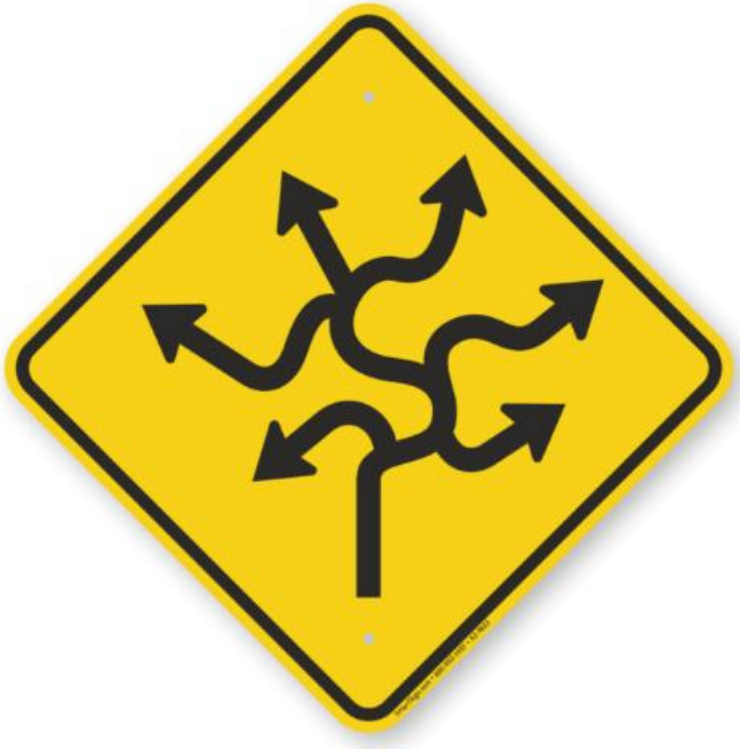
Covers all education and training

EQF	QF-EHEA
Referencing	Self-certification
Led through EQF criteria	Led through Bologna criteria
Focus on EQF levels 1-8	Focus on higher education cycles
European Commission/EQF structures	Bologna Process structures

QF-EHEA:

Covers higher education cycles:

- Short Cycle
- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctorate



As an Authority, are we legally required to recognise the EQF level assigned by another country?

What is Passporting

A passport is a document that provides its holder with a legally recognised identity, guaranteed by the issuing State and respected by the receiving jurisdiction.



Mechanism that allows an entity authorised in one Member State to operate throughout other participating jurisdictions without requiring separate national licences/re-authorisation.



Passporting principles for operation:

- An institution licensed in one State is considered fit to operate elsewhere.
- The host country accepts the regulatory judgement of the home country.
- The institution does not need to start the approval process from scratch.
- Oversight remains primarily with the home regulator.
- Information is exchanged through trusted regulatory networks.

The system rests on three foundations:

1. Mutual Trust
Regulators trust that the standards applied by another regulator are sufficiently robust.

2. Comparable Standards
Common rules ensure that licences mean approximately the same thing everywhere.

3. Shared Information Infrastructure
Authorities exchange reliable information about licences, supervision and compliance.

Recognition is based on trust, transparency and common standards rather than repeated assessment. This will facilitate Automatic Recognition, which at present is hampered with trust issues.

Can a similar principle be identified within the EHEA?

Can academic qualifications referenced to **EQF**, circulate throughout Europe in a manner analogous to ‘passportable’ services….



….or does recognition remain fundamentally a national matter despite the existence of common European frameworks?

Main changes

1. Know and Trust the Governance Structure and Regulators

Public Access to regulatory databases

Current system:

- ESG Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
- National Qualifications Frameworks
- ENIC-NARIC databases
- EQF referencing
- EQAR register
- QF-EHEA self-certification
- Europass Infrastructure

2. Acceptance - unless established specific criteria exists to refuse recognition

The Lisbon Recognition Convention:

qualifications should be recognised unless substantial differences can be demonstrated.

Outcome:

Passporting will likely favour:

- recognition becomes automatic or semi-automatic
- refusal requires referenceable justification
- Appealable at State and supra-State level
- Substantial differences less relevant at this stage, except for TCNs qualifications

3. Common Reference Framework

EQF and/or **QF-EHEA** need to be used if Passporting is the final objective. **NQF** can be used along side.



4. Home Authority Principle

The home regulator carries primary responsibility of determining status through the assignment of the **EQF**.

The country that awards the qualification becomes the principal source of assurance regarding:

- level
- status
- accreditation
- learning outcomes

The receiving country would rely more heavily on that judgement.

If irregularities are suspected in the home regulator, receiving country can request clarification from issuing authority, or report to governance structures

5. Ownership of process by issuing countries, and certificate holders

An **EQF** passporting-inspired system would allow:

- Immediate recognition decisions
- One simple system for everyone

Mechanism:

- Physical certificates?
- Europass digital credentials?
- blockchain-based credential ecosystems?
- digital Qualification Attestations?

Final objective is not the format, but the process that will give the **EQF** passporting power. Leads to Automatic Recognition, between ENIC-NARICs and others

Thank you