# EQF-Ref
# Wp3: EQF Referencing Process – Exchange of Experience Austria

September 2009

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## 1. Introduction

This report has been written in the context of the EU project EQF-Ref (www.EQF-Ref.eu)[1], which aims at facilitating communication between the partner countries in order to enhance learning from each other and to develop 'mutual trust' for referencing qualifications levels to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This case study will describe the Austrian strategy for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF.

Austria's National Qualifications Framework (NQF) development process started after the EQF consultation process in 2006. Many responses tacitly assumed the development of an Austrian NQF. The implementation of the EQF was also associated with positive expectations for structural reforms in the Austrian educational system. The first steps towards the development of the NQF were taken in 2006, a NQF consultation paper was prepared in 2007 and, in 2008, results of a consultation process were presented in a conference.

Since a political strategy paper defining the further steps in the NQF development process is still in preparation, this report is mainly based on the NQF consultation document, the report analysing the results of the consultation process, the results of 'NQF pilot projects' and the results of so-called 'discussion circles'[2] (status quo: September 2009). The information regarding the implementation of the EQF and the EQF referencing report is also based on an interview with a member of the 'NQF Project Group'.

## 2. NQF Development and Implementation

### 2. 1 NQF development in Austria

The General Directorate for Vocational Education and Training of Austria's Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (bm:ukk) has initiated and is coordinating the NQF development in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Science and Research (bm:wf), which is in charge of higher education. Stakeholders are mainly involved via two working groups set up in the context of the NQF development process:

- In 2006, a project group for the NQF development was set up (NQF Project Group): It includes representatives from the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research. The group coordinates NQF agendas within both ministries and is responsible for strategic planning, commissioning research studies and communication with stakeholders.
- At the beginning of 2007, a 'National Steering Group' was initiated. It is a decisionmaking body that includes 23 members from all relevant ministries, social partners and provinces (*Länder*). Because they are in charge of qualifications development, validation and certification processes in different subsystems and sectors, their main task is to involve stakeholders from their sphere of influence into the NQF development.

The NQF development process is organised into three strands: formal qualifications, qualifications acquired in non-formal learning (for example, in adult education institutions outside the formal education and training system) and informal learning.

The NQF development process started with a 'fact-finding phase' (February to October 2007), which was particularly dedicated to foster discussion, to gather information, to work on the relevant research issues and to produce a proposal for the NQF consultation paper.[3] A national consultation process was conducted between January 2008 and the end of June 2008. In the following months, the approximately 270 responses from stakeholders were analysed. In November 2008, the expert team responsible for this analysis presented its conclusions and recommendations to the national steering group.[4] The consultation process resulted in a recommendation to implement an Austrian NQF. Based on these results and further discussions, the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research are preparing a policy paper to devise the strategy for the Austrian NQF implementation.

In the consultation paper (bm:ukk & bm:wf 2008), the time frame for developing and implementing the NQF was described according to the implementation of the EQF: By the end of 2010, all qualifications of the formal qualifications system should finally be allocated to the Austrian NQF. At the same time, initial steps are to be made related to qualifications in the non-formal and informal sector, a 'National Coordination Unit' is to be established and basic framework conditions (including organisation) are to be decided.

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[3] The commitment for developing a NQF in Austria is also included in the governmental agreement of 24 November 2008: 'Die Umsetzung des Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmens soll die Transparenz formal und nonformal erworbener Qualifikationen und damit die Durchlässigkeit des gesamten Bildungswesens national und europaweit gemäß den Leitlinien des Europäischen Qualifikationsrahmens fördern' (Regierungsprogramm 2008-2013, 212).

[4] The report (Konsolidierung der Stellungnahme zum Konsultationspapier- Aff et al. 2008) is available at the website of the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (www.bmukk.gv.at/europa/nqr/nqr_sn.xml).

## 2.2 Aims of the Austrian NQF

The Austrian NQF primarily aims to map all obtainable national qualifications and present them in relation to each other and to make explicit the implicit levels of the Austrian qualification system. The NQF should help make Austrian qualifications better understood and comparable in Europe.

The main objectives are:
- Facilitating transparent referencing of Austrian qualifications to EQF;
- Enhancing transparency and comparability of qualifications;
- Strengthening the understanding of Austrian qualifications abroad (internationally);
- Improving permeability between VET and HE;
- Reinforcing the use of learning outcomes in standard settings, curricula and assessments;
- Supporting lifelong learning and enabling stronger links between the adult learning sector and the formal education and training system;
- Recognising broader range of learning forms (including non-formal and informal learning).

## 2.3 Design features

*Orientation or Regulation:*
According to the NQF consultation document (bm:ukk & bm:wf 2008), the Austrian NQF should have a guiding function (in contrast to a regulatory framework model that would provide specific recognition and validation mechanisms and rigidly define legal access to programmes). The NQF should enable citizens to compare qualifications in an overall picture of qualifications and to organise continuing education activities. However, there is a need to further elaborate the concept of 'guiding function' as well as the mid-term and long-term implications. In particular, stakeholders from the higher education sector are concerned that the NQF might, in the long term, become a regulatory framework.

*Scope*
The NQF consultation document (bm:ukk & bm:wf 2008) notes the intention to develop and implement a common, complete and comprehensive NQF in Austria that should do more than combine individual sub-frameworks. The NQF should encompass all forms of learning and all sectors of education (including general education, higher education, adult education, further education and vocational education and training). The NQF consultation document proposed developing a NQF with eight levels.

*Level descriptors*
The NQF consultation paper proposed to use the EQF descriptors, based on knowledge, skills and competence, as a starting point to develop the NQF (for more information see part 3.2).

## 2.4 Challenges and open questions

The report analysing the feedback of the stakeholders in the consultation process identifies a number of challenges and open questions for the further NQF development and implementation process. The statements collected from different groups of stakeholders clearly show that different values, interests and expectations are formulated and are therefore influencing the NQF development process. The following paragraphs summarise some of the open questions and challenges for the NQF development and implementation process:
- The further development process needs clear policy decisions related to the aims and functions of the Austrian NQF. For example, should the NQF only be used for making visible the existing

qualifications structures (transparency, 'guiding function') or should the NQF also be used as a driver for national reforms?

- Furthermore, the short-term and medium-term implications of developing an NQF have to be discussed.
- Also, the further involvement of stakeholders has to be discussed and decided: Who has to be involved in what way? How can ownership of the NQF and commitment be established?
- In particular, stakeholders from the higher education area stressed that the relationship with the Bologna Process and the qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area needs to be clarified.
- Further development is also needed in relation to the concept of 'learning outcomes': this would include elaborating concepts and methods for describing learning outcomes, valid methods for evaluating and validating learning outcomes as well as adequate quality assurance measures. The open question remains of how to balance the approaches between a learning-outcomes orientation and an input orientation.
- Many statements to the consultation document discussed the principle of 'equivalence but not similarity' of qualifications allocated to the same NQF level. Further clarification and discussions related to this principle are needed. In particular, its consequences and implications should be discussed for such areas as the labour market, the educational system and collective agreements/salaries.
- Another topic that needs to be addressed is the classification of qualifications (allocation to levels). The open questions in this context include:
  - How to understand and read the descriptors table?
  - How to apply the principle of 'best fit'?
  - What kind of qualifications shall or shall not be included in the Austrian NQF?
    It is still an open question whether and how partial qualifications will be included in the NQF. The focus will probably be on a holistic view of qualifications: partial qualifications should be linked to full qualifications.
  - How will the differences of qualifications (types) be defined?
    An important issue related to the NQF is the definition of types of qualifications. Therefore, an additional task in the NQF development process was to propose categories for a typology of qualifications (for example, according to their legal base, acquisition or scope) and structure national qualifications according to these categories. This typology could serve as a basis for the decision on which types of qualifications should or should not be included in the NQF.
  - Do we need different procedures to allocate different types of qualifications to the NQF?
  - What kind of organisational structure(s) is/are needed?
  - What is a realistic timeframe for this process?

# 3. EQF Implementation

## 3.1 General information

The NQF consultation document (bm:ukk & bm:wf 2008) proposed to use the EQF descriptors table as a starting hypothesis for a national descriptors table and thus as the basis for further NQF development. Therefore, according to ongoing discussions, the process for developing the Austrian NQF may have two steps:

- First step: For the eight levels of the EQF descriptors, develop additional explanations ('explanatory table') to be known as 'guidelines and procedural principles for the classification of

qualifications' (for example, clarifying key terms and formulations in the EQF table and principles and criteria for allocating qualifications to levels). The learning outcomes associated with each level should also be illustrated by using selected qualifications as a kind of reference (*Referenzqualifikationen*);

- Second step: The additional explanations and allocation guidelines will be tested in pilot projects.
- Third step: Allocate qualifications from the formal system to the NQF levels based on the EQF descriptors and the further information developed in the first step.

The referencing of the NQF levels to the EQF levels will then be a quite simple procedure: Since the EQF descriptors table should also be used for the Austrian NQF, the referencing of the NQF to the EQF will probably be based mainly on the information given in the 'explanatory table/allocation guidelines'.

This approach (as well as the possible content of such an 'explanatory table') is still being discussed. Currently, 'discussion circles' are being organised to further elaborate and discuss these issues and national NQF pilot projects were being conducted to test this approach. These pilot projects were commissioned by the bm:ukk and conducted during the consultation process (for the tourism sector and for the construction sector)[5] or following the consultation (for the electrical engineering sector)[6]. In the pilot projects, the EQF level descriptors were discussed in joint working groups with experts from a certain field (for example, tourism) but from different segments of the qualifications system (such as VET, higher education, adult education). The working groups sought to map selected qualifications to the EQF descriptors table and to allocate them to levels. They also discussed whether the EQF descriptors are sufficient to classify qualifications in Austria or whether additional information is necessary. They concluded that the EQF descriptors generally appear to be suitable for the classification of qualifications despite – or because of – the considerable scope for interpretation.

Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that Austria participates in the Bologna process but has not yet started the process of 'self certification' with the Qualification Framework of the Higher Education Area.

A political decision on the future strategy for the NQF development and EQF implementation in Austria should be available by the end of 2009.

### 3.2 'Experiences and available results'

The national NQF pilot projects began by referencing selected qualifications to the EQF levels (see 3.1). Austrian partners took similar approaches in EQF projects (commissioned by the European Commission in the framework of the Lifelong Learning programme). The experiences indicate that the EQF descriptors are in principle suitable for classifying qualifications. However, some open questions still exist and need to be clarified. For example, the crucial questions include: What does the principle of 'equivalence' of qualifications allocated to the same level mean? How can the principle be applied? And, what are the implications of applying the principle?

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[5] Cf. Luomi-Messerer & Lengauer 2009; Tritscher-Archan 2009a. Information about the two pilot projects was also published in Cedefop Info 3/2008 (Luomi-Messerer & Tritscher-Archan 2008). Another pilot project was conducted in the field of non-medical health professions (Schlögl 2009).
[6] Cf. Tritscher-Archan 2009b.

Furthermore, as the learning outcomes associated with a qualification are better documented in the qualification descriptions, then it becomes easier to match the EQF descriptors and assigning qualifications to a particular level. The existing qualification descriptions in Austria are, however, organized very differently and thus provide quite varied and often only very limited arguments for assigning a learning outcome to a particular level. In any event, Austria needs to further develop qualifications descriptions that are oriented towards learning outcomes.

### 3.3 Information related to the criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF developed by the EQF Advisory Group

Since the political strategy for further development of the NQF is still missing, the information related to the criteria and procedures is mainly based on expectations for future developments and assumptions based on already existing structures and developments.

> *Criterion 1*
> The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.

In Austria, different ministries and resorts within these ministries are responsible for the different qualifications in the formal system. Some examples include:

- The highest national body for school matters (including also higher education institutes for teacher training – *Pädagogische Hochschulen*) is the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, which is also responsible for the school-based part of the apprenticeship training.
- The company-based part of apprenticeship training falls within the competence of the Federal Ministry of Economics, Family and Youth but also social partners play an important role in this context (for example, representatives of employers' and employees' organisations are involved in the Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship, the Regional Advisory Boards on Apprenticeship or the Regional Apprenticeship offices).
- The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management is responsible for establishing and maintaining the colleges of agriculture and forestry (whereas the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture has direct responsibility for the educational aspects of these colleges, such as the design of framework curricula and college inspections).
- The Federal Ministry of Health is responsible for creating the legal basis for the training of health professionals other than doctors.
- The accreditation of *Fachhochschul* courses (universities of applied science) has to be approved by the Federal Ministry of Science and Research. Universities also fall within the sphere of competence of this ministry.
- Social partners and the provinces (*Länder*) are also responsible for certain aspects in the formal qualifications system.

All these responsible bodies will, within their sphere of competence, have to be involved in allocating qualifications to the levels of the Austrian NQF. However, one ministry will probably be responsible for the overall organisation of this process (similar to the National Steering Group, which is composed of representatives of all ministries, social partners and provinces and is coordinated by the General Directorate for Vocational Education and Training of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture). The NQF coordination unit, which will also serve as the EQF National Coordination Point, will probably be established outside of, but under, the supervisory control of this ministry.

The EQF National Coordination Point (NCP) has not been designated yet. Currently, it is represented by a member of the 'NQF project group', who also belongs to the EQF Advisory Group (Eduard Staudecker, bm:ukk - department 'European Union and International Issues in VET'). It will probably be established formally in 2010.

The National Steering Group will presumably be transformed into a 'referencing committee'.

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*Criterion 2*
There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework.

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As mentioned above (see 3.1), the Austrian NQF will – according to current plans – be composed of eight levels and the EQF level descriptors will be used as the basis for the NQF level descriptors. Therefore, the EQF referencing process will be closely linked to the process of allocating qualifications to the Austrian NQF.

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*Criterion 3*
The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems.

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*Principle and objective of learning outcomes*
In principle, qualifications are to be included in and assigned to the NQF based on both the level of learning outcomes achieved and their relevance for the employment market. (Input factors will still be relevant – for example, for steering the educational system – but probably not for referencing qualifications to the NQF.) The consultation document (bm:ukk & bm:wf 2008) suggests strengthening and further developing the learning-outcomes approach in the Austrian qualifications system (because it will be central to the positioning of qualifications on the NQF) and, at the same time, provide the possibility of classifying qualifications that currently are only partly oriented towards learning outcomes. Therefore, guidelines and procedural principles need to be developed to classify qualifications that also address this issue.

Further clarification is needed on the concepts, assessment methodologies and tools related to the learning-outcomes approach. A central question to be answered in the near future is how to balance between input factors and outcome. However, many qualifications are already oriented towards learning outcomes, although the approach has not been applied consistently across all sectors and institutions. Some examples are described in Annex 1.

*Arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning*
Austria has no explicit national strategy on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFL-IFL), but the NQF currently under development gives high importance to the general demand for integrating non-formally and informally acquired qualifications. Within this NQF, these learning contexts should be given basically the same significance as formal learning processes. However, because of the relatively new procedures and methods, a different time specification is laid down here. (Tritscher-Archan & Mayr [eds.] 2008, 30). This different time frame is reflected in the division of the NQF development process into three strands or 'corridors' ('sectors of learning'). The three corridors include:

- Corridor 1: formal qualifications system;
- Corridor 2: non-formal learning (for example, in adult education institutions);
- Corridor 3: informal learning.

The development work in these three sectors is done simultaneously and pays attention to synergies. The three-corridor approach has an important effect on when and what qualifications are classified in the NQF. At the beginning, the focus of allocating qualifications to the NQF will be on the formal qualifications system but strategies are also being developed also for the other corridors. For example, in 2009, a proposal for a strategy paper related to Corridor 2 was prepared by a thematic working group and will probably be discussed by the NQF Steering Group. It can be assumed that the NQF could provide the opportunity to make more visible the non-formal and informal learning in different sectors; however, assessment and validation processes (and sometimes also the relevant qualifications) would need to be created first.

*Credit systems*
The higher education sector has implemented the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) according to the Bologna process. So far, the other sectors of the Austrian qualifications system do not have credit systems. The European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is not yet implemented in Austria.

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*Criterion 4*
The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.

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Transparency should result from an 'explanatory table' with clear guidelines and criteria for the allocation of qualifications to the NQF. The *Referenzqualifikationen* (selected qualifications allocated to the different levels as a kind of reference for the learning outcomes associated with each level) must be described in terms of learning outcomes. The allocation of all other qualifications will also be based on the principle of learning outcomes. It can be expected that the following procedure to include qualifications in the NQF will be implemented:

- The responsible body for a certain qualification prepares a proposal to allocate it to a certain level. This proposal is to be based on the guidelines and criteria for the allocation of qualifications to the NQF and has to include expert's opinion. The decision for placing the qualification on this specific level has to be explained and justified in a comprehensive way.
- The proposal will be presented and discussed in the National Steering Group. Feedback will be given that can either result in a confirmation of the proposal or a request for reconsidering this proposal (for example, by including additional statements of further experts).
- However, the responsible body for a certain qualification will probably also be responsible for the final decision on the level allocation.
- In case of a conflict situation, a decision will probably have to be made on a political level.

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*Criterion 5*
The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer (s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation).

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Manifold and partly systematic quality efforts exist in the different segments of the Austrian qualifications system. Some are directly in line with European principles for quality assurance: 'On the basis of wide public debate, a large number of projects and pilots since the mid-1990s, quality development and quality assurance have established themselves as key educational policy objectives in the school sector over the past five years. In line with the international trend, the focus in Austria has also shifted from central input control towards process and mainly output control. From this follow fundamental changes in the conception of control levels' (Tritscher-Archan & Mayr [eds.] 2008, 35). Such initiatives include, for example, the initiative Quality in Schools (Q.I.S.) or the VET Quality Initiative (QIBB).

However, the formulation of this criterion as well as the accompanying information expected is rather unclear.

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*Criterion 6*
The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.

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Since the national bodies responsible for qualifications are also responsible for quality assurance their involvement can be insured and their stated agreement will be included (see Criterion 1).

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*Criterion 7*
The referencing process shall involve international experts.

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From the very beginning of the NQF development process, there is a strong interest in Austria to discuss potential developments and strategies with other countries and to share experiences – in particular with neighbouring countries and countries with a similar education/VET dual system. Experiences related to consequences and implications of NQFs in other countries are being discussed and analysed in relation to the Austrian context as well as experiences related to the involvement of stakeholders, the (changing) roles of institutions and their responsibilities, the management of the transition and coordination process, or the ongoing maintenance (see, for example, Luomi-Messerer et al 2007). Austrian institutions actively participate in international projects and working groups at the European level and international experts have been involved in the following ways:

• Discussions in meetings with so-called 'like-minded countries' (Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Denmark);
• NQF expert group with Poland and Croatia;
• Presentations of international experts at national NQF conferences;
• Discussion of relevant issues at the 'EQF experts seminars' in December 2008 and December 2009.

International experts from this 'pool' will probably be invited to give feedback on the EQF referencing process and results.

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*Criterion 8*
The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria.

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This will probably be the responsibility of the NQF Steering Group.
However, the term 'certify' seems to be rather unclear.

The referencing report will be sent to the European Commission to inform them about the completion of the referencing process. The report will probably be published on the website of the National Coordination Point (still to be established).
The expected kind of information is not clear. Is it sufficient to have a statement confirming the intention to send the report to the Commission and to publish it at the website?

It can be assumed that relevant procedures will be initiated to ensure that all new certificates and diplomas awarded for qualifications that are allocated to the NQF will also contain the appropriate EQF level.
There will probably be European-level changes to the Europass documents based on the EQF implementation. Following these changes, probably the Austrian Europass documents will also include the appropriate NQF and EQF levels.

Conclusions:
Some of the criteria seem to be rather unclear (Criterion 8) or it is not clear what kind of information is expected to give in relation to them (Criterion 5, 9).

## 3.4 Referencing Report

*Structure and content of the EQF referencing report (besides addressing the criteria)*
The EQF referencing report should include a brief overview of the national qualifications system (maximum 10 pages). The national descriptors table as well as explanations on allocating qualifications to the levels should also be included (for example, in the annex).
The report should be available in the national language as well as in English.

*Extent of the EQF referencing report (number of pages)*
The report could have a maximum 70 pages (excluding annexes).

*Degree of details and extent of the information provided in the EQF referencing report*
*Degree of details and extent of the information that would be accepted from other countries provided in their EQF referencing report*
Criterion 2: Selected qualifications (described in learning outcomes) should be included to illustrate the learning outcomes of the respective levels.
Criterion 7: The report should also include statements of the international experts involved in the referencing report.

### 3.5 Organisation of the process for preparing the referencing report

*Organisation of the process for developing the EQF referencing report on national level*
See 3.1!

*Challenges that can be identified in this process and ways to address/overcome them*
One of the main challenges in this process and, including, of course, the process of the NQF development, is the need to involve many different national bodies responsible for distinct qualifications. Austria has no 'national qualifications authority' because different ministries have the responsibilities for qualifications. Such a process needs a very thorough coordination. At this point, it is too early to say whether a more centralised steering of the NQF process would actually be needed. However, such a centralisation would probably not fit the current structures in the Austrian qualifications system and could therefore lead to the failure of the whole process.

*Organisation of international cooperation (Should a 'pool of expert' be developed? Should countries do the EQF referencing process together? Should 'networks' be established?)*
It can be recommended to develop a 'pool' of experts experienced in referencing processes. Countries with similar structures could do the referencing together, share their experiences and, if appropriate, develop common solutions.
Some countries have already established networks (for the Austrian context see Criterion 7); such activities should be further supported.

*Organisation of feedback to the national referencing reports on the European level (Who should give feedback and in what way? How should it be taken into account on national level?)*
In principle, it should be up to the Member States to decide how they would like to receive feedback but it is recommended to organise feedback sessions on a 'peer level' (groups of Member States).

*Kind of support (related to contents and not to financial issues) that should be provided by the EC and/or the national coordination point?*
The European Commission could start to establish a 'good' platform for exchange and discussion, involving internal and external experts. Also, events providing sufficient possibilities for discussing open questions, critical points as well as good practices in the referencing process could facilitate cooperation and support the establishment of mutual trust.


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Website:
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**Annex 1**

*General education*
The educational goals for lower-level, academic secondary schools describe competences that include subject competence, self- and social competence as well as a religious-ethical-philosophical educational dimension. For some subjects, specific action competences are described in terms of subject competence, methodical competence, social and self competence.

*VET schools and colleges*
In 2005, the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture launched a project to develop educational standards for core subject areas in general and VET. The educational standards for VET schools and colleges define 'content' (subject and knowledge areas and topics with specified goals), 'action' (cognitive achievements required in the particular subjects) and additional personal and social competences related to the respective field. Four competences are described: subject-matter competence (declarative knowledge), methodological competence (procedural knowledge), social competence (ability to communicate, cooperate and interact) and personal competence (ability to guide one's own actions through self-motivation and self-control).

*Apprenticeship*
The Federal Ministry of Economics issues the training regulation for each profile in apprenticeships (dual system). It consists of the 'occupational competence profile' (*Berufsprofil*) with related activities and work descriptions and 'job profile' (*Berufsbild*) with knowledge and skills to be acquired by apprentices. The *Lehrabschlussprüfung* (final apprenticeship examination) is to assess whether the candidate has acquired the necessary skills and competences for entry to qualified work. It comprises a theoretical and a practical test. The provincial economic chambers organise master craftsperson examinations (for manual trade vocations) and examinations to prove the respective competence (for other regulated trades).

*Universities*
For study programmes at universities, the University Act (*Universitätsgesetz*) in 2002 introduced a 'qualification profile' that describes goals of learning outcomes and definitions of learning outcomes for each module. Although bachelor study programmes at universities are designed according to the Bologna Cycles, the Dublin Descriptors are not used consistently. For example, the curriculum for the bachelor study programme in electrical engineering includes factual competence, social and self-competence, whereas the competences of graduates are described according to the Dublin Descriptors. In another example, the bachelor study programme for sociology at the University of Vienna, the competences of graduates are described in terms of subject competence, methodical competence, communicative and social competence.[7]

*Universities of applied sciences*
Due to the educational mandate to offer practice-oriented courses at the higher-education level, Austrian universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*, FH) have, from their very beginning, addressed the issue of learning outcomes, albeit without explicitly using this term in the Accreditation Guidelines (FH Council 2006). Learning outcomes are implicitly reflected by the description of the connections between the vocational fields of activity, the related qualification profile and the curriculum. According to the Accreditation Guidelines, each FH degree programme has to describe the vocational fields of activity by referring to the following aspects:
   a. The main industries and examples of types of enterprises or organisations where graduates find employment shall be named.

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[7] Lassnigg/Vogtenhuber 2007

b. The positions which graduates may fill shall be specified.
c. Jobs and tasks which graduates can realistically carry out shall be specified' (FH Council 2006, 15).

The connections between the vocational fields of activity, the related qualification profile and the curriculum have to be described and these connections also must be demonstrated in the teaching concept. Although the concept of learning outcomes lies behind these regulations, the accreditation guidelines for FH programmes do not explicitly use the term 'learning outcomes' and the FH sector does not share a common understanding of this concept.