

Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2006/2002(INI)	Procedure completed
Creation of a European qualifications framework		
Subject 4.15.06 Professional qualifications, recognition of qualifications 4.40.01 European area for education, training and lifelong learning		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	 EMPL Employment and Social Affairs		27/10/2005
		PPE-DE MANN Thomas	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	 IMCO Internal Market and Consumer Protection		21/02/2006
		PPE-DE ZAPPALA' Stefano	
	 CULT Culture and Education (Associated committee)		07/02/2006
		PPE-DE GAL'A Milan	
European Commission	Commission DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture	Commissioner FIGEL' Ján	

Key events			
08/07/2005	Non-legislative basic document published	SEC(2005)0957	Summary
19/01/2006	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
19/01/2006	Referral to associated committees announced in Parliament		
11/07/2006	Vote in committee		Summary
18/07/2006	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0248/2006	
25/09/2006	Debate in Parliament		
26/09/2006	Results of vote in Parliament		
26/09/2006	Decision by Parliament	T6-0368/2006	Summary
26/09/2006	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2006/2002(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	EMPL/6/32958

Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document		SEC(2005)0957	08/07/2005	EC	Summary
Committee draft report		PE371.911	10/04/2006	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE374.182	18/05/2006	EP	
Committee opinion	CULT	PE371.943	29/05/2006	EP	
Committee opinion	IMCO	PE374.034	22/06/2006	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0248/2006	18/07/2006	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0368/2006	26/09/2006	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2006)4772	19/10/2006	EC	
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2006)5076	13/12/2006	EC	

Creation of a European qualifications framework

PURPOSE : to present a plan for a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. **CONTENT** : in March 2005 the EU Heads of States asked the Commission to examine the possible creation of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) within the context of lifelong learning. The purpose of this report is to outline the main features of a future EQF and to open a consultation process between the Commission and EU national policy-makers, social partners, stakeholders and experts.

It should be stressed that a future EQF would be developed and implemented on a voluntary basis only and would entail no legal obligations. It would be a meta-framework the purpose of which will be to increase transparency and mutual trust between educational stake-holders. The EU directive on professional qualifications adopted in June 2005 would remain the legal instrument that is binding on Member States concerning the recognition of professional qualifications in the field of the regulated professions. The development of an EQF should not be used as a tool to impose any additional requirements on the existing Directive.

In its paper the Commission proposes that a future EQF should be based on three core elements, namely:

- A set of common reference points based on eight levels.
- Reference levels supported by a range of tools and instruments addressing the needs of individual citizens. For example, an integrated European credit transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning, the Europass instrument and the Ploteus database on learning instruments.
- Awarding the EQF a set of common principles and procedures which provide guidelines for co-operation between stake-holders at the various levels. Particular focus would be given to quality assurance, validation, guidance and key responsibilities.

Regarding the eight levels, each level would be awarded a qualification based on three types of learning outcomes namely, knowledge, skills and wider competences. The learning outcomes do not include details of specific qualifications given that these are a national or sectoral responsibility.

In preparing this structure the Commission has sought to create a framework that encourages co-operation between the various actors. Given that a future EQF would be voluntary in nature and would not entail any legal obligations, its success depends on the level of commitment to the framework from the various stakeholders who operate at different levels. To optimise co-operation and mutual trust the paper proposes the establishment of a single 'National Framework of Qualifications' which in turn would be linked to a single 'National Framework to the EQF?'. Such a system would allow each country to put in place a process whereby existing qualification structures are linked to the EQF.

In presenting this paper the Commission asks all interested parties to submit their views and opinions on the future structure of a European Qualification Framework. In order for it to be a success it needs to be both relevant and credible. The views of stakeholders are therefore vital. The questions posed by the Commission to stake-holders include, inter alia:

- What is needed to make the EQF work in practice?
- Does the 8-level reference structure sufficiently capture the complexity of life-long learning in Europe?
- How can a National Qualification Framework for lifelong learning be developed?
- How can the EQF contribute to the development of mutual trust between stakeholders?

Creation of a European qualifications framework

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Thomas MANN (EPP-ED, DE) on the creation of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It welcomed the Commission's initiative on modernising, improving and reinforcing European education and training systems with a view to laying down a common reference framework for European certification systems. MEPs pointed out, however, that the EQF must serve primarily to classify certification procedures based on the outcome of vocational training and they called for "simple, workable descriptors" to be used and the number of levels reduced. They added that the competences set out in the descriptors should include knowledge not only of social and ethical issues but also of cultural issues. The EQF should also be more closely linked to the labour market and greater emphasis should be placed on improving the ability of the individual to find employment and achieving greater security for workers at the workplace.

The report said that particular attention should be paid to methods and systems of evaluating learning outcomes achieved by non-formal or informal methods, as the development of skills in the context of lifelong learning takes place in a wide range of everyday work situations. Every country should have its own national or regional qualifications framework ensuring compatibility with the EQF. MEPs stressed that the implementation of the EFQ on a voluntary basis required the support and commitment of national and sectoral stakeholders and that increased cooperation between the Member States in the context of the EFQ should result in mutual trust, thereby making a significant contribution to mobility in the European labour market. The Commission was urged to develop and propose appropriate methods and strategies for the efficient functioning of the EFQ for an appropriate trial period, an impact assessment and a supporting evaluation. Lastly, the report pointed to the importance of a wide and well-structured communication and dissemination strategy to raise awareness of the EFQ and generate interest in its benefits.

Creation of a European qualifications framework

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Thomas MANN (EPP-ED, DE) on the creation of a European Qualifications Framework. It pointed out in the resolution that one of the main tasks of the EQF must be to facilitate the transfer of qualifications between different education and training systems. This is in order to make transnational professional mobility possible and better to meet the requirements of supply and demand in the European labour market. On this basis, the Commission proposal is a correct approach, even if it does not entirely meet the requirement of a transparent qualifications framework.

Parliament called for the eight proposed reference levels of the EQF to be revised and improved. It felt that their descriptors should be expressed more concisely and comprehensibly and that it is important to distinguish clearly between the various reference levels, so that there could be a clear hierarchy of qualifications. Parliament went on to state that the competences set out in the eight-level descriptors should include knowledge not only of social and ethical, but also of cultural issues. It recalled that that the EQF must serve primarily to classify certification procedures based on the outcome of vocational training and to that end, Parliament called for simple, workable descriptors to be used and the number of levels reduced. Comparative experiments have shown that the more fragmented the levels and the more numerous the criteria, the more difficult it is to coordinate them.

There must be stronger support for common European principles on validating non-formal and informal learning processes on lifelong learning particularly regarding the acquisition of technological and scientific knowledge and skills. Parliament took the view that it is essential to pay particular attention to methods and systems of evaluating learning outcomes achieved by non-formal or informal methods.

Parliament called for every country to have its own national or regional qualifications frameworks, organised in cooperation with the responsible organisations and bodies as appropriate, ensuring compatibility with the EQF. It asked the Commission and Member States to enhance the role and structure of the National Europass Centre (NEC) and to make it easier for the NEC to fulfil its core tasks, with particular reference to the wider dissemination of the instruments directly managed by the NEC (European Curriculum Vitae, Mobility Europass) and the progressive adoption of the Europass system. The EQF can make a significant contribution to the mobility of the European labour market if the decision of a Member State to match individual national qualifications to a particular EQF level is accepted by others.

Parliament called on the Commission to revise its proposal on the basis of Parliament's observations, and to brief Parliament on the outcome of the national consultations before drawing up its final proposal.