



European Qualifications Framework PRO

Progress Report

Public Part

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Executive Summary

To make lifelong learning a reality, educational institutions, and universities in particular, have to ensure individuals, along their life, with access, continuity and progression. In this perspective it is evident now that Qualifications Framework encompassing all levels and forms of qualifications will be powerful tools by introducing a common language between all actors involved. The promoters of the EQF Pro project share this conviction. However, while the principles promoted by qualifications frameworks are suited to reduce barriers in individual learning pathways, they observe that the impact of these instruments on continuity and progression depends on the extent to which European countries accept this perspective. They observe too, for the moment, that a lot of obstacles make difficult, sometimes impossible, the development of fluid learning pathways. Regarding Higher Education, we understood from the debate between the EHEA framework and EQF that the levels 5 and 6 of EQF would be a crucial point of transition, needing the development of voluntarist policies from States and HEIs to organise a better articulation, to encourage permeability.

This intermediate level represents a challenge:

- ✚ for individuals with vocational education and training backgrounds or for candidates with a huge professional experience willing to continue in HE system, without having to restart from the beginning;
- ✚ for national authorities when elaborating their National Qualifications Framework and referring it to the European Qualifications framework;
- ✚ for employers and trade unions interested in opportunities to develop human resources;
- ✚ for educational institutions conceiving and designing programmes and seeking to provide learning opportunities in continuity to individuals;
- ✚ for European institutions or organisations that try to build a general system able to meet the future need of our society in a more challenging context.

The EQF Pro project has six objectives:

- ✚ to explore the current state of play in 10 countries (9 Member States + Russia) at the level 5 and 6;
- ✚ to develop better understanding of issues associated to the definition of a National Qualification Framework;
- ✚ to use the comparison between countries as a way to question each national situation and problematic;
- ✚ to examine the current national situation at level 5 and 6 of EQF on the basis of 25 to 30 qualifications awarded in Bank/insurance and IT sectors;
- ✚ to explore with decision makers in HEIs and ministries, with representatives from professional bodies and social partners potential propositions and recommendations;
- ✚ to elaborate a set of propositions or guidelines and to promote it to decision makers, European networks and stakeholders.

We have built our partnership in order to cover a diversity of learning cultures and traditions (for instance regarding cooperation with social partners) and a diversity of systems regarding education and training at HE level. Are involved countries with well established education and training systems (Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal and UK), countries that have started deep changes in their traditional system but are at different levels of implementation (Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovenia) and finally, as silent partner, a country trying to implement the Bologna process, using it as a conveyor for transformation.

The project is divided in two phases:

- ✚ the first phase aims at building a better understanding on how the articulation between EQF levels 5 and 6 are or not working in the different countries;
- ✚ the second phase will try to verify what it is possible to undertake on the basis of an analysis of 25 to 30 qualifications awarded by universities and other HEIs in two sectors: Bank/insurance and Information Technology. We will also discuss with European institutions, organisations and networks, and with experts these results and elaborate some recommendations.

During the first phase of the project we achieved the following tools and products:

- ✚ a glossary based on the glossary adopted by the Working Group in charge of the preparation of EQF;
- ✚ an analysis of the current situation in Europe regarding Qualifications Frameworks: EQF, NQF, sectoral frameworks, the EQF and the Directive 2005/36/EC;
- ✚ a first inventory of the qualifications envisaged by partners as potential basis for the second phase of the project;
- ✚ two grids for partners: one to analyse the situation in a particular country, another one to describe the qualifications selected for further analysis;
- ✚ a transversal analysis of the current situation in the 10 partner countries;
- ✚ an analysis of common issues arising from national situations.

The further steps of the project will be the following ones:

- ✚ An in depth analysis of the qualifications offered at level 5 and 6 in Bank/Insurance and IT domains in universities and other HE institutions selected as case studies by our partners;
- ✚ June (15-16): Management group in Poland: the objective of this meeting will be to discuss a draft report on these case studies. A second version of this report will be published after the meeting and submitted to the existing focus groups to receive their feedback and suggestions.
- ✚ September in Lille: Open seminar with around ten European experts on EQF-NQF issues and representatives of social partners to present and discuss the results of the analysis of case studies ;
- ✚ October: Production of a draft full report taking into account the remarks and contributions from experts and representatives of universities and preparation of the dissemination tools and of the dissemination event

- ✚ November (26-27): Dissemination event in Porto of the results of the project. These results will be presented and discussed with the different categories of partners identified above

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1. Project Objectives

The origin of the EQF-PRO project is linked to the apparition of discussions, debates and problems in European Union at European, national and institutional level on the implementation of the EQF, the establishment of national frameworks that have to be articulated with the EQF.

The implementation seminar in Brussels in June 2008 has clearly highlighted these debates, particularly in the Workshop 5 which explored how EQF could be used to build links between different sub-systems of education, including adult, vocational education and training and higher education.

EQF is seen as a tool to promote mobility of individuals between countries but also as a tool to facilitate lifelong learning. The eight levels of EQF cover the entire span of qualifications and this approach is supposed to reduce institutional and sectoral barriers. Progression and continuity have progressively become the key issues of the lifelong learning perspective. How can individuals develop continuous and, if possible, progressive professional and personal pathways whatever the place and the way they learn?

The challenge became crucial in the last years due to the debates between the Commission and the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) provoking a competition between the framework stemming from the Bologna process and the one stemming from the Copenhagen process. The EHEA considered that higher education in designing the BMD structure for HE education, in developing its own descriptors (the Dublin descriptors), in creating a system of credits for transfer and accumulation had done the work regarding the highest qualifications in a country and that this work had to be taken into account when establishing the European Qualifications Framework and later National Qualifications Frameworks.

This challenge is particularly sensible for the so-called “intermediate level”: EQF level 5 and the Bologna short cycle and the Bachelor level especially when designing a National Qualifications Framework. We have tried to clarify this situation in a document proposing a **state of play** enlarged to debates appeared between EQF, LMD and sectoral qualifications frameworks and the framework for regulated professions defined by the 2005 directive from the DG Internal market.

On this basis, the EQF Pro project has 6 main objectives:

- To explore the current state of play regarding the qualifications’ structure in 10 countries (9 Member States and Russia as “silent partner”) focusing on the level 5 and 6 of EQF, which is a particular crucial transition point currently in higher education in Europe.
- To develop better understanding of issues associated to the definition of a National Qualification Framework. The ambition of a NQF is to increase the coherence of national qualifications systems in order to make the individual qualifications and experience through formal, non formal and informal learning more transportable and transferable. But EHEA considers that the BMD structure already constitutes a national qualifications framework for higher

education based on three levels. So they consider, and all national higher education departments in ministries of Education relay this statement, that authorities building a NQF linked to the EQF have to take into account the HE framework. So there is a potential risk of competition between two frameworks which is likely to provoke some difficulties for continuity and progression at the levels 5 and 6.

- To use the comparison between countries as a way to review each national situation and to better identify and understand the different dimensions of the problem at European level, in order to work on relevant contributions, propositions and recommendations.
- To examine concretely the current national situation using the levels 5 and 6 of EQF to examine what is happening on 25 to 30 qualifications awarded in two sectors: Bank/insurance and IT. We have chosen these two sectors because they are asking more and more for continuity and progression due to the demand of increasing competences and to the necessity for a large part of companies in these sectors to propose concrete progressive professional pathways to their employees.
- To explore, in a second phase, with decision makers in HEIs and ministries, with representatives from professional bodies and social partners potential propositions and recommendations.
- To elaborate a set of propositions or recommendations and to promote it to decision makers, European networks and stakeholders.

The benefits for users

EQF Pro addresses different categories of potential users.

Our intention is to provide to decision makers in higher education institutions and in HE administrations a concrete overview of what is happening in institutions in their respective countries and in other European countries on the basis of existing qualifications. The objective is to make them sensitive to the issues of continuity and progression in higher education especially between sub-systems. For the moment it is evident that local and national authorities are trying first to implement the BMD structure or to defend this structure against a NQF that they esteem still a project which has to become a reality. They have not all identified the potential developments offered by qualifications frameworks conceived as a whole and they are not all ready to make changes in their educational systems. We intend to demonstrate, thanks to the case studies collected, that they are positive results in some countries which could help to imagine solutions or at least to formulate some recommendations to avoid obstacles to mobility or dead ends.

Our priority, in this project, is to reach the needs of the final users, the students and learners, but also indirectly employers. The promoters of this project and the partners involved consider that it is crucial, in a lifelong learning perspective, to guarantee now to every student or learner enrolled in a HE programme or willing to come back to a university after a period at work, continuity and progression in his or her individual professional and personal pathway along his or her life without obligation to re-start from beginning, without recognition of what they have learnt formally, non formally or informally.

This obliges HEIs to offer programmes and systems which make possible this continuity and progression, without dead-end or exclusion between subsystems, in particular between higher vocational education and training institutions and universities. So, our main target group, at this stage, will be the actors having responsibility in the construction and the management of the system: decision-makers or institutional managers working on National Qualifications Frameworks, social partners (in particular employers), rectors or boards of HEIs, who have to deal with this issue and to work on possible solutions.

Our perception is that this project may have an impact at three levels:

- First level: to provide to all actors a better understanding of the current situation at national and European level on a concrete basis. We have seen with some surprise during the first phase of the project that decision makers, social partners, and institutional managers had not all general view and estimation of the situation. They have, in general, a fragmented vision of what is happening, in most cases on what is close to them institutionally speaking.
- Second level: to analyse concretely the existing situation in 25-30 programmes provided by institutions of different educational sectors and to identify the problems likely to emerge if we would like to try to ensure to students and learners continuity and progression between institutions and subsystems.
- Third level: to take stock of best practices developed in some countries and to help other institutions to work on solutions, on new approaches.

The approach developed in this project is a bottom up approach aiming first at raising awareness of institutions on these issues, then to provide some elements of reflection or some concrete solutions to decision makers and to social partners to use the opportunity offered by the definition of National qualifications Frameworks to propose solutions avoiding confusion or rigidity.

2. Project Approach

New schedule for the project

During its first meeting, the Management Group took stock of the increased duration of the project from 18 to 24 months indicated in the contract. A new schedule has been defined giving extra time for an analysis of the national situation in partners' countries and for the identification and the collection of the descriptions of qualifications. The new schedule is attached to the confidential part of the report.

Methodologies, surveys and analysis carried out

During the first phase of this project, the consortium has decided to concentrate its work on four categories of activities:

- To come to a common understanding between partners of the European situation regarding Qualifications Frameworks. The European Parliament and the Council have adopted at the beginning of 2008 the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. Member States are invited now, on a volunteering process, to adopt by 2010 their National Qualifications Framework and to relate it to EQF. This proposition integrates the Qualification Framework elaborated by EHEA (European Higher Education Area). However, if we analyze what is concretely happening in Europe, in member States, in institutions, we understand that the problem of the articulation between levels 5 and 6 is more than a problem of technical transition. Concretely we have two EQF (one with 3 levels and one with 8 levels). This means that two networks are more or less in competition at national level. And simultaneously, economic sectors are developing their own qualifications framework that challenges EQF and NQF and regulated professions refuse to base their qualifications on EQF and NQF.
- To work on an analysis of the national situation in partners' countries regarding the EQF levels 5 and 6. This analysis has been done with the support, in nearly all countries, of a focus group involving different categories of actors, mainly representatives of higher education institutions, ministries or companies and professional bodies.
- To identify in each country qualifications at levels 5 and 6 in Bank/insurance and IT domains relevant for further analysis. The last Management Group meeting in Versailles has adopted the list of the programmes that will be analysed in depth during the second phase of the project.
- To make a transversal analysis of the current situation in the 10 countries participating in the project and identify transversal common issues arising from this analysis.

Our methodological strategy in this project was to involve all the partners at the same level. They are representing a typical situation in a country and they have to contribute on this basis at the emergency of a European comparison likely to have an impact in return on their country. So we have based our common work on exchanges

between meetings by emails, by meetings and by provision of tools and guidance for the production of materials.

We consider the meetings of the partnership:

- as seminars when we work on European and national policies, when we try to help all partners to come to the same level of understanding of the current situation,
- as workshops when we multiply exchanges and contributions, when we discuss all together the results of our investigations;
- as management group when we organise the collection of data and review the developments of the project.

After each meeting, detailed minutes are provided to partners, including short feedbacks on discussions and on the work done by each partner.

To come to our provisional results, we have produced:

- a glossary based on the glossary adopted by the Working group in charge of the preparation of EQF
- an analysis of the current situation in Europe regarding Qualifications Frameworks: EQF, NQF, sectoral frameworks, the EQF and the Directive 2005/36/EC. This analysis is presented in two documents: a Chart resulting of a powerpoint presentation during the first Management Group meeting and a “European State of play”, a draft 17 pages document;
- a first inventory of the qualifications envisaged by partners as potential basis for the second phase of the project
- two grids for partners: the first one to gather information and to analyse the situation in a particular country, the second to describe the 25-30 qualifications that will be more in depth analysed during the second phase of the project. These grids have been prepared by the promoter with the help of the external evaluator. They have been discussed during Management Group meetings.
- the analysis of materials are built in four phases:
 - a first draft sent to partners before management group meetings
 - discussion of this draft paper during the meetings
 - new version sent after the meetings calling for remarks or amendments
 - and then adoption of the final version
- the analysis of common issues is a direct result of the discussion during the last management group, in January in Versailles on the basis of a first analysis of the materials already collected;

To produce the materials required, most of partners have set up a focus group including representatives of higher education institutions, of authorities and stakeholders. The role of these focus groups was to help our partners to better appreciate the national situation and the challenges, especially when level 5 and 6 are clearly separated between institutions, to identify the problems emerging and to explore later potential propositions or recommendations. The composition of these groups is variable. It is linked to the national situation and to the motivation of authorities and stakeholders to participate in this kind of workshops. We must say that the question of articulation between level 5 and 6 is not yet seen in some

countries as a crucial issue likely to encourage concrete participation and favour concrete contributions.

The evaluation strategy

The external evaluator receives all the documents produced by the partnership and participates in all meetings.

The support that we receive is made of four types of contributions:

- involvement in discussions during the meetings asking for additional information, providing advices and reactions;
- remarks on tools mobilised and contributions from partners;
- report after each management group meeting;
- reactions on documents elaborated.

The dissemination and exploitation strategy

At this stage, we have not yet started a formal process of dissemination.

The current results are used by partners in meetings dealing with Qualifications Frameworks issues at national or European level. The documents produced during the last period meet some interest when we mention them as support in discussions about EQF and NQF. We think that the document on “transversal issues” attracts particular attention from the audience. Our perception is that the articulation between level 5 and 6 is felt by a lot of our interlocutors as a crucial issue for Higher Education in the next years regarding the building of National Qualifications Frameworks. All initiatives that may contribute to clarify the situation and to provide recommendations or propositions are welcomed.

Partners are using these interim results in their respective institutions in order to mobilise their hierarchy and to contribute - for some of them - in discussions at national level.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

Major achievements and results of the first year

Our initial proposal had not envisaged a presentation of interim results. When re-scheduling our project, we have given deadlines for the end of the first year to our partners. We expected the following products and results:

- from the responsible of the project two methodological tools: a macro-level and a micro-level grid and a glossary;
- from our partners a list of qualifications at level 5 and 6 in two sectors Bank/Insurance and IT and 25-30 draft case studies (descriptions of qualifications).

This production has been completed by three analysis prepared by the manager of the project on the basis of the contributions of partners, of the discussions in meetings and by email, of the comments of the external evaluator.

- a European State of play concerning the two EQF in competition (the EHEA one and the EC one), the situation regarding sectoral frameworks and the position adopted by the DG Internal Market regarding regulated professions;
- a transversal analysis of the national situations on the basis of the reports and comments of partners;
- a short presentation of the key issues emerging from the national reviews and from a first survey of draft case studies. The production of this document has followed three steps: establishment of a list of key issues, presentation of this list to partners, discussion of these key issues and enrichment on the basis of the materials collected, writing a first draft analysis which is a potential guide for a more in depth analysis of the data collected or to ask complements, further exploration at national level, if necessary.

The initial proposal consisted of six objectives.

Objective 1: to explore the current state of play at level 5 and 6 in partner countries:

Each partner has produced a national report, on the basis of a common grid (the macro level grid), presenting the current situation at level 5 and 6 in its country. Each partner has been invited to present its survey at the Barcelona meeting. Each presentation has been discussed by the other partners and the external evaluator. On the basis of these comments and remarks and with the help of methodological recommendations by the external evaluator, the partners have reviewed their national report and transmitted them to the manager of the project. This phase helped the partners to better understand the complexity of the context and the challenges arising from the implementation of Qualifications Frameworks in their respective countries.

Objective 2: to develop better understanding of issues associated to the definition of a NQF:

This part of the work was done by the manager of the project and reviewed by the external evaluator. It consisted of two documents: a **chart** drawing the current situation in Europe regarding the qualifications frameworks presented and discussed during the first meeting of the management group and a document establishing more in detail a “**European state of play**” of the debates and challenges. This approach has been completed by the elaboration and the adoption of a **glossary** helping partners to adopt a common language. These materials have been elaborated on the basis of an analysis of documents produced at European level by the European Commission, the EHEA and higher education working groups, the documents produced before or during the Conference in Brussels on the implementation of EQF.

This comprehensive state of play and comments, and answers to questions during presentations contributed to make partners more sensible on the debates in process at European level and to help them to identify the potential effects of these debates at national and institutional level. Because the decisive position adopted by the EHEA and the different approaches developed by economic sectors in countries have not the same impact in all countries. This analysis contributed to help them to finalise their analysis of the situation at national level and to feed our common reflection on the European debates.

Objective 3: to develop a comparison between countries

The members of the consortium have met three times during the period: in Lille (28 March 2008), Barcelona (8-9 September 2008) and Versailles (19-20 January 2009). We have done a transversal analysis of the national reports on the basis of a grid (macro level grid) which has been adopted by the Management group according to the recommendations of the external evaluator. On the basis of the exchanges in the Management Group we produced a document presenting the key issues arising from the discussion of national reports.

We used the comparison between countries as a way to review each national situation and to better identify and understand the different dimensions of the problem at European level, in order to work on relevant contributions, propositions and recommendations.

Two documents have been produced by the partnership:

- a chart presenting in parallel the situation in each country member of the consortium on the basis of nine key issues:
 - Systems at work at level 5 and level 6
 - Role of the State
 - Role of professional bodies and companies
 - Role of social partners
 - Level of implementation of the NQF
 - Bologna process framework and NQF
 - Perception of key issues
 - Trends
 - Specific remarks

- a document summarising the key issues emerging from a transversal analysis of the above chart and a first reading of the draft case studies elaborated by partners. Nine key issues are emerging from the transversal analysis of the data collected at national level:
 - The lifelong learning perspective. We have indicated in our initial proposal that our main concern was: how to ensure continuity and progression in HE (irrespective of the programmes) and how NQF related to EQF could help? Concerning continuity/discontinuity, we have identified three situations in the 10 partners' countries:
 - In some countries, continuity exists; there are no obstacles between level 5 and level 6, in the same institution or between different institutions. The use of credits contributes effectively to this positive answer.
 - In some other countries, continuity exists but there are some conditions to meet. In general students who wish to develop through further programmes are invited to enrol in adaptation or transition programmes.
 - In the other countries, qualifications awarded at level 5, in particular by non-university institutions are not taken into account. Students are obliged to re-start their learning pathway and attend "normal" programmes from the beginning.
 - The learning outcomes as the main tool. A generalised use of learning outcomes, with a more common conception than the one currently at work, would help to overcome the rigidities linked to learning cultures, to the diversity of traditions, of pedagogical organisations. But in some cases, universities consider that the learning outcomes approach will oblige them to lower their standards to that of the weakest students to the detriment of the strongest. This perception should be challenged, together with debate between ECTS and ECVET.
 - The NQF appears in the countries where the discussions have started as a way of introducing discussions on these issues or of reviewing traditional dialogue between sectors, or between education and economy.
 - Level 5 "second choice", dead end or step in a progressive learning process.
 - The opportunities offered in partners countries for continuity and progression between level 5 and 6 are quite erratic.
 - The role of the State in the accrediting and assessment process of qualifications is decreasing.
 - There is a deep (but slow) evolution in the choice of quality criteria used by the Quality Assurance Agencies. We move progressively from an approach based solely on academic criteria to the inclusion of criteria that take into account the requirements of the marketplace, paying attention to the employability of students or learners. In some countries, the rate of employment after graduation is becoming a higher priority in the hierarchy of criteria.
 - Continuity and progression require mutual trust between sectors and between institutions.

- The participation of economic and social partners, and more generally of external partners (for instance Regions or local authorities) in expression of needs, design of programmes and accreditation processes, is very different from one country to another. In some countries they are involved in the process of accreditation (but often with little power). In these countries, they are more often involved in the process of designing courses, and sometimes in teaching and assessing. In other countries they are not at all involved and they are not really willing to be involved because they are not interested in developing relationships with universities. In some cases, professional bodies and companies complain about the current situation, arguing that universities are unable to adapt themselves to the needs of the market. But are they really ready to contribute? Sometimes universities are complaining about the difficulties to find partners. Indeed, the agendas, ethos and needs of these different bodies may conflict with those of HEIs. This involvement can also be linked to the type of programmes. In some cases, especially at level 5, contribution of external partners in the elaboration of programmes and sometimes participation in teaching are compulsory.

All this issues will be illustrated, enriched and discussed during the second phase of the project with the information provided by case studies.

Objective 4: to examine the current situation at level 5 and 6 in two domains:

The partners have done an inventory of existing qualifications at level 5 and 6 in Bank/insurance and IT domains in universities partners and in HEIs close to these universities as potential case studies for further analysis.

The Management Group discussed and adopted a grid (micro level grid) prepared by the manager of the project with the contribution of the external evaluator that has been used to collect the elements of information concerning each qualification in line with the objectives of the project.

On the basis of the inventory done by partners, we have by dialogue established the list of selected qualifications, coming to an agreement between partners on the number, level, domain and educational sector of case studies to produce.

We have gathered the expected case studies from all the countries except two.

Objective 5: to explore the solutions with decision makers and social partners

We have asked to each partner to set up a focus group involving representatives from ministries, from higher education institutions, from social partners to confront our analysis with their view and explore with them potential propositions and recommendations. Most of our partners have already set up these groups. These groups are different from one country to another depending of the level of interest of authorities and/or professional bodies or social partners and depending of the capacity of the partner to establish such a group. These focus groups have been

involved in the preparation of the national reports and in the choice of the qualifications for case studies.

We expect now to consult them during the second phase of the project on our analysis in depth of case studies and ask for their contribution in the elaboration of propositions and recommendations.

This association of decision makers, professional bodies and social partners will be the main objective of the Open Seminar scheduled in September in Lille and of the Dissemination event in November in Portugal.

Objective 6: to elaborate a set of propositions or recommendations

It is too early at this stage to provide elements on this objective. However, the document presenting the transversal issues arising from the analysis of national reports provide useful elements that we will certainly use to orient the analysis in depth of case studies and the proposition of recommendations.

4. Partnerships

The added value of the multi-country partnership in executing the project

We have understood from the discussions regarding the elaboration of National Qualifications Frameworks linked to European Qualifications Framework that this issue will be crucial and source of debates with Higher Education. Each country is free to adopt a NQF and to relate it to EQF, but how is it conceivable that a Member state remains out of this process? So we are necessarily entering a common process which will mobilise Member States during the next two years. Even each country faces a more or less specific situation, the problems to take in consideration are or will be nearly the same, specifically in HE, due to the debate (the competition?) existing between the Bologna framework of EHEA and the EQF (and on a lower scale with sectoral frameworks).

We have built a partnership presenting a diversity of learning cultures and situations regarding higher education. Five countries belong to the western part of Europe, five to the eastern part. We have involved countries with well established education and training systems leading on different learning cultures (Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal and UK), countries that have started deep changes in their traditional system but are at different levels of implementation (Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovenia) and finally, as silent partner, a country trying to implement the Bologna process, using it as a conveyor for transformation (Russian Federation).

These countries present quite different situations regarding the institutional distribution of programmes at levels 5 and 6 inside universities, or between universities and other higher education institutions, in particular higher vocational education institutions, and universities are more or less ready to cooperate with other subsystems. They present also different levels of collaboration between higher education and professional bodies or social partners. In some countries such relationships do not exist or are not seen as possible. They are at different level of implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks. France and UK have already one, some other countries have started rapidly the process of implementation, and some are still reluctant. Some are tempted to use the structure provided by EQF, and some (such as Lithuania or Slovenia) use this process as an opportunity to review their national system of education and training.

We think that this partnership, thanks to its diversity, gives us a powerful basis for a European vision of the problem of the transition between the levels 5 and 6. This partnership presents a double advantage. The first advantage is to help us to identify good questions for the debate, for the discussion, because what is so evident or feasible here is not evident or impossible to do in another country. Regarding this project, the transversal analysis of national states of play has contributed to the emergence of a set of general issues which will be explored during the second phase of the project. The second advantage of this multi-country approach is to contribute to the identification of good practices, interesting experiments which demonstrate that solutions are possible, even if some resistances come from institutions or actors.

Before a more in depth analysis that we part of the second phase of the project, we consider that the first results of the transversal analysis of the situation in countries illustrates perfectly the cooperation between partners. The identification of the nine key issues evoked supra demonstrates how a comparison between countries, beyond local and limited approaches, offer an opportunity to identify some demarches that could help to pass from rhetoric to practice and to come to concrete recommendations or at least to identify the steps and difficulties to overcome.

European partnership at work

Management Group meetings and events are shared between 4 countries: France, Poland, Portugal and Spain.

From the beginning on, we have established a Management Group that involves all the partners. So, all the partners have the same role which is to contribute on the basis of their national experience and to participate in discussions and analysis.

We have insisted from the beginning on working as a team attached to a shared mission. Universities have respected this “rule” and it has been possible to gather a group of colleagues having a shared vision of the project and being really interested in participation.

Benefits of partnerships established with groups outside of the direct project

Our partners have been invited to establish and to work during the project with a focus group involving representatives of HEIs, administrations and social partners. These focus groups are differently shaped according to local and national situations. The role of these focus groups, during the first phase of the project, was to provide useful information to contribute to the national state of play, to identify key issues and to help universities in choosing qualifications for case studies.

It is difficult to measure, at this stage, the concrete results of this partnership. We can only observe some interest coming from the management of universities involved about the first results coming from the comparison between countries, from transversal analysis. We can also register some interest about the future results from external partners consulted during the first phase of the project.

5. Plans for the Future

The further steps of the project will be the following ones:

- An in depth analysis of the qualifications offered at level 5 and 6 in Bank/Insurance and IT domains in universities and other HE institutions selected as case studies by our partners;
- June (15-16): Management group in Poland: the objective of this meeting will be to discuss a draft report on these case studies. A second version of this report will be published after the meeting and submitted to the existing focus groups to receive their feedback and suggestions.
- September in Lille: Open seminar with around ten European experts on EQF-NQF issues and representatives of social partners to present and discuss the results of the analysis of case studies ;
- October: Production of a draft full report taking into account the remarks and contributions from experts and representatives of universities and preparation of the dissemination tools and of the dissemination event
- November (26-27): Dissemination event in Porto of the results of the project.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The European added value of this project is to contribute to a European reflection on the implementation of NQFs and to contribute to a European improvement of EQF.

This project is meeting some key issues arising at European level in relationship with the policy processes on education and training promoted by the European Commission and the Member States.

In April 2008 the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong learning was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council after a long process of discussion and consultation. This EQF is one of the key elements supporting the working plan "Education and Training 2010" which is part of the Lisbon process. By 2010, Member States, on a volunteering basis, are invited to elaborate their own National Qualifications Framework and to reference this NQF to the EQF by 2010. The EQF functions as a meta-framework providing a set of 8 levels describing what a learner or an employee knows, understands and is able to do irrespective of the qualification system. A NQF is a way of showing the relationships between qualifications in a country. It is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved.

In May 2005, the Bergen Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education adopted the overarching framework for qualifications in the European Higher Education Area, comprising:

- three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications),
- generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences,
- and credit ranges (ECTS) in the first and second cycles.

Ministers committed themselves to elaborating national frameworks for qualifications compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA by 2010.

They also underlined the importance of ensuring complementarities between this framework and the proposal for the broader framework developed on the initiative of the European Commission.

These complementarities are at the heart of the problem. As the EHEA is not ready for the moment to merge its Qualification Framework into the European Qualifications framework, it was evident for us that if we want to make the lifelong learning perspective a reality, which is the main pillar of the European education and training policy, the articulation between the EHEA framework and the EQF, and in particular the articulation at the levels 5 and 6 of EQF is crucial for ensuring continuity, smooth transition and providing opportunities for progression to students and learners, for the development of fluid learning pathways, for offering permeability between subsystems, in particular VET and HE. This articulation is a source of debates in the countries that are now working on the construction of their own NQF.

A workshop in the EQF implementation Conference in Brussels in June 2008 addressed more particularly this issue and confirmed the need for more clarification on what was happening in Member States and called for propositions and recommendations.

As now, discussions and consultations have started to prepare the post-Lisbon process (“An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training”) and the post-Bologna process (Bologna 2020), we expect that the work done on this project could contribute, modestly, to the reflection at national as well as at European level by providing some concrete elements stemming from comparison between countries. A recent document published by the European Commission considers that three main forms of NQFs are for the moment observed in the countries taking part in the Copenhagen process: sectors based frameworks with no explicit links between the subsystems, bridging frameworks with formal links between subsystems and the integrating frameworks (in reality one for the moment, the Irish one) with no separate subsystems frameworks. Integration is highly desirable in a lifelong learning perspective but it is also a highly controversial issue. In this context, displaying good examples of practices bringing the two sectors of HE closer together, good collaborations and partnerships between providers at levels 5 and 6, is important. However, analysing in other places difficulties, obstacles for continuity and dead ends, is also useful to identify where concretely the problems happen.

A report from peer learning activities on NQFs in 2008 identifies the issues that NQFs are expected to address. Four of them are addressing articulations issues:

- involvement of stakeholders from different sectors and segments to fight fragmentation;
- transparency of systems and qualifications, for individuals, employers and others;
- pathways and progression routes in the education and training systems;
- valuing a broad range of learning outcomes, including non formal and informal learning.

Our contribution through our analysis will be:

- To enrich the reflection of decision makers at institutional, national and European level about positive contributions to the development of continuity and progression in HE and beyond to the lifelong learning perspective in European countries.
- To inform them about difficulties, resistances, misunderstandings, which could limit the developments of policies carried on by European processes in the field of Education and Training.
- To contribute to the implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks and to referencing this framework to the EQF.
- To help them to adjust their processes and make if necessary the relevant corrections or impulsions.
- To provide them at institutional or national level evidences about the decisive contribution of continuity to lifelong learning.

- To contribute to a dialogue between subsystems, between institutions operating these subsystems and between actors, notably directors of programmes and teachers.
- To encourage partnerships and collaborations between institutions of different HE subsystems;
- To demonstrate positive collaborations with sectors to ensure progression and development of competences
- To provide to actors involved in concrete practices opportunities to have access to a community of actors, to reassure themselves on their own practices, to encourage exchange and common work. This could be a way to develop later new European projects on specific issues, domains or tools.