



COMPARISON BETWEEN NATIONAL SKILL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK (NSQF) AND EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK (EQF)

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Executive summary

This document presents a detailed comparison of the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The analysis aims to deepen our understanding of their structures, functions, and implications, and explores how these frameworks contribute to the recognition of qualifications, mobility of learners and workers, and the harmonization of education and labour policies.

Key Objectives:

- **Structural Analysis:** The NSQF, a competency-based framework with ten levels, and the EQF, a translation tool comprising eight levels, are examined. Each level is defined by descriptors indicating learning outcomes.
- **Framework Components:** The NSQF emphasizes Qualification Packs and National Occupational Standards, aligning with industry needs, while the EQF focuses on cross-border comparability without specifying components.
- **National and International Context:** The NSQF supports national and international exposure, emphasizing the importance of education. The EQF facilitates transparency and recognition across Europe.
- **Implications for Education and Labor Policies:** Both frameworks influence national and international policies, with the NSQF focusing on diverse pathways and the EQF promoting cross-border mobility and transparency.
- **Integration with Education Systems:** The NSQF integrates with Indian education levels, promoting varied pathways. The EQF collaborates with national frameworks to ensure comparability and mobility in Europe.
- **Challenges and Advantages:** Both frameworks face challenges in addressing diverse education systems, with the NSQF tackling fragmented implementation and the EQF addressing differences in European systems.
- **Quality Assurance:** Both frameworks prioritize quality assurance, ensuring trustworthiness in qualifications content and level.
- **Recognition and Validation:** Both frameworks acknowledge Recognition of Prior Learning, enabling the formal recognition of experiential skills.

- **Stakeholder Perspectives:** Educational institutions, employers, and learners view the NSQF as a tool for lifelong learning and quality education. The EQF facilitates qualification recognition for individuals moving to EU countries.
- **Mobility of Learners and Workers:** Both frameworks aim to enhance mobility within and across borders, emphasizing transparency and comparability.
- **Qualification Recognition Across Frameworks:** While EQF qualifications are widely recognized across Europe, specific recognition of NSQF qualifications by other frameworks is not explicitly observed.
- **Challenges and Opportunities in Implementation:** **Challenges** include diverse European education systems for the EQF and a fragmented NSQF ecosystem. **Opportunities** lie in facilitating lifelong learning and adaptability.
- **Standardization, Coordination, and Adaptability:** Both frameworks address standardization through descriptors. The EQF coordinates through an advisory group, while the NSQF collaborates with sector skill councils.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The comparison reveals nuanced similarities and differences between the NSQF and EQF. Recommendations include establishing equivalence, defining clear learning outcomes, providing multiple pathways, robust assessment mechanisms, stakeholder involvement, opportunities for skill building, and common reference levels.

This analysis serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, educational institutions, and stakeholders to strengthen the effectiveness of both frameworks, fostering international recognition and mobility.

Introduction:

Degree of learning and skill proficiency



Qualifications frameworks serve as structured blueprints that systematically categorize and define various levels of learning achievements. These frameworks offer a comprehensive arrangement of levels, each representing a specific degree of learning and skill proficiency, to which qualifications and learning outcomes can be aligned.

These frameworks play a pivotal role in elucidating the interrelationships between different qualifications, thereby facilitating the construction of educational and occupational pathways across various sectors. They are instrumental in aiding learners in charting their educational and career trajectories, providing educators with a robust foundation for curriculum design, and equipping employers with a clear understanding of the qualifications of prospective employees.

Spanning across national, regional, and international spheres, qualifications frameworks are globally prevalent. The Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks offers insights into the frameworks of 99 countries. These include the National Skills Qualifications Framework

(NSQF) in India, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in Europe, the Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework in Bhutan, and the Hong Kong Qualification Framework, among others. The United Kingdom has been utilizing one of the oldest Qualifications Frameworks, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), since 2008. In most frameworks, such as the Australian Qualifications Framework, the highest qualification is typically a doctoral degree.

In addition to their fundamental roles, qualifications frameworks serve a broader purpose in standardizing qualifications, promoting transparency, and facilitating mobility and recognition of qualifications across different regions or countries. However, the implementation and harmonization of these frameworks are not without challenges. These include the diversity of education systems, variations in quality assurance mechanisms, and differences in the interpretation of learning outcomes. To overcome these challenges, strategies such as international cooperation, stakeholder engagement, and continuous monitoring and evaluation are employed. This document aims to delve deeper into these aspects, providing a comprehensive understanding of qualifications frameworks and their significance in the global education landscape.

Potential Objectives for this document:

The primary objectives of this document are:

1. Provide a comprehensive comparison between NSQF and EQF to enhance understanding of their structures, functions, and implications.
2. Explore how the frameworks contribute to the recognition of qualifications, mobility of learners and workers, and the harmonization of education and labour policies.
3. Highlight the challenges and advantages associated with the implementation of NSQF and EQF, addressing issues of standardization, coordination, and adaptability.
4. Offer practical recommendations for policymakers, educational institutions, and stakeholders to strengthen the effectiveness of both frameworks and promote international recognition and mobility.

Overview of National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF):



The National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) is a competency-based framework that organizes qualifications according to a series of knowledge, skills, and aptitude.

The NSQF was launched by the Government of India to address the demand-supply mismatch in the country's economy, which requires a more 'skilled' workforce than is currently available. It was notified in India on 27th December 2013.

The framework aims to integrate vocational education with general education and provide multiple pathways, both horizontal and vertical, within vocational education and training. This allows for a seamless transition from school to work or further education and training.

The NSQF comprises 10 levels, each representing different levels of complexity, knowledge, and autonomy required to demonstrate competence commensurate with that level. Each level is defined by learning outcomes which the learner must possess regardless of whether they were acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning.

The NSQF is a competency-based framework that organizes qualifications according to a series of knowledge, skills, and aptitude. It covers qualifications from Grade IX (NSQF level 1) to Diploma (NSQF level 5), Advanced Diploma, and Degree (NSQF levels 6-10) in Colleges and Universities. The NSQF provides national principles for recognizing skill proficiency and competencies at different levels leading to international equivalency. It allows for multiple entry and exit between vocational education, skill training, general education, technical education, and job markets.

Here's a brief description of levels:

Level 1:

- Prepares for repetitive tasks without prior practice.
- Familiarity with trade terminology, basic instructions, and safety measures.
- Basic literacy, numeracy, and awareness of social and environmental factors.
- No responsibility works under close supervision.

Level 2:

- Conducts repetitive tasks with limited understanding.
- Limited application of tools and materials.
- Basic service skills, quality awareness, and communication abilities.
- Works under instruction with no independent responsibility.

Level 3:

- Executes routine and predictable activities.
- Applies basic facts and principles in the trade.

Level 4:

- Performs well-developed skills in familiar contexts.
- Applies knowledge of facts, principles, and processes in the field.

Level 5:

- Requires well-developed skills with discretion and judgment.
- Applies knowledge in a specific field of work or study.

Level 6:

- Demands a wide range of specialized technical skills.
- Applies knowledge in a specialized field.

Level 7:

- Requires command of specialized technical skills and theoretical knowledge.
- Applies knowledge in a specialized field.

Level 8:

- Comprehensive cognitive knowledge and practical skills.
- Exercises management and supervision in unpredictable contexts.
- Responsible for self and others' development.

Level 9:

- Advanced knowledge and skills with critical understanding.
- Responsible for decision-making in complex technical activities.

Level 10:

- Highly specialized knowledge and problem-solving skills.
- Responsible for strategic decisions in unpredictable complex situations.

Overview of European Qualifications Framework (EQF):

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a translation tool that makes national qualifications easier to understand and more comparable. It supports cross-border mobility of learners and workers and promotes lifelong learning and professional development across Europe.

The EQF is an 8-level, learning outcomes-based framework for all types of qualifications. It was set up in 2008 by the European Union to make national qualifications easier to understand and more comparable. The EQF supports cross-border mobility of learners and workers, promotes lifelong learning and professional development across Europe. It is recognized at the European level.

Each of the 8 levels of the EQF is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any qualifications system. The EQF covers all types and all levels of qualifications. The level increases according to the level of proficiency.

The learning outcomes are defined in terms of:

- **Knowledge:** It includes theoretical and/or factual knowledge. Asking for directions at level 1 and understanding basic mathematical concepts at level 2 are the good examples of the knowledge component in EQF.
- **Skills:** Skills are cognitive and practical.
 - **Cognitive skills:** It involves the use of logical, intuitive, and creative thinking.
 - **Practical skills:** It involves manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools, and instruments.

Sorting objects by colour or shape at level 1 and using basic arithmetic to solve simple problems at level 2 are the good examples of the skill component in EQF.

- **Responsibility and Autonomy:** These are the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility such as following instructions to complete a simple task at level 1, completing assigned tasks independently at level 2.

The EQF applies to all types of education, training, and qualifications, from school education to academic, professional, and vocational. This framework helps improve transparency, comparability, and portability of people's qualifications and makes it possible to compare qualifications from different countries and institutions. The EQF covers all types and all levels of qualifications and the use of learning outcomes makes it clear what a person knows, understands, and is able to do.

The EQF, on the other hand, consists of eight levels, each defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level. These levels can be described in terms of knowledge, skills, and competencies expected to acquire:

Level 1:

- Basic general knowledge and skills for simple tasks.
- Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context.
- Examples: Basic vocational training certificates, literacy, and numeracy certificates.

Level 2:

- Basic factual knowledge in a field and practical skills.
- Work or study under supervision with some autonomy.
- Examples: Lower secondary education diplomas, basic vocational certificates.

Level 3:

- Knowledge of facts, principles, and processes in a field.

- Cognitive and practical skills for tasks and problem-solving.
- Take responsibility for task completion; adapt behavior to solve problems.
- Examples: High school diplomas, vocational education, and training (VET) certificates.

Level 4:

- Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts.
- Cognitive and practical skills for problem-solving.
- Exercise self-management in predictable contexts; supervise routine work.
- Examples: Technical and vocational certificates, associate degrees.

Level 5:

- Comprehensive, specialized knowledge within a field.
- Cognitive and practical skills for creative problem-solving.
- Exercise management and supervision; review and develop performance.
- Examples: higher vocational certificates, higher education diplomas.

Level 6:

- Advanced knowledge with a critical understanding of theories.
- Advanced skills for solving complex problems in a specialized field.
- Manage complex activities or projects, responsibility for decision-making.
- Examples: Bachelor's degrees in various fields.

Level 7:

- Highly specialized knowledge, basis for original thinking and research.
- Critical awareness of knowledge issues; specialized problem-solving.
- Manage complex and unpredictable contexts; contribute to professional knowledge.
- Examples: Master's degrees in various academic and professional disciplines.

Level 8:

- Knowledge at the most advanced frontier; interface between fields.
- Most advanced skills, including synthesis and evaluation.
- Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, and professional integrity.
- Examples: Doctoral degrees (Ph.D., D.Sc., etc.) in various fields.

Comparison between NSQF and EQF:

In the subsequent sections, we will undertake a detailed examination of the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This exploration will encompass their structures, components, and implications, providing insights into their unique approaches and shared objectives.

I. Structure of the Qualification framework:

- The NSQF levels are graded from one to ten whereas EQF levels are graded from one to eight. For example, at NSQF level 1, the expected competency might be just assisting, being a helper while still learning and supporting someone more experienced. As we progress to levels 5 or 6, the expectation shifts to being responsible and independent. But in EQF, each of the 8 levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any qualifications system.
- Each level of NSQF is described as a statement of learning outcomes in five domains: process required, professional knowledge, professional skills, core skills, and responsibility whereas each level of EQF is described in three domains: knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy.
- Mapping of these two frameworks directly might not be accurate due to differences in education systems, qualifications, and learning outcomes in different countries. However, both frameworks

aim to improve transparency, comparability, and portability of qualifications, making it easier for learners and workers to move between countries and continue their education or work.

II. Components:

- The key components of the NSQF include the development of Qualification Packs (QPs), National Occupational Standards (NOSs), and assessment mechanisms in their respective domains, in alignment with the needs of the industry.
- The EQF, on the other hand, does not specify the components but provides a framework for comparing qualifications across different countries.

III. Facilitation to national and international context:

- The NSQF supports high-quality learning and enables students to get exposure to national & international opportunities. It amplifies the significance of education, and geographical boundaries no longer remain a barrier.
- The EQF facilitates transparency and recognition of qualifications internationally. Comparing EQF with national and regional qualifications frameworks of third countries enables a better understanding of other national and regional qualifications frameworks in Europe and vice versa.

IV. Implications for national and international education and labor policies/ alignment with broader education and employment strategies:

- EQF and NSQF have significant implications for national and international education and labor policies.
- The EQF, developed by the EU, serves as a translation tool to enhance the understanding and comparability of national qualifications. It is closely linked to national frameworks, fostering transparency and portability of qualifications across Europe.
- The NSQF organizes qualifications into levels, covering Grade IX to Degree, allowing for multiple entry and exit points between education, training, and job markets. NSQF provides international equivalency and is working towards alignment with EQF to enhance global job opportunities.
- Both frameworks aim to improve qualification understanding, promote lifelong learning, and facilitate labor mobility, albeit with nuanced approaches and scopes.

V. Integration with respective national education and training systems:

- The Council's November 2018 Recommendation promotes mutual recognition of qualifications, highlighting the EQF for transparency in national education systems. Meanwhile, the NSQF is a comprehensive, nationally integrated competency-based framework, offering diverse pathways and linking various education levels.
- The UGC has implemented Community Colleges and the B.Voc. Degree program to expand vocational education and provide vertical mobility. The NSQF integrates learning from diverse areas to create an eight-level progress matrix.
- Thus, both the EQF and NSQF aim to enhance qualification understanding, facilitate lifelong learning, and enable labor mobility, albeit with different structures and focuses.

VI. Challenges and advantages associated with this integration:

Challenges to integrate with respective national education and training systems:

- Both EQF and NSQF face the challenge of addressing the diversity of their respective education and training systems, making it complex to assess qualifications from different national traditions.
- While EQF's challenge lies in the diversity of European education systems, NSQF encounters issues with fragmented implementation and lack of uniform standards, hindering seamless vertical mobility. Over the past years, the NSQF has been implemented by people who have very little understanding of it.

Advantages on integration with respective national education and training systems:

- Both frameworks, EQF and NSQF, aim to facilitate lifelong learning, ensuring individuals remain adaptable and competitive in a dynamic environment.
- EQF serves as a translation tool for cross-border mobility, fostering transparency and mutual trust across Europe. In contrast, NSQF focuses on progressive education, multiple pathways, and linking different levels within vocational and technical education.

Thus, while both EQF and NSQF share the overarching goals of enhancing qualification understanding and promoting lifelong learning, they differ in the specific challenges they face due to the nature of their integration with diverse national education and training systems. erse pathways for vertical mobility.

VII. Quality assurance mechanisms of framework:

- Both frameworks are underpinned by strong quality assurance mechanisms to ensure the trustworthiness of qualifications in terms of content and level.
- EQF emphasizes quality assurance for qualifications at each EQF level, whereas
- NSQF serves as a quality assurance framework for education and training, striving for interoperable standards and supporting progression and upward mobility.

VIII. Qualifications recognition and validation within framework:

- Both EQF and NSQF acknowledge the importance of recognizing prior learning, allowing individuals to have their experiential skills formally recognized and certified.
- NSQF explicitly mentions Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as a process to recognize and certify skills acquired through experience. EQF does not specifically mention a comparable process.

IX. Perspectives from key stakeholders, such as educational institutions, employers, and learners, on the implementation and effectiveness:

- Educational Institutions:
 - Both EQF and NSQF aid educational institutions by providing frameworks that align qualifications with industry needs.
 - EQF primarily focuses on translation between national frameworks, while NSQF emphasizes a competency-based framework to organize qualifications.
- Employers:
 - Both frameworks assist employers in understanding the skills and competencies of potential employees by offering a standardized way to compare qualifications.
 - EQF facilitates international comparison, while NSQF provides national principles for recognizing skill proficiency leading to international equivalency.
- Learners
 - Both EQF and NSQF promote lifelong learning, making qualifications more understandable and comparable across different contexts.

- EQF fosters professional development across Europe, while NSQF emphasizes a progressive education system that enables learners to build upon their skills over time.

X. Contributes to the mobility of learners and workers within their own countries and across borders:

- Both EQF and NSQF aim to enhance the mobility of learners and workers within their countries and across borders, improving transparency and comparability of qualifications.
- EQF focuses on cross-border mobility in Europe, emphasizing harmonization, while NSQF is geared towards skills recognition nationally in India.
- NSQF explicitly targets international equivalency, reflecting a global recognition emphasis.
- EQF stresses trust in qualifications within national frameworks, while NSQF underscores standardized outcomes through national quality assurance for global mobility.

XI. Qualifications gained under one framework are recognized in the other

- The specific recognition of NSQF qualifications by other international qualifications frameworks is not explicitly observed.
- European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is widely recognized across Europe. To date, 38 European countries have opted to develop national qualification frameworks (NQF) to support the implementation of the EQF. These NQFs may have a different number of levels and may pursue different objectives. In addition to Germany, 34 other countries have referenced their NQF as part of the referencing to the EQF.
- This means that qualifications gained under the EQF are recognized in these countries.

XII. Challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation:

- European education systems vary, posing challenges in assessing qualifications across countries. The EQF facilitates comparison through dialogue and mutual interest, aligning with operational RQFs. However, many RQFs are still in early development, impeding progress.
- The NSQF faces challenges due to a fragmented ecosystem and limited understanding among implementers. The lack of uniform standards hinders vertical mobility for students. Short-term, non-coherent courses funded by the government raise concerns as low placement rates suggest a misuse of taxpayers' money.

XIII. Issues related to standardization, coordination, and the adaptability of the frameworks:

Standardization:

- EQF is for enhancing the readability and understanding of qualifications across diverse countries and systems. However, the differences in European education systems pose challenges in assessing the capabilities of individuals with qualifications from other countries.
- NSQF facilitates individuals in acquiring desired competency levels through formal, non-formal, or informal learning.

Coordination:

- Collaborates with European and international instruments to support qualification recognition. The EQF Advisory Group (AG) ensures coherence, transparency, and trust, serving as a central forum for discussions among the Commission, countries, and stakeholders.
- In NSQF, various Sector Skill Councils develop Qualification Packs (QPs), National Occupational Standards (NOSs), and assessment mechanisms aligned with industry needs, promoting coordination and responsiveness to industry requirements.

Adaptability:

- EQF is established in 2008 and revised in 2017, maintaining core objectives of transparency and mutual trust in the European qualifications landscape.

- NSQF offers multiple pathways, both horizontal and vertical, connecting vocational education, training, general education, and technical education. This facilitates individuals in acquiring competencies, transitioning to the job market, and returning for further skill upgrades.

Stakeholder Perspectives:

Each stakeholder group plays a crucial role in shaping and utilizing these frameworks, and understanding their viewpoints will enrich our comprehension of the practical implications and challenges associated with NSQF and EQF. The perspectives of key stakeholders on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) are:

Educational Institutions:

- Educational institutions see the NSQF as a tool that encourages lifelong learning and quality education. It fosters partnerships between educational institutions and companies, leading to a better understanding of market demands.
- The National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) is expected to be in sync with the NSQF to ease the integration of vocational education into higher education.

Employers:

- Employers view the NSQF as a practical tool that is fully embedded in the Indian skill development ecosystem. It is derived in partnership with industry and prospective employers for validation of curriculum and upgrading with current knowledge and technologies.

Learners:

- Learners see the NSQF as a framework that supports high-quality learning and enables them to get exposure to national & international opportunities. It amplifies the significance of education, and geographical boundaries no longer remain a barrier.
- From the EQF perspective, one of the key benefits is to make the recognition of qualifications easier for people who move to an EU country to learn or work.

Implications of comparing NSQF and EQF:

The comparison between the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) can serve as a powerful tool to accomplish several key objectives in the field of education and skill development. It can:

- facilitate international recognition of qualifications and skills.
- promote the mobility of skilled labour across countries and regions.
- ensure consistency and quality in skill development and education.
- guide the development and alignment of educational and training programs.
- enhance the employability of individuals by providing them with internationally recognized qualifications.
- promote policy harmonization in the context of skills and qualifications.
- foster collaboration between countries, educational institutions, and industry partners.
- establish a framework for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of education and skill development programs.

Recommendations:

Considering the comprehensive comparison between the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the following recommendations emerge as strategic imperatives to enhance the effectiveness, recognition, and international mobility facilitated by both frameworks.

1. Establish equivalence between the two frameworks for cross-border opportunities.

For instance, a Diploma in Mechanical Engineering under the NSQF could be recognized as equivalent to a similar qualification under the EQF. This would allow a diploma holder from India to seek job opportunities or further education in Europe.

2. Define clear learning outcomes for each level of qualification.
3. Provide multiple pathways for progression within and between different types of education and training.
Create pathways that allow a student who has completed a Level 4 vocational course in India (under NSQF) to pursue a Level 5 course in a European institution (under EQF), thereby facilitating academic mobility.
4. Implement robust assessment mechanisms for all qualifications.
5. Involve key stakeholders in the development and implementation of the frameworks.
6. Provide opportunities for individuals to build upon their skills and knowledge over time.
7. Develop common reference levels and learning outcomes. For instance, ensure that a Level 5 qualification in the NSQF and a Level 5 qualification in the EQF both represent a similar level of knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the comparison between the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) reveals both similarities and differences in their structures, components, and implications. Both frameworks play crucial roles in enhancing transparency, comparability, and mobility of qualifications, with a shared goal of promoting lifelong learning and facilitating labour mobility.

While NSQF focuses on a competency-based approach with ten levels, EQF, as a translation tool, comprises eight levels. The NSQF integrates vocational education with general education, emphasizing multiple pathways, both horizontal and vertical, for seamless transitions. On the other hand, EQF fosters cross-border mobility within Europe and supports lifelong learning through clear descriptors of learning outcomes at each level.

Despite their unique approaches, both frameworks face challenges related to standardization, coordination, and adaptability, reflecting the complexity of integrating qualifications within diverse national and international education systems.

“Education is the passport to the future, and qualifications frameworks are the navigational tools guiding individuals toward a world of opportunities. As we explore their intricacies, challenges, and potential, let us remember that each qualification earned is a step towards a brighter and more interconnected global landscape”.

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