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Guidelines for the Development of Joint Qualification - Recommendations

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Introduction. Purpose and scope of the Guide

The purpose of the Guidelines for the Development of Joint Qualification is to set out the framework to develop new or update existing joint qualification at upper-secondary level of education. The guide sets out to describe the structure and scope of the joint qualification for a particular profession and provide tips/recommendations to secure the appropriateness of particular international qualification. This document outlines the four stages of developing qualifications up to their approval. The experts developing qualification can use these recommendations to develop either full joint qualification with both general and vocational part, partial joint qualification with only vocational part or only certain number of modules which will be elaborated in the curricula.

Investment in education and skills are considered to be a core strategic asset for social and economic growth, innovation and increase of productivity. Qualification frameworks play a vital role in linking education objectives and programmes. Qualifications are the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process by a competent authority and typically take the form of documents such as certificates or diplomas. They determine that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.¹ The qualification profile or standard is a common, useful working tool to describe the qualification, which helps express ideas about skills and knowledge of a person after the completion of education i.e. provides an insight into the expected learning outcomes of the education and training process. Qualification profiles are the basis for the development of curricula for one or more programmes.

Comparing descriptions of qualifications across Europe, it is clear that there is adversity of approaches regarding sources, degree of detail, form and structure² as well as a lack of uniformity in the definition of learning outcomes. At the same time, there are also similarities that enable us to build on development of transnational qualification - in the processes of qualification development, skills identification and referencing European Qualification framework.

The activity proposed in these Guidelines results in a profile of joint qualification that includes description of qualification: qualification level, scope, shared learning units etc. In this context, qualification profiles are developed to match future vocational qualifications in line with the needs of the economy of two or more countries, to enable young people to acquire qualifications that will enable them to have satisfactory careers and career advancement or further education, and to develop vocational qualifications in accordance with provisions of the countries involved. The profile sets out the possible number of common learning outcome units. In addition to this, the documents describes some steps which should be taken before the drafting of Profile of qualification.

¹; Council of the EU (2017). Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. O J C 189, 15.6.2017, p. 15–28 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615(01)&from=EN)

² European Union (2011) Using learning outcomes. European Qualifications Framework Series: Note 4. Available at: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Using_learning_outcomes.pdf

International qualifications feed in the context of the development and implementation of two European initiatives: the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European classification of skills/competences, qualifications and occupations (ESCO). The 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) specifies the need to increase transparency, comparability and recognition of skills and qualifications in EU. In order to realize these priorities, exchanging the information on economic indicators, technical development, socio-economic data and operational know-how of development of national qualifications is needed. It is also important to consider countries internationalization strategies and rationale for cooperation.

This guide does not aim to be a detailed manual for development of full joint qualification. Considering the individual countries qualification frameworks and provisions of the regulatory bodies some previous work has to be done – mostly regarding comparison of the development processes and recognition. National frameworks set the requirements for accreditation/register of qualification which should be considered for each country respectively, in addition to these guidelines. The Guidelines describe some general principles and recommendations on procedures of the development of joint qualifications at upper secondary level of education. The document also proposes a structure of the qualification profile for the vocational joint qualification. It contains forms to describe a qualification and form for the defined units of the learning outcomes which is to be defined.

These guidelines are developed within the Erasmus+ project ImproVET and should serve as a reference document for organizations drafting joint qualifications, especially for quality assessment.

The framework defines the parameters within which joint qualifications can be designed. Specifically, it proposes:

- a) Instructions for analysis - provide reference points against which joint qualifications can be benchmarked and defined
- b) The key steps to be taken
- c) The structure, level and credit requirements for qualification.
- d) Enable a common understanding of the characteristics and achievements under the qualification
- e) Provide a basis for quality assurance during design process
- f) Set up a framework for the stakeholders - organizations and groups that will be responsible for activities

Issues to Consider When Developing Joint Qualification

REFLECT ON WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE JOINT QUALIFICATION, WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ACHIEVE AND WHO IS THE TARGET AUDIENCE.

The process of developing joint qualification begins with the identification of the need and interest from different stakeholders - employers/business community, workers, public sector, education sector - vocational training centres etc. It encourages networking and cooperation of two or more countries and discussion across stakeholders - institutions that are essential

for achieving the development of work force and sustainability of particular economic sector. Rationale for cooperation in this area to make qualifications more recognizable can be diverse, related to country's internationalisation strategy, potential of economic markets/sector activity of specific interest, facilitating labour market access, networking of neighbouring countries due to geographic proximity, etc.

The decision to develop a joint qualification should be based on the analysis of labour market, employer's needs and the relevance of the qualification for students, employers and teachers i.e. it should reflect the economic, social and educational needs of the countries involved. Therefore statistical data, official government or organization reports, strategies, and policies should be considered. If there is a clear rationale and objectives for developing joint qualification, but there is no analysis available, some desk research should be implemented prior to the development of qualification and before or parallel with the research of employers (described in the following chapter).

Additionally, all included partners should have a clear understanding of key concepts used. Terminology that will be used, including the one in these guidelines, should be reviewed and discussed. Also, with the target audience in mind, language used to describe qualification should be accessible to all future users.

Methodology

This chapter describes step-by-step process of developing joint qualification. Aside from the processes proposed in this Guidelines related to the description of the qualification, some additional preparatory steps need to be taken which will be the basis for the decision on the parts of the joint qualification which can be developed and on the content of learning units and learning outcomes.

I. Basis for the development of joint qualification

I.1.

Firstly, it is recommended to consult existing documentation - analysis and studies of economic activity - both inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral, strategic orientation in local, national and international level, analysis of the potential and degree of development of the occupation in the sector, analysis of trends, including quantitative and qualitative data. Strategies are of particular importance as they anticipate changes in the needs, define actions to maximize positive impacts and boost the competitiveness of the sector. Analysis of the real and potential demand and job opportunities needs to be clear and based on a consensus of proposers of the joint qualification in all countries.

I.2.

Based on the previous analysis, the next step is to define knowledge and skills of the qualification, i.e. employer's needs regarding workers skills (sector specific professional skills and general or transversal skills). As qualifications are usually developed on the basis of occupational standards, it is recommended to review occupations related to the qualification which will be developed in the sector and current educational trajectories. Experts developing joint qualification should review existing occupational standards, national and international

existing data on the requirements for occupational competence or job tasks and the underpinning knowledge and skills. Employers' research provides a unique perspective for detection of educational needs in the labour market and understanding the skill problem. Employers are the most relevant source of information about an occupation because they set up working conditions that require skills. The main objective of the research of employers is to draft an operating list of key job tasks.

Within the ImproVET project, Guidelines for the Research of Employers and Market Needs were developed which can be referenced for the purpose of research and collecting evidence. The document suggests methodology for collecting and analysing data from employers about employment needs and their opinions about necessary knowledge, skills and competencies of new or future workers. Guidelines can be accessed on the ImproVET project website: <https://www.hgk.hr/documents/31-guidelines-for-the-research-of-employers-and-market-need5e343133a4b82.pdf>

Therefore, the following step should be systematization of information and data collected:

- Creating a list of key work tasks
- Associating key work tasks and individual skills and knowledge - defining a list of knowledge and skills related to key jobs
- Describing working conditions, including health and safety requirements, environmental aspects or legal obligations critical to the occupation

1.3.

If there already exists national qualification for chosen joint qualification in one or several countries, it is useful to analyse existing curricula and credit requirements.

The following table could be used in comparing the structure of qualification.

Description of vocational education and training received (credits)	Country 1	Country 2	Country 3	Country 4...
General education				
Professional education				
Practical education at the employer				
Extracurricular activities *				
Open curriculum *				
Final examination*				

* if applicable

This step should define the part of the vocational education and training received - total number of hours/credits. Usually, general education is the part regulated at national level and cannot be changed or developed but should be left to the national processes and experts. Professional education, practical education at the employer and open curriculum (if it is incorporated in the

structure of the curricula) are the areas which can be tailored to educational programmes in different countries. Education and training needs are flexible and evolving and drafting a joint qualification can be an opportunity to update existing qualification.

II. Recognition, benchmarking and mapping

National qualification frameworks set the standards that qualifications must meet and usually include some form of assessment process of the developed qualification which will regulate the joint qualification. When developing full or partial joint qualification it is important to include description of key elements which are obligatory to enable its recognition. Qualification must meet the formal or legal specifications in order to be accepted (recognized) as fulfilling the (transparently) set standards, such are often defined for the professions.

First step in the analysis is to identify if there are already similar qualifications developed in national frameworks. It is important to determine the level of joint qualification (*benchmarking*) and review the knowledge, skills and assessment already defined (*mapping*). It is advisable to consult national qualification registers and international tools such as [ESCO](#) and [Europass](#) (Europass Certificate Supplement if it exists).³

Four modes of recognition of qualifications exist: credential evaluation, prior agreement, benchmarking and social uses. Each of these modes attempt to improve transparency, demonstrate competence, facilitate cross-border mobility, and give access to social goods.⁴ Benchmarking is an activity of comparing levels of the qualifications of the qualification frameworks which enables to determine the level of the joint qualification. Referencing of national qualifications frameworks to the in European Qualification Framework enables establishment of relationships of qualification levels among NQFs.

Qualification level:	EQF	NQF 1	NQF 2	NQF 3	...

Second step is the analysis of qualification content to identify subject knowledge, skills and competencies.

Functional mapping of an existing qualifications:

	Country 1	Country 2	Country 3	...
Title of the qualification				
Qualification level				
Credit requirements				
Full or partial qualification				
Nominal study period				
Type of qualification				
Category of qualification				
Type of education				

³ Some examples are available at: <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/documents/european-skills-passport/certificate-supplement/examples>

⁴ UNESCO (2015). Level-setting and recognition of learning outcomes: the use of level descriptors in the twenty-first century. [online] Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000242887>

Duration				
Admission requirements				
ISCED field				
ISCED subfield				
Industry / Sector				
Profile of skills and competences – units				
General/vocational Obligatory/optional				

If a completely new qualification is developed, it can be benchmarked and mapped with similar existing qualifications in countries other than the ones involved in the development of joint qualification. Experts should identify the countries from which the qualification profiles/standards or contents of learning units can be mapped.

III. Development of Qualifications

In the final step, the profile has to be developed. Profile of qualification includes summary of the qualification and described learning units with learning outcomes.

After the analysis, the working group can decide to develop either full joint qualification with both general and vocational part, partial joint qualification with only vocational part or only certain number of modules which will be elaborated in the curricula. This will allow either the development of full new curricula or update of certain modules which will be incorporated in already existing VET programmes. Qualification and curricula should be based upon both national and European Qualification Framework and fit within the framework of the ESCO code aiding to the extent to which the program is comparable.

Formalizing proposal of profile of qualification requires:

1. To describe the qualification
 - a. For full new joint qualification: fill in the qualification descriptors
 - b. For developing part of existing qualification: compare existing qualifications
2. To study what key jobs and activities from occupational standards or employers research should be included
3. Write down the names of the units of the learning outcomes of the qualification and briefly describe them.

This methodology, if followed, will allow for the identification of common learning units across sector. This type of standardization in the form of minimum common learning outcomes that must necessarily be included in the education programs and which are agreed upon by consensus among all stakeholders in the system, represent a standard that becomes the basis for ensuring the quality and reliability of acquiring qualifications. The developed Qualification Profile should be flexible and adapted over time if necessary. What should additionally be considered are the requirements of the national regulatory body for the formal recognition of qualification.

Profile of qualification consists of:

1. Summary of qualification which includes:

- a) Title of the qualification - correct and complete name of the qualification;
- b) Title of the qualification in all national languages - translated title of the qualification
- c) Qualification level
- d) Credits - credit value of qualification (overall, general education, professional education, practical education at the employer, extracurricular activities, open curriculum, final examination) – if a qualification developed is partial or the goal is only to update qualification, the table should be filled for already existing national qualification.
- e) Full or partial qualification
- f) Duration - nominal study period
- g) Type of qualification - qualification at the level of education or professional qualification e.g. upper secondary
- h) Category of qualification – educational qualification
- i) Type of education – e.g. upper vocational-technical education
- j) Admission requirements - the conditions are specified in the education laws (elementary, secondary, higher education, adult education), and a prerequisite can be a certain level of qualification (e.g. level 2 completed)
- k) ISCED field
- l) ISCED subfield
- m) Awarding body - institution issuing the public document
- n) Body responsible for the qualification - institution where the qualification is obtained - vocational college, organization, verified institution of education.
- o) Assessment and completion - mode of assessment criteria - how the assessment will be conducted, who will evaluate
- p) Range of occupations accessible to the holder of the certificate.

2. Description of module which includes:

- a) Title of the module/learning outcome unit
- b) Objective of learning outcome unit
- c) Volume of the learning unit
- d) List of learning outcomes
- e) Conditions in which learning outcomes are acquired and assessed

Qualification Profile

1. Summary of qualification

Title of the qualification					
Title of the qualification in national language 1	<i>The title of the qualification must be classified according to one or more of the following NQF categories</i>				
Title of the qualification in national language 2					
Title of the qualification in national language 3					
.. (Translated title of the qualification)					
Qualification level:	EQF	NQF 1	NQF 2	NQF 3	...
Credits	For full joint qualification *	NQF 1	NQF 2	NQF 3	...
Overall					
General education					
Professional education					
Practical education at the employer					
Extracurricular activities *					
Open curriculum *					
Final examination*					
Full or partial qualification					
Duration (nominal study period)					
Type of qualification					
Category of qualification					
Type of education					

Admission requirements					
ISCED field					
ISCED subfield					
Awarding body/ Body responsible for the qualification:					
Assessment and completion					
Range of occupations accessible to the holder of the certificate					

*if applicable (change the table if necessary)

2. Development of learning outcomes for selected modules

Learning outcomes statements clarify what a learner is expected to know and be able to do and understand having completed a learning sequence, a module, a programme or a qualification.⁵ Description of the content of the qualification is a description of the standard on which the qualification is based which offers the details of the education program, unit of qualifications, information adopted from knowledge and skills needs which will be the basis for developing educational program. It offers description of module/learning outcome unit, with a list of learning outcomes (a brief description of knowledge, skills and competences). The development of learning outcomes is influenced by the activities of a particular occupational standard or group of occupations and the skills needed to achieve them.

⁵ Cedefop (2017). Defining, writing and applying learning outcomes: a European handbook. Luxembourg: Publications Office. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/566770>

Description of module

Title of the module/learning outcome unit	
Objective of learning outcome unit	
Volume of the learning unit	<p><i>Enter the proposed number of teaching hours: including the hours of assessment and self-study, i.e. the time required for the average student to acquire the proposed set of learning outcomes. The total time required to acquire the proposed set of outcomes is obtained by summing:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• hours with the teacher</i> <i>• hours of independent work</i> <i>• hours of assessment.</i>
List of learning outcomes:	
<p>1.</p> <p><i>Indicate what students need to know and be able to do, what content is relevant for students</i></p> <p><i>Enter all expected learning outcomes, each described by an active verb in a logical and one-word sentence.</i></p> <p><i>Preferably, list 5 to 10 outcomes, but is optional.</i></p> <p><i>Learning outcomes should clearly describe what the student or trainee will know, understand, or be able to do after the specific experience of acquiring a particular skill and knowledge.</i></p> <p><i>Learning outcomes should be designed to make it easy to identify the learning achievement for which the student will receive credit</i></p>	
<p>2. <i>Add if necessary</i></p>	
<p>3.</p>	
Conditions in which learning outcomes are acquired and assessed	<p><i>A clear description of the general and specific material conditions and skills of teachers required to obtain learning outcomes.</i></p>

Elements for quality assurance of qualification

Eligibility Requirements	<i>(if applicable)</i>
Justification for introducing a qualification and the role of qualification	<i>Identification of the key purpose of the qualification being analysed. The key purpose of a qualification is a concise yet comprehensive statement of the outcomes of education and training related to the standard for work in a given occupation. The key purpose describes what students are expected to know how to do.</i>

Roles and responsibilities

The qualification profile is developed by organizations who have a legitimate interest in developing a qualification in cooperation with relevant stakeholders. As the developed qualification profile will be the basis for designing and evaluating educational programs for acquiring a particular qualification and the objective is to develop quality joint qualification which will be recognized by national regulatory bodies, it is suggested to approach the process in a team-based manner. The working group that develops the qualification profile should be composed of institutions that are potential providers of educational and study programs that acquire a specific qualification, with the possibility of involving other relevant stakeholders (employers, professional associations), depending on the role of the qualification.

Development of Profile of qualification is a joint effort. It is recommended to form a working group and determine the roles, tasks, and relationships of experts involved, considering the skills and expertise of each member. A working group should have a coordinator in charge of planning and organization of the process of developing the profile. Additionally, a separate validation group could be set to review developed profile – or existing national assessment procedures can be used. The validation team assesses the extent to which learning outcomes and learning outcomes units adhere to the NQ rules. The validation team also assesses the extent to which the information in the document can be effectively used to design the vocational curriculum.

The task is the following:

- Outline and arrange the administrative support that will be required to facilitate the qualification development process.
- Aside from the experts involved in writing profile of qualification, it is advised to involve appropriate stakeholders in the process if necessary, for feedback – e.g. employers, representatives of regulatory body etc. In the beginning, identify the appropriate stakeholders to involve and consult.
- Set a procedure and timeline for routinely monitoring and reviewing the progress of the development.
- Establish how and how often communication with working group members will take place – define tentative timeline of activities with number of meetings.
- Set a procedure and timeline for reviewing whether the qualification needs to be updated.

List for checking the quality of qualification and coherence with requirements of curricula:

	YES	NO
There is a clear and justified purpose for the joint qualification		
There is evidence of sector wide support for the qualification		
The content of the developed part of the qualification aligns with the rationale		
Developed qualification meets the level requirements of NQFs*		
Developed qualification meets the credit requirements of NQFs*		
All elements of the summary of qualification profile are defined		
Language and terminology used is clear		
Credits are shown for each module**		
Volume of each learning outcome unit is shown		

The contents of the document are internally coherent, make sense and are simply stated		
Broad as well as specific outcomes are included		
Conditions in which learning outcomes are acquired and assessed are written for each learning outcomes unit		
Are the relevant stakeholders involved in the quality assurance and/or development of qualifications?		
Is there a feedback system for stakeholders put in place?		

*if applicable

**only applicable for full joint qualification

The main objective of the quality assurance is to develop VET qualifications by securing that they meet national standards and match labour market demand. The degree of regulation and autonomy varies depending on the national qualification frameworks and ways of evaluation and verification of newly developed qualifications. Whether a new qualification is being developed or a certain number of modules that will be the basis for modernization of curricula, it is crucial to ensure compliance with national policies and strategies for qualifications in all steps of qualification development.

Disclaimer:

Document **Guidelines for the Development of Joint Qualification** offers recommendations for developing new or updating existing joint qualification at upper secondary level in two or more countries. These guidelines are developed within the Erasmus+ project ImproVET and can serve as a reference document for organizations drafting joint qualifications, especially for quality assessment. This guide does not aim to be a detailed manual for development of full joint qualification. The tools and methods proposed can be adapted to the national requirements as needed.