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How to move from a European Qualifications Framework to a National or Institutional Approach – Experiences of the Project HE_LeO

Abstract

First of all, the article identifies the context of the HE_LeO project, the European environment, in particular both European Qualifications Frameworks, the QF for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and for Lifelong Learning (EQF). These frameworks have to be seen in the light of the decisive question: how can designers of learning programmes know what the learners should know and be able to do at the end of a programme (the learning outcomes)? The frameworks supply one area of orientation. Further insights may be gained through primary research, e.g. by analysing the present situation and future trends of the labour market. The article focuses on one study in particular to foster the idea that those offering a programme make in fact a promise to the learner to the extent that he or she will dispose of an added value after the outcomes of the learning exercise have been achieved in a documented way. This rather theoretical background is mirrored with the results of the case studies, supplied by the project partners. It becomes obvious, that there is no general approach yet as most partner countries have not developed their national frameworks. However, what has become very clear is that at grassroots level organisations feel the need to develop a framework as they are aware that otherwise recognition, permeability, transparency, to name but a few of the objectives related to the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes, may never be achievable.

Abstract in German

Der Beitrag erklärt zunächst den Zusammenhang, in dem die Partner des HE_LeO-Projekts kooperieren, den europäischen Kontext der Qualifikationsrahmenwerke, und zwar den QR für den Europäischen Hochschulraum (QR-EHR) und für das lebensbegleitende Lernen (EQR). Diese Rahmenwerke müssen unter folgender entscheidender Fragestellung betrachtet werden: wie können Entwickler/innen von Studiengängen wissen, was ein/e Lernende/r am Ende eines Programms wissen und in der Lage sein sollte zu tun (die Lernergebnisse). Ein anderer Ansatz ergibt sich durch Primärforschung, z.B. durch die Analyse des Arbeitsmarktes. Der Aufsatz bezieht sich insbesondere auf eine Untersuchung und unterstützt den Ansatz, dass die Programmanbieter dem/der Lernenden gegenüber ein Versprechen abgeben: Er oder sie wird einen Mehrwert an Wissen und Können erwerben, und zwar nachprüfbar. Es wird in den verschiedenen Fallstudien des Projekts deutlich, dass es bislang keinen allgemeingültigen Ansatz gibt, insbesondere auch deshalb nicht, weil in den meisten Ländern der beteiligten Projektpartner noch keine Rahmenwerke entwickelt worden sind. Dennoch wird durch die Partner deutlich, dass sie sich der Vorteile eines Rahmenwerks bewusst sind und die Notwendigkeit einer Entwicklung einfordern, damit Anerkennung, Durchlässigkeit, Transparenz, um nur einige Ziele der Qualifikationsrahmen im Bologna bzw. Kopenhagen Prozess zu nennen, erfolgreich realisiert werden können.

Keywords

Qualifications Frameworks, labour market, learner, learning outcomes, Onion Model

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Context of the Project HE_LeO

The project is embedded both into the Bologna and the Copenhagen Process. As the participants are higher education institutions on the one hand, a Framework for Qualifications of the Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) serves as a guideline. As on the other hand Ministries are involved and one project also focuses on prior learning, the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong-Learning (EQF), bridging all areas of formal, non-formal and informal learning, serves as orientation and is a challenging issue for higher education institutions, considering prior learning and continuing education as major areas of interest. In the following the major issues related to the cases outlined by the different actors are highlighted to allow the reader to get an overview about the various initiatives. However, *“...the main focus of the HE_LeO project and the handbook is the higher education sector – with reference to the EQF”* (jointly defined “Structure of the handbook). Both approaches have in common that they are based on learning outcomes. The project partners decided to define “learning outcomes” according to the EQF: *“Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process...”*. Although it was stressed that the learning processes are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence accept an application of the “Dublin descriptors”, used in the QF-EHEA, if suitable, was accepted. This set-up allows for a common basis and fosters the partners to implement a new way of thinking in curricula design: a learner centred, outcome oriented approach. It also stresses the importance of a continuous communication with the labour market to understand present situations and anticipate future developments and changes to act rather than react in terms of learning-programmes. At the same time the curricula designers should be aware that graduates of programmes, the research of institutions and the lecturers themselves have a direct impact on the labour market. Only if this permanent exchange takes place, state-of-the art learning outcomes can be defined, being the key element in modern approaches of curricula design.

Part I

How do we know what learners should know and be able to do at the end of a learning programme?

1. Guidance at European level: The European Qualifications Frameworks

The choice of deciding about the level and kind of learning outcomes is guided by the national framework within which the programme is placed. To this extent the bottom-up approach – as outlined in the HE_LeO-project – has to be reflected against standards and guidelines, documented by the respective national framework. As it was agreed by the countries their frameworks have to be compatible with the EQF, Higher Education or Lifelong Learning. To understand the different layers within the process, these frameworks are outlined in the following allowing for an easier access to the cases later on.



A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)

The “Bologna” Qualifications Framework initiated by the education and training ministries of the partner countries was presented to the Bergen Conference in 2005 by the Bologna-Follow-Up-Group. Its objective is to design an overarching framework for the higher education sector, also helping to develop national references. It stresses the relationship between qualifications and labour market, fosters an active life in a democratic society and supports personal development and encourages and maintains a broad, advanced knowledge basis (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks 2005).

Recommendations are outlined which should be considered when a national framework is being designed:

- Involvement of all stakeholders both inside and outside higher education
- Clear definitions of national goals and objectives
- Obvious relationship to academic standards, national and institutional quality assurance and enhancement systems
- Public confidence in academic standards requiring an understanding of the learning outcomes of the various qualifications and degrees in higher education.

To describe the qualifications the so called “Dublin Descriptors” are proposed. These were developed by the “Joint Initiative”, a group of ministries and experts from various EU member states, and contain expectations as regards learning outcomes which are linked to the three cycles within the Bologna Process, i.e. the qualifications of the first, second and third cycle are described according to “Knowledge and Understanding, Applying Knowledge and Understanding, Making Judgements, ability to Communicate and to be able to Learn to Learn”. It should be taken into account that the framework is subject to a dynamic process and may change over time. Therefore it has to be monitored, updated and further developed.

The process recognising individual learning outcomes is highlighted (process of articulation). To allow for this procedure it is essential that at the level of the Bologna partner countries the national qualifications (their levels, learning outcomes and descriptors) are related to the level descriptions of the European Framework (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, 2005). To verify the compatibility of national with the European frameworks a number of criteria are stipulated e.g. “...that the national framework and its qualifications are based on learning outcomes and that they are linked to ECTS credits...” (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, 2005, p. 10). Also, the procedure how the compatibility can be implemented by the partner countries themselves is detailed in here:

- “The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education
- There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework
- The national framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes and the qualifications are linked to ECTS or ECTS compatible credits
- The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national framework are transparent



- The national quality assurance system for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqués agreed by the ministers in the Bologna Process
- The national framework, and any alignment with the European framework, is referenced in all Diploma Supplements
- The responsibilities of the domestic parties to the national framework are clearly determined and published.” (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, 2005, p. 10).

When designing national frameworks for all education and training areas the need of lifelong-learning should be taken into account: “...Indeed, National Frameworks, and their related features such as the link to credit accumulation and transfer, moving towards a learning outcomes based approach and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning that is enabled by a real learning outcomes approach, all facilitate and encourage increased lifelong learning and international research shows that these are important elements of many countries’ approaches to encouraging lifelong learning” (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, 2005, p. 93).

In the QF-EHEA the model of reference for academic recognition is the qualification, being described by learning outcomes which can be assessed. However, one should be aware that in practice recognition is granted by the “receiver” (university, enterprise...), realising that mutual trust in the various qualifications is the essential issue. A “zone of mutual trust” surely needs time to develop, being supported by measures how to link qualifications framework and procedures of quality assurance and enhancement, not in the sense of a final check at the end of a learning process but rather earlier, following the Japanese principle of “make it right first time”. This particularly is facilitated by the description of the learning outcomes in case they are not only accredited at a certain point of time but also evaluated and updated permanently, realising that the support through continuous examinations should be preferred to final examinations.

European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong-Learning (EQF)

The European Qualifications Framework describes three categories of competences (Knowledge, Skills, Competence) and ranks them into eight levels, independent of the place (School, Job, University), form (formal, non-formal, informal), type (first cycle, continuous education), duration and intensity of learning. In April 2008 the final version was accepted through the decision process of the European Union. It should be taken into account that the EQF is an initiative of the EU and thus solely Member States of the EU participate, whereas the QF-EHEA is taken up by presently 46 countries, beyond the EU borders.

The EQF is based on assumed progressions in the various competence dimensions (vertical) which enable a presentation of national qualifications (horizontal) through bundling of learning outcomes which can be and have to be assessed. The EQF does not describe any qualifications at all, and the name “qualifications framework” may be misleading to outsiders. In reality the EQF presents a description of learning outcomes which may be understood as standards which allow the EQF to be used as a means to design comparable qualifications which are part of other national qualifications frameworks.

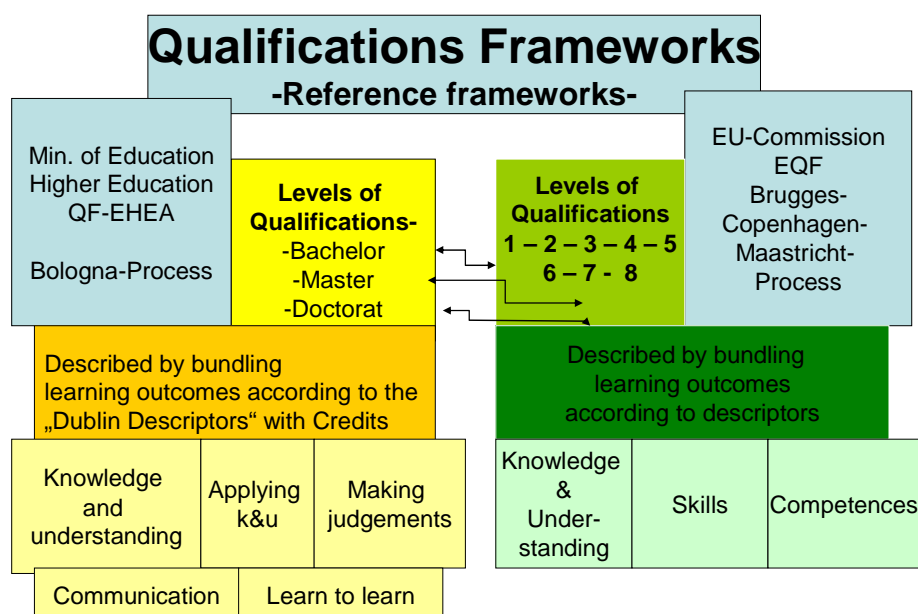


The EQF indicates that the levels 5-8 are compatible to those of the QF-EHEA. This is worthwhile to mention as normally speaking the QF-EHEA comprises 3 cycles only. The EQF respects short-cycle programmes, being common in several Member States, as part of the higher education area. This may be interesting as regards vocational education and training, e.g. the German Apprenticeship Scheme.

As a meta-framework the EQF should encourage the Member States to design their national frameworks in an adequate way to reach the stipulated objectives. The EQF does not oblige the partners to use a specific number of dimensions of competences or levels. The common denominator should be the compatibility between national framework and the EQF.

In contrast to the QF-EHEA the EQF national qualifications are “translated” into another national framework by comparing the learning outcomes. Whereas the QF-EHEA assumes that a bachelor as a defined qualification in one partner country corresponds to a bachelor level in another country – irrespective of the denomination of the number of the level (as countries may have a different number of levels, the numbers cannot be compared directly) - the EQF does not intend to compare directly a qualification in one country with a qualification in another. For both, however, the description of learning outcomes is the basic principle.

Summarising, both qualifications frameworks are outlined in the following diagram:



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2. Orientation at National level

The partner countries of both processes, Bologna and Copenhagen, may voluntarily decide to design a national qualifications framework to structure national qualifications according to level 1-8 in case of the EQF or to the three cycles if only the higher sector is chosen in line with the QF-EHEA. The mirroring of national qualifications and degrees with respective national levels remains the task of the partner country. Decisive is a



sound quality assurance and enhancement system as outlined above to foster mutual trust.

As at the time of the project only Germany and Hungary had designed a national framework – but only for the higher education sector – the focus of the following paragraph is on initiatives which can be taken at local level to define learning outcomes independent of a national orientation.

3. Initiatives at local level

Also at “grassroots-level” some initiatives can be taken to identify learning outcomes. Experience from the past may be remembered, certain innovative ideas discussed or a new design considered as adequate². In any case, an investigation into the labour market might reveal interesting results. One can do so by sending out questionnaires, interviewing experts or exploiting studies which were recently published (González, Wagenaar, 2008; DAAD 2007). The results stress the importance of competences which are not directly related to subjects but are rather general, that is generic for any employment. 660 companies (half SMEs, half large enterprises), e.g., responded to a DAAD initiated study and helped to sketch-out a “Desired ‘Can Do’ Profile”: More than 90% of the interviewees opted for the following profile of generic skills:

The learners should be able to

- communicate
- work in teams
- solve problems
- learn to learn
- work independently
- adapt to new situations

Subject-related knowledge was expected by 87% of the enterprises, close to the 88% asking for the learners to be able to analyse. Interestingly enough, it is not specialised knowledge which seems to be required strongly (supported by 68%) but rather a broad knowledge is favoured, supported by the employers’ view that specialised knowledge has to be acquired on-the-job. Of course, it is up to the designers of a programme to select their approach. As can be taken from the various cases outlined by the partners in the HE_LeO-project, the “experience lens” perspective dominates.

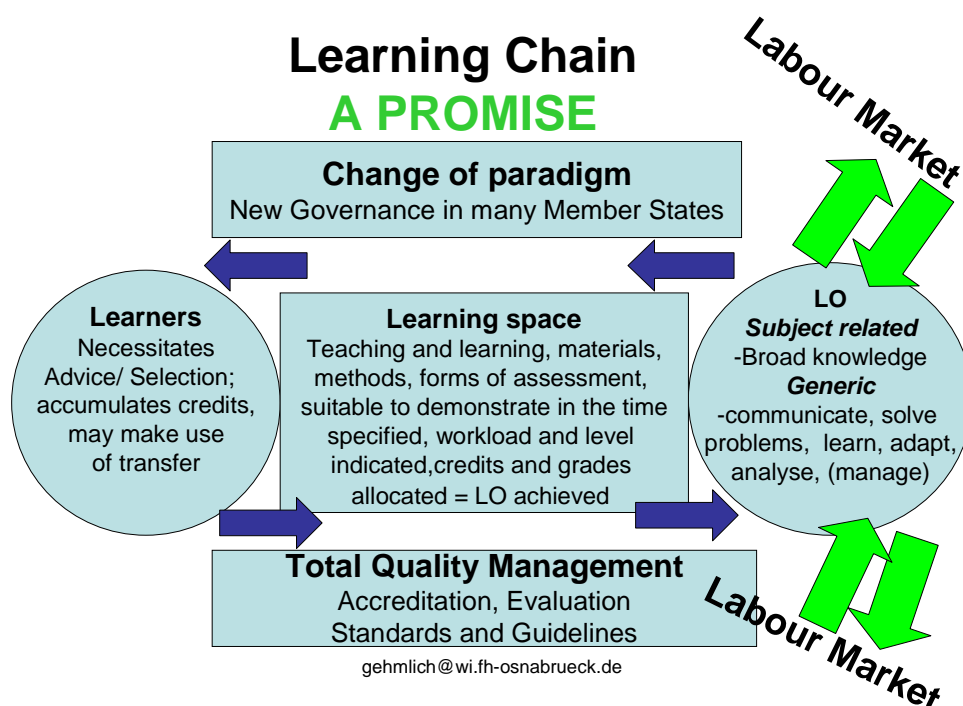
In any case, the planners have to consider how these learning outcomes can be achieved in a particular programme: curricula, syllabi have to be outlined and didactical and methodological approaches selected. The designers have to be aware that – by documenting what a learner is expected to know and able to do at the end of the programme – they promise him or her a defined value added in terms of learning outcomes when following the requirements of the programme. However, there is a catch: the programme can only promise the outcomes if the profile of the learner allows for the success, i.e. it is not enough that the learner is motivated to be successful, he or she also has to be capable within the specified time of a programme, e.g. 3 to 4 years to

² When planning a new development, Johnson, Scholes and Whittington refer to three different perspectives: the experience, ideas and design lens (Exploring Corporate Strategy 2008).



conclude a bachelor programme in higher education. In other words, before a learner can register for a programme there should be a selection or rather a consultancy process, in which the learner understands the nitty-gritty of the course and the organisers learn more about the candidate to be in the position to anticipate whether the programme in question is suitable for the learner to be successful.

This context, identified as a learning chain, highlights the shift of paradigm, from an input oriented system of the past to the modern outcome orientation of today, placing the learner in the centre of programme design, indicating the promise between those who offer the learning programme and those who register.



In detail the promise comprises the following elements:

1. The *learning outcomes*, i.e. a learner can achieve those learning outcomes designed for the respective learning activity, taking into account that the learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and / or be able to do at the end of a period of learning (EQF 2007).

2. The learner has to invest time and effort – his or her *workload*. The workload is a quantitative measure of all learning activities that may be feasibly required for the achievement of the learning outcomes (ECTS Key Features, revised, not yet published).

The workload is expressed as a quantitative figure, the credit. The achievement is expressed as a qualitative result, the learning outcomes.

This is documented in a Learning Agreement:

By registering for a learning programme



- The learner agrees that he or she has to sit for examinations etc. to be eligible for the desired degree, certificate...
- The institution agrees to make available the teaching and learning facilities to ensure that the learning outcomes can be achieved in the stipulated time and to award a degree, certificate... as soon as the learner has fulfilled the learning requirements.

The guiding principles for the allocation of credits in relation to the workload are the ECTS Key Features in Higher Education, and for the learning outcomes finally the European Qualifications Frameworks, specified within a changing environment, the capabilities of the learner and the expectations of the society, including the stakeholders.

The ECTS Key Features support a learner-centred system, they are based on workload required to achieve learning outcomes and agree to the “convention” that 60 credits represent an annual workload of a full-time learner. Credits are allocated to all aspects of a learning programme, based on completion and assessment in accordance with the learning agreement and can be used for accumulation as well as for transfer purposes.

Within the HE_LeO-case studies ECTS plays a minor role only. Some partners refer to the respective level as detailed in the QF-EHEA, i.e. a bachelor can be awarded if 180-240 ECTS credits have been achieved or 60-120 in case of a master. The reason is that QF-EHEA qualifications stipulate an anticipated workload whereas in the EQF learning outcomes are described in a generic way without a defined relation to a specific qualification. In fact, the EQF stresses that the qualification as such is made up by a bundle of learning outcomes and that the level of the qualification achieved depends on an evaluation (which may have been done within a national, sectoral or institutional environment beforehand).

Also, ECVET, the credit system designed for the vocational sector does not play a role yet, as at present a detailed system of allocation is still in discussion.

Part II

1. The HE_LeO Case Studies

Hungary, Ministry of Education and Culture

As the Department for EU Relations in the Ministry of Education and Culture was the partner, their work focused on the developments at national level. The Hungarian government introduced a national qualifications framework for higher education within the line of the Bologna framework in 2005/06. By 2010, they will have designed an overarching framework according to the EQF to include all forms of learning. Its implementation is foreseen for 2013 at the latest. The intention is to finally have one set of descriptors for describing all qualifications on the basis of learning outcomes. To achieve the goal the ministry set up a “Higher Education Round Table” in 2006 which also looks into the regulations as regards introducing and implementing programmes for learning and the awarding of degrees and certificates. The HE_LeO partner is one of the main actors in these initiatives, highlighting in their report the difficulties to define a common set of descriptors for all learning activities and realising that the introduction of a common qualifications framework based on learning outcomes will lead to a significant reform of the Hungarian education and training system.



Spain, Valencia University of Technology

The Spanish partner was involved in initiating qualifications frameworks at national and institutional level. For this purpose the Spanish ministry reformed the legal basis. However, the institutions seemed to need further support. This is why the HE_LeO partner – jointly with the Spanish Ministry for Education and Science – initiated pilot projects for the three cycles in five different broad academic areas, Arts and Humanities, Sciences, Health Sciences, Social Sciences and Law and Engineering and Architecture, and invested a lot of energy to disseminate their experience. The projects used the Dublin Descriptors as applied in the QF-EHEA.

To identify the different dimensions of the qualifications frameworks, the partner developed a scheme based on labelling learning outcome categories, various higher education cycles and the scope of disciplines. Within the project they discussed and proposed learning outcomes at institutional level for Engineering and Architecture and at school level for Mechanical Engineering. As a key message the project partner realised the enormous challenge of designing and implementing a qualifications framework at any level.

Bulgaria, South-West University “Neofit Rilski”

Bulgaria signed the Bologna Declaration already in 1999. Since then, however, the development to reform the higher education sector has been rather tedious. The HE_LeO partner analysed seven degree programmes with the purpose to design guidelines how to introduce and encourage a learner centred approach in curriculum and syllabus design, in teaching and learning. The focus on learning outcomes became obvious, also when realising that qualification profiles of study-programmes were described incoherently, lacked information which competences were needed to respect the criterion of “employability” as outlined in the Bologna Declaration, and also a common terminology and a standardised format was needed urgently, to name but a few of the findings of the partner institution.

Austria, Graz University of Technology

In June 2008 the first round of a consultation process to design an overarching national qualifications framework was concluded. Presently the comments and proposals are evaluated.

Having no qualifications framework as reference yet, the project partner focused on designing guidelines and recommendations as regards the various Bologna cycles. They developed a template to help institutions in the development of curricula and to design a qualification profile. Additionally, they tried to match course-types and competences and link those to course descriptions. Overall their work focused on a User’s Guide-type approach to disseminate their experience to the benefit of other institutions and organisations when writing learning outcomes at programme and course level, supported by a glossary to prepare a common usage of terminology.

Germany, Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg

Since 2005 Germany has implemented a national qualifications framework compatible with the QF-EHEA, consisting of three cycles. However, in the past hardly anybody has been aware of its existence. It was in May 2007 when the German Accreditation Board reminded the Accreditation Agencies of its existence and asked for a closer check of the



learning outcomes characterising the qualifications of the three cycles when accrediting study-programmes. Presently a working group, comprising all stakeholders, elaborates on the development of an overarching framework, first of all for all formal learning activities. The group is chaired by both, the federal ministry and the ministries of the states. It is assumed that in 2009 a testing phase will be started.

In HE_LeO both a federal ministry (Lower Saxony) and a university (Oldenburg) were engaged. Whereas the ministry fed in the developments in Germany, and considered results of the project meetings, the university partner focused on evaluating the effects and benefits of learning outcomes. For this purpose they designed two cases: The first to be investigated was a first cycle programme in “Educational Sciences” for “regular undergraduate students”; the second in “Business Administration”, also at bachelor level, but within continuing education. Whereas in the first case-study the writing of learning outcomes was the key issue, the second case particularly concerned recognition and accreditation of prior learning – based on learning outcomes – as the learners were employees. The project partner realised in both cases that a significant redesign of programmes and recognition procedures had to be initiated.

The university also looked into the effects of introducing learning outcomes in relation to student mobility between co-operating universities. Their experience with various institutions in different countries underline the fact that a learning outcome approach benefits mobility significantly and thus facilitates academic recognition and the development of stable and mutual advantageous co-operation based on the assumption that the respective partners follow the learner centred approach.

2. Lessons learned from the initiatives of the project partners

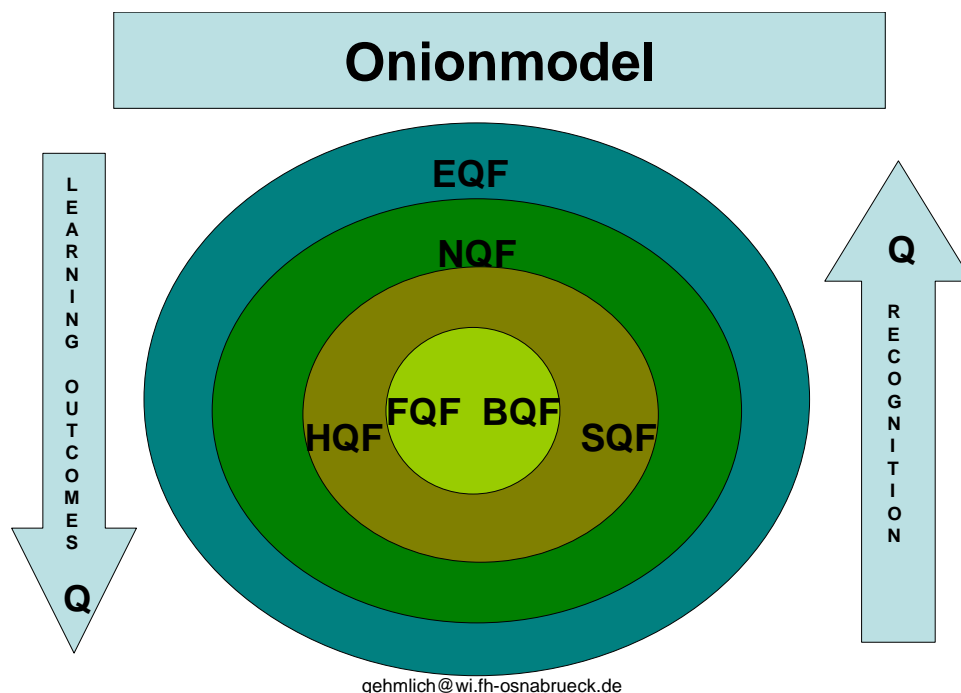
As can be learned from these examples of the partners’ initiatives HE_LeO was a very ambitious programme. However, without the back up of national frameworks (with the exception of Germany and Hungary), all partners got involved to find a way how to translate the new way of thinking, the learner centred approach, into their local or national environment. Obviously, the impact of their initiatives depended a lot on their government support – one of the reasons why HE_LeO had the respective ministries as partners as well – and on the overall speed of reform. They all have in common the design of curricula and syllabi on the basis of learning outcomes, being the major common denominator the project management put forward to support their partners. Also, the different approaches at various levels of development stages in the partner countries indicate the diversity which such a process entails. HE_LeO has clearly indicated several options and has helped to increase the awareness of the intended reforms.

Linking the results to the overall picture outlined at the beginning of this contribution, it becomes obvious that there is not one way, there is even no automatic acceptance of either the Dublin Descriptors or the ones used in the EQF. Everywhere, however, a discussion has started, looking at the benefits – not neglecting potential shortfalls – to design systems which are easily understood and compatible with each other to finally help the learner to select from various pathways without being at a disadvantage because of region, gender or any other reason. Neither descriptors, nor the number of levels are taken for granted in any country. The discussions, quite often – and this is



particularly true in this project – begin at grassroots level. However, without the support of the governments and the learner the change will not happen.

Also, it has become quite obvious that not only the QF-EHEA and EQF respectively are interdependent but also all national and institutional frameworks. Even sectoral approaches are possible. Although not all of these options were in the focus of the project, the following “Onion Model” includes them to indicate the whole picture.



Abbreviation	Qualifications Framework
EQF	European Qualifications Frameworks (both: EHEA and LLL)
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
HQF	Higher Education (Institutional) Qualifications Framework
SQF	Sectoral Qualifications Framework
FQF	Faculty Qualifications Framework
BQF	Business Organisation Qualifications Framework

Note: SQF, FQF and BQF are not further outlined in this book. They should indicate that there even more options for the design of frameworks than detailed here.

All qualifications frameworks are based on learning outcomes, the requirement for recognition of learning in whatever form, at whatever place. Additionally, the partner case-studies revealed the following needs:

- A clear presentation of the **structure of the frameworks** is essential. Technical terms have to be defined in an easily understandable way. The learning outcomes have to demonstrate an obvious relationship to education and training standards respectively and – as a bundle – represent competence profiles (qualifications). The levels of competence are designed in a documented way. On the basis of transparent examinations evidence of achieved learning outcomes is furnished.

On this basis the frameworks can fully exploit their **embedded functions**:

- Comparability and compatibility, being transparent to all stakeholders and enabling a translation into different environments, so that several pathways are open and mobility is possible between different programmes, institutions and countries (permeability and mobility).
- Award of “qualifications at adequate level”, also across countries, and facilitating recognition and accreditation of prior learning, comprising formal, non-formal and informal learning is possible as elements of qualifications are described by learning outcomes. Qualifications describe the employability of the holder in form of learning outcomes and form a foundation for curriculum design, a basis for consultation, also within the context of lifelong learning and foster to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of education and training programmes.
- Credits are used within academic qualifications and may be used in other learning environments soon (ECTS / ECVET e.g.).

As **critical success factors** the concept should be investigated in the light of

- o Suitability (is the framework suitable to reach the objectives?)
- o Acceptability (will all stakeholders agree?)
- o Feasibility (is it possible to introduce the frameworks, e.g. at national level, at all?)
- o Sustainability (can the framework be regularly monitored and updated?)

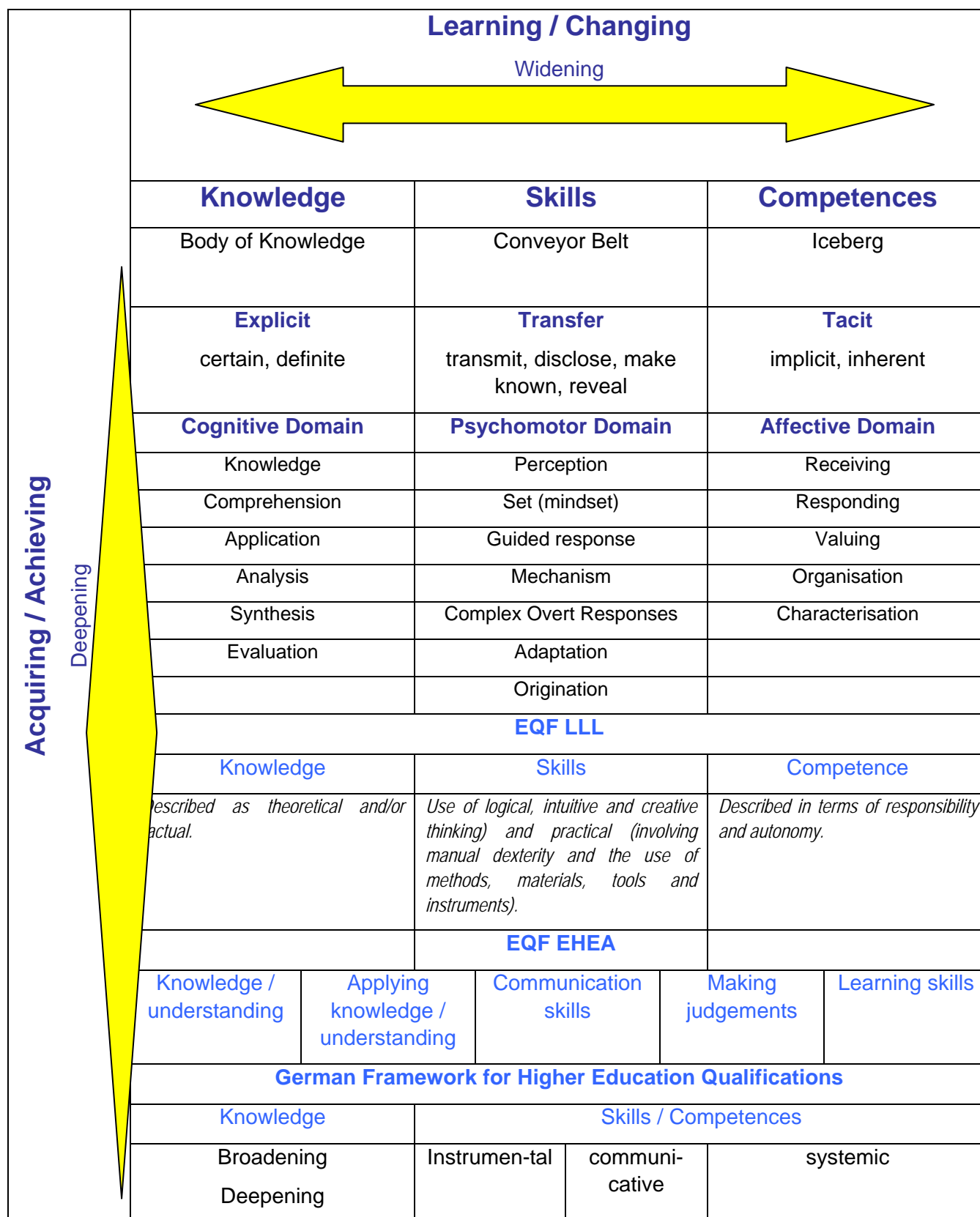
The decision as regards descriptors does not appear to be of decisive importance. In none of the case-studies was it mentioned that a particular choice had to be made. As regards national frameworks the descriptors are decided by the government, sometimes they may be identical to those of the QF-EHEA (Dublin Descriptors) or the EQF (knowledge-skills-competence). The main objective should be to include all forms of learning in any area, school, vocational education, higher education. The descriptors seem to be rather a political decision; as the levels appear to be as well, considering the 10 levels of the Irish or the 12 levels of the Scottish national framework as examples.

By comparing the academic approach (Bloom) with the EQFs, and, as an example, the German Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, it is obvious that the descriptors presently applied are not contradictory to each other; they rather seem to facilitate compatibility between the various frameworks.

The table below demonstrates the close relationship between different criteria to describe learning outcomes. If Bloom’s taxonomy was considered – learning in three different domains (cognitive, psychomotor, affective) - a compatibility could be identified with explicit knowledge, transfer skills and tacit competences. Or, to use another “picture”, knowledge is interpreted as a body of knowledge essential for a certain subject area, discipline etc.; skills are like a conveyor belt to reveal knowledge in a given context, and, finally, competences are inherent, only partly recognisable, and may be identified, when needed in particular circumstances (iceberg). There is also the chance that the full range of competences of a person will never ever be revealed to the full extent.

Accepting this interpretation, it becomes obvious that the descriptors of both the QF-EHEA and the EQF fit well into it, proving a compatibility of descriptors and learning outcomes.





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One issue, however, may endanger this successful approach: organisations and governments etc. sometimes are not satisfied with sharing experiences gained by others or definitions agreed upon by a vast majority. Some tend to “invent the wheel again” and block further developments by doing so. Many attempts have, for example, been made to apply terms of a purely national context everywhere. Within ECTS this has been tried by designing a marking system or in Tuning by defining terms such as lectures, seminars etc. They all failed as they are closely embedded into national systems. Compatibility seems the way out, not harmonisation. To this extent HE_LeO has supplied interesting insights at national and organisational level.

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