

ESQF Questions & Answers

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ESQF

Questions & Answers

The European Sectoral Qualifications Framework (ESQF) for Asylum and Reception Officials is a practical tool that can offer Member States (MS) a comprehensive overview of the competences that officials working in the sector require to carry out their duties and tasks and the corresponding learning that will support them to do their jobs effectively.

The following questions and answers are intended to clarify some of the concepts from the field of higher education and vocational training that may be new to some users. We hope they will help make the tool more meaningful and encourage users to benefit fully from its potential to guide learning strategies both on an individual level and on an organisational level.



► What is the background to the ESQF?

In 2015, EASO¹ formed the Certification and Accreditation Working Group (CAWG) to commence preparations for the accreditation of the EASO Training Curriculum. After having implemented a pilot programme for accreditation, it was recognised that a key component of EASO's strategy to offer accredited training and learning would be the development of a Sectoral Qualifications Framework. An exercise to produce the occupational standards was initiated in July 2018. The occupational and corresponding educational standards were validated by the CAWG, EASO and Member States and reviewed by a reference group. In November 2020, the European Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Asylum and Reception Officials (ESQF) was finalised.

► What is the aim of the ESQF?

The European Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Asylum and Reception Officials aims to capture all learning required to perform the job tasks of asylum and reception officials in Member States. It specifically targets officials responsible for the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The aim of the ESQF is, therefore, to identify relevant training and learning paths for Member State asylum and reception officials based on their duties and job tasks.

¹ EASO has now become the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)

► What is a qualifications framework?

A qualifications framework is a reference grid of learning outcomes, set out in levels that denote the level of complexity of the learning. Its primary uses are to inform the design of qualifications and enable comparison between qualifications. The learning outcomes approach puts the focus on what the learner will know, understand or be able to demonstrate on completion of a programme of study.

► What exactly are ‘learning outcomes’?

‘Learning outcomes’ mean statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

- ‘Knowledge’ means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work.
- ‘Skills’ means the ability to apply knowledge to complete tasks and solve problems.
- ‘Competence’ means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities in work [...] situations. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of ‘responsibility and autonomy’².

² Source: The recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the EQF

As you can see from the ESQF, we also use ‘responsibility and autonomy’ as it will inform managers of the level of autonomy that can be expected from their staff when they have successfully achieved the learning outcome.

Learning outcomes may be written for qualifications (as is the case in qualifications frameworks), for programmes, for modules, for units or for individual learning activities. Learning outcomes written at qualification or programme level are broad, overarching statements, whereas learning outcomes written for shorter learning sequences such as modules are more specific in describing what the learner will be able to do.

Learning outcomes serve the following purposes:

- to inform learners of what is expected of them;
- to guide designers and developers when devising content and assessments about what should be included and at what level of complexity;
- to guide the trainer in his or her approach to delivery of content and assessment that focuses on what the learner will be able to do as a result of the learning;
- to influence the domain (and level) of learning required of delivery and assessment;
- to fulfil the requirements of programme outcomes leading to qualifications.



► How do National Qualifications Frameworks relate to the European Qualifications Framework?

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), known as the European Qualifications Framework, was specifically designed to enable the comparison of qualifications across Europe and thus enable worker mobility and promote lifelong learning. Each EU Member State, and many other countries, have developed National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), with the number of levels determined nationally and reflective of national education systems, along with a referencing report of how the NQF maps onto the EQF. Thus, equivalence can be established and evaluated such that a qualification has the same level of learning complexity achieved. All qualifications issued in Europe state the level of the qualification in accordance with the NQF and the level in accordance with the EQF.

► How are EQF levels defined?

The European Qualifications Framework structure comprises of eight levels of three types of learning: knowledge, skills and responsibility/autonomy (R/A). The levels increase in complexity from level 1 through to level 8, with learning outcomes that are defined for each type of learning. To provide some context, a Bachelor's degree is EQF level 6, a Master's degree is level 7 and a PhD is level 8.



► Are the levels in the ESQF equivalent to European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels?

No, the levels are not equivalent, but they mirror the EQF. The level of complexity of the job competences has been defined by carefully consulting the EQF. As you can see, the ESQF educational standards have the following three levels: Level 4-5/Level 6/Level 7. In order to better understand the increasing level of complexity, below are the EQF descriptors for each level mentioned in the ESQF.

EQF Level 4

Knowledge	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study
Skills	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study
Responsibility and autonomy	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities

EQF Level 5

Knowledge	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge
Skills	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems
Responsibility and autonomy	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others



EQF Level 6

Knowledge	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles
Skills	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study
Responsibility and autonomy	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups

EQF Level 7

Knowledge	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research; critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields
Skills	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields
Responsibility and autonomy	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams

➤ What is the meaning of the levels of the occupational and educational standards?

The occupational standards are classified under levels A, B and C, with 'A' reflecting the least complex tasks and 'C' reflecting the most complex tasks. The same applies to the educational standards, which are organised under numerical columns (4-5/6/7).

➤ Do the levels reflect hierarchical structures in Member State authorities?

No, they are uniquely based on the level of complexity of the duty or task. The ESQF maps learning outcomes and **not** the position of the learner in their hierarchy. An example is the section on supervisory and management competences; it captures supervisory and management-type tasks, **not** tasks for managers and supervisors.



► What does the term ‘sectoral’ mean?

In terms of qualifications frameworks, a sector is an area or subject that is distinct from others. There are sectoral qualifications frameworks (SQF) on subjects, such as ‘psychology’ or ‘mathematics’ and SQFs for occupational areas such as ‘nursing’, ‘border guarding’ or ‘construction work’. The sector for the ESQF is asylum and reception. There are two key points to consider in relation to the definition of the sector.

Firstly, the ESQF does not cover the learning for other professionals who work in the asylum and reception fields, such as nurses, doctors or social workers. The learning required for their professions is determined by other qualifications frameworks. However, the ESQF can be used to define supplemental learning required by other professions working in the asylum and reception fields that is asylum/reception specific.

Secondly, the ESQF is structured in such a way that it separates competences where the learning is necessary for some asylum and reception officials but is not distinct to the sector. For example, the supervisory and management competences.



► Why a European SQF and not an International SQF?

Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks can be developed at a national level or at international level. International Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (ISQF) reference learning standards across two or more countries. The EUAA has opted to name the SQF a European SQF rather than an International SQF as it better reflects the region of application. Although it may be very useful for countries other than Member States to consult the ESQF, it has mainly been developed to support the harmonised implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). As such, it supports interoperability, harmonisation and mobility between organisations that differ in size, that operate with different national laws and have different hierarchical structures, staff job titles and varying responsibilities.

The ESQF provides a common set of training standards, developed by working groups of experts from Member States expressed with a common language and ordered in a way which enables cross references with European (EQF) and national (NQFs) levels.



► Are Member States obliged to make use of the ESQF?

Thanks to the extensive involvement of Member States, the current job tasks and corresponding learning for all asylum and reception officials across the EU are reflected in the ESQF. However, certain tasks within the ESQF may not be relevant for some Member States and, therefore, the corresponding learning will not be necessary. The ESQF does not oblige any Member State to include a task or learning for its officials if they are not relevant. Member States are encouraged to make use of the ESQF, but they are in no way obliged.

► What is a qualification?

According to the EQF definition, a qualification is “a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards”. This definition ties a qualification to assessment of learning and quality assurance of the assessment. Quality assurance agencies have minimum ‘sizes’ for programmes of study that lead to a qualification. The ‘size’ is expressed in learning credits (ECTS for higher education and ECVETs for vocational education). The reason for setting a minimum number of learning credits mean that a qualification is only awarded where the assessment(s) reflect substantial learning. Consequently, the learning outcomes for a qualification are at a higher level.



➤ Will I get a qualification after completing an EAC training module?

Not yet, but we are working on it! As you can see above, a qualification is awarded after a designated number of credits have been obtained. Currently, the EUAA is building up a training quality assurance framework to enable full alignment to European standards. The aim is for the European Asylum Curriculum (EAC) to become accredited in the context of a European reference framework for qualifications. A starting point is mapping our training to EQF levels and then building programmes that would be credit carrying. This would enable the skills and qualifications of asylum and reception officials to be easily recognised across borders and it would thereby promote harmonised implementation of the Common European Asylum System.



► How are the matrices of occupational and educational standards linked?

Both the ESQF occupational standards and educational standards are divided into three sections: 'Asylum and Reception Generic Competences', 'Asylum and Reception Specific Competences' and 'Supervisory and Management Competences'. Within each section, there are 'competence areas' listed in the first column. The complexity level in the occupational standards should match the complexity level of the corresponding educational standards. In some cases, the standards are the same in both matrices. Where the educational standard is expressed in different terms to the occupational standard, it is to ensure that the outcome of the learning can be verified. As you can see in the following example, the occupational standard is quite wide. The educational standard is more specific and provides a basis to evaluate if the learning needed to carry out the task has been acquired.

Example:

Occupational standard 3e: *Ability to communicate effectively in a broad range of professional contexts*

Educational standard 3e: *Skill = Selectively apply communication techniques and styles to communicate effectively in a broad range of asylum-related professional contexts*



► Why are there empty boxes? Is this intentional or is there something missing?

The occupational standards reflect the competences needed to perform a task in terms of level of complexity. If a box is empty it is because no task has been identified (neither less complex nor more complex) for a 'Competence Area' - so the empty boxes are intentional. The same applies to the educational standards. Boxes are only filled when an actual job task or learning outcome has been identified. For example, knowledge may have already been acquired at a lower level but the application of the knowledge (skill) reflects a higher level of complexity.

Example:

Occupational standard 17a: *Broad basic knowledge of information and documentation to be provided to applicants is captured under level A.*

It is then applied at level B

Occupational standard 17e: *Ability to determine and approve information to be shared with the applicant in relation to specific cases.*

The 'knowledge' box at level B is empty because it has already been acquired at level A; It is the application that is more complex.



➤ Are all job tasks for asylum and reception officials covered in the restricted number of boxes?

The occupational standards are high level but may cover many job tasks that are necessary to achieve the occupational standard.

Example:

19e: Ability to assess the claim to determine if status of international protection should be granted, excluded or ended, using all relevant evidence and information.

This occupational standard encompasses a number of sub-tasks such as conducting a risk assessment, identifying what evidence is relevant to a claim and making a decision.

It is not possible to list all of the sub-tasks in the matrix. However, they have been captured to inform the EUAA Training Needs Analysis Tool (ETNAT). They are also used to design and develop training as some training may cover certain job tasks but not the entire occupational standard.



► Why is language proficiency not included?

Although a level of language proficiency may be necessary to carry out certain duties and tasks, this is outside the scope of the ESQF. There is a separate European framework, namely the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which can be used to ascertain language levels.

► Where can I find out more?

Readers are invited to familiarise themselves with the literature (some examples below) and, in particular, with national and European implementation of qualification frameworks.

- Cedefop (2009), The shift to learning outcomes, policies and practices in Europe, available at: **Cedefop publications and resources**
- Europass webpage with a comprehensive description of the European Qualifications Framework: **Europass_European qualifications framework**
- European Commission. (2008), The European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF). Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, available at: **European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning**
- European Commission (2013), Final report on the evaluation of the implementation of the EQF, available at: **Europass_Study on the implementation of the EQF**

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