The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a translation grid for qualifications around Europe. It has two principal purposes: (1) to promote mobility between countries, and (2) to facilitate lifelong learning. Both are indispensable for achieving more and better jobs and growth, as Europe faces the challenges of becoming an advanced, knowledge-based economy. The European Parliament has today approved the Commission proposal for a Recommendation to set up the EQF.

Ján Figel’, European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, explained its significance: “People in Europe too often face obstacles when they try to move from one country to another to learn or work. They sometimes also face obstacles when they want to move from one part of their own country’s education system to another, e.g. from vocational education and training to higher education. The EQF will make different qualifications more easily readable between different European countries, and so promote increased mobility for learning or working. Within countries, it has already encouraged the development of National Qualifications Frameworks. The EQF will also promote lifelong learning, for example by making it easier to gain credit for the learning people have already achieved.”

At the core of the EQF are its eight reference levels, from basic to advanced. These describe what a learner knows, understands and is able to do, regardless of the system in which the learner's qualification was acquired.

The EQF therefore shifts the focus away from learning inputs (such as the length of a learning experience, or the type of institution), to learning outcomes. Shifting the focus towards learning outcomes brings significant advantages:

* it supports a better match between education and training provisions and the needs of the labour market (for knowledge, skills and competences);
* it facilitates the validation of non-formal and informal learning; and
* it facilitates the transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education and training systems.
As an instrument for promoting lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training, as well as higher education. The eight EQF levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education, up to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training.

The Recommendation approved by the European Parliament foresees that Member States relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010, and that individual certificates or diplomas should bear an EQF reference by 2012.

The political agreement reached in the European Parliament follows three years of intensive preparation, in close co-operation with Member States and stakeholders. The EQF is already influencing the development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) in many Member States, where NQFs are often themselves part of the wider national reform process. Most countries now are developing NQFs. The Commission is also supporting this process by funding projects bringing together groups of countries and sectors testing the implementation of the EQF.

It will therefore enable individuals and employers to use the EQF as a reference tool to compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems.

Following the agreement between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, the EQF will be formally adopted by the Council in the coming weeks.

More information: