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## It was said...



## MRS. MÁIRE GEOGHEGAN QUINN

European Commissioner Designate  
Research Innovation and Science

Europe has entered the Age of Innovation. We can be followers or leaders. Europe is at its best, when working in the future tense. Working in partnership with the European Parliament and this committee we can move forward. Together we can make a difference. We need to make a difference. (...) We need a proper use of funds, proportionate controls and professional management. We must maximise simplicity without compromising on audit or evaluation quality. For our vital Public Private Partnerships this means more innovation-friendly operating rules and conditions. (...) A world of zero risk, is a world of zero innovation. (...) We need to look at how to leverage complementary structural funds resources. (...) We also need to address the increasing disconnect between science and society. Society must be familiar and at ease with the science underpinning its progress, functioning and survival. Science must belong in Society. (...) Within a new Research and Innovation policy we need to make the Fifth Freedom for the mobility of researchers, knowledge and technology throughout Europe a reality. Our researchers need to be able to travel and work in other Member States and enjoy fully protected social security and pension entitlements. (...).

From the Opening Remarks at the European Parliament on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2010.

# Editorial

Among important issues for university, educational and labour societies in Europe the issue of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) plays a leading role. The EQF is an ambitious and far-reaching instrument which has implications for education and training systems, the labour market, industry and commerce and citizens. The EQF applies to all types of education, training and qualifications, from school education to academic, professional and vocational. The system shifts the focus from the traditional approach which emphasises 'learning inputs' such as the length of a learning experience, or a type of institution. It also encourages lifelong learning by promoting the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The EQF recognises that Europe's education and training systems are so diverse that a shift to learning outcomes is necessary to make comparison and cooperation between countries and institutions possible. In the EQF a learning outcome is defined as a statement of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. The EQF therefore emphasises the results of learning rather than focusing on inputs such as length of study. Learning outcomes are specified in three categories – as knowledge, skills and competence. This signals that qualifications – in different combinations – capture a broad scope of learning outcomes, including theoretical knowledge, practical and technical skills, and social competences where the ability to work with others will be crucial. It will therefore enable much easier comparison between national qualifications and should also mean that people do not have to repeat learning if they move to another country. It is important to find out without the difficulty e.g. in an enterprise in Greece during the recruitment of a job applicant e.g. from Ireland the level of the qualifications presented by the Irish candidate. But once the EQF is fully implemented, an Irish person's certificates will bear a reference to an EQF Reference Level. The Greek authorities will have already decided where their own national certificates in the field concerned lie, so the Irish enterprise would use the EQF reference to get a better idea of how the Irish qualification compares to Greek qualifications. In fact the EQF was adopted by the European Parliament and Council already on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2008, and the suitable works are to be finished in the member countries of the European Union in principle till 2010 but considerable delays in that range among other in Poland were noted. The EQF is a common European reference framework which links countries' qualifications systems together, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. It promotes workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitates their lifelong learning. The EQF will relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework. Individuals and employers will be able to use the EQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems. The EQF encourages countries to relate their qualifications systems or frameworks to the EQF by 2010 and to ensure that all new qualifications issued from 2012 carry a reference to the appropriate EQF level. Most Member States are now or were just developing their own National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) to link into the EQF. The recommendation establishes a common European reference which will link the various national qualifications systems together and so facilitate greater communication between them. A network of independent but related and mutually understandable qualifications systems are thereby be created. The European Commission, national authorities and social partners are working to implement the EQF through an EQF Advisory Group. The group's work is complemented by the Cluster on the Recognition of Learning outcomes, one of the eight clusters within the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, which supports the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The core of the EQF are eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – 'learning outcomes'. The EQF will relate different countries' national qualifications systems and frameworks together around a common European reference – its eight reference levels. The levels span the full scale of qualifications, from basic (Level 1, for example school leaving certificates) to advanced (Level 8, for example Doctorates) levels. As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses all levels of qualifications acquired in general, vocational as well as academic education and training. Additionally, the framework addresses qualifications acquired in initial and continuing education and training. The eight reference levels are described in terms of learning outcomes. Using learning outcomes as a common reference point, the Framework will facilitate comparison and transfer of qualifications between countries, systems and institutions and will therefore be relevant to a wide range of users at



European as well as at the national level. Most European countries have decided to develop National Qualifications Frameworks reflecting and responding to the EQF. These developments are important to ensure that the European-level cooperation process is properly anchored at the national level. This closer relationship between countries' qualifications systems will have many beneficiaries. The EQF supports greater mobility of learners and workers. It makes it easier for learners to describe their broad level of competence to recruiters in other countries. This help employers interpret the qualifications of applicants and so support labour market mobility in Europe. At a very practical level, from 2012 all new qualifications should bear a reference to the appropriate EQF level. The EQF will thus complement and reinforce existing European mobility instruments such as Europass, Erasmus, and ECTS. The EQF should benefit individuals by increasing access to, and participation in, lifelong learning. By establishing a common reference point, the EQF will indicate how learning outcomes may be combined from different settings, for example formal study or work, and from different countries, and can thus contribute to reducing barriers between education and training providers e.g. between higher education and vocational education and training, which may operate in isolation from each other. This will promote progression so that learners do not have to repeat learning for example. The EQF can support individuals with extensive experience from work or other fields of activity by facilitating validation of non-formal and informal learning. The focus on learning outcomes will make it easier to assess whether learning outcomes acquired in these settings are equivalent in content and relevance to formal qualifications. The EQF will support individual users as well as providers of education and training by increasing transparency of qualifications awarded outside the national systems, for example by sectors and multinational companies. The adoption of a common reference framework based on learning outcomes will facilitate the comparison and (potential) linking together of traditional qualifications awarded by national authorities and qualifications awarded by other stakeholders. The EQF will thus help sectors and individuals take advantage of this growing internationalisation of qualifications. The rapid development of EQF and NQFs demonstrates the need for increased transparency and comparability of qualifications at all levels and shows that the basic principles underpinning the EQF are broadly shared. That is why we invite PT Authors to share with PT Readers of our Journal with the achievements in that range. The pages of the chapter Education and Research Trends of the Journal are at your disposal and the importance of the issue surely encourage to the broad discussion.

Prof. Leszek A. Dobrzanski M Dr hc  
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