

Cross- National Synthesis Report, *Bolster Up*

Introduction:

The Cross-national Synthesis Report for Furniture-making and Upholstering aims to:

- Provide a comprehensive account of the qualifications in Furniture-making and Upholstering in seven EU countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Poland and Romania. Table 1 provides this information in summary form.
- Provide an account of the similarities and differences between qualifications in the seven countries. Table 2 provides the information in summary form.
- Indicate the prospects for comparison of qualifications and the construction of core qualification profiles within the context of the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

The report has been constructed from seven national reports from each of the partner countries. On the basis of the information provided in these reports, a grid of abilities and activities covered by each qualification was built up. This grid was constructed on the basis of previous work on situating sectoral qualifications (EQF). These include work on conceptual and linguistic challenges in implementing the EQF (Brockmann et al, 2011); a proposed sectoral framework for the European Construction Sector (Garstka and Syben, 2009) and a comparative study of Bricklaying qualifications in eight countries using a classification derived from Brockmann et al and Garstka and Syben (Brockmann et al 2010). This synthesis report uses this methodology to provide a comprehensive mapping of the Furniture-making and Upholstering Sector.

Table 1 *Elements for Cabinet making and Upholstering* provides a comprehensive tabular account of these qualifications for seven countries. It is a more fine-grained framework than that adopted by the EQF, which aims to identify learning outcomes and has a tripartite distinction between *knowledge*, *skills* and *competence* to do so. In Table 1, on the other hand, distinctions are made between *know-how* (occupational skills, transversal abilities), and *knowledge* (General Education, Occupational Knowledge). By 'occupational skills' we mean abilities to perform particular tasks, such as *Reading technical drawings*, *Working with automated and*

computerised equipment and Applying protective and decorative coatings.

Transversal abilities are abilities for which more different skills may be relevant in different contexts, but which are concerned with maintaining the production cycle from planning to evaluation, such as *Maintaining quality in production process*, *Communicating and co-operating with colleagues in the production process* and *Maintaining a healthy and safe working environment*. The transversal abilities may be combined to provide the ability to manage the production cycle from planning a product to evaluating quality. Another way of looking at this is to see transversal abilities as taking the place of competence in the original EQF framework (third column). They relate, not just to a position within a managerial hierarchy, but to the ability of workers to manage their own work, to co-operate and co-ordinate with fellow workers and to engage in project management, such as controlling the whole cycle of production. In some of the countries in the study this is the case, as can be seen from Table 1. These abilities appear to be of increasing importance in the light of technological changes in the sector.

“Whereas furniture has traditionally relied on specialised craftsmanship and technical skills, workers increasingly need to combine and integrate a heterogeneous set of skills, drawing on, amongst others, creative skills, marketing and project management skills in order to deal with issues such as flexibility, early problem detection, quality, and client orientation.” (Gijsbers et al, p.22).

The Knowledge category is also subdivided to take better account of the content of qualifications. General Education is the continuing process of individual and civic development that takes place alongside the development of technical proficiency. Examples include *Proficiency in the mother tongue* and *Learning a foreign language*. *Participation in Sport* is also included within this category. Continuing general education is an important feature of all the countries’ qualifications included in this study, albeit with differing degrees of importance. Occupational Knowledge refers to the systematic knowledge which underpins action in the workplace (skills and transversal abilities) and which is meant to be applied in action. It also includes knowledge which helps the employee better understand the context of furniture production and upholstery. Examples include: *Materials for packaging for furniture/upholstered products* and *Economics*.

It is important to note that, although we have classified these different attributes separately, qualifications in some countries assume that they are deployed in an integrated way. In this way occupational knowledge is integrated both into occupational skills and transversal abilities in extended sequences of independent

action in which the worker is expected to show a high degree of independence of action and judgement. Very often this will vary according to the level of the qualification. Table 1 was constructed through an iterative process of examining the national reports in the first instance, aggregating the results and then twice cross-checking with the national partners for accuracy and comprehensiveness. It should be noted that the layout of the grid and the conceptual distinctions that underlie it appear to be well-understood by the partners and form a useful lens through which to view the qualifications.

This information, together with the contextual information found in the national reports enabled us to construct a basis for 'at a glance' comparison of the qualifications available in each of the seven countries in the study, and this is to be found in Table 2. Table 2 suggests considerable convergence between the qualifications in all seven countries, albeit with considerable difference in the detail of the qualifications, as can be seen through close inspection of Table 1. Two major points of divergence stand out however in the comparison of VET in the seven countries. The first is that in five of them the predominant mode is that the location is a vocational school accompanied by structured workplace experience. The Netherlands and Belgium–Flanders constitute a partial exception to this pattern, as they combine school and work-based approaches to qualification, and Germany a major exception through the predominant use of the dual system of apprenticeship in that country. The Netherlands and Belgium also make considerable use of dual apprenticeship, which involves the learner being a worker within the firm, who then also receives instruction in a vocational college for about one day per week.

The other point of divergence relates to the level of social partnership involved in the governance of the VET and the qualification, ranging from a comprehensive model from workplace to the level of the region, sector and the State in the case of Germany and sector and the State in the Netherlands, to a minimal involvement in the case of Poland, although it should be noted that in that country there is legal provision for one worker member on the management board for firms of greater than 500 employees (Conchon 2013). Some other countries, such as Belgium, Bulgaria and Romania have no regulations for social partnership at board level, but do have some provision at the national/regional/sectoral level. Finally it should be noted that although the predominant length of programme leading to qualification is three years leading to a qualification at approximately EQF level 3, there are instances of shorter programmes and, in some cases, a hierarchy of programmes ranging from level 2 to level 4 (the Netherlands being an example).

Crossnational summary:

This section provides a commentary on the comprehensive grid shown in Table 1 (Annexe 1). The grid follows the three column EQF design of: Knowledge, Skills and Competence, but is refined to take account of the needs of the sector. Thus *Knowledge* is subdivided into General and Occupational Knowledge; *Skills* are task-related forms of know-how while *Transversal Abilities* cover competence. They include articulated competence which forms project management abilities, as well as more specific ones and thus characterise the abilities needed to manage oneself and work with others in the production cycle. We will comment on convergences and divergences in the seven countries studied.

Knowledge: General Education

General Education is primarily concerned with the continuing individual and civic development of those entering the sector. All qualifications in both branches in all countries pay a considerable attention to General Education, although this attention is more limited in the Polish case. Variation can primarily be found in the areas of a] a foreign language and b] sport. It should be noted that, although we have classified learning a foreign language within General Education, it clearly has occupational implications, for example for workers who think of migrating or who have to work with foreign-based customers.

Knowledge: Occupational

Occupational Knowledge concerns the declarative knowledge (as opposed to know-how) that is necessary to practise the occupation. It consists of both systematic (theory-based) and non-systematic (usually locally-based) knowledge. It is noteworthy that here there is also considerable convergence between the seven countries in the project. The notable exception is the Danish qualification, which makes optional a range of elements which other qualifications count as compulsory: economics, entrepreneurship, market conditions for the product (for Belgium and Poland as well). Poland has also a more limited offer in terms of Occupational Knowledge but not so much so as Denmark. Note again the tiered nature of the Romanian system where Occupational Knowledge becomes more important at the higher level.

Occupational Skills

There is a very wide range of Occupational Skills in evidence across the seven countries in the study. However, relatively few such skills are shared across all the countries. These include: *reading technical drawings, working with manual tools and with automated and/or computerised equipment*. Beyond this, there is a large measure of commonality, the notable exception being Poland, which has a much narrower range of occupational skills than all the other seven countries. This pattern is repeated in the other categories and probably reflects the fact that the basic Polish qualification is predominantly school-based, with 4 to 6 weeks work placement per year.

Notable areas where skills are optional include: *Producing lattice furniture* (Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland) and *Producing doors (from solid wood and/or wood-based materials)* (the Netherlands, Poland), *Wood Carving* (all bar Romania compulsory), *Wood Turning* (all bar Germany - no option available and Romania compulsory). Upholstering also includes a wide range of optional elements in Bulgaria and Poland. These include *Dis-assembling, Repairing, Interior decoration and upholstering and Making detachable upholstery products*.

Generally speaking, there is a considerable degree of convergence in the covering of occupational skills, but one should note also the narrowness of the Polish qualification on the one hand and the tiered nature of the Romanian one, which produces variations between levels 3 and 4 (Romanian NQF classification).

Transversal Abilities

Transversal Abilities refer to forms of know-how which can employ different skills in different contexts. They are important, both in the management of the product cycle and in employer independence of action in the workplace. There is a marked degree of uniformity in the specification of transversal abilities in the partner countries. Thus, there is a concern with management of the product cycle and with self-management and co-operation. The development of these abilities does seem to be consonant with research on future trends within the sector, which places an increasing premium on these abilities in the context of increasingly computerised manufacturing processes. The exceptions that should be remarked on include Poland and Romania, where the lower level of their tiered system makes some of the Transversal Abilities optional. Generally speaking, the specification of Transversal Abilities is a strong signal of the ability of the worker to operate independently, with relatively little close supervision and to manage the product cycle.

Knowledge and Know-how: Broad Curriculum or not

There is a high level of convergence in curricula between six of the seven countries in both occupational and general knowledge. The concern appears to be to give workers in the sector a good grounding: in the underpinning knowledge necessary to undertake the occupation; ability to understand the product cycle; to manage self; and to work effectively with others. The curriculum also includes a fairly wide range of occupational skills. There is some uneven development in terms of knowledge of the economics and market conditions of the occupation. In view of the rapid technological change in the sector, this may be an area that merits further attention.

Similarities and Differences in the VET systems for furniture-making and upholstery in the seven partner countries.

Table 1: Elements for Qualifications in Cabinet Making and Upholstery

NO indicates that the element is not compulsory

Yellow compulsory		Turquoise optional		Belgium		Bulgaria		Denmark		Germany		Netherlands		Poland		Romania	
Know-How				Compul-sory	Op-tional	Compul-sory	Op-tional	Compul-sory	Op-tional	Compul-sory	Op-tional	Compul-sory	Op-tional	Compul-sory	Op-tional	Compul-sory	Op-tional
Occupational skills	Cabinet Maker/ Upholsterer	Cabinet Maker	Up-holsterer														
all	Reading technical drawings			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES	
	Preparing technical drawings			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		NO		YES	
	Working with computer assisted design			YES		YES		YES		YES Craft sector only		YES		NO		YES Level 4	YES Level 3
all	Working with manual tools			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES	
	Working with portable electrical and pneumatic tools			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		NO	YES	YES	
all	Working with automated and computerised equipment			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES Automated Level 2 YES Compute	

		seating furniture															
		Applying protective and decorative coatings		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES	
		Wood carving		NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO		NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	
		Wood turning		NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO		NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	
			Dis-assembling upholstered furniture	YES		NO		YES		NO		YES		NO		NO	YES
			Re-upholstery (restoring upholstery) of products	YES		NO	YES	YES		NO		YES		YES		NO	YES
		Producing packaging for furniture		YES		YES		YES		NO	YES	YES		NO	YES	YES	
	Mounting and packaging of furniture and upholstered products			YES		NO	YES	YES		YES		YES		YES		YES	
		Repairing furniture	Repairing upholstery products	YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		NO	YES
			Artificial drying of lumber	NO	YES	YES		YES		NO		NO		NO		YES	
			Decoration and upholstering of interiors	NO		NO	YES	YES		NO		NO		YES		YES	
			Making of detachable	YES		NO	YES	YES		YES		YES		YES		YES	

			upholstery products														
Transversal Abilities																	
	Planning and controlling product cycle			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		NO	YES	YES	
	Designing (sketching) and costing product			YES		YES		YES		YES Craft sector		YES		NO	YES	YES	
	Innovating and developing new models			YES		NO		YES		YES Upholsterer		YES		YES		NO	YES depending upon trainers
	Maintaining quality in production process			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		NO	YES	YES	
	Ordering, assessing, preparing and maintaining materials			YES		YES		NO	YES	YES		YES		YES		YES	
		Applying cycle of furniture production	Applying cycle of production of upholstered products	YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		NO	YES	YES	
	Maintaining a healthy and safe working environment			YES		NO		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES	
all	Using tools and machinery safely			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES	
	Assuring quality of finished product			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		NO	YES	YES	
	Communicating			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES	

	and co-operating with colleagues in the production process															
	Communicating in a simple form in a foreign language with suppliers and/or customers			YES		YES		YES		YES		NO	YES	YES		
	Assuming responsibility within the production process			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		
	Assuming responsibility for enhancing occupational skills			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		NO	YES	
	Dealing with waste			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES Level 3	YES Level 2	
	Communicating with management			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES Level 3	YES Level 2	
	Communicating with customers			YES		NO		NO		YES Cabinet maker		NO	YES	YES Level 3	YES Level 2	
	Problem solving			YES		NO		YES		YES		NO	YES	NO	YES Level 3	
Knowledge																
General education																
	Mother tongue			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		
	Foreign language 1			NO	YES	YES		YES		YES		NO	YES	YES		
	Foreign language 2			NO		YES		NO		NO		NO	YES	NO		
	Sciences			YES		YES		NO		NO		YES		YES		
	Maths			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		
	ICT			YES		YES		NO		YES		NO	YES	YES		
	Citizenship			NO		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		

	Social Sciences			NO		YES		NO		NO		YES		NO	YES	
	Natural Sciences			NO		YES		NO		NO		NO		YES		YES
	Environmental protection			YES		YES		NO		YES		YES		YES		NO
	Sport			NO	YES	YES		YES		YES		NO		NO	YES	YES
Occupational Knowledge																
all		Cycle of furniture production	Cycle of production of upholstered products	YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES
all		Construction and assembly principles for furniture making	Construction and assembly principles for upholstered products	YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		NO	YES	YES
all		Operational principles for specialised machinery for furniture making	Operational principles for specialised machinery for upholstery	YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES
all	Materials for packaging for furniture/ upholstered products			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES
all		Materials for production for furniture	Materials for production for upholstery	YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES
	Health and safety			YES		NO		YES		YES		YES		YES		YES

	Economics			YES		YES			YES	YES		YES		NO	YES	YES Level 3	
	Entrepreneur-ship			YES		YES		YES		YES		YES		NO	YES	YES Level 3	
	Environment protection			YES		YES		NO	YES	YES		YES		YES		YES Level 3	
	Market conditions for the product			NO	YES	YES		NO	YES	YES		YES		NO	YES	YES Level 3	
	Company specific knowledge			YES		YES		NO	YES	YES		YES		YES		YES	
	Rights and obligations			YES		YES		NO	YES	YES		YES		YES		YES	
				Belgium		Bulgaria		Denmark		Germany		Netherlands		Poland		Romania	

In this section we examine the similarities and differences between the VET systems in each of the seven countries in the study. It can readily be seen that there is a high degree of convergence in the general approach taken in each country, although there are differences in detail in individual national qualifications, which are more apparent when one examines Table 1 above. We note the convergence amongst the seven in terms of: a broad curriculum in both occupations; the presence of continuing civic and general education; and an emphasis on transversal abilities as well as skills. Indeed these abilities may well assume increasing importance in the future.

There are two main areas of divergence. One of these concerns the predominance of school- or work-based routes. Poland, Romania and Bulgaria have a predominantly school-based VET route. Belgium-Flanders and the Netherlands have a significant proportion in both school and work-based routes, while Germany and Denmark rely mainly on a work-based VET route. The other concerns the level of trade union involvement in the design and administration of the qualifications, which is a proxy indicator for social partnership as the mode of operation in trade union involvement is to work with government, awarding bodies, regional authorities (where relevant) and employer associations to design and deliver the qualifications. We note a high level of trade union involvement in Belgium-Flanders, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, but a low level in Bulgaria, Poland and Romania. It is also worth noting that Romania and the Netherlands (to a lesser extent), have a tiered system of qualification where a comprehensive qualification only fully appears at level 3 or even at level 4 in the case of Romania.

It is also noteworthy that all those countries that have a significant VET work-based route (including those with mixed systems) also have high trade union involvement in VET. It is, however, worth noting that the three countries classified as 'low level' in respect of trade union involvement do nevertheless have trade union involvement in the qualification to some degree. In Bulgaria and Romania for example there is some involvement at the local and sectoral levels. In Poland one may assume that trade unions have some involvement in larger firms due to their having a seat on the management board of the firm, although we have no information as to whether this has an impact on the design and management of qualifications in the sector.

Table 2: At a glance comparison of VET for cabinet makers and upholsterers

	Broad Curriculum Cabinet maker	Broad Curriculum Upholsterer	General and Civic Education	Transversal Abilities	Primarily School-based	Primarily Work-based	Trade union Involvement
Belgium - Flanders	√	√	√	√	1	2	High level 3
Bulgaria	√	√	√	√	√		Low level
Denmark	√	√	√	√		√	High level
Germany	√	√	√	√		√	High level
Netherlands	√	√	√	√	4	5	High level
Poland	√	√	√	√	√		Low level
Romania	√	√	√	√	√	√6	Low level

1 the school-based pathway (*BSO – beroepssecundair onderwijs*)

2 the work-based pathway (*DBSO – deeltijds beroepssecundair onderwijs and leertijd*), which would be more readily comparable with an apprenticeship

3 the expression ‘high level’ implies that trade unions are involved in the design and delivery of VET at national, sectoral and local level – this is not the case with the expression ‘low level’

4 the school-based pathway (*BOL – beroepsopleidende leerweg*)

5 the work-based pathway (*BBL – beroepsbegeleidende leerweg*), which would be more readily comparable with an apprenticeship

6 if the apprenticeship is carried out under an Apprenticeship Agreement according to the Apprenticeship Law

Table 2 thus suggests a tentative grouping into two sets of countries in respect of VET.¹ Group 1 (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands) is characterised by significant work-based routes and a high level of social partnership. In the Netherlands, both school- and work-based routes lead to the same qualification. Group 2 (Poland, Bulgaria, Romania) is characterised by predominantly school-based routes and relatively low (but by no means non-existent) levels of social partnership. It should be emphasised that these differences exist against a background of a common approach in respect of the curriculum, general and civic education and the importance of transversal abilities. The prospects for the development of a Zone of

¹ See *Apprenticeship supply in the Member States of the European Union*, pages pp 143-149.

Mutual Trust (ZMT – Coles and Oates 2004) are, therefore, relatively high for Furniture-making and Upholstering among these seven countries, particularly if greater uniformity can be achieved in terms of length of study and the impact of social partnership on curriculum and qualification design.

There is, however, one area of divergence that should be mentioned, which has the potential to impede mutual recognition of qualifications. This is the fact that in some countries (eg the Netherlands), the qualifications are offered at different NQF levels, and therefore only some of the qualifications will correspond with those in other partner countries. Clarity will be needed on at which level the core qualification should be based.

Key Points of EQF Design and their Relevance to this Project

Adopted by the European Parliament in 2008, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is designed to promote a common terminology and a common reference point for the comparison of qualifications of the member countries of the European Union (EU) (Méhaut and Winch 2011). It can be seen as part of the general tendency, supported by international organisations (notably the OECD), to develop such frameworks at national and international level. The EQF appears as a comprehensive framework, aiming at transcending the boundaries between vocational and general education and thus consonant with one of the aims of European policy. The EQF is also fully engaged with the European policy of lifelong vocational and professional education, covering without distinction qualifications in both initial and continuing education. However it goes further in - following European terminology and Recommendations - aiming at qualifications which recognise learning acquired through 'formal', 'informal' and 'non formal' processes. In order to do this, but also on account of the failure of previous European attempts to elaborate a system of equivalence between qualifications, it is founded on learning outcomes which are to be seen as 'outputs' independent of the processes which have led to them. It thereby apparently breaks with the 'input-output' approach (number of years of study, number of hours of VET (inputs) and, for example, an exam pass mark signifying a level of knowledge (outputs)). However, closer inspection of what

is actually meant by 'learning outcomes' suggests that the break is not as radical as it might at first sight appear. This is confirmed by a recent review of progress towards the development of National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) undertaken by CEDEFOP, a specialised agency, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP 2013). In effect, *standards*, that is waymarks for achievement on a curriculum, can now count as learning outcomes, as well as the statements of task ability that characterise the more radical forms of outcomes-based qualification, such as the National Vocational Qualifications in England (see Coles 2007 for an explanation of the distinction and Brockmann, Clarke and Winch (2008) for a critique).

This is quite important for this study as it suggests that curricular convergence should make it possible to arrive at some measure of common learning outcomes on these programmes. The evidence displayed in Table 1 indicates that this is possible.

The design features of the EQF are intended to achieve two explicit objectives.

1. 'Horizontal' comparability of qualification levels between countries, supposedly necessary in the context of learner and labour market mobility in Europe. For the purposes of *Bolster-up* this is a very important aspect of the comparison of qualifications, because if there is a failure to maintain trust in the assigned level that a given country confers on a qualification, then comparison will be difficult, if not impossible. There is anecdotal evidence that the referencing process at the national level may have been uneven in quality and that EU countries may have engaged in 'competitive inflation' to avoid their qualifications appearing at a lower level than those of others. We recommend a sector-based referencing process for the Furniture-making and Upholstering sector, which is based on mutual agreement and respect for a sectoral referencing process that all countries can trust.
2. 'Vertical' comparability, more concerned with intra-national considerations in the

context of life-long VET and vertical pathways from one qualification to another (as in the French or Dutch systems). It is considering the extent to which each individual qualification is 'permeable' that is, whether it contains sufficient substance so that passing it enables the qualification holder to move to the next level of qualification. Qualifications that have little or no general educational component are unlikely to have a high degree of permeability, as will qualifications that presuppose a very short period of study.

A third objective of the EQF, however, largely implicit, is that of position 'on the labour market', being presented as an instrument for the mobility of workers, facilitating comparison of qualifications and vocational abilities. 'Competence' is thereby formulated as 'autonomy' which refers back to both autonomy in learning and autonomy in the workplace. This feature of the EQF is particularly important for the purposes of this report, as its success will depend on embedding the framework in different economic sectors in such a way that it can be used by employers and workers, as well as by educators. *Bolster-up* can be seen as an attempt to do so within the furniture industry. The emphasis on transversal abilities suggests that there is a common understanding of the significance and role of relative autonomy within the workplace within the sector as well as in making provision for progression within education (although the picture here is more varied).

Scope

One major omission in the original EQF design was the specification of the particular knowledge and abilities that a qualification guarantees. The specification we call the 'scope' of a qualification or part of a qualification. For the EQF to have any prospect of being adopted for labour market purposes, scope specifications will need to be built in to sectoral qualification frameworks. We have carried this out for the Furniture sector through the detailed specification of knowledge and abilities needed, and the scope of the qualifications is set out in Table 1 country by country should enable ease of comparison. Specification of scope is a prerequisite for

comparison. It should be clear thought that for scope classification to work, like should be compared with like, so that two or more activities or items that fall under the same description really are the same. The National Reports in this project do not provide this level of information, so more detailed comparative work will need to involve a closer inspection of the curricula. This information is available for some but not all of the partner countries.

How the EQF and Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks work

EQF does not directly certify competences, as its purpose is to act as an indirect comparator for qualifications in different countries. If certificated achievements can be specified in an NQF in terms of learning outcomes, then it should be possible to lay two or more qualifications alongside each other on the EQF grid to determine their degree of equivalence. If national qualifications are themselves based on learning outcomes and conform to the structure of the EQF, comparison becomes all the easier.

It is now much clearer that, although the EQF as originally conceived as a ‘transformative’ qualification framework (Allais, Raafe and Young 2009), which took a radical view of learning outcomes completely divorced from content of pedagogical process. The recent CEDEFOP report on the implementation of NQFs in the EU makes it clear that a more flexible approach to learning outcomes is now being adopted (CEDEFOP 2012), which pays due regard to inputs such as curriculum and pedagogy and does not try to specify learning outcomes without any regard to processes of learning and teaching. Nevertheless, partner countries will all need to understand what they exactly mean by ‘learning outcomes’ when comparing qualifications.

Increasingly both NQFs and the EQF itself are being referred to as an instrument of qualification transparency, or as a ‘transparency tool’ which allows for ease and accuracy of comparison of one or more qualifications. The EQF has shifted from a phase in which it was used as a means of encouraging countries to develop outcomes-based NQFs (in the strong sense of ‘learning outcome’) to one which is more concerned with description and comparison of qualifications. The practical consequence of this shift for this project is that there is no need to modify the design

of the qualifications compared, as learning outcomes terminology can be used for standards-based qualifications. However, for the purpose of ensuring transparency via the EQF, sufficient curricular detail and an accurate specification of EQF level are required. This involves the development of Sector Qualification Frameworks (SQFs), in which the necessary detail for describing occupations in particular sectors is set out within the overall categories of the EQF. The former requirement should be met through the information provided in this report which could form the basis for an SQF for Furniture making and Upholstering. The issue of levelling is more difficult, since there is plenty of evidence (EU 2013) that it will be difficult to reconcile the referencing exercises of the various EU countries at the more formal, national level. As with the case of Bricklaying (Brockmann et al 2010), referencing will need to be carried out at the sectoral level in order to ensure mutual trust amongst the various national social partners.

The Relationship between EQF and ECVET.

The EQF and ECVET are conceived to be complementary tools. EQF provides transparency of comparison between qualifications, while ECVET provides a means of ensuring portability of part-qualifications from one country to another. Like EQF, ECVET is based on a learning outcomes approach, of the softer sort described above. The aim is to provide credit for prior learning as the means of ensuring portability. However, ECVET has had to proceed cautiously, for two reasons. First of all, the aim to specify credit through a purely outcomes-based approach (eg EU 2006) has been adapted so that it is capable of taking into account amount of time/effort required to reach a certain standard. Thus it is possible to assume a rough equivalence of standards achieved in two qualifications based on an equivalence of study or practice time taken.

Second, and potentially more problematically, the idea of tying credit to quantification through 'credit points' has proved to be more difficult and less popular than was originally envisaged (CEDEFOP 2013). This means that it is possible to develop ways of allocating credit for part-qualifications that do not entail the explicit awarding of credit points. Sectors may wish to develop their own systems of credit award through mutual negotiation and agreement. There is no obstacle to their using a credit point-based system should they choose to do so, but no obligation either. This will have an impact on Work Package 4 of this project, which currently talks of awarding credit, without mentioning credit points. Our suggestion is that further work on explicit and implicit study time would need to be undertaken before credit points could be awarded with any confidence. It may, however, not be

necessary to do this if other ways of awarding credit can be devised, for example by establishing notional equivalence between individual part-qualifications.

A Common Framework for Furniture Making within EQF and ECVET?

We conclude this report with some brief comments on the issue of core qualifications and a common framework for comparison.

The first point is that a softening of the original EQF idea of a learning outcome makes it much easier for the sector to develop core profiles based on learning outcomes derived from national curricula, provided all the partner countries understand what each means by a 'learning outcome', for example as a standard indicating the amount of knowledge, ability and competence arising from following a curriculum, with provisions made for accrediting non-formal and informal learning. Our view is that the study shows that 'learning outcome' corresponds to something like a standard in the sense outlined above, but partners will need to check that this is indeed the case.

The second point is that the information displayed in Table 1 can form the basis for core occupational profiles so that the minimum requirements for a qualified worker (at a certain level) can be set out. This point is relevant to Work Package 3 of the project. This does not mean that individual countries have to do away with elements that do not occur in the core profile, only that core and non-core elements are clearly displayed.

The third point is that notional hours of study or practice, whether in formal, non-formal or informal contexts can be used to form the basis of a credit system for taking part-qualifications from one country to another. It is up to the sector to determine whether equivalences should be expressed in credit points or not.

The fourth and final point that we wish to make is that core qualifications should be built 'from the ground up' taking into account the needs of the sector. For reasons already explained, referencing should be done at sector level and only later aligned with the overarching EQF framework. Although this does not correspond with the current referencing procedure, it is important to avoid a mismatch between EQF and SQF levels.

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