

Submission proposal 5th Crossing Boundaries 2023, Kaunas, Lithuania

A Sector Qualification Framework (SQF) Level 2-7 for Industrial Shoe Production

1 Background

In the years 2008 and 2017, the European parliament and the council published two recommendations to improve comparability of qualifications among member states, which refer to «the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning» (cp. EU 2008 and EU 2017). The European Qualification framework consists of eight levels, starting with level one for (almost) unskilled workers and ending with level eight for PhD holders.

The added value of general Qualification Frameworks, might they claim national or transnational relevance, has been questioned since the publication of the first recommendation in 2008, for example Bohlinger (2019) argued that they are «somehow nothing but a paradigmatic case of travelling educational reforms».

This is not surprising, as descriptors like «A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study» (EQF, level 4, skills, EU 2008) are this generic, that various stakeholders might interpret it very different.

Some evidence has been published already (cp. europeactive 2018, newhealth 2022) that frameworks, focussing on one sector only, might be a better option, as they offer the possibility to specify the mentioned «field of work or study» and to characterise the «range of cognitive and practical skills».

2 Research questions

Against this background, one of the focuses of the transnational Erasmus+ research and development projects ICSAS (Integrating Companies in a Sustainable Apprenticeship System) and DIA-CVET (Developing Innovative and Attractive Continuous Education and Training profiles) worked on developing a Sector Qualification Framework (SQF) for the sector of industrial shoe production for Romania, Spain, Portugal and Germany.

Leading questions have been:

- * What are the relevant «fields of work or study», in both Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) and CVET? (These «fields of work or study» are named «Spheres of Activity (SoA)» in the projects.)
- * How can the different expertise of professionals skilled in the various VET programmes of the mentioned countries be differentiated?
- * Can the qualifications of the sector from the participating countries be levelled to the SQF?

3 Methodology

The approach combines desk research and expert-workshops. After analysing SQF of other sectors (cp. europeactive 2018, newhealth 2022), a drafted structure has been developed; this structure has been modified via expert-workshop in the participating countries. Currently the developed SQF is presented to experts from other sectors – crossing boundaries in VET would be a marvellous option to expand this to an audience beyond the participating countries.

4 Findings

Regarding the first question, there was a broad consensus that nine Spheres of Activity are appropriate to describe the (potential) «fields of work or study» of IVET qualified, for CVET 13 Spheres of Activity have been identified (cp. ICSAS 2019, DIA-CVET 2021).

Findings on the second question, on how to differentiate the «range of cognitive and practical skills» of a qualification holder in the different Spheres of Activity, pointed in a unique dimension: the level of autonomy. That skilled workers via IVET have the necessary knowledge and skills for successful working on a task of a Sphere of Activity was self-evident for the experts consulted. Thus, findings can be figured as following:

	autonomous performance
	initiation
	Partly; e. g. planning of a single product (not production line)
	not tackled

Table 1: level of autonomy as descriptor for performance

Analysing CVET, the same dimension (level of autonomy) seems to be appropriate, but it should be considered that most of the Spheres of Activity from IVET are not part of the qualification, but a precondition to enter this educational pathway.

With respect to the third question, levelling of IVET qualifications was very smooth and confirmed by all experts consulted (cp. ICSAS 2020). The SQF level 2-4 was sketched as a general overview of all Spheres of Activity, levels and countries in one table as well as for each level of qualification for a better overview (cp. table 2).

Level 4										
Country	Level according to EQF (Qualification)	Spheres of activity in footwear sector								
DE	Level 4 (Shoemaker)	Cutting	Stitching	Lasting	Assembly	Finishing	Design	Technical development	Production planning	Quality assurance
PT	Level 4 (Footwear pattern maker)	Cutting	Stitching	Lasting	Assembly	Finishing	Design	Technical development	Production planning	Quality assurance
PT	Level 4 (Footwear Manual Production Technician)	Cutting	Stitching	Lasting	Assembly	Finishing	Design	Technical development	Production planning	Quality assurance
PT	Level 4 (Footwear & Leather Goods Production Manager)	Cutting	Stitching	Lasting	Assembly	Finishing	Design	Technical development	Production planning	Quality assurance
RO	Level 4 (Technician in textile and leather industry - footwear included)	Cutting	Stitching	Lasting	Assembly	Finishing	Design	Technical development	Production planning	Quality assurance
RO	Level 4 (Technician in footwear industry)	Cutting	Stitching	Lasting	Assembly	Finishing	Design	Technical development	Production planning	Quality assurance
RO	Level 4 (Designer technician in textile and footwear industry)	Cutting	Stitching	Lasting	Assembly	Finishing	Design	Technical development	Production planning	Quality assurance
ES	Level 4 (Footwear and fashion accessories technician)	Cutting	Stitching	Lasting	Assembly	Finishing	Design	Technical development	Production planning	Quality assurance

Table 2: Qualification level 4 from DE, PT, RO and ES

5 Outlook

The projects have delivered evidence that a SQF increases transparency of qualifications, especially in very specific areas of the labour market like industrial shoe production.

Thus, SQF seem to have benefit, both for companies and skilled workers: In a globalised world, they could support companies finding suitable staff and vice versa, to help professionals to estimate whether job announcements from abroad are appropriate for their skills.

However, and even more important, a unified SQF, including all career options via IVET, CVET and Higher Education (HE) might have the potential to increase not only transparency, but also permeability between educational tracks.

Project partners are currently working on referencing CVET and HE qualifications from the sector, as well – and are curious about the results of the research on this crossing of boundaries between VET and HE that will be presented in Kaunas.

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