

Short descriptions of learning outcomes for publication on databases/registers of qualifications: main outcomes of an European EQF Advisory group project

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Learning outcomes are statements of what an individual should know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a learning process. The development and use of National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) based on learning outcomes and linked to the European qualifications framework (EQF) at EU level, have improved transparency and comparability of qualifications across Europe. While EQF and NQF levels offer a simple way to gain a first understanding of qualifications, the ongoing development of qualification databases/registers holds significant importance to deepen transparency of qualifications. The use of the learning outcomes approach has proved useful in identifying similarities and differences between qualifications, providing a better understanding of their scope and orientation. However, recent studies and projects reveal that learning outcomes descriptions can vary for example in term of length, formulation, granularity and this poses a challenge to comparability of qualifications. Full descriptions of national qualifications are developed according to national criteria and priorities and may refer to numerous specific learning outcomes. Short and synthetic descriptions, building on but not replacing full national descriptions, have multiple benefits as they can provide an easy access and an entry point for multiple users such as for learners taking decisions about their learning paths; employers assessing qualifications of applicants; educational and training providers deciding on learner's applications, and so on. Structuring short descriptions according to the same principles is important to increase transparency, understanding, facilitate comparison and leverage digital developments to access, use, connect and compare information on the content and profile of qualifications. Improving accessibility, transparency and comparability of qualifications can enhance mobility of workers and learners, support lifelong learning and career management by bridging different qualifications and experience. Full descriptions of national qualifications are developed according to national criteria and priorities and may refer to numerous specific learning outcomes. Differences in the formulation of learning outcomes, for examples in terms of length, format, granularity, limits comparability of qualifications reduces the potential of digital tools for analysing, comparing or using information on qualifications. Short and synthetic descriptions of learning outcomes of qualifications can give access to and better understanding of the content and profile of a qualification, going beyond just the title and the EQF/NQF level. The paper will present the outcomes of the project group on short descriptions of learning outcomes established within the EQF-Europass Advisory group between December 2021 and October 2023. The aim of the project group was to develop and agree on common guiding principles for structuring short learning outcomes descriptions for publications of qualifications in databases/registers connected to Europass. The project group builds on the assumption that the varied formulations pose a challenge to the comparability of qualifications across countries and on how to strengthen and deepen transparency of qualifications. 12 countries (FI, IT, DE, FR, BE(NL), PT, HU, SI, AT,

CY, NL, NO) were part of the group, along with representatives of Business Europe, SME United and ETF. Chaired by DG EMPL, the group has been technically and conceptually supported by Cedefop. A total of 33 qualifications (short and full descriptions) were submitted within the context of the group. Out of these, 22 qualifications were analysed to extract key principles upon which to base the guidelines. An initial draft of the guidelines was presented at the 60th EQF AG meeting in November 2022 and then tested. This involved gathering feedback from national stakeholders on the text of the guidelines as well as developing short descriptions of qualifications using the guidelines also with the aim to add examples. By the end of the process, 20 descriptions were developed, and a peer review process was conducted to identify aspects where the guidelines needed improvement for better clarity and to identify descriptions that could serve as role examples for the guidelines. The final draft of the guidelines includes explanations, guiding questions, recommendations, additional tips and considerations. In addition to the three examples of short descriptions, the guidelines also encompass numerous specific examples that correspond to the various recommendations.