



Glossary of vocational education and training: key terms

This glossary of key terms is based on the terminological work of CEDEFOP.

accreditation (of programmes, institutions)

The process of accrediting an institution of education or training, a programme of study, or a service, showing it has been approved by the relevant legislative and professional authorities by having met predetermined standards.

activities (professional)

A set of tasks corresponding to functions required for the delivery of goods and services in an enterprise belonging to a specific sector

APL

Accreditation of prior learning

assessment

The sum of methods and processes used to evaluate the attainments (knowledge, know-how, skills and competences) of an individual, and typically leading to certification.

awarding body

A body issuing qualifications (certificates or diplomas) formally recognising the achievements of an individual, following a standard assessment procedure.

basic skills (key competences)

The skills and competences needed to function in contemporary society, e.g. listening, speaking, reading, writing and mathematics.

certificate/diploma

An official document, issued by an awarding body, which records the achievements of an individual following a standard assessment procedure.

certification (of knowledge, skills and competences)

The process of formally validating knowledge, know-how and/or skills and competences acquired by an individual, following a standard assessment procedure. Certificates or diplomas are issued by accredited awarding bodies.

comparability of qualifications

The extent to which it is possible to establish equivalence between the level and content of formal qualifications (certificates or diplomas) at sectoral, regional, national or international levels.

competence¹

Ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in a habitual and/or changing work situation. Competence includes: i) cognitive competence involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; ii) functional competence (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they are functioning in a given area of work, learning or social activity; iii) personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and iv) ethical competence involving the

¹ The definitions of qualifications and competences provided in this note are compatible with those agreed by the European social partners in 2001: Competences are the knowledge, skills and know-how applied and mastered in a given work situation; Qualifications are a formal expression of the vocational or professional abilities of the employee. They are recognised at national or sectoral levels.



possession of certain personal and professional values.

Comment: in the version of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) presented in Budapest, the last two categories have been collated into one (*personal, professional and ethical competences*), keeping the total to three categories of competencies.

continuing education and training

Education or training after initial education or entry into working life, aimed at helping individuals to:

improve or update their knowledge and/or skills

acquire new skills for a career move or retraining;

continue their personal or professional development.

credit points (or credits)

Credit points are allocated to qualifications and to the units that constitute them. By agreement, they represent, in numerical form the volume of learning outcomes, the relative importance of each of the units that make up a qualification, in relation to the expected results, i.e. the knowledge, skills and competences that must be acquired and assessed, regardless of the learning pathway.

credit system

A system of credits makes it possible to break down a qualification or the objectives of a programme of vocational education and training into units. Each unit is defined in terms of knowledge, competences and skills. It may be characterised by its size and relative importance, expressed in general by credit points (or credits) or other factors. Each unit can be validated and awarded separately.

curriculum

A set of actions followed when setting up a training course: it includes defining training goals, content, methods (including assessment) and material, as well as arrangements for training teachers and trainers.

diploma supplement

The diploma supplement (DS) is a document attached to a higher education diploma aiming at improving international 'transparency' and at facilitating the academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates etc.). It is designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which this supplement is appended. It should be free from any value-judgements, equivalence statements or suggestions about recognition. It is a flexible non-prescriptive tool, which is designed to save time, money and workload. It is capable of adaptation to local needs.

employability

The degree of adaptability an individual demonstrates in finding and keeping a job, and updating occupational competences.

Europass

The core document of the Europass is the Europass CV, to which students or workers can attach other Europass documents according to their choice. The other Europass documents are Certificate Supplement, Diploma Supplement, Language Portfolio and Europass Mobility

formal learning

Learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification.



informal learning

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

initial education/training

General or vocational education carried out in the initial education system, usually before entering working life.

Comment:

some training undertaken after entry into working life may be considered as initial training (e.g. retraining)

initial education and training can be carried out at any level in general or vocational education (full-time school-based or alternance training) pathways or apprenticeship.

knowledge

The facts, feelings or experiences known by a person or a group of people

learning

Learning is a cumulative process where individuals gradually assimilate increasingly complex and abstract entities (concepts, categories, and patterns of behaviour or models) and/or acquire skills and wider competences. This process takes place informally, for example through leisure activities, and in formal learning settings, which include the workplace.

learning outcome²:

The set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process. Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning.

lifelong learning

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.

meta-framework

A meta-framework can be understood as a means of enabling one framework of qualifications to relate to others and subsequently for one qualification to relate to others that are normally located in another framework. The meta-framework aims to create confidence and trust in relating qualifications across countries and sectors by defining principles for the ways quality assurance processes, guidance and information and mechanisms for credit transfer and accumulation can operate so that the transparency necessary at national and sectoral levels can also be available internationally.

non-formal learning

Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It normally does not lead to certification.

occupation (standard)

A set of jobs whose main tasks and duties are characterised by a high degree of similarity constitutes an occupation. Classification purposes lead to introduce the concept of "standard occupation" to designate the "core part of an occupation, what could be generally observed when analysing the same occupation in different contexts. (ILO).

² This definition is based on elements provided by Cedefop (2004) and the Bologna working group on qualifications framework, February 2005, p 39

**portfolio**

In education, portfolio refers to a personal collection of information describing and documenting a person's achievements and learning. There is a variety of portfolios ranging from learning logs to extended collections of achievement evidence. Portfolios are used for many different purposes such as accreditation of prior experience, job search, continuing professional development, certification of competences.

prior learning

The knowledge, know-how and/or competences acquired through previously unrecognised training or experience.

professional area

The set of occupations, which characterise and correspond to a specific sector

programme (of education and training)

An inventory of activities, learning content and/or methods implemented to achieve education or training objectives (acquiring knowledge, skills or competences), organised in a logical sequence over a specified period of time.

qualifications

A qualification is achieved when a competent body determines that an individual's learning has reached a specified standard of knowledge, skills and wider competences. The standard of learning outcomes is confirmed by means of an assessment process or the successful completion of a course of study. Learning and assessment for a qualification can take place through a programme of study and/or work place experience. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practice a trade.

qualifications framework

A qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications' descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector, for example initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners. All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally.

qualification system

Qualifications systems include all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications.

quality

Quality refers to the inherent or distinctive characteristics or properties of a person, object, process or other thing. Such characteristics or properties may set a person or thing apart from other persons or things, or may denote some degree of achievement or excellence.



recognition

a) *Formal recognition*: the process of granting official status to skills and competences either

- through the award of certificates or

- through the grant of equivalence, credit units, validation of gained skills and/or competences

and/or

(b) *social recognition*: the acknowledgement of the value of skills and/or competences by economic and social stakeholders.

regulated profession

professional activity or group of professional activities access to which, and the practice of which (or to one of its forms) is directly or indirectly subject to legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions concerning the possession of specific professional qualifications.

sector

The term sector is used either to define a category of companies on the basis of their main economic activity, product or technology (chemistry, tourism) or as a transversal/horizontal occupational category (ICT, marketing or Human resources).

Comment: the following distinctions are common:

(a) between *public sector* (government at various levels and government-controlled bodies) and *private sector* (private business)

(b) between *primary sector* (agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, mining and quarrying*), *secondary sector* (manufacturing industry, gas and electricity, water supply, construction*) and *tertiary sector* (services, e.g. transport, storage, communication, trade, financing and insurance, as well as the public sector*).

sectoral qualification

A qualification implemented by a group of companies belonging to the same sector in order to meet common training needs.

skill

The knowledge and experience needed to perform a specific task or job.

social dialogue

A process of exchange between social partners to promote consultation, dialogue and collective bargaining.

Comment:

(a) social dialogue can be bipartite (involving representatives of workers and employers) or tripartite (also associating public authorities and/or representatives of civil society, NGOs, etc.);

(b) social dialogue can take place at various levels (company, sectoral /cross-sectoral and local/regional/national/transnational);

(c) at international level, social dialogue can be bilateral, trilateral or multilateral, according to the number of countries involved.

stakeholder

A person or organisation that has a legitimate interest in a project or entity. In discussing the decision-making process for institutions -- including large business corporations, government agencies and non-profit organizations -- the concept has been broadened to include everyone with an interest (or "stake") in what the entity does.

**transparency of qualification**

The degree to which the value of qualifications can be identified and compared in the (sectoral, regional, national or international) labour and training markets.

unit

A unit is part of a qualification. It can be the smallest part of the qualification that can be evaluated, validated or certified. A unit can be specific to one particular qualification or common to several qualifications. The knowledge, skills and competences that make up the credit form the basis for the assessment and validation of people's outcomes. Units are validated at the end of the assessment of outcomes, the results of which must comply with the requirements of the qualification.

validation (of non-formal and informal learning)

The process of assessing and recognising a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences, which people develop throughout their lives within different environments, for example through education, work and leisure activities.

valuing learning

The process of recognising participation in and outcomes of (formal or non-formal) learning, in order to raise awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning.

vocational education and training (VET)

Education and training which aims to equip people with skills and competences that can be used in the labour market.