

*The 4<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Designated Authorities -  
“The Essential Framework and its impact on the Recognition of Qualifications”  
Hosted by Malta Qualifications Council  
Held at Dar l-Ewropa - Valletta  
On the 4<sup>th</sup> November 2009*

<b>Speakers : Dr James Calleja</b>	<b>- Chief Executive Officer also in his capacity as the Mutual Recognition Coordinator</b>
<b>Mr Joseph Abela Fritzpatrick</b>	<b>- Chairman Malta Qualifications Council</b>
<b>Mrs Doris Mangion</b>	<b>- Senior Manager Standards and Qualifications</b>
<b>Mr Jens Bjornavold</b>	<b>- CEDEFOP</b>
<b>Mr Sean O'Reilly</b>	<b>- National Qualifications Authority of Ireland</b>
<b>Mrs Helga Ellul</b>	<b>- President of the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise &amp; Industry</b>

**Participated – Representatives from Trade Unions  
Representatives from Employers Organizations  
Desk Officers of the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre**

### **Preliminaries**

Dr James Calleja welcomed all the attendees. During his short speech, he underlined the legal responsibility of the Office of the Mutual Recognition Coordinator to convene such meetings once a year. He expressed his intention to work closer with the Designated Authorities in the near future wherein a member of the staff will be responsible since this has not been possible due to the workload with limited staff.

Dr Calleja then introduced the Chairman of the Malta Qualifications Council, Mr Joseph Abela Fritzpatrick, to address the conference.

Mr Abela Fritzpatrick stated that the process of the Framework came in force by the Legal Notice 347, October 2005. Eight levels of education and qualifications based on eight level descriptors, represent the learning difficulties and outcomes. Over these four years the Malta Qualifications Council organized five National conferences. In June 2007, after a public consultation, the Malta Qualifications Council was launched. The framework promotes workers' mobility. The Malta Qualifications Council immediately embarked on the process to bring Malta in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). During the past months the Council worked hard to prepare a blue print of this Referencing Report. In September 2009 the Chief Executive Officer of the Malta Qualifications Framework referred the report to the Council members where he presented the report as a final product after a series of consultations. He officially thanked those who took part in the recommendations and declared this piece of work as an important tool.

The Mutual Recognition Coordinator thanked the Chairperson for his speech and also for his continuous support to the Council.

## Overview of the Referencing Report

Two power point presentations re the Referencing Report were presented:

The first presentation was delivered by Dr Calleja. He introduced the issues that were tackled for the preparation of this Referencing Report. He put forward the following points/questions;

- What sort of Framework should Malta have?
- What is the effect of such Framework?
- The insistence that such qualifications framework should be for all ages.
- A Framework that should link education and employment.
- Reference to the last meeting where all the stake holders were invited to present their input.

Dr Calleja emphasized that a Referencing report is an exercise which transforms a system into a wider and more challenging context. The Referencing Report has two important messages:

- bridging cultural diversities
- meeting bigger challenges

He explained that besides Malta's obligation to reference the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), this Referencing Report also aims at cross-referencing the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) since the level descriptors of Higher Education in Malta reflect the level descriptors of both Frameworks.

He explained that the Referencing Report is based on four parts of equal importance:

- Part One - European dimension
- Part Two - National dimension
- Part Three (the technical Part) - Referencing Process
- Part Four - Beyond the Referencing Process

He emphasized that the roots of such a process are the Lisbon Strategy, the Bologna Process and the Copenhagen Process. He pointed out the question: "What added value does a Referencing Report give to a system of qualifications?" In his reply to this question he stressed that the Referencing Report is:

- a blueprint for the design of a national qualification and therefore the issue of partial or full qualification, and the concern of home grown qualifications.
- An essential link between Education and Employment – between qualifications and labour needs.

He stressed that this is the pathway to build mutual trust between all parts. The Referencing Report is the last track: national qualifications which will now be efficiently and effectively recognized. He announced that by 2012 all qualifications should carry a level.

Dr Calleja's next power point showed the comparison of the MQF to current European and International Qualifications Frameworks. MQF gives greater transparency to such process. He explained that the Referencing Report reflects consistency and coherence between the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF), the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and all other National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) of EU member States and beyond. This builds trust between the stake holders, a common language. He insisted that this Report is a catalyst for reform and innovation.

He added that MQC is now moving towards the issue of a certificate supplement which will include the history of that particular programme of study. He insisted that this would create more visibility and that one has to be more vigilant. People need to have faith in that qualification. We will all be playing with the same rules. Malta will thus be more attractive to foreign students who decide to come and study locally.

He referred to the metaphor of a "small fish in a big or small pond" (Malta being a small country compared to a small fish) to highlight three lessons learnt from this process:

1. Small fish but in "**Secure** waters" – the referencing process as a transparent process and a learning experience – enriching diversities even though in larger contexts;
2. Small fish but in an "**Unlimited** territory" (opportunities) – the referencing process can go beyond EU zone and can serve as an attraction for economic growth, more and better jobs!
3. Small fish but in a "**Fair** system" – only Quality will determine recognition and attraction!

**Ms Doris Mangion, Senior Manager Standards and Qualifications** presented the second presentation. In her introduction Mrs Mangion referred to the 10 Malta's overarching principles-

1. 8-Level: parity of esteem between Vocational Education Training (VET) and the general education
2. Credit system
3. Learning outcomes
4. Assessment
5. Key Competences
6. School Leaving Certificate
7. VINFL in MQF Levels 2 and 3
8. Qualifications in MQF Level 4 and 5
9. One Higher Education Area
10. Agreement endorsed by QA Agency

She explained the Report structure which is divided into four parts.

**Part 1** focuses on the “European Education Reform” which is based on the Lisbon Strategy from which the European Qualifications Framework and the establishment of National Qualifications Framework in each member state emanated, the Bologna Process from which the European Credits Transfer System (ECTS) and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) emanated and the Copenhagen Process from which the European Credits Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) emanated. These instruments bridge the gap between VET and Academic qualifications

**Part 2** focuses on the “Malta Qualifications Framework”. The Policies and the reform needed in order to establish Credits, Assessment, Quality Assurance, Level-Rating and Protocols

**Part 3** focuses on the “Referencing of the MQF to the EQF and to the OF/EHEA”. Ms Mangion stated that text boxes were introduced to explain the Referencing Criteria and the 8 Level Descriptors, plus the concept of party of esteem. But this is at the discretion of the training providers to determine

**Part 4** focuses on “Beyond Referencing” which impinge on the role of the stake holders which is based on:

- Ongoing Communication Strategy
- Writing of Learning Outcomes
- Link between social partners and educational and training providers;
- ESF Projects:
  - (a) Competence Matrices;
  - (b) Occupational Standards

Reference to the conclusion of the Report was made:

- Reviewers and Council Members shaped the report
- A product for further consultation
- Demonstrates the link between education and employment;
- The report’s design and the handbook are user-friendly

## *Major Developments in National Qualifications Framework and Learning Outcomes in Europe and Beyond*

Mr Jens Bjornavold from CEDEFOP took the floor to make his presentation. He emphasized on the fact that the 27 member states are bound to develop such a referencing report. He was pleased to comment that Ireland and Malta are the first countries which concluded this Referencing Report. He insisted that the other 25 countries have to conclude their Referencing Process by 2010 and 2011. He explained how in 2004 only France, Ireland and the United Kingdom had developed their National Qualifications Frameworks.

He added that whilst a few of the European countries are still in their conceptualization and design state, others are already in the design phase. Malta, Belgium (Flanders) and Denmark are in the implementation stage while Ireland, United Kingdom and France are in the revision state since they were at the forefront in implementing their National Qualifications Framework.

According to Mr Jens Bjornavold the main objectives and ambitions are:

- transparency which is an important issue
- a platform for cooperation and dialogue.
- to strengthen coherence of qualifications systems
- reinforce the learning outcomes' orientation

He also insisted that National Qualifications Frameworks are seen as instruments to:

- Support Lifelong Learning
- Facilitate the recognition of broader range of learning
- Establish number of levels (though this is a very technical issue). It is not the number of levels that count; the reflection of the national system of education and national situations are of utmost importance

He stressed that the success of such processes, are based on the involvement and dialogue of stake holders in order to develop NQFs. He said that there are important lessons to be learned in this field. He concluded by insisting that the NQF development is a global trend.

## ***Panel Discussion on issues to the Referencing Report and Regulated Professions***

**Mr Sean O'Reilly** from the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland was the ***first speaker*** on the panel.

Mr O'Reilly stated that there are 32 Frameworks. He emphasised the need of a proper quality assurance process for each Qualifications framework. Although there are many different Awards, yet all such awards can be classified and aligned to the levels of a Qualifications Framework. Designated authorities can assist Qualifications Authorities to make such a process more effective, transparent and technically correct.

He explained that to obtain such a positive result, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland convened the National Steering Committee. This Steering Committee included representatives from Further Education & Training Higher Education & Training, Universities' sector, schools' sector and three international experts. He insisted that a Referencing Report has to belong to the system. The language used has to unite and not to fragment. He added that when one is formulating a process one has to seek for other experts, out of one's network. National Qualifications Authority of Ireland concluded that the international experts prompted the right framework. He said that the committee used Referencing Criteria and Procedures agreed by the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group. Their input was extremely important. He confirmed that consultation with the stake holders was another important pillar and was extremely important for the process.

Mr O'Reilly said this was the very first time that everyone was represented in an educational process. The Consultative Group organized national seminars, issued information bulletins, draft reports were published on the website for stakeholders' comments. He emphasised that a sufficient National Qualifications Framework has to be based on learning outcomes and transparency all the way through. He said that a Referencing Report has to be based on a snap shot in time.

He spoke about the benefits for stakeholders from such an instrument. He stated the benefits of national frameworks – including the recognition of learning; transparency of learning outcomes; and the building of trust across the education and training system. He insisted that the EQF acts as a neutral reference point to facilitate the dialogue between national frameworks or systems of qualifications. It also supports mobility and lifelong learning. The responsibility of the stakeholders is to meet European responsibilities by fulfilling national responsibilities – transparent implementation, accurate leveling, and strong quality assurance.

He concluded by referring that there is ongoing work, to try and bring additional clarity and clear quality assurance. It is beneficial for all the stake holders. He insisted that the European Qualifications' Framework (EQF) supports mobility and lifelong learning.

The *second speaker* on the panel was *Ms Helga Ellul*, President of the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry.

In her introduction she referred to the Peer Learning Activity held by the Malta Qualifications Council two weeks previous. She exclaimed that this activity was a success, and she felt certain that this event has also produced positive feedback.

She insisted that the MCCEI believe that it is the duty of the social partners to play a key role in education, training and employment. Through social dialogue the MCCEI:

- Influence educational curricula,
- adopt joint programmes,
- promote lifelong learning,
- develop occupational sectoral standards,
- provide training for vulnerable groups
- social inclusion, etc

Mrs Ellul added that MCCEI also recognizes the importance of Learning Outcomes based on curricula from an early stage at school and the means to higher levels of education that match the demand of business.

She spoke about the initiatives taken by the MCCEI such as the setting up of the Business Education Committee which has developed a framework for which MQC will be designing modular courses, and the development of training programmes addressing the needs of family – run micro and small business.

The Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have specific needs. She insisted that they are the back bone of our economy. We are doing more on the occupational standards but we need to validate what is already there, in our enterprises. She raised the question; “Who can assess?” She said that it shouldn’t be the teachers, but people in that particular sector who make use of the machines and tools, they should determine the proper standards and the level of competences.

She mentioned the rapid growth of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST).

She also made reference to other committees in the MCCEI such as the Quality Committee and the Internationalization Committees, which are currently developing a fully-fledged modular training plan for 2010. She emphasised that their next step is to discuss these modular training plans with the MQC. Mrs Ellul said that their determination is to cement their collaboration with this important organization (MQC).

The Malta Chamber will be collaborating further with the MQC, in designing occupational standards for various sectors, in order to validate informal learning. She spoke about another initiative taken by the Malta Chamber with MQC - the creation of three Technical working Groups which will be working on a project targeting the Plastics, Construction, and Trading Sectors. She also said that these working groups will also include HR Managers from the relevant sectors.

She concluded that the common initiatives in the areas of education will ensure employability. The Malta Chamber believes that investing in people is the best form of social welfare, wherein training will always be the more beneficial option in the long-term for both employers and employees alike. She stressed that in Malta it takes long to change and to convince, but when they decide to do it, they make it right and in a very professional way.

### ***Discussion, Interventions and Feedback from Designated Authorities***

Dr James Calleja opened the floor for discussion, interventions and feedback from Designated Authorities.

#### ***Mr Edward Paris – Travel and Tourism Association***

He insisted that there are a lot of occupational standards and forwarded the following questions to Mr O'Reilly;

- Does your national authority has quality assurance?
- Are these types of organizations world wide?

Mr O'Reilly answered that the Irish Framework is not a regulatory framework. He said that they have a number of particular regulatory profession. He said that they have world wide recognition and quality assurance and that they have four grouping of awarding bodies.

Dr Calleja stated that in Malta we have twenty six Designated Authorities or Competent Authorities. He added that MQC is also working with non- regulated sectors. As the Minister said, there is the need to introduce sector skills councils

#### ***Mr Adrian Rizzo – Association of Airline Engineers***

Mr Rizzo asked if the first contact point should be the regulated body and if it is academic should the first contact point be NARIC? But at the same time is the responsibility to operate in the hands of the regulatory body?

Dr Calleja replied that we are within the NARIC network but the final word stands with the Designated Authorities.

In another intervention Mr Rizzo insisted that we should make more use of the media.

He also spoke about the Qualifications Directive and the issue of mutual recognition.

***Ms Gillian Mifsud – Council for the Professions Complimentary to Medicine***

She spoke about a person who consulted MQC to organize a course together with the Council for Nutritionists. She insisted that Nutritionists are registered.

Dr Calleja replied that the ultimate decision of the access into the profession is always the onus of the Designated Authorities because they have to register the individuals. MQC is to assess, validate and evaluate qualifications only.

***Mr Stephen Grech – Association of Airline Engineers***

He put forward the following questions:

- If MQC encourages life long learning and the recognition of work experiences
- What happens when one wants to move from one company to another but they do not have qualifications?

***Mr Ray Muscat – Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry***

asked;

- What happens when a specific area is not regulated?  
Also in the case where there is no Designated Authority?

Dr Calleja replied to both Mr Grech and Mr Muscat's questions stating that MQC is pushing for the setting up of the Sector Skills Units in order to establish level rating of qualifications matched to occupational standards. MQC encourages lifelong learning and is also piloting several projects which should lead to the legislation/validation of informal and non-formal learning. Moving from one company to another without qualifications may be difficult especially in a world which is becoming more specialised in training. Validating prior learning and matching this to levels of recognized qualifications will certainly help.

***Perit Barbara – Masons Board***

Perit Barbara spoke about skills match versus miss match. He said that a mason in UK is validated at Level 2 while in Malta he has more responsibility, should he still be validated at level 3?

Dr Calleja replied that the Designated Authority or the sectoral authority would be in a position to establish that level. The MQRIC cannot issue any level rating without the consent of the competent authority.

***Conclusion***

Dr Calleja thanked all the speakers and participants who attended the conference and reiterated MQC's drive to keep constant contact with DA throughout the year.