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History of the competence concept in the German vocation training

A history, description and assessment of any national initiatives and structures relating to the use of 'competence' in VET and professional development

In Germany, the competence concept was applied for the first time in the recommendations of the German educational council during the reorganisation of the Sekundarstufe II and the connection of general and professional learning (1974). There was still a distinction between competence (for the purposes of the individual arrangement) and qualification (for the purposes of the professional requirement).

By applying the concept of "key qualification" the concept „professional action competence“ was implemented in the field of vocation training.

The leading aim of „occupational competence“ was anchored in the 1980s for the first time within the scope of the reorganisation of the metal occupations and electric occupations in the training regulations for the training in vocational schools.

The objective for the occupations that require formal training is set since 1987 in the following formula: The apprenticeship shall enable to carry out a qualified, professional activity. This involves especially independent planning, realization and examination. The abilities gained have to be shown in the final examination. At the latest, since the introduction of IT occupations that aim is also referred to the term occupational competence.

The German Vocational Training Act (BBiG) provides an orientation concerning the final examination. The examinee has to prove, that he/she has got the relevant knowledge and skills.

Since 1996 the leading aim for vocational schools is the term action competence. This shows clearly, that the aim of an apprenticeship is directed towards the acquirement of skills respectively competences.

The current version of the German Vocational Training Act (BBiG) results from different new constraints for the field of vocational training. This refers also for carrying out examinations.

The BBiG defines in § 38 the examination matter as follows:

„By the final examination it has to be ascertained, whether the examinee obtained the occupational competence. During the examination the examinee has to prove, that he/she acquired the relevant occupational action competences, and that he/she gained the relevant occupational knowledge and skills as well as that the examinee knows the relevant educational materials, which was provided by the vocational school. The training regulation has to be taken as a basis for that.“

By that definition there is a clear reference to the concept “skills”. On the one hand the occupational action competence respectively occupational action competence as general aim is named, on the other hand the (relevant occupational) skills are mentioned. It is set, that the examining skills or the bundle of competences, which define an occupation, are mentioned in the training regulation.

That image of occupational action competence was in 1996 set as the educational mandate for vocational schools by the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (“Kultusministerkonferenz”, KMK). Since then, that concept is the base for the framework curriculum in order to define the lessons in vocational schools.

§ 38 of the BBiG contains a double reference to the training regulations and the framework curriculum. Herein the standards for the final examination in the training regulations arise. Thus it has to be resolved, how the concept of (occupational) action competence is used in the training regulations and whether exact description for that exist.

As in the occupations that require formal training in the field of further training, i.e. “the ordinance concerning the examination for the recognized qualification for certified industrial foremens in the field of chemistry” from 2004 contains the following contents:

1. Occupational and work pedagogical qualifications,
2. Multidisciplinary core qualifications,
3. Action specific qualifications.

The above named qualifications will be obtained by a bundle of competences according framework curriculum.

The German qualification framework (DQR)

In October 2006 the Federal Ministry of education and research (BMBF) and the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany agreed jointly to develop the DQR. With the implementation of the proposal Germany responds to the submission of the EU (08.07.2005) and the proposal of the European Commission for the development of an European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning from 5th of September 2006 and the subsequently, on 23.04.2008, enforced proposal of the EU Parliament and the EU Council. BMBF and KMK appointed in 2007 a Bund-Länder-Coordination group for the development of the DQR draft by also involving the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi), the Conference of Economic Ministers (WMK) and from stakeholders from the fields of general education, university education and VET, social partners and economic organisation as well as other experts from science and practice.

The DQR aims,

- to make the German qualification system more transparent,
- reliability, permeability in the education system and support quality assurance,
- to emphasize the equivalences, especially in the field of vocational training and general education as well as academic education and to show differences in the resulting qualifications
- to provide the actors in the field of the education and occupations system with a translation instrument to be able to arrange qualifications and to make the recognition of qualification obtained in Germany in the EU much easier,

- to make the equivalence of general, vocational and academic education (including further training) clearer,
- to promote the mobility of learners and employees between Germany and other European countries
- to promote the orientation of qualifications on competences,
- to promote the orientation of the qualification processes towards learning results (Outcome orientation) and
- to improve possibilities of the recognition of results from non-formal and informal learning processes in order to strengthen lifelong learning.

The development of the DQR

In February 2009 the DQR working group presented a draft (introduction text, matrix and glossary) as a discussion proposal for the second development phase. It was the result of a cross-sectional discussion, which was led at first at a conceptual level – without reference to the relevant qualifications. The aim was to develop a common competence understanding in coherence with the identified competence dimensions and proven educational taxonomies. The starting point were the educational and training goals, which were defined for single areas and built the base for curricula development.

This first DQR draft was tested in May 2009. The results of this phase were evaluated and amendments were implemented in matrix and glossary. The final version was adopted on the 22nd of March, 2011 by the DQR working group and was confirmed on the 31st of January, 2012 by top representatives of the Federal Government (BMBF and BMWi), by the KMK and the WMK of the Länder, by the central association of the German craftsmen, by the federal union of the German employers' associations, by German Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce, by the German association of labour unions and by the Federal Institute of vocational education and training. During a summit talk an arrangement was made concerning the introduction of the DQR and allocation of first qualifications.

The allocation of general degrees was at first not pursued. Until January 2017 all allocations will be discussed again on the base of the competence oriented on educational standards for graduation from schools for general education, and competence oriented training regulations in the field of first professional training. The further development at European level shall be taken into account as well as an upgrading shall be examined.

Phases of the DQR development

Phase / period	Tasks
Phase I From March, 2007 to February, 2009	Establishing of the DQR-Bund-Länder-coordination group and the DQr-working group Kick off conference March, 2007 Consensus about aims and guidelines, subordinate competence categories, terminology and levels Development of a model for the DQR with description of the learning outcomes for single levels (descriptors)
Phase II till Sept. 2010	Test phase: Exemplary allocation of formal qualifications to the DQR levels Test of the matrix Reflexion of the results
Phase III till Dec. 2012	Completion of the DQR (March, 2011) Political decision on mode of implementation Allocation of formal qualification of the German education system to the DQR-levels Recommendations to the inclusion of non-formal and informal acquired competence in the DQR Manual for the allocation of qualifications to the DQR Decision on the legal status and institutional anchorage, establishing of the national coordination body Referencing report
Introduction phase until Jan. 2017	Reference to the levels of the DQR/EQF in all new qualification proofs. Further steps concerning the inclusion of non-formal and informal acquired competences Evaluation of the DQR system and the allocations, if necessary adaptations Allocation of the qualifications of the general school education

Professional training in Germany

Any differences between 'official'/VET uses and uses by industry and professional bodies

The vocational training in Germany occurs predominantly in the so called Dual System. The vocational training is to be understood as training in a company, in the administration or in offices of independent professions on the one hand and in the vocational school on the other hand. Therefore 2 locations for training exist. The concept of the “*Beruf*” respectively occupation is pursued.

The legal basis for the vocational training in the dual system is the BBiG and for the training in a crafts profession it is the crafts ordinance. Both regulate the rights and duties of the training companies and the apprentices; the training contract, which is the individual legal base of the apprenticeship contract; the system of the approved occupations that require a formal training as well as the task of the responsible bodies (chamber of trade and commerce, chamber of crafts).

In Germany, the training regulations set the national standards for the vocational training in the framework of dual vocational training. The training regulation manages the factual and temporal structure of the vocational training.

The development of new training regulation respectively the adjustment of existing training regulations in a changed professional practise follows a certain procedure. The bund, the Länder, the employer, the unions and the VET research are participating.

The legal basis of the second learning location, the vocational school, is the respective school law of the relevant federal state, where the school is located. The most important regulation is the obligation to visit the vocational school: Apprentices have to attend the vocational school, independently, whether they did or did not complete the 12 year of general compulsory education. T

This obligation is based on the fact, that vocational training contents and the curriculum of the vocational schools are harmonized with each other. Moreover, the BBiG determines that the occupation specific subject matter is part of the final examination. So the situation of the vocational system in the dual system is elemental.

Concerning new/modernized training regulations the experts of the Länder will work on a new framework curriculum concerning new/modernized occupations. The framework curriculum is the base for the lessons in the vocational school.

Hence, there are nearly no differences between the competence understanding of official bodies and the industry.

At higher levels (DQF 6/EQF 6), especially in the field of further training the so called “Meister” are widely accepted. They act as middle level managers. Apprentices, who successfully finished the first professional training undertake a further training (distance learning course etc.) and the become i.e. a certified industrial foremen in the field of chemistry. This career path is a proven and well recognized step to have managerial duties. The Europeanisation’ of German VET creates pressures to move towards a more fragmented system. EQF/DQR has enabled high-level VET qualifications such as

Meister to gain parity with i.e. academic degrees, but it also creates pressure to split up 'large' qualifications such as *Facharbeiter*.

In addition the *Beruf* concept also beginning to lose some of its validity as ways of organising work change towards process rather than traditional clusters based on skilled occupations.

Competence understanding

Any recommended or widely-used conceptual models and development methodologies

As a methodical instrument expert workshops were used to being able to evaluate the practicability of the DQR by involving experts from field such as competence description, curricula preparation and interpretation. As base for the attribution of the qualification the relevant regulatory instruments, such as laws, regulations, agreements and framework curricula of the KMK, guidelines and curricula of the countries and examination regulations were used.

The DQR was set up as a framework with an orienting function and not a regulating function. The aim was to uncover differences and similarities as well as equal qualifications ("Gleichwertigkeit") and not similar qualifications ("Gleichartigkeit").

The occupational profiles in Germany are the result of a regulated process from where the federal government, federal state, employers, unions and VET research are involved. The (developed) regulatory instruments have to create binding legal contents and objectives of the vocational educational and training as well as they have to take into account the dynamics of technical and socio-economic development. The process for work on training regulation follows a certain procedure:

- Determination of benchmarks ("Eckwerteberatungen") for the training regulations:

The benchmarks of the training regulation are set in a proposal dialog with the relevant federal ministry.

- Preparation and agreement on training regulations

The Federal Institute for vocational education (BIBB) and training demands from the relevant employer and employees organisation to name experts. These experts work with the BIBB on the drafts for training regulations. The main committee of the BIBB decides of the draft of the training regulations.

- Enactment of the training regulation

If the main committee of BIBB agrees to the draft and the federal government-federal state-coordinating committee agrees to the new training regulation, the relevant ministry publishes the new training regulation in the Federal Law Gazette ("Bundesgesetzblatt").

The German DQR follows a certain competence understanding. Within the scope of the creation of the professional education it is worked with a politically accepted "competence understanding":

In Germany the understanding of the "action competence" of the minister of education and the arts conference (KMK) dominates for the frame curricula and the leading aim is the "legal capacity" according to BBiG/HwO in the training regulations.

The „professional action capacity“ is defined as a leading aim of the operational education in the binary system and is legally anchored as follows:

„The professional training has to mediate for the exercise of a certified professional activity in a changing professional life for necessary professional skills, knowledge and abilities (professional legal capacity) in a regular education way. It has to allow further the acquisition of the necessary work experiences.“ (§1 paragraph 3 vocational training law, in 2005)

The framework curricula of the KMK are developed in a procedure concerning the reorganization of a occupational profile and in accordance with the relevant training regulations. Since 1996 the framework curricula for all new job profiles follows a common structure. They enclose five parts under the headings:

1. Preliminary remarks
2. Educational order of the vocational school
3. Didactic principles
4. Vocational preliminary remarks
5. Learning fields

In the preliminary remarks the general relations and aims are described. Besides, the contributions of the lessons are shown among other things in the vocational school to the professional qualification and at this level it is the aim for the imparting of action competence.

On the basis of the training regulations and the framework curricula, which regulate the aims and contents of the apprenticeships, the final qualifications in an approved qualified job are taught. The curriculum framework contains no methodic specification for the lessons. Methods which promote the occupation action competence are especially suitable and shall therefore apply during the lesson.

In connection with the educational order of the vocational school the aimed presentation of action competence is explicitly defined:

The mentioned aims are directed upon the development of occupational action competence. This is known to behave here as the readiness and ability of single person to act properly in social, professional and private situations as well as individual and social responsible.

In addition, it becomes clear that this understanding is limited not only to context of a vocational training, but it is directed concerning coping with life in general. As dimensions of occupational action competence professionalism, personnel competence and social competence are stated. They are defined as:

Professional competence calls the readiness and ability to solve on the basis of technical knowledge and skill duties and problems aim-oriented, properly, method-escorted and independently and to being able to judge the result.

Personnel competence describes the readiness and ability to clarify, to think through and to judge, the developing chances, demands and restrictions in family, occupation and public life as an individual personality, to unfold own talents as well as to catch life plans and cultivate them. It encloses personal characteristics like independence, criticism, self-confidence, reliability, responsibility and sense of duty.

Social competence describes the readiness and ability to live and form social relations, to grasp allowances and tensions, to understand as well as to argue with other rationally and responsibly. Moreover to it belongs the development of social responsibility and solidarity.

Methodical and learning competence arise from a well-balanced development of these three dimensions.

With it a clear position is covered against a narrow understanding of VET and further training. The educational task of the vocational school in a broader sense is the support of individuals, concerning occupational efficiency and personal responsibility. The differentiation of professional, personal and social competences and the enclosed method and learning competence refers to a analytical, dimensional understanding of competences.

It is important to point out in that context the difference between competence and qualification:

Competence refers to the learning success concerning the single learner and his/her ability to act independently in private, professional and social situations. On the other hand the learning success is understood by qualifications concerning the usability, i.e. from the point of private, professional and social situations.

The competence concept of the German qualification framework

The DQR enlarges the competences understanding by working with the 2 elements professional competence and personnel competence. In comparison to the EQR, where competences are only one learning outcome category among knowledge and skills, the DQR includes all learning outcomes.

professional competence		personal competence	
knowledge	skills	social competence	self-reliance
breadth and depth	Instrumental and system broad skills, judgement ability	Team-/leadership ability, co-creation and communication	Autonomy / responsibility, reflexivity and learning competence

Institutions in the field of vocational training

The type of bodies responsible for the frameworks (both in VET and industry/professions)

Federalism principle: State duties divided between federal and 16 state governments. Cultural highness of the Länder. So the Länder are responsible for the school system. The municipalities are the bearers of the professional schools.

The Regulation competence for the extracurricular first professional and further has the Bund. Institutionally, the responsibility for VET is spread among state committees at the level of the Länder, the municipalities and the Bund as well as cooperative committees.

National level: Federal Ministry of education and research (BMBF); Länder level: Ministries of Education and Arts

BIBB (federal institute of vocational education and training):

1969 founded; cooperation between state and non-state actors

Task: Preparation, quality assurance, advancement of professional education and continuing education

KMK (Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany)

1948 founded; coordination and standardization. Responsible for matters of the cultural politics with supraregional significance, decisions not obligatorily, recommendations

BLK (Bund-Länder-Commission)

In 1970 founded; common institution of the Bund and the Länder for matters of educational planning and research questions.

For coordinating the task, which are the result of the common resolution, representatives of the KMK, the conference of the ministers for economy and the BMWi meet. The DQR committee acts as an advisor. The Bund-Länder-Coordination body is the national coordination body, which checks the allocations concerning coherence of the whole structure and carries out the following tasks:

- Provision of recommendations for the linking of the qualification levels of the DQR with those of the EQF.
- Guarantee of a transparent methodology to link the qualification levels of the DQR with the EQF, in order to increase comparability.
- Establishing and updating of a list of the allocations carried out by the responsible bodies to a level of the DQR and the EQF and the publishing of an updated version of the list
- Inclusion of the social partners and economic organisations and further, relevant organisations.

Coverage of the DQR with the demands of labour market

Approximate coverage in terms of breadth of the labour market and level of occupations included

The introduction of a German qualification frame is not indisputable in its details. There are concerns, whether the DQR is a framework for all educational areas. The demonstration of job market related qualification from the area of VET as well as from the field of general education, where the exploitation on the job market is less relevant, is challenging. The question of the recognition of informal and non-formal learning is seen basically positive, the forms of the recognition and a possible integration of the learning results are unclear. Intercultural and democracy relevant competences were first excluded in the first drafts of the DQR. Some further educational qualification from the formal and the non-formal educational area, were not yet assigned to the DQR. They are subject to further discussion in the DQR committees. The DQR has no separate level for habilitations.

Especially in the field of youth and adult education there are hefty controversies concerning the classification of learning outcomes in the qualification framework. One question is, whether it does make sense to disclose everything what a person learns/will learn. A widespread opinion is, that the learner him-/herself has to be sure, whether he/she wants to recognize non-formal and informal learning. But the DQR is only a supporting tool for that, because the DQR is not joint with competence validation and recognition processes.

DQR – EQF common characteristics and differences

Whether and in what way there is any linkage with national qualification frameworks or the EQF

The European qualification framework (EQF) acts as a translation instrument, which makes national qualifications understandable throughout Europe and promotes the mobility of employees and learners and their lifelong learning. It is the reference framework for the comparison of different national qualification systems. Core of the EQF are the 8 reference levels. They describe learning outcomes, what learners know, understand and are able to do. Therefore the learning outcomes are described on each level in the three columns “knowledge”, “skills”, where “competences” relates to the takeover of responsibilities and refers to self-reliance. The EQF, which was adopted in 2008 by the European institutions, is implemented throughout Europe. For this purpose the EU member states develop national qualification frameworks. The levels are assigned to the levels of the EQF. The EQF serves as an European meta framework, which makes it easier to compare different national educational systems.

The DQR describes like the EQF eight levels. Nevertheless, the DQR levels are differently structured than the EQF levels. For the characterisation it was referred to a bigger number of categories. The categories and competence descriptions of the DQR extend and concretise in a certain manner the EQF, which shows – according to the character of a meta-framework – a high abstraction level. The DQR has four (instead of three "columns") (knowledge – skills – social competence – self-reliance) in order to show in an appropriate way the learning results, which are important in Germany. It becomes clear, that in the German education system a comprehensive competence understanding is pursued. In difference to the EQF, each level a short text is prepended, which describes the requirement structure of the respective level ("level indicator"). The four-column structure was chosen to illustrate occupational action competence appropriately in all its facets.

The EQF, which is a general transparency instrument, to set different national educational goals to each other, puts the abstract category of the learning outcomes in the centre. Competences appear here as learning outcome category beside others: the knowledge and the skills. On the other hand the competence concept in the DQR forms the frame for all analyzed learning outcomes.

The levels of the DQR were assigned within the scope of the so-called "1:1" referencing to the levels of the EQF. German qualifications, which were assigned to the DQR are assigned therefore at the same time to the relevant EQF level. Further details provide the German referencing report.

Use of the DQR in education and continuing education

How the frameworks are used overall

The DQR as an orienting framework

The DQR is a qualification framework with orienting functions. This means the transparency instruments have no legal effects. They base on existing classifications of training formats and access regulations, but at the same time they leave them untouched. The aim is to make characteristics and differences of qualifications better visible.

The statements about the equivalence of the qualifications, which the DQR makes, concern their demand level. It can be the same in different training contents and in different educational fields.

The DQR is an orienting qualification frame, therefore the allocation of results from non-formal and informal learning require the further development of validation tools.

European arrangements like the EU directive for the recognition of occupational qualifications remain untouched by EQF and DQR. The allocation of the qualifications of the German training system to the levels of the DQR does not substitute for the existing system of the access authorisations. The achievement of a certain DQR level does not entitle automatically to the access to the next level. Also the achievement of a level is decoupled by collective- and salary-juridical effects.

Note on proofs of qualification

The expulsion of the allocation to the EQF/DQR occurs obligingly on all qualification certificates issued by the responsible institutions (schools, chambers of commerce etc.). In the university area the EQF- and DQR level is expelled in the Diploma supplement.

The allocation is only noted on certificates of the qualifications, which mentioned in the allocation list (arrangement to the common decision). Since the development of regulations in different areas a gradual expulsion of the allocation of qualifications to the DQR/EQR level on qualifications certificates is visible.

- *Specific position relating to the industry or profession that the partner will be working with*

The Saxon Education Company for Environmental Protection and Chemical Occupations Dresden Ltd. (SBG) is a private, non-profit educational institution, whose core activity is initial vocational training and further training, in the fields of natural science and technical environmental protection.

Being the leading company of two training networks, the Training Network for Chemical and Chemistry-related Occupations and the Vocational training network for supply and disposal, it cooperates with more than 120 companies and scientific institutions (chemical industry, pharmacy, biotechnology, paints and coatings industry, research institutes like Max-Planck, Leibniz and Fraunhofer), coordinates vocational qualification for them and carries out parts of the practical training by itself. As an inter-plant vocational training center within the German „dual“ VET system, the SBG is closely cooperating with the industry and organizing the practical training in accordance with its needs. Having laboratories and a modern pilot plant, it offers excellent training conditions for chemical and pharmaceutical operators on EQF level 3 and 4 as well as further training on level 6 (certified industrial craftsman specializing in chemical industry/industrial foreman = German “Meister”).

Any examples of particularly good practice and any particular problems or issues that have been identified

Projects:

CREDCHEM

Development and test of a Credit transfer system for the improvement of the mobility in the chemical sector.

Aims:

- Improvement of the mobility in the chemical sector
- Produce transparency between the different education systems
- Protection of the lastingness by establishment of a mobility group

Results:

- Notification about learning result units (Work in the lab)
- Description of learning results
- Choice of working duties for the learning units
- Formulation of exam duties
- Development of mobility documents
 - Memorandum of understanding
 - Learning agreements
- Experiences with the use of learning result units by mobility

Process Industry LEarning Unit Project (PILE UP)" ***(Lerneinheitenprojekt für die Prozessindustrie)***

Aims:

- Transfer of an innovative method of the development of learning units (CREDCHEM) for the job profiles "operator" and "Maintenance technician"
- Description of learning units
- Theoretical test this in vocational training and process industry and adaptation of the learning units
- practical test
- Focus on (vertical) mobility of skilled workers (for comparison CREDCHEM: on (horizontal) mobility of apprentices / students)

Results:

- Description of defined units of learning outcomes for the occupations Chemical operator and maintenance technician.
- Development of an assessment tools to the competence statement in the relevant occupations, including a manual for the development and assessment.