



NOTE

Position paper on the review of the 2006 recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning

REFERENCE: Contribution to the public consultation

This note presents Cedefop's opinion on main issues raised by the European Commission during the public consultation process on the review of the 2006 key competence framework for lifelong learning. It focuses on key competences in vocational education and training (VET) and is based on Cedefop's monitoring of the Riga conclusions calling for strengthening key competences in VET ⁽¹⁾, and on its work on qualifications frameworks, guidance, skills mismatch, among other sources. It also takes into account ReferNet's [country factsheets](#) on key competences in VET.

Cedefop supports the aim of the review: ensuring that the key competence framework 'reflects political, social, economic, ecological and technological developments since 2006' including 'recent developments in areas such as multilingualism, cultural diversity and varied ways of communicating, migration, citizenship, and sustainability issues' ⁽²⁾.

Key competences are becoming increasingly important in the labour market, as revealed by Cedefop's [European skills and jobs survey](#). For example, almost half the respondents considered advanced literacy skills vital for their jobs, especially in occupation groups predicted to grow most in the future. Even more respondents considered maths and digital skills crucial in performing their work. About half the adult employees in the industrial sector are in the STEM group ⁽³⁾, while 26% work in services and a 21% in public administration.

Cedefop considers that a key instrument for promoting key competences has been the national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) developing across Europe since 2005 ⁽⁴⁾. Initiated in response to the European qualifications framework (EQF), NQFs introduced learning outcomes or competence-based level descriptors, which, in many cases, were directly and explicitly influenced by the 2006 EU key competence framework. This influence can be particularly observed

⁽¹⁾ Medium-term deliverable 4.

⁽²⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/education/initiatives/key-competences-framework-review-2017_en

⁽³⁾ The European skills and jobs survey defines STEM graduates as those 'whose field of study is either engineering, maths and stats, natural sciences and computing sciences'.

⁽⁴⁾ Except for France, Ireland and the UK, where frameworks existed before 2005.

in national interpretations of ‘competence’ or ‘autonomy and responsibility’. Countries have generally considered it necessary to articulate this part of the descriptors in more detail compared to the original EQF descriptors. The key competence framework, not least due to the parallel timing of initiatives, has been used as an important input to the national processes of interpretation and detailing. These level descriptors have increasingly been acting as reference points for the design and review of learning-outcomes-based qualifications. Several countries now refer to the frameworks and their level descriptors as reference points to ‘calibrate’ their programmes and qualifications. This means that key competences, via the frameworks, play an important role in the overall national governance of qualifications.

Therefore, a radical change of the key competence framework compared to its 2006 version risks undermining the link to the NQFs, and thus their ability to support implementation of the key competences.

A general shift towards learning outcomes has taken place in Europe in the past decade and has been important in promoting the key competence framework. Countries are also generally aware of a need to indicate general skills and competences not related to a particular occupation. These learning outcomes are expressed in different settings and at different levels, but the most important ones are occupation and education standards, curricula, and assessment standards.

Further, the role of ESCO (European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations) ⁽⁵⁾ in promoting key competences should not be underestimated. The key competence framework provided important input to the work of ESCO’s cross-sectoral working group, developing a framework of transversal skills and competences for ESCO. The draft ESCO terminology on cross-sectoral and transversal skills and competences is organised under five key headings divided into 16 subheadings:

- application of knowledge;
- social skills and competences;
- language and communication;
- thinking skills and competences;
- attitudes and values at work.

While attitudes and values at work are only partly about skills and competences, this is an important category for defining learning outcomes. As done for the occupation-specific skills and competences, national terms were mapped onto the ESCO list. The ESCO terms are more detailed than those in the current key competence framework, but are clearly inspired by it and can also support future developments.

The global vision of the [Bruges communiqué](#) on enhanced cooperation in VET for the period 2011-20 emphasises a need for developing easily accessible and high-quality lifelong information, guidance and counselling services. In the first cycle of the communiqué (2011-14), stakeholders already clearly agreed to integrate career management skills in VET curricula ⁽⁶⁾. The [Riga conclusions](#) also suggest stepping up efforts for better information and guidance. Therefore,

⁽⁵⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/home>

⁽⁶⁾ In the fourth short-term deliverable.

career-related aspects need to be duly reflected in the new framework. A reference to employability and career development aspects could improve the use of the framework for guidance, validation and human resource services.

The learning-to-learn competence needs to reflect better adaptability to several types of learning environment, including work-based and workplace contexts. It should also accommodate aspects related to access and interpretation of basic career information, such as knowledge of professions and the development of attitudes and skills to make career choices, maintain work-life balance and adapt to different life/career stages. This is partly implied in the concept of wellbeing, but needs to be made explicit.

Cedefop also considers that a reference to the European entrepreneurship competence framework and the work [on green skills for inclusive growth](#) would be beneficial to the reviewed document.

Current key competences and their descriptions include many of the skills needed in the 21st century but they may need grouping to reflect changes, for example, placing more emphasis on soft skills.

We hope that this input will prove to be of value in the framework review.

In addition, in May 2017, Cedefop organised two discussion sessions on key competences in VET during the ReferNet partnership forums in Riga and Helsinki. A summary of ReferNet members' opinions was sent to Ms Ivana Vrhovski (DG EAC) on 25 May 2017, a copy of which is attached to this document for ease of reference.

Annex: ReferNet partnership forums 2017 in Helsinki/Riga: Main points on the review of key competence framework

Annex

CEDEFOP REFERNET PARTNERSHIP FORUMS 2017, HELSINKI/RIGA Session on key competences in VET: main points

Disclaimer

This summary reflects the views of individual ReferNet members. Cedefop's opinion is presented in a separate note.

ReferNet partners have received Cedefop and DG EAC background papers on key competences (originally presented during the ACVT meeting in April) and expressed their views on the review of the EU key competence framework. This is a short summary of their discussions.

- Mother tongue and foreign languages could be merged. In multicultural/multilingual societies, such as in Luxembourg, they are difficult to separate.
- Language competences would need reinforcing in VET to support international mobility.
- Need to explain entrepreneurship competence better. It is mainly about being proactive.
- New framework should pay more attention to competences needed for teachers/trainers. This will support their role and motivation as a consequence.
- Reference to DigiComp framework could be an asset. In general, the framework should explain the links to other frameworks and platforms, such as the 21st century skills platform.
- OECD PISA (and PIAAC) results have an impact on the education world but will the framework? Is it only targeting policy-makers?
- Schools and teachers often ignore the framework in their practice.
- Too many cross-cultural and cross-sectoral frameworks are difficult for professionals to interpret, and therefore, use.
- Is it really necessary to revise a well-established framework? The change could confuse those who already use the framework.
- Some felt the approach of having a key competence list was fine; others preferred the idea of a visualisation that could illustrate better how the competences are interlinked, which ones should be transversal; this would also help prevent misunderstandings when it comes to texts and translations – a way out could be to have both.
- Soft competences should be emphasised more.
- Need to show the link to top 10 competences that were presented in the World Economic Forum (emotional intelligence, cognitive flexibility, etc.).
- The framework should clarify whether it is descriptive in nature or rather attempts to influence current policies/practices.
- Equity and equality should be included as underlying principles of the framework supporting multicultural skills and gender issues. This links also to migration issues.

- Critical thinking should be emphasised as (junk) information streams are overwhelming. It is important to be able to judge the reliability of information.
- Cultural awareness may need rethinking; it should be transversal. More generally, soft skills should be transversal, as they have become more prominent.
- Sustainability should be considered regarding environmental issues.
- Innovation and STEM go together; linked to solving problems, e.g. when technology does not work; new tools are needed etc.; skills to innovate are currently part of key competence descriptors in some cases, but should be emphasised.

ReferNet members were also reminded of the public consultation that was still open when the two forums in Helsinki and Riga took place. Several ReferNet members said they had submitted their individual/organisation input through an online questionnaire.