The development of the German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen – DQR) is part of a European process. In April 2008, the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) entered into force. To implement the EQF, 39 European countries have now decided to develop national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). These NQFs can have a different number of levels and pursue different objectives. In addition to Germany, 32 other countries have assigned their NQFs to the EQF as part of the referencing process. The EQF portal [1] provides information on the current status of developments.

The EQF, as a reference framework for lifelong learning, maps the learning outcomes of the respective European national education systems in eight levels. It serves as a translation device between the education and qualifications systems of the EU member states and is intended to make learning outcomes from all educational sectors internationally more comprehensible and more comparable, thus promoting the mobility of employees in Europe.

Like the EQF, the DQF describes eight levels that describe learning outcomes that are bundled into competences independently of the degree. In principle all DQR levels should be accessible via various educational pathways. In levels 5 to 8 the DQR opted for parallel descriptions allowing the allocation of academic and vocational qualifications. Compatibility with the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications (Qualifikationsrahmen für Deutsche Hochschulabschlüsse – HQR) adopted in 2005 is guaranteed in DQR levels 6 to 8.

At the end of January 2012 the Federation, Länder, social partners and business organisations agreed on a fundamental line for the introduction of the DQR. The allocation of general school-leaving certificates was deferred for a five-year trial period.

The allocation of the DQR levels to the EQF levels was carried out in the so-called referencing process. The German Referencing Report was successfully presented to and approved by the EQF Advisory Group, the advisory body at European level, in December 2012. The exclusion of general education was criticised.


The aim of the DQR is to make the German qualification system more transparent, to support reliability, permeability and quality assurance and to increase the comparability of qualifications. The Federation and the Länder have agreed that the assignment of qualifications and degrees to levels
does not replace the existing system of entrance qualifications. The allocation takes place in accordance with the principle that each qualification level should always be accessible via various educational pathways. The achievement of a level does not provide automatic entitlement to access the next level and is not considered in conjunction with the implications for collective wage agreements and laws relating to remuneration. The EU Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications remains unaffected by the EU Recommendation.

The German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning is the first framework to cover all qualifications of the German education system across all educational sectors. In the Annex to the Joint Resolution, the qualifications of the formal sector assigned by consensus are presented in a tabular overview. A learning outcome-oriented justification is attached in each case. In most cases, an anchor qualification stands for a qualification type. The exemplary reason is then followed by a list of qualifications that correspond to this type and are assigned in the same way.

In 2017, the Standing Conference decided on the allocation of general education degrees. The Hauptschulabschluss (HSA) was assigned DQR level 2, the Mittlere Schulabschluss (MSA) DQR level 3 and the Fachhochschulreife (FHR), the Fachgebundene Hochschulreife (FgbHR) and the Allgemeine Hochschulreife (AHR) DQR level 4. An allocation to two levels was confirmed for initial vocational education and training: Level 3 for two-year training programmes and level 4 for three-year and three-and-a-halfyear training programmes. This ensures the equivalence of vocational and general education and training in the assignment process to the DQF.

The indication of the EQF/DQR reference level on new certificates issued for qualifications is being carried out by the respective authorities (schools, chambers, etc.). In higher education, the EQF/DQF level is shown in the Diploma Supplement. A uniform formulation is used in all areas of education. The current exception to this is the classification of general qualifications. The DQR level is not shown for qualifications obtained before the Joint Resolution came into force. The assignment is only noted on qualification certificates of qualifications that are listed in the annually updated "List of Assigned Qualifications[5]".

In principle, all assignments of qualifications from the formal area are also shown bindingly in the DQR Qualifications Database in German (partly also in English).

As well as qualifications from the formal sector, in future the qualifications of the non-formal sector are also to be allocated to the DQR – i.e. from the area that works with regulatory means that are not regulated by laws or ordinances. A pilot procedure for this was launched in September 2017. The aim is to develop procedures and criteria for assigning qualifications of non-formal learning to the levels of the DQR. Results are expected in autumn 2018. In a further stage it shall be possible to include informally acquired competences in the DQR too. The development of procedures required to determine and assess the results of informal learning (“validation”) is taking place outside the DQR process.

The DQR Manual[6] explains the DQR[5] to all interested persons. It serves as a guide for authorities which are responsible for allocating qualifications to the DQR. It specifies the criteria and procedures for the description of qualifications for the DQR and is intended to ensure that the allocation of newly developed qualifications always follows the same criteria and procedures. It lays down binding allocations which indicate the competences acquired through a particular qualification, thereby making the allocations comprehensible, and also describes the competences and sources of information. A glossary[7] explains the terms which are important to understand the DQR.