

## **Relating NetQues benchmarks to EQF levels**

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### **Introductie en samenvatting**

In het kader van het vrije verkeer van personen heeft het Europees parlement aanbevolen om voor de opleidingen tot gereguleerde beroepen een kwaliteitskeurmerk in het leven te roepen. Daartoe is het European Qualifications Framework (EQF) opgezet om zodoende opleidingsniveau's met elkaar te kunnen vergelijken en erkenning van elkaars diploma's te vergemakkelijken. Richtlijn 2005/36/EG en Richtlijn 2013/55/EU regelen de erkenning van een in een andere lidstaat behaalde diploma.

CPLOL heeft onder andere het zogenaamde NetQues project opgezet om 65 logopedie opleidingen uit alle EU landen te beschrijven en met elkaar te vergelijken. In een werkgroep is vervolgens nader uitgewerkt wat het EQF niveau is van 10 specifieke competenties die de student moet beheersen aan het eind van de opleiding tot logopedist. Daarnaast wordt voor 10 generieke competenties het EQF niveau aangegeven.

De conclusie is dat het niveau van de meeste EU landen EQF 6 (Bachelor) of EQF 7 (Master) is. De aanbeveling is om EQF niveau 7 als eindniveau van de opleiding te hanteren. De veranderende maatschappij vraagt om professionals die kritisch en zelfstandig kunnen handelen, kunnen samenwerken met andere zorgprofessionals en evidence zoeken of ontwikkelen voor hun handelen,

### **Summary**

CPLOL initiated and led the NetQues project with the aim of contributing to the harmonization of Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) education in Europe. Data from the 31 participating countries showed that SLT programs in Europe are offered at different educational levels.

In this document, we want to describe levels 6 (Bachelor's) and 7 (Master's) of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF). Concrete examples will be given of EQF level allocations for the ten most mentioned specific competences of the NetQues benchmarks.

Our conclusion is that EQF level 7 is desirable, in order for SLTs to be able to provide good quality, up-to-date services for complex cases.

However, the level of many benchmarks has to relate to the specific SLT context in each country, e.g., the degree to which SLTs work independently and the areas within which they work. The level of competence required is dependent on the conditions under which SLT education and SLT practice are carried out. Therefore, in many cases, we are unable to allocate a definite level.

## Background

In order to facilitate increased transnational mobility of the workforce, the European Parliament recommended the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF). Using a set of eight reference levels, different countries' national qualifications systems can be mapped onto this common European reference framework (<https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/descriptors-page>).

CPLOL initiated and led the NetQues project with the aim of contributing to the harmonization of Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) education in Europe. A list of benchmarks was agreed upon, defining the threshold for entry into the profession in terms of the competences required ([http://www.netques.eu/?page\\_id=1051](http://www.netques.eu/?page_id=1051)). The aim of this document is to describe how the NetQues benchmarks can be related to EQF-levels, as an extension to Annex IV of the NetQues report, where this issue was initially addressed (<http://www.netques.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/ANNEX-IV-NetQues-NQ-SLT-competences-by-EQF.pdf>).

*Competence* is "the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities in work or study situations and in professional and personal development" (<http://www.eucen.eu/EQFpro/GeneralDocs/FilesFeb09/GLOSSARY.pdf>).

As most SLT programs in Europe are at either a Bachelor's or Master's level (<http://www.netques.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ANNEX-II-Profile-Snapshots-key-features-of-EU-SLT-Education.pdf>), the levels of interest are levels 6 and 7, as defined in table 1 below. Level 6 corresponds to undergraduate and level 7 to postgraduate education, according to the Dublin Descriptors within the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area ([http://www.ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Dublin\\_Descriptors](http://www.ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Dublin_Descriptors)).

Table 1. Descriptors defining the levels of the EQF (<https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/descriptors-page>).

	EQF level 6 Bachelor's degree	EQF level 7 Master's degree
<b>Knowledge</b>	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Highly specialized knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research. Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields

<b>Skills</b>	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field of work or study	Specialized problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields
<b>Competence</b>	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals or groups	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams

### Interpretation of EQF levels 6 and 7

A comparison between EQF levels 6 and 7 shows that important features of level 7 encompass highly specialized knowledge, the ability to integrate knowledge from different fields and responsibility for creating new knowledge and new approaches. An SLT at level 6 relies mainly on standardized tasks for assessment and intervention, following given guidelines. Advanced competences within the field of SLT is the main issue, focusing more on the individual's knowledge and ability to keep updated about developments within the field with respect to both theory and practice. The key words for level 7 are *responsibility* and *autonomy*. An SLT at this level is able to devise new dynamic procedures, to invent new materials and procedures, mixing methods adapted to the patient's needs. Importantly, level 7 involves contributing to the development of the profession, to be able to support colleagues to meet a changing world with new challenges. An SLT at this level is flexible, reflective and proactive. S/he is able to evaluate what s/he reads or hears critically and is prepared to take on leadership and entrepreneurship.

In particular, focusing on *competence* (as in the NetQues benchmarks), we could define the difference as relating to scope. That is, at level 6 the scope of responsibility is mainly restricted to the competence of the individual SLT, whereas at level 7 the scope of responsibility is widened to the competence of the profession.

### Relating NetQues benchmarks to EQF levels

Allocation of an EQF level involves an interpretation of the scope of the competence described in the benchmark and the complexity of the client's condition. In general, level 6 is sufficient for more predictable cases, but for complex cases and situations that the SLT faces, for example due to changing demographics (see below), level 7 needs to be achieved to meet the requirements. The important difference between the levels is that at level 7 the emphasis is on being able to handle unpredictable situations and cases and to create new approaches to document and to share with colleagues.

### Subject specific competences

Interpretations of competence at level 6 and 7 for the top 10 NetQues subject-specific competences (i.e., those that were most frequently judged essential in order to be able to practise as a newly qualified SLT by academics, recent graduates and employers of SLTs) for the newly qualified SLT are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The top ten subject-specific competences from the NetQues benchmarks complemented with interpretations and reflections.

Top 10 SUBJECT-SPECIFIC COMPETENCES FOR THE NEWLY QUALIFIED SLT	
Competence	Interpretations/reflections
Can assess, diagnose and intervene in speech and language disorders	<p>Level 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can select and apply appropriate assessment tools, select a diagnosis and select and apply intervention methods following guidelines</li> </ul> <p>Level 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can select and apply assessment tools, analyze the client’s situation within an ICF framework (or other classification system), select a diagnosis and create and run an intervention plan</li> <li>• Contributes to the creation of new procedures for assessment, diagnosis and intervention, according to the needs and responses of the client and shares with colleagues</li> </ul>
Provides appropriate feedback on interpretation of assessment results to the client and significant others, in a way they can understand easily	<p>Level 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can interpret the results of assessments and provides appropriate feedback in more predictable contexts</li> </ul> <p>Level 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides feedback in unpredictable contexts requiring new strategic approaches, for clients/cases requiring specialist competence</li> </ul>
Can produce oral and written reports of assessment results, including analysis and interpretation of assessment information	<p>Level 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can produce assessment results in client files using appropriate terminology and also is able to present this in a way that is generally understandable</li> </ul> <p>Level 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes into account different perspectives in complex cases where a multidisciplinary approach is necessary and includes these in the report</li> </ul>
When necessary, refers client to other professionals in a timely and appropriate manner	<p>Level 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knows and stays within the boundaries of her/his profession (as above)</li> </ul>

<p>Integrates assessment results with other relevant information to set goals</p>	<p>Level 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrates assessment results with other relevant information in routine cases</li> </ul> <p>Level 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrates knowledge from different sources and fields and knows how to find solutions in more complex and rare/unexpected cases</li> </ul>
<p>Implements appropriate therapy techniques using the necessary materials and instrumental equipment</p>	<p>Level 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knows how to use existing materials and techniques</li> </ul> <p>Level 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is able to evaluate and evidence-base intervention methods and/or to develop new methods and techniques</li> </ul>
<p>Understands rationales and principles that underlie specific therapy methods</p>	<p>Level 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is able to describe and select the appropriate intervention methods</li> </ul> <p>Level 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is able to compare and explain the methods and relate to a wider theoretical perspective</li> </ul>

<p>Discusses long-term outcomes and decides, in consultation with the client, whether speech and language therapy is appropriate or required. Includes key people in these discussions.</p>	<p>Level 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can formulate expected and realistic long-term outcomes together with the client and relevant key people</li> </ul> <p>Level 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes into consideration different possible scenarios and the current evidence base also in rare and unexpected cases and in multidisciplinary contexts</li> </ul>
<p>Understands the professional roles and boundaries of a speech and language therapist</p>	<p>Level 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the limits of her/his competence and when to consult other profession(al)s</li> </ul> <p>Level 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is able to contribute to the development of the professional role of the SLT in intra- and interprofessional contexts</li> </ul>
<p>Observes the code of ethics of the national professional body and/or as prescribed by the employer, and/or the national/state government</p>	<p>Level 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is familiar with and knows how to act in accordance with the code of ethics</li> </ul> <p>Level 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can contribute to the evaluation and development of the code of ethics</li> </ul>

Some of the other subject-specific competences from the NetQues benchmarks that are more in keeping with level 7 are the following:

*Identifies the influence of different situations, environments or contexts on the client's problems*

*Collects information, including qualitative and quantitative data, to evaluate the effectiveness of therapy*

All competences require reflection and evaluation, at both level 6 and level 7.

### **Generic competences**

The generic competences are the necessary conditions required to fulfill the subject-specific competences at both level 6 and 7, where level 7 involves more reflective and integrated use of the competences. They are necessary prerequisites for functioning at both levels 6 and 7, and mostly relate to ethical issues. The ten most cited generic competences are listed in table 3.

Table 3. The ten most cited generic competences from the NetQues benchmarks.

<b>GENERIC COMPETENCES FOR THE NEWLY QUALIFIED SLT</b>
Demonstrates behaviour which is honest, sincere and reliable
Demonstrates the ability to be self-critical and reflect on their own performance
Provides accurate feedback in a comprehensible and sensitive manner
Empathises with clients and colleagues
Takes responsibility for developing their own knowledge and skills throughout their lifespan
Demonstrates a positive attitude and pro-activeness
Is able to extract information from informants efficiently and sympathetically
Uses appropriate, effective skills and materials in written, oral and visual communication of information and instruction
Adapts own behaviour and approach to fit new situations
Identifies the important factor in a problem and suggests possible solutions

It is thus almost impossible to allocate specific levels for these benchmarks. There are, however, some other generic competences further down in the list that are clearly more consistent with level 7, for example:

*Demonstrates resilience in coping with the demands of the profession in a way which enables him/her to maintain self-esteem and manage stress*

*Works independently and autonomously*

*Formulates creative and original solutions for novel situations*

*Synthesizes information from diverse sources to select an appropriate course of action or to answer a question*

## **Discussion**

To a large extent, the suggestions for EQF levels are in accordance with the proposal in Annex IV of the NetQues report (<http://www.netques.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/ANNEX-IV-NetQues-NQ-SLT-competences-by-EQF.pdf>). However, this is a matter of interpretation, and, importantly, the level of any benchmark has to relate to the specific speech and language therapy context in each country.

The competent SLT needs to have strategies to be able to update their knowledge and skills and to have advanced problem-solving skills, using knowledge from different fields. Leadership competence will also be increasingly important. In order to develop knowledge and practice it is necessary to have professionals at level 7 as well as some at level 8 (PhD), particularly in view of the changing conditions for SLT practice globally and the challenges ahead, for example those stated in the NetQues report (chapter 4):

- The changing demography relating to ageing populations; people will live longer, which entails more complex and persistent conditions where cognition and language are implicated (scope of practice developments)
- The need for interprofessional practice to respond to these more complex conditions
- The requirement for evidence-based practice, which puts high demands on scientific competence (reading scientific papers, collecting and analyzing data independently)
- The need to be able to practise in changing environments with more mobile populations and multicultural and multilingual contexts (sociological changes)
- The need to be able to respond to the competent client who has acquired information by themselves in advance
- The need to account for our actions and recommendations, in order to demonstrate the value of our skilled services to those who finance them
- Not least, the need to be updated about recent research developments affecting, for example, diagnostics (e.g., genetics) and technological advances affecting both diagnosis and intervention and advances in communication technology

Several of these issues are addressed in CPLOL working groups, for example multilingualism, interprofessional practice, and telemedicine.

Overall, for many benchmarks, level 6 competence may be sufficient in order for a clinician to carry out tasks, as long as s/he is receptive to gaining new knowledge and developing and takes responsibility for his/her life-long learning and continuing professional development. Being able to provide good quality, up-to-date services to manage complex cases, as well as to handle unpredictable situations, indicates a need for competence that is more consistent with level 7. It is also important to pay attention to CPLOL resolution no. 9, which “draws attention to the need for initial education for speech and language therapists to be at Masters level”

([http://www.cplol.eu/index.php?option=com\\_jdownloads&task=download.send&id=2381&catid=10&m=0&Itemid=307&lang=en](http://www.cplol.eu/index.php?option=com_jdownloads&task=download.send&id=2381&catid=10&m=0&Itemid=307&lang=en)) as well as to CPLOL’s position statement “Minimum standards”([http://www.cplol.eu/images/Documents/education/Revised\\_Min\\_Standards\\_2007\\_la.pdf](http://www.cplol.eu/images/Documents/education/Revised_Min_Standards_2007_la.pdf)).

## **Conclusion**

Our conclusion, in accordance with CPLOL resolution no. 9, is that EQF level 7 is desirable as an entry level for SLTs. However, the level of many benchmarks has to relate to the specific SLT context in each country. The level of competence that is required as an entry level is dependent on the conditions under which SLT education and SLT practice are carried out. Therefore, in many cases, we are unable to allocate a definite level: the final decision has to be discussed and decided in each country and will depend on, for example, organizational characteristics.

It is important that a section of the SLTs in a country also has achieved level 8 in speech and language therapy or in a related discipline, in order to be able to contribute to the scientific development and basis of the profession.

The competent SLT needs to be able to demonstrate advanced strategies relating to self-assessment, problem-solving skills, and also have specific knowledge and professional expertise relevant to diverse contexts and to the diversity of difficulties that clients can demonstrate. Leadership competence will also be increasingly important.

Finally, it is important to continuously analyze the level of SLT education in relation to SLTs' responsibilities and tasks, and how these may need to be changed, in the context of future challenges.

Toelichting:

CPLOL is een overkoepelende organisatie voor Verenigingen van Logopedie in de EU aangevuld met landen uit de EER zoals IJsland en Noorwegen. Zwitserland is ook lid. Totaal zijn 32 landen verbonden met 35 Verenigingen. CPLOL representeert rond de 80.000 logopedisten.

Elke Vereniging voor logopedie vaardigt 2 gedelegeerden af naar de CPLOL.

Namens de NVLF hebben momenteel (2018) Jenta Sluijmers en Bauke Leijenaar zitting in de CPLOL.

CPLOL organiseert elke 3 jaar een inhoudelijk congres.

Meer informatie <https://cplol.eu>

Kalf, H., Leijenaar, B. (2006). *De NVLF in Europa*. Logopedie en Foniatrie nr 2, p. 42-46.

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