

The Significance of the EQF for Shiatsu in Europe

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To understand the significance of the EQF (European Qualifications Framework) in the ESF strategy for the professional recognition of Shiatsu in Europe, it is first necessary to know the background and objectives that led to the development and establishment of the EQF.

The basic idea behind the EQF

The global idea behind the EQF is the four fundamental freedoms of the European Union, which are designed to secure the single market:

- **Free movement of goods** (no customs duties or trade barriers within the EU)
- **Free movement of persons** (EU citizens are allowed to live and work in any member state)
- **Free movement of capital** (money transfers and investments are possible without restriction throughout the EU)
- **Freedom of establishment and to provide services** (companies and self-employed persons can operate throughout the EU)

In order to settle in another European country or to offer Shiatsu services there, the following conditions must be met:

- the **recognition of professional qualifications**, provided that there is a legal regulation for this profession in the country concerned
- a **translation instrument** that makes national qualifications understandable and comparable throughout Europe.

The freedom of establishment and the freedom to provide services are important in order to be able to practice Shiatsu as an independent, protected and recognised profession throughout Europe. However, this does not automatically mean that a Shiatsu practitioner who practices a legally regulated profession in his or her home country can practice this profession without restriction in any other European country. This is only possible if the Shiatsu qualification is recognised in the respective country (in a comparable way) or if Shiatsu is not subject to any special regulation there.

An example: an Austrian Shiatsu practitioner, for whom Shiatsu is regulated by law in Austria, has the right to work in Italy due to the freedom of establishment and the freedom to provide services. Since there are no specific legal requirements for Shiatsu in Italy, only tax aspects are relevant – specifically, the tax domicile and thus the application of either Austrian or Italian tax laws. However, the opposite

case is different: an Italian Shiatsu practitioner who wants to come to Austria must prove the professional qualifications prescribed in Austria in order to be able to work there legally.

However, a fundamental problem remains: a Shiatsu profession cannot simply be established in a country if no corresponding legal regulation exists there. This is precisely where the 'EQF Strategy of the ESF' comes in: the creation of an official European standard for Shiatsu provides a political basis for promoting the recognition and legal establishment of Shiatsu as a profession in countries without existing qualitative regulation.

The objectives of the EQF

Comparable to the Bologna Process, which has been creating standardised degrees and comparable quality assurance since 1999 to enable more mobility, transparency and recognition of degrees, the EQF aims to achieve:

- Europe-wide transparency in the education landscape (which goes beyond the degrees covered by the Bologna Process)
- Comparability of qualifications and their transferability
- Increasing employability
- Promoting the mobility of 'workers' and 'learners'

Structure of the EQF

In order to make professional qualifications and skills comparable, the EQF has created an eight-level, learning-outcome-oriented reference system that all national qualification frameworks (NQFs) refer to. The EQF assesses the knowledge, skills and competences that graduates acquire during their training and demonstrate in a final examination.

- **Knowledge** is theoretical and/or factual (e.g. yin and yang, five elements, meridians)
- **Skills** are cognitive (e.g. problem-solving skills) or practical (e.g. handling instruments and materials). It is about the ability to apply knowledge in practice to fulfil tasks/goals and solve problems (e.g. application of techniques to strengthen the spleen)
- **Competences** denote the degree of 'responsibility' and 'autonomy' required for practical application (e.g. in adapting treatment to changing situations)

Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
<p>Knowledge: Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts</p> <p>Skills: A range of cognitive and practical skills required</p>	<p>Knowledge: Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge and awareness of the boundaries</p>	<p>Knowledge: Advanced knowledge; Critical understanding of theories and principles</p>

<p>to generate solutions to specific problems</p> <p>Responsibility and autonomy: Self-management within contexts that are usually predictable; Supervision of the routine work of others; Some responsibility for evaluation and improvement</p> <p>Examples: first year of a degree (UK), Abitur (BRD), Matura (A), Baccalauréat (France), Bachillerato (Spain)</p>	<p>Skills: A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions</p> <p>Responsibility and autonomy: Management and supervision of activities where there is unpredictable change; Review and develop performance of self and others</p> <p>Examples: HNC, HND (UK), Fachmatura/HTL (A), BUT, Classe préparatoire aux grandes écoles (France)</p>	<p>Skills: Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems</p> <p>Responsibility and autonomy: Managing complex activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work; Taking responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups</p> <p>Examples: Bachelor, Meister (A), Fachkaufmann (BRD). Laurea triennale (Italy), Licence (France), Diplomado, Grado (Spain)</p>
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The main differences between levels 5 and 6

In general, level 6 (compared to level 5) implies

- **increased personal responsibility** (including reflection on the task), and
- **higher professional demands** due to greater complexity and more frequent changes (in work processes).

Professional expertise	Personal expertise	Autonomy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is broader and encompasses current professional developments and relevant knowledge at the interfaces with other fields • Skills are more diverse and deal with complex problems and the development and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to present complex, specialised problems and solutions to experts and to develop them further in discussions with them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes – in addition to reflection, evaluation and control – the planning of work objectives

evaluation of new solutions		
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The significance of the EQF

The significance of the assignment to the EQF means professional recognition in public, which particularly applies to professions without legally regulated training, which in this way demonstrate their seriousness and quality:

- **in relation to customers** (shows the high quality of the method and at the same time the distinction from traditional massage)
- **in relation to students** (attractiveness for younger students to take up Shiatsu as a profession)
- **towards institutions** (e.g. in the health sector)
- **towards authorities** (e.g. for legal recognition)

In addition, the training and professional standards are ensured.

Why the ESF is aiming for EQF level 6

The basic rule is: the higher the level in the EQF, the higher the reputation that training and the associated profession enjoy – but also the challenges that come with the training and achieving the classification.

- In Austria, Shiatsu has reached level 6 and is thus on the same level as (commercial) massage.
- Level 6 gives Shiatsu the value it deserves.
- In several countries, most of the requirements for achieving level 6 are already in place

Challenges associated with level 6

Achieving level 6 in other European countries is associated with a number of challenges, both in the area of Shiatsu training and at the political level due to the possibly incomplete or 'one-sided' implementation of the NQF into national law:

- Training requirements
- Requirements for the curriculum
- Requirements for the examination system
- Non-formal training cannot be submitted in many countries
- Levels of the National Qualifications Framework above 5 are reserved for academic professions in most countries.

Training requirements

For level 6, a minimum of 1,000 training hours is required – in many countries, significantly more than the current Shiatsu training there comprises. In addition to the Shiatsu-specific content (in the Austrian curriculum, which is based on the NQF entry: 515 hours), there are further requirements that are required by European authorities to ensure consumer protection and integration into the professional-economic system. These include medical basics (anatomy, physiology, pathology, hygiene, first aid) as well as legal and business aspects relevant for practising the profession in the respective country.

In addition, the Austrian curriculum includes 255 hours of practice (supervised Shiatsu treatments, case studies, personal experience) and 80 hours for the preparation of a thesis.

These higher requirements are a cause for concern for some training providers, especially those whose curricula do not yet meet these requirements. They are faced with the challenge of expanding their programmes, involving additional teachers and presumably raising training fees – with the fear that this could lead to higher costs and a decline in the number of students.

However, not all of the required training hours have to be completed as classroom lessons at the schools. For example, about 155 hours of practical training and 80 hours of specialised work can be done through largely independent work. Moreover, additional content can be taught through alternative models that relieve the burden on the schools – for example, through offers from the national association or through cooperation between schools. In Austria, for example, economic and legal courses were initially organised exclusively by the ÖDS (50% of the scheduled hours are direct instruction, the other 50% home study) before they were later integrated into regular classes by some schools.

Curriculum requirements

A competence-oriented curriculum is generally associated with the assignment to the NQF, regardless of the level aimed for. The focus here is on the acquisition of practical skills, applicable knowledge and personal competence. This differs from a content-oriented ('traditional') curriculum, which is primarily geared towards imparting specialised knowledge and theoretical content, usually in the form of a fixed syllabus with clearly structured topics and teaching units.

In a competence-oriented curriculum, clear learning objectives are defined that are based on the real-life demands of professional life. The focus is not only on professional competence, but also on social, methodological and reflective skills in order to promote independent thinking, problem solving and practical application. The aim is to optimally prepare graduates for professional practice.

The good news is that the assignment of the Austrian Shiatsu training to the NQF means that a template is already available that can also be used by other national associations.

Requirements for the examination system

In a competence-oriented system, the (final) examination has a different role than in a content-oriented curriculum. Here, it is not only about the control of knowledge, but above all about the proof of actual (theoretical and practical) competence, in particular through practical relevance and competence proof.

In addition, a clearly structured and objective examination system must be established by the national association.

National challenges

In some countries, there are obstacles that currently prevent the registration of a Shiatsu training in the NQF, either completely (there is no possibility to submit a non-formal training) or for level 6 (levels 6 and upwards are only open for academic degrees) – contrary to the EU's objective, the framework of which, as the Austrian example shows, would allow this.

The good news is that the assignment of the Austrian Shiatsu training to the NQF sets a precedent that can be referred to. And the more countries that achieve a Shiatsu assignment at level 6, the more likely a corresponding European standard will be.