



# EQF and the shift to learning outcomes; implications for Quality assurance

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CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training

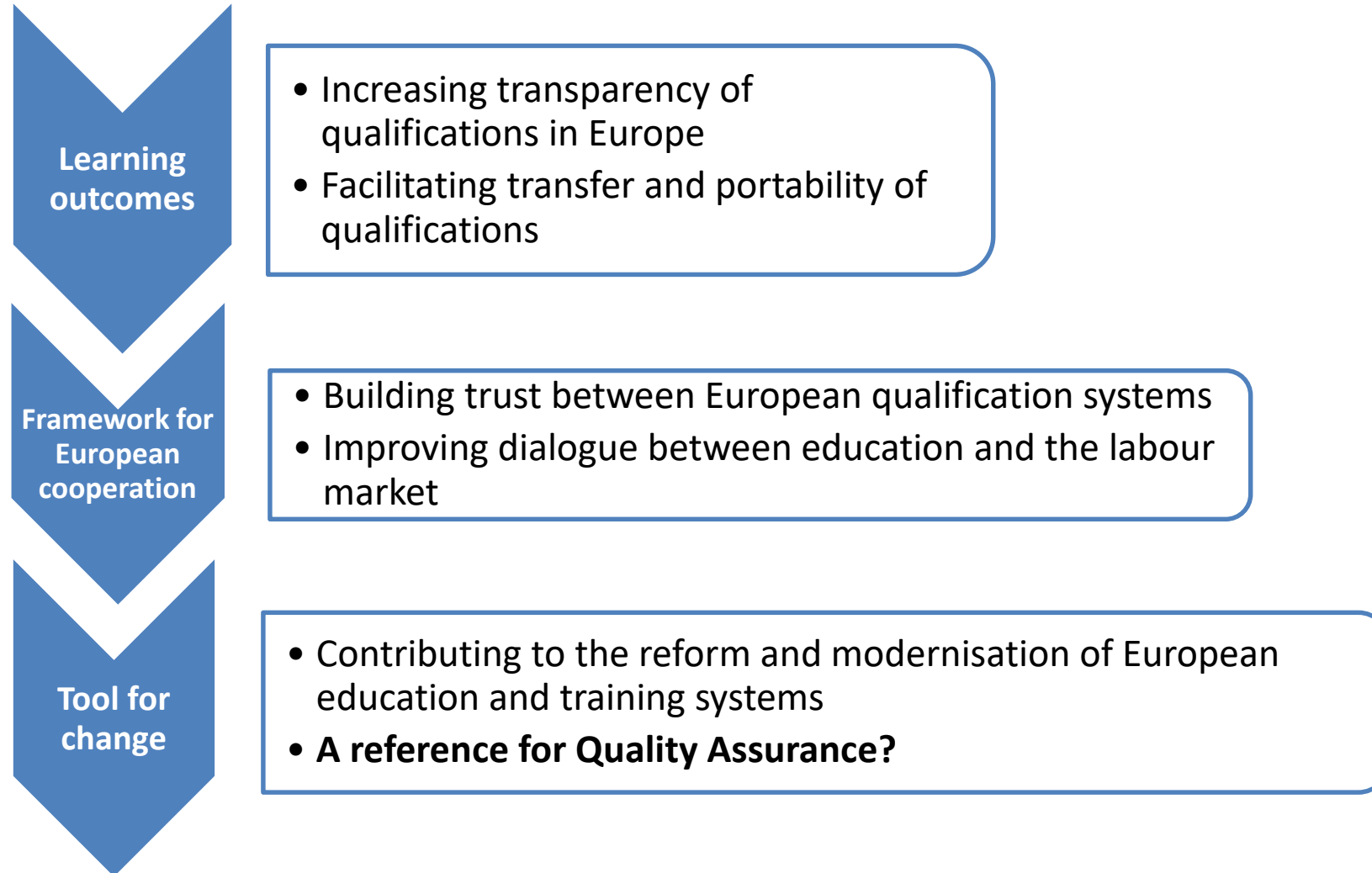
# A reminder - the main features of the EQF

- An 8-level reference framework for Europe, covering all types and levels of qualifications
- Defined in terms of **learning outcomes**



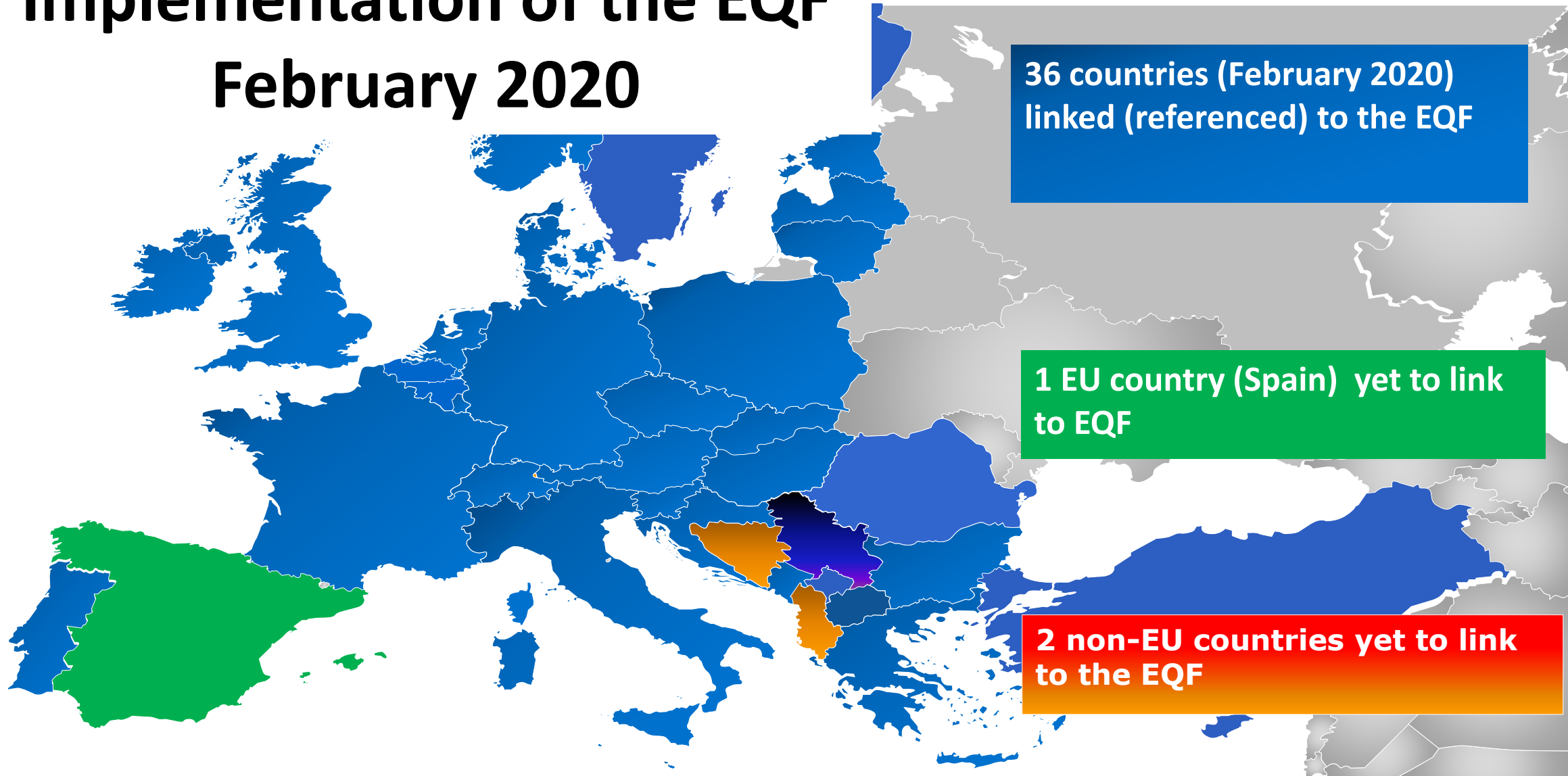
- A **translation grid** for qualifications across European countries

# A reminder - main objectives of the EQF



# Implementation of the EQF

## February 2020



# EQF and Quality Assurance – Referencing criteria

1....4

5. The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications frameworks or systems and are consistent with the principles on quality assurance as specified in Annex IV to this recommendation.
6. The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies that the referencing report is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.

(7....10)



# EQF and Quality Assurance – Annex IV on Quality Assurance (1)

1. address the design of qualifications as well as application of the learning outcomes approach;
2. ensure valid and reliable assessment according to agreed and transparent learning outcomes-based standards and address the process of certification;
3. consist of feedback mechanisms and procedures for continuous improvement;
4. involve all relevant stakeholders at all stages of the process;
5. be composed of consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review;

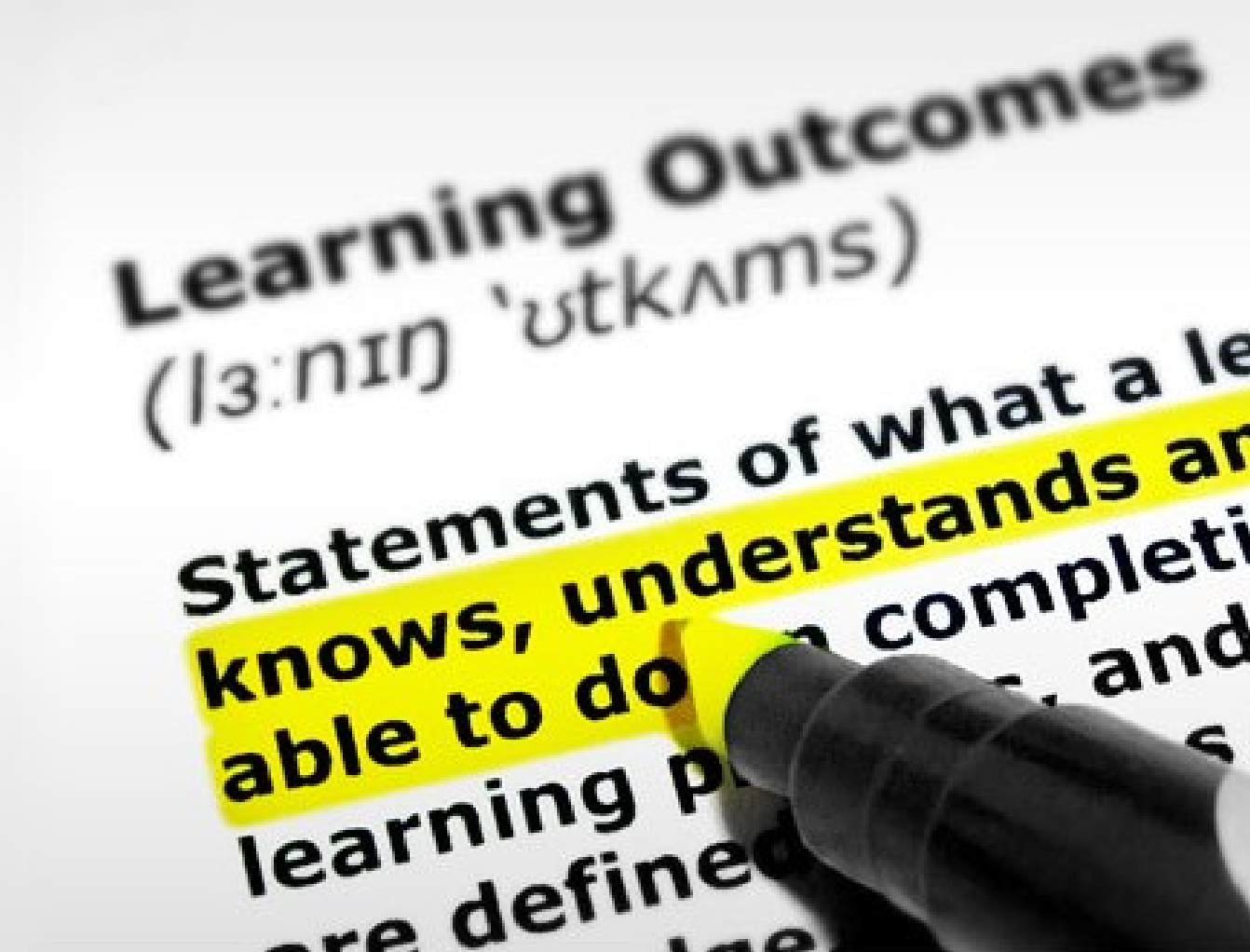


# EQF and Quality Assurance – Annex IV on Quality Assurance (2)

6. be an integral part of the internal management, including sub-contracted activities, of bodies issuing qualifications with an EQF level;
7. be based on clear and measurable objectives, standards and guidelines;
8. be supported by appropriate resources;
9. include a regular review of existing external monitoring bodies or agencies, carrying out quality assurance;
10. include the electronic accessibility of evaluation results.



# The shift to learning outcomes and the implications for QA





# Learning outcomes aspirations – the Swiss Army knife of education reform



- Increase the **transparency** of qualifications
- Facilitate **the valuing** of all learning, including that which has been acquired outside formal education and training.
- Increase the **comparability** of qualifications between countries
- Allow for **a dialogue** between education and training and the labour market  
and
- Provide a reference point for **quality assurance**

# Impacts of learning outcomes?

Cedefop's **2009** study showed an overall shift to learning outcomes across Europe; although with clear differences between countries and education and training sectors

Cedefop's **2016** study on learning outcomes confirms that the shift to learning outcomes is gaining speed and that differences between countries and education sectors are diminishing

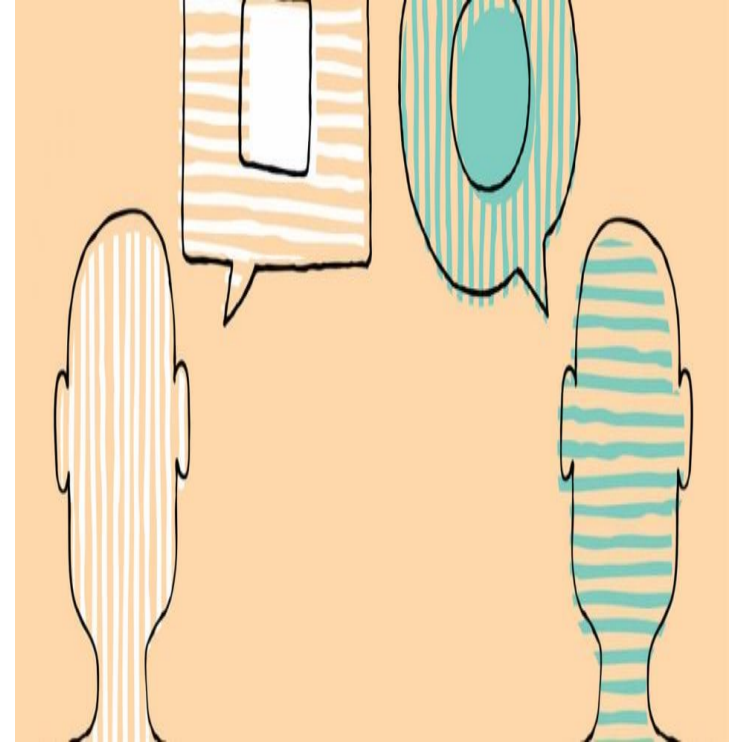
Cedefop's **2019** study on the Changing nature and role of Vocational education and training confirms the significance of the shift to learning outcomes



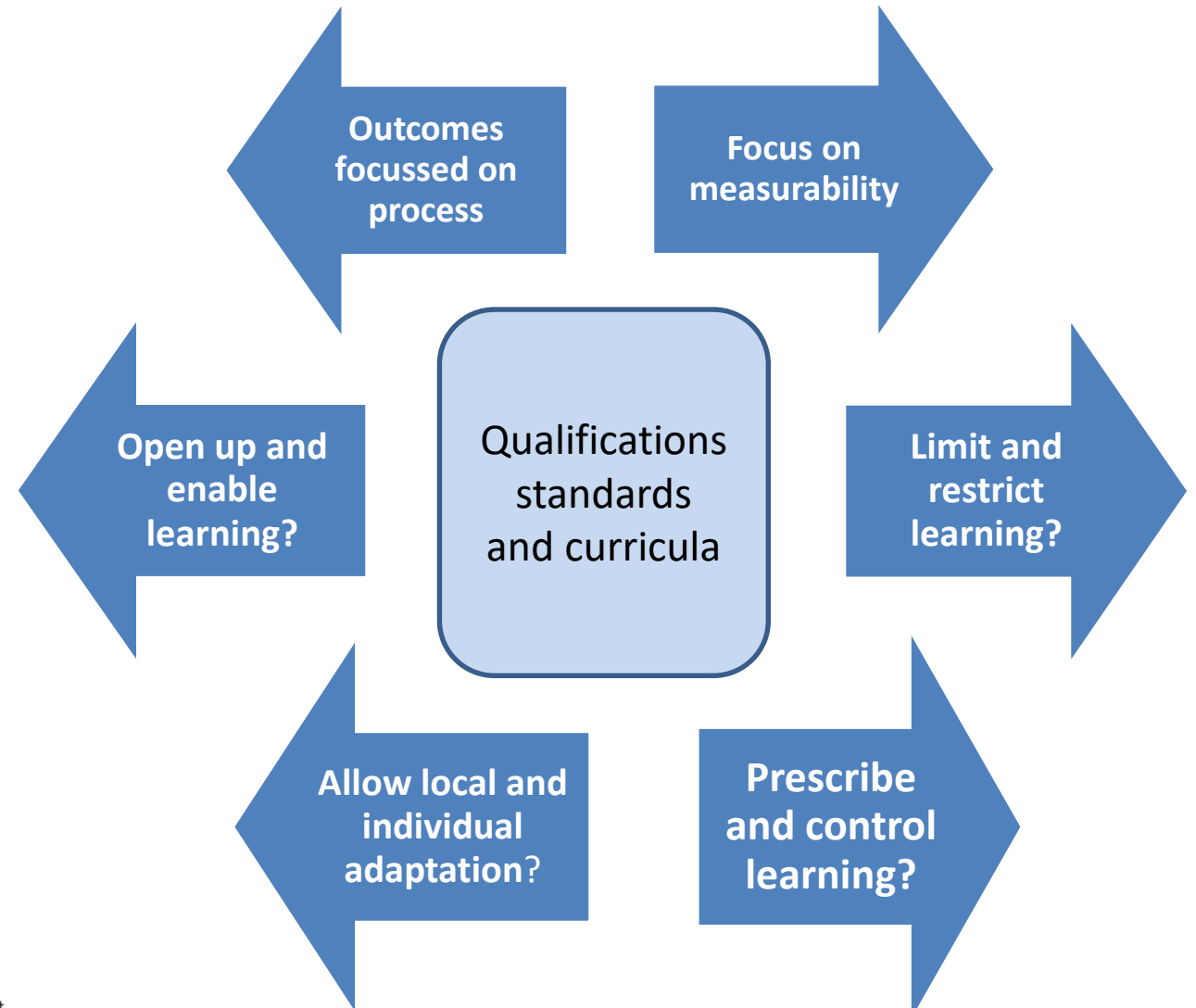
# Designing qualifications - Theory matters

The writing of learning outcomes – and the design of qualifications - operates in a tension between schools of thought

- A behaviouristic tradition will emphasise learning outcomes as result oriented, full-ended, clearly observable and (objectively) measurable,
- A constructivist approach will emphasise the need for learning outcomes to be process-oriented and open-ended, somewhat limiting measurability



# Implementing learning outcomes - potential contradictions



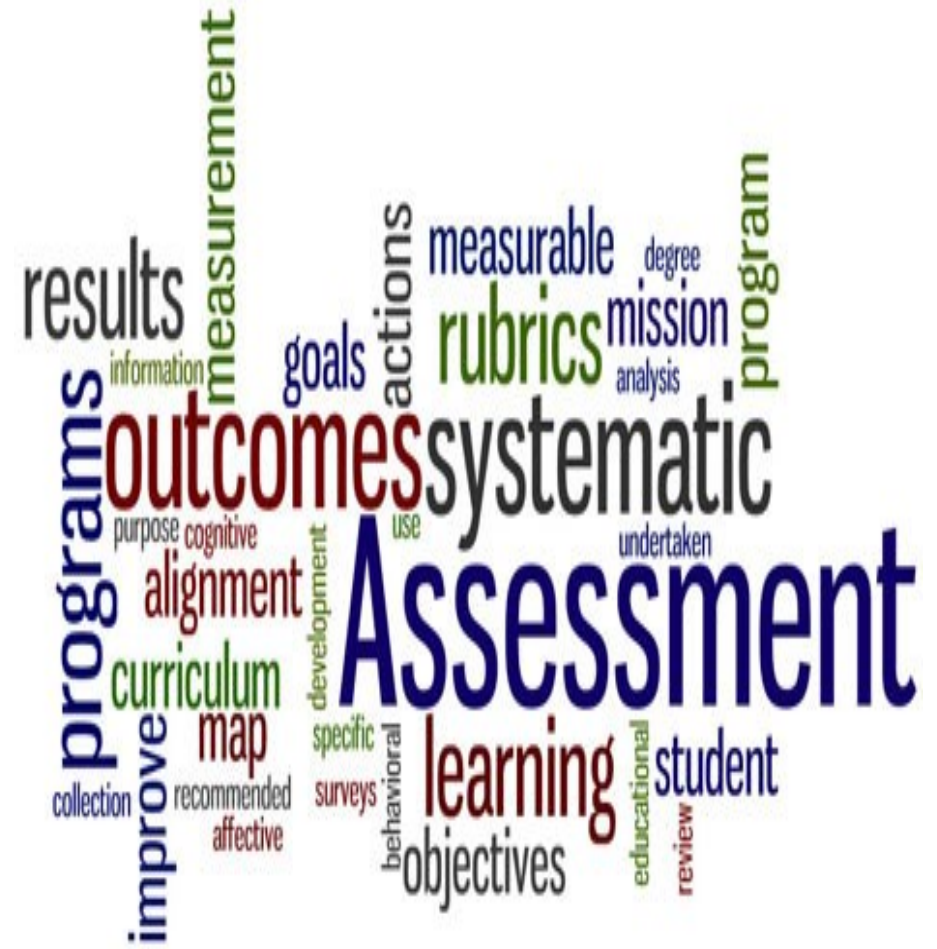
# Implementing learning outcomes - the danger of 'dumbing down'



- Learning outcomes need to be defined and written in a way which allows for adaptation and interpretation
- Too detailed and prescriptive statements can lead to a 'dumbing down' of the learning and assessment process.

# Implementing learning outcomes – be aware of the role of assessment

- A shift to learning outcomes must include assessment criteria
- DANGER: ‘Teaching to the test’ and ‘the test becoming the curricula’
- Need to balance summative and formative assessment
- Need to find a balance between reliability and validity



# Implementing learning outcomes - alignment and coherence

A challenge to align

- ✓ Qualifications frameworks
- ✓ Qualifications standards;
- ✓ Curricula;
- ✓ Assessment specifications
- ✓ Teaching and training





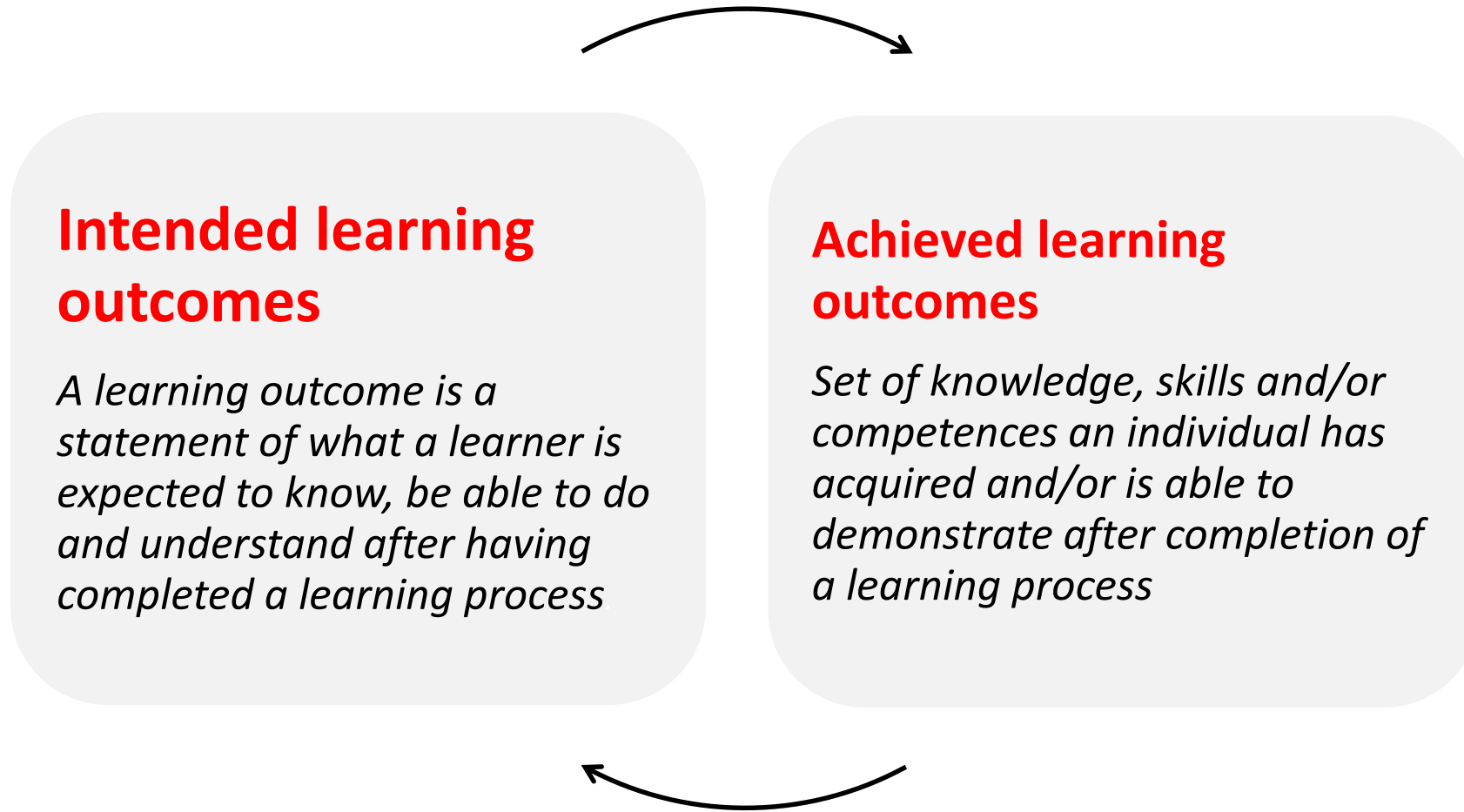
# Implementing learning outcomes - alignment and coherence

- To what extent are qualifications and their assessment defined in accordance with the levels expressed in qualifications frameworks?
- To what extent are qualifications frameworks used as a reference point for defining qualifications
- To what extent are frameworks used to ensure consistency of the education and training system (“when looking at learning outcomes, are all Bachelor degrees at EQF level 6”)

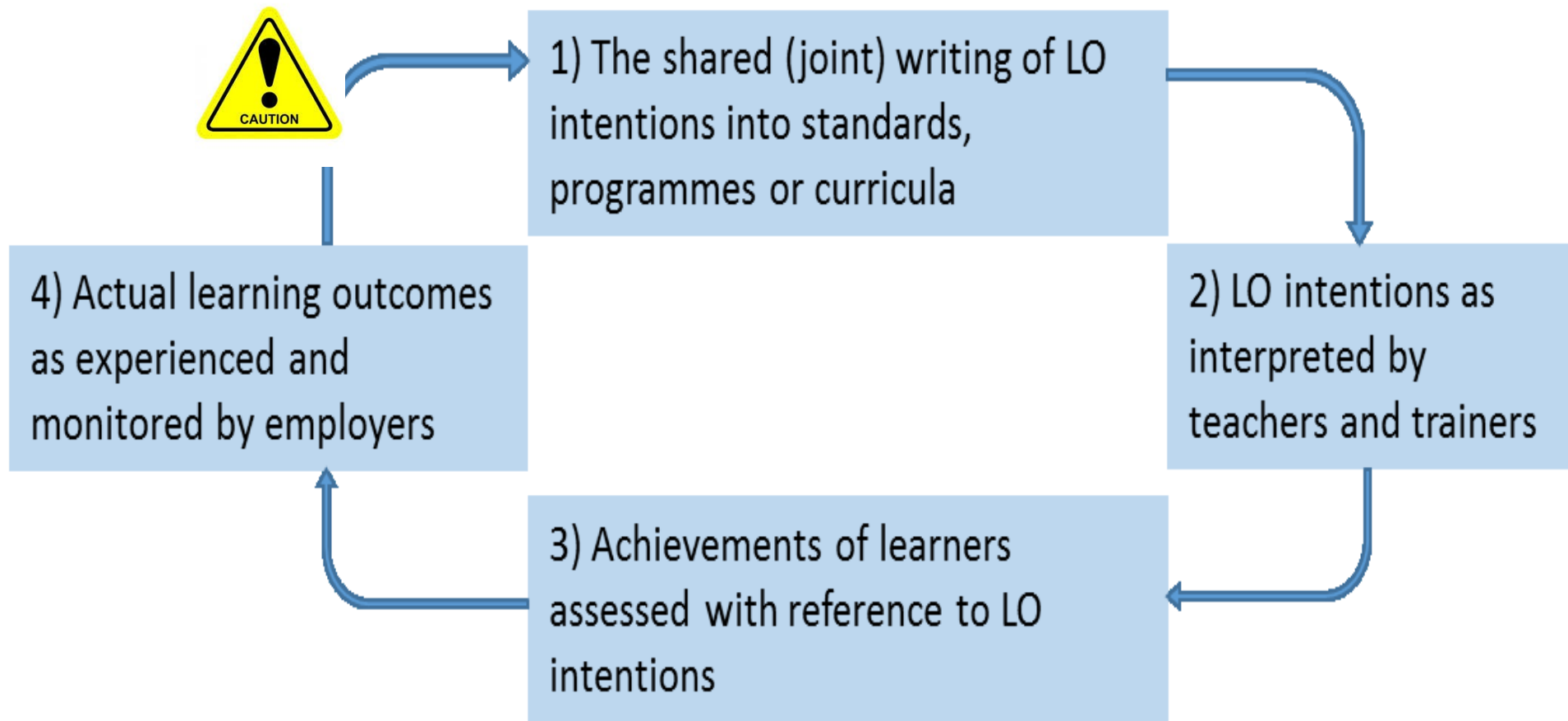




# Reviewing and renewing qualifications – the feed-back-loop



# Quality assurance and learning outcomes – the feed-back loop



# An incomplete feed-back loop

- The learning outcomes feed-back loop is only partly completed in the 10 countries compared by Cedefop 2016-17
- The feed-back from employers/labour market to the education and training system (step 4 in the loop) is not systematically developed
- The relevance and quality of qualifications is directly affected by the incomplete loop



# An incomplete feed-back loop

- In Vocational education and training, tri-partite working groups play a key role, the expertise in/support to these groups vary
- Surveys and forecasts are frequently too general to be of relevance
- In higher education, the involvement of stakeholders from labour market and society in reviewing qualifications is less systematic than in VET; which are the implications?



# Learning outcomes

## A shift in perspective - from provider and input to a focus on the content and the outcomes of education and training



**Learning Outcomes**  
(l3:n11) 'utkams)

Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of learning process, and are defined

