



# Global inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks 2019

## Volume II: National and regional cases



Jointly written by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), and published by the ETF in 2019.

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Section I

# **Inventory of National Qualifications Frameworks**

# AFGHANISTAN

## Introduction and context

Initiated in 2008 by the Government of Afghanistan, the Committee on Education and Skills Policy (CESP) was formed to lead the development of the Afghanistan National Qualifications Authority (ANQA), the Afghanistan National Qualifications Framework (ANQF) and the establishment of six regulatory boards, including the TVET Board, in the country. The secretariat of CESP has developed the legal and operational frameworks for the establishment of the ANQA and ANQF, which will put in place policies, structures, facilities and mechanisms to deliver relevant, equitable and cost-effective education and training in Afghanistan.

The economic challenges faced by Afghanistan include addressing industry and commerce requirements for a pool of skilled labour, and ensuring that ordinary men and women get gainful employment and decent work. Afghanistan's economy consists mostly of microenterprises in the informal sector and subsistence agriculture. Some 70% of adult women have never attended school and the literacy rate is very low at 18% (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008, p. 63).

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) suffers from lack of proper governance and the absence of an overarching body to coordinate and manage it. Other challenges include addressing the rigidity of the existing system; putting in place functioning mechanisms of quality assurance; and regulating, registering and accrediting training providers. Removing the hurdle of an outdated curriculum, which is currently not responsive to the needs of learners and employers, is another challenge. This situation is further complicated by the lack of trained and qualified teachers/instructors. Presently, there are no mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning. Generally, the quality of provision is poor.

Afghanistan still lacks a long-term vision for the continuing vocational education and training (CVET) of adults. As a result, there is low incentive for adults to continue to learn and to build on the

knowledge, skills and competences they acquired through non-formal and informal learning. The majority of Afghans, especially those historically excluded from national education, training and skills development, currently obtain their learning and competences through non-formal grassroots programmes in non-formal settings and informal apprenticeships.

In general, educational institutions have little capacity to train current participants or to ensure new entrants enter the labour force with the needed skills.

## Policy objectives

The ANQF is seen by the government as an important policy instrument for:

- coordinating and improving education and training quality;
- making qualifications more responsive to the needs of the country;
- assisting citizens who are historically excluded from the national education, training and skills development system;
- adopting an integrated approach to education, training and skills development by registering all qualifications and competency standards in the ANQF;
- recognizing the different forms of learning and their specific contributions to the entire spectrum of education and training;
- expanding access, progression and mobility within and across all learning sectors;
- developing a comprehensive policy on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL);
- ensuring that all qualifications in the ANQF are subject to a quality-checking process;
- helping individuals to plan their education and training career progression;
- offering programmes (courses) that lead to recognized qualifications;
- helping employers to recruit workers with qualifications relevant to the labour market.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The ANQF has eight levels, which allow for a full range of qualification types in the education, training and skills development system.

The level descriptors cover three areas (CESP, 2010, pp. 65–81):

- a. knowledge and understanding,
- b. practice and skills, i.e. applied knowledge and understanding,
- c. attitudes and competences, further divided into generic cognitive skills; communication, ICT and numeracy skills; and autonomy, accountability and working with others.

Level descriptors are prepared in terms of learning outcomes. In other words, the knowledge, skills and responsibilities expected of the graduate of a learning programme at a specific level should align with the knowledge, skills and responsibilities expressed in the level descriptors for that specific qualification framework level.

Each ANQF-registered qualification, whether incorporating unit standards or not, is designed as a whole to serve a specified purpose.

In the process of establishing the ANQF, an integrated framework based on the Irish model has been envisaged in order to embed formal, non-formal and informal training and education without privileging one sector over the other.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Committee on Education and Skills Policy (CESP) is responsible for operationalizing the ANQA/ANQF and TVET Board, which is the cornerstone of ANQA, in close coordination with relevant departments, ministries and agencies involved in TVET.

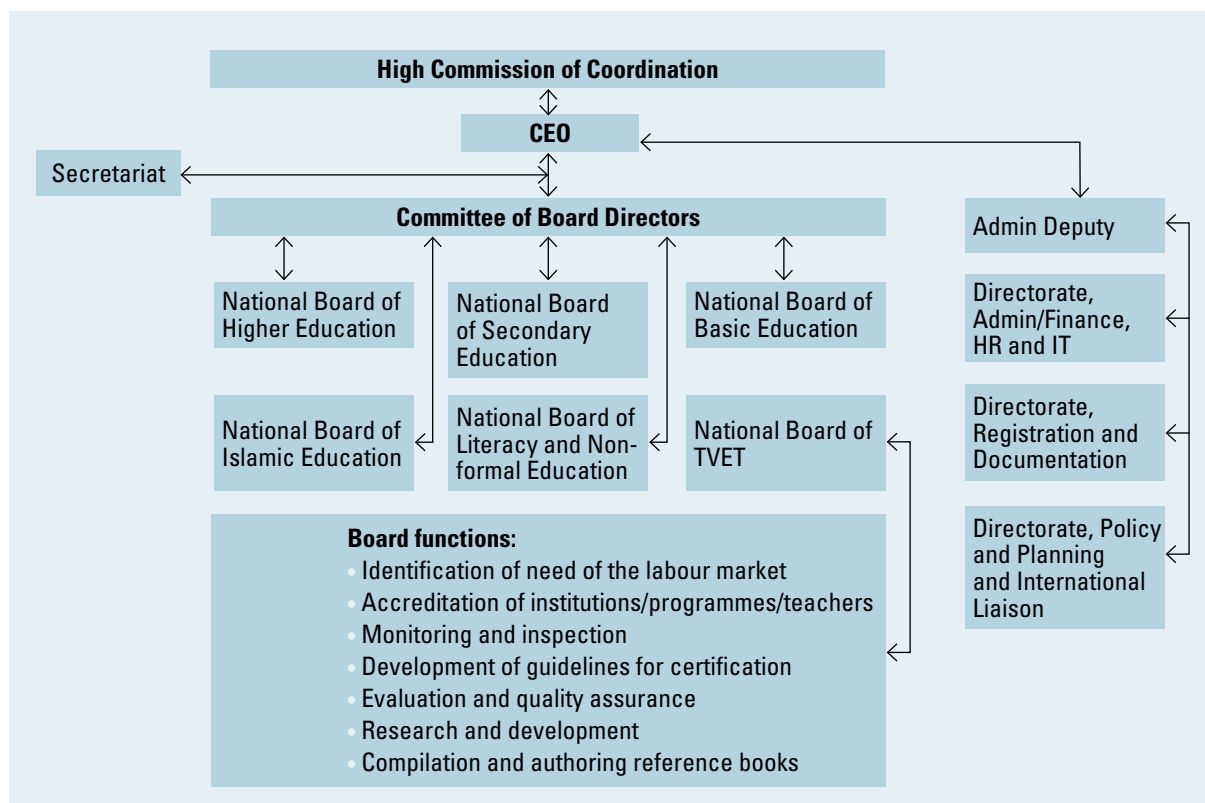
During the initial stages of CESP's development, a working group that included CESP, the World Bank, UNESCO and the National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMED) was established. Its task was to align ANQF with the

**Table 1. Afghanistan National Qualifications Framework**

ANQF LEVELS	LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION	SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION	TVET	ISLAMIC EDUCATION
L8		HE/Ph.D.		
L7		HE/Master		
L6		HE/Bachelor degree		
L5		Tertiary education/grade 14 diploma	Tertiary TVET/grade 14 diploma	Tertiary Islamic education/grade 14 diploma
L4		Advanced certificate, high school/grade 12	Advanced certificate, TVET high school	Advanced certificate, Islamic high school
L3	Intermediate education/ Grade 9 certificate		Intermediate vocational education and training certificate	Intermediate Islamic education/grade 9 certificate
L2	School preparation literacy LC Progression literacy LB Foundation literacy LA		Vocational training certificate	
L1	Basic level		Apprenticeship	

Source: CESP, 2010, p. 61.

**Figure 1. Proposed ANQA operational chart**



Source: CESP, Concept and Information of ANQA/ANQF, n.d.

Skills Development Framework to develop National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS) and curricula.

CESP is led by the first vice-president and comprises ministers from the departments of education, labour and social affairs, higher education, finance and economy. The ANQF is now operational in the country and applicable to all stakeholders. CESP established the TVET Board as the first to be developed under the ANQA. Regulations and standard operating procedures were developed and nationwide awareness and communication campaigns were held.

CESP is to be gradually replaced by new, statutory regulatory bodies that are approved by acts of parliament and are independent of all ministerial linkages. This includes the Afghan National Qualifications Authority (ANQA) and the awarding boards, such as the National Board for Primary/Basic Education, Secondary Education, the National Vocational Education and Training Board, the Islamic Education National Board, the Literacy and Non-formal Education National Board, and the Higher Education National Board. The awarding boards' functions are to identify needs of the labour market; accredit institutions, instructors and

programmes; undertake monitoring and inspection; and develop guidelines for certification, research and development. The awarding boards are legal authorities, with each board reporting to a chief executive officer.

CESP will put in place the administrative, legal and regulatory foundations necessary to establish the ANQA in a time-bound manner.

Monitoring, evaluation, quality control and assurance units within the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Labour will be under the direct supervision of the deputy minister in charge of the TVET sector.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

The ANQA and TVET Board (as the first board created under the ANQF) facilitate the recognition and appreciation of distinctions between different forms of learning and their specific contributions to the entire spectrum of education and training. The ANQF and TVET Board are expected to promote

lifelong learning – specifically the recognition of non-formal and informal learning – as a right. The aim is to motivate adults to continue learning and to remedy a situation where, under the existing qualifications system, only non-formal and informal learning that is equivalent to Grade 6 of formal school is recognized, and only on the condition that the learner is of a suitable age for the level which he/she is assessed and that the learner continues his/her education in a formal school (CESP, 2013).

The majority of Afghan people gain training and education in non-formal or NGO-run training centres. Workers in the informal economy generally acquire skills by serving as apprentices with masters, fathers or brothers. This learning will be officially recognized or certified through the qualifications framework. A recognition system for the informal sector linked to the ANQF is envisaged. In the meantime, the National Skills Development Project (NSDP) has established a methodology for the assessment of skills based on a competency-based training approach. The assessment includes identification of competences, and collection of evidence on performance and knowledge that can be compared to the required occupational standards. Only if competences are demonstrated will a certificate be issued; otherwise, the learner is recommended to do a further training course. Non-formal education and training is offered mainly by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and by NGOs. The updating of standards with a focus on occupational skills standards is undertaken by these ministries.

As of now, the learning pathways in the National Qualifications Framework reflect the situation as it exists on the ground in Afghanistan. For example, TVET and Islamic education currently go up to Grade 14 only. However, if the TVET and Islamic education tracks of learning are going to provide specialised degrees of higher education in future, then the levels of qualifications in those two areas could be revised to higher levels of qualification in accordance with the approval of respective boards under the ANQA (CESP, 2010, p. 63).

## **NQF implementation**

The Afghanistan National Qualifications Authority is the apex body responsible for the governance and management of the NQF. In addition, it

coordinates policy across government ministries and ensures adequate involvement of stakeholders; establishes and promotes the maintenance of standards, skills, and competences leading to the award of qualifications in the areas of TVET, general education, Islamic education, and basic and higher education; and promotes and facilitates access, progression and mobility through the framework. [Figure 1](#) provides the revised proposed ANQA operational chart.

## **Referencing to regional frameworks**

The eight member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – finalized the SAARC Framework for Action (SEFA) for Education, leading to its consideration and adoption at the Third SAARC Education Ministers Meeting to be held in Maldives in late 2016. Under regional collaboration and partnerships, it was agreed that the objective of this action plan is to develop an expert group to review the frameworks/procedures followed in different SAARC countries for the recognition, validation and accreditation of the outcomes of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

## **Important lessons and future plans**

An important lesson is the setting in motion of a consultative process between the government and all national stakeholders to discuss the ANQA/ANQF.

The eight levels and six education programmes of the proposed ANQF (basic education, secondary education, technical and vocational education, Islamic education, literacy and non-formal education, and higher education) are ready to move on to the next stage of their development.

A crucial element in the further development of the framework is how well it caters for all segments of society, particularly underprivileged members of society.

The next steps to be taken involve the drafting of acts for legal status and implementation, and their approval by the authorities, including government and parliament (CESP, 2016).

<b>Abbreviations</b>			
ANQA	Afghanistan National Qualifications Authority	ICT	Information communications technology
ANQF	Afghanistan National Qualifications Framework	MoLSAMD	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled
CBT	Competency-based training	NOSS	National Occupational Skills Standards
CEO	Chief executive officer	NSDP	National Skills Development Programme
CESP	Committee on Education and Skills Policy	SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training	SFFA	SAARC Framework for Action
		TVET	Technical and vocational education and training

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# ALBANIA

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

Law No 10 247 on the Albanian qualifications framework (AQF) was adopted by parliament in March 2010. A revision of this Law (23/2018) was adopted in May 2018. Secondary legislation under the revised AQF Law is being prepared. Bylaws are foreseen on the establishment of sector committees and inclusion of Lifelong learning qualifications in the AQF.

The NQF has eight levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications and certification. The AQF law has no provisions for partial qualifications but the new VET law (2017) states that Curricula are modularized or unitized by learning areas so that learners can take these units separately, thus offering flexible options for different types of learners.

Tools and approaches are available to support the reform of qualifications systems, the implementation of the NQF and redesign of vocational qualifications. The focus is now on implementation.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

In June 2014, Albania became a candidate country for entry to the European Union (EU). The decision by the European Council to grant candidate status to Albania can be considered an endorsement of the new Albanian government, which was formed by the Socialist Party-led Alliance for a European Albania after winning the 2013 elections.

The new government has presented an ambitious programme with employment and quality development of the labour force as main priorities. The National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) and Action Plan 2014–2020 integrates economic, educational, training and entrepreneurial policies. NESS complies with the European Employment Strategy 2020 and will bring Albania closer to EU integration.

The NESS Action Plan, with concrete measures, aims to address the number one concern in Albania, the unemployment trap. In 2017, labour force participation rates remain below European averages, with women participation rates significantly lower than men's (66.8% overall, 57.7% for women and 75.8 % for men). Youth participation rates are considerably lower than for the rest of the population, however, youth unemployment rate in 2017 declined to 25.9% during 2017. Unemployment among women was reported to 12.8% in 2017, experiencing an annual decline of 1.8 percentage points as well. However, the gender gap in labour participation remains still high, reported at 17.0% in 2017, the gender gap increased compared to 2015 and it still remain slightly higher than the strategy objective.

Annual GDP growth in real terms increased from 3.4% in 2016 to 3.9% in the first three quarters of 2017. All components of domestic demand have contributed positively to output expansion. Capital spending has been the main driver, benefitting from large foreign direct investment (FDI) in the energy sector. Private and public consumption have also recovered over the past two years. Net exports added to GDP growth between mid-2016 and mid-2017 based on very strong services export (including tourism) and a recovery of goods export. Despite stronger economic activity, per capita GDP in purchasing power standards stood at only 29% of the EU-28 average in 2016, practically unchanged since 2009. SMEs provide 80% of employment and two thirds of value added in the non-agricultural private sector. Various state- and donor-funded schemes support SMEs' competitiveness. However, further steps need to be taken to strengthen their innovation capacity and improve their access to finance, such as developing the venture capital market. In 2016, services again increased their share of gross value added (to 53.2%). Agriculture remained the second most important sector (at 22.9%). Industry (13.3%) has gradually increased its share of the economy over the past 10 years, mainly as a result of rising crude oil production. Within

industry, manufacturing is relatively small (6.4%) and mainly produces low value added and labour-intensive products such as textiles and footwear. Construction (10.5%) has seen its share of the economy decline sharply over the past 10 years.

Albania has a population of 2.8 million (2013). Population growth rates are slowing down due to a falling birth rate and continuing emigration. In 2010, the number of Albanian citizens abroad was estimated at 1.4 million individuals, but due to the economic crisis many migrants had lost their jobs abroad and turned home. The country is homogeneous in terms of its ethnic composition – minority groups make up less than 1.5% of the population. The 2011 census showed that, for the first time in history, more people (54%) lived in urban rather than in rural areas. Tirana and Durres are the cities with the highest population growth and density.

According to the National Employment and Skills Strategy and Action Plan 2014–2020, the AQF is one of the pillars for effective employment, education and training policies. Challenges to address include improved administration, efficient use of financial resources and better design, monitoring and evaluation of outcomes. Implementation of the AQF is considered instrumental to a strong governance of the labour market and qualification systems.

The vocational education and training (VET) system is still a centralised system with limited involvement of social partners and low responsiveness to local needs. There are two separate VET provider systems – the vocational schools and the vocational training centres. Their structures and offers could be streamlined and better aligned to labour market needs. Both should deliver qualifications to one common national qualifications framework (AQF). The attractiveness of vocational education is still low and perceived as a second best path to tertiary education, rather than a route to labour market entry.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

Development and implementation of the AQF is one of the policy objectives of the National Employment and Skills Strategy and Action Plan 2020 (NESS). NESS is an ambitious reform programme that aims to address the unemployment trap in Albania. It includes actions to enhance decent job opportunities through labour market reform, actions to offer quality VET for youngsters and adults through VET reform, actions to promote inclusion

and cohesion and actions to strengthen governance of labour market and qualification systems. The latter includes the AQF.

NESS links the AQF policy objective to the following action lines:

- review of existing qualifications and qualification development processes by the National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ) and under different donor projects as well as qualifications offered by public or private VET providers or universities:
- revision of the system for assessment and certification:
- establishment of sector committees:
- development of the national catalogue of vocational qualifications:
- revision of curricula based on AQF qualifications and standards, and referenced to AQF levels:
- selecting bodies and putting in place procedures for the validation of qualifications, skills assessments, certification and the validation/ recognition of prior learning.

VET reform is a main pillar of NESS. The VET system is still a centralized system with limited involvement of social partners and low responsiveness to local needs. Albania has two separate VET provider systems – the vocational schools and the vocational training centres. One of the policy objectives of VET reform under NESS is optimising the provider's network, streamlining structures by creating multifunctional centres with offers that are better aligned to labour market needs. All providers should deliver qualifications to one common national qualifications framework (AQF). The attractiveness of vocational education is still low (but improving) and perceived as a second best path to tertiary education, rather than a route to labour market entry.

### International cooperation

Albania is an EU candidate country. It receives financial assistance from the EU via IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance). IPA II provides budget support to help implement the National Employment and Skills Strategy and Action Plan 2020. The related Sector Reform Contract includes one performance indicator related to the development of AQF legislation.

As an EU candidate country, Albania is implementing actions in line with the RIGA 2015 conclusions on a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015–2020 (Riga is a follow-up of the Bruges process). MTD 3 is related to the NQF: enhance

access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### NQF scope and structure

The AQF is designed as an inclusive/comprehensive framework for classification of all quality-assured qualifications. The AQF Law distinguishes between three categories of qualifications: general/traditional qualifications, vocational/professional qualifications and qualifications for lifelong learning. The annex shows for each category and AQF level the types of qualifications as defined by appendix 1 of the revised AQF Law.

The term ‘qualifications for lifelong learning’ in the AQF Law is used to distinguish between the formal qualifications that are automatically included in the AQF, based on existing legislation (e.g. VET Law, Higher Education Law) and all other qualifications. Lifelong learning qualifications is an umbrella term that covers very diverse types of qualifications. These can be short courses for adults, special courses for continuing professional development, and qualifications provided by universities or other public or private institutes for continuing education. The AQF Law stipulates that lifelong learning qualifications can in principle be included in the AQF, whereas criteria and procedures need to be defined in secondary legislation.

### Alignment to other classification systems

The AQF is the national instrument for classifying qualifications in Albania.

Linked to the AQF is the national catalogue of vocational qualifications that is yet to be developed. Article 16 of the new VET Law states that the national catalogue of vocational qualifications is a dynamic online instrument that lists and makes accessible all vocational qualifications with the allocated level, which are included in the AQF’.

All vocational qualifications included in the AQF will have a link with a list of occupations, recently revised to align with ISCO-08 and to better reflect the structure of the occupations/jobs in the Albanian labour market. This classification of occupations organises 5 489 jobs in 480 unit groups, 133 minor groups, 43 sub-major groups and 10 major groups. It is used for statistical purposes and to facilitate dialogue between the labour market and the education and training sector. The

revision of the national list of occupations has been executed by the National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ) who has also embarked on developing descriptions of tasks and duties and other aspects of the jobs, which belong to each of the defined groups. These aspects include goods and services produced, skill level and specialisation, occupations included and excluded, and entry restrictions. A total of 666 occupational descriptions have been compiled through in-depth interviews and consultations with private sector companies and representative organisations.

### NQF levels and level descriptors

The AQF has eight levels. AQF level descriptors have been defined in terms of learning outcomes and use the domains knowledge, skills and competence (AQF Law 2010). These level descriptors are a copy of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level descriptors.

More detailed level descriptors have been defined – and are used – by NAVETQ for AQF levels 2 to 5 and in higher education for AQF levels 5 to 8. These are tailored to education subsectors and are used for development of new qualifications and programmes. However, an AQF for lifelong learning needs a coherent set of descriptors that describe learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and (broader) competences for each AQF level, regardless of types of qualification. Secondary legislation, a Decision of the Council of Ministers has been drafted to define more detailed level descriptors. This decision was expected to be adopted by the end of 2018.

### Use of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are the backbone of the AQF, one of whose main objectives is ‘encouraging development of qualifications based on learning outcomes that are comparable with international standards for knowledge, skills and broader competences’.

The new VET Law states that ‘national vocational qualifications are defined by learning outcomes and derived from qualification descriptions and occupational standards.’ (Article 15.4); ‘assessments and tests are done to determine whether learning outcomes have been achieved to given standards’ (Article 17.1); and ‘vocational curriculum determines (among others) learning outcomes’ (Article 32.2).

VET qualifications are totally based on learning outcomes. Higher education qualifications are not yet based on learning outcomes but according

to the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth all higher education learning programmes will be expressed in learning outcomes.

### **Definition of qualification**

The definition of qualification in the AQF law is as follows: 'Qualification' is a formal result of an evaluation and validation process, obtained by an accredited competent body/educational institution, which determines that the individual has achieved a certain level of knowledge, skills and competences in accordance with a provided standard.

The definition in the new VET Law (2017) is as follows: 'Qualification' covers different aspects; (a) formal qualification: the formal outcome (certificate, diploma or title) of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards and/or possesses the necessary competence to do a job in a specific area of work. A qualification confers official recognition of the value of learning outcomes in the labour market and in education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practice a trade (OECD); (b) job requirements: knowledge, aptitudes and skills required to perform specific tasks attached to a particular work position (ILO).

The new higher education law does not give a definition of qualification. The law uses the term qualification in connection with the AQF. The law defines AQF levels against study programmes based on cycle, European credit transfer system (ECTS) credits and length of the programme.

### **Qualification standards**

NAVETQ develops descriptions for all qualifications on the national list of qualifications, which are the standards of vocational qualifications. Currently, 100 vocational qualification descriptions/standards have been developed, all accessible online through the NAVETQ website<sup>1</sup>. Each includes information on:

- qualification title and code,
- duration (in hours to get this qualification),
- level of qualification,
- scope of qualification,
- admission criteria,
- further qualification and employment possibilities,
- approval date,
- information on previous versions,
- learning outcomes expressed in knowledge, vocational skills and broader competences.

A qualification description/standard is the basis for developing a national frame curriculum for that qualification.

Higher education institutes have considerable autonomy in developing and providing study programmes but the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth grants final approval for opening a new study programme, based on State quality standards, which also include institution-related criteria and can be considered as higher education qualification standards.

### **Development process of qualifications**

NAVETQ develops occupational descriptions and qualification descriptions for all qualifications in the national list of vocational qualifications.

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth develops State standards for both pre-university qualifications and higher education qualifications. Based on these standards, the Institute of Educational Development develops pre-university education programmes and higher education institutes develop higher education programmes.

### **Access, progression and credit**

Access to qualifications and progress and transfer within the AQF is defined by the combination of different arrangements in the education subsectors, regulated by respective laws on higher education, VET and pre-university education:

- a. Law No 80/2015 On higher education and scientific research in the Republic of Albania;
- b. Law No 8872 On vocational education and training in Republic of Albania (29.3.2002), amended by laws No 10 011 (30.10.2008); No 10 434 (23.6.2011); and No 63 (6.6.2014);
- c. Law No 69/2012 On pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania.

The AQF Law defines increasing access to qualifications and progress between qualifications as aims of the AQF. Progression between the education and training subsectors is not (yet) defined. The higher education law does not mention progression.

The AQF Law states that the AQF aids accumulation and transfer of credits. The European credit transfer system in higher education is operational but VET does not yet have a credit system. General/pre-university education programmes and subjects in upper secondary education are expressed in credits (one teaching hour in classroom equals one credit), which are being used for assessment as well. With the changes to be introduced in pre-university curricula and assessment, only grades,

<sup>1</sup> [www.akafp.gov.al/lista-kombetare-profesionale/](http://www.akafp.gov.al/lista-kombetare-profesionale/)

not credits, will be used for student assessment, but the programmes will continue to be expressed in credits.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

### Legal basis of NQF

Law No 10 247 on the Albanian qualifications framework (AQF)<sup>2</sup> was adopted by parliament in March 2010. A revision of this Law (23/2018) was adopted on 18 May 2018. Secondary legislation under the AQF Law is being prepared, among others about more detailed level descriptors, the establishment of sector committees and inclusion of lifelong learning qualifications in the AQF. Adopted AQF legislation, both primary and secondary, are indicators for the EU IPA II budget support programme.

### Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The management of the AQF is divided by educational subsectors between two ministries. The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth is responsible for the subsectors pre-university, general and higher education as well as for the qualifications for lifelong learning for these subsectors; the ministry responsible for VET, currently the Ministry of Finance and Economy, is responsible for the sub-sector vocational education and training and for the lifelong learning qualifications for this sub-sector. A coordinating NQF body is not foreseen in the Law.

The Law defines three implementing institutions:

- a. the National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ);
- b. higher education institutions cooperate with institutions responsible for employment and ability to carry out periodic labour market assessments and employment of graduates;
- c. the ministry responsible for education and its subordinated agencies, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the applicable legal framework.

Functions of the responsible ministries for the subsectors they cover are:

- strategic planning of the development and implementation of the AQF;

- overseeing institutions with specific responsibilities for the development and implementation of the AQF;
- approving documents related to the AQF;
- drafting and adopting policies related to the AQF and coordinating the activities of the institutions responsible for the implementation of the AQF;
- periodic reporting to the Council of Ministers on issues related to the AQF;
- approval of the criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the AQF for the sub-sectors of VET. Procedures for the approval of the national catalogue of vocational qualifications of the sub-sector of VET are determined by instruction of the minister responsible for it;
- establishing the principles for the development of qualifications of VET and setting priorities for their development;
- drafting and proposing the legal and sub-legal basis in the AQF;
- conducting a review of the criteria and procedures for the quality assurance of qualifications included in the AQF.

The competences of NAVETQ are to:

- carry out periodic evaluation reviews of qualifications and compare them with international qualifications;
- conduct periodic assessments of the labour market;
- consult with stakeholders on the development, implementation and review of procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the AQF;
- propose changes in criteria and procedures for securing the quality of qualifications included in the AQF;
- design, maintain and propose the national catalogue of vocational qualifications in cooperation with sector committees;
- follow the procedures for the qualification quality of qualifications, part of the AQF, in cooperation with sectoral committees.

Competences of the ministry responsible for education and its subordinated agencies:

- consult with stakeholders on the development, implementation and review of procedures for incorporating qualifications into the AQF;
- certify study/qualification programmes in accordance with the AQF;
- ensure the standards and quality of qualifications in compliance with the applicable legal framework;
- periodically carry out evaluation reviews of qualifications and compare them with international qualifications;

<sup>2</sup> [www.akafp.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/LIGJ-10247.pdf](http://www.akafp.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/LIGJ-10247.pdf)

- advise institutions responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications, for academic or employment purposes, for comparative and/or equivalent issues;
- design and maintain qualifications records for each sub-sector of education.

### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

The Government of Albania and social partners signed the initial agreement on vocational education and training in Albania in April 2010. The agreement covers the following issues:

- Social partners agree that the AQF serves as the basis for the VET system.
- The AQF will organise Albanian qualifications in an eight-level structure aligned to the EQF. This will make it easier for Albanian citizens with education and training qualifications to gain employment in other countries. It will also assist Albanian companies with qualified employees to win international contracts.
- All qualifications will be subject to a quality checking process before being registered in the AQF. This will ensure that qualifications are up-to-date, relevant to the needs of the labour market and in line with international standards.
- It will also ensure that social partners and other stakeholders are involved in the development of standards and qualifications.
- All assessment leading to the award of AQF qualifications will be subject to external quality assurance. This will ensure the consistent application of national standards and promote public confidence in the quality and reliability of qualifications.
- All education and training institutions offering AQF qualifications will be subject to some form of accreditation or academic assessment, to ensure that they meet certain minimum standards for physical and human resources, systems and procedures. This will eliminate unacceptable differences in quality across the country.
- The AQF will develop learning pathways and systems of credit accumulation and transfer which will make it easier for people to progress in education and training to the highest level of which they are capable. It will make the education and training system more flexible and encourage adult learning (Government of Albania and social partners, 2010).

The AQF taskforce has a two-year mandate from two ministries: the Ministry of Finance and Economy (responsible for VET) and the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (responsible for general and higher education). The mandate includes preparing revision of the AQF law and

secondary AQF legislation and referencing the AQF to the EQF. The taskforce is co-chaired by the director of the Department for Integration of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth and the director of NAVETQ. Members of the taskforce are representatives of Business Albania (director), trade unions, NAVETQ Qualification Department (head), higher education and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. Working groups of technical experts support the taskforce, which started its work in November 2015. The mandate of the taskforce was renewed in 2017 until the end of 2019.

The revised AQF Law stipulates the establishment of sectoral skill councils. These councils are considered a key element for revising/designing new qualifications. They will review which qualifications are required within a sector, participate in revising the national list of professions and in developing occupational standards, thus supporting NAVETQ in occupational and qualification standards development. The sector councils will be regulated as part of the AQF Law and its complementary secondary legislation, namely the decision of the Council of Ministers. Swiss-funded Risi Albania project will support the establishment of sector skill councils with a pilot in three sectors. The first pilot sectoral skill councils is expected to start in the beginning of 2019, after adoption of the decision.

### **Resources and funding**

The IPA II Sector Reform Contract for the employment and skills sector (2016–2019) includes one performance indicator related to AQF development. However, in essence, the Ministries of Finance and Economy, and of Education, Youth and Sports do not allocate any additional funds to this task, over and above the ordinary allocations to NAVETQ and the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

The AQF Law stipulates that all qualifications in the AQF shall be quality assured. The AQF includes qualifications from the different education subsystems, each with their own arrangements for quality assurance.

### **Vocational education**

Even though there is a well-structured internal quality assurance of the development of vocational qualifications, there is not yet a coherent system of external quality assurance of development, provision, assessment and certification of vocational qualifications.

Donor-funded pilot projects have introduced methodologies for quality assurance, including

self-evaluation by public vocational schools, but they have not gone beyond the pilot stage.

The new VET law and related sub-legal acts regulates quality assurance of VET provision in a new and more comprehensive way. To implement this law, a coherent quality assurance model to cover all VET provision must be built.

### **Higher education**

Before a higher education institute can issue any diploma, both the institute and the programme itself must be accredited by the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AQAHE). The AQAHE monitors and assesses the quality of higher education institutions and programmes.

Improvement of quality assurance in higher education is high on the agenda of education reform. The new higher education law foresees a higher independency in quality assurance. Previously the accreditation decisions were taken by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (based on AQAHE proposals), while this is now a responsibility of the Accreditation Board, an independent collective decision-making body.

Furthermore, the Albanian government contracted the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK (QAA) to ensure the quality of the quality assurance arrangements. The QAA will perform an external evaluation of the accreditation process of all higher education institutes. The institutional accreditation of all higher education institutes was finalized in 2017 and is a continuous process. The accreditation of higher education programmes in line with a national template, which specifies also knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired, is a continuous process also.

### **Legal basis of Quality Assurance Framework**

Quality assurance of the AQF is regulated in chapter IV of the revised AQF law. This chapter has articles about qualifications in the AQF, institutional accreditation and assessment and certification.

All qualifications in the AQF are to be quality assured, including internal and external quality assurance of development, delivery, assessment and certification of professional qualifications. Qualifications in the AQF should be consistent with best international practices, including compliance with the levels, tools, criteria and processes of the EQF, the European Credit System for VET (ECVET) and the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System. Vocational qualifications are based on relevant occupational standards and professional qualification standards, based on learning outcomes.

The new VET Law (2017) regulates quality assurance of VET providers with stipulations for licensing and accreditation of VET providers, accrediting institutions and procedures and inspection. The VET law refers to the AQF law; AQF legislation sets quality criteria for the development of qualifications, for their validation, assessment and certification.

The new Law on Higher Education regulates quality assurance of higher education (Chapter X). The law regulates internal quality assurance by the institutions for higher education, and external quality assurance by the AQAHE. The AQAHE is a public legal institution that monitors and evaluates the quality of the higher education institutions and the programmes offered. By law all quality assurance processes and procedures in higher education are based on a Quality Code that is developed by the AQAHE and compatible with European standards and quality guidelines in the European area of higher education. The Accreditation Board within the AQAHE, is a collegial decision-making body and independent in its activity. The Board takes the final decision on the accreditation of higher education institutions and the programmes they offer. An important element of the new Higher Education Law is the inclusion of student's representatives in the decision-making bodies and the institutionalisation of the students' parliaments.

In quality assurance, the AQF has three regulating bodies:

- a. the Ministry of Education, responsible for qualifications quality assurance in general/pre-university education;
- b. NAVETO, responsible for vocational qualifications quality assurance (AQF levels 2 to 5);
- c. AQAHE, responsible for quality assurance in higher education programmes and higher education institutes.

The Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AQAHE, formerly APAAL) is an affiliated member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA) since 2010.

The main issues and challenges for AQF and qualifications quality assurance are listed below.

- a. NAVETO is responsible for the development of qualifications but lacks resources.
- b. Currently, there is no structured social partner engagement in the governance of quality assurance related to VET qualifications and quality assuring qualifications standards in terms of relevance and attainment in general.

- c. VET provision (public and private) is not directly linked to delivering qualifications developed by NAVETQ.
- d. In VET, frame curricula are traditionally subject-based and prescribe the number of lessons per subject. Schools are free to adjust parts of the curriculum to local needs (mainly conditions in schools).
- e. Methodologies for developing qualifications are not shared by VET and higher education actors.
- f. Testing of VET students is carried out under arbitrary conditions in vocational schools and vocational training centres. Industry representatives are meant to be involved but this rarely happens. Appropriate assessment of practical skills is not universal practice and certificates verify attendance rather than skills acquired.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The revised AQF Law mentions recognition of prior learning within the scope of AQF implementation (Article 6): ‘certification of non-formal and informal learning outcomes [...] including recognition of prior learning’. The VET Law also states that: ‘Recognition of informal and non-formal prior learning is the process through which competences a person obtained earlier in the informal and formal system can be considered through an assessment leading to the award of a certificate of a formal qualification.’

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is a priority measure in the national strategy for employment and skills 2014–2020. Recognition of knowledge and skills acquired through work experience and/or voluntary activities is a valuable tool to encourage people to pursue lifelong learning and for optimising training costs. A bylaw (decree) under the VET Law (2017) on the system of recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning is ready for adoption by the Council of Ministers.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

The Albanian VET and qualifications agency NAVETQ compiles a national list of vocational qualifications that includes all vocational qualifications at AQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. Design of a public interactive, searchable web portal/database on qualifications, curricula and training offers by VET providers is one

of the deliverables in the action plan (B3.2) of the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2020. An instruction of the Minister of Finance and Economy on the approval of the national catalogue of vocational qualifications has been drafted and will be adopted soon. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth is creating a national register of higher education programmes, each of which will be coded according to the field of study.

### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of AQF implementation have not yet been defined.

### Impact for end-users

A revision of the 2010 AQF Law has been adopted in May 2018. Bylaws to regulate operational details are being prepared. An action plan for the implementation of the AQF has yet to be developed. An online qualifications database is to be established. Meanwhile the existing national list of vocational qualifications is published on the NAVETQ website.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Albania is an EU candidate country and participates in the EQF advisory group. Referencing the AQF to the EQF is part of the mandate of the AQF taskforce and is foreseen for 2019.

## Important lessons and future plans

The adoption of the revision of the AQF Law in May 2018 is a long expected step towards a more relevant qualification and education system. The AQF Law provides conditions for a more coherent system of quality-assured qualifications with establishment of sector councils to ensure the relevance of qualifications for the labour market.

The IPA II Sector Budget Support Programme provides the necessary funding for implementation of the AQF Law.

Albania has chosen to arrange the management of the AQF along existing sub-sectors, responsibilities are divided between two ministries. An NQF coordination body is not foreseen. Making the AQF a real framework for lifelong learning, which facilitates the permeability between VET and higher education, will be the main challenge.



VET curricula are prepared in full compliance with qualification description per AQF levels. Revision and linking of the curricula to the AQF is a process that requires improvement of financial resources and the mechanisms to optimise their use. NAVETO

is working on changing the Decision of the Council of Ministries that defines fees and payment of experts, especially of those coming from industry/ sectors, contributing to the revision of the vocational qualifications in compliance with AQF levels.

**Table 2. Types of qualification in the AQF**

<b>AQF</b>	<b>GENERAL/ TRADITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS</b> <b>1</b>	<b>VOCATIONAL/ PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS</b> <b>2</b>	<b>LIFELONG LEARNING QUALIFICATIONS</b> <b>3</b>	<b>ACCESS AND PROGRESSION</b>
<b>8</b>	Doctorate Graduate school study in Advanced Studies	Executive Master / Second Level Master / Postmaster Long-term specialisation	Study programmes for continuous education	
<b>7</b>	Master of Science Master of Arts / Master of Fine Arts / Programme Level II study  Integrated study programme of the second cycle  Four-year study programme (before the enactment of the Bologna system)	Professional Master / First Level Master	Study programmes for continuous education	Qualifications at level 7; category 1 (general/traditional qualifications) give access to qualifications at level 8; categories 1, 2 and 3.  Part of the credits of level 7/2 are recognized at level 7/1.
<b>6</b>	Bachelor Study Programme First Level			Qualifications at level 6; category 1 (general/traditional qualifications) give access to qualifications at level 7; categories 1, 2 and 3.
<b>5</b>		Post-secondary study programme of professional type  Professional non-university study programme after secondary education  Vocational certificate	Bridge courses (Certificate)  Specialisation courses based on professional requirements	Credit parts of level 5/2 are recognised at level 6/1.

(Continued)

**Table 2. Types of qualification in the AQF (Continued)**

AQF	GENERAL/ TRADITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS 1	VOCATIONAL/ PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS 2	LIFELONG LEARNING QUALIFICATIONS 3	ACCESS AND PROGRESSION
4	State Matura Diploma issued at the end of the general secondary school programme	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. State Vocational Matura Diploma issued upon completion of the vocational high school programme;</li> <li>2. Vocational Certificate issued at the conclusion of the four-year study programme for middle technicians / managers;</li> <li>3. Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the one-year programme for middle technicians/ managers;</li> <li>4. Vocational Certificate issued at the conclusion of the two-year programme for technicians / middle managers;</li> <li>5. Vocational Certificate issued at the end of an apprenticeship programme.</li> </ol>	<p>Bridge courses</p> <p>Vocational training courses</p> <p>Specialisation courses based on professional requirements</p>	State Matura diploma (level 4/1) and Vocational State Matura diploma (level 4/2) give access to level 5/2, 5/3 and 6/1.
3		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vocational certificate issued at the end of a one-year programme for skilled workers</li> <li>2. Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of a three-year programme for skilled workers</li> <li>3. Vocational certificate issued upon completion of an apprenticeship programme</li> </ol>		Qualifications at level 3/2 give access to qualifications at level 4.
2		Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the two-year programme for semi-skilled workers		Qualifications at level 2/2 give access to qualifications at level 3.
1	Final school report after completion of compulsory nine-year education		Minimum entry requirements to work or social life	Qualifications at level 1/1 give access to qualifications at level 2.

Source: Revised AQF Law, Annex 1

**Abbreviations**

AQF	Albanian qualifications framework		programme for candidate and potential candidate countries)
AQAHE	Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	NAVETO	National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications
EQF	European Qualifications Framework		
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (the EU's support	NESS	National Employment and Skills Strategy

**Prepared by:**

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

# ARMENIA

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The Armenian national qualifications framework (ANQF) was first adopted by Government Decree (No 332-N), in March 2011; an updated decree was adopted in July 2016 (No 714-N).

The ANQF has eight levels, covering general education, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education; currently, levels 6 to 8 are reserved for higher education.

The Ministry of Education and Science is the lead organisation for the national qualifications framework (NQF). The ministry has developed tools and approaches, but the framework has not yet had an impact on end-users. No qualifications have been placed in the ANQF to date, nor have quality criteria for levelling been agreed and adopted. Governments have usually prioritised higher education over VET.

Armenia participates in the Bologna process in higher education having joined in 2005, and is developing its qualifications framework in higher education.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Armenia has a population of circa 3 million and an estimated per-capita GDP of USD 9648. The country experienced strong economic growth prior to the 2008–09 crisis, with an annual average GDP growth of 13.4% between 2002 and 2007, driven by capital inflows and remittances. Growth was notable in infrastructure, with USD 3.2 billion of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the telecommunications, energy and transportation sectors between 2002 and 2012, representing 58% of Armenia's FDI over this period (UNCTAD, 2013).

However, following a deep recession in 2009, post-crisis growth has been variable due to falling investment activity, particularly in the construction sector, whose share in GDP reduced from 27% in 2008 to 9.3% in 2014.

After expanding by 7.2% in 2012, growth slowed. A 3.2% growth in 2013 was followed by 3.5% in 2014. The economy grew by 3.0% in 2015, driven by agriculture and industry as expansion in services moderated. The slowdown was driven mainly by a contraction in investment activity, in part due to delays in implementing infrastructure projects. Weak household consumption was another constraint on growth, partly because of a slowdown in remittances, which represent approximately 18% of Armenian gross domestic product (GDP). But the economy recovered significantly in 2017, recording a 7.5% growth.

In 2015, agriculture grew by 11.4%, while industry excluding construction grew by 6.3%; construction contracted by 4.2% following a 4.6% decline in 2014. The expansion in services, which generates about half of GDP, slowed sharply to 1.1% from 5.8% in 2014. Growth in services came mainly from higher growth in information technology, finance, insurance, and recreation.

The World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016 ranks Armenia 58<sup>th</sup> and 72<sup>th</sup> in the world for labour market efficiency and education and training, respectively.

Between 2010 and 2014, the total population fell from 3,249,500 to 3,017,100, with the population aged 15–24 years declining from 608,100 to 472,200 and that aged 25–64 years falling from 1,718,500 to 1,648,400. In 2017, the population stood at 2,986,000; the 15–24 age group accounted for 17.2% of the population.

The Armenian economy has strong links to the Russian market, which represents one quarter of Armenian exports – the second largest destination after the EU – and is the source of about 90% of remittances.

The value of remittances, which represent 18–20% of Armenian GDP, halved with the depreciation of the rouble, causing a contraction in household spending and growth. While pre-crisis growth was driven by the construction industry, agriculture,

services and mining sectors have been gaining prominence in recent years.

Agriculture remains the largest sector of the economy (17.7% of GDP), though processed manufacturing is increasing its share of GDP (10% in 2014, compared to 8.3% in 2008). Services accounted for 55% of GDP in 2016. Diversifying exports have become a government priority. Although it has begun declining in recent years, Armenia's unemployment rate remains high and there is some evidence of skills gaps in key economic sectors, and negative migration flows intensified after the 2008–09 crisis. Likewise, a large informal sector constrains economic competitiveness and development.

Between 2012 and 2016, the activity rate for the age group over 15 declined from 62.7% to 61%. Correspondingly, the employment rate for the same age group also fell from 51.9% to 50%. This was mirrored by increases in the total unemployment rates from 17.3% to 18%. For men, unemployment increased from 16.5% to 18.1%, while for women, the figures showed falling unemployment, 18.2% to 17.8%. For young people aged 15–24, total unemployment rose from 35.4% in 2012 to 36.6% in 2016. Young men actually saw a decline in unemployment levels, 31.5% to 29.8%, but for young women unemployment increased, 40.7% to 46%.

Figures for NEETs (those not in employment, education or training) aged 15–24, show a drop from 36.8% to 28.5%, 2012 to 2016. For males, these figures are 34.3% to 19.5%, for females 39.3% to 37.8%.

As a proportion of total upper secondary education, figures show a rise in share of VET students at upper secondary from 2012 to 2016, from 20.9% to 26.2%.

In educational attainment, figures from 2012 to 2016 show rising levels. Low-level attainment dropped from 11.9% to 8.7%; medium-level attainment rose from 66.9% to 67.9%, while high level attainment increased from 21.2% to 23.5%.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

The ANQF, in addition to supporting overall improvement of quality, aims at providing more transparency to education and training qualifications, assisting employers in assessing the workforce skill level, and allowing the government to take decisions for skills matching adjustments.

The objectives of the Armenian framework are similar to the frameworks of other countries:

- to link different levels of qualifications in a hierarchy from the lowest to the highest;
- to link Armenian qualifications to those of other countries, promoting international mobility;
- to enable learners to attain qualifications, transfer between different pathways and progress from one level to the next.

### International cooperation

In its NQF development, Armenia has in fact given priority to its higher education component, in particular to meeting Bologna requirements. It has been engaged in a twinning project, seeking to raise the capacity of actors, including in the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance, supporting universities in meeting Bologna requirements in curricula and qualifications, and reviewing higher education legislation.

Armenia seeks compatibility with the European Qualifications Framework, but it has no formal link as the country has no association agreement with the EU.

In higher education, recognition of qualifications is based on common principles set out in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which the country ratified in 2004. Armenia belongs to the ENIC-NARIC network (ENIC: European Network of Information Centres in the European Region, NARIC National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### NQF scope and structure

The ANQF is designed to include all types of qualifications. It was revised and updated in 2016 with new definitions for each level. The framework has eight levels and follows the European Qualifications Framework model. Each level is based on knowledge, skills and competences. It is a generic framework and it is intended to cover all education levels. According to the new framework, VET levels are defined as:

- third level of NQF: preliminary VET without secondary general education (without matura);
- fourth level of NQF: preliminary VET with secondary general education (with matura);
- fifth level of NQF: middle VET<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Includes *matura a priori*.

### **Alignment to other classification systems**

A revision of the law on education was adopted in 2014 to make provision for implementing supplementary and continuing education policies, and as an important contribution to promoting continuing VET (CVET) in the country. It includes new concepts of, and procedures for, the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Revision of the law, based on the Supplementary and Continuing Education Strategy 2013–17, was adopted after consultation with other public institutions, NGOs and social partner organisations. However, rules for implementation of the law, particularly to establish a system for validating non-formal and informal learning, are still pending.

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

Armenia has an eight-level framework. NQF descriptors are divided into three broad categories: knowledge, skills and competences.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

Qualifications development is based on learning outcomes, including educational standards of occupations and corresponding modular programmes, and the revised list of occupations and qualifications of primary and secondary VET (2016).

### **Access, progression and credit**

The current framework does not sufficiently allow for easy progression or transfer across education subsectors.

Piloting of a credit system for VET took place in some regional State colleges starting from the school year 2014/15.

## **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

### **Legal basis of NQF**

The Armenian national qualifications framework (ANQF) was adopted by Government Decree (No 32-N), in March 2011 and revised in July 2016. This update was mainly concerned with higher education qualifications. Relevant related legislation includes: Law of Armenia 'On Education', Law of Armenia 'On Primary and Secondary VET', Law of Armenia 'On Higher Education and Postgraduate Studies', Regulation on further education of VET colleges graduates with high academic performance at universities in relevant specialties, credit system pilot implementation for some VET specialties, Regulation on non-formal and informal learning outcomes recognition.

### **Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF**

The Ministry of Education has the overall lead in the NQF. But more precise allocation of tasks and functions needs to be determined.

### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

In September 2009, a memorandum of understanding on social partnership was concluded between the Ministry of Education, the Union of Employers and the Chamber of Commerce, foreseeing cooperation in developing and updating educational standards as well as in the provision and assessment of VET.

With EU budget support, 100 training standards were developed by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training Development in cooperation with sector skills councils, representing employers, to ensure that the standards met the requirements of the labour market. These standards are competence-based and are organised into learning modules, outcomes and performance criteria. They are also structured by general subjects, core skills, and general vocational skills for the sector and specialised vocational skills for particular professions, including theory and practice. The structure also defines the number of weeks and hours devoted to theory and practice.

### **Resources and funding**

Funding is limited; there is considerable reliance on EU and other donor support.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

Quality assurance in VET mechanisms related to qualifications exist, albeit in need of modernisation and improvement and include licensing, accreditation standards that include assessment standards, internal and external evaluation, addressing inter alia curricula, an inspectorate, monitored procedures for teacher assessment, and procedures for training standards and curricula, etc.

No procedures have yet been agreed to level or place qualifications in the framework.

## **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

Validation systems are still at the planning stage. In 2015, the government approved procedures for continuing vocational training and validation of non-formal and informal learning. According to

the decree, the Ministry of Education and Science was assigned the responsibility of developing the procedure for keeping national training records and inputting it in an available electronic system.

The National Training Fund (NTF) will introduce the system of validation (assessment and recognition) of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The NTF is developing an implementation plan that will draw resources mainly from international organisations and the private sector, on a fee-for-service basis. The NTF requires resources and, if it is to realise its potential, must work in partnership, for example with the network of VET colleges, employers' organisations and the State employment agency. Considerable scope also exists to link the system with migration services.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

No qualifications are yet included in the NQF levels; no database or register of qualifications has been created yet. However, the Ministry of Education and Science has recently set up a working group to review the national classification of qualifications.

### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

Notwithstanding its otherwise slow development, the authorities revised some of the NQF descriptors in 2016.

### Impact for end-users

No impact yet, as the framework is not in operation.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Armenia is a member of the Bologna process in higher education, and so complies with its norms. The NQF has not yet been self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area.

## Important lessons and future plans

Legislation has been adopted; the NQF and the level descriptors have been partially developed.

The priority is to operationalise the NQF. A stronger degree of agency coordination is required to confirm the NQF level descriptors, develop methodologies for allocating qualifications to NQF levels, promote pathways across education subsectors and progression, introduce a credit system, develop a quality assurance system and build stakeholder capacity, so they are equipped to contribute to a lifelong learning VET system.

### Abbreviations

ANQF	Armenian national qualifications framework
FDI	Foreign direct investment
NQF	National qualifications framework
NTF	National Training Fund
VET	Vocational education and training

### Prepared by:

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

# AUSTRALIA

## Introduction and context

The Australian qualifications framework (AQF) is the national policy for regulated qualifications in the Australian education and training system. It incorporates quality-assured qualifications from each education and training sector into a single comprehensive national qualifications framework. It provides education institutions, students, recognition authorities and employers with confidence in the quality and consistency of qualifications and the ability of graduates to apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired. The rigour of the AQF helps to build trust with international governments and supports the mobility of graduates with Australian qualifications around the globe.

The AQF was developed in the early 1990s at the request of State, territory and federal ministers for the Department of Education and Training through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. Building on existing qualifications systems, the Australian Government noted the need to deliver national consistency and standardisation of programmes, pathways and qualifications. A national, cross-sectoral qualifications framework was subsequently identified as a means of providing consistent recognition of outcomes achieved in all Australian post-compulsory education, in both vocational education and training (VET) and higher education.

A key issue was that VET qualifications no longer provided a widely acceptable framework to recognise achievement. The AQF was particularly influenced by changes in the way VET was delivered, funded and recognised, especially with regard to the introduction of nationally recognized training based on competences identified by industry and enterprises. A key feature was the integration of trade qualifications, centred on workplace competence, with other VET qualifications and higher education qualifications.

The development of flexible pathways was also a key objective. This would support mobility between

higher education and VET sectors and the labour market by providing the basis for recognition of prior learning, including credit transfer and work experience. The framework would encourage individuals to progress through education and training levels by improving access to qualifications, clearly defining pathways and contributing to lifelong learning.

The AQF was introduced across Australia on 1 January 1995, and was fully implemented by the end of 1999. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs established the AQF Advisory Board to oversee the AQF and to promote and monitor its national implementation.

A major review was undertaken from 2009–11 to ensure the AQF remained fit for purpose, particularly in the context of increasing internationalization of Australia's education and training system and the establishment of two national regulators, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). The result of this exercise was the AQF second edition in January 2013, which was fully implemented by 31 December 2014.

More recently, the Australian Government announced another AQF review in the 2017–18 budget. The review is currently ongoing; more information is provided in the last section of this chapter (*Important lessons and future plans*).

The AQF has made a significant contribution both to Australia's vibrant international education sector and to international confidence in the country's qualifications. With the rapid growth of qualifications frameworks around the world, there are more opportunities to engage with other national and regional qualifications frameworks.

## Policy objectives

The objectives of the AQF are to provide a contemporary and flexible framework that:



- a. accommodates the diversity of purposes of Australian education and training now and into the future;
- b. contributes to national economic performance by supporting contemporary, relevant and nationally consistent qualification outcomes that build confidence in qualifications;
- c. supports the development and maintenance of pathways which provide access to qualifications and assist people to move easily and readily between different education and training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market;
- d. supports individuals' lifelong learning goals by providing the basis for them to progress through education and training and gain recognition for their prior learning and experiences;
- e. underpins national regulatory and quality assurance arrangements for education and training;
- f. enables the alignment of the AQF with international qualifications frameworks;
- g. supports and enhances the national and international mobility of graduates and workers through:
  - increased recognition of the value and comparability of Australian qualifications;
  - consistency in qualification types and learning outcomes;
  - high-quality qualifications in line with national standards;
  - the portability of qualifications that are easily understood.
- f. ensuring students have access to information relating to education in Australia.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

AQF qualifications ensure national recognition and consistency as well as common understanding across Australia as to what defines each qualification. AQF levels and the criteria for them are discipline-free and cross-sectoral. They provide an indication of the relative complexity and/or depth of achievement and the autonomy required to demonstrate that achievement.

Each qualification type is defined by a descriptor expressed in terms of learning outcomes. There are 14 AQF qualification types from across all education and training sectors and each, with the exception of the senior secondary certificate of education (SSCE), is located at one of the 10 levels.

Learning outcomes describe what graduates are expected to know, understand and be able to do as a result of learning. They are expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and the application of knowledge and skills.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Stakeholder involvement is critical to ensuring the success of the AQF and its continued acceptance. The Australian Government, in its governance of the AQF, engages with individuals and organisations from all education sectors, as well as assessing authorities and institutions, employers and other government agencies.

TEQSA and ASQA are Australia's national regulators of higher education and VET. The former regulates all higher education providers and ensures that they and their courses meet the higher education standards framework 2015; the latter regulates VET institutions and registered training organisations in most Australian states.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The AQF supports the progression of students through qualifications by giving credit for learning outcomes they have already achieved. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is an assessment of an individual's relevant prior learning, including formal, informal and non-formal learning, to determine the

Australia's diverse and complex education system is supported by internationally accepted principles of quality assurance. For higher education (universities and other higher education institutions), VET and schools, this takes the form of a multi-layered, interrelated framework across bodies under both commonwealth and State government responsibility.

The objectives of Australia's quality assurance system include:

- a. national consistency in regulating education;
- b. regulation of education using a standards-based quality framework and principles relating to regulatory necessity, risk and proportionality;
- c. protecting and enhancing Australia's reputation for excellence and international competitiveness in the provision of education;
- d. encouraging and promoting an education system that is proportionate to the social and economic needs for an educated and skilled population;
- e. protecting students undertaking, or intending to undertake, education by requiring the provision of quality higher education;

credit outcomes of an application for credit. Credit outcomes may allow entry into a qualification or provide credit towards the qualification. Credit given may reduce the time required for a student to achieve the qualification.

The organisation issuing RPL determines the extent to which previous learning is equivalent to the learning outcomes of the components of the destination qualification, takes into account the likelihood of the student successfully achieving the qualification outcomes, and ensures that the integrity of the qualification is maintained.

The typical RPL process consists of:

- identifying the evidence required;
- providing advice to students about the process;
- providing students with sufficient information to enable them to prepare their evidence to meet the standard required for assessment;
- assessing, using appropriate evidence-gathering methods and tools;
- recording the outcome;
- reporting to key internal and external stakeholders.

The AQF qualifications pathways policy establishes the principle that pathways:

- are clear and transparent to students;
- are systemic and systematic;
- enable flexible qualification pathways;
- may be horizontal across AQF qualifications at the same level as well as vertical between qualifications at different levels;
- can support credit for entry into, as well as towards, AQF qualifications;
- eliminate unfair or unnecessary barriers for student access to AQF qualifications.

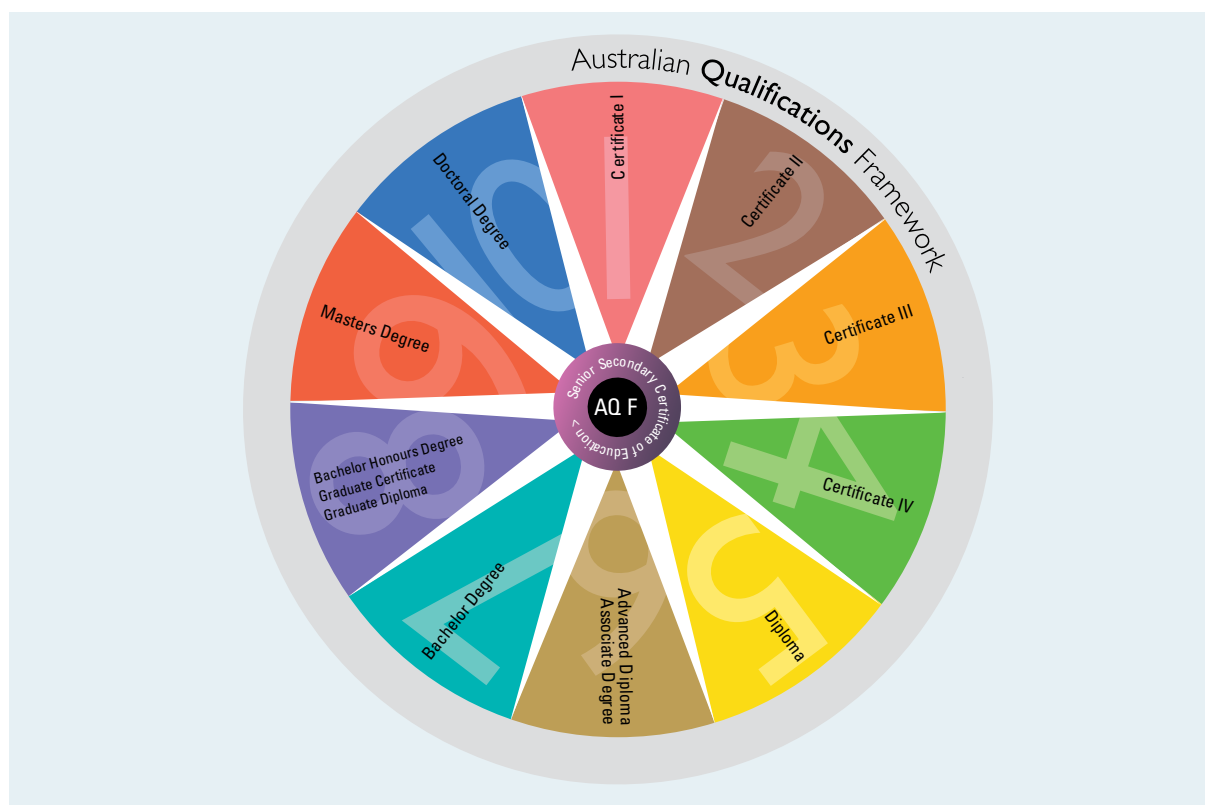
## NQF implementation

Building on previous qualifications standards, the AQF was developed in the early 1990s; implementation commenced in 1995. During 2009 and 2010, the AQF Council worked with AQF users and stakeholders to update the AQF. Revisions were approved in 2011.

### Predecessors of the AQF

The Australian Council on Awards in Advanced Education (ACAAE) nomenclature and guidelines for awards in advanced education were implemented in 1972 to 'promote consistency in the nomenclature of qualifications in the advanced education sector and to assist in the development of meaningful relationships between levels of qualifications' (AQF, 2013). The following categories of award

**Figure 2. Australian qualifications framework (AQF)**



Source: [www.aqf.edu.au](http://www.aqf.edu.au)

were defined: master degree, graduate diploma, bachelor degree, diploma and associate diploma. Named Australian qualifications were included on the national register of awards in advanced education. The number of named qualifications was expanded in 1983 and 1984, and was replaced by the Australian Council on Tertiary Awards (ACTA) guidelines for the national registration of awards, which was implemented in 1986. The ACAAE award nomenclature was retained by ACTA.

The Australian Education Council register of Australian tertiary education (RATE) was established in January 1990 as a single national register of authorities (including institutions) empowered by the jurisdictions to accredit tertiary education qualifications. The AQF was introduced in 1995 and fully implemented from 2000.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Australia aims to build strong foundations for bilateral and multilateral cooperation to improve mobility through international framework engagement as defined by a set of principles approved in 2011.

The Australian experience is that international framework engagement occurs along a spectrum based on mutual understanding of purpose and expected outcomes. Without an internationally agreed definition of terms, words such as referencing, mapping, alignment, evaluation and comparability are interpreted and applied differently by different stakeholders in different situations.

Using the AQF, the Australian Government has engaged in a range of activities that aims to improve transparency and understanding of qualifications frameworks, learning outcomes and quality assurance arrangements.

- a. In December 2015, Australia and New Zealand completed a joint project to compare the AQF and New Zealand qualifications framework based on in-depth technical analysis against mutually agreed principles. The report *Enhancing mobility: referencing of the Australian and New Zealand qualifications frameworks* complements existing mobility arrangements between Australia and New Zealand.
- b. Australia and the European Commission are progressing a technical comparison of the AQF and the European qualifications framework to identify similarities and differences.
- c. Australia is supporting the development and implementation of the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations (ASEAN) qualifications reference framework (AORF).

Australia is also collaborating with Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) economies on the APEC integrated referencing framework for skills recognition and mobility. This aims to build understanding of the skills and knowledge held by workers across APEC economies in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The framework will be translated into practical outputs such as national referencing reports, information on TVET systems, and graduate statements to promote understanding, transparency and trust in training systems and enable informed skills recognition.

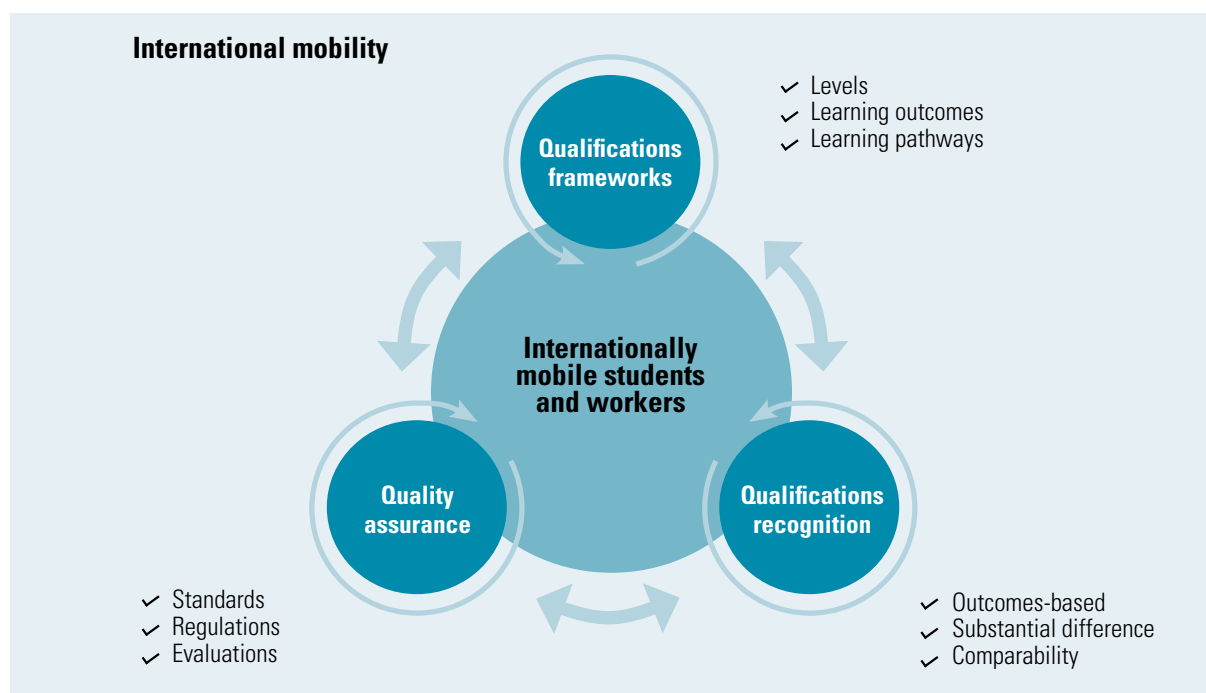
## Important lessons and future plans

Australia has learned a number of important lessons from the development of the AQF in the early 1990s and the strengthening process undertaken during 2010–11. Effective leadership and stakeholder support are paramount to building a national qualifications framework that is relevant to economic and social conditions and addresses identified challenges. Engagement and consultation with stakeholders, particularly within industry, remains critical throughout each phase of development, implementation, evaluation and reform.

Australia has also learned that a national qualifications framework which delivers on domestic priorities can become a valuable tool for international engagement and international mobility. However, qualifications frameworks that are not supported by robust and transparent quality assurance processes undermine cooperation and collaboration by affecting trust in learning outcomes. Creating better connections between the key policy areas of qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition of qualifications presents both challenges and opportunities.

Based on the above lessons learnt, the Australian Government is currently undertaking a review of the AQF, due to be completed in late 2019. The review is led by an expert panel representing different groups of stakeholders, and will also involve public consultations. In its discussion paper (Department of Education and Training, 2018), the expert panel identifies a number of contextual issues that have prompted the review of the AQF. These include the changing nature of work, due to technological, demographic and geopolitical factors, and the impact these changes are having on the knowledge and skills needed in the labour market; and the new

**Figure 3. Internationally mobile students and workers in Australia**



Source: [www.aqf.edu.au](http://www.aqf.edu.au)

types of skills, learning methods and qualifications that are emerging to respond to these changing requirements.

Possible areas of change envisaged in the revised AQF are the inclusion of new, particularly shorter, types of qualifications or credentials; the treatment of generic and foundation skills, or social and enterprise skills in the context of the AQF; and the revision of the AQF taxonomy and some of the level descriptors to improve clarity and coherence across the framework.

#### Abbreviations

ACAAE	Australian Council on Awards in Advanced Education
ACTA	Australian Council on Tertiary Awards
AQF	Australian qualifications framework
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
RPL	recognition of prior learning
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
VET	vocational education and training

#### Further sources of information

Australian Skills Quality Authority: [www.asqa.gov.au/](http://www.asqa.gov.au/)

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency: [www.teqsa.gov.au](http://www.teqsa.gov.au)

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## Introduction and context

Austria has one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in the EU, with early school leaving below the EU average (6.9% compared to 10.7% in 2016). The main factor explaining this success is high participation in vocational education and training (VET); this is one of the main educational pathways in the country, well adapted to the labour market, with VET courses of high quality and relevance. VET is also seen as crucial in the integration of refugees and migrants. Adult participation in lifelong learning is also well above the EU average. However, foreign-born students are much more likely to leave school early and educational performance continues to be strongly dependent on parents' socioeconomic status. According to the 2015 Programme for international student assessment (PISA) results, the proportion of Austrian students with underachievement in science and mathematics is similar to the EU average, and slightly higher than the EU average in reading. Around half of Austria's teaching personnel, especially at secondary level, are expected to have to be replaced over the next decade; this is both a challenge, having to attract sufficient new teachers into the system, and an opportunity for innovation in pedagogy. Current education and training reforms are focused on increasing school autonomy, improving digital skills of students at all levels, and strengthening the social dimension of higher education (European Commission, 2017).

As a response to the European qualifications framework (EQF) initiative, Austria carried out a national consultation process on the EQF in 2005–06 and designed a national qualifications framework (NQF) with an eight-level structure. It was 'designed as a comprehensive framework, encompassing all types and levels of qualifications from the formal and non-formal sector, and appreciating the results of informal learning' (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research, 2012). As the education system is already highly regulated in terms of what kind of qualifications give entrance to certain education

pathways and access to occupations/professions in the labour market, the NQF has been designed to promote transparency and guidance, with no regulatory functions. While qualifications in general play an important role in Austria, the term as defined in an EQF context is not used consistently and is sometimes used to refer to *curricula* or training programmes.

After several years of preparation, with intensive involvement of stakeholders and experts, the Austrian Parliament approved the Federal Act on the national qualifications framework<sup>4</sup> in March 2016, establishing the governance structure for the framework and the procedures involved in allocating qualifications to levels. Referenced to the EQF in June 2012, the Austrian NQF is now operational. Its influence has been observed since the development phase of the framework, with NQF principles being applied in the design of new qualifications and in the modernisation of existing ones to ensure mapping to NQF levels (Cedefop and Refernet Austria, 2018).

## Policy objectives

The main roles of the Austrian NQF are communication and transparency of qualifications, nationally and internationally. The framework helps map national qualifications from all education and training subsystems and learning settings, present them in relation to one another, and make explicit the implicit levels of the qualification system. It aims to strengthen coordination between the different subsystems by highlighting existing pathways and developing new ones to open up new progression possibilities<sup>5</sup>. It is also expected to aid validation of non-formal and informal learning and to be an

<sup>4</sup> The NQF Act was published in the *Federal Law Gazette* 14/2016, Part I, 21 March 2016. [www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA\\_2016\\_I\\_14/BGBLA\\_2016\\_I\\_14.pdf](http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA_2016_I_14/BGBLA_2016_I_14.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Further information on objectives can be found on the Austrian Parliament's online service on legal innovations (in German): [www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/module?genetics.am=Content&p.contentid=10007.180581](http://www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/module?genetics.am=Content&p.contentid=10007.180581)

important tool in promoting lifelong learning. While having no regulatory functions and no legal effect on vocational and other authorisations, the NQF is used as a basis for reform and further development in VET qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Specific objectives are the following<sup>6</sup>:

- a. strengthen transparency, understanding and comparability of Austrian qualifications internationally;
- b. promote cross-border mobility;
- c. make formal and non-formal qualifications easier to understand and more visible for Austrian citizens;
- d. improve permeability between formal and non-formal sectors of the qualification system: develop new pathways, open new progression possibilities, and support lifelong learning;
- e. progress the learning outcomes orientation;
- f. promote the European dimension in higher education.

## Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The Austrian NQF has eight levels. The decision on the number of levels followed broad consultation and a study providing information on implicit hierarchy in the national qualification system, using statistical educational research and statistical frameworks (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research, 2011). One important topic of discussion was the inclusion of non-traditional higher education qualifications at NQF levels 6 to 8. A 'Y-structure' was agreed, to capture differences between academic higher education and VET qualifications at these levels. EQF level descriptors are used for all qualifications except those awarded by higher education institutions, with additional explanations serving as a guide to make the EQF descriptors understood in the Austrian context<sup>7</sup>. Parallel Dublin descriptors were introduced at levels 6 to 8 for qualifications related to Bologna cycles (bachelor degree, master degree and doctorate) and awarded by higher education institutions (universities, universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) and university colleges for teacher education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*)). Reference qualifications have been used in the

referencing process to illustrate levels of learning outcomes<sup>8</sup>.

As learning outcomes are central to positioning qualifications in the NQF, its development is seen as having had a positive effect on strengthening the learning outcomes orientation across education and training. This is not just in terms of use of learning outcomes in developing qualifications but in increasing knowledge and understanding about the learning outcomes approach (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). Many qualifications are already learning outcomes-oriented, but the approach has not been applied consistently across all sectors and institutions, so work continues. Initiatives designed to strengthen this orientation include the introduction of educational standards in the school-based sector and the introduction of competence-based and learning-outcome-oriented curricula in VET (Cedefop, 2016a; Cedefop, 2016b). In general education, core subject areas (German, mathematics and English) are described in terms of learning outcomes.

In school-based VET, learning outcomes are defined in VET educational standards<sup>9</sup>; this has been implemented in a step-by-step approach in recent years. Educational standards for VET schools and colleges define 'content' (subject and knowledge areas and topics with specified goals), 'action' (cognitive achievements required in particular subjects), and personal and social competences related to a specific field. Competence-oriented and standardised upper secondary school leaving examinations (*AHS-Reifeprüfung* and *BHS-Reifeprüfung* and *Diplomprüfung*) were used for the first time in the school year 2015/16, aiming to increase transparency and comparability of upper secondary qualifications, and fairness and access to higher education<sup>10</sup>. Higher VET curricula are being revised and qualifications awarded by VET colleges are being updated based on NQF principles. A recent initiative was piloted to increase transparency and quality assurance in the master craftsperson qualification (*Meister*) and examinations, with a more detailed definition of learning outcomes and implementation of a competence-oriented structure

<sup>6</sup> Explanations to the NQF act (in German): [www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/II/II\\_00999/fname\\_498915.pdf](http://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/II/II_00999/fname_498915.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Available on the NQF webpage: [www.qualifikationsregister.at/public/Deskriptoren](http://www.qualifikationsregister.at/public/Deskriptoren)

<sup>8</sup> Reference qualifications are those from the Austrian educational qualification landscape and serve to illustrate and understand more easily the requirements connected with each level. They are to form 'qualification cornerstones', an aid for orientation in the allocation of additional qualifications.

<sup>9</sup> A description of VET educational standards can be found in the project handbook *Bildungsstandards in der Berufsbildung*. [www.berufsbildendeschulen.at/fileadmin/content/bbs/Handbuch\\_BIST\\_15.10.2015.pdf](http://www.berufsbildendeschulen.at/fileadmin/content/bbs/Handbuch_BIST_15.10.2015.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [www.bmb.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/ba/reifepruefungneu.html](http://www.bmb.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/ba/reifepruefungneu.html)

of the preparatory courses. The master craftsperson qualification<sup>11</sup> has now been allocated to NQF level 6 (September 2018), increasing the comparability of training pathways and reflecting the high esteem of this qualification in Austria<sup>12</sup>.

In apprenticeship (dual system), a training regulation is issued for each profile by the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs. The regulations are largely written in learning outcomes and are currently under reform to strengthen the outcome orientation of apprenticeship training. Each consists of an occupational competence profile (*Berufsprofil*), with related activities and work descriptions, and job profile (*Berufsbild*), with knowledge and skills to be acquired by apprentices<sup>13</sup>.

Implementation of the learning outcomes approach in higher education is clearly linked to the Bologna process and Dublin descriptors. Higher education institutions have already described their programmes and qualification profiles in learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) established under university autonomy (Cedefop, 2016a) but implementation differs across institutions.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Austrian approach has been characterised from the beginning by active stakeholder involvement and occasional conflicting views on the NQF's role<sup>14</sup>. The General Directorate for VET at the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (as it was then called) initiated the NQF development process, in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy, which was responsible for higher education. Cooperation has been strong, especially with the social partners, who were part of the development of the legal framework of the NQF

as well as part of the qualification mapping process (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). As of 2018, following administrative restructuring, the main authority in charge of NQF development and implementation is the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, now responsible for all education and training subsystems.

The 2016 NQF Act<sup>15</sup> establishes the governance structure for the framework, and defines the responsibilities of institutions and bodies, as well as processes involved in implementation. The Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (*Österreichischer Austauschdienst* (OeAD)) has been appointed as NQF/EQF national coordination point (NCP) and the main implementation coordinating body. According to Article 5 of the Act, its tasks include:

- a. formal and content-related verification of the request for qualification mapping;
- b. keeping a public NQF register with mapped qualifications, including description of a qualification and its learning outcomes, NQF level and the name of the provider;
- c. setting up a list of those with expertise for any content-related verification of request for mapping a qualification.

An NQF steering committee of 32 members representing all the main stakeholders (all federal ministries, social partners, stakeholders from the different fields of education, public employment service, federal youth representation and the *Länder*) has been set up as the central governance body and meets regularly. Its key task is to provide advice to public authorities responsible for education, training and qualifications at all levels. Further tasks include approval of operational procedures (such as inclusion of qualifications in the NQF register and appeals) and content-related issues (such as adoption of the NQF manual). The broad representation reflects stakeholder interests and acknowledgement of the importance of social aspects in the allocation of qualifications to levels.

An NQF advisory board, consisting of seven experts from different qualification contexts (initial, further and continuing education and training, and professional practice), was established to advise and inform the coordinating body on allocation decisions.

In addition to specifying the responsible bodies, the NQF Act also regulates the process of mapping

<sup>11</sup> Master craftsperson examinations (*Meisterprüfungen*) have been mapped to NQF level 6. The five qualifications published in the NQF register are examples showing the full scope of this qualification type.

<sup>12</sup> [www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20181108\\_OTS0115/oesterreichs-gewerbe-und-handwerk-ist-gut-vorbereitet-fuer-die-zukunft](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20181108_OTS0115/oesterreichs-gewerbe-und-handwerk-ist-gut-vorbereitet-fuer-die-zukunft)

<sup>13</sup> [www.bmb.gv.at/schulen/bo/umsetzung/dielehre\\_18624.pdf?4k99xc](http://www.bmb.gv.at/schulen/bo/umsetzung/dielehre_18624.pdf?4k99xc)

<sup>14</sup> One important topic of discussion was opening NQF levels 6 to 8 to non-traditional higher education qualifications, with VET stakeholders on one side and higher education on the other. When the NQF was designed, consensus was achieved in the form of a 'Y-structure' opening the highest levels to qualifications awarded outside higher education institutions. This was very important for parity of esteem of different learning contexts.

<sup>15</sup> The NQF Act [in German]: [www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA\\_2016\\_I\\_14/BGBLA\\_2016\\_I\\_14.pdf](http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA_2016_I_14/BGBLA_2016_I_14.pdf)

qualifications<sup>16</sup> based on learning outcomes to the eight levels of the NQF and publication of the mapping process results in the register.

Qualifications or levels are not specifically included in the Act, and only qualifications based on the Bologna system are mapped by law in Austria. The Act makes a distinction between the allocation of formal versus non-formal qualifications: mapping of non-formal or informal learning requires further process specification as it is not fully defined in the NQF Act (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>17</sup>

Development of a validation strategy started in 2013, with the establishment of a working group<sup>18</sup> comprising relevant federal ministries (currently: Education, Science and Research; Digital and Economic Affairs; Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection; Defence; Federal Chancellery: Families and Youth), social partner organisations (chamber of labour, chamber of commerce), youth organisations (Austrian Youth Association), adult education (Austrian Conference of Adult Education), Universities Austria and Austrian Association of Universities of Applied Sciences. Their work has been strongly linked to development of the Lifelong learning strategy<sup>19</sup>, and of the NQF. The 2012 recommendation (Council of the European Union, 2012) and (partly) the implementation of the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) also play a role in the process.

Analysis of existing validation arrangements in three areas (the low-qualified, VET and higher education) fed into a consultation document for the national validation strategy (including key objectives and measures), published in 2015. Following a national consultation process, the national strategy for validating non-formal and informal learning was

finalised and adopted in November 2017<sup>20</sup>. Its strategic objectives include:

- a. increasing the value of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning contexts;
- b. making validation arrangements more accessible by providing low-threshold, central information and advisory services;
- c. improving opportunities for education and work (e.g. by making it easier for adults to obtain qualifications as 'second-chance education');
- d. improving permeability at the central interfaces of the Austrian education and training system (improving flexibility and efficiency);
- e. strengthening validation as an integral part of the Austrian education and training system;
- f. promoting the learning outcomes orientation and quality assurance.

The national validation strategy promotes summative approaches to validation, based on the requirements and standards of the qualifications system and aimed at the acquisition of a qualification or part of one; there are also formative validation approaches aiming to identify and document competences to empower individuals. Three thematic working groups have been established, related to quality, communication and system synergies. Their first results include a catalogue of quality criteria for validation initiatives in VET and adult education in a pilot phase throughout 2018. In higher education, several steps have been taken to support and improve validation quality.

The strategy is intended to provide a platform and framework for development and coordination of the many existing initiatives that were devised 'bottom-up', as well as future ones, in all sectors and areas; to raise awareness about the value of competences gained in non-formal and informal settings and to provide potential users with an overview of relevant available measures. To date, different acts and regulations include mechanisms and arrangements that enable formal education and training institutions to recognise learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings, such as in the context of 'external exams'. Almost all qualifications (from general education and VET, but not university degrees) can be obtained without participating in programmes or courses. This requires passing the relevant exam (as 'externals') as required in the regular system, such as acquisition of the compulsory school leaving

<sup>16</sup> A schematic view of the mapping process can be found in Cedefop and Refernet Austria (2016). [www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/austria-nqf-law-enters-force](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/austria-nqf-law-enters-force)

<sup>17</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update of the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al. (forthcoming)).

<sup>18</sup> Linked to action line 10, measure 10.3 of the Lifelong learning strategy 2020.

<sup>19</sup> The text of the Lifelong learning strategy 2020 is available in German at: <https://uil.unesco.org/i/doc/lifelong-learning/policies/austria-strategie-zum-lebensbegleitenden-lernen-in-oesterreich-2020.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> The text of the Strategy for validating non-formal and informal learning is available in German at: [www.qualifikationsregister.at/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Strategie\\_zur\\_Validierung\\_nicht-formalen\\_und\\_informellen\\_Lernens.pdf](http://www.qualifikationsregister.at/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Strategie_zur_Validierung_nicht-formalen_und_informellen_Lernens.pdf)



certificate (*Pflichtschulabschluss*) by young people and adults, and exceptional admission to the final apprenticeship exam. Validation is also used to obtain exemptions and shorten programmes, such as skipping grades for pupils in general education or VET who demonstrate appropriate achievements, and shortening degree programmes at universities of applied science based on recognition of professional experience. There are also possibilities to gain access to higher education programmes in an alternative way. *Berufsreifeprüfung* (BRP) and the higher education entrance examination (*Studienberechtigungsprüfung* (SBP)) can both be taken by graduates of specific apprenticeships, VET schools and early leavers from VET colleges that traditionally are not granted university access through their initial education. Preparatory courses for BRP are offered outside formal education. It is also possible to acquire certificates/ qualifications without any equivalence in the formal education system: the professional title *ingenieur*; certificates issued by the Academy of Continuing Education in adult education; access conditions to regulated professions; or several other initiatives in the private and voluntary sectors. However, these non-traditional pathways are in limited use.

One weakness of the current system is the absence of a legal framework to regulate validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, which has not been changed with the publication of the current strategy, and which could be an obstacle to implementation.

With the approved NQF Act in March 2016, the allocation of formal qualifications started in 2017; the inclusion of non-formal qualifications into the NQF is part of a second implementation phase, with mapping procedures currently being developed<sup>21</sup>. NQF service centres, expected to be selected and authorised by the Ministry of Education in 2018, are to be established to support and advise providers of non-formal qualifications in submitting requests for allocation. Long-term planning will make it possible to acquire all qualifications mapped to the NQF through validation of non-formal and informal learning. The basic prerequisite for this is learning-outcome-based quality assurance and the further development of validation methods and procedures. Thus, the NQF and the Austrian validation strategy are closely linked and based on common objectives.

<sup>21</sup> Throughout 2013, criteria and procedures for allocating qualifications from the non-formal learning context (adult education) to the Austrian NQF have already been tested and simulated (Löffler and Lachmayr, 2014).

## NQF implementation

After the adoption of the NQF Act<sup>22</sup> in 2016, which establishes procedures for allocating qualifications to the eight levels of the NQF and the responsible bodies, the NQF entered an operational stage. The NQF manual<sup>23</sup> describing the process and criteria of allocation was adopted in September 2016 by the NQF steering committee and mapping of qualifications started in 2017. Academic higher education qualifications (bachelor, master and PhD/ doctoral degrees) are directly allocated to levels 6, 7 and 8 of the NQF by law. Mapping of all other formal and non-formal qualifications is based on a request for mapping a qualification made to the NQF NCP, with a detailed description of the qualification, related learning outcomes and the assessment procedure.

In the formal sector, the allocation request is made by the responsible federal ministry or *Länder* government. For non-formal qualifications, NQF service centres are envisaged as the applicants, serving as intermediaries between qualification providers and the NQF bodies. Mapping recommendations by the NCP, supported by the advisory body, are approved by the NQF steering group, which also has the right to appeal against the NCP's mapping recommendations<sup>24</sup>.

The following indicators have been defined for implementation<sup>25</sup>:

- include major VET qualifications (such as initial school-based vocational qualifications, apprenticeships and master craftsperson qualifications) by 2018;
- align curricula in formal education and training, particularly for VET to learning outcomes orientation by 2020;
- increase in cross-border mobility in VET for 20%.

The initial focus has been on formal qualifications from the VET sector at levels 4, 5 and 6, starting with VET school-based and apprenticeship

<sup>22</sup> The NQF Act was published in the *Federal Law Gazette* 14/2016, Part I, issued on 21 March 2016. [www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA\\_2016\\_I\\_14/BGBLA\\_2016\\_I\\_14.pdf](http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA_2016_I_14/BGBLA_2016_I_14.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Handbuch für die Zuordnung von Qualifikationen zum Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmen [Manual for the assignment of qualifications to the national qualification framework], available on the NQF webpage: [www.qualifikationsregister.at/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/HandbuchNQR\\_Einzelseiten.pdf](http://www.qualifikationsregister.at/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/HandbuchNQR_Einzelseiten.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> A schematic view of the mapping process can be found in Cedefop and ReferNet Austria (2016): [www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/austria-nqf-law-enters-force](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/austria-nqf-law-enters-force)

<sup>25</sup> Available at: [www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/module?genics.am=Content&p.contentid=10007.180581](http://www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/module?genics.am=Content&p.contentid=10007.180581)

qualifications under the Ministry of education<sup>26</sup>; these will be followed by qualifications under the responsibility of other ministries, such as healthcare and police. Mapping VET qualifications at level 6 and above has been found more challenging, involving extensive discussions (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The inclusion of non-formal qualifications into the NQF is part of a second implementation phase, expected to start in 2019. As procedures for these qualifications are not fully defined in the NQF Act, preparatory work is currently being carried out. The prospect of mapping non-formal qualifications has provoked discussions and a drive to develop suitable quality assurance systems<sup>27</sup>.

Mapped qualifications are included in the national qualifications register<sup>28</sup>, which currently contains 31 qualifications from the VET sector (September 2018). Work is under way to describe and include in the register qualifications, linked to the Bologna cycles, which have been mapped by law to the NQF levels. The NQF levels are indicated in the register and discussions are also under way to include them in the database of the Austrian Employment Service. Both NQF and EQF levels are indicated on qualifications from the VET sector that have been mapped to the NQF and on their Europass supplements<sup>29</sup>.

The NQF is being used as a basis for reform and development in VET qualifications, with significant influence in VET at higher levels, where curricula and qualifications are being updated based on NQF principles. The new legal acts regulating VET qualifications such as *Meister* or *Ingenieur* make reference to the NQF and its adoption act. The new *Ingenieur* qualification<sup>30</sup> was developed in consequence of the NQF, as the methods for identifying the competences in the previous *Ingenieur* qualification did not match NQF requirements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

So far, the NQF's communication efforts have been primarily oriented towards qualification-awarding bodies, aiming to help them prepare their qualifications for the mapping process and inclusion in the NQF register a secondary focus is experts using the NQF in their work. Dissemination of information about the NQF is carried out via the NQF website<sup>31</sup>, newsletters, seminars and one-to-one meetings.

The key challenges for NQF implementation in the next period are related to financial resources. Having enough funding for both the mapping process and for dissemination of the NQF on a wider level and to larger target groups is seen as difficult due to budget cuts in the public sector.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Austria referenced its NQF to the EQF and self-certified its higher education qualifications to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in June 2012, preparing one comprehensive report. Compatibility between the NQF and the QF-EHEA is also discussed in the referencing report, which is available on the EQF portal<sup>32</sup>.

## Important lessons and future plans

A strength of the Austrian NQF development is involvement and engagement of a broad range of stakeholders, representing all subsystems of education and training, as well as the social partners. Now formalised through the 2016 NQF Act, this broad group of stakeholders is engaged in implementation via the NQF steering group, which includes all federal ministries, social partners, stakeholders from the different fields of education, and the *Länder*. More widely, education and training providers, labour market stakeholders, guidance and counselling practitioners and recognition authorities and bodies, all have basic knowledge of the NQF and have started to use it in their work (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The NQF aims at improved coordination of a national qualification system that has traditionally witnessed distinct separation between different segments of education, particularly between VET and higher education. Increased transparency of VET and non-formal qualifications is expected. Austria also sees the

<sup>26</sup> In-company training is based on a training regulation valid throughout Austria, which is within the remit of the Federal Ministry of Economy, but largely shaped by the social partners.

<sup>27</sup> Idem.

<sup>28</sup> The Austrian qualifications register is available at: [www.qualifikationsregister.at](http://www.qualifikationsregister.at)

<sup>29</sup> The webpage of the Austrian Europass centre is available at: [www.europass.at](http://www.europass.at)

<sup>30</sup> The legal act regulating the *Ingenieur* qualification is available in German at: [www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20009785](http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20009785)

<sup>31</sup> The NQF website and register are available at: [www.qualifikationsregister.at](http://www.qualifikationsregister.at)

<sup>32</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/referencing-reports-and-contacts>

NQF as a communication tool to make qualifications transparent and comparable internationally, and to increase learning and work mobility.

While it is too early to assess the framework's impact, its benefits have already been observed in improving understanding and use of the learning outcomes approach. Its influence on the qualifications system can be seen in higher VET, where NQF principles are used for revision of qualifications. The NQF is also central in implementing the Austrian strategy for validation

of non-formal and informal learning. The prospect of integrating non-formal and informal learning into the framework has highlighted the need to develop suitable quality assurance mechanisms.

Future plans related to the implementation of the NQF include continuing the mapping of qualifications to the NQF, developing procedures for inclusion of non-formal and informal learning into the framework, and inclusion of academic higher education qualifications in the NQF register.

**Table 3. Austrian national qualifications framework**

NQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctorate ( <i>Doktorgrade</i> )	8
7	Master degree ( <i>Master- bzw. Diplomgrade</i> )	7
6	Bachelor degree ( <i>Bachelorgrade</i> )	6
	Master craftsman ( <i>Meister</i> )	
	Engineer ( <i>Ingenieur</i> )	
5	VET college school leaving certificate ( <i>Reife- und Diplomprüfung der berufsbildenden höheren Schulen</i> )	5
4	VET school qualification ( <i>Abschluss der berufsbildenden mittleren Schule</i> )	4
	Apprenticeship diploma ( <i>Lehrabschluss</i> )	
3		3
2		2
1		1

Source: Austrian NQF register (2018): [www.qualifikationsregister.at/public/home](http://www.qualifikationsregister.at/public/home) [accessed 11.12.2018].

Abbreviations			
BRP	Berufsreifeprüfung (examination providing access to higher education for skilled workers and graduates of three- and four-year full-time VET schools)	OeAD	Österreichischer Austauschdienst (Austrian agency for international cooperation in education and research)
EQF	European qualifications framework	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework of the European higher education area
NCP	national coordination point	SBP	Studienberechtigungsprüfung (higher education entrance examination)
NQF	national qualifications framework	VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

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## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The national qualifications framework (NQF) is legislated by several legal acts including some preceding its official adoption. The Action Plan on implementation of the National Strategy for the Development of Education (Presidential Order No 995 of 19 January 2015) includes the preparation and application of the NQF and is instrumental for introducing competency-based education. The Strategic Roadmap for Vocational Education (2016) emphasised elements of the NQF implementation, like competency-based standards and curricula and the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The NQF was adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers Decree No 311 dated 18 July 2018. Further legislative changes in 2018 are the Employment Strategy 2019–2030, giving attention to training and qualifications in combatting informal employment and unemployment, the Law on Vocational Education, amendments to the Law on Education, and the Law on the 2019 budget of Unemployment Insurance Fund.

The NQF has eight levels, comparable to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and linked to formal qualifications or key stages. Level 1 covers outcomes of basic education, level 2 outcomes of lower secondary education, etc. Level 8 covers outcomes of PhD and Doctor of Sciences degrees in line with international practice. Vocational education and training (VET) qualifications cover levels 3 and 4 (initial VET) and level 5 (higher VET). All qualifications from level 3 to 7 with a labour market orientation will be based on occupational standards. Occupational standards will be adapted to NQF levels. NQF level descriptors have three domains: knowledge and understanding, skills, and autonomy and responsibility. Key competences are integrated.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has the policy lead. A provisional NQF secretariat was established

by Ministerial Decree (5 August 2016) to prepare legislation. Important MoE implementing bodies are the VET Agency, the Office for Nostrification and Accreditation, and the Institute of Education. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population (MoLSPP) is in charge of coordinating occupational standards. It has established a section for occupational standards in the Department of Employment and Demography. Stakeholders from sectors and line ministries (sectoral committees) will be actively involved in developing standards and possibly certification. The VET Agency, MoE and MoLSPP are working on developing the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Azerbaijan faces challenges in the education and economic sectors. The economic recession in 2016, driven by the fall in oil prices and oil production, triggered the need for a 'non-oil' economy. This 'knowledge-based economy' requires the development of human capital and calls for an improved, modern education system for the whole population. The strategic roadmaps for the national economy and main economic sectors were approved in December 2016. Government strategy on matching education and training to labour market requirements is further outlined in 'Azerbaijan 2020: look to the future' development concept, the Education Strategy and Action Plan and the Draft Employment Strategy for 2017–30.

With a population of 9.81 million, Azerbaijan is one of the few countries in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States with a young population. Almost one quarter (22.5%) are children (0–14 years) and young people aged 14–29 make up 27% of the population. The business environment is vibrant, with proactive reforms such as a one-stop-shop company registration scheme and a best practice e-government portal making start-ups easier. Globally, Azerbaijan is in fifth place in the ranking of 190 economies on the ease of starting a business and the country ranks 65<sup>th</sup> out of 190 countries in the 2017 Doing Business report.

Vocational training and skills are one of the top priorities of government policy, reflected in recent the strategy outlined in the strategic roadmaps to boost the economy and competitiveness. The State Agency for Vocational Education was established in April 2016 and a new employment strategy for 2017–30 has set 16 targets for 2030. These targets aim to reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training and lower unemployment rates, as well as increase employment in small- and medium-sized enterprises. Increasing the scope and scale of training and self-employment measures is also at the forefront, as well as validation of skills acquired in non-formal and informal learning.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

For sustainable growth, Azerbaijan needs to reduce its dependency on oil and gas, and diversify its economy. The Strategy for Azerbaijan 2020, a Vision to the Future, (December 2012) aims to support the rapid development of the non-oil sector. This should result in an export-oriented open economy, with more innovation and a better environmental balance. Key elements of the developmental strategy are better infrastructure and telecommunications to create a better business climate throughout the country and more cooperation with growing developing countries, as these economies are growing faster than the industrialised world.

Azerbaijan still has a very large pool of unqualified labour. There is some progress in recent years with the youngest generation gradually becoming more educated, including more and more students studying abroad. However, about half of the graduates from secondary education do not enter initial vocational education, secondary specialised education or higher education. Moreover, only one in five companies trains their staff systematically. One of the difficulties companies face is determining what to train their staff for, so that the company can grow and develop.

The Strategy for Azerbaijan recognises the importance of the development of human capital to diversify the economy. This requires investment in the education system, giving more importance to adult and lifelong learning, and ICT-assisted learning through the internet. The strategy also underlines the importance of efficient health care and social protection and better governance. The National Strategy for the Development of Education was adopted in October 2013. It has five strands of action, of which three directly related to the Azerbaijan qualifications framework (AzQF): education is based

on competences focused on individuals requiring the development of curricula for all levels of education; providers apply modern training methods for competency-based education, and ensure quality; a transparent management system is established, to ensure the quality of education.

The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Education Development Strategy (adopted in January 2015), mentions the adoption of the NQF. The NQF development preceded the action plan, but approval came only in 2018. There were important preceding steps however. In 2016 a NQF secretariat was established in the MoE to support the implementation. Moreover, a series of international, EU-funded and bilateral projects have helped to develop new outcome-based curricula. In addition to higher education, VET has become a national priority since 2015. In 2016, the VET Agency was established and a Strategic Roadmap for VET established as part of a wider set of 11 strategic areas for the development of the country. The VET Law was adopted in 2018.

The NQF aims to improve the relevance, quality and transparency of qualifications. It takes into account the demands of the society and labour market when defining qualifications (occupational standards), and hence improve national economic performance and facilitate communication and movement between education and training sectors and the labour market. It aligns national qualifications and qualifications levels with the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) and the EQF. The NQF supports and widens access to qualifications and learning. It promotes lifelong learning of Azerbaijani citizens. The validation of non-formal and informal learning is recognised as a key component. The NQF should also facilitate the national and international mobility of learners and workers through increased recognition of the quality and comparability of Azerbaijani qualifications abroad, and increase competitiveness and mobility of people.

The NQF is closely linked to other policy initiatives, including the reduction of informal employment, employment promotion and labour mobility. In education, it is clearly seen as a quality assurance tool. The recent openness towards the validation of non-formal and informal learning is a real victory over conservative attitudes and shows that Azerbaijan is not only focusing its attention to raising the quality for those in education, but is serious in improving access to learning, qualifications and jobs. ICT tools are expected to play an important role as well in introducing the NQF as Azerbaijan is quickly developing ICT services.

### **International cooperation**

The NQF fully complies with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF).

The NQF is an important tool for implementing the Bologna process. The EU has funded a number of twinning projects and Tempus and Erasmus Plus projects to support curriculum development and quality assurance in higher education, and in particular the use of learning outcomes. A new twinning project for higher education will continue the support in this area in 2018–19, making a link as well to occupational standards, assessment and certification and quality assurance. The results are becoming visible. According to the latest Bologna report (Paris 2018), Azerbaijan is now describing all higher education programmes and their component in learning outcomes. There are still many more steps needed. Learning outcomes and ECTS are implemented, but they are not yet systematically monitored as part of the external quality assurance policies for higher education. Azerbaijan still seems to be a few years removed from self-certification. Tools are developed but not yet embedded systematically and integrated in quality assurance and recognition procedures. In higher education, there is not yet any validation of non-formal and informal learning. Azerbaijan is also a signatory of the Lisbon Convention. Recognition processes are expected to take progressively account of the qualifications reforms and quality assurance measures. A large number of Azerbaijani students study abroad, many with a governmental grant.

The EU has become the most important donor in the education sector, a role previously fulfilled by the World Bank. The ETF works closely with the EU Delegation in planning and supporting this work. The Action Plan 2014 includes a series of measures to support the MoE with implementing aspects of the NQF, including the development of outcomes-based standards and curricula, based on occupational standards, assessment and quality assurance procedures and the systematic involvement of representatives of the world of work. The projects and grant schemes promote coherent approaches in VET and higher education. The EU is also developing support under the Action Plan 2016 for the MoLSPP on improving labour market intelligence and occupational standards. Follow-up measures are being planned under the Action Plan 2018 with attention to developing modularisation, credit systems and validation of non-formal and informal learning, etc. There are also bilateral VET reform projects that support the development of new competency-based programmes for VET and teacher training.

## **Levels and use of learning outcomes**

### **NQF scope and structure**

The NQF Decree states that qualifications included in the AzQF are defined in line with the education stages and levels described in the Law on Education (2009). These include qualifications for general education, initial VET, secondary specialised education (sub-bachelor education), higher education, and further education/adult learning. Qualifications can be obtained through formal, non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the Law on Education. This law includes reference to non-formal and informal learning and a wide spectrum of qualifications for adult learning. The NQF, therefore, is not limited to formal education but it includes only qualifications that are quality assured, which refers to setting standards, assessment and certification processes and the involvement of relevant stakeholders. Recently, the positions on the scope of the NQF and the possibility of validation of non-formal and informal learning have progressively opened up and evolved.

The NQF has eight levels, comparable to the EQF and linked to the main formal qualifications or key stages. Existing qualification types have been analysed in order to provisionally allocate them to the NQF levels. Level 1 covers outcomes of basic education, level 2 outcomes of lower secondary education, etc. Level 8 covers outcomes of PhD and Doctor of Sciences degrees in line with international practice. Initial VET qualifications could be divided in levels 3 and 4 qualifications. NQF levels will also be used to level occupational standards.

### **Alignment to other classification systems**

Labour market monitoring should inform the development of occupational standards, coordinated by the MoLSPP. Labour market-oriented qualifications should be linked to specific occupations (and occupational standards). The MoLSPP is also responsible for keeping the National Employment Classification in accordance with the requirements of the labour market. However, unlike in some other post-Soviet countries, the NQF is not directly linked to the tariff qualification system, which is not anymore operational.

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

The work on levels started originally from an analysis of the descriptors in the country, but has been inspired as well by the Dublin descriptors for the QF-EHEA and the EQF and the eight European key competences (2006). The result, in the end, is a list of eight levels with level descriptors which are more detailed than the EQF descriptors, addressing knowledge and understanding, skills, and autonomy and responsibility, and which are calibrated and

fine-tuned with the main qualifications types in the country. Key competences are integrated in the level descriptors.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

A national curriculum for general education based on learning outcomes was introduced in 2009 and improved in 2010. General education does not offer any specialisation. Development of qualification standards for primary education (AzQF level 1), general secondary education (AzQF level 2) and full secondary education (AzQF level 4) do not exist yet, although learning outcomes have been identified for key stages. Azerbaijan participated in PISA 2018, but the results are not known yet. This round should provide some indication whether these reforms have led to better learning outcomes.

Occupational standards developed by the international projects since 2008, and especially by the World Bank project on the development of improved occupational standards (DIOS) between 2011 and 2014, have been used in pilot curricula for initial VET (IVET) prepared by the MoE. Learning outcomes in the new curricula for IVET are based on competences identified in occupational standards. Until 2017, 67 modern VET curricula were developed, although they were not systematically implemented in schools. The first new curricula were developed by donor projects, such as the UNESCO project, and the Tacis VET reform project, that developed their own occupational standards for that purpose. The MoE also initiated the development of 40 new curricula with the Institute of Education and developed some more with World Vision. The EU-funded twinning project for VET in agriculture also developed some curricula, partially using occupational standards. Ten curricula were developed for the Sumgait Chemical-Industrial Park under the Ministry of Economy and one new curriculum for beekeeper is developed with support of the United Nations Development Programme.

A critical analysis of these curricula showed that:

- a. Different methodologies/approaches were used to define curricula.
- b. The structure of curricula varied considerably.
- c. The link with occupational standards was often weak, and sometimes absent.
- d. Available curricula are only used by selected VET schools and sometimes not used at all.
- e. assessment is rarely independent and solely based on evaluating learning outcomes.

Since 2017, the EU-funded VET Reform project has developed and tested a new template for modular curricula based on occupational standards that is progressively being used in other projects.

All occupational standards include key and specialised competences required from workers. Key competences can be used for development of learning outcomes for general subjects, and specialised competences for vocational training subjects by specialty. All the occupational standards developed by the DIOS project identified future-oriented competences, thus creating a floor for further training. They can be used in further education and training, also because they incorporate training pathways covering non-formal and informal training, as well as recognition of prior learning. All the occupational standards are available online (<http://dios.az/standards/>).

The ETF carried out an evaluation of the use of occupational standards, which showed that they could be better used in education. In the meantime, agreements have been made to coordinate the development of new standards and VET curricula. Funding for occupational standards has been approved for 2019 and beyond from the unemployment insurance budget. Legislative changes have been drafted that should come into force soon and lead to a more active programme of development and maintenance of occupational standards.

As far as standards for adult learning (additional education according to the Law on Education) are concerned, the MoE is developing standards for educational professionals, and there are the 69 qualification standards developed under the DIOS project by the MoLSPP, but overall this is still a highly contested area. Modular programmes for the training of the unemployed are not linked yet with the occupational standards.

There is a linking of different databases on occupational standards, qualification standards, curricula, providers and assessment centres. It is important to develop a database of units or modules, in addition to the register of qualifications, to support the development of qualifications and modular curricula. It is recommended that the AzQF integrate a national credit system that is based on the units and linked to the ECTS and ECVET.

### **Definition of qualification**

According to the NQF Decree, a qualification is a formal outcome (diploma, certificate) of an assessment process confirming an individual's achievement of learning outcomes as defined in given standards. This definition is close to the EQF definition.

The decree provides, however, more details. It states that qualifications need to be described in terms of minimum learning outcomes required from learners. This is repeated in other words, when the decree states that all qualifications are described



in terms of knowledge, skills and autonomy or responsibility, and referenced to the AzQF levels. Qualifications are developed in accordance with the requirements of labour market and occupational standards. All qualifications are quality assured and quality assurance encompasses all relevant processes, including description of expected learning outcomes, assessment and validation of an individual's learning achievement.

The qualifications at levels 3–7 that are related to a specific occupation and specialities in the labour market are based on occupational standards. These include initial VET qualifications, secondary specialised (sub-bachelor's) qualifications, bachelor's qualifications, basic medical higher education qualifications, master's and postgraduate medical education (residency) qualifications, as well as relevant further education qualifications.

Education standards for VET and higher education are generic in character and only provide indications for the outcomes and inputs for the type of qualification. There are no real qualification standards in Azerbaijan, but the curriculum structure offers assessment elements. There is no external quality assurance or independent assessment of professional competences, but state exams are available to test the knowledge of graduates.

Occupational standards are generally seen as the new starting point for developing state educational standards, but there is not yet a system-wide use of them. Different approaches have been tested to involve representatives from the world of work more in renewing vocational and higher education standards, but so far a more consolidated new approach is only coming into place slowly, with the support of European projects. For initial VET qualifications, a new curriculum template has been developed and tested by the EU VET reform project. For higher education, learning outcomes are used but without referring to occupational standards so far. The twinning project 'Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan' is also exploring how to strengthen competency-based higher education in the country.

### **Access, progression and credit**

The university entrance exam and entrance to colleges (post-secondary vocational education/ sub-bachelor degree) is centrally administered and compulsory for everybody who wants to enter a bachelor programme, including graduates from colleges, although credit transfer from sub-bachelor to bachelor degrees is foreseen in the future. It is going to be experimented in the EU NQF project. Graduates from vocational lyceums receive so far two qualifications – the attestation of maturity

(general secondary education diploma) and a diploma of specialisation. One in seven graduates actually enters higher education. Graduates from vocational schools only receive a diploma of specialisation. It is expected that more flexible credit arrangements may be developed in the years to come. Currently access to qualifications is granted only to people who have achieved the qualification at the preceding level.

## **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

### **NQF legal basis**

The Law on Education (2009) has been the starting point for the development of the NQF as it gave importance to lifelong learning, including non-formal and informal learning. These were later followed by Azerbaijan 2020, A Vision for the Future (2013), the Education Development Strategy 2013–2020 (2013) and related action plan, the establishment of the Office for Nostrification and Accreditation (2015), the establishment of the VET Agency (2016), the convergence of the State Committee for Admission of Students into the State Examination Centre (2016), the NQF Secretariat (2016), and the adoption of a roadmap for VET (2016).

In 2018, many new legislative documents were adopted that regulate the implementation of the qualifications framework. The most important act was probably the NQF Decree, but also the VET Law, amendments to the Law on Education and the employment strategy have an impact on the implementation of the NQF. Moreover, a set of regulations have been developed, but not approved yet, on the development and maintenance of occupational standards. In addition, new legislative documents are under preparation to establish a system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and for the attribution of roles in the implementation of the NQF.

The NQF Decree assigns key responsibilities to both the MoE and the MoLSPP. Within the MoE, the provisional NQF Secretariat has been preparing the NQF legislation. However, new structures are needed to ensure coordination of the implementation. The VET Agency has a leading role in developing the system for validation in cooperation with the MoLSPP that is in charge of coordinating the development of occupational standards. These standards are in line with the NQF Decree, the basis for all labour market-related qualifications at all levels. However, to ensure the development and maintenance of the standards additional regulatory document are needed to define a new workflow, with a stronger role for sectors.

For VET, curricula have become the main documents defining the qualification requirements. They are modular in structure and can be used to obtain a full qualification through state exams as well as reference certificates for completion of modules.

The basis for the AzQF was the law on education (2009). It provided a start to move beyond the formal education system and address both formal initial education and adult learning in a coherent system. However, the law was not always very specific on the use of learning outcomes, assessment, and quality assurance. Moreover, it does not describe the interinstitutional cooperation beyond the MoE, the Cabinet of Ministers and the Higher Attestation Committee.

The legal status of occupational standards has been strengthened by the NQF Decree, the VET Law, the VET Road Map and the road maps for economic development and tourism, the Employment Strategy 2019–2030 and a Law on the use of the budget of the Unemployment Insurance Fund for 2019. Secondary legislation has been drafted to establish a new workflow for developing standards that is likely to be adopted in 2019.

#### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

According to the NQF Decree, the MoE is responsible for the development of educational standards, typical curricula, assessment standards and accreditation standards; the quality assurance of qualifications; and the development and updating of the national register of qualifications.

The MoLSPP is responsible for the monitoring and analysis of the labour market; submits proposals on improving the National Employment Classification; and coordinates the development and application of occupational and qualification standards. It has established a section for occupational standards development in the Department of Employment and Demography.

The MoE should create a system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in cooperation with the MoLSPP.

Different line ministries, which are in charge of their own education institutions, can submit proposals on education and occupational standards and are involved in quality assurance of the related qualifications.

The Higher Attestation Commission oversees the certification of doctor of philosophy and doctor of science degrees.

The future of the NQF Secretariat and other implementing structures is not yet clear. The

secretariat, established in August 2016, is not actively functioning, apart from support for the preparation of the NQF Decree by the chair. There is no obvious focal point for the secretariat in the MoE and its agencies. Within the ministry, a new permanent unit or department would need to be created. The three agencies from the MoE – VET Agency, Institute of Education, and Office for Nostrification and Accreditation – each could have a strong supportive role for the secretariat, but none seems to show much enthusiasm to coordinate the NQF.

Nothing is indicated in the NQF Decree on the role of social partners, sectoral organisations or professional bodies, although the decree leaves the door open for establishing sectoral frameworks.

The MoLSPP has developed secondary legislation that could give an important role to sectoral bodies. The employment law already acknowledges the responsibilities of trade unions and employers in the development of occupational standards.

There are several ongoing initiatives to develop implementing structures.

#### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

Quality assurance is the key principle of the NQF. The NQF Decree has a whole chapter dedicated to it. Quality assurance encompasses the development of relevant qualifications, based on learning outcomes, which will be vetted before they are included in the NQF register. The register, therefore, becomes a repository of quality assured qualifications. Where appropriate occupational standards are available they should be the basis for qualifications (educational standards). Beyond the standards, the assessment and certification processes will also be part of the quality assurance arrangements as is the programme accreditation of providers. The quality assurance principles are in line with the European Standards and Guidelines, EQAVET and the European Guidelines for the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. External quality assurance will be carried out by the Office for Nostrification and Accreditation, while external assessment will be carried out with support of the State Examination Centre. These principles for quality assurance are seen as very important and needed, but at the same time difficult to implement under the current conditions.

#### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

The VET Agency is in charge of developing the validation of non-formal and informal learning

and does this in cooperation with the MoLSPP. There is a growing interest in the subject. Two EU-funded projects support its development and piloting through the NQF project and a grant project managed by the United Nations Development Programme to establish an assessment centre in Ganja. Policy papers are being developed under the responsibility of the VET Agency. The VET Law mentions the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the VET Road Map states that after 2025, vocational qualification could be compulsory for employment. The public debate has started with high profile events and articles in the press.

The NQF Decree legislates the validation of non-formal and informal learning and assigns the MoE with the task of developing a national system in cooperation with the MoLSPP. One of the objectives of the decree is to support lifelong learning, as well as to provide recognition of the competences obtained through non-formal and informal learning. The decree mentions the recognition of competences gained through informal and non-formal education as a process of identifying, documenting, evaluating and certifying competences against the relevant standard, gained through informal and non-formal education carried out by an accredited body.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

The register is a key instrument for the NQF. It will include all quality assured qualifications that are part of the AzQF. The national qualifications register will be regularly updated and accessible on a national website. The register is not yet established. There are currently lists of specialisations for initial vocational education, for post-secondary vocational education and for higher education. The MoLSPP maintains an online database of occupational standards (<http://dios.az/standards/>).

The NQF Decree was adopted in 2018 and is not yet fully implemented, but aspects of it, including the use of learning outcomes, development of occupational standards, new curricula, competency-based education, externalised assessment procedures have been tested of the previous years. Different projects have contributed to pilots and studies, and the present generation of EU projects (VET Reform project, NQF project and Twinning for the Higher Education System) are moving developments forward in a more systematic way. One difficulty however is the lack of clarity on the institutional settings. The future role of the NQF Secretariat and other implementing structures are not yet clear. The NQF Secretariat established in

August 2016, is not actively functioning, apart from support for the preparation of the NQF Decree by the Chair. There is no obvious focal point for the Secretariat in the MoE and its agencies. Within the ministry, a new permanent unit or department would need to be created. The three agencies from the MoE – VET Agency, Institute of Education, and Office for Nostrification and Accreditation – each could have a strong supportive role for the Secretariat, but none seems to show much enthusiasm to coordinate the NQF.

### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

No evaluation conducted yet.

### Impact for end-users

The NQF is no longer just a topic for experts, but the wider public is only becoming gradually aware. There are several donor projects (EU-funded, British Council, GIZ) to support its development and implementation. The NQF is part of important national education and labour market policies. There are more capacities in public institutions but it is not yet enough to reach end-users. Providers and representatives from the world of work and line ministries are the next groups to be mobilised. Methodologies for standards and curricula have advanced. Next steps are: validation of non-formal and informal learning, use of credits, independent assessment and quality assurance.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Azerbaijan is a member of the Bologna process and the NQF will be self-certified to the QF-EHEA. The framework was developed on the basis of the principles of the QF-EHEA and the EQF for lifelong learning. Links to the EQF are mentioned in the EU-Azerbaijan Mobility Partnership, in EU programming documents for support to the education sector in Azerbaijan, and in the NQF Decree. Azerbaijan still has to implement a number of steps before it can self-certify. It has support of EU-funded twinning projects to prepare this, with emphasis particularly on using learning outcomes in assessment, learning and quality assurance, as well as ECTS, diploma supplements and recognition procedures. The new EQF recommendation offers as well the opportunity to link the AzQF to the EQF.

## Important lessons and future plans

2018 was a very important year for NQF developments in Azerbaijan. It witnessed the formal adoption of the NQF Decree and the development of new arrangements for occupational standards. The VET Law and the Employment Strategy

were adopted. Funds for the development of new occupational standards were approved. A methodology for developing competency-based VET curricula through the EU VET project was tested. The conceptualisation of a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning was discussed through two EU projects, to name just a few results. The EU support that is on the ground can accelerate some of these developments, but in the end, much depends on institutional capacities in the country. 2019 will show whether the institutional capacities can be strengthened, whether the practical work

can advance (in terms of standard and curriculum development, and validation of non-formal and informal learning) and the register of qualifications can be launched. During the coming stages it is important to clarify the coordination mechanisms, and to empower sectors and training providers to start playing a more active role in standard and curriculum development. Quality assurance procedures will need to link with qualifications. Teachers and trainers will need retraining to implement competency-based education.

**Table 4. Types of qualification in the Azerbaijan qualifications framework**

NQF LEVEL	GENERAL EDUCATION	VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION	SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION	HIGHER EDUCATION	ADULT LEARNING
1	No formal qualification, but learning outcomes				
2	Certificate of general education				Diploma/certificate
3		Diploma of specialisation			Diploma/certificate
4	Attestation of maturity	Diploma of specialisation			Diploma/certificate
5			Sub-bachelor degree		Diploma/certificate
6				Bachelor degree	Diploma/certificate
7				Master degree	Diploma/certificate
8				PhD degree Doctor of sciences degree	

*Note:* The allocation of qualifications by type to the NQF level is purely indicative. No levels have been attributed yet. The NQF has only been used to formulate occupational qualifications standards in IT and management but no certificates for these have been issued.

**Abbreviations**

AzQF	Azerbaijan qualifications framework
DIOS	development of improved occupational standards
ECTS	European credit transfer system
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLSPP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
VET	vocational education and training

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# BANGLADESH

## Introduction and context

Bangladesh has a large informal economy. Three-quarters of the population is rural while about a third of people live below the international poverty line. This means that every third person is struggling every day to survive.

Bangladesh is highly dependent on the remittances migrant workers sent back to the country – indeed, these constitute the largest source of foreign capital (Ministry of Education, 2011). Numerous government reports and industry bodies have called for improvements to the skill levels of Bangladeshi workers so that the value of these remittances will increase (BMET, 2008; ILO, 2014).

However, the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector that produces most of the skilled workers is beset by a number of difficulties. These include: insufficient quality assurance system; lack of autonomy for training centres to adapt courses to local needs; overly rigid traditional school-based curricula and vocational standards; excessively long course durations; lack of continuing professional teacher training; lack of access to skills for underprivileged groups; lack of regulation and certification of informal apprenticeships; and insufficient recognition of existing skills and informal learning, preventing labour mobility. The government recognizes that these shortcomings lead to a serious wastage of skills in the economy (Ministry of Education, 2011).

The National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) was adapted as a key tool to build and structure skills development for new and existing workforce. The NTVQF was initiated in 2008 as one of the most important building blocks of the TVET Reform Project, a project funded by the European Commission and implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh<sup>33</sup> (Ministry of Education, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Education in coordination with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Overseas Employment and Expatriate Welfare.

The NTVQF allows for the recognition of skills workers have acquired in the informal sector, and includes post-secondary qualifications up to diploma level. The new qualifications are offered in formal education and training, as well as workplace training and all trainings provided by public and private organizations (NSDC, 2011).

Currently, Skills 21 – Empowering Citizens for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth, a project implemented by the ILO in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and funded by the EU has taken initiative to extend the NTVQF to the national qualifications framework. This proposed framework will provide a route that leads to a unified or harmonized quality assured qualifications system in Bangladesh (Ministry of Education, 2018).

## Policy objectives

The NTVQF, an essential component of the government's National Skills Development Policy (Ministry of Education, 2011), is intended to accomplish a wide range of goals in relation to TVET reform, the introduction of competency-based training and assessment, and quality assurance. The NTVQF aims specifically to:

- expand the number of qualifications available to reflect the changing occupational and skills profiles in both domestic and international labour markets;
- support stronger integration of skills training in community organizations, schools, training institutions and the workplace by providing a common national benchmark for qualifications up to, but not including, university degrees;
- provide formal recognition of workplace skills obtained in both the formal and informal economies;
- improve employability skills and increase their productivity;
- provide a new benchmark for international recognition of the skills and knowledge of Bangladeshi workers, who are recognized as an increasingly important export for the country;

- introduce consistent naming of credentials for formal skills-based education and training;
- encourage employers to participate in the development of the national qualifications framework;
- improve the alignment of formal training programmes with industry requirements;
- support lifelong learning by providing recognized pathways for workers to raise the level of their knowledge and skills throughout their working lives and beyond (Ministry of Education, 2011).

The NTVQF is aligned with other broader national policies for the expansion of TVET opportunities at post-primary level, focusing on improving the employability and income level of adolescents, youth and adults (of both sexes), child labourers, those with low levels of literacy, and those in rural areas (ILO, 2009). These other national policies are: the National Education Policy 2010, the Non-Formal Education Policy of 2006, the National Youth Policy (2003), the National Workforce Strategy of 2008, and the National Skills Development Policy (ibid.).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The NTVQF consists of six levels plus two pre-vocational levels, making it an eight-level framework (see Table 5). The six main levels focus on knowledge, skills and responsibility. The table also illustrates the relationship of the NTVQF to the existing qualifications structure.

The two pre-vocational levels cater to the underprivileged and low-educated groups in society who have not completed eight years of school (eight years' schooling is the minimum to gain entry into a vocational training institute) and who lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills necessary to enter the lowest level of the qualifications framework. The following five levels, NTVQF 1–5, lead to certificates that closely align with existing TVET programmes for school students. Under the NTVQF, registered training organizations will also be able to conduct training for specific units of competences.

**Table 5. Bangladesh national technical and vocational qualifications framework**

NTVQF LEVELS	PRE-VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	TECHNICAL EDUCATION	JOB CLASSIFICATION
<b>NTVQF 6</b>			Diploma in engineering or equivalent	Middle-level manager
<b>NTVQF 5</b>		National skill certificate 5 (NSC 5)		Highly skilled worker/supervisor
<b>NTVQF 4</b>		National skill certificate 4 (NSC 4)		Skilled worker
<b>NTVQF 3</b>		National skill certificate 3 (NSC 3)		Basic-skilled worker
<b>NTVQF 2</b>		National skill certificate 2 (NSC 2)		Basic-skilled worker
<b>NTVQF 1</b>		National skill certificate 1 (NSC 1)		Basic worker
<b>Pre-Voc. 2</b>	National pre-vocational certificate NPVC 2			Pre-vocational trainee (2)
<b>Pre-Voc. 1</b>	National pre-vocational certificate NPVC 1			Pre-vocational trainee (1)

Source: Ministry of Education, National Skills Development Policy, 2011.

In general education, a new system of dual certification will be introduced so that students who achieve the skills component of vocational education programmes will receive an NTVQF qualification in addition to, and separate from, the school qualification (National Skills Development Policy, 2011).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

There are two key national coordination and regulatory TVET agencies in Bangladesh: the National Skills Development Council (NSDC) and the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB).

The NSDC, the apex authority on skills in Bangladesh, is responsible for setting and implementing the national skills strategy. The key outcome of the strategy is to progressively produce a workforce in Bangladesh that should acquire nationally and internationally-referenced skills. The NSDC has transitioned to a much stronger 'Authority'<sup>34</sup> mandated to provide an important tripartite forum where representatives of government, employers, workers and civil society can work together to provide leadership and clear direction to skills development in Bangladesh.

The BTEB is the quality assurance, assessment and certification agency that is responsible for the implementation and periodic review of the NTVQF. A new act, the BTEB Act of 2018<sup>35</sup> reiterates the power of the BTEB to organize, supervise, regulate, control and develop technical and vocational education and training in Bangladesh.

The BTEB has overall responsibility for the implementation and periodic review of the NTVQF under direction from the NSDC. While it leads and coordinates, it shares responsibility with the agencies representing education, industry, employers' groups, private sector providers and non-government organizations. Among them are:

- a. government agencies: Ministry of Education, Technical and Madrasah Education Division, Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training, Directorate of Technical Education, Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs,

- Ministry of Youth and Sports, government TVET institutions;
- b. employers and workers groups, Industry Skills Councils, industry; and
- c. private training providers and non-government organizations.

All competency-based programs are registered with the BTEB. Major public TVET providers and ministries have now accepted the NTVQF as a model for future demand-driven skills development in the country and have made moves to change their traditional supply-driven curriculum-based courses into fully market-driven competency-based programmes.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The lock-out of learners who have not achieved Grade 8 has constrained admission to TVET and formal skills programmes. In order to overcome this barrier, the government has been working with its partners to introduce reforms to remove the Grade 8 prerequisite from formal courses and replace it with learning outcomes entry requirements. Under competency-based training approach, learners/workers will need to demonstrate that they have the knowledge required to be admitted to their chosen courses. In this way, the NTVQF allows those with limited formal education to undertake formal courses leading to nationally recognized qualifications.

The NTVQF is associated with the existing qualifications structure: this permits transfer between general education and TVET. Students who fail the academic component of the Senior Secondary School Certificate (vocational) or Higher Secondary School Certificate (vocational) may nevertheless be assessed as competent in the National Skills Certificate of the NTVQF. They will receive the appropriate National Skills Certificate award and can continue their studies to gain national skills certificates at the higher NTVQF levels. TVET programmes in schools such as the Senior Secondary School Certificate (vocational), the Higher Secondary School Certificate (vocational) and the Higher Secondary School Certificate in Business Management will be revised to ensure that their vocational components are based on industry competency standards, and that students only receive NTVQF qualifications if they have been assessed as competent.

The BTEB with the support of the ILO is improving arrangements for the formalization of skills of workers in the informal economy through a

<sup>34</sup> Known as the National Skills Development Authority Act, enacted by the Parliament and approved by the Prime Minister in October 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Enacted and approved in November 2018 for modifying, amending, changing and updating the Technical Education Act of 1967 and Technical Education Regulations of 1975.



recognition of prior learning (RPL) system. This initiative has increased access of underprivileged groups to TVET.

To date, the BTEB has certified more than 31,000 existing workers in different NTVQF levels through RPL method (BTEB, 2019). The Government of Bangladesh has taken initiative through the support of development projects and from their own resources so that around 200,000 people per year will have their skills recognized within the next five years. Trainers are equipped to identify and assess all new learners for skills they already possess and to support them through the RPL process. Assessment centres are available in a number of locations. Some centres stand alone; others form part of existing TVET institutions; others belong to the industry. Some 75% of government training institutions have been restructured to offer flexible learning options through evening courses.

Barriers are being removed to recognize the skills of departing and returning Bangladeshi migrant workers. A number of host countries now recognize NTVQF qualifications, and skilled workers returning to Bangladesh are offered RPL assessment to recognize any new skills they have gained overseas.

It is hoped that public sector training will change greatly. Job announcements are now required to list opportunities for training and promotion; this includes general TVET-level qualifications in management, planning, leadership, budgeting and communication. Many of the 259 TVET institutions under the Ministry of Education, as well as assessment centres, either have achieved registered training organization status or are in the process of doing so. Private providers affiliated with the BTEB will be required to offer RPL to all prospective students.

## NTVQF implementation

The ILO has supported the Government of Bangladesh in reforming its TVET system through partnership with the European Union. Efforts towards the establishment of a national qualifications framework started with the TVET sub-sector through the initiatives of the TVET Reform Project (TVET-R) in 2008. This was followed by the B-SEP project in 2014 with support from the Government of Canada where NTVQF implementation was expanded to five industry sectors, namely: agro-food, ceramics, furniture, pharmaceuticals, and the tourism sector. Building on the two projects, Skills 21 will continue to implement NTVQF housed under a broader national qualifications framework.

The NTVQF was developed through a series of consultations and meetings producing a number of reference documents. There were 12 Industry Skills Councils organized, which created standards and technical committees to develop measurable quality benchmarks for domestic and international recognition. They are also responsible for aligning skills needs in accordance with the NTVQF levels and occupations. They are also responsible for the Skills Data System, which has been operational for three years and enables training institutions to prioritise courses with high industry demand.

Approximately 50% of training providers are registered with the BTEB and are delivering traditional vocational courses. Recently, the BTEB implemented NTVQF courses in many occupations and also introduced a competency-based qualification for the coaching of trainers. As a result, industry-based trainers are for the first time outnumbering TVET institution-based trainers. The BTEB is also implementing the Skills Quality Assurance System and reports to the National Skills Development Authority. Private training providers that wish to issue nationally recognized qualifications under the NTVQF must be registered and accredited under the new Bangladesh Skills Quality Assurance System (ILO, 2013).

## Referencing to regional frameworks

There is a growing initiative towards developing a SAARC Qualifications Referencing Framework (SQRF). The SQRF is envisioned to be a device to enable comparison of qualifications and recognition of skills. It will aim to facilitate harmonization of skills at the regional level for enhanced recognition of migrant workers from South Asia in the destination countries.

The rationale for a SQRF is derived from the Kathmandu Declaration of November 2014, when the SAARC Heads of State or Government agreed to promote regional cooperation in the field of vocational education and training. The SAARC Education Ministers agreed to develop a Regional Strategy for Enhancing the Quality of Education to raise the standards of South Asian educational institutions and better serve the youth in the region.

In May 2016, SAARC Action Plan for Labour Migration, which includes a provision for the development of an SQRF, was drafted. The plan provides for: (a) mapping and review of existing qualifications frameworks, occupational standards and competency levels in South Asia and also that of major destination countries to support the development of relevant regional standards in

priority trades for migrant workers from the region; and (b) recognition of skills/qualifications with destination countries of SAARC migrant workers.

In July 2017, participants at the ILO Inter-regional Experts Forum on Skills and Migration in the South Asia-Middle East Corridor held in New Delhi supported the development of a regional qualifications referencing framework. India's Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship offered to take up a lead role in this undertaking.

### Important lessons and future plans

The NTVQF has generated enthusiasm amongst stakeholders – government, non-government, bilateral and multilateral development partners, public and private training institutions, industries, workers and employers groups, and learners and trainees. In more than five years since its adoption, the NTVQF has worked well in the following aspects: (a) growing awareness of the value of a competency approach for workforce development; (b) appreciation of the value of continuous quality improvement through implementation of the National Skills Quality Assurance System; and (c) establishment of leadership of industry and professional bodies in the development and maintenance of qualifications. The government will continue to implement and massify the new NTVQF as an approach to workforce development.

The efforts towards establishing a unified and harmonized Bangladesh Qualifications Framework (BQF) are becoming more and more imminent. The BQF provides a special opportunity for Bangladesh to facilitate lifelong learning by opening up access, attracting investment and recognizing non-formal and informal learning. It hopes to strengthen national qualification systems by harmonizing sub-systems of qualifications such as senior secondary education and its equivalent Madrasah and language levels, non-formal education and adult learning, TVET and higher education.

The following steps are planned:

1. Design the BQF structure to define qualification pathways in the three education sub-systems: higher education, TVET, and Senior Secondary School Certificate and the Higher Secondary School Certificate. The BQF will outline a unified lifelong learning framework that allows vertical and horizontal pathways for all learners.
2. Operationalize the BQF National Steering Committee. High-level discussions will be necessary on the merging of a higher education qualifications framework into the BQF, and the National Skills Development Authority to clarify their regulatory role and its relationship with the BTEB and the NTVQF.
3. Implement a step-by-step roadmap for BQF development. Significant activities include: (a) activation of the technical working groups to develop the BQF structure in terms of levels, level descriptors and learning outcomes for the different education sub-systems; (b) activation of technical panels and standing committees to work on quality assurance policies and strategies for the development of BQF; (c) production and dissemination of BQF materials; and (d) initiation of legislative reforms for BQF adoption.

#### Abbreviations

BMET	Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training
BTEB	Bangladesh Technical Education Board
ILO	International Labour Organization
NSC	National Skills Certificate
NSDC	National Skills Development Council
NTVQF	National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SAARC	South Asian Agency for Regional Cooperation
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training

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# BELARUS

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The national qualifications framework (NQF) in Belarus is part of a new qualification system, which should replace the current system that dates back to Soviet times. The most important legal document is the Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No 764 'On the strategy to improve the national qualification system (NQS) of the Republic of Belarus' of 24 October 2018.

The NQF for Higher Education is mentioned as well in the Roadmap for the implementation of the Bologna Process that Belarus joined in 2015. A National Strategic Action Plan has been defined based on the Concept for the Development of the System of Education of the Republic of Belarus for the Period till 2020 through 2030, agreed upon by the Republican Pedagogical Conference with the participation of the President of the Republic of Belarus (23–24 August 2017) and approved by Order of the Minister of Education of the Republic of Belarus No 742 as of 27 November 2017.

The pilot NQF (2014) has eight levels that follow the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) structure with three domain descriptors for learning outcomes for knowledge (theoretical and/or practical), skills (cognitive and/or practical), and the level of responsibility and degree of autonomy.

The NQS strategy proposes the establishment of a National Council for the Development of the Qualification System. This council will be an interdepartmental as well as a tripartite body. The Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education are the lead implementation bodies, supported as well by the Institute of Labour, the Republican Institute for Vocational Education (RIPO) and the National Institute for Higher Education (RIVE). For the Bologna Process the lead is with the Ministry of Education and stakeholders from the higher education sector.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Belarus' population is just under 9.5 million and is predominantly (three-quarters) urban. The country is aging, and the population is in decline, putting pressure on younger generations. Due to relatively lower wages in comparison to most of its neighbours, migration has aggravated this decline. Internal migration from the countryside to cities has also contributed to lower birth rates.

The labour market is characterised by low levels of unemployment, and a decreasing labour force. The working-age population still makes up 60% of the total population but is in decline. Labour shortages are increasing. The employment rate is over 80%. Some 6.7% of the workforce is over the retirement age. Unemployment is very low but slowly increasing among older workers, as jobs are being automatised. The assignment of the labour force to certain jobs and the labour demand forecast based on vacancies continue from Soviet times. The practice of job placement of vocational education graduates in state enterprises still exists. The problem is not that people cannot find jobs in their field of specialisation, but the skills of the labour force are not developed enough to support innovation of the economy and make it competitive at a global level.

Belarus seems caught in a middle-income trap: economic growth of the country becomes slower and eventually stops after reaching the middle-income level. In order to overcome this situation the country shifts to the strategy of innovation and searches for new market outlets to support the rise in exports, as well as growth of the domestic demand. The biggest challenge is to make a transition from economic growth, focused on resources and depending on a low-cost labour and capital, to growth, based on high-rate productivity and innovation. This requires investments in infrastructure and education.

The current qualification system regulates both education and labour market requirements. The

system is not flexible enough in empowering mobility and career development that are crucial for reallocating and adapting the labour resources to changing labour market requirements. Qualifications under the current system are a tool for labour market regulation and a guarantee to a certain category of jobs and lifelong job security. In order to upgrade the workforce, qualifications need to become more an instrument for career development and lifelong learning, for constant adaptation to new conditions, for more self-reliance and a passport to different types of jobs. Many elderly workers may need substantial requalification to be kept active longer.

The Strategy for the Improvement of the National Qualification System will bring the system more in line with international practices, while also building on its traditional strengths. The reforms that are proposed are far reaching, but should be implemented gradually.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

Improving the NQS to ensure a match between demand and supply in qualitative and quantitative terms. To achieve this goal the following tasks are planned:

1. develop cooperation mechanisms between governmental organisations and the world of work, and educational providers to identify skill needs;
2. establish the legal and institutional framework for the functioning of the NQS, the creation of a coordination body defining priorities and main tasks (the National Council for the Development of Qualifications);
3. reorient the education system to changes in the labour market in accordance with the needs of the economy;
4. create the conditions for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and establish a system of independent assessment and certification of qualifications.

Two developments that are linked drive the introduction of a NQF to reform the existing NQS:

1. the reform of the existing qualification system based on the General State Classifier of the Republic of Belarus 'for worker professions and the job titles of employees'; the Unified Tariff Qualification System which was inherited and adapted from the Soviet Union; and

2. the Bologna Process for the establishment of the European Area for Higher Education.

The current Unified Tariff Qualification System, with its classifiers of occupations and job-titles, its handbooks of qualification characteristics, its list of educational programmes and specialisations that are all linked, is seen as too rigid for an innovation-based economy in which people routine jobs will be automated and all jobs more digitalised, in which the labour force will need to be specialised at a higher level in order to add value, and will be less dependent on the state and more autonomous. The changes will be gradual and are foreseen in two phases of the Strategy for a Sustainable Social and Economic Development towards 2030: a developmental stage until 2020, and an implementation phase between 2020 and 2030.

In May 2011 the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection prepared a draft Action Plan for implementation of the proposals of the interagency workgroup for transition of Belarus to an NQS, taking into account the experience of the European Union (EU). In 2012 the government declared its intention to develop an NQF.

The Action Plan of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection for the period 2011–15 included:

- a pilot project on the improvement of the national system of qualifications;
- the development of the draft NQF and preparation of proposals for its approval.

The same Action Plan contained measures for the development of information and analytical materials on professions and qualifications structure, on anticipation of demand of the regional labour markets, and structure of vocational education supply, etc. In 2013 the National Research Institute of Labour under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection prepared a National Innovation Project on the Development of the NQF. The European Training Foundation (ETF) supported the Institute of Labour in 2013 in piloting the establishment of the sector skills councils, including the preparation of the main statutory documents and supervising the first phase of the establishment and operation of the sector skills councils.

On 17 January 2014 the Council of Ministers issued Decree No 34 'On some key aspects to develop the national qualification system of Belarus in pilot sectors'. According to the Decree, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection should test and develop of new elements of the national

qualifications system in the Republic of Belarus. At the end of 2015 the Innovation Project presented its final report, including a roadmap for implementation that has not been adopted yet. Further testing work is foreseen with the support of the EU project on Employment and Vocational Education, while some elements (occupational standards) are already gradually introduced.

With the adoption of the Strategy for the Improvement of the National Qualifications System 2018 a new stage starts that will lead to system-wide changes over the next seven years, opening up the current qualification system, make it more flexible, more adapted to recognising qualifications during different stages of working life, facilitating the validation of non-formal and informal learning, improving as well confidence in qualifications through an independent assessment and certification system and making qualifications in Belarus more relevant and easier to compare with those in Europe and neighbouring countries.

### **International cooperation**

The Bologna Process is one of the main drivers for the development of the NQF and should ensure an NQF that is in line with the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area. A Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform was adopted during the Yerevan Ministers' Conference committing the government to higher education reform in accordance with the values, principles and goals of the European Higher Education Area in full respect of the powers of the government, the national parliament, higher education institutions, and other stakeholders. An advisory group representing stakeholders from Belarus and the Bologna Follow-Up Working Group, is monitoring the implementation of the roadmap. Work on the NQF has been progressing, introducing the three-cycle system and bringing higher education degrees fully in line with the framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, including the use of the European credit transfer system (ECTS) and Diploma Supplement.

The European project on Employment and Vocational Education that started in 2017 supports the development of the regulatory framework for NQF, including reviewing existing legal provisions, regulations on state educational standards, assessment, quality assurance and certification, testing the NQF through a set of new vocational education qualifications developed on the basis of 45 occupational standards from four strategic economic areas for which sector skills councils will be established. The occupational standards will be translated into new curricula and should facilitate the testing of the validation of non-formal

and informal learning. A Lifelong Learning Strategy is also foreseen to be developed to contextualise the implementation of the NQF beyond the current formal education system. The ETF will conduct the mid-term review of the project at the end of 2019/ beginning of 2020.

The Mobility Partnership signed in October 2016, includes the recognition and validation of skills and qualifications, and proposes close cooperation in order to facilitate mutual recognition of vocational and academic qualifications as well as to develop curricula in such a manner as to enhance recognition of respective qualifications. The Annex of the Mobility Partnership mentions supporting Belarus in improving the quality and transparency of Belarus' qualifications through consultation in the development of a NQF and linking it with the Qualifications Framework of the European Area for Higher Education and the EQF and in applying the subsidiary text to the Lisbon Convention: 'Recommendation on the use of qualifications frameworks' in the recognition of foreign qualifications. It also mentions supporting Belarus in improvement of qualifications based on learning outcomes, occupational standards and sectoral qualifications frameworks and to improve assessment, certification and quality assurance processes within the reform of broader NQS and raising awareness on the EQF and other European transparency tools as well as on the recognition procedures of Member States among relevant stakeholders.

Among the objectives of the inclusion of Belarus to WorldSkills in 2014 was to synchronise Belarusian and international qualifications and to make a realistic assessment of the level of preparation of young professionals. Although the WorldSkills standards specifications have been defined for best performers participating in international competitions, they will also have an impact of vocational qualifications in Belarus.

## **Levels and use of learning outcomes**

### **NQF scope and structure**

The pilot NQF is described in the Annex to the Council of Ministers' Decree N°34 of 17 January 2014 'On some questions on the development of the national qualifications system in the Republic of Belarus'<sup>36</sup>. The pilot NQF (2014) has eight levels that follow the EQF structure with three domain descriptors for learning outcomes for knowledge

<sup>36</sup> [www.pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=C21400034&p1=1](http://www.pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=C21400034&p1=1)

(theoretical and/or practical), skills (cognitive and/or practical) and the level of responsibility and degree of autonomy. The NQS strategy foresees as well the development of sector qualifications frameworks. During 2019–21, level descriptors will be developed and tested. The number of levels and domains of the descriptors are still open. The proposal for the Higher Education NQF describes the following levels and stages of the current national education system: the first stage of higher education, the second stage of higher education (Master's degree), the first stage of post-graduate education and the second stage (doctorate). Sectoral qualifications frameworks are also foreseen in the NQS strategy.

The scope is to cover all qualifications that are relevant for the labour market, including the qualifications of the education system and those used for upgrading and retraining adults. New types of qualifications are expected to become part of the NQS, including full and partial qualifications. Occupational standards are expected to play an important role in defining qualifications, changing the contents of education and training and establishing a system for independent assessment and for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

#### **Alignment to other classification systems**

The NQF is going to be a central part of the improved NQS. The NQF will inform sectoral qualifications frameworks. NQF levels will be used for qualifications and parts of qualifications and occupational standards. It is not yet clear whether this means that existing wage levels (*razryadi*) will disappear.

#### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

There are eight levels in the pilot NQF. The draft qualifications framework for higher education seems to have four levels, one each for the first and second cycle and two for the third cycle. The number of levels of the NQF covering lifelong learning is not yet set.

The draft level structure that is annexed to the Council of Ministers Decree for the development of the National Qualifications System in Belarus contain eight levels that follow the EQF structure with three domain descriptors for learning outcomes for knowledge (theoretical and/or practical), skills (cognitive and/or practical) and the level of responsibility and degree of autonomy. The domains of the definite NQF are still to be defined.

#### **Use of learning outcomes**

The education system is beginning to gradually introduce competence-based approaches in

selected curricula. There is a growing understanding among policymakers and practitioners that the education system needs a major re-focusing on results, and that quality and relevance should drive the vocational education modernisation agenda. Introducing the learning outcomes approach remains a major challenge for the system in the coming years. Some modern vocational and higher education standards have introduced learning outcomes, but they do not reflect fully a competence-based approach. The concept of learning outcomes is not used consistently in the different pilots. The pilot occupational standards developed in the Innovation Project provide different descriptions of competences and of qualification standards. In the standards for general education and general secondary education, neither learning outcomes nor key competences are mentioned. Learning outcomes should inform the assessment criteria and the assessment approaches. The ETF and the Council of Europe stated in 2016 that capacity building on how to formulate and use learning outcomes must be a priority (Conclusions and recommendations from the seminar 'Implementation of the modernised national qualification system in Belarus' – next steps). Occupational standards are developed in order to identify the learning outcomes for new qualifications and specialties. Currently, sector qualification councils and occupational standards are planned for architecture and construction, real estate, social services, commercial operatives, and pedagogues.

#### **Definition of qualification**

The General State Classifier of the Republic of Belarus 011-2009 'On specialties and qualifications' (Part 3) uses the following definition: 'Qualification is the preparedness of a worker to perform professional activities for executing a job of a certain degree of complexity in the framework of a specialisation or direction of specialisations.'

The following examples of qualifications are given in the General State Classifier: teacher, philologist, electrical engineer, and mechanical engineer.

The Labour Code (p. 1) describes a qualification as follows: 'Qualification is the level of general and specialised preparation of a worker, confirmed by the appropriate legal type of document (credential, diploma, certificate, etc.).'

The Labour Code uses the term 'academic qualification', and the Classifier the term 'professional qualification'. Although the Labour Code is clearly referring to credentials and awards, qualifications are still more associated with occupations than with awards. That link between credentials and the ability to perform labour

activities is maintained in the newest definition used in the NQS strategy: Qualification is the official recognition of obtained knowledge, skills and experience, necessary for the execution of a labour activity, confirmed by a legally determined type of document.

Basically, state education standards set the requirements for each individual qualification. The Innovation Project planned the development of occupational qualification standards, but they have not been used yet to assess and certificate individuals. This is foreseen, however, in the NQS strategy that links occupational standards to independent assessment.

Traditionally state education standards set the requirements for certification. State education standards for vocational and higher education are based, so far, on qualification characteristics that have been developed for occupations in the Classifier of Occupations. Occupational standards are now the new starting point for developing state educational standards, but how this is done exactly still needs to be elaborated.

### **Access, progression and credit**

Lifelong learning as a notion is known in Belarus but its actual meaning requires further development and practical implementation measures. The Code on Education uses terms as additional adult education and post-university education. Additional adult education includes 14 types of educational programmes. Non-formal education is gaining importance outside the formal education provision. The NQS strategy aims to widen access to qualifications.

The Code of Education guarantees access to education to all citizens, but access to higher education is regulated. It also states that progression and continuity of the levels and degrees within the initial education system is guaranteed. Graduates of full-time vocational education can continue to post-secondary and higher education but will have to pass entrance exams. Government executive bodies define the national demand for trained specialists, with particular attention to economic, educational and social policy perspectives. The existing admission system at the universities of the country allows the most gifted applicants to be selected on a competitive basis.

Since 2008 the ECTS has been in use in higher education, and these are now gradually brought in line with ECTS guidelines that make a stronger connection to learning outcomes. Scientific research is undertaken to explore the possibilities of introducing a credit system for vocational education.

## **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

### **NQF legal basis**

The pilot NQF was provisionally legislated. On 17 January 2014 the Council of Ministers issued Decree No 34 'On some key aspects to develop the national qualification system' in order to test and develop new elements of the NQS, including:

1. establishment of sector councils for qualifications;
2. development of sector qualifications frameworks in accordance with the national framework of qualifications for the pilot economic sectors;
3. development of occupational standards;
4. development of standard cards for professional development and career growth.

According to the Strategy for the Improvement of the National Qualification System (2018), the NQF in Belarus is part of a new qualification system. The new NQF descriptors are planned to be developed in the coming years. During 2017–18 important legal documents were developed that prepare the implementation of the NQF. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection adopted an exemplary regulation No 36 on sector qualifications councils on 28 July 2017 as well as methodological recommendations (resolution No 37 of 28 July 2017) on the development of occupational standards. The most important legal document is the Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No 764 'On the strategy to improve the national qualification system of the Republic of Belarus' of 24 October 2018. The strategy builds on the results of the Innovation Project launched after the Council of Ministers Decree No 34 of 17 January 2014 'On some key aspects to develop the national qualification system'. That decree stated that the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection should test and develop new elements of the NQS, including the development of qualifications frameworks for pilot economic sectors in accordance with the NQF. The EU project on Employment and Vocational Education that started in 2017 provides support for developing the regulatory framework for NQF implementation and testing its components.

The NQF for higher education is mentioned as well in the Roadmap for the implementation of the Bologna Process that Belarus joined in 2015. A National Strategic Action Plan has been defined based on the Concept for the Development of the System of Education of the Republic of Belarus for the Period till 2020 through 2030 agreed upon by the Republican Pedagogical Conference with the participation of the President of the Republic



of Belarus (23–24 August 2017) and approved by the Order of the Minister of Education of the Republic of Belarus No 742 as of 27 November 2017. In the Belarus Strategy that is part of the Paris Communiqué adopted by the Ministers of Education, it is stated that the Higher Education NQF (the fourth step of the development of the NQF) which was developed in 2018 should be adopted by 2019 and prepared for self-certification in 2020.

The NQS will need to be further embedded in education and labour legislation. The EU project on Employment and Vocational Education will review existing legislation to assess what needs to change. This will lead to changes in the Education Code and the Labour Code and other laws and regulations.

### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

The strategy foresees the establishment of new bodies such as the National Council for the Development of the Occupation System, a state body overseeing the assessment and certification of qualifications, sector qualification councils and centres for assessment and certification of qualifications.

The main instrument to test and elaborate the NQF is the EU project on Employment and Vocational Education. It foresees that development of the NQS is coordinated with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in agreement with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Economy, and includes:

- a. reviewing the proposed NQF;
- b. referencing new qualifications to NQF levels;
- c. developing an implementation plan with allocation of roles/functions of different actors;
- d. supporting a Methodical Centre for NQS development to be established by the Ministry of Labour;
- e. developing a regulatory legal framework on the implementation of the NQF;
- f. reviewing the existing template of state educational standards for vocational education;
- g. elaborating uniform terminology;
- h. integrating the levels of vocational technical and secondary (specialised) technical education;
- i. re-formulating individual study programmes in line with a learning-outcome-based approach;
- j. piloting the new standards and training programmes in the pilot schools and companies;
- k. identifying key competences and developing recommendations on their inclusion in all qualifications.

The Bologna Roadmap is overseen by the Bologna Follow-Up Group, helped by an Advisory Group, which meets every six months. The group includes

three representatives from stakeholders in Belarus, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Bologna Secretariat, the European Student Union, and from several countries that participate in the Bologna Process. The group works on the implementation of the roadmap in cooperation with the Belarusian authorities, regularly reviews the implementation plans for higher education reforms, building on the stages set in the roadmap. It assists the national authorities in the implementation of the roadmap and development of the individual areas of education policy, provides expertise, promotes cooperation, and keeps the Bologna Follow-Up Working Group updated on the progress. The National Institute for Higher Education (RIVE) supports the Ministry of Education and representatives from the higher education sector logistically in the higher education reforms linked to the Bologna Process.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

Quality assurance systems have developed considerably in recent years. Different processes are in place to accredit providers' capacities to deliver specific programmes. The compliance of the provision with educational standards is an important part of the system, in both vocational and higher education, and quality assurance builds on internal self-assessment processes in providers that have considerable autonomy. For teachers, qualification requirements are a tool for career development and their performance is regularly assessed. Learning outcomes are not yet playing a very important role in quality assurance processes. Quality assurance is a very important part of the EU project on Employment and Vocational Education that aims to improve quality assurance measures for vocational education qualifications and provision.

Belarus has developed the concept for establishing the national independent system of higher education quality assurance. Measures will be taken to further improve the procedures of internal quality assurance in higher education institutes by 2020 and to develop a legal framework for the activities of an independent quality assurance agency with the purpose of launching its full-scale practical activities by 2022. The activities aimed at establishing the independent higher education quality assurance system and preparing the national independent quality assurance agency to associate with ENQA/EQAR will be carried out in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015).

There is not yet a special approach to ensure the quality of qualifications, but the identification of relevant profiles based on labour market

information, the work of sector qualifications councils, occupational standards, sector qualifications and learning outcomes, and the validation of the learning outcomes will be part of the quality assurance measures as well as a system of independent assessment.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is an explicit goal of the NQS. The strategy does not distinguish between non-formal and informal learning, but refers to both uncertificated learning of groups of learners and autonomous learning by individuals. The Paris Communiqué (appendix 2) states that, by 2019, international experts/consultants, including ETF experts, will be asked to advise on building up the grounds for developing a legal framework aimed at ensuring prior learning recognition, with a view to developing the respective procedure in 2021.

There is a clear link between the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the NQS. In the Roadmap for the Bologna Process, it is stated that Belarus should develop a plan for the recognition of prior learning by the end of 2015, and implement the plan by the end of 2017. This is now reflected in the Strategy for the National Qualification System, although the dates have moved slightly forward. By 2021 there will be a clear concept of validation of non-formal and informal learning and by 2025 the system will be functioning.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

The main instruments for developing the NQF are the Strategy for the Improvement of the National Qualification System, the EU project on Employment and Vocational Education and the Bologna Process. Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of NQF implementation, other than monitoring of the Bologna Roadmap by the Advisory Group, have not been defined yet.

The NQS strategy is divided in two phases.

1. The developmental phase (2018–20) during which the legal basis for the new NQS is developed and organisational work started, including awareness raising and training activities; labour market analysis; elaboration of the NQF levels, and occupational standards development; development of new types of

education standards; and new institutional structures are established.

2. The implementation phase (2012–25) during which the new elements are put into practice in order to improve the links between supply and demand, and ensure recognition of all types of qualification through independent assessment.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for a General Classifier of Specialties and Qualifications that will be adapted to the new NQS. Moreover, the new NQS should include new types of qualification (including partial qualifications) that are outside the education system. Occupational standards will play an important role in defining new qualifications.

### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

None yet as the NQF is not implemented.

### Impact for end-users

None yet, but the number of people involved in the development of the new NQS is gradually increasing.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Belarus joined the Bologna Process during the Yerevan Ministerial Meeting in May 2015. An ambitious roadmap has been developed to ensure that Belarus can progress quickly and join the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area by 2020, but progress so far is not in line with this roadmap. The pilot NQF in the Innovation Project was very similar to the EQF in terms of descriptors and levels. The NQF and EQF are mentioned as references in the Annex of the Mobility Partnership that was signed in October 2016.

## Important lessons and future plans

The Strategy for the Improvement of the National Qualification System is an important step forward as it describes the outlines and functions of the improved NQS and the steps to get there. In the meantime, the EU project on Employment and Vocational Education has started its implementation. At the same time – within the framework of the Bologna Process and the government support to the implementation of the Roadmap for the Bologna Process, and an Advisory Group established by the Bologna Follow-Up Group and national stakeholders – higher education reforms are moving forward, albeit sometimes faced with delays in legislative and implementation processes.

In comparison to the situation two years ago, the structures of the new NQS are much clearer

but there is still much conceptual, technical and methodological work needed before the system can become operational. This includes the functioning of sector qualification councils to develop occupational standards, translating occupational standards in education standards, developing a system of independent assessment, defining the national and sectoral qualifications frameworks and improving the awareness and involvement of all stakeholders. The reform of the qualification system is not only about finding technical solutions to new challenges. It will require the active participation of many stakeholders at different levels to be successful.

Capacity building on how to formulate and use learning outcomes is important to become gradually more familiar with them. These learning outcomes need to include transversal skills (key competences) as well as occupation specific skills. With the upcoming reforms, there is a big need to ensure terminology reflects new concepts and approaches, so that they are understandable and understood in a coherent way between stakeholders. The available information could be shared via websites. Many elements are covered by the EU project on Employment and Vocational Education, which will function as a new laboratory, but developments have to be widened beyond the project if system-wide implementation is supposed to start in 2020. This will include reaching out to representatives of the world of work, which only had a limited involvement in defining qualifications so far, but also in preparing education providers, by involving them from an early stage in the design of the new system. There is ample international experience, showing that the only way to ensure that capacities for reform across the system will be there is starting to work with whomever is available, irrespective of their current capacity to contribute.

The creation of a lead body – the National Council for the Development of the Qualification System – over the coming months will be an important step forward to coordinate the role of different stakeholders and institutions, to define priorities and to set precise goals. As Belarus is entering a whole new set up of institutions and defining and testing new methodologies over the coming three years, good feedback mechanisms will be important to establish an inclusive and productive qualification system and to resolve unforeseen difficulties.

Many elements are promising for the progress of qualification reforms: the Strategy for the Improvement of the National Qualification System that is creating a very clear framework; the concrete

roadmap for reforms under the Bologna Process, and support of the Advisory Group; scientific and technical expertise developed through the Institute of Labour, the Republican Institute for Vocational Education (RIPO) and the National Institute for Higher Education; the experience of the Innovation Project; cooperation between the ministries of Labour, Education and Economics; easier access to lessons learned from other countries; and the EU project on Employment and Vocational Education providing international experience.

Belarus has started relatively late with its qualification reforms. The country is aging rapidly, and although it recognises the importance of education and of improving the quality of its workforce, it will not be easy to overcome rigidities in the current education and qualification system. The initial education system and the adult learning provision are not well linked through a concept for lifelong learning with a practical dimension. Many concepts and solutions from the past are very detailed and prescriptive and may often seem to offer more solid solutions than the alternatives for a modernised, more flexible system. Overcoming the legacy of the past – with different institutions working in silos, with a historical understanding of qualifications, levels and competences that is different than those used internationally, with a strong scientific orientation, and resistance against widespread experimentation with the involvement of outsiders – may slow down implementation. Many reforms can only be implemented and improved in learning by doing, solving one problem at the time. Without a strong coordination, open communication and a clear vision, it will be difficult to mobilise all the stakeholders and build capacity. In this context, a clear institutional home for the implementation of the reforms, to ensure technical coordination between stakeholders and ensure communication, was lacking and it is hoped that it will now take shape with the establishment of the National Council for the Development of the Qualification System, which would need a good secretariat and methodological support to be successful.

#### Abbreviations

ECTS	European credit transfer system
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
NQF	national qualifications framework
NQS	national qualification system

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# BELGIUM

Due to its federal structure, Belgium developed three national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), one for each of the three language communities: Flemish, French and the German-speaking. Despite adaptation to the needs of each community, the three frameworks share important common features, supporting interoperability. An amendment to Belgian federal law on the general structure of the education system was adopted in 2012, stating that the European qualifications framework will be used as a common reference for the three communities in Belgium; this addresses the challenge of linking the three frameworks, and potentially eases mobility of Belgian citizens within the country. The three frameworks have been/will be referenced separately to the European qualifications framework: the Flemish and French Communities have completed this process and the German-speaking Community is expected to do so in the near future.

The country as a whole performs above average on a number of key education and training indicators: the rate of early leaving has fallen (8.9% in 2017, compared to 10.6% in the EU), tertiary educational attainment and the employment rate of recent graduates are high, and participation in early childhood education and care is among the highest in the EU. On the other hand, the percentage of adults in lifelong learning is below the EU target. Equity is one of the main challenges in the country. The gap in performance between students with low socioeconomic and migrant background and those that do not come from disadvantaged groups is one of the highest in Europe. Inequalities also exist between communities and education sectors, with students from the French Community and from vocational education and training (VET) performing less well. Plans to modernise school education were adopted in 2017, including a major systemic reform in the French Community. The Flemish Community adopted key measures targeted at secondary education, and introduced centrally validated tests

to address concerns about the unequal value of primary school qualifications awarded. In 2017, participation in adult learning reached its highest level (8.5%) and was strengthened in line with the 2016 Council recommendation on upskilling pathways<sup>37</sup> (European Commission, 2018).

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<sup>37</sup> Council of the European Union (2016). Council recommendation of 19 December 2016 on upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults. *Journal of the European Union*, C 484, 24.12.2016, pp. 1–6. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2016:484:FULL&from=EN>

# Flemish Community of Belgium

## Introduction and context

On 30 April 2009 the Flemish Parliament and Government in Belgium adopted the act on the qualification structure<sup>38</sup> ('kwalificatiestructuur') introducing a comprehensive qualifications framework, covering all levels and types of qualifications. The framework, based on an eight-level structure described by the two main categories of knowledge/skills and context/autonomy/responsibility, was formally referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in June 2011.

The road from formal adoption to implementation proved more time-consuming than originally predicted. Delays were partly caused by the need for further legal instruments (implementation decrees on professional and educational qualifications), and partly by negotiations with the social partners on how to link and level professional qualifications to the framework. This clarification was largely completed by 2013–14, allowing implementation to speed up<sup>39</sup>. An update of the reference-report was presented in 2014.

The Flemish qualifications framework (FQF) is operational, including by February 2019 a total of 384 professional ('Beroepskwalificatie') and 252 educational qualifications ('Onderwijskwalificatie') at level 6 and 7 in the qualifications database<sup>40</sup>. Professional qualifications have been levelled individually (as opposed to a placement 'block-wise') in a process involving the main social partners.

The qualifications framework for higher education was self-certified against the qualifications

framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2009 and is an integrate part of the FQF for lifelong learning.

## Policy objectives

The 2009 act on the qualifications structure defines the Flemish qualification system as '[...] a systematic classification of recognised qualifications based on a generally adopted qualifications framework (FQF)'. The qualification structure (including the qualifications framework) aims at making qualifications and their mutual relationships transparent, so that stakeholders in education (students, pupils and providers) and in the labour market (social partners) '[...] can communicate unambiguously about qualifications and the associated competences' (Flemish Parliament, 2009, Chapter I, Article 3).

The act underlines that the qualification structure (including the qualifications framework) should act as a reference:

- for quality assurance, for developing and renewing courses;
- for developing and aligning procedures for recognising acquired competences;
- for comparison (nationally and at European level) of qualifications.

This indicates that the FQF is seen as more than a simple description of existing qualifications: it plays a role in the continuous review and renewal of qualifications.

In 2018, the Flemish Government launched changes in secondary education (new educational structure and update of content) aiming to help reduce social inequalities. With this reform, starting in 2019<sup>41</sup>, the FQF is seen as an instrument reshaping the structure and content of secondary education. It is stipulated in legislation that educational qualifications are a leading principle of this reform. In vocational educational programmes, professional qualifications are integrated in educational qualifications<sup>42</sup>. The new policy reform aims at introducing the concept of 'competences' as a reference within secondary education. There is also

<sup>38</sup> Flemish Parliament (2009). Decreet betreffende de kwalificatiestructuur [Act on the qualification structure]. *Belgisch Staatsblad*, 16.7.2009, p. 49597. <http://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=14111> [accessed 19 March 2019].

<sup>39</sup> The implementation decisions for professional qualifications were agreed by the Flemish Government in January 2013. The implementation decision which operationalises educational qualifications level (1–4) was approved in January 2014. The implementation decisions for educational qualifications level 4 (Se-n-Se) and 5 were agreed by the Flemish Government in January 2013 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> The qualification database (*Kwalificatiedatabank*): [https://app.akov.be/pls/pakov/f?p=VLAAMSE\\_KWALIFICATIESTRUCTUUR:KWALIFICATIEDATABANK](https://app.akov.be/pls/pakov/f?p=VLAAMSE_KWALIFICATIESTRUCTUUR:KWALIFICATIEDATABANK) [accessed February 2019].

<sup>41</sup> The reform of secondary education will start on 1 September 2019 and be finalised in 2026 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

<sup>42</sup> Educational qualifications are based on learning outcomes determined by education level. The parliament Act on the Flemish qualification structure makes a distinction between the procedures for recognition at levels 1–5 and levels 6–8 (Government of Flanders; AKOV (2011)).

reform at level 5 where the current higher vocational education HBO5<sup>43</sup> will be transformed into short-cycle higher education qualification as a recognised specialised professional qualification for the FQF and EQF at level 5 (European Commission and Cedefop (2018)). This short-cycle qualification will give access to bachelor (level 6)<sup>44</sup>.

On 1 September 2019, this short cycle degree will be considered a fully fledged component of higher education, to attract pupils who currently do not find their way to tertiary education (see the national reform programme 2018). Only one type of higher VET qualification at level 5 (HBO5) will continue: the post-secondary programme for nurses at FQF/EQF level 5.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The term 'competence' plays a significant role in Flemish education, training and employment policies and is used as an overarching concept. Competence and learning outcomes are used as interchangeable terms in education and training with the exception of higher education.

The FQF is based on an eight-level structure described by the categories of knowledge and skills, and context, autonomy and responsibility. Compared to the EQF, FQF descriptors are more detailed, particularly for lower levels. A main feature of the Flemish framework is the use of 'context' as an explicit element of the descriptors. The context in which an individual is able to function is seen as an important part of any qualification.

The descriptors are used to describe two main categories of qualification; professional and educational. A professional qualification is based on a set of competences allowing an individual to exercise a profession and can be achieved both inside and outside education. An educational qualification is based on a set of competences an individual needs to participate in society, to continue education and/or to exercise professional activities. An educational qualification can only be acquired through participating in an education programme and in education institutions recognised by the Flemish authorities. Depending on the educational level and the form of vocational education,

educational qualifications may consist of one or more professional qualifications, final objectives and/or specific final objectives<sup>45</sup>. The distinction between professional and educational qualifications is applied for all eight levels<sup>46</sup> of the framework; allowing professional qualifications to be placed at high levels in parallel to traditional academic qualifications.

Practical implementation of the principles of learning outcomes/competences has progressed in recent years. The VET sector is probably the most experienced in this field. A competence-based approach is well integrated, referring to professional requirements in the labour market. The use of competences in initial VET has been inspired by Dutch developments, particularly the upper secondary vocational education ('middelbaar beroepsonderwijs') reform. Learning outcomes are also present in general education, for example by the setting of learning objectives/the attainment targets in national core curricula.

A public debate<sup>47</sup> on the attainment targets/learning outcomes for secondary education, including vocationally oriented secondary education (initial VET), took place between February and June 2016. Following the advice of the Council of State, the Flemish Government adopted on 2 February 2018 a decree<sup>48</sup> on altering the secondary education structure and the renewal of learning outcomes for compulsory education<sup>49</sup>. The decree stipulates 16 'key competences'<sup>50</sup>, based on the results of the public debate. All these key competences need to be considered as broad thematic domains, which

<sup>43</sup> HBO5 comprises vocationally-oriented training programmes organised at FQF/EQF level 5 which do not lead to a bachelor or master degree (European Commission and Cedefop (2018)).

<sup>44</sup> It will, however, be the autonomy of higher education institutions to determine whether students of the short-cycle can receive credit exemptions.

<sup>45</sup> [www.onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/kwalificatiestructuur/links-en-publicaties/bijlagen/Brochure-Developed\\_Approved\\_Implemented-\(En\)-12-2012.pdf](http://www.onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/kwalificatiestructuur/links-en-publicaties/bijlagen/Brochure-Developed_Approved_Implemented-(En)-12-2012.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> There are currently no professional qualifications at levels 1 and 8.

<sup>47</sup> This debate involved around 40 000 participants, half of which were young learners. The 2006 EU key-competences framework served as one of the reference documents. More information can be found at: [www.onderwijs.be/](http://www.onderwijs.be/)

<sup>48</sup> More information can be found at: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-3\\_en#2017\\_Modernisation\\_of\\_secondary\\_education\\_legislative\\_process](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-3_en#2017_Modernisation_of_secondary_education_legislative_process)

<sup>49</sup> Compulsory education lasts for a maximum of 12 school years, up to the age of 18 or as soon as a pupil obtains the diploma of secondary education.

<sup>50</sup> The 16 'key competences' relate to: physical and mental well-being, Dutch, other languages, digital and media literacy, social competences, civic competences, historical awareness, spatial awareness, sustainable development, economic and financial competences, judicial competences, learning and research competences (critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, ...), self-consciousness and self-expression, entrepreneurial competences, cultural consciousness and expression.

will be further operationalised in attainment targets. For this reason, development committees have been established, comprising representatives of education networks, teachers and academics.

In the first half of 2018, the new attainment targets for the first grade of secondary education were developed, within the framework of the above key competences. They were validated by the Flemish Parliament on 5 December 2018. Their implementation will start in September 2019. In November 2018, development committees started the development of the attainment targets for the second and third grade of secondary education, though only for those tracks preparing for tertiary education. Although it has been agreed that more attention needs to be given to key competences in the vocationally oriented tracks, it is still subject to debate which of the presently developed attainment targets for the second and third grades will be implemented in the vocational tracks as well.

Developments in higher education have been influenced by the Bologna process, but are mainly dependent on initiatives taken by single institutions or associations of higher education institutes. While reflecting a diverse situation, a clear strengthening of the learning outcomes principle has taken place in Flanders. Learning outcomes that have been acquired previously can (after successful assessment or validation of them) lead to acquisition of the corresponding credits in higher education. Credits are referred to in Flanders as 'study points', while students who successfully complete a course or modules are awarded a credit certificate<sup>51</sup> (European Commission et al., forthcoming). At levels 6 to 8, the Parliament Act of 2009<sup>52</sup> states that higher education institutions will jointly describe the subject-specific learning outcomes for higher education courses. The validated descriptions of the subject-specific learning outcomes are automatically recognised as educational qualifications by the Flemish Government and published in the Flemish qualifications database (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

In adult education, a working group of representatives of education and representatives of the Flemish public employment service are working together in developing education and training programmes. In this way the content of

both types of programme is based on professional qualifications standards and the building blocks that are part of the programmes are the same or compatible. Training programmes outside formal education (for example, the public employment service, the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training) can be based on professional qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Flemish national qualifications framework process has involved a broad range of stakeholders at all stages<sup>53</sup>, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Training. Other ministries – Ministry of Labour and Social Economy and Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media – have also been involved. From the education and training side, participation by relevant sectors (general education, initial, continuing and higher vocational education and training, and higher education) has been important. Both the Minister of Education and the Minister of Work and Social Economy wanted a closer alignment between education and training and the labour market. To formalise this collaboration, an overarching management committee of education, training and work has been created to prepare and monitor policy decisions.

The day-to-day running of the FQF has been delegated to the Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education Qualifications and Study Allowances (AHOVOKS, Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs, Kwalificaties en Studietoelagen)<sup>54</sup>. The agency was appointed as EQF national coordination point and is responsible for coordinating the process of implementation, involving all stakeholders through expert committees.

<sup>51</sup> Students get credits for parts of the learning programme for which they were successfully assessed.

<sup>52</sup> Flemish Parliament (2009). Decreet betreffende de kwalificatiestructuur [Act on the qualification structure]. *Belgisch Staatsblad*, 16.7.2009, p. 49597. <http://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=14111> [accessed 18 March 2019].

<sup>53</sup> In the Flemish Community, the Department for Education and Training coordinates policy and three executive autonomous agencies are responsible for implementation, as well as the autonomous Education Inspectorate. The three agencies are AgODI, (Agency for Educational Services for elementary, secondary, part-time artistic education, student guidance centres), AHOVOKS (Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Allowances) and AGIO, (Agency for Educational Infrastructure), which is responsible for designing, planning, building and renovating school buildings for grant-aided public and private schools. Source: [www.oecd.org/education/Education-Policy-Outlook-Country-Profile-Belgium.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/education/Education-Policy-Outlook-Country-Profile-Belgium.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> AHOVOKS took over this role from the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV – Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming), which has been discontinued due to reorganisation of the Flemish administration.

Quality assurance is an important topic on the policy agenda in Belgium Flanders. The main body overseeing quality assurance for professional qualifications, as well as the integrated framework for quality assurance for professional qualifications, is AHOVOKS<sup>55</sup>. The development of occupational standards is supervised by AHOVOKS, involving sectoral representatives of employers and employees, VDAB (Flemish public employment service), Syntra Vlaanderen (Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurship Training), independent experts and education and training providers.

The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) ensures the quality of higher education in the Netherlands and Flanders by assessing and accrediting programmes, as well as contributing to improving quality<sup>56</sup>.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>57</sup>

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been well-established on the public policy agenda in Belgium. In Flanders, the term EVC ('erkennen van competenties' (recognition of competences)) is used to refer to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Validation is used to gain admission to an education and training programme, to request exemptions from (parts of) the study programme and to obtain a work experience certificate<sup>58</sup>. Validation is a matter of policy in different sectors and the arrangements in these sectors differ as each Ministry department regulates validation within its own sector. Validation practices in the different sectors have not changed substantially since 2016. The main change has been increased cooperation between different validation providers (inside as well as outside education) and the willingness to create a single integrated framework linking validation processes to the FQF.

<sup>55</sup> AHOVOKS has made available a self-assessment instrument to help organisations assess the quality of their validation procedures. More information can be found at: <http://erkennenvancompetenties.be/evc-professionals/evc-toolbox/> [accessed 18 March 2019].

<sup>56</sup> NVAO is listed on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). More information on NVAO can be found at: [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/NVAO\\_-\\_Accreditation\\_Organisation\\_of\\_the\\_Netherlands\\_and\\_Flanders](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/NVAO_-_Accreditation_Organisation_of_the_Netherlands_and_Flanders) [accessed 18 March 2019].

<sup>57</sup> This section draws mainly on input from 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>58</sup> Legislation is planned that will make it possible for an individual to receive a professional qualification after an EVC-procedure.

New developments in quality assurance have also taken place. A decree<sup>59</sup> approved by the Flemish government in February 2019 has the aim of strengthening the coherence of validation systems. An integrated quality framework has been developed in this decree; it will serve as the basis for a system of external quality assurance for all courses resulting in a professional qualification at all levels<sup>60</sup>. This will ensure that all people following professional courses or procedures for recognition of prior learning resulting in the same professional qualifications titles, also obtain the same set of competences after completion of the course or procedure.

Readily accessible information and guidance is provided in Belgium Flanders, but awareness-raising efforts will only be increased once the new, integrated approach enters into force. All information on validation in Flanders is available to the public via a dedicated website<sup>61</sup>.

## NQF implementation

The road from adoption to implementation and operational status has proved complex for the Flemish NQF. The transformation of the 2009 law into practice was needed: it required the introduction of a series of 'implementation decrees'<sup>62</sup> as well as clarification of the role of the social partners in linking professional qualifications to the framework. A qualifications framework for higher education linked to the Bologna process was developed and put in place (2008)<sup>63</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> Flemish Government (2019). Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering betreffende de uitvoering van het decreet van (datum) betreffende een geïntegreerd beleid voor de erkenning van verworven competenties [Decision of the Flemish Government concerning the implementation of the decree of (date) concerning an integrated policy for the recognition of acquired competences]. [www.vlaanderen.be/nl/nbwa-news-message-document/document/090135578027091c](http://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/nbwa-news-message-document/document/090135578027091c)  
Flemish Government (2019). Ontwerp van besluit betreffende de uitvoering van het decreet betreffende een geïntegreerd beleid voor de erkenning van verworven competenties (EVC) [Draft decision on the implementation of the decree concerning an integrated policy for the recognition of acquired competences (EVC)]. [www.vlaanderen.be/nl/nbwa-news-message-document/document/090135578027091b](http://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/nbwa-news-message-document/document/090135578027091b)

<sup>60</sup> This decree covers professional qualifications at levels 1–4 as well as professional qualifications at levels 5–8 obtained outside higher education.

<sup>61</sup> EVC – erkennen van competenties: [www.erkennenvancompetenties.be/](http://www.erkennenvancompetenties.be/) [accessed December 2016].

<sup>62</sup> For an overview over legal initiatives between 2009 and 2017, see: <http://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/#>

<sup>63</sup> The relationship between the two framework initiatives was discussed throughout the development process and



The FQF distinguishes between ‘professional qualifications’ and ‘educational qualifications’. By February 2019, a total of 384 professional and 252 educational qualifications (mostly bachelor and master degrees) were formally included in the FQF and published in the Flemish qualifications database<sup>64</sup>, indicating the NQF/EQF level<sup>65</sup>. Educational qualifications at levels 1 to 4 are still under revision and have not been included in the database. It is also worth noting that professional qualifications cover a wide span, currently covering levels 2 to 7 (384 professional qualifications (‘Beroepskwalificatie’)<sup>66</sup>. This demonstrates the increasingly important role of the framework in making this part of the qualification landscape more visible.

Flemish professional qualifications are developed within a tripartite system, giving the social partners, in the context of the Social and Economic Committee (SERV), a decisive role. All professional qualifications build on professional competence profiles<sup>67</sup> defined and approved by the social partners: a professional qualification has to reflect the competences of the profile and no single professional qualification description can be approved without social partner input and approval. While time-consuming and challenging, the inclusion of professional qualifications into the FQF can be deemed a success as it demonstrates that stakeholders are fully involved and responsible for implementing the framework.

So far, the FQF’s communication efforts have been primarily oriented towards partners at macro and meso level (representatives of other policy domains, social partners, sectoral organisations, education institutions, learners). Dissemination of information about the NQF is carried out via the NQF website<sup>68</sup>, brochures with technical information<sup>69</sup> and seminars, meetings with sectoral organisations. The guidance

the 2009 act takes this into account in its terminology, framework descriptors and procedures.

<sup>64</sup> Flemish qualifications database: [https://app.akov.be/pls/pakov/f?p=VLAAMSE\\_KWALIFICATIESTRUCTUUR:KWALIFICATIEDATABANK](https://app.akov.be/pls/pakov/f?p=VLAAMSE_KWALIFICATIESTRUCTUUR:KWALIFICATIEDATABANK)

<sup>65</sup> This applies for higher education qualifications; for professional qualifications only the NQF level is mentioned.

<sup>66</sup> There are 42 professional qualifications at level 2, 108 at level 3, 135 at level 4, 78 at level 5, 15 at level 6, and 6 at level 7. Source: Flemish qualifications database.

<sup>67</sup> Occupational competence profiles had been defined using the *Competent* database created by the SERV. The database itself built on the French operational directory of professions and jobs (Répertoire opérationnel des métiers et des emplois – ROME), which was adapted to the Flemish labour market (Cedefop, forthcoming).

<sup>68</sup> Flemish qualifications framework website: <http://vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be/en/>

<sup>69</sup> <http://vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be/wat-is-vks/meer-info-en-downloads/>

and counselling practitioners of the Flemish public employment service (VDAB) and the stakeholders that develop professional qualifications use the same reference framework (the *Competent* database)<sup>70</sup>. The Flemish public employment service is also involved in meetings about policy decisions on qualifications<sup>71</sup>. Until reform of secondary education is implemented, the FQF will not be well known by guidance and counselling practitioners working in schools (European Commission and Cedefop (2018)).

In the new legislation on secondary education, it is stated that FQF/EQF levels have to be mentioned on certificates and diplomas, only for the initial VET apprenticeship system, ‘dual leren’<sup>72</sup>). The FQF/EQF levels are not included on Europass supplements for professional and educational qualifications and there is no intention to include them in the near future.

An evaluation of the framework has not yet been made.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The FQF was referenced to the EQF in June 2011, and an updated report was submitted in March 2014. A qualifications framework for higher education linked to the Bologna process was put in place in 2008 and self-certified to the QF-EHEA in 2009.

## Important lessons and future plans

The NQF is considered operational. A qualifications database has been established and a large number

<sup>70</sup> The *Competent* database can be accessed at: <http://production.competent.be/competent-nl/main.html>

<sup>71</sup> The VDAB organises numerous practically-oriented vocational training programmes in almost all vocational and attitudinal (work related behaviour, adaptation to the work situation, career and job-orientation courses) fields and also offers Dutch-as-a-second-language and ICT courses. These courses are offered in a flexible and individually tailored way (timetable, methods, place, module scheduled). When there is a professional qualification available that corresponds with a vocational training programme, the VDAB updates the content of the training programme so that it is completely in line with the competences of the professional qualification (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

<sup>72</sup> See Article 33 of the decision: Flemish Government (2018). Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering houdende uitvoeringsmaatregelen betreffende het dual leren en de aanloopfase en diverse andere maatregelen [Decision of the Flemish Government concerning implementing measures concerning dual learning and the start-up phase and various other measures]. *Belgisch Staatsblad*, p. 79631, 19 October 2018. <https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=15263>

of qualifications have been already included (mostly professional qualifications and educational qualifications from higher education (bachelor and master degrees)). Educational qualifications at levels 1 to 4 are being revised and are not yet included: the framework plays a role in the continuous review and renewal of qualifications. Stakeholders consider implementation of the FQF for professional qualifications to be successful (European Commission and Cedefop (2018)).

Future FQF plans include updating and reviewing more qualifications and including them in the register and framework.

An integrated quality assurance system for professional qualifications, when complete, will

further strengthen the role of the framework in building trust in professional qualifications and acquired competences, independent of the way they were obtained.

The key challenges for FQF implementation in the coming period are related to alignment between social partners and education and training providers, who can have a different view on the use of qualifications in education and training programmes. Discussion is continuing with formal providers of secondary education on the way to integrate professional qualifications into educational qualifications in secondary vocation and technical education (European Commission and Cedefop (2018)).

**Table 6. Qualifications framework of the Flemish Community of Belgium (FQF)**

NQF LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctoral degree ( <i>Universiteit – Doctor</i> )		8
7	Academic master degree ( <i>Universiteit – Master</i> ) Advanced master programmes ( <i>master na master – manama</i> )	Examples: Librarian/information manager ( <i>Bibliothecaris/Informatiemanager</i> ) Physiotherapist ( <i>Kinesitherapeut</i> ) Archivist/information manager ( <i>Archivaris/informatiebeheerder</i> )	7
6	Academic bachelor degree ( <i>Universiteit – Bachelor</i> ) Professional bachelor degree ( <i>Hogeschool – Bachelor</i> ) Advanced bachelor programme ( <i>bachelor na bachelor – banaba</i> )	Examples: Dietitian ( <i>Diëtist</i> ) Dental technologist ( <i>Dentaaltechnoloog</i> ) Textile designer ( <i>Textielontwerper</i> )	6
5	Higher vocational education 5 ( <i>Hoger Beroepsonderwijs 5</i> )	Examples: Archive expert ( <i>Archiefdeskundige</i> ) Coordinator-advisor of decorative painting ( <i>Coördinator-adviseur decoratieve schilderwerken</i> ) Police inspector ( <i>Inspecteur Politie</i> )	5

**Table 6. Qualifications framework of the Flemish Community of Belgium (FQF) (Continued)**

NQF LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	EQF LEVELS
4	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate ( <i>Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs – ASO</i> ) Upper secondary technical education school leaving certificate ( <i>Technisch Secundair Onderwijs – TSO</i> ) Upper secondary artistic education leaving certificate ( <i>Kunstsecundair Onderwijs – KSO</i> ) Secondary-after-secondary education certificate ( <i>Secundair na Secundair – SenSe</i> ) in upper secondary technical education ( <i>TSO</i> ) Certificate of a specialisation year (7 <sup>th</sup> year) in upper secondary vocational education ( <i>BSO</i> )	Examples: Barman ( <i>barman</i> ) Electrician ( <i>Elektromecanicien</i> ) Commercial assistant ( <i>Commercieel assistant</i> ) Pastry chef ( <i>Banketbakker</i> )	4
3	Upper secondary vocational education certificate ( <i>Beroepssecundair Onderwijs – BSO</i> )	Examples: Construction welder ( <i>Constructielasser</i> ) Florist assistant ( <i>Assistent florist</i> ) Driver in the fuel service ( <i>Chauffeur in de brandstoffenhandel</i> )	3
2	Adult basic education Lower secondary education – first stage of secondary education Pre-vocational education	Examples: Animal production assistant ( <i>Assistent dierlijke productie</i> ) Room service employee ( <i>Medewerker kamerdienst</i> ) Bakery employee ( <i>Medewerker bakkerij</i> )	2
1	Certificate of elementary education (6 years)		1

Source: Adapted from AKOV, 2014. Flemish qualification database: [https://app.akov.be/pls/pakov/f?p=VLAAMSE\\_KWALIFICATIESTRUCTUUR:KWALIFICATIEDATABANK](https://app.akov.be/pls/pakov/f?p=VLAAMSE_KWALIFICATIESTRUCTUUR:KWALIFICATIEDATABANK) [accessed 1 February 2018].

<b>Abbreviations</b>			
AHOVOKS	Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs, Kwalificaties en Studietoelagen (Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Allowances)	FQF	Flemish qualifications framework (Vlaamse kwalificatiestructuur)
		HBO5	hoger beroepsonderwijs (Higher vocational education 5)
		NQF	national qualifications framework
AKOV	Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming (Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training)	NVAO	De Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders)
EQF	European qualifications framework	QF-EHEA	European higher education area
		SERV	Social and Economic Committee
		VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

- Flemish qualifications framework website: <http://vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be/en/>
- Flemish qualifications database: [https://app.akov.be/pls/pakov/f?p=VLAAMSE\\_KWALIFICATIESTRUCTUUR:KWALIFICATIEDATABANK](https://app.akov.be/pls/pakov/f?p=VLAAMSE_KWALIFICATIESTRUCTUUR:KWALIFICATIEDATABANK)
- AHOVOKS (Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Allowances) – acts as EQF national coordination point: <https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/agentschap-voor-hoger-onderwijs-volwassenenonderwijs-kwalificaties-en-studietoelagen-ahovoks>
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- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2009). *Self-certification of the Dutch and Flemish national qualifications frameworks for higher education vis-à-vis the overarching framework for qualifications of the European higher education area: report of the Verification Committee on Flanders* (2 February 2009). [www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Qualifications\\_frameworks/78/8/NQF\\_Flemish\\_National\\_Qualifications\\_Framework\\_596788.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Qualifications_frameworks/78/8/NQF_Flemish_National_Qualifications_Framework_596788.pdf)
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# French Community of Belgium

## Introduction and context

The French Community of Belgium has been working on a national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (Cadre francophone des certifications pour l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie (CFC)) since 2006. Three distinct political authorities<sup>73</sup> are involved in the work:

- a. the French Community (the inhabitants of the French-speaking area of the Walloon Region and the French-speaking inhabitants of Brussels); Walloon-Brussels Federation (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles);
- b. the Walloon Region;
- c. the COCOF (Commission communautaire française de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale).

The current framework dates back to 2010 when the three governments of the French Community agreed on the principle of creating a qualifications framework with double entry, one for educational qualifications and one for professional qualifications, placed into eight levels and consistent with the descriptors of the European qualifications framework. The proposed framework structure is close to that applied by the Flemish Community of Belgium. All major stakeholders agreed in mid-2011 on these main principles of the framework. The CFC was formally adopted in 2015, through a decree operationalising the agreement between the three francophone governments<sup>74</sup>. The follow-up to the decree, particularly the inclusion of qualifications into the framework, has been slower than originally anticipated and the CFC has not yet reached full operational status.

<sup>73</sup> Responsibility for compulsory, adult and higher education lies with the French Community, whereas the Walloon Region and the COCOF are responsible for continuous vocational training in their respective areas.

<sup>74</sup> Ministère de la Communauté française (2015). Décret portant assentiment à l'accord de coopération conclu le 26 février 2015 entre la Communauté française, la Région wallonne et la Commission communautaire française relatif à la création et la gestion d'un Cadre francophone des certifications, en abrégé «CFC» [Decree of 15 May 2015 approving the cooperation agreement concluded on 26 February 2015 between the French Community, the Walloon region and the French Community Commission on the creation and management of the francophone qualifications framework, abbreviated as CFC]. *Moniteur belge*, No 145, p. 32947, 9.6.2015. <http://archive.pfwb.be/10000000201500e>

The framework was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in December 2013. Self-certification to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area is work in progress.

## Policy objectives

The development of the CFC has been seen as an integral part of the evolution of the existing education and training system, for the purposes of improving overall transparency and collaboration, aiding mobility and supporting individual learning pathways for citizens. The 2015 decree on the CFC refers to the following key objectives:

- a. facilitate learning continuity and progression;
- b. build bridges between different parts of the education and training system;
- c. strengthen relationship between initial and continuing education and training;
- d. support validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- e. increase transparency and facilitate comparison across regional and national borders.

New objectives of the framework are (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF, 2018):

- a. facilitate the employment of citizens and recruitment for employers;
- b. promote equal opportunities for citizens;
- c. facilitate assessment of competences.

While the CFC is seen as an instrument for strengthening the use of learning outcomes and for referencing to the EQF, the framework will not have a regulatory role and it is not seen as an instrument for reform of existing institutions and structures. According to the activity report of the CFC conducted by the EQF national coordination point (May 2016 to June 2018)<sup>75</sup>, the framework is a tool that can play an important role in citizens' education, training and career pathways. It is also not seen as a control device for the validation of qualifications but rather a support instrument aiming at the continuous improvement of qualifications (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and Wallonie COCOF, 2018).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The referencing report (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF, 2013) shows that

<sup>75</sup> This report will be published on the CFC website and will be available on request in the future (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and Wallonie COCOF, 2018). [www.cfc.cfwb.be/](http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/)

the CFC is based on learning outcomes and that this approach has given rise to arrangements for validation and credit transfer. An eight-level structure has been adopted, using two blocks of terms: knowledge/skills and context/ autonomy/ responsibility<sup>76</sup>. The descriptors developed by the Flemish qualifications framework have been used as a basis but adjusted according to the conditions of the community.

A competence-based approach is well established in compulsory education and training. Learning outcomes are described in terms of 'socles de compétences' and 'compétences terminales'. For adult education (including higher education short cycles, bachelor and master degrees) the term used is 'capacités terminales'. A team has been appointed within the Ministry of Education to coordinate the 'cross-diagnostics of schools, training centres and validation of skills providers'<sup>77</sup>. Among the items under revision is the evaluation of the learning outcomes, the material resources, the monitoring of quality in the assessment of learning outcomes and of the staff who carry out this process (Cedefop, forthcoming).

In vocational education and training, work is continuing to define and describe qualifications in terms of learning outcomes, to meet the need for shared reference systems for vocational education and training (VET). Since 2010, regional providers of continuous VET (CVET) have developed a common certification procedure ('reconnaissance des acquis de formation' (recognition of prior learning)) based on common qualifications and assessment standards, with a competence-based approach. The French service for trades and qualifications (Service francophone des métiers et qualifications (SFMQ)) is playing an important role for learning outcomes, both for initial VET (IVET) and for CVET. The descriptions of qualifications are based on the occupational profiles (occupational standards) defined by the social partners. Common training profiles, in line with the reality of trades to ensure the labour market relevance of training, are then defined by providers. It is expected that use of these profiles by all training providers (IVET and CVET) will support learner mobility by ensuring that prior learning is taken into account; it will also increase education and training system transparency and improve validation opportunities (Cedefop, forthcoming). These profiles are described in units

<sup>76</sup> More information: [www.cfc.cfwb.be/cfc/](http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/cfc/)

<sup>77</sup> A team of 'diagnosticians' from education, training or validation of skills evaluate jointly the assessment processes of VET providers. This is an external evaluation in accordance with the reference framework set by EQAVET (Cedefop, forthcoming).

of learning outcomes compatible with the European credit system for VET (ECVET) specifications. Progress has also been made in the pilot implementation of certification by units ('certification par unités' – CPU) in formal IVET programmes. As of September 2017, CPU was put in place for three optional subjects in post-secondary education<sup>78</sup>. The aim is to organise the three years of VET in the form of learning outcomes units. A 2018 circular<sup>79</sup> foresees expansion to additional subjects as of September 2018. Schools that intend to introduce the CPU in other subjects can request authorisation from the cabinet of the Minister for Education. The experimentation and developments are carried out in the framework of the Pact for excellence in education<sup>80</sup>, which is a 2015 action plan that has paved the way for improving accessibility of all to VET and qualifications (Cedefop, forthcoming).

Although higher education institutions are autonomous in designing their curriculum, they are required to align their school programme in accordance with the 'compétences communes' developed by ARES (Académie de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur). A guide has been produced to help higher education institutions define their learning outcomes to fit into common competence reference systems. There is little information on the extent of use of learning outcomes, apart from in the university colleges. Here, the new competences reference systems are gradually being implemented (Cedefop, 2016).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Ministry of the French Community regulates formal education in collaboration with school boards. The Walloon and Brussels Regions are in charge of vocational training and employment, and four regional public training services regulate vocational training provisions. This sharing of competences requires close and regular intergovernmental cooperation, with formal and non-formal agreements, to ensure the consistency of the system.

<sup>78</sup> Graduates have direct access to tertiary education and can upgrade their VET qualification by following one-year technical follow-up programmes (called seventh year) at post-secondary level (Cedefop, forthcoming).

<sup>79</sup> Circular 6475 of 2 January 2018.

<sup>80</sup> Preparation of the Pact for excellence in education – an action plan to reform education – started in January 2015. The pact aims to improve education quality and reduce inequalities (between schools, students and genders) in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. It focuses on four main aspects: students, education players, learning content, and governance (Cedefop, forthcoming).

The three executive bodies of French-speaking Belgium (the French Community, the Walloon Region and COCOF) initiated the CFC development and established an expert group to do the preparatory work. This group includes representatives from all levels of education and regional bodies for vocational training. After 2010, a new steering group was set up, including stakeholders from general education (at all levels and of all types, including universities) and vocational/professional education and training (including social partners). With the adoption of the 2015 decree, operationalising the agreement between the three francophone governments<sup>81</sup>, responsibilities and implementation processes for the framework have been established. The decree establishes the CFC Forum (Instance CFC) as a steering and coordinating authority, composed of various bodies (Decree of 15 May 2015):

- a. the Executive Committee manages day-to-day requests for allocation of qualifications to levels, the evaluation of the CFC and the updating of the qualifications register;
- b. the Management Committee assigns a level to the qualifications submitted by education and training operators. The organisation of the Management Committee is governed by internal regulations;
- c. the Committee of Experts provides its opinion on current and future decisions by the Management Committee, along with useful information on the functioning of the system and evaluation of its implementation;
- d. the Board of Appeal deals with appeals on the allocation of levels to qualifications<sup>82</sup>.

During its first two years of operation, the Executive Committee has created a common working culture and an environment of trust around its main task of managing positioning requests. As the only public service body in French-speaking Belgium that involves representatives of all public VET operators, the Management Committee also contributes to the establishment of dialogue with the parties involved. The Committee of Experts met for the first time in March 2018. Its membership was extended to the Skills validation consortium (Consortium de validation des compétences)<sup>83</sup>, the social partners,

<sup>81</sup> Ministère de la Communauté française (2015).

<sup>82</sup> For more information on the composition of the Management Board, the Committee of Experts and the Board of Appeal, please consult the Government Order of the French Community (February 2017) appointing these members. The order can be found at: [www.gallilex.cfwb.be/document/pdf/43594\\_000.pdf](http://www.gallilex.cfwb.be/document/pdf/43594_000.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> The skills validation consortium (Consortium de validation des compétences), which was created by the cooperation agreement of 24 July 2003, groups

and the services of the Inspectorate of Education<sup>84</sup>. This reflects the importance attached to consulting all CFC stakeholders (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF, 2013).

The division of the framework into two main strands – educational and professional qualifications – has implications for stakeholder involvement. The French service for trades and qualifications (SFMQ) plays a key role in defining and positioning professional qualifications at levels 1 to 4. It is well placed to play this role as its overall task is to develop occupational profiles based on the inputs from the social partners and in collaboration with employment services. Its role is also to develop training profiles for these occupational profiles, in liaison with education and training providers. ARES, the Academy of Research and Higher Education will be responsible for defining and positioning educational higher education qualifications at levels 6 to 8. This procedure is still in process. ARES and the SFMQ will share responsibility for qualifications at level 5, reflecting the extensive ‘mix’ of professional and educational qualifications at this level.

The quality assurance system in French-speaking Belgium involves an external and formative assessment approach for higher education programmes, implemented by the Agency for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (AEQES)<sup>85</sup>. In addition, a legal assessment and inspection procedure is implemented by the General Inspectorate for basic, secondary, special and social promotion education in particular. This approach is also used by the IFAPME/SFPME through the Training Directorate whose role is to inspect training centres. Since there are different quality assurance systems, it is necessary to develop a common

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together five education and vocational training operators (Enseignement de promotion sociale (Education for Social Promotion), the Forem, Bruxelles Formation, the IFAPME and the SFPME) whose aim is to award qualifications by the validation of prior learning on behalf of the three executives of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonia and the COCOF (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and Wallonie COCOF, 2013).

<sup>84</sup> Since the 2007 decree, the Inspectorate has been reorganised and now represents a major element of the education system in terms of quality. The Inspectorate is competent for primary and secondary education as well as for the education for social promotion and the arts higher education. The higher education for social promotion and the arts higher education are thus subject to two quality assurance systems: the AEQES and the Inspectorate (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and Wallonie COCOF, 2013).

<sup>85</sup> The AEQES is an independent public service and a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) network, and is included in the European Quality Assurance Register for higher education.

internal structure to bridge those systems and promote convergence/harmonisation of the quality assurance systems (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF, 2013).

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>86</sup>

In French-speaking Belgium, the system for validating non-formal and informal learning has undergone important developments since the early 2000s. It is the result of initiatives supported nationally and is framed by important pieces of legislation. Validation of non-formal and informal learning was first developed in adult education (Education for social promotion ('enseignement de promotion sociale')) in 1991, followed in 2003 by the continuous vocational education and training (CVET) sector, with a focus on individuals with no formal qualifications. Recent policy strategies<sup>87</sup> confirm that validating non-formal and informal learning is now a key element of employment and education policies.

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is embedded in the NQF decree, which makes facilitation of validation of non-formal and informal learning as part of the NQF's objectives. It defines 'certification' as the formal result of an evaluation and validation carried out by a competent authority, establishing that an individual possesses the learning outcomes corresponding to determined standards, either at the end of an education or training pathway or following validation of his/her competences.

There are now two types of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Belgium: the validation of competences ('validation des compétences') in the CVET sector, leading to the award of a recognised skills certificate ('titre de compétence') following an assessment procedure; and the valorisation of prior experience ('validation des acquis de l'expérience' (VAE)) in adult education and higher education, leading to the validation of learning units or exemptions from certain parts of a study pathway. It is important to make the distinction between the concepts of 'valorisation' – to enhance

and get credit for prior experience with a view to obtaining access to formal education and training – and 'validation', which gives access to a recognised title or qualification. Although the standards used for validation for the latter are the same as in the formal system, skills certificates awarded through validation are not equivalent to formal VET qualifications. They can be used to access further training courses and can be combined to obtain a qualification in the adult education sector which may be included in the NQF.

The most significant developments recently have been in adult education, where a new decree<sup>88</sup>, adopted in 2017 and published in January 2018, promotes a unified approach to admission, exemption and certification of formal, non-formal and informal prior learning. It also seeks coordination between providers of education for social promotion, further development of validation procedures, transparency, clear routes and further transferability of certificates, as well as close cooperation with the CVET sector. In higher education, with a new regulatory framework in place since 2014 (Decree on the organisation of higher education), VAE has a stronger institutional basis and is used to grant admission to education pathways (all cycles of higher education) or exemptions. At secondary level (vocational or non-vocational), VAE is used to grant admission into education pathways or exemptions, but it can also lead to the issuing of a certificate of achievement ('attestation de réussite') when the student passes the integrated final test ('épreuve intégrée'). Challenges still need to be addressed, particularly in terms of widening the profile of VAE users and reaching out to disadvantaged communities such as migrants and refugees. While awareness of the value of validation procedures for the labour market has been increasing, additional investment and strategies in visibility efforts are to be put in place. However, the scheme today is generally considered effective and robust.

## NQF implementation

The CFC reflects the federal structure of the country and coexists with the qualifications frameworks of the Flemish and German-speaking Communities. Introducing the distinction between educational and professional qualifications was instrumental in

<sup>86</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>87</sup> • Plan Marshall 4.0 (2015): <http://planmarshall.wallonie.be/>  
• Strategy for the Walloon Region 2014-19 (Déclaration de politique régionale 2014-19): [www.wallonie.be/sites/wallonie/files/publications/dpr\\_2014-2019.pdf](http://www.wallonie.be/sites/wallonie/files/publications/dpr_2014-2019.pdf)  
• Strategy 2025 for Brussels: <https://strategie2025.brussels/>

<sup>88</sup> Gouvernement de la Communauté française (2018). *Arrêté du gouvernement de la Communauté française fixant les modalités de valorisation des acquis pour l'admission, la dispense et la sanction dans une ou des unités d'enseignement de promotion sociale*. *Moniteur belge*, No 13, pp. 3407–3416, 18.1.2018.



bringing the NQF process forward. This distinction made it possible to open up for professional qualifications at higher levels without questioning the autonomy of universities and their responsibility in relation to bachelor, master and doctorate awards. Using one set of level descriptors for all levels and both types of qualification has been accepted by the different stakeholders and will, in the longer term, make it possible to look more carefully into how these two strands can interact with each other.

While the legal adoption of the CFC in 2015 was important, delays in appointing an executive staff has slowed down overall progress, particularly for inclusion of qualifications in the framework. This means that the CFC has not yet reached full operational status. However, in 2016 the CFC Forum was established and the first inclusions of qualifications started in 2017.

A national database of qualifications has been set up<sup>89</sup>. To date, 50 qualifications have been included in the register individually at levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. These are vocational and secondary general education qualifications and qualifications awarded through validation (see above). It is possible to position qualifications for a period of two years under a transitional procedure, after which a new application will have to be submitted for final allocation of level. The need for this progressive approach comes from the differences between the systems of the competent authorities, which imply agreements for criteria shared by all providers. The positioning phase has started (with the inclusion of 50 qualifications), aiming to reach a critical mass of qualifications (general secondary education, higher education and almost all VET qualifications) needed for the different parties to use the framework (Cedefop, forthcoming).

One of the main objectives of the CFC Forum is to indicate the NQF/EQF level on all qualifications, so it has asked all the public services and ministries to include the levels on qualifications documents. Adult education providers responded positively, while general education and higher education responded negatively. VET operators have not responded but are moving towards an indication of the level to all qualifications documents (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). CFC/EQF levels are also

displayed on Europass certificate and diploma supplements<sup>90</sup>.

The main challenges in implementing the CFC have been to include a large number of qualifications in the framework to enhance comparability and disseminate the benefits of the framework to citizens and beneficiary institutions (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). However, the competent authorities have no obligation to file an application for positioning qualifications. Another reason for the lack of inclusion of more qualifications is that such qualifications might not fully meet the prerequisites for inclusion. In order to address this issue, the EQF national coordination point has held three meetings presenting recommendations on the systems of the competent authorities and procedures of external quality agencies or mechanisms (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF, 2018).

The EQF national coordination point is planning to disseminate information about the framework using its website, video clips, brochures and guidance documents. The target groups that will be prioritised will be employers, guidance counsellors of education and training providers, employment counsellors of public employment services, teachers, trainers, trade union representatives and human resources managers; these will be able to disseminate the benefits of the framework to the end-users.

The communication plan second stage will have more specific objectives such as targeting the general public, as the framework is currently less known among labour market actors at regional and local level. To date there has been no evaluation study on the different aspects of the framework and its impact (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The CFC levels were referenced to the EQF levels in 2013 (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF, 2018). An updated referencing report is foreseen for 2020.

<sup>89</sup> *Registre des certifications*: [www.cfc.cfwb.be/cfc/certifications/](http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/cfc/certifications/). It is linked to the Learning opportunities and qualifications in Europe portal (LOQ portal).

<sup>90</sup> See Europass certificate and diploma supplements.

**Table 7. Qualifications framework of the French Community of Belgium (CFC)**

CFC LEVELS	QUALIFICATIONS	EQF LEVELS
8		8
7		7
6		6
5	Skills certificate for adult education ( <i>Certificat de compétences acquises en formation de formateur(trice) professionnel(le) d'adultes</i> )  Professional degree (for business manager) ( <i>Diplôme de chef d'entreprise agent(e) commercial(e)</i> )  Professional degree (for police inspectors) ( <i>Diplôme de formation de base d'aspirant(e) inspecteur(trice) de police</i> )	5
4	Upper secondary technical education certificate (*) ( <i>Certificat de qualification de technicien</i> )  Certificate of apprenticeship offered by regional providers (**) ( <i>Certificat d'apprentissage</i> )  Skills certificate (***) ( <i>Certificat de compétences</i> )	4
3	Upper secondary vocational or artistic education leaving certificate (****) ( <i>Certificat de compétences acquises en formation</i> )	3
2	Lower secondary education – Technical performance assistant ( <i>Auxiliaire technique de spectacle</i> )	2
1		1

(\*) For example: *certificat de qualification de technicien(ne) chimiste; certificat de qualification de technicien(ne) en décoration et aménagement d'espaces.*

(\*\*) For example: *certificat d'apprentissage d'infographiste; certificat d'apprentissage d'opticien(ne) lunetier(ière).*

(\*\*\*) For example: *certificat de compétences acquises en formation d'agent(e) en comptabilité; certificat de compétences acquises en formation d'aide-comptable.*

(\*\*\*\*) For example: *certificat de compétences acquises en formation de coffreur(euse) ferrailleur(euse).*

Source: Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and Wallonie COCOF (2018). [www.cfc.cfwb.be/cfc/certifications/](http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/cfc/certifications/)

### Important lessons and future plans

While formal adoption is important, moving towards operational status requires that practical follow up and implementation takes place as required.

The development of the CFC also demonstrates the importance of finding a workable link between higher education and the other forms of education and training. Distinguishing between educational and professional qualifications at all levels has been instrumental in making progress. Whether

this structure can be used to open up for future developments of professional qualifications at higher levels and for establishing stronger links between educational and professional sectors remains to be seen.

One of the key challenges is the need to have a high percentage of qualifications from all types of providers included and levelled so that the CFC can guarantee their comparability in French-speaking Belgium.

<b>Abbreviations</b>		
AEQES	Agence pour l'évaluation de la qualité dans l'enseignement supérieur [Agency for Quality Assessment in Higher Education]	(Walloon regional office for employment and vocational training)
IFAPME		Institut de formation en alternance des petites et moyennes entreprises (SME work/study training institute)
ARES	Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement supérieur (Academy of Research and Higher Education)	IFPME
IFPME		Institut de formation permanente pour les classes moyennes et les petites et moyennes entreprises (training institute for SMEs, Community institution preceding the IFAPME and the SFPME)
CFC	Cadre francophone des certifications pour l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie (French-speaking qualifications framework for lifelong learning)	IVET
IVET		initial vocational education and training
COCOF	Commission communautaire française de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale (French Community commission in the Brussels-capital Region)	NQF
NQF		national qualifications framework
SFPME		Service Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises [Training service for SMEs]
CPU	certification par unités (certification per units)	SFMQ
SFMQ		Service francophone des métiers et qualifications (French service for trades and qualifications)
CVET	continuous vocational education and training	VAE
VAE		validation des acquis de l'expérience (valorisation of prior experience)
EQF	European qualifications framework	VET
VET		vocational education and training
Forem	Service public wallon de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle	

## Main sources of information

CFC Forum (Instance CFC) – acts as EQF national coordination point: [www.cfc.cfwb.be/](http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/)

CFC website: [www.cfc.cfwb.be/](http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/)

*Registre des certifications*: [www.cfc.cfwb.be/cfc/certifications/](http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/cfc/certifications/)

Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF (2013). *Report on referencing the French-speaking qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*. <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/referencing-reports-and-contacts>

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Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF (2018). *Activity report of the CFC (May 2016–June 2018)* [unpublished].

Ministère de la Communauté française (2015). Décret portant assentiment à l'accord de coopération conclu le 26 février 2015 entre la Communauté française, la Région wallonne et la Commission communautaire française relatif à la création et la gestion d'un Cadre francophone des certifications, en abrégé «CFC» [Decree of 15 May 2015 approving the cooperation Agreement, concluded on 26 February 2015 between the French Community, the Walloon region and the French Community Commission on the creation and management of the francophone qualifications framework, abbreviated as CFC]. *Moniteur belge*, No 147, p. 32947, 9 June 2015. <http://archive.pfwb.be/10000000201500e>

# German-speaking Community of Belgium

## Introduction and context

The German-speaking Community of Belgium adopted its qualifications framework (Qualifikationsrahmen der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft – QDG) on 18 November 2013<sup>91</sup>. Being the smallest part of Belgium (geographically and in terms of population) the framework reflects the work done in the Flemish and French Communities but is also inspired by the German qualifications framework. The 2013 decision envisages that a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning will be linked to the QDG. The QDG has, so far, not been referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF).

## Policy objectives

A main objective for the framework is to strengthen national and international understanding and comparability of qualifications. While subject to federal laws on education applying in Belgium, the geographic location of the region means that citizens are likely to cross regional or national borders for living and working. This makes it a priority to clarify the relationship between own qualifications and those awarded in the neighbouring countries. The framework also promotes equivalence between general and vocational education and training<sup>92</sup>, and the strengthening of the learning outcomes principle is an important step in increasing transparency and strengthening permeability.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

An eight-level, learning-outcomes-based framework has been introduced. The framework builds on the concept of ‘Handlungskompetenz’ (action competence) with qualifications levels defined in

<sup>91</sup> Ministry of the German-speaking Community (2013). Dekret zur Einführung eines Qualifikationsrahmens der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft [Decree of 18 November 2013 establishing a qualifications framework for the German-speaking Community]. *Belgisch Staatsblad*, p. 12532, 13 February 2014. <http://reflex.raadvst-consetat.be/reflex/pdf/Mbbs/2014/02/13/126688.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> For example, the completion of the general upper secondary level and upper secondary technical and arts education are both level 4.

terms of two categories of descriptors: subject/occupation-specific competences, referring to knowledge and skills; and personal competences, referring to social competence and autonomy (Cedefop, 2018) (see below).

**Table 8. Level descriptors of the German-speaking Community of Belgium: main categories**

ACTION COMPETENCE (HANDLUNGSKOMPETENZ)			
Subject/occupation-oriented competence ( <i>Fachliche Kompetenz</i> )		Personal competence ( <i>Personale Kompetenz</i> )	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Autonomy

Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2013).

In addition to the legally stipulated descriptors, the so-called Dublin descriptors also apply to qualifications in the higher education sector in the German-speaking Community.

The framework is seen as an instrument for promoting a learning-outcomes- or competence-based approach across the different parts of education and training in the region. It distinguishes between general and vocational qualifications. General upper secondary education (Abitur) is placed at level 4, with the three cycles of bachelor, master and doctor placed at levels 6 to 8. In vocational education and training, completed apprenticeship (dual system) is at level 4. A master craftsman with two years of training is placed at level 5, one with three years of training at level 6.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The framework has been developed over a relatively short time, involving all main education and training stakeholders in the German-speaking Community. This includes the social partners who normally play a key role in an education and training system inspired by that of Germany, such as the Institute for Education and Training in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen – IAWM)<sup>93</sup>. Scientific cooperation has been established with the Flemish Community

<sup>93</sup> [www.iawm.be/de/ueberuns/aufgaben.html](http://www.iawm.be/de/ueberuns/aufgaben.html)

and the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB).

The department of VET and Organisation of Education in the Ministry of the Community acts as the EQF national coordination point and has the task of referencing the QDG to the EQF, using transparent methodologies and providing all stakeholders, institutions and companies with relevant information<sup>94</sup>.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>95</sup>

A strategy for introducing a validation system was outlined in 2015. This refers to European developments in this area and sees validation as an integrated part of an overall, lifelong learning strategy for the region. Individuals with no (or low) qualifications are seen as a key target group. A public launch event on the recognition of competences took place in October 2016, with stakeholders of the German-speaking Community invited to participate in a debate. Subsequently, a steering group was set up involving stakeholders from formal and non-formal education as well as employment and the social partners. Between February and November 2017, the steering group developed a validation concept with the aim of putting concrete arrangements in place by 2018. On that basis, application arrangements are being developed, jointly financed by the European Social Fund (Cedefop, forthcoming).

In July 2018, a pilot project – Creating future directions – was initiated to support validation of non-formal and informal learning. It is aimed primarily at low-skilled jobseekers and workers, as well as migrants whose foreign diplomas could not be recognised; access to education and employment is very difficult for these target groups. The project is divided into three parts: guidance and counselling to find an appropriate continuous

training offer (support level); the ProfilPASS workshops focusing on the elaboration of personal competence profiles (level of formative validation); and the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired professional competences with reference to training occupations and programmes offered by the training providers in the German-speaking Community (level of summative validation).

### NQF implementation

The QDG was adopted by decree on 18 November 2013 (Ministry of the German-speaking Community, 2013), paving the way for implementation. It is a comprehensive qualifications framework, covering qualifications from general education, higher education and vocational education and training (VET). Criteria<sup>96</sup> and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications and diplomas to the QDG have been developed. Only qualifications with clear description of learning outcomes and those obtained in institutions accredited by Government are included. Among important criteria for inclusion is the relevance of a qualification on the labour market and for further learning. The inclusion of qualifications is work in progress by a technical commission in charge of inclusion and levelling. Currently, there are 21 qualification types included in the QDG<sup>97</sup>.

Alignment of a qualification within the framework levels does not replace the existing system of access and does not provide automatic entitlement to access the next level<sup>98</sup>. QDG qualification levels are not yet included in certificates and diplomas as the templates were adopted by the Government in 2009 and the QDG was only implemented in 2013. There is no register of qualifications. The templates for all certificates and qualifications that can be obtained in general education, higher education, and VET are part of the Government Decree of 28 May 2009<sup>99</sup>.

<sup>94</sup> See Eurydice description of the German-speaking Community's qualifications framework: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/belgium-german-speaking-community/national-qualifications-framework\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/belgium-german-speaking-community/national-qualifications-framework_en)

<sup>95</sup> This section builds on the information provided in the government strategy document: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2015). *Ostbelgien Leben 2025 Regionales Entwicklungskonzept der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*. [Future strategies for the German-speaking Community of Eastern Belgium – 2025]. The information provided here builds on the section covering the *Bildungsregion* DG (the German-speaking education and training region). [www.ostbelgienlive.be/PortalData/2/Resources/downloads/rek/REK4-72dpi-KORR\\_23sept.pdf](http://www.ostbelgienlive.be/PortalData/2/Resources/downloads/rek/REK4-72dpi-KORR_23sept.pdf)

<sup>96</sup> These criteria are mentioned in Article 6 of the decree of 18 November 2013.

<sup>97</sup> See Articles 9 and 10 of the decree of 18 November 2013.

<sup>98</sup> See Eurydice's description of the German-speaking Community's qualifications framework: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/belgium-german-speaking-community/national-qualifications-framework\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/belgium-german-speaking-community/national-qualifications-framework_en)

<sup>99</sup> Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2009). Erlass der Regierung vom 28. Mai 2009 über die Bescheinigungen, Nachweise, Brevets, Zeugnisse, Diplome und Zusatzdiplome zur Bestätigung der in der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft organisierten Studien [Government Decree of 28 May 2009 on certificates, diplomas and additional diplomas certifying studies organised in the German-speaking Community]. *Belgisch Staatsblad*, p. 62798, 17 September 2009. <http://reflex.raadvst-consetat.be/reflex/pdf/Mbbs/2009/09/17/114314.pdf>

An important current step is to link a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning – currently under development – to the framework. Once this happens, a central validation body will be set up.

Available information indicates that QDG has so far played a limited role in supporting education and training practices in the region; as an example, the QDG is not referred to the 2025 vision for the region<sup>100</sup>. Emphasis given to validation and competences indicates, however, that the learning outcomes orientation underpinning the QDG is being taken forward in a systematic manner. This is also apparent in relation to other projects outlined in the 2025 strategy, such as strengthening support to individual pupils and application of competence-oriented diagnostics.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The QDG has not been referenced to the EQF.

## Important lessons and future plans

The German-speaking Community of Belgium has adopted its qualifications framework; it is being implemented but has not yet been referenced to the EQF. The key task that remains is the full implementation of the framework; referencing it to the EQF and setting up arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning (the preparation of which was initiated in 2014) is needed.

A project called Creating future directions has been launched to support validation of non-formal and informal learning, targeting the low-qualified in need of guidance and professional orientation as well as those whose diploma has not been recognised in Belgium. The ultimate goal is to reach all citizens of the German-speaking Community in order to recognise their informally and non-formally acquired competences.

**Table 9. Qualifications framework of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (QDG)**

NOF LEVELS	GENERAL EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS	VET QUALIFICATIONS
<b>8</b>	Doctoral or postdoctoral degree/ habilitation <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer Promotion oder Habilitation auf Doktoren- bzw. Professorebene)</i>	
<b>7</b>	Master degree <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines Hochschulstudiums langer Dauer auf Masterebene)</i>	Master degree on successful completion of dual track higher education (long duration) <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines dualen Hochschulstudiums langer Dauer auf Masterebene)</i>
<b>6</b>	Bachelor degree <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines Hochschulstudiums kurzer Dauer auf Bachelorebene)</i>	Master craftsperson certificate on successful completion of a three-year master craftsperson programme <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer dreijährigen Meisterausbildung mit dem Meisterbrief)</i>  Professional bachelor degree on successful completion of dual track higher education <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines dualen Hochschulstudiums kurzer Dauer auf Bachelorebene)</i>

(Continued)

<sup>100</sup> See Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2015).

**Table 9. Qualifications framework of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (QDG) (Continued)**

NQF LEVELS	GENERAL EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS	VET QUALIFICATIONS
<b>5</b>		<p>Master craftsperson certificate on successful completion of a two-year master craftsperson programme <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer zweijährigen Meisterausbildung mit dem Meisterbrief)</i></p> <p>Successful completion of supplementary secondary vocational education <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer Ausbildung im ergänzenden beruflichen Sekundarunterricht)</i></p>
<b>4</b>	<p>Successful completion of upper secondary general education <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Oberstufe des allgemeinbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)</i></p>	<p>Successful completion of upper secondary technical and arts programmes <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Oberstufe des technischen oder künstlerischen Sekundarunterrichts)</i></p> <p>Attestation of competence upon successful completion of year 6 in vocational education <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des sechsten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts mit Befähigungsnachweis)</i></p> <p>Successful completion of year 7 (complementary year) in vocational education <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des siebten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)</i></p> <p>Journeyman certificate on successful completion of an apprenticeship <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer mittelständischen Lehre mit dem Gesellenzeugnis)</i></p>
<b>3</b>	<p>Successful completion of lower secondary general education <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Unterstufe des allgemeinbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)</i></p>	<p>Successful completion of lower secondary technical, vocational or arts programmes <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Unterstufe des technischen, künstlerischen oder berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)</i></p> <p>Certified partial qualification acquired in year 2 of an apprenticeship <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer zertifizierten Teilqualifikation im zweiten Jahr der mittelständischen Lehre)</i></p>
<b>2</b>	<p>Successful completion of 'common' year 2 in secondary education <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des zweiten gemeinsamen Jahres des Sekundarunterrichts)</i></p>	<p>Successful completion of year 3 in vocationally-oriented education <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des dritten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterricht)</i></p> <p>Attestation of competence certifying lower secondary special needs education <i>(Befähigungsnachweis der Unterstufe des Fördersekundarunterrichts)</i></p>
<b>1</b>	<p>Successful completion of primary education, four years <i>(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Grundschule)</i></p>	<p>Certificate upon successful completion of year 2 in vocationally oriented education <i>(Das Studienzeugnis des zweiten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)</i></p>

Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2013).



### Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
QDG	Qualifikationsrahmen Deutschsprachiger Gemeinschaft (Qualifications framework of the German-speaking Community)
VET	vocational education and training

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The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in collaboration with national experts.

## Introduction and context

The development of the Bhutan Qualifications Framework (BQF) was mandated in 2010 by the Tertiary Education Policy of the Kingdom of Bhutan (BAC, 2012). It is a national document pertaining to qualifications and their classification that is based on a set of nationally agreed-upon criteria and benchmarked in line with international practices. It integrates, harmonizes and links school, monastic, vocational and tertiary education qualifications awarded by education providers both within and outside the country.

Bhutan has a total population of 735,553 and was ranked 134<sup>th</sup> in the global Human Development Index (HDI) of 2017. Its gross national income and purchasing power parity (GNI PPP) is USD 8,850<sup>101</sup> and the literacy rate is just over 70% (PHCB, 2017). The country is still primarily an agrarian society based on subsistence farming. Electricity and construction are the other major economic sectors, representing a vital source of hard currency and employment. A large proportion of the workers in these sectors are migrants, particularly at the highest and lowest extremes of the skills spectrum. Middle- and management-level jobs are occupied mainly by Bhutanese citizens.

Greater enrolment in primary and secondary education has increased demand for post-secondary education and training (after years 12 and 13); however, the shortage of tertiary education institutions in Bhutan has led to an exodus of students to foreign universities, particularly in India (Thinley, 2009). The technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and post-secondary sectors are administered by a bewildering variety of different bodies, making it difficult for students to progress either within a field or from one field to another. While most TVET courses are under the administration of the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, diploma courses in TVET are

administered by the Royal University of Bhutan, and academic courses by the Ministry of Education. Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, also provide vocational education and training as well as employment opportunities to school leavers. A system is therefore needed that recognizes diverse types of qualification and clarifies equivalences between them.

The problem of unemployment among TVET graduates has become much more acute in recent years. Limited job growth in government has made it more difficult for graduates to obtain civil servant or corporate positions; meanwhile, the number of students leaving school without employable skills has increased, even among those completing training in vocational training institutes. Despite efforts to promote the growth of the private sector, creating attractive jobs has proved difficult. For certain skill sets, a mismatch thus remains between supply and demand.

TVET is negatively perceived in Bhutan and is therefore the least preferred route among young people. Private training providers (particularly in the ICT and services sectors) often seek to fill the gap left by inadequate TVET provision. They then look to the government for guidance and regulations to make their qualifications more marketable, for example through affiliation or official endorsements of certificates.

A further challenge is that non-formal skills training initiatives for rural people remain supply-driven instead of adopting a demand-driven approach highlighting, for example, how a person's competences can be utilized in the labour market and in society.

To meet the challenges of the 21st century, Bhutan needs to build a knowledge-based society. Tertiary education, through formal settings as well as continuing education programmes, requires a system that is able to facilitate the recognition of diverse types of qualifications, and to create

<sup>101</sup> Source: [www.ifs.se/IFS/Documents/Application%20Forms/GNIPC.pdf](http://www.ifs.se/IFS/Documents/Application%20Forms/GNIPC.pdf)

equivalency and professional pathways. A qualifications framework plays an important role in developing degree systems as well as in developing study programmes in tertiary education institutions. Such a framework not only facilitates the recognition of qualifications, it is also important for those who make use of qualifications, particularly learners and employers. In view of this, the Bhutan Accreditation Council developed the BQF (BAC, 2012).

## Policy objectives

The BQF aims to provide an up-to-date and flexible framework that:

- guarantees the quality of education and training;
- accommodates the diverse educational and career goals of Bhutanese people, including those who aspire to work outside Bhutan;
- enables comparison and ensures consistency between qualifications offered by academic, vocational and monastic institutions;
- allows Bhutanese qualifications to be recognized and valued internationally, promoting workers' international mobility;
- facilitates lifelong learning;
- allows for lateral movement between different fields;
- enables human resources to be more effectively deployed;
- provides for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning;
- promotes gross national happiness (GNH), a philosophy that guides the Government of Bhutan.

Educational policy in Bhutan is strongly influenced by the theory of GNH (Thinley, 1999). Instead of focusing on a narrow set of job-specific skills, GNH-inspired learning seeks to inculcate a common set of core skills (Thinley, 2009), which include:

- knowledge of a subject area;
- practical skills including information management;
- social skills and responsibilities;
- GNH values and principles, including mindful leadership;
- communication and ICT skills;
- accountability and autonomy;
- problem-solving and scientific skills;
- innovation and entrepreneurial skills.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The BQF has eight qualification levels, each of which assesses the following criteria:

- depth, complexity and comprehension of knowledge;
- application of knowledge and skills;
- degree of autonomy and creativity in decision-making;
- communication skills;
- breadth and sophistication of practices (BAC, 2012).

The BQF defines learning outcomes based on academic workload: this facilitates programme comparison between schools, technical and vocational institutes, and monastic and tertiary education institutes, which in turn promotes the mobility and portability of qualifications.

The BQF caters for all types of qualifications, whether certificates, diplomas or degrees. Qualifications are awarded by a competent authority, which affirms successful completion of the course of study in question and achievement of the expected standard. This guarantees the holder's ability to perform the job for which he/ she is qualified.

The BQF includes three qualification levels relating to vocational education: National Certificate NC1 (semi-skilled work) is equivalent to qualification level 3; National Certificates NC2 (skilled work) and NC3 (highly skilled work) correspond to qualification level 4; and National Diplomas 1 and 2 (for supervisory personnel) make up qualification level 5.

Credit is awarded where candidates demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a field and show that they are able to apply this knowledge to practical situations. The amount of time and effort the candidate invests in carrying out required activities is also taken into consideration. Credit is awarded not on the basis of experience but rather on the basis of what has been learned through reflecting on experience (BAC, 2012).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The BQF was developed by the Bhutan Accreditation Council, which is responsible for establishing the relationship between tertiary academic education, TVET and the school system. The Council recently produced a document on the BQF for local and international stakeholders that contains information on each qualification (*ibid.*). It also provides basic guidelines for providers to develop clearly defined and suitably named qualifications programmes.

**Table 10. Bhutan Qualifications Framework**

BQF LEVELS	SCHOOL EDUCATION	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	UNIVERSITY EDUCATION	MONASTIC EDUCATION
8			Doctorate	Khenpo
7			Master degree	Geshey
6			Bachelor degree	Tenchoe
5		ND1 and ND2	Diploma	Madhyamik
4	BHSEC	NC2 and NC3		
3	BCSE	NC1		
2	LSE			
1	PE			

PE – primary education;  
LSE – lower secondary education;  
BCSE – Bhutan Certificate for Secondary Education;  
BHSEC – Bhutan Higher Secondary Education Certificate;  
NC – National Certificate;  
ND – National Diploma

Source: BAC, 2012

The Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework was initiated between October 2000 and June 2003 as one of the programmes of the National Technical Training Authority (NTTA) under the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources and in collaboration with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), now called the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

In 2003, the Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Authority (BVQA) was established as a regulatory department under the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources in collaboration with the Department of Employment and Labour and the NTTA. The aim was to dissolve the division between the NTTA's training delivery and regulatory functions. In January 2006, the BVQA was replaced by the Department of Occupational Standards (DOS) in accordance with government directives.

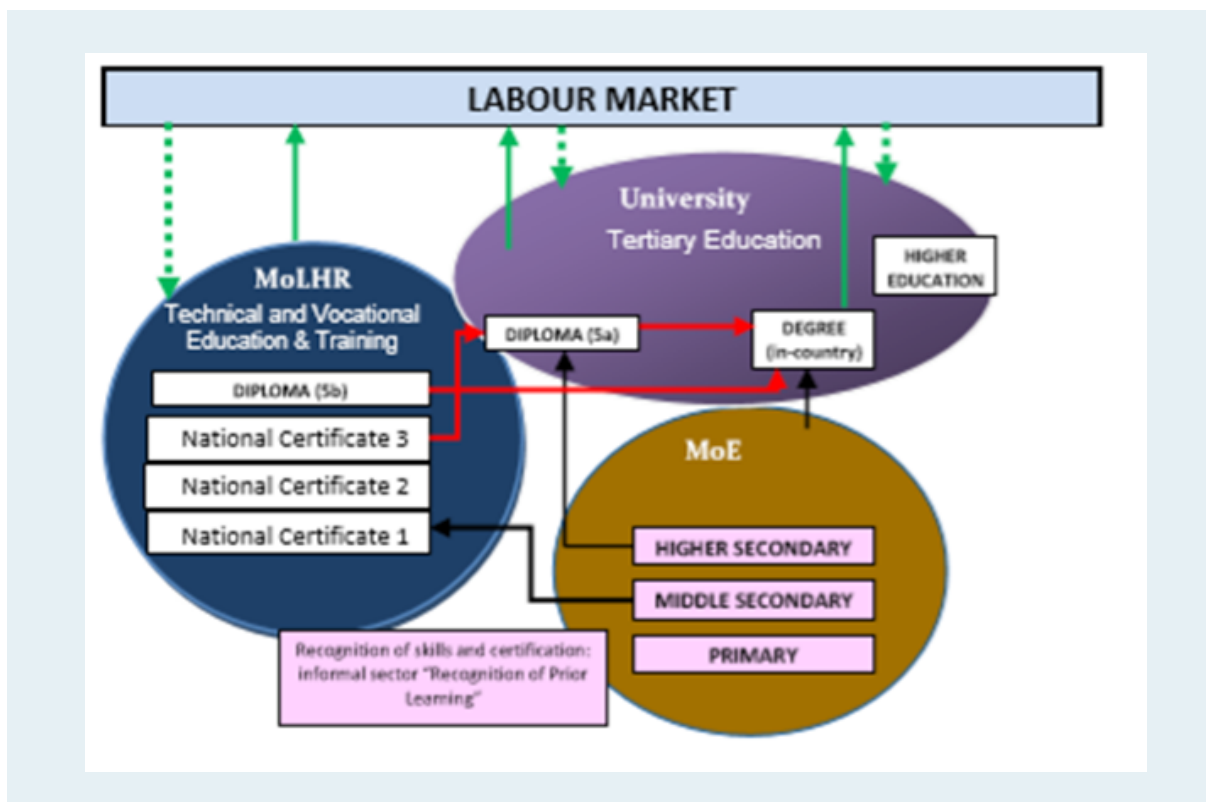
### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The BQF was designed to support the building of pathways between different educational and training sub-sectors. This enables the individual to progress

in further education through a transfer of credits and recognition of prior learning acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning pathways, irrespective of time and place, in the context of lifelong learning. Pathways between vocational and academic qualifications will allow for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning; credit transfer and work experience programmes will promote career planning and continuous learning. The BQF provides equivalences between qualifications of different types and at different levels. It also introduces regulations on the accumulation and transfer of credits, and the accreditation of prior learning, as well as on entry requirements and the use of certificates and diplomas. Diploma programmes may be designed in conjunction with degree programmes so as to enable graduates of a diploma programme to enter the second year of a degree programme.

The BQF builds on the Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework (BVQF), which was developed in 2003 for the TVET sector. The BVQF is a reform to the TVET system: input from employers and training providers helps to establish qualifications, thus ensuring quality of skills and establishing a benchmark for comparison with international standards (MoLHR, 2010). The BVQF already determines entry to formal TVET courses

**Figure 4. Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework (BVQF)**



Source: BVQF, 2013

after basic education – that is, after seven years of primary and four years of secondary education (ibid., p. 7). The TVET courses are assessed using the National Certificate levels. These are supported by level descriptors elaborating the range of responsibilities and learning demands at each level (see Table 10). The BVQF structure also makes provision for progression from national certificate to diploma and degree levels. This has been made possible by the Royal University of Bhutan and the Ministry of Education, along with other organizations under different jurisdictions.

Figure 4 depicts the various bridging arrangements that enable movement both within and between education and the job market. The government expects that these pathways will enable lifelong learning and upgrade the qualifications of those who might otherwise be in danger of social and educational marginalization.

There is potentially great scope for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Bhutan. Bhutan distinguishes between accreditation of prior learning, accreditation of prior certificated learning, and accreditation of prior experiential learning. Accreditation of prior learning concerns learning gained through formally assessed and certified

programmes outside the university. Accreditation of prior certificated learning covers learning achieved and assessed through a formal programme of study in a higher education or professional institution. Accreditation of prior experiential learning refers to learning gained in informal and non-formal settings such as the workplace or the community.

### NQF implementation

The DOS, which is one of four departments under the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, currently has the mandate to:

- improve and monitor the quality of vocational skills;
- develop quality assurance policies and procedures;
- develop qualifications;
- develop the National Assessment and Certification System;
- develop and implement the National Accreditation System.

These objectives are implemented through a departmental structure comprising three divisions: the Standards and Qualifications Division, the

Assessment and Certification Division, and the Review and Audit Division.

The DOS is responsible for the development of occupational profiles. There is an occupational profile for each discipline or disciplines covered by a qualification; for example, a student may obtain a bachelor's degree majoring in English and environmental sciences (BAC, 2012). Occupational profiles incorporate information from industry experts about the skills they require from their workers in the light of current economic and technological conditions. A Technical Advisory Committee advises the DOS on the identification of priority occupations, taking into account international and regional comparability of qualifications.

Occupational profiles provide employers, employees and jobseekers with a common understanding of the knowledge, skills and competences required for a particular job. In addition, they help in the development of curricula for qualifications programmes, and support educational services such as occupational training, exchange and promotion. They also support the implementation of a reliable testing and certification system that complies with international standards. The goal is to increase the proportion of the labour force holding National Competency Certificates.

Occupational profiles are developed at three occupational levels: National Certificates NC1, NC2 and NC3 (see Table 10). They take into account the following criteria:

- complexity of skills,
- knowledge and competences,
- duties and tasks,
- working environment,
- complexity of task sequences and junctures,
- degree of routine,
- teamwork,
- leadership,
- degree of autonomy,
- degree of control of financial and physical resources,
- degree of analysis and diagnosis involved.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Formal education in Bhutan is already recognized by Indian bodies. The Bhutan Certificate for Secondary Education (Grade 10) and the Bhutan Higher Secondary Education Certificate (Grade 12) administered by the Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment are recognized by the Association of Indian Universities in Delhi,

the Council of the Boards of School Education in India, the Central Board of Secondary Education, and the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination. It is hoped that the BQF will help extend this recognition to other countries and attract international scholars and students to Bhutan. The BQF will provide tools for the establishment of mutually beneficial alliances with top-quality universities and institutions around the world. In order to achieve these goals, the BQF will be closely related to other regional and international qualifications frameworks (BAC, 2012).

## Important lessons and future plans

The adoption of the BQF (levels and descriptors) in 2012 represents a major step in the development of a reference framework. Important issues of governance have also been resolved. While the Bhutan Accreditation Council is responsible for the school, tertiary education and continuing education sectors, the DOS in the Ministry of Labour assumes responsibility for setting vocational qualification standards and developing occupational profiles.

Bhutan is working hard to overcome hurdles impeding the implementation of the BQF by improving the institutional capacity of public authorities (administrative) and other stakeholders, as well as nurturing stakeholders' awareness of the importance of shifting from a curriculum-based to a competency-based approach to education (Lhazom, n.d.). While still striving for a modern knowledge-based economy, Bhutan has made its policy on BQF locally relevant, focusing on training TVET teachers, improving curricula and teaching resources, building partnerships with industries and employers, and smoothing out differences among the different organizations responsible for TVET and higher education.

### Abbreviations

BQF	Bhutan Qualifications Framework
BVQA	Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Authority
BVQF	Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework
DOS	Department of Occupational Standards
GNH	gross national happiness
ICT	information communications technology
NTTA	National Technical Training Authority
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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# BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Council of Ministers adopted the baseline qualifications framework (BQF), in March 2011; the decision carries the force of law. The Council of Ministers adopted an action plan to implement the BQF in February 2015.

The BQF has eight levels and includes all types and levels of qualification and certification. The 19-member Intersectoral Committee is the policy-making body for the BQF. It comprises six members per each of the three major population groups – Bosniak, Croat and Serb – plus one member for minorities such as Roma. It is chaired by the country-wide Ministry of Civil Affairs. However, the Intersectoral Committee has not sat or operated since spring 2015: nomination of representatives has been delayed for political reasons.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a strategy to implement the BQF and has begun developing tools and approaches; it therefore straddles the initial and structured stages. Institutional arrangements for coordination of the BQF implementation are still pending for approval.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a population of circa 3.2 million<sup>102</sup>, which is both ageing and declining numerically, partly through migration. It is an upper-middle-income market economy. Nearly half (48%) of the population live in urban areas, while 14.6% are aged 15 to 24. The literacy rate is very high, at 99% in 2013; most of the population have primary or secondary school education (41.7% and 48.6%, respectively), while 9.7% have higher education. There is a low early school leaver rate (6.7%). People tend to postpone entering an uncertain labour market by extending their stay in education. Participation in higher education has almost

doubled since 2000, but this has not led to better employment opportunities.

The labour market in the country continues to be characterised by a low activity rate, high and long-term unemployment, especially among young people, including a high level of informality. Young people (15 to 24 years) have the lowest activity, with less than one third (28.3%) participating in the labour market and with marked gender differences of 19.4% female and 36.3% male.

Like many developed and transition countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing population growth stagnation, with a negative annual growth of -0.12% in 2013. Demographic projections show that the labour force will shrink considerably in the next 40 years. The country will be ageing rapidly, with the dependency ratio rising to 55.1% by 2050 (from 45.5% in 2013). The main cause is lack of confidence in the future. Highly skilled workers, in particular, are keen to look for further and better work possibilities abroad, adding to the problem of brain drain. More than 20% of graduates from tertiary education in the 25+ age group are currently estimated to live in OECD countries. The national labour market clearly needs more jobs, and more attractive jobs, to ensure sustainable social and economic development.

Approximately three quarters of students in upper secondary are enrolled in vocational education and training (VET). Career and development opportunities are clearly worse than in most other European countries. The education attainment levels of the population are still lagging behind those of the EU, although they are improving. And there are high levels of structural long-term unemployment.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted its VET development strategy for 2007–13 in 2007; a new VET strategy for 2015–20 is being drafted. The BQF is an element in the strategies and in the strategic

<sup>102</sup> Data in this section are from the ETF report *Torino Process 2016–17: Bosnia and Herzegovina*.



directions for the development of education with the implementation plan 2008–15, and the strategic platform for development of adult education in a lifelong learning context for 2014–20.

### **International cooperation**

Bosnia and Herzegovina is an EU potential candidate country. In February 2016, the country submitted its application to join the EU. It receives financial assistance from the EU via the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). An IPA-funded project, managed by the British Council, sought to develop the qualifications framework for primary and general secondary education in the country. It aimed to raise the quality of education and reform the school-leaving matura exam. The project prioritised training for teachers, pre- and in-service, in primary and secondary education. It ran from October 2014 to October 2016.

The EU VET IV project developed vocational qualifications based on occupational standards. The German Technical Assistance Agency (GIZ) is a strong presence in the country and is currently running a project to support adult education. One element of this is the ‘passport of competences’ designed to recognise informally acquired skills, a type of recognition of prior learning. A joint EU-Council of Europe project on higher education qualifications developed a good practice guide for development of qualifications and occupational standards in higher education.

From March 2016 to June 2018, the EU-funded project ‘Qualifications framework for lifelong learning’ worked on several aspects of the BQF, such as quality assurance, accreditation procedures, referencing to the European qualifications framework (EQF), and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

## **Levels and use of learning outcomes**

### **Scope and structure of the NQF**

The BQF is inclusive/comprehensive. It includes all types (general education, VET, higher education and lifelong learning) and levels of qualifications (1 to 8) and certification. The BQF illustrates different types of certificate/qualification in principle attainable at the various levels.

Qualifications that are not the outcome of formal education can in principle be included in the BQF but criteria and procedures for inclusion and for referencing to levels have yet to be defined. The EU project ‘Qualifications framework for lifelong learning’ has developed a methodology for this purpose.

### **Alignment to other classification systems**

The BQF is the national instrument for structuring and classifying qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The country already had a classification system of qualifications, the nomenclatura, which comprehensively reflects the world of education, but does not provide meaningful links to the world of work.

There is no register or catalogue of qualifications available in the country, although the agency charged with primary, secondary and vocational education (APOSO), holds data on qualifications and provision. Creation of a BQF web portal (to serve as a BQF register) was a part of the remit of the EU project on qualifications frameworks for VET and adult education.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning or recognition of prior learning forms part of the action plan and of the EU project programme but, apart from isolated cases, remains a goal to be achieved, not a national, working system. However, given the number of adults who have been displaced and the current numbers of migrant workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, validation of non-formal and informal learning or recognition of prior learning would be most valuable and practical. The lack of standards is a hindrance. One exception has been the ‘passport of competences’ led by GIZ, the German Technical Assistance Agency. This supports employability of adults by identifying informally acquired competences.

Reform in higher education has been influenced by the Bologna declaration and the Lisbon convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region. Higher education reform is supported by the EU and the Council of Europe. All State universities started to implement the first and the second cycle in 2006, in accordance with the Bologna Process, and the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) has been introduced in all new study programmes. Though the framework law on higher education was adopted in 2007, its full implementation is taking its time. Many amendments incorporated in the final adopted version have made it difficult to implement but all entity and cantonal legislation has been harmonised with the State-level framework law.

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

The BQF currently has eight levels and no sublevels. Other countries in the region, including Montenegro and Croatia, maintain sublevels. The eight levels are intentionally designed for straight level-to-level linking with the EQF (e.g. level 4 BQF to level 4 EQF).

The current level descriptors are derived from the EQF level descriptors and use the same domains: knowledge, skills and competence. Further development may be necessary to fit national and local conditions better, as well as for EQF referencing.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

The framework level descriptors are described using learning outcomes; it is not explicitly stated that all qualifications in the framework have to be outcomes-based, but the text refers to levels.

### **Definition of qualification**

The definition of 'qualification' in the action plan is as follows: 'Qualifications: a formal title of the result of a process of assessment and validation obtained once a competent body determines that an individual has achieved the learning outcomes as per the defined standards.' In practice, it can be difficult to distinguish between curriculum and qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **Access, progression and credit**

The BQF sets out vertical and horizontal progression as one of its main aims. Credit, with the exception of higher education and levels 6 to 8, is not described in detail in the BQF document.

## **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

### **NQF legal basis**

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Council of Ministers adopted the baseline qualifications framework (BQF) in March 2011; the decision carries the force of law. The Council of Ministers adopted an action plan to implement the BQF in February 2015.

Two main documents were adopted: the Decision on Adoption of the Baseline of Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Official Gazette*, No 31/11, 39/12) and the Decision on Adoption of the Action Plan for the Establishment and Implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014–20 (*Official Gazette*, No 28/15).

The following laws have been adopted at the state level:

- the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary education (2003);
- the Framework Law on Pre-primary Education (2007);
- the Framework Law on Higher Education (2007);

- the Law on the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education (2007);
- the Framework Law on VET (2008).

In 2014, the Council of Ministers adopted the 'Principles and Standards in the Field of Adult Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina' and the 'Strategic Adult Education Development Platform in the Context of Lifelong Learning for the Period 2014–2020', which constitute pre-requisites for regulating the field of adult learning and development of lifelong learning in the country. The adoption of these framework documents at the entity and cantonal levels is a lengthy process.

### **Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF**

The 19-member Intersectoral Committee is the BQF's current executive, policy-making body, during framework development. It is chaired by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, a country-wide office. The action plan provides for eventual establishment of a BQF Council as a decision-making/governing body, and sectorial councils as technical/expert bodies.

Formally, Intersectoral Committee's membership should comprise representatives of the following sectors/institutions:

- a. five representatives of the education sector (Ministry of Civil Affairs – Education Sector, Federal Coordination of Ministers of Education: two canton representatives, Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska, Education Department of the Government of the Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina);
- b. three representatives of the Rectors Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- c. three representatives of education agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Agency for Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education, Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance, and Centre for Information and Recognition of Documents in Higher Education);
- d. three representatives of the statistics sector (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Federal Institute for Statistics, Republic Institute for Statistics of Republika Srpska);
- e. three representatives of the labour and employment sector (Ministry of Civil Affairs – Section for Labour and Employment, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Labour and Protection of Veterans and Disabled Persons of Republika Srpska);

- f. one representative of employers (Association of Employers of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and one representative of the labour unions (Confederation of Labour Unions of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

In practice, institutional arrangements are complex and fragmentary. As a consequence of the Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995, the country's constitution is highly decentralised, which poses challenges in creating a national qualifications framework (NQF) with equal validity and application across the country.

There is the State level: in education, this means the Ministry of Civil Affairs; the two entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska; 10 Federation cantons; and cities and municipalities. There is also the Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Each of the two entities, plus Brcko, plus the 10 cantons inside the federation, has its own administration, meaning there are 14 separate education authorities.

In 2018, the Intersectoral Committee remained suspended for political reasons. Some of the institutions and ministries referred to above decline to participate in any initiative beyond temporary EU or other donor-funded projects, and not in a more established national body.

#### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

According to the action plan, after an initial phase and a one-year mandate, the Intersectoral Committee should have a seven-year mandate once appointed (2014–20). Its decisions are majority-determined, qualified by the requirement to include a minimum of two thirds of votes from the representatives of each constituent people. Its principal functions are to oversee and ensure implementation of the action plan.

The Agency for Pre-primary, Primary, and Secondary Education (APOSO) includes a VET department. Its principal concern is with quality; its functions include developing standards (education and occupational) and guiding curricula. Cantons and the two entities – the Federation and Republika Srpska – develop individual qualifications and determine the awarding process.

This raises questions about the reliability and validity of qualifications: it is not clear if outcomes are comparable, as standards are different between the cantons and entities. EU-funded projects in qualification frameworks for general, VET and adult education have an important task to ensure that outcomes, standards and methodologies used

by all managing authorities are harmonised and comparable.

Employers and trades unions are represented on the BQF policy-making body, the Intersectoral Committee, though they are generally not strong across the country's wider institutional set-up. The Ministry of Civil Affairs (with its coordination responsibility in education and work and employment sectors at country level), EU projects, and the State agencies APOSO and HEA (Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance) have sought to link education and training more closely to the labour market. Employer organisations such as the chambers of commerce, complain that decentralisation leads to excessive difficulty in engaging with government bodies and officials in VET. They also underline that graduates, VET or otherwise, lack soft or core skills.

In technical work, the involvement of sector representatives remains weak and the development of occupational standards is carried out mainly with the support of teachers from schools, who visit a large number of enterprises.

#### **Funding**

The BQF development has been supported mainly by EU-funded projects. The recently completed EU project on Qualification Frameworks for Lifelong Learning had a budget of EUR 1.4 million over its two-year timespan. The other EU project in qualification frameworks in general education had EUR 2 million over its two-year timespan. Budgets of State/public institutions are otherwise very limited.

#### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

In practice, with exception of higher education, quality assurance in qualifications is little developed in the country. In VET in particular, it is highly fragmented.

In higher education, the institutional lead lies with the HEA, the Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance based in Banja Luka (but covering all of Bosnia and Herzegovina). In recent years, it has conducted accreditation of higher education institutions, private and public, of which several offer short-cycle, level 5 qualifications, which are vocational in orientation. To date, this has been general accreditation as providers, not for programmes or individual qualifications. The agency has also been updating quality assurance procedures in higher education, to meet the Bologna Process' European Standards and Guidelines.

The Baseline Qualifications Framework document of 2011 refers in general terms to standards but does not go beyond this level; the Action Plan specifies a timetable to develop quality assurance measures, including development of occupational standards; the EU project developed methodologies to support the design of new qualifications, which includes quality criteria.

The Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance is an affiliated member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA) and plans to apply for full membership.

In higher education, quality assurance is regulated by the Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance. Higher education institutions develop programmes and qualifications, validated for use by the agency.

VET is more complex. APOSO develops qualification standards and assessment criteria but schools do the assessment, which is mainly internal. Ministries and cantons are the principal awarding bodies: it is their stamps which appear on certificates.

Neither in VET nor in higher education are there yet agreed criteria for validation of qualifications, which would support quality and levelling of qualifications in the NQF. The EU-funded project developed guidelines including standards and criteria for external evaluation and self-assessment based on best European practices and models. Most assessment remains in-school or internal, though for matura, the school-leaving exam, a pilot was developed, which included external assessment.

A Manual for Enhancement of Vocational Qualifications was developed by the EU-funded project 'Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning'. The manual is a result of the working group composed of representatives of all competent education authorities and other key partner institutions, and it is intended for all institutions and bodies involved in developing the basic elements of the qualifications framework (occupational standards, qualification standards, curricula and programmes, use of learning outcomes). The manual is directly linked to the training programme for enhancement of VET qualifications, which includes additional material for training qualifications developers.

The main issue and challenges for quality assurance of qualifications are the lack of comparable education or occupational standards, the lack of agreed criteria for development and validation for

use of qualifications, minimal external assessment, and fragmented functions among the many actors. There are good cases of quality assurance practice, e.g. some qualifications are written in learning outcomes, there is some validation of qualifications, but there is no consistency across the system or country.

## **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is part of the action plan but there is no country-wide system as yet. Individual providers offer it for access to programmes, while the German development agency GIZ developed the 'competence passport' to support recognition of adult and adult learner skills. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is at the ad hoc stage in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A first concept was developed by a working group under the EU-funded project 'Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning', but no other development has been registered.

## **NQF implementation**

### **Inclusion of qualifications in a register**

There is currently no register or database at national level, although APOSO (see above) maintains a general overview of existing and new VET qualifications, and the Higher Education Agency of higher education qualifications. Creation of the BQF web portal is foreseen in the near future within the EU-funded project on qualification frameworks in VET and adult education.

The ETF conducted an inventory of vocational qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2017, comprising all types of qualification from level 2 up to level 5. The inventory includes 1 155 vocational qualifications, of which 836 are formal, obtained in vocational schools, while 319 are obtained through lifelong learning programmes. The largest number of qualifications comes from formal VET at levels 3 and 4. Only six qualifications are at level 2, while at level 5, 88 qualifications were collected. Looking at the number of qualifications at each level, it could be concluded that further development of the qualifications at level 2 might be required, especially given the need to provide qualifications for long-term unemployed adults and persons with special needs.

Vocational qualifications at levels 3 and 4 are classified in 13 occupation families. More than

half of the 742 qualifications at these levels (56.1 %) were developed in 1995 and 1996 and they need to be revised. The greatest numbers of qualifications are found in two occupation groups: metal processing (20.3%) and electrical engineering (15.8%). However, the number of students per group shows that economics, law, administration and trade is the most popular group. At level 5, structural modernisation from old qualifications for 'high skilled worker' to new 'master-craftsman' represents a challenge for all educational authorities.

Learning outcomes are not used at level 2 and only in very few cases at level 5. However, about 43% of the most popular qualifications at levels 3 and 4 are based on learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are a compulsory element and a requirement for each qualification to be placed into the qualifications framework and the process of designing learning outcomes-based qualifications will be one of the greatest challenges in dealing with vocational qualifications. Curricula for the aforementioned 419 qualifications that contain learning outcomes have them only at the level of the module, but not as an exit profile of the entire qualification.

#### **Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF**

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of BQF implementation have not been fully defined yet, but the Intersectoral Committee will have an important role in this process. No monitoring or assessment has been conducted as yet.

#### **Impact for end-users**

The BQF is not being used yet as a reference system or tool by learners, providers and workers.

### **Referencing to regional frameworks**

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a potential candidate for EU accession since 2013. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement entered into force on 1 June 2015. The country joined the EQF advisory group in October 2015 as a full

member. Making the BQF ready for referencing to the EQF is, therefore, a priority. Similarly, Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in the Bologna Process in higher education, whose requirements include self-certification against the qualifications framework for the European higher education area.

### **Important lessons and future plans**

EU projects will deliver useful tools such as qualifications development methodologies, and lay groundwork for elements such as quality assurance systems, but these technical advances will not have an impact on qualification or VET systems in the country without political backing. This means, in the first instance, re-establishment of the Intersectoral Committee and creation of a BQF Council at political level.

Vocational training reform has initiated changes in almost all education functions, but its quality remains a challenge, particularly in terms of learning outcomes, accreditation of training providers and programmes, and teaching and learning. The reform has continued to focus on bringing vocational training closer to labour market needs.

The complex institutional arrangements with state institutions which have very limited mandates makes the overall pace of reform slower than might otherwise be the case.

Implementation of the Action Plan for the BQF is far behind its own schedule. While the EU projects have performed much of the technical work necessary to implement the Action Plan, the completion of both projects by now may create a hiatus between the design of those methodologies and its adoption and further implementation. There needs to be a sustained follow-up of implementation of the NQF infrastructure, with the necessary allocation of financial resources from Bosnia and Herzegovina public funds at all relevant government levels.

**Table 11. NQF structure (annex to the BQF)**

LEVEL	TYPE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING	QUALIFICATIONS TITLES (POSITION IN THE LABOUR MARKET)	AWARD TYPE (DIPLOMA/CERTIFICATE/EDUCATION LEVEL)
1	Elementary education	Unskilled worker	Certificate on completed elementary education
2	Occupational training programmes	Low-skilled worker	Certificate on completed programme or education for lower level occupational qualifications, which contains the following information: - duration of education; - knowledge, skills and competence acquired; - field of work a person is trained for.
3	Vocational education and training	Skilled worker for a certain occupation	Diploma/certificate of final examination (matriculation) with practical work, including a supplement which contains the following information: - level of qualifications; - knowledge, skills and competence acquired; - field of work a person is trained for.
4	Secondary technical education	Specialised skilled worker for technical and related occupation	Diploma/certificate of secondary graduation with a supplement which contains the following information: - level of qualifications; - field of major study, specific knowledge, skills and competence acquired; - field of work a person is trained for.
	Secondary general education	Generally skilled worker	Secondary school graduation diploma with a supplement containing the following information: - level of qualifications; - major field of study with specific knowledge, skills and competence acquired; - other knowledge, skills and competence acquired by a person.
5	Postsecondary education, including master craftsman exams and similar exams	Highly skilled worker specialised for a certain occupation	Diploma/certificate of completed post-secondary education or passed master craftsman exam and/or similar exam for a certain occupation, with a supplement containing the following information: - level of qualifications; - duration of education; - major field of study or type of exam passed, indicating specific knowledge, skills and competence acquired; - other types of knowledge, skills and competence acquired; - field of work a person is trained for.

**Table 11. NQF structure (annex to the BQF) (Continued)**

LEVEL	TYPE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING	QUALIFICATIONS TITLES (POSITION IN THE LABOUR MARKET)	AWARD TYPE (DIPLOMA/CERTIFICATE/EDUCATION LEVEL)
6	First cycle of higher education	Titles of qualifications and contents of diploma and diploma supplement for levels 6, 7 and 8 will at a later stage include relevant NQF/EQF levels and will be further elaborated by the adoption of the Rulebook on Use of Academic Titles and Acquisition of Scientific and Professional Titles. The title of the bylaw is defined under Article 6 of the Framework Law on Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina ( <i>Official Gazette</i> , No 59/07).	- BA - Diploma issued by the institution of higher education - Diploma supplement in English and local language
7	Second cycle of higher education		- MA - Master's level diploma - Diploma supplement in English and local language
8	Third cycle of higher education		- PhD - Doctorate diploma - Diploma supplement in English and local language

**Abbreviations**

APOSO	Agency for Pre-primary, Primary, and Secondary Education (includes VET)
BQF	Bosnia and Herzegovina baseline qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Technical Assistance Agency)
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (the EU's support programme for candidate and potential candidate countries)
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

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# BULGARIA

## Introduction and context

Bulgaria is reforming all levels of education as a political priority. Although measures do not yet match the magnitude of challenges, there is an increased focus on reducing early school leaving, increasing teacher salaries, introducing dual learning, improving digital skills and strengthening inclusive education. The rate of early school leaving has fallen for the first time since 2011. The rate in 2017 was 12.7%, but remains above EU average of 10.6%. Early school leaving is particularly high in rural areas and among Roma. To tackle early school leaving Bulgaria has launched multidisciplinary teams of teachers, social workers, Roma mediators and other experts to identify out-of-school children and return them to education. Although not reflected automatically in the rate of early school leaving, data suggests that almost half of the children who dropped out of primary and lower secondary education in 2016/17 have emigrated, the figure being one quarter of dropouts in upper secondary. However, the data collection and monitoring system is insufficiently developed. The percentage of underachievers in science, maths and reading is around double the EU average, explained by a combination of education and equity factors. Low adult participation in lifelong learning (2.3% in 2017) coexists with skills mismatch and skills shortages. The skills of higher education graduates do not sufficiently match the needs of the jobs market. The employment rate of recent tertiary graduates increased by 8% to 86.5% and is now above the EU average (84.9%). However, skills shortages persist, particularly in the manufacturing, construction and digital sectors, as do skills mismatches. The employment rate of Bulgarian VET graduates is low; 59.1% of recent graduates were in employment in 2017, well below the EU average of 76.6% (European Commission, 2018).

The Bulgarian national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (BQF) was adopted in 2012, to raise trust in the Bulgarian education system and to support mobility and recognition of qualifications. The framework was also seen as an enabler of national reform, with implications for setting up a

system for validating non-formal learning, improving education and training quality, modernising curricula and strengthening provider accountability.

The BQF is a single, comprehensive, eight-level framework with an additional preparatory level 0. It includes qualifications from all levels and subsystems of formal education and training: pre-primary<sup>103</sup>, primary and secondary general education, vocational education and training (VET), and higher education, described in terms of learning outcomes. At this stage, the framework is restricted to qualifications from the formal education and training system.

The BQF is now firmly embedded in the national legislation; implementation, though, is in its early stages. The referencing report was adopted by the Minister for Education and Science in March 2014 and amendments to national legislation will support implementation. A new pre-school and school education bill was adopted in late 2015<sup>104</sup> and is expected to lead to amendment of the BQF at secondary education levels. Two bills amending and supplementing the Law on vocational training<sup>105</sup> support the BQF, with legal arrangements for validation of non-formal and independent (informal) learning, for learning outcomes units, and for introduction of the VET credits accumulation and transfer system.

The BQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in May

<sup>103</sup> Two years of pre-school education before first grade are mandatory.

<sup>104</sup> Pre-school and School Education Act. *State Gazette*, No 79, 13.10.2015. In force since 1.8.2016.

<sup>105</sup> Bill No 354-01-76 amending and supplementing the law on vocational education and training. Available in Bulgarian at the National Assembly website: <http://parliament.bg/bills/42/354-01-76.pdf>

Bill No 354-01-88 amending and supplementing the law on vocational education and training. Available in Bulgarian at the National Assembly website: <http://parliament.bg/bills/42/354-01-88.pdf>



2013. The referencing report has not yet been published on the official EQF website.

## Policy objectives

The overall objective of developing and introducing a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) compatible with the EQF and the QF-EHEA is to make Bulgarian education system levels clearer and easier to understand by describing them in terms of learning outcomes. This will also improve understanding of national qualifications among target groups and stakeholders. It is hoped that this will raise trust in education and training and make mobility and recognition of qualifications easier. More specific aims addressed by BQF development include (Bulgarian Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, 2013):

- a. develop a device with translation and bridging functions;
- b. promote mobility within education and in the labour market;
- c. promote learning-outcomes orientation of qualifications;
- d. support validation of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning;
- e. strengthen orientation towards a lifelong learning approach;
- f. increase cooperation between stakeholders.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The BQF comprises eight levels and an additional preparatory level (BQF level 'zero', covering pre-school education). Level descriptors take into account EQF and QF-EHEA descriptors. All levels are described in terms of knowledge (theoretical and factual), skills described as cognitive (use of logical and creative thinking) and practical (manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments), and competences. Competence descriptors distinguish between personal and professional competences. Personal competences include autonomy and responsibility, and key elements such as learning competences, communicative and social competences are also emphasised. Learning-outcomes-based qualification levels are expected to give learning outcomes a more prominent role in planning education provision (Bulgarian Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, 2013). This is especially the case in developing VET standards divided into units of learning outcomes.

Specified learning outcomes at the qualification levels reflect the legal acts governing different subsystems of education and training, as well as

State education requirements for contents and expected learning outcomes in the national education system (general and VET) and in higher education.

The national strategy for lifelong learning for the period 2008–13<sup>106</sup> does not stop at providing a definition of the term 'learning outcomes'; one of its priorities (along with vocational training, key competences and recognition of qualifications) is 'assessment of learning outcomes'. Learning outcomes (in Bulgarian: *резултати от учене*) are defined as 'acquired knowledge and skills as a result of formal, non-formal and independent (informal) learning'<sup>107</sup>. In January 2014, the Council of Ministers adopted the new national strategy for lifelong learning (for 2014–20)<sup>108</sup> which addresses the challenges in all forms of education, training and learning – formal, non-formal, independent (informal) – which an individual could undertake throughout his/her life. The new national strategy for lifelong learning, like the previous one, provides explanation of the phrase 'learning outcomes' and contains a definition of the term 'learning outcome units' (in Bulgarian: *единици учебни резултати*)<sup>109</sup>; this is understood as 'a component of qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competences, which could be assessed and validated through a certain number of credit points, linked to them'. As a whole, the term learning outcomes is widely used in the strategy.

Although the phrase learning outcomes is not so widespread in policy documents on general education, it is used or referred to in national curriculum, assessment and examination documents, particularly in State education standards<sup>110</sup>. However, an action plan for implementing the approach has not been adopted nor discussed in the country. The current position in

<sup>106</sup> National strategy for lifelong learning for 2008–13 (in Bulgarian: *Национална стратегия за учене през целия живот за периода 2008–13*), adopted by the Council of Ministers on 30.10.2008. Available in Bulgarian at: [www.strategy.bg/FileHandler.ashx?fileId=690](http://www.strategy.bg/FileHandler.ashx?fileId=690)

<sup>107</sup> National strategy for lifelong learning for 2008–13, p. 34. [www.mon.bg/upload/6561/strategy\\_LLL\\_2014\\_2020.pdf](http://www.mon.bg/upload/6561/strategy_LLL_2014_2020.pdf)

<sup>108</sup> National strategy for lifelong learning for 2014–20 (in Bulgarian: *Национална стратегия за учене през целия живот за периода 2014–20*), adopted by the Council of Ministers on 10.1.2014; available in Bulgarian at: [www.strategy.bg/FileHandler.ashx?fileId=4297](http://www.strategy.bg/FileHandler.ashx?fileId=4297)

<sup>109</sup> Note that there is a slight difference between the terminology used for 'learning outcomes units' in the Bill amending and supplementing the Law on vocational education and training and that used in the National strategy for lifelong learning for 2014–20. In the former the wording is 'единици резултати от ученето', whereas in the latter it is 'единици учебни резултати'.

<sup>110</sup> The term 'standard' has been adopted instead of the term 'requirement' since 1 August 2016 with the new law for school and preschool education.

the various subsystems shows that implementation of the approach has continued in the new State education standards adopted after the new law on pre-school and school education entered into force. It is also in the new State education requirements on acquisition of higher education in regulated professions, adopted after the BQF entered into force.

Two bills amending the law on VET introduce the term and a legal definition of it. State education standards and examination requirements, especially those for acquiring vocational qualifications, have been updated (or new ones developed), to describe or to refer to learning outcomes. This update is a prerequisite for implementing the validation procedure and awarding of credits.

Higher education institutions are autonomous and responsible for developing curriculum, assessment and examination rules; some have learning outcomes within study programmes, so implementation differs from one institution to another. The New Bulgarian University is an example of an institution using learning outcomes in its study programmes<sup>111</sup>. The Burgas Free University also uses learning outcomes in some of its master programme courses<sup>112</sup>. However, there is no systematic approach for implementing a learning outcome approach in higher education. According to a Cedefop study (2016), the law on higher education in Bulgaria<sup>113</sup>, which governs accreditation of universities, does not stress the importance of learning outcomes for the accreditation process.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria coordinated and led the drafting of the BQF and is now coordinating its implementation. National coordination point (NCP) responsibilities lie with the International and European Cooperation Directorate in this ministry. Following the adoption of amendments to the EQF recommendation (May 2017), a working group has been mandated to update the BQF. The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) has been involved in developing

and updating the list of qualifications for VET, which is integrated in the BQF. Sustained efforts are required for the BQF to achieve its aims (Cedefop, forthcoming).

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>114</sup>

Validation arrangements currently exist in general, vocational and adult education, but not in higher education. The Vocational Education and Training Act (VETA) was amended in 2014 to include a procedure for validation, to establish equivalence between vocational knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning and VET standards related to a specific professional qualification (Article 40, *State Gazette*, No 61/2014). In relation to this, Ordinance No 2 on the conditions and procedures for the validation of professional knowledge, skills and competences was approved and has been in force since 2015 (*State Gazette*, No 96/2014). It defines validation stages, requirements for assessors, procedural requirements and types of validation certificate to be issued. It also sets in place an institutional framework with clear allocation of responsibilities and coordination between public institutions and social partners, which is one of the strengths of the current system. Recent amendments to the Pre-school and School Education Act (in force since 2016), brought it in line with VETA and introduced opportunities to acquire a vocational qualification in the new secondary education structure (Cedefop, 2018). Validation provides access to general education, VET and/or facilitates access to the labour market.

In VET, validation includes two main stages. The first, 'identification of professional knowledge, skills and competences acquired by a candidate' is further subdivided into sub-stages: determination of the professional field and profession; preliminary comparison of the declared professional knowledge, skills and competences with the learning outcomes included in the VET standard; guidance on additional training where necessary and verification of acquired professional knowledge, skills and competences; and assessment by examination in the theory and practice of the profession. The second stage refers to the recognition of the professional qualification or partial professional qualification (Article 6, *State Gazette*, No 96/2014).

<sup>111</sup> New Bulgarian University, e-catalogue: [http://ecatalog.nbu.bg/Default.asp?V\\_Year=2013](http://ecatalog.nbu.bg/Default.asp?V_Year=2013)

<sup>112</sup> Burgas Free University, Master programmes: [www.bfu.bg/index.php?q=node/1793](http://www.bfu.bg/index.php?q=node/1793)

<sup>113</sup> Law on higher education (in Bulgarian: *Закон за висшето образование*). *State Gazette*, No 112, 27.12.1995. Last amendment: *State Gazette*, No 101, 22.11.2013. Available in Bulgarian at: <http://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2133647361>

<sup>114</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

The standards used for validation are the same as the VET standards used in formal education and training. Where VET standards for a particular vocational qualification do not exist, the approved curriculum for the respective profession is applied.

While there are no explicit quality assurance indicators for validation, current legislation stipulates that institutions have to put in place internal quality assurance systems. The project *System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences: new opportunity for my future (2013–15)*, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, other relevant ministries and social partners, contributed to developing internal quality assurance mechanisms related to assessing evidence of previous learning. Training was provided to validation practitioners in VET and a *Manual for vocational schools for validating non-formal and informal learning* was developed, providing methodological guidelines and instruments (such as comparative tables) for assessing equivalence between competences declared by a candidate and those defined for a specific vocational qualification in the corresponding VET standard.

The BQF has among its aims to facilitate validation and recognition of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning and work-based training, by virtue of presenting detailed descriptions of learning outcomes in line with State education standards. Each unit of learning outcomes can be independently assessed and validated. However, at this stage the framework is restricted to qualifications from the formal education and training system. Certificates acquired through validation differ from issued VET certificates, as in title and description: the former describe validated competences<sup>115</sup> and the latter subjects of education.

Bulgaria has used the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in higher education from 2004 and is implementing the European Credit System in Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) as a part of the National lifelong learning strategy. Credit transfer and accumulation has been introduced in the VET system with amendments to the VET Act in July 2014.

The project *New chance for success (2014–20)*, implemented under the Science and education for smart growth operational programme (2014–20), enables validation arrangements for disadvantaged

groups, including unemployed individuals and those at risk of unemployment. It provides literacy and basic education courses and awards certificates that allow access to general secondary education or to training for the acquisition of a VET qualification at BQF/EQF level 2.

## NQF implementation

The qualifications framework is firmly based on national legislation, adopted by the Council of Ministers<sup>116</sup> and further legislatively embedded in the Pre-school and School Education Act 2015, in force since August 2016. The BQF, as proposed for referencing, is a classification framework: its future reforming role to support development and revision of qualifications and quality assurance arrangements is acknowledged. The BQF is embedded in wider educational reforms; legislative changes have been introduced to strengthen BQF implementation and curricula and provision will be modernised. In accordance with Article 141 of the law for preschool and school education<sup>117</sup>, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents will be referenced to the relevant BQF level, linked to the corresponding EQF level.

Currently, the BQF comprises all education stages and levels (from pre-school to doctoral level); it can be regarded as a comprehensive framework. VET can start quite early (at age of 13) and is spread over four levels in the BQF (levels 2 to 5), starting with the 'first level' of a vocational qualification placed at level 2, along with the basic education certificate. Levels 3 and 4 comprise lower and upper secondary stages and include the 'second and third level' of a vocational qualification, along with general education. Level 5 comprises VET only; the 'fourth level' of a vocational qualification is placed here. This is the most advanced (post-secondary) vocational qualification. Levels 6 to 8 relate to qualifications obtained in higher education: bachelor, master and doctor degrees. However, it is restricted to qualifications from formal education and training; levels 6 to 8 are limited to qualifications awarded by higher education institutions.

<sup>115</sup> A demo version of a certificate for validation is available in Bulgarian at: [www.navet.government.bg/bg/media/Svidetelstvo\\_validirane.pdf](http://www.navet.government.bg/bg/media/Svidetelstvo_validirane.pdf)

<sup>116</sup> Decision of the Council of Ministers No 96 of 2 February 2012 on the adoption of the national qualifications framework of the Republic of Bulgaria.

<sup>117</sup> Law on pre-school and school education, *State Gazette*, No 79/2015, [www.mon.bg/?h=downloadFile&fileId=8245](http://www.mon.bg/?h=downloadFile&fileId=8245)

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Bulgaria delivered a joint referencing report in May 2013, referencing the BQF to the EQF and the QF-EHEA. The referencing report has not yet been published on the official EQF website.

## Important lessons and future plans

The BQF aims to increase transparency in education and training and aid knowledge and skills transfer, improving labour force mobility. Level descriptors defined in learning outcomes aim to provide a reference point and common language for diverse qualifications from different education subsystems. By referring to education levels and State education standards, the BQF has been given a strong input orientation. It is expected, however, that learning-outcomes-based level descriptors will play an important role in supporting dialogue and that discussion among stakeholders will strengthen the learning-outcomes dimension in qualifications design. This is work in progress.

The framework can play an important role, if it is part of a wider strategic policy resulting in

necessary reform and institutional regulations. Although it is an explicit aim of BQF work to strengthen orientation towards a lifelong learning approach, it remains a challenge that lifelong learning aspects are inadequately focused. There is little information so far on system flexibility and the conditions and role of the framework for promoting lifelong learning and supporting access, progression and adult participation.

Future plans include modernisation of curricula in schools and higher education, and promotional activities. Implementing the BQF at institutional level is seen as a major challenge, particularly by higher education institutions. Among employers there is insufficient understanding of the differences between bachelor and master degrees.

Stakeholders (including State institutions) in some economic sectors (IT, machinery, transport) have recently started discussions regarding sectoral qualifications on levels 2 to 7 of the BQF, including labour market needs, current possibilities, horizontal and vertical permeability. This might be perceived as a step towards development of a sectoral qualifications framework.

## Bulgarian qualifications framework (BQF)

BQF LEVELS	BQF	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctor degree Continuing training	8
7	Master degree Continuing training	7
6	Bachelor degree Degree of 'professional bachelor in...' Continuing training	6
5	Vocational qualification-level 4	5
4	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate Vocational qualification-level 3	4
3	Lower secondary school leaving certificate Vocational qualification-level 2	3
2	Basic education certificate (class five to eight) Vocational qualification-level 1	2
1	Primary education certificate	1
0	Pre-primary education	N/A

Source: Bulgarian Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, 2013.

**Abbreviations**

BQF	Bulgarian qualifications framework	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework of the European higher education area
EQF	European qualifications framework	VET	vocational education and training
NQF	national qualifications framework	VETA	Vocational Education and Training Act

## Main sources of information

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## Introduction and context

China is the most populous country in the world, with nearly 1.4 billion inhabitants, and also the largest developing country in the world: its per capita GDP is only two-thirds of the global average and ranks around 72 in the world (IMF, 2018). The number of people living below the poverty line exceeds 30 million (SCLGOPAD, 2018), with the majority of the country's poor living in rural areas. Consequently, reducing poverty is central to the government's national development strategy.

China offers a state-run system of public education which took its current shape between 1977 and 1980 and is managed by the Ministry of Education. All citizens must attend school for at least nine years, known as 'nine-year compulsory education'. This is funded by Chinese Government and includes six years of primary education, starting at age six or seven, and three years of junior secondary education for ages 12 to 15. After junior secondary school, there is an option to attend three years of senior secondary school, which completes the secondary education. Since 1982, the number of private primary and secondary schools has increased year on year, and the number of enrolled students has grown to 18.9 million, accounting for 10.2% of the student population in 2017 (MoE, 2018a).

China has different types of formal higher education: 'for-degree' and 'not-for-degree' education, full- and part-time education, as well as open and distance higher education. According to data for 2017 (ibid.), there are 2,868 higher education institutions (HEIs) in China, out of which 1,243 universities and 1,388 higher vocational colleges. In addition, there are 282 adult learning and education institutions, including 45 single-mode distance education institutions (including six open universities and 39 radio and TV universities). The gross enrolment rate for higher education is 45.7%, and there are 2,576 college students for every 100,000 people. Formal education institutes are accredited as legal

entities and approved by the government (ibid.). There are a further 747 non-government HEIs in China, including 265 independent institutions<sup>118</sup> and one adult HEI<sup>119</sup>, catering to a total of 6.8 million students (ibid.).

China's National Vocational Qualification Certificate System (NVQCS) was introduced in 1993 by the Ministry of Labour (now called the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security). It is an essential part of the Chinese labour employment system and includes a national examination conducted by assessment agencies approved by the government. Accreditation is granted following the assessment of skill levels or vocational qualifications provided by an institute; these, in turn, are based on vocational skill standards or qualification requirements established by the government (MHRSS, 2019).

In June 2012, the Department of Vocational and Adult Education of the Ministry of Education entrusted the Open University of China (OUC) to carry out the project 'Research and Practice of the National Continuing Education Learning Outcomes Accreditation, Accumulation and Transfer System'. To this end, OUC established a qualifications framework, which, in the form of credit banks, aims to accredit, accumulate and transfer learning outcomes among vocational, continuing and adult learning institutes.

<sup>118</sup> Chinese independent colleges are run by private education providers, which are affiliated to a degree-awarding institution known as the 'mother' HEI. The link between the college and HEI are approved by the Ministry of Education in China but the colleges are independent from the 'mother' HEI in terms of admission, teaching and funding.

<sup>119</sup> Adult HEIs provide higher education for adults in accordance with the national standards and approval procedures. The enrolled students need to pass the national adult higher education entrance examination and have a senior high school diploma or equivalent qualifications. The courses are mainly part-time, with various teaching and learning modes such as open and distance learning, online learning, blended learning, etc.

In 2016, Guangdong Province established 'Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework Level Standard' with an aim to connect various types of education and learning institutions in order to develop 'growth pathways'. It is the first standardized qualifications framework jointly established by various government departments, educational institutions and industries in China. In March 2017, the Guangdong Provincial Quality and Technical Supervision Bureau approved a 'Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework Level Standard', China's first qualifications framework standard at provincial level.

Although China has made great efforts to develop its NVQCS and qualifications framework, inequalities persist with regard to education and economy across the country. Furthermore, several industry sectors still need to be modernized or integrated in the context of China's economic transformation. It is a challenge to stipulate a nationwide standard or qualifications framework that is applied in all regions and cities and across all industries and occupations.

Another challenge pertains to international comparability of qualifications. With the development of the economy and increasing globalization, more Chinese students are travelling abroad to study. According to the OECD Education Report 2016, over 600,000 Chinese students studied abroad in 2016 (OECD, 2018). In addition, the export of labour has increased over the years: in 2000, an estimated 425,667 Chinese citizens emigrated for work; in 2016, this number rose to 969,000 (MoC, 2017). China therefore needs to build a unified qualification framework in order to strengthen the comparability of qualifications and promote international mobility.

A third and final challenge applies to the mismatch between the labour market and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) providers. There is insufficient cooperation between TVET institutions and employers within workplace training, which is compulsory for students enrolled in higher vocational education institutes. There is also an insufficient planning to meet the needs of the labour market. The coordination between labour supply and demand sides is also poor (OECD, 2018).

## Policy objectives

In 2010, China issued the National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020), wherein the Ministry of Education proposed establishing pathways of lifelong learning in the education and training system (MoE, 2010).

From an educational perspective, the government's aim was to:

- connect every level and form of learning and establish a way to measure learning outcomes;
- enable the credits earned in continuing education to be accumulated and transferred so that the recognition and validation of different kinds of learning outcomes could be achieved;
- ensure the comparability and transparency of the learning outcomes;
- facilitate equal access to quality education.

From a social perspective, the aim was to:

- enhance the acceptance of qualifications by society and the labour market;
- improve the quality of the labour force and the development of the society and economy;
- strengthen the international competitiveness of the labour force in response to the challenges of the knowledge-economy;
- promote nationwide lifelong learning.

From the personal perspective, the aim was to:

- provide more choices to meet the various learning needs for personal and career development;
- respect the learning outcomes of learners from different learning settings (formal, non-formal and informal);
- establish self-directed learning pathways;
- improve individual competence.

The 2013 Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed transferring credits among conventional education, vocational education and continuing education in order to develop the practice of lifelong learning in the country. The following year, Chinese President Xi Jinping, at the fourth meeting of the Central Comprehensive Deepening Reform Leading Group, called for the establishment of a lifelong learning overpass that connects and communicates various categories of education and recognizes a variety of learning outcomes. This led in 2016 to a newly revised education law promoting 'mutual recognition and transfer of different types of learning outcomes to promote lifelong learning for all'.

The 'Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China' promulgated in 2016 (hereinafter referred to as the '13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Outline') proposed the establishment of a personal learning account and credit accumulative system to smooth the continuing education and lifelong learning channel,

formulate a national qualifications framework, and promote the credit transfer and mutual recognition of non-degree education learning outcomes and vocational skills levels. The plan also proposed the development of a national qualifications framework in China.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The NVQCS has five levels (see Table 12); occupational standards are key to the system. A certificate is proof that the holder has the knowledge and skills essential for the practice of the occupation in question, and qualifies the holder to set up a business in China.

Table 13 illustrates the corresponding relationship between NVQCs and two other sub-frameworks.

The NVQC is designed for specialized industries, such as the medical and law industries, without which workers cannot be employed by these industries. 'PC' is the entrance examination of an occupation.

The Qualification Certificate for Professional and Technical Personnel (QCPTP) is designed for white-collar workers and has its own levels: junior, intermediate and senior.

The Qualification Certificate for Skilled Workers (QCSW) is designed for blue-collar workers. In China, in contrast to other countries, 1 is the highest level and 5 is the lowest level.

**Table 12. Levels and competence demands of China's NVQC**

LEVEL	NAME OF THE CERTIFICATE	COMPETENCE DEMAND
5	Primary worker certificate	Able to complete regular work independently with basic skills.
4	Intermediate worker certificate	In addition to the requirements of Level 5, Level 4 certificate holders are also able to cooperate with other workers and carry out more complicated work with specialized skills in certain situations.
3	Advanced worker certificate	Able to complete complex and irregular work with specialized skills and special competences skilfully; to master the key skills of his/her own occupation; to deal with and solve technical challenges independently; to make innovation in technology; to organize and supervise other workers; to train general staff.
2	Technician certificate	Able to carry out complicated work, including irregular work with basic skills and specialized competence; to deal with problems happening in the workplace independently; to supervise other workers and assist training of general staff.
1	Senior technician certificate	Able to complete complex and irregular work with specialized skills and special competence in every area of his/her own occupation; to master the key operation skills of his/her own occupation skilfully; to deal with and solve high-difficult challenges independently; to make innovation in technology; to organize technical reform and innovation; to hold systematic training of specialized skills.

Source: MHRSS, 2018.



**Table 13. Corresponding relationship of China's NVQC with QCPTP and QCSW**

LEVELS	NVQC	QCPTP	QCSW
5	Primary worker certificate	/	Primary worker certificate
4	Intermediate worker certificate	/	Intermediate worker certificate
3	Advanced worker certificate	Junior	/
2	Technician certificate	Intermediate	/
1	Senior technician certificate	Senior	/

Source: MHRS, 2018.

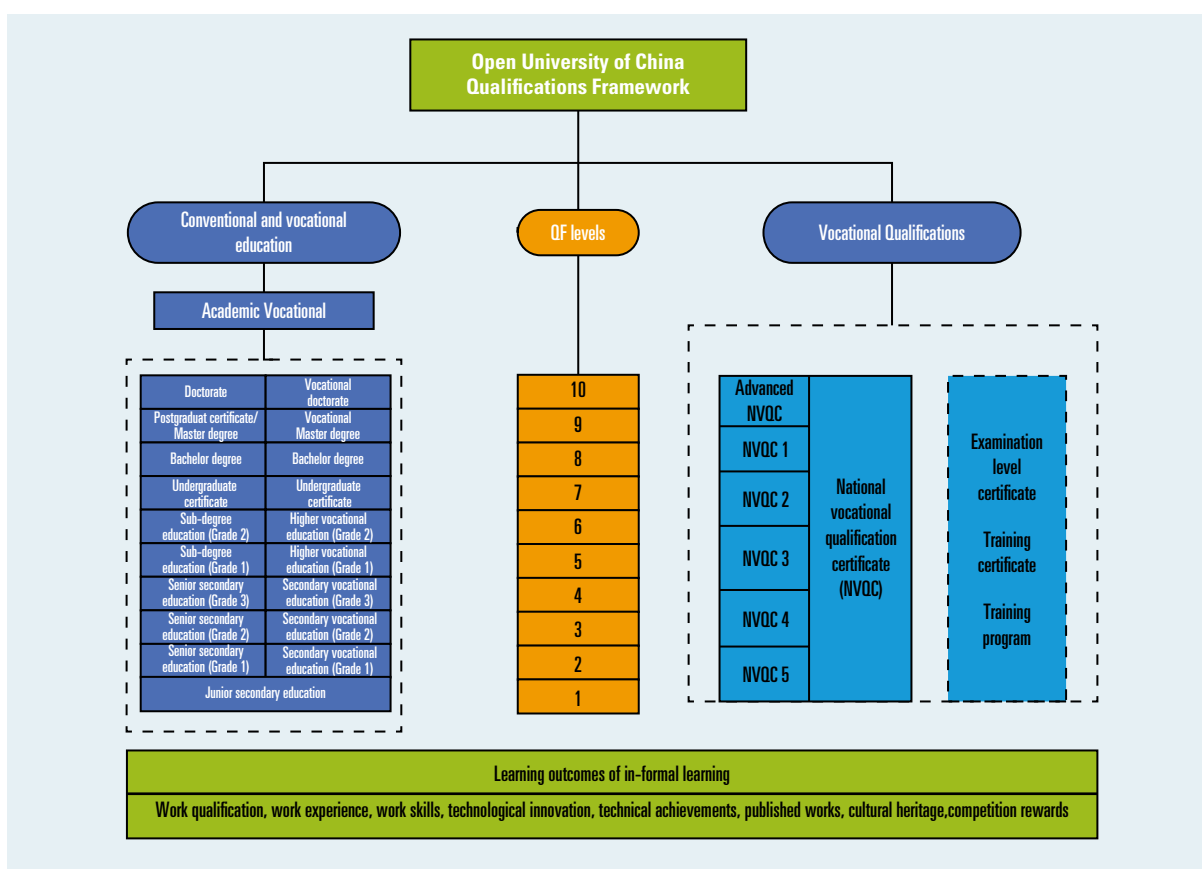
### Levels and use of learning outcomes of qualifications frameworks

#### Open University of China Qualifications Framework (OUCQF)

OUCQF consists of 10 qualification levels, with three domain descriptors for learning outcomes:

knowledge (factual, technical and theoretical), skills (cognitive, technical, communicative and expressive), and competency (autonomy, judgment and responsibility in terms of the application of knowledge and skill). Up to now, OUC has established 70 learning outcome accreditation centres across the country, covering 31 provinces, cities and 20 industries (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Open university of china qualifications framework**



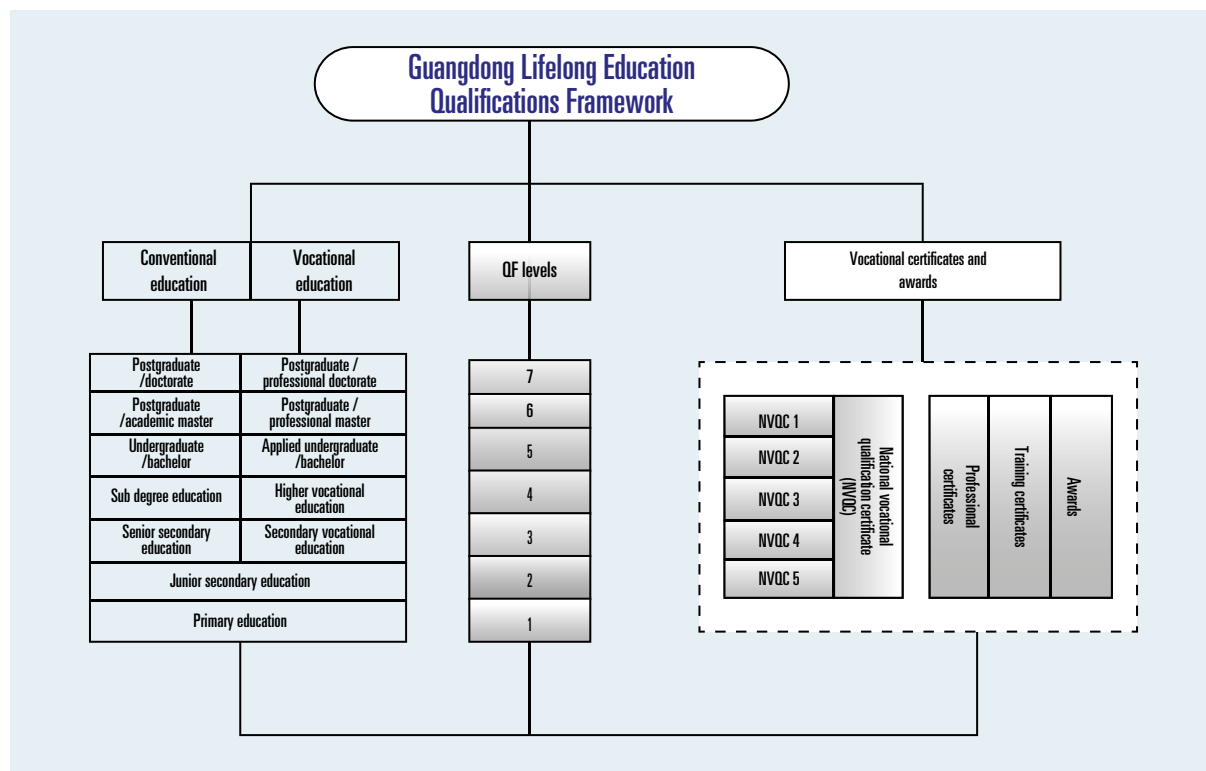
Source: Zhang and Xie, 2017, p. 77

## Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework (GDLEQF)

GDLEQF divides qualifications outcomes into seven levels; clarifies the relationship between general education, vocational education, training and

performance; and establishes the standards of each level from the three dimensions of knowledge, skills and competency (see Figure 6). It is the first local standardized qualifications framework in China.

Figure 6. Guangdong lifelong education qualifications framework



Source: Zhang and Xie, 2017, p. 78

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

As of July 2016, there are 38 credit banks across China; these include lifelong learning credit banks, citizen credit banks, alliance credit banks<sup>120</sup>, adult college credit banks, vocational school credit banks, corporate credit banks and credit bank projects (Zhang et al., 2017). In order to bridge formal, non-formal and informal learning, some open universities, such as the Open University of China, Guangdong Open University, Shanghai Open University, Jiangsu Open University, Beijing Open University, Yunnan Open University and Chongqing Radio and Television University, also developed

ways to implement pathways for the recognition, validation and accreditation of learning outcomes.

Since the establishment of the Shanghai Lifelong Education Credit Bank<sup>121</sup> in 2012, for example, more than 730,000 learners have deposited over 44 million learning outcomes. The credit bank forms a learner's personal learning archive and the learners can apply for the conversion of learning outcomes according to set standards and procedures (Zhang and Zhang, 2017).

Meanwhile, the Open University of China Lifelong Education Credit Bank, based on the OUCQF, developed a learning achievement accreditation online platform as well as a mutual recognition alliance for learning outcomes. The projects that are currently being promoted include a teacher

<sup>120</sup> The alliance credit bank is a cooperative mechanism established by several institutions to realize the mutual recognition and transfer of learning outcomes, resource sharing, and types of courses.

<sup>121</sup> Shanghai Lifelong Education Credit Bank is led by the Shanghai Education Commission and managed and operated by Shanghai Open University.

education project; continuing education learning outcome accreditation, accumulation and conversion pilot; and the accumulation and conversion of higher vocational education learning outcomes. The purpose of the projects is to carry out the accreditation of different types of learning outcomes between the Open University of China and local universities, relevant industries, various institutions and training institutions to realize the accumulation and transfer of learning credits. (ibid.).

Guangdong Lifelong Education Credit Bank, based on GDQF, has established the qualifications framework level and standards, an organizational system, a standard system, an institutional system, a service system, and an information online platform<sup>122</sup>.

Yunnan Lifelong Education Credit Bank was launched in 2012. Up to 2014, the credit bank's programme, organizational structure, and platform construction were completed. The number of credit bank accounts has reached 124,124, and 921,085 learning outcomes are stored. In 2015, the Model Alliance of Higher Vocational Colleges of Yunnan Credit Banks was established to explore the vertical connection and horizontal communication of vocational education (ibid.).

Since the promulgation of Administrative Measures for Lifelong Education Credit Banks in Jiangsu Province (Trial) in December 2013, the Jiangsu Lifelong Education Credit Bank has established alliances with Jiangsu Open University and the City Vocational College of Jiangsu to implement learning outcomes accreditation and transfer.<sup>123</sup>

In addition, Chongqing Radio & TV University has established a vocational and training qualifications framework, and the general competence standards for rail transit and software engineering are under construction.<sup>124</sup>

## NQF implementation

### Vocational qualifications implementation and reform

In the last 10 years, China's Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Personnel have published a series of policies and regulations that stipulate how

vocational qualifications assessments should be made. Local labour and personnel ministries have also set out corresponding methods of vocational qualifications implementation.

For example, the 1+X Vocational Certificate System, which will be implemented in 2019, is a vocational certificate for students with high-quality technical skills. (MoE, 2018c). The certificate recognizes academic achievements as well as professional/technical skills, increasing learners' chances of finding employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

### Lifelong education qualifications framework implementation

Based on the OUCQF, learning outcome accreditations have been applied in various industries: there are currently more than 560 qualification standard units in more than 20 industries including foundry, information security, logistics, social work, pensions, chemistry, machinery, software and construction.

With regard to the GDLEQF, in December 2017 a pilot project for the development of an automotive industry and mechanical manufacturing qualification standards was launched. Guangdong Jiaotong Vocational and Technical College and Guangdong Road Transportation Association jointly presided over the development of qualification standards for the automotive industry, while Guangdong Electromechanical Vocational and Technical College, Guangdong Machinery Industry Association and Guangdong Cole Technology Development Co., Ltd. jointly presided over the development of qualification standards for machinery manufacturing. At the end of 2019, the automotive industry and mechanical manufacturing qualification standards will be released in the form of group standards.

Jiangsu Lifelong Education Credit Bank has compiled a learning achievement framework that is consistent with the levels and standards of GDLEQF. Based on this, the bank cooperated with the Beauty Salon Association of Jiangsu Beauty and Hairdressing Association to develop a Nail Professional Occupational Proficiency Standard. As a result, the knowledge, skills and competencies required for the development of hand and foot care has been established, from Level 2 (junior level) to Level 6 (master degree level).

### Important lessons and future plans

Efforts by the Chinese Government to establish a unified qualifications framework have shown that:

- although some local qualifications frameworks have been established, a national qualifications

<sup>122</sup> Based on an interview by the authors with Xuechan Li, Deputy Head of Guangdong Credit Bank Office, Guangdong Open University, on 11 January 2019.

<sup>123</sup> Based on an interview by the authors with Xuan Zhang, Head of Jiangsu Credit Bank Office, Jiangsu Open University, on 15 January 2019.

<sup>124</sup> Based on an interview by the authors with Nanzhong Wu, Head of the Credit Bank Office, Chongqing Open University, on 18 January 2019.

framework is urgently needed in order to meet international standards and key indicators;

- national qualifications frameworks should include all kinds of learning outcomes, from formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- various government units, educational institutions, industries and companies must be involved in the establishment and implementation of national qualifications frameworks.

It is a priority of the Chinese Government to develop a comprehensive national qualifications framework that covers all types of education and learning at all levels and promotes local educational development and the international comparability of qualifications. Work on this has already begun and some experiences have been learned in vocational education, continuing education and lifelong learning.

#### Abbreviations

GDLEQF	Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework
HEI	Higher education institution
NVQC	National Vocational Qualification Certificate
NVQCS	National Vocational Qualification Certificate System
OUC	Open University of China
OUCQF	Open University of China Qualifications Framework
QCPTP	Qualification Certificate for Professional and Technical Personnel
QCSW	Qualification Certificate for Skilled Workers
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training

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## Introduction and context

Croatia's *Strategy for education, science and technology*, adopted by parliament in 2014 (Croatian Parliament, 2014), aims to develop all education and training subsystems. A major curriculum reform was launched by the government in 2015, but implementation has been delayed. A pilot curriculum reform was introduced in general education in 2018/19 to increase quality and relevance, and new legislation is setting the ground for reforms in vocational education and training (VET). The country has the lowest rate of early school leaving in the EU (3.1% in 2017, compared with the EU average of 10.6%). The employment rate of recent VET graduates increase sharply from 45.7% in 2015 to 70.3% in 2016, but fell to 59.4% in 2017. The country faces important challenges in terms of basic skill levels, especially in science and maths, participation rates in early childhood education and care and in adult lifelong learning, and low relevance of VET and higher education for employability (European Commission, 2018). The Croatian qualifications framework (CROQF) is seen as an important tool for the latter aspects, aligning education and training with the needs of the labour market (European Commission, 2017).

Development of the CROQF started in 2006, aiming to modernise secondary VET, higher education and adult education and to address existing and foreseen skill shortages on the labour market. The CROQF Act (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2013), adopted by the Croatian Parliament in 2013 and subsequently amended in 2018 (Croatian Ministry of Science and Education, 2018), established the CROQF and set out the legislative and institutional framework for its development and implementation. It is a single, comprehensive framework, which has eight levels and three sublevels<sup>125</sup>, described in terms of learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and level of autonomy and responsibility. It also incorporates

credit systems. It includes qualifications from all levels and subsystems of formal education and training (general education, VET and higher education) and forms the basis for developing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. The framework was taken into account while creating the comprehensive curriculum reform for primary and secondary education and in the amended Act on VET, in force since March 2018<sup>126</sup>. It is also linked to planned developments in higher and adult education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The CROQF was linked to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2012.

## Policy objectives

While the CROQF development process started in response to the two European qualifications frameworks (EQF and QF-EHEA), its aims are closely linked to the Croatian context. Besides allowing for comparability of Croatian qualifications at European level and internationally, the framework is seen as reflecting national needs and priorities, as an instrument for developing new education and training solutions.

The CROQF development aims to: enable better communication and coordination between stakeholders in the qualifications system; provide a classification of the existing system as a basis for transparency of qualifications, including description of old qualifications and facilitation of recognition of foreign qualifications; and act as a tool for reforming national education and training, promoting the use of learning outcomes, the development of quality assurance systems and of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning

<sup>125</sup> Initially, the CROQF had sublevels at levels 4 and 8. A sublevel at level 7 was introduced in 2018 with the amended CROQF Act.

<sup>126</sup> The text of the amended Act on VET is available at: [www.zakon.hr/z/383/Zakon-o-strukovnom-obrazovanju](http://www.zakon.hr/z/383/Zakon-o-strukovnom-obrazovanju) (in Croatian).

(Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2014).

Objectives for the development of the CROQF and principles guiding its implementation include:

- a. better linking education and training with labour market needs;
- b. improving personal, social and economic development, and social inclusion and equity;
- c. emphasising the role of key competences for lifelong learning;
- d. improving pathways between subsystems and between sectors;
- e. making qualifications transparent and more consistent with the use of learning outcomes;
- f. supporting partnerships among stakeholders in the qualifications system;
- g. supporting lifelong learning and employability (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2014).

The CROQF builds on reforms under way since 2005, such as developing new education standards and national curricula for general education and VET, and introducing the State *matura*. The comprehensive curriculum reform for primary and secondary education, which takes the CROQF into account, has as its main goal to modernise education to respond better to learners' age and interests, preparing them for work, further education and contemporary life challenges. It also seeks to define clear learning outcomes and redefine the roles of teachers and educational institutions (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

In the framework of the *Strategy for education, science and technology* (Croatian Parliament, 2014), the CROQF is seen as a basis for establishing a quality assurance system at all levels of education and training by driving the development of necessary elements and instruments. It is also seen as a central instrument for improving and expanding work-based learning. The role of the CROQF in improving education quality is also emphasised in the *Strategy for lifelong career guidance and career development*<sup>127</sup>, which establishes links between career guidance development, recognition of prior learning and the CROQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The CROQF is a qualifications and a credit framework. Each qualification in the framework is defined in terms of profile (field of work or study), reference level (complexity of acquired competences) and volume/workload (credit points)<sup>128</sup>. Qualifications can be full and partial. The CROQF has eight reference levels, in line with the EQF, but with three additional sublevels at levels 4, 7 and 8. Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge (theoretical and factual); skills (cognitive, practical and social skills); and responsibility and autonomy. Although some key competences are explicitly indicated in the CROQF, it is emphasised that key competences should be included in each qualification (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2014).

Initially, sublevels for levels 4 and 8 were agreed to cater for existing Croatian qualifications of different workload and complexity. For example, a qualification with a minimum of 180 ECVET and/or HROO points (from which a minimum of 120 ECVET and/or HROO points are required at the fourth reference level or higher) is referenced to level 4.1. For a qualification at level 4.2, a minimum of 240 ECVET and/or HROO points are required (a minimum of 150 ECVET and/or HROO points at the fourth reference level or higher) (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2014).

Sublevels of level 7 were recently introduced. According to the 2013 CROQF Act, level 7 included graduate university studies (*sveučilišni diplomski studiji*), specialist graduate professional studies (*specijalistički diplomski stručni studiji*) and post-master specialist university studies (*poslijediplomski specijalistički studiji*). Following public debate, the CROQF Act was revised in 2018 (Croatian Ministry of Science and Education, 2018), splitting level 7 into sublevel 7.1 which now covers graduate university studies (*sveučilišni diplomski studiji*) and specialist graduate professional studies (*specijalistički diplomski stručni studiji*); and sublevel 7.2 which includes post-master specialist university studies (*poslijediplomski specijalistički studiji*) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). While keeping the two qualification types (academic and professional) at the same level (7.1), this amendment limits

<sup>127</sup> Available at: [www.hzz.hr/UserDocsImages/Strategija\\_CPU\\_i\\_razvoja\\_karijere\\_u\\_RH\\_2016-2020\\_EN.pdf](http://www.hzz.hr/UserDocsImages/Strategija_CPU_i_razvoja_karijere_u_RH_2016-2020_EN.pdf)

<sup>128</sup> Three credit systems are used to measure the volume of qualifications and of learning outcomes: the Croatian credit system for general education (HROO), the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET), and the European credit transfer and accumulation system for higher education (ECTS).

access to doctoral programmes for graduates of professional studies (European Commission, 2017). Entry requirements for level 8.2 were also redefined with the amended CROQF Act<sup>129</sup>.

The CROQF plays a central role in developing and implementing the learning outcomes approach in all subsystems of education and training, building on the reforms so far. Strengthening learning outcomes is supported by major stakeholder groups and mentioned in the *Strategy for education, science and technology* (Croatian Parliament, 2014) as central to the CROQF role in increasing quality assurance of education and training and in responding to the demands of the labour market. Learning outcomes are the main element of any qualification and they are organised in units/modules of learning outcomes. This is seen as giving transparency to qualifications and having a positive impact on transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes across sectors and institutions (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The CROQF also establishes competence-based occupational standards and learning-outcomes-based qualifications standards as the basis for accreditation of programmes developed in line with the CROQF methodology<sup>130</sup>. Occupational standards are developed through research-based analysis of labour market needs, particularly the Occupational standard survey, a questionnaire completed by employers. Occupational standards are then the basis for developing qualifications standards for qualifications aimed at the labour market. Qualifications standards developed for other purposes (pursuing further education, other individual or societal needs) are not based on the occupational standards. Qualifications standards entered in the CROQF register are the basis for developing and redesigning education and training programmes. At present, aligning programmes with qualifications standards in the CROQF register is not mandatory but is a mark of programme

quality, transparency and relevance, leading to a qualification with an assigned CROQF/EQF level.

The learning outcomes approach has been gradually introduced in VET since 2006. The amended Act on Vocational Education and Training<sup>131</sup>, in force since March 2018, defines occupational and qualifications standards in compliance with the CROQF Act. VET curricula are developed according to occupational and qualifications standards. In 2018, the dual model of VET education was launched experimentally for particular qualifications as a model based on the cooperation between education institutions and employers. Regional centres of competence were appointed to make VET more attractive.

The State *matura* was introduced in 2010 as an obligatory final exam (including Croatian language, mathematics, the first foreign language and the mother tongue for ethnic minority pupils) for gymnasium graduates and as an optional choice for VET graduates on completion of four-year programmes. In 2018, the experimental reform programme *School for life* began in general education, aimed to prepare students for challenges they face in life.

Higher education has undergone extensive change in the last decade, including strengthening the learning outcomes dimension. The decision (2001) to take part in the Bologna process made it necessary for Croatia to adjust its higher education system significantly. Introduction of undergraduate (first cycle) and graduate (second cycle) programmes started in 2005. The change in curricula is intended to develop competences needed on the labour market. The CROQF is thought to be the main instrument for bridging higher education and the labour market (European Commission, 2017). A number of occupational and qualification standards in higher education have already been developed and are to be assessed by the sectoral councils (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Major stakeholders from education and training and the labour market (government representatives, learning providers, employers, students and other social partners) were involved in all phases of CROQF development. Public debate and round table discussions for the broader public were held in the initial phase of drafting of the CROQF Act

<sup>129</sup> The entry requirement for level 8.2 (postgraduate university doctoral studies) is a qualification acquired on completion of a graduate university degree, fulfilment of conditions defined in a regulation adopted by a university or university component and conditions defined in the study programme of the university or the university component. Exceptionally, the university can define another previously acquired qualification as entry requirement providing that an additional programme was completed in the university.

<sup>130</sup> Development of occupational and qualifications standards based on learning outcomes has been supported through IPA (instrument for pre-accession assistance) and European Social Fund projects, including through workshops on the use and assessment of learning outcomes.

<sup>131</sup> The amended Act on VET is available at: [www.zakon.hr/z/383/Zakon-o-strukovnom-obrazovanju](http://www.zakon.hr/z/383/Zakon-o-strukovnom-obrazovanju) (in Croatian).



(Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2013). The act sets up the institutional and legislative framework for CROQF implementation and defines the involvement, roles and responsibilities of key bodies and stakeholders.

The National Council for Development of Human Potential was appointed by the Croatian Parliament in June 2014, as the strategic body for developing and implementing the CROQF. It comprises a president and 24 representatives of national ministries, regional structures, social partners, education providers and national agencies involved in developing and awarding qualifications in different subsystems of education and training<sup>132</sup>. The council oversees policies in education, training, employment and human resource development and monitors and evaluates the CROQF's impact and the work of the sectoral councils. The variety of stakeholders actively involved in the national council is both the strength of the current governance arrangement – as it ensures wide consensus on matters regarding the CROQF – and also its weakness, as the decision-making process may take a long time.

On a technical and policy level, the Ministry of Science and Education coordinates development and implementation of the CROQF, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Pension System. The main tasks of the Ministry of Science and Education include: setting up and maintaining the national CROQF register, establishing and coordinating the work of sectoral councils, providing support to the National Council for Development of Human Potential, developing procedures related to standards of qualifications, developing a system of validation of non-formal learning, and informing the public about the CROQF. The main tasks of the Ministry of Labour and Pension System include managing the sub-register of occupational standards and developing procedures related to them. Cooperation between the two ministries is ensured through regular coordination meetings.

The Ministry of Science and Education is also the EQF national coordination point (NCP).

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<sup>132</sup> The National Council for Development of Human Potential consists of representatives of the following institutions: Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Crafts, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Regional Development, regional structures, associations of unions, associations of employers, civil society organisations, the Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Trades and Crafts, the sectoral councils, higher education institutions, adult education institutions, the Agency for Education and Teacher Training, the Agency for Vocational Education, the Agency for Science and Higher Education, and the Croatian employment service.

The budget for national qualifications framework (NQF)-related activities comes from various sources: the State budget, the EQF NCP grant, the European Social Fund and the Swiss-Croatian programme of cooperation for projects implemented by education institutions and the Ministry of Science and Education, and the Croatian employment service. Most funds are directed towards NQF development, implementation and research (Cedefop, 2015).

Sectoral councils (25 advisory and professional bodies working on the development of human potential in line with labour market needs in their respective sectors) have been established and started their activity. Each sectoral council has a president and 10 members (representing the ministry of the respective sector, the Croatian employment service, the agency for quality assurance, and sectoral experts), who are appointed by the minister of Science and Education. Their role includes assessing proposals for occupational standards, qualifications standards and units of learning outcomes.

Occupational and qualifications standards are developed by working groups including representatives from education institutions and the labour market, in line with a detailed methodology. They are then assessed in the sectoral councils, and need to be finally approved by the competent minister. Once approved, they are entered in the CROQF Register and become national standards. Qualification standards entered in the CROQF register become the basis for development or redesign of education and training programmes.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>133</sup>**

While there is yet no formal national consensus in Croatia on how validation is to be implemented, it has been incorporated in several strategic documents<sup>134</sup>. Developments in the past five years have been slowly, but steadily, setting the scene for a national validation framework. The *Strategy for education, science and technology*

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<sup>133</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>134</sup> Besides the *Strategy for education, science and technology* (Croatian Parliament, 2014), other strategic documents referring to validation are: the *Strategy for lifelong career guidance and career development 2016–20*; the *Strategic plan 2017–19* of the Ministry of Science and Education; and the *Strategic framework for the promotion of lifelong learning in the Republic of Croatia 2017–20*.

(Croatian Parliament, 2014) recognises validation as an essential part of lifelong learning, with adults as the main target group, and points out the need for consensus among key stakeholders.

One explicit aim of the CROQF<sup>135</sup> is to set up a system for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning at national level, based on units of learning outcomes. The development of qualifications standards, units of learning outcomes and occupational standards, as well as the CROQF itself and the CROQF register were seen as prerequisites of the validation of non-formal and informal learning system. The register<sup>136</sup> is seen as the main quality assurance tool for validation and most education and training efforts have been focused on CROQF-related developments in recent years. Building on previous work, two key methodologies were developed in the form of national level guidelines: one for developing occupational standards<sup>137</sup> and one for qualifications standards<sup>138</sup>.

Article 15 of the CROQF Act foresees the creation of an Ordinance on recognition and validation of prior learning; this will specify the procedure in detail, and establish a closer link to the CROQF. According to the CROQF Act, recognition of prior learning for CROQF levels 6 and higher shall be regulated by higher education institutions, so the Ordinance on recognition and validation will be applicable to CROQF levels 1–5 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The National Council for Development of Human Potential has recently developed Recommendations for strategic development of validation of prior learning<sup>139</sup>, as a basis for developing the ordinance. This set of 15 recommendations concerns

the revision of legal acts in adult<sup>140</sup> and higher education, the operationalisation and financing of the system development, suggestion for a model for validation of competences, and suggestions for fundamental principles for the development of the validation system. A draft of the Ordinance has been developed and is expected to be approved in 2019.

The amendments to the CROQF Act adopted in 2018 define recognition and validation of prior learning in a broader sense (compared to the initial stipulation in the 2013 CROQF Act, which referred to validation of non-formal and informal learning), taking into account predefined standards (occupational, qualification) from the CROQF register that are valid at national level. The qualification standards will serve as a foundation for creating procedures for assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning. All 25 sectoral councils foreseen by the ordinance on the CROQF register have been established and received training in preparing and evaluating occupational and qualification standards for inclusion in the register; these can then be used for validation purposes.

In practice, validation of learning outcomes acquired outside formal education and training is still rare; in principle, no access to formal qualifications can be currently granted without formal learning. Validation arrangements are in place for adult education on a sectoral level, and for crafts occupations. For instance, a master craftsman exam can validate and recognise non-formally acquired knowledge and competences. The examination can be taken by a person having passed a journeyman exam (secondary level) in the desired occupation and having two years of work experience in it, or some other secondary level diploma and three years of work experience in the occupation. Some providers in higher education have developed internal guidelines for recognising prior learning for specific purposes, such as admission to certain higher education programmes or allocation of ECTS credits in the framework of accredited study programmes.

## NQF implementation

The CROQF has reached an early operational stage; the CROQF Act was adopted in 2013 and amended in 2018. The amendments introduced definitions for types of qualifications at all levels, clarified the types of qualification that can be placed at sublevels of level 7, redefined entry requirements for level 8.2 and redefined recognition and validation of

<sup>135</sup> Article 3 of the CROQF Act (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2013).

<sup>136</sup> The CROQF register is available at: <https://hko.srce.hr/registar/>

<sup>137</sup> Ministry of Labour and Pension Systems (2017). *Guidelines for the development of occupational standards*: [www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-08/Smjernice%20za%20izradu%20standarda%20zanimanja.pdf](http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-08/Smjernice%20za%20izradu%20standarda%20zanimanja.pdf)

<sup>138</sup> Ministry of Science and Education (2017). *Guidelines for the development of qualification standards*: [www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-09/Smjernice%20za%20razvoj%20standarda%20kvalifikacija.pdf](http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-09/Smjernice%20za%20razvoj%20standarda%20kvalifikacija.pdf)

<sup>139</sup> National Council for Human Resources Development (2018). *Recommendations for strategic development of recognition and validation of prior learning*. Available in Croatian at: [www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2018-05/Preporuke%20NVRLJP-a%20za%20strateški%20razvoj%20priznavanja%20i%20vrednovanja%20prethodnog%20učenja.pdf](http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2018-05/Preporuke%20NVRLJP-a%20za%20strateški%20razvoj%20priznavanja%20i%20vrednovanja%20prethodnog%20učenja.pdf)

<sup>140</sup> An update to the Adult Education Act is foreseen and should take into account developments related to the CROQF.

prior learning<sup>141</sup>. Governance and implementation structures have been decided. The ordinance on the CROQF register adopted in 2014<sup>142</sup> stipulates the content and management of the register, plus procedures for requests, assessment, and entry of qualifications into the register. The areas of activity of sectoral councils, the criteria for the selection of new council members and their operational activities, as well as the internal and external quality assurance systems, are also regulated by the Ordinance. All 25 sectoral councils foreseen have been established, have been trained in preparation and evaluation of occupational and qualification standards for inclusion into the register, and have started their activity.

The structure of the CROQF register and its online database have also been created. It consists of three sub-registers: one of occupational standards; one of units of learning outcomes; and one of qualifications standards<sup>143</sup>. The first is regulated and maintained by the Ministry of Labour and the other two by the Ministry of Science and Education. While no qualifications have been entered in the register so far, proposals for occupation and qualification standards have been developed as part of the implementation of projects jointly financed from the European Social Fund. Currently, there are six occupational standards already registered in the database and requests for the inclusion of another 61, at different qualification levels, were submitted (data from September 2018).

Occupational standards are the basis for development of qualifications standards for those qualifications aimed at the labour market. Once qualification standards are included in the CROQF register in a future phase of CROQF implementation, they will become the basis for development or redesign of education and training programmes.

According to the ordinance on the CROQF register, qualifications and programmes included in the register need to be in line with CROQF standards and procedures. As far as the current legal framework is concerned, the CROQF is a voluntary option. Creating education programmes

in line with the CROQF is not mandatory, although it represents a mark of quality. Legislative changes are necessary in the different education and training sub-systems for CROQF implementation, to regulate quality assurance procedures. This is seen as one of the main challenges in the current implementation phase. Recent amendments to the Act on VET define occupational and qualifications standards in compliance with the CROQF; revision of higher education and adult education legislation is also planned. Guidelines for developing study programmes in line with the qualification standards expected to be included in the CROQF register in the future will also need to be developed.

As recommended by the National Council for Development of Human Potential in December 2015, the CROQF will be used by the Agency for Science and Higher Education for initial accreditation and reaccreditation of study programmes in higher education. It is also recommended that CROQF should be used by public universities for their internal quality assurance systems and that higher education institutions should use CROQF for preparing and revising study programmes. In 2015, the National Council also adopted the Recommendations regarding the use of the CROQF in adult education. While the recommendations are not legally binding, they serve to support or initiate reforms.

Communication efforts in relation to the CROQF have so far targeted stakeholder groups directly involved in the development of the framework and in the development and assessment of occupational and qualifications standards. A high level of response to the public debate on the amendment of the CROQF Act, carried out in 2017, indicates a fairly high level of interest in the framework among stakeholders, though the CROQF is less known by the general public. Communication to a wider audience has mainly been carried out through the CROQF webpage<sup>144</sup> and the yearly CROQF conference organised by the National Council for the Development of Human Potential. It is foreseen that CROQF and EQF levels will be indicated on qualification documents and Europass supplements once qualifications are included in the register and education and training programmes leading to CROQF qualifications are developed.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Croatia referenced its national qualifications levels to the EQF and self-certified to QF-EHEA in March

<sup>141</sup> For details, please see section on *Levels and use of learning outcomes* and *Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways*, above.

<sup>142</sup> The text of the ordinance on the CROQF register (*Pravilnik o Registru Hrvatskog kvalifikacijskog okvira*) is available in English at: [www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-09/Ordinance%20on%20the%20CROQF%20Register.pdf](http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-09/Ordinance%20on%20the%20CROQF%20Register.pdf)

<sup>143</sup> The CROQF register is available at: <https://hko.srce.hr/registar/>

<sup>144</sup> Available at: [www.kvalifikacije.hr/en](http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/en)

2012; it then published a joint report in 2014 (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2014). An updated referencing report is planned to be presented to the EQF advisory group by 2020, once the first qualification standards are included in the CROQF register.

### Important lessons and the way forward

The relatively rapid development of the CROQF illustrates the importance of stimulating active and broad participation throughout the entire process, complemented by targeted support for, and training of, stakeholders. Progressive, step-by-step development has been emphasised. While the high level of response to the public debate on the amended CROQF Act, carried out in 2017, indicates a similar level of interest in the framework, the level of ownership of the CROQF among stakeholders will become clearer once the register is fully operational. So far, levels of ownership have been highest among the ministries involved in the development of the legal base, but it is gradually being accepted by others through participation in events and projects.

Some of the challenges encountered so far in the development of the CROQF have been met successfully. Agreement on key concepts among stakeholders was reached and the framework is now firmly grounded in legislation, with links to adopted or planned legal acts regulating the different education and training subsystems, and to strategic documents. Proposals for occupational and qualifications standards were prepared and are currently being assessed for entry into the CROQF register. All 25 sectoral councils tasked with assessment of standards and of units of learning outcomes have been established and have become operational.

Potentially, the CROQF is a pivotal instrument in the Croatian education and training system, underpinning the development of quality assurance mechanisms in all subsystems, the creation of a system for validation and recognition of prior learning, enhanced dialogue between education and training and the labour market, and increased parity of esteem between different types of qualifications.

Further work is necessary, however, for the CROQF to reach this potential. To support implementation, its principles and application, and the legislation that regulates the different education subsystems will have to be further aligned with each other. Planned legislative changes in higher and adult education need to be taken forward, regulating quality assurance procedures. The development of proposals for occupational and qualifications standards for inclusion in the register will need to be supported, and education and training programmes aligned to qualification standards (that are to be included in the CROQF register in the future) will need to be developed and delivered before the first qualifications assigned to CROQF and EQF levels are issued. The Ordinance on recognition of prior learning is to be finalised and adopted, possibly in 2019.

The current thinking behind the new Act on quality assurance in science and higher education – to make qualification standards mandatory for all new study programmes and to use the CROQF in quality assurance arrangements in accordance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area – shall be subject to broader public debate. It will be important to clarify the role of the framework for the various education and training subsystems and the nature of its regulatory function. Another related and open question that remains is the extent to which Croatian qualifications will be defined and regulated through the CROQF or through existing legislation at subsystem level.

**Table 14. Croatian national qualifications framework (CROQF)**

CROQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8.2	Doctoral diploma ( <i>poslijediplomski (sveučilišni) doktorski studiji; obrana doktorske disertacije izvan studija</i> )	8
8.1	Postgraduate research master of science diploma ( <i>poslijediplomski znanstveni magistarski studiji</i> )	

**Table 14. Croatian national qualifications framework (CROQF) (Continued)**

CROQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
7.2	Post-master specialist university studies ( <i>poslijediplomski specijalistički studiji</i> )	7
7.1	Master diploma – graduate university studies ( <i>sveučilišni diplomski studiji</i> ) Professional master diploma – specialist graduate professional studies ( <i>specijalistički diplomski stručni studiji</i> )	
6	Bachelor diploma – undergraduate university studies ( <i>sveučilišni preddiplomski studiji</i> ) Professional bachelor diploma – undergraduate professional studies ( <i>stručni preddiplomski studiji</i> )	6
5	Professional higher education diploma – short cycle ( <i>kratki stručni studiji</i> ) VET post-secondary development and training certificate ( <i>strukovno specijalističko usavršavanje i osposobljavanje</i> ) Master craftsman diploma ( <i>programi za majstore uz najmanje dvije godine vrednovanog radnog iskustva</i> )	5
4.2	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate ( <i>Gimnazijsko srednjoškolsko obrazovanje</i> ) Upper secondary VET certificate – four years / Upper secondary VET certificate – five years ( <i>Četverogodišnje i petogodišnje strukovno srednjoškolsko obrazovanje</i> )	4
4.1	Upper secondary VET – three years ( <i>Trogodišnje strukovno obrazovanje</i> )	
3	Upper secondary VET certificate – two years / Upper secondary VET certificate – one year ( <i>Jednogodišnje i dvogodišnje srednjoškolsko strukovno obrazovanje</i> )	3
2	Vocational training certificate ( <i>Strukovno osposobljavanje</i> )	2
1	Primary education certificate – eight years ( <i>Osnovno obrazovanje</i> ) (*)	1

(\*) The first eight years of schooling are called primary education. It refers to both ISCED 1 and 2 (primary and secondary education).

Source: Adapted from Croatian Ministry of Science and Education (2018) (Article 7).

Abbreviations		EQF	European qualifications framework
CROQF	Croatian national qualifications framework	HROO	Croatian credit system for general education
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system for higher education	NCP	national coordination point
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training	NQF	national qualifications framework
		QF-EHEA	qualifications framework of the European higher education area
		VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

The EQF NCP for Croatia is the section for the Croatian qualifications framework at the Ministry of Science and Education.

CROQF website: [www.kvalifikacije.hr/en](http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/en)

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## Introduction and context

Investment in education and training in Cyprus is among the highest in the EU for primary and secondary education. While the rate of early school leaving is relatively low (7.7% in 2016, compared to 10.7% the EU average), the high level of spending per student does not translate into comparable education outcomes. According to the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the proportion of 15 year olds with low achievement in basic skills in reading, mathematics and science is among the highest in the EU, with significant differences in performance between genders, especially in reading. Measures are being taken by the government to improve outcomes in response to the PISA results, as well as to integrate the growing number of migrants in the education system. A new system for appointing teachers began implementation in 2017 and new legislation reforming upper secondary general education will follow in the school year 2018/19. While the economy has started to recover after the crisis, employment of recent graduates remains below the EU average at all qualification levels. Participation in vocational education and training (VET) has reached only 15.6% in 2015; however, the employability of recent VET graduates has increased more compared to general and tertiary education, pointing to a valuable VET sector for economic recovery. Measures to reform secondary technical and vocational education and to develop post-secondary VET include upgrading of apprenticeship schemes, revision of curricula and introduction of new specialisations. The rate of tertiary education attainment is among the highest in the EU (53.4 % in 2016), but the employment of recent graduates is below the EU average and marked by skills mismatches. Quality assurance of higher education and increased cooperation between universities and the world of business are among the government's priorities. Adult participation in lifelong learning is relatively low and has been decreasing (6.9% in 2016), especially among the low-skilled. A validation system for non-formal and informal learning is currently being developed (European Commission, 2017).

Cyprus has developed a comprehensive national qualifications framework called the Cyprus qualifications framework (CyQF) to improve permeability, both horizontal and vertical, within its education and training systems. CyQF incorporates all levels and types of qualification from all subsystems of education and training and from primary to higher education. The system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) being developed by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA) is an integral, but distinct, part of CyQF. A total of 120 SVQ qualifications are expected to be integrated in the system until 2019. Discussions are being held to develop common structures and elements for combining and transferring education credits.

A decision to create a national qualifications framework (NQF) was taken by the Council of Ministers in 2008<sup>145</sup>. A first NQF draft, with a detailed timetable for implementation, was presented in April 2010; consultation with stakeholders took place in spring 2011. The NQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in February 2017.

## Policy objectives

The CyQF operates as a reference framework, enabling the validation and comparability of qualifications and hence the mobility of workers and learners. It is an attempt to encompass the diversity of lifelong learning, formal, non-formal and informal learning (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). More specific objectives and targets are:

- a. the recognition and validation of qualifications;
- b. mobility;
- c. quality assurance of education and training programmes;
- d. promotion of lifelong learning.

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<sup>145</sup> Law No 67445, 9/7/2008.

The aim is to develop an inclusive framework of qualifications, including those awarded outside formal education. This is primarily achieved by including the vocational qualifications system – established by the HRDA – within the framework (at levels 3 to 7) to bring about comparability and better correlation of qualifications acquired in formal or non-formal learning. These qualifications refer to occupational standards and certificated learning outcomes acquired at work. This is important for increasing adult participation in lifelong learning which remains below the EU average and is decreasing (see introduction). This is clearly linked to the aim of the NQF to promote lifelong learning, giving all Cypriots a second chance for educational advancement and job progression.

The CyQF aims to support greater worker and learner mobility, and provide quality assurance through the existing competent authorities and according to specific principles. A newly established Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education is the competent authority responsible for ensuring the quality of higher education in Cyprus.

A further policy objective is to reinforce VET at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels through the framework initiative the Cyprus Productivity Centre. The Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance is responsible for the Cyprus Productivity Centre, which offers short modular programmes for employees in technical occupations and management; the Higher Hotel Institute of Cyprus offers upgrading courses for employees in the hotel and restaurant sector. The New modern apprenticeship scheme (NMA) (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017) provides alternative learning pathways and increased employability, based on labour market needs, for those who leave formal education without basic or vocational skills. Implementation of the NMA has begun and embraces young people between 14 and 21 years of age at two apprenticeship levels (preparatory and core, CyQF levels 2 and 3). The NMA is part financed by the European Social Fund and has been fully operational since 2015. The setting-up and upgrading of post-secondary VET institutes (Metalykeiaka Instituta Epaggelmatikis Ekpaideysis kai Katartisis – MIEEK) has been a major step towards attracting more students to this pathway. They deliver qualifications at CyQF/EQF level 5 fully integrated into the framework.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

An eight-level reference structure has been adopted to reflect the national qualification

system's main characteristics. Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Knowledge is defined by the type and complexity of knowledge demanded and the ability to place one's knowledge in context. Skills are defined according to the complexity of problem-solving and communication skills involved. Competence relates to the following aspects: space of action, cooperation and responsibility, and learning skills (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017; Cedefop, 2018). These descriptors were developed concurrently for all levels so there would be clear progression from one level to the next. CyQF level descriptors give a broad profile of what an individual should know and do with varying degrees of autonomy and responsibility. The current qualifications system is input-based (quality of teachers, infrastructure, and length of education and training programmes). Assessment of learning outcomes is not presently covered by national legislation, policy documents or development programmes. However, attention is increasingly being directed to the need to focus on skills and key competences required in the 21st century, and to revise curricula, learning programmes and assessment methodologies in line with learning outcomes. Several reforms are under way, such as modernising pre-primary and upper secondary curricula, and improving VET by introducing post-secondary VET institutes. A committee at the Ministry of Education and Culture – advisory committee for the implementation of curricula, assessment and teaching – (Syntonistiki Epitropi Analytikon Programmaton, SEAP) is the body responsible for the implementation of learning outcomes in all grades across education departments in formal education (levels 1 to 4).

Implementation of the learning outcomes approach has coincided with the ambitious *Cyprus national reform programme 2018*<sup>146</sup>. Educational reform proposes comprehensive changes and innovations at all levels and aspects of the system; its main objective is to create a democratic and learner-centred education system.

Emphasis is being placed on improving teacher competences and establishing and monitoring the quality of learning outcomes. NQF implementation will benefit from experience gained in developing competence-based vocational qualifications in SVQ. These are based on occupational standards (currently available for

<sup>146</sup> Cyprus Presidency Unit for Administrative Reform (2018). *Europe 2020 - Cyprus national reform programme 2018*. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-national-reform-programme-cyprus-en.pdf>



83 occupations) and make it possible to award a qualification to a candidate irrespective of how and where they acquired the relevant knowledge, skills and competences.

Learning outcomes are mainly expressed in formal education as part of subject and stage-based general education. In the curriculum, learning outcomes are described as the knowledge, skills and attitudes, and awareness learners are expected to achieve at the end of each stage. Level descriptors indicate the standards a learner should achieve at each certificated level of education. The development of a single unified curriculum from pre-primary to primary and lower secondary education, based on learning outcomes, is an important goal.

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The general directorate for VET at the Ministry of Education and Culture initiated and is coordinating NQF developments. Since 2012, the Ministry of Education has operated as the competent authority and designated EQF national coordination point (NCP). It includes representatives from all departments of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and the Human Resource Development Authority. Stakeholders play a central role in existing validation practices but there is limited involvement from social partners such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

A new permanent advisory body – the council of the NQF of Cyprus – has also been established and acts as a forum for collaboration between stakeholders. Consultation with stakeholders and evaluation of the CyQF implementation was planned for 2018.

The Council of Ministers on 18 May 2017 approved<sup>147</sup> the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority, with the powers to improve quality assurance systems in education and training, to monitor and integrate into the CyQF the scheme for validating non-formal and informal learning, to monitor the CyQF/EQF levels on certificates, diplomas and Europass documents, to strengthen the legal aspect of CyQF, and to develop a registry for it. The National Qualifications Authority is operational.

<sup>147</sup> Decision No 82.592.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>148</sup>

Cyprus does not yet have a national framework for validating non-formal and informal learning but this is currently under development, through a project, European Social Fund part funded, to establishing an appropriate mechanism. This project has supported a mapping study of the current situation in Cyprus<sup>149</sup> and a national action plan setting up a validation mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (*epikirosi mathisis*) was developed at the beginning of 2018. This plan was put into public consultation during the first half of 2018<sup>150</sup> and was completed in May 2018. It will enter pilot implementation during 2019, focusing on adult education, youth and volunteering. The validation process will entail five stages: information-individualised counselling; identification; recognition of learning outcomes; assessment of learning outcomes; and certification. The first results from the pilot are expected to be available at the end of 2019.

Implementation will build on work already done by the HRDA, which has developed a system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) – *Systima epagelmatikon prosondon* (ΣΕΠ) – through which it is possible to validate non-formal and informal learning by the award of full or partial qualifications. It is planned to develop a further 80 vocational qualifications during the 2014–20 European Social Fund programming period. The 83 vocational qualifications already developed will also be revised in response to labour market needs. Standards used in the vocational qualifications system relate not only to occupational skills but also soft skills developed through work experience (such as teamwork and collaboration); they are different from those used in apprenticeship or school-based VET qualifications and are not recognised in formal education. However, ways of linking the two VET systems are being considered as CyQF is developed.

The autonomous nature of higher education institutions enables them to accept credits from prior learning. The Cyprus Council for Recognition

<sup>148</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>149</sup> EEO Group (2017). *Mapping study on the validation of non-formal and informal learning* [unpublished].

<sup>150</sup> See the text for consultation prepared by the EEO Group for the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture: [www.moec.gov.cy/eiao/el/drastiriotes/imerides\\_seminaria\\_synedria/2018/2018\\_protasi\\_ehtnikou\\_sd\\_diavoulefsi.pdf](http://www.moec.gov.cy/eiao/el/drastiriotes/imerides_seminaria_synedria/2018/2018_protasi_ehtnikou_sd_diavoulefsi.pdf)

of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS), also recognises work experience credits as part of an individual's qualification. Success in information and communication technology examinations is certificated regardless of where and when the knowledge was developed. In terms of implementing upskilling pathways, the Ministry of Education and the HRDA are preparing a report during July 2018 on how Cyprus is responding to the Council recommendation on upskilling pathways.

## NQF implementation

The framework is at early stage of implementation. The EQF national coordination point was established at the Ministry of Education and Culture as an in-service department overseeing the development and gradual implementation of the framework. Stakeholders responsible for accreditation of qualifications will continue to work according to the existing legislative framework but new legislation is required for CyQF to clarify how stakeholders will work together. A decision of the council of ministers is expected and a new legislative framework will be introduced if required (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). A new permanent body – council of the NQF of Cyprus – has been established, which includes all stakeholders<sup>151</sup>; it is the consultative body for the CyQF referencing report. Its main tasks are advisory and focus on:

- a. consulting with stakeholders on CyQF development and implementation;
- b. developing, implementing and reviewing CyQF procedures;
- c. disseminating public information on CyQF;
- d. advising the Ministry of Education and Culture on policy and resource implications.

In 2017, the board of ministers approved the development of the National Qualifications Authority<sup>152</sup>.

The CyQF includes the development and implementation of the procedures for quality assurance and qualifications award. Quality assurance should underpin all levels of the NQF. A new Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency in higher education was established by law in March 2016, bringing together quality assurance functions

<sup>151</sup> The National Committee for the Development and Establishment of a National Qualifications Framework in Cyprus, consists of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Culture (President of the Committee), the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and the General Director of the Human Resource Development Authority or their representatives.

<sup>152</sup> Decision No 82.592.

under one roof. The agency is operational. The new legislation provides a quality assurance framework for higher education, within which higher education institutions will be driven to improve quality and develop an internal quality culture.

The HRDA has a robust quality assurance process in place for monitoring the SVQ. All aspects of the system, and those participating in it, are quality assured by the HRDA, which holds the relevant registers of assessing centres and assessors for each vocational field and region. The HRDA has also introduced a system for evaluating and certifying training providers<sup>153</sup>.

A national qualification database is planned to be ready by mid-2019. When it is finalised, qualifications from general, VET and higher education systems will be included in the register.

The Ministry of Education and Culture has decided that a reference to corresponding EQF levels will be included on qualification certificates and diplomas on approval of the referencing report. Some institutions have proceeded with the indication of NQF and EQF levels in national qualifications databases. Full implementation is expected to be finalised by the end of 2019 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). Further communication is needed to raise the importance of the indication of NQF and EQF levels on new certificates, diplomas and/or Europass supplements.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The Ministry of Education and Culture is the national body responsible for referencing national qualifications to the EQF. The CyQF was referenced to the EQF in February 2017. The CyQF booklet, which provides full information on the CyQF and its social benefits, was prepared and circulated to all stakeholders.

## Important lessons and future plans

Development of the NQF and of a competence-based system of vocational qualifications, which is an integral part of the NQF, is expected to strengthen the ties between VET for young people and vocational training for adults, and to improve their knowledge and skills. However, the comprehensive and inclusive nature of the new framework requires stakeholders to work together. Setting up a council for the NQF was important in

<sup>153</sup> This system is entitled *Evaluation and certification of training providers* (AxioPistoSyn): [www.hrdauth.org.cy/easyconsole.cfm/page/project/p\\_id/23/pc\\_id/17154](http://www.hrdauth.org.cy/easyconsole.cfm/page/project/p_id/23/pc_id/17154)

establishing a permanent forum for collaboration between stakeholders: the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, the Human Resource Development Authority and representatives of employer and employee organisations and the academic community.

An NQF/EQF communication strategy is yet to be developed in Cyprus, due to budget limitations. However, the main communication channels and tools used for disseminating information on the NQF/EQF are leaflets, school-based seminars and conferences organised in the Cyprus chambers of commerce and Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation. Although education and training institutions and providers, labour market stakeholders and recognition bodies are aware of the framework, interaction and constant dialogue is needed. In 2019, evaluation of the framework and an updated

referencing report to the EQF advisory group is planned. The expected change in the NQF that calls for an updated report is inclusion of a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning.

Future plans for Cyprus include strengthening the CyQF legal base, while future CyQF NCP actions will include developing the CyQF guidelines handbook. This handbook will contain guidelines, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the national registry. Establishment of a validation agency, the development of guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning, and analysing and implementing learning outcomes in different subsystems are expected to be completed by 2020 to ensure continuity and consistency between levels and services (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).

<b>Abbreviations</b>		NQF	national qualifications framework
CyQF	Cyprus qualifications framework	PISA	programme for international student assessment
EQF	European qualifications framework	SVQ	system of vocational qualifications
HRDA	Human Resource Development Authority	VET	vocational education and training
NMA	new modern apprenticeship scheme		

**Table 15. Cypriot national qualifications framework (CyQF)**

<b>CYQF LEVELS</b>	<b>EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS</b>	<b>SVQ LEVELS</b>	<b>EQF LEVELS</b>
<b>8</b>	Doctoral degree ( <i>Διδακτορικός Τίτλος</i> )		8
<b>7c</b>	Master degree ( <i>Μεταπτυχιακός Τίτλος</i> )		7
<b>7b</b>	Postgraduate diplomas ( <i>Μεταπτυχιακό Δίπλωμα</i> )		
<b>7a</b>	Postgraduate certificates ( <i>Μεταπτυχιακό Πιστοποιητικό</i> )		
<b>6</b>	Bachelor degree ( <i>Πτυχίο</i> )	SVQ 6	6
<b>5c</b>	Higher certificates and diplomas – three years ( <i>Ανώτερα Διπλώματα και Πιστοποιητικά</i> )	SVQ 5	5
<b>5b</b>	Post-secondary certificates and diplomas – two years ( <i>Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Διετούς Διάρκειας</i> )		
<b>5a</b>	Post-secondary certificates and diplomas – one year ( <i>Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Μονοετούς Διάρκειας</i> )		
<b>4</b>	Upper secondary general education and evening schools certificates – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade or 12 <sup>th</sup> and 13 <sup>th</sup> for some private schools ( <i>Απολυτήριο Μέσης Γενικής Εκπαίδευσης</i> ) Upper secondary technical and vocational education and evening technical schools certificates – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade ( <i>Απολυτήριο Μέσης Τεχνικής Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης</i> )	SVQ 4	4

(Continued)

**Table 15. Cypriot national qualifications framework (CyQF) (Continued)**

CYQF LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	SVQ LEVELS	EQF LEVELS
3	Lower secondary education certificate – 10 <sup>th</sup> grade – preparatory year for upper secondary education (Απολυτήριο Πρώτου Κύκλου Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης - 10η τάξη) New modern apprenticeship certificate – 10 <sup>th</sup> grade (Νέα Σύγχρονη Μαθητεία - 10η τάξη)	SVQ 3	3
2	Compulsory lower secondary education certificate – 9 <sup>th</sup> grade (Απολυτήριο Πρώτου Κύκλου Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης - 9η τάξη) Preparatory programme – New modern apprenticeship (Προπαρασκευαστικό Πρόγραμμα Νέας Σύγχρονης Μαθητείας)		2
1	Compulsory education certificate – elementary school certificate, or graduates of 7 <sup>th</sup> and/or 8 <sup>th</sup> grade (Υποχρεωτική Εκπαίδευση)		1

Source: Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017: [www.cyqf.gov.cy/index.php/en/diagram](http://www.cyqf.gov.cy/index.php/en/diagram)

## Main sources of information

CyQF: [www.cyqf.gov.cy](http://www.cyqf.gov.cy)

Cyprus EQF NCP, established by the Ministry of Education and Culture: [www.moec.gov.cy](http://www.moec.gov.cy)

Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture (2017). *The referencing of the Cyprus qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*: [www.cyqf.gov.cy/archeia/dimosiefseis/cyqf-referencing-report.pdf](http://www.cyqf.gov.cy/archeia/dimosiefseis/cyqf-referencing-report.pdf)

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## Websites

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## Prepared by:

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in collaboration with national experts.

## Introduction and context

Czechia is positioned relatively well with regard to some European education and training indicators, with a low rate of early school leaving (6.6% in 2016, compared to 10.7% the EU average) and a high employment rate for recent graduates. The country has the highest percentage of upper secondary students in vocational education and training (VET). While educational achievements in reading, maths and science are comparable to EU averages, the percentages of Czech underachievers have increased significantly over recent years, particularly in science and reading, and socioeconomic background is a strong factor in differences in student performance. Tertiary educational attainment has increased but remains below EU average, and participation in early childhood education and care is not yet as widespread as in other EU countries (European Commission, 2017).

Over the last decade there have been major developments in almost all parts of the education system: decentralisation of governance and curriculum reform in the schools system, introduction of the three-cycle system in higher education, and development of the national qualifications system in further education. However, 'awareness of interconnectedness between various parts of the education system has gradually decreased' (Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2014, p. 5). Development of the education system in the direction of lifelong learning has become a priority; it is acknowledged that, for this to become a reality, there is a need to establish links between different education pathways. As Czechia has not yet developed a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF), the question is whether an overarching NQF could help coordinate and bridge developments in the different sub-systems.

The national register of qualifications (*Národní soustava kvalifikací* (NSK)), which functions as a qualifications framework for validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) and continuing VET (CVET) qualifications, and a draft of the higher

education framework<sup>154</sup> have been developed. There are also draft level descriptors for primary and secondary education. Promotion and development of a comprehensive NQF is in line with the national *Strategy for education policy until 2020*; however, the possibility of developing a comprehensive NQF is not mentioned explicitly and it is unlikely that one will be established before 2020 (European Commission et al. (forthcoming), p. 9).

The country referenced its national qualifications system to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2011 (NÚOV, 2011). All qualifications awarded in secondary education, higher education, and the qualifications included in the NSK are linked to the EQF levels. The three sub-systems are regulated by three different acts<sup>155</sup>.

## Policy objectives

Interlinked development of a framework and a register of vocational qualifications was a cornerstone of the (now expired) national *Strategy for lifelong learning* (Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2007). The strategy's main elements reflected identified and agreed needs, and aimed at improving access to lifelong learning<sup>156</sup> and a more permeable education and training system. In 2015, the *Strategy for lifelong learning* expired. The main strategic documents currently in

<sup>154</sup> Adoption of the qualifications framework for higher education is pending.

<sup>155</sup> Act No 561/2004 Coll., on preschool, elementary, secondary and tertiary professional and other education (The Education Act). [www.msmt.cz/uploads/VKav\\_200/Act\\_561\\_2011/edu\\_act\\_2011.doc](http://www.msmt.cz/uploads/VKav_200/Act_561_2011/edu_act_2011.doc)  
Act No 111/1998 Coll., on higher education institutions. [www.msmt.cz/uploads/odbor\\_30/TF/Legislativa\\_a\\_metodicke\\_pokyny/Novela\\_2016/Zakon\\_o\\_vysokych\\_skolach\\_AJ.pdf](http://www.msmt.cz/uploads/odbor_30/TF/Legislativa_a_metodicke_pokyny/Novela_2016/Zakon_o_vysokych_skolach_AJ.pdf)

Act No 179/2006 Coll., on the verification and recognition of further education results. [http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/czech\\_rep\\_2006\\_act\\_recognition\\_further\\_education\\_results.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/czech_rep_2006_act_recognition_further_education_results.pdf)  
<sup>156</sup> Important progress was achieved in adult participation in lifelong learning, from 6.8% in 2009 to 11.4% in 2011; however it fell again to 8.8% in 2016, below the EU average (10.8%) (European Commission, 2017).

force in the country are the *Strategy for education policy until 2020*, the *Long-term policy objectives of education and development of the education system (2015–20)*, and the *Long-term objectives in higher education (2016–20)*. The *Strategy for education policy until 2020* includes priorities to reduce inequalities, to increase the quality of teaching, to improve partnerships between schools and employers and to improve governance of the education system (Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2014). The *Long-term objectives in higher education (2016–20)*<sup>157</sup> refer to the introduction of the NQF for higher education and its self-certification to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA).

Developments in VET and higher education – to some extent pursued through projects – have not been coordinated or connected. At the same time, the idea of a comprehensive framework is neither well nor widely understood. Despite the efforts of the EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP), most stakeholders and decision makers are not convinced about the need for a national framework or its benefits (European Commission et al., forthcoming). This leaves several unanswered questions and challenges for developing shared concepts, improving communication and cooperation between sub-systems, and opening up access pathways to education programmes.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The national register of qualifications (NSK)<sup>158</sup>, which addresses adults as a main target group and learning outcomes acquired outside formal education and training, has eight levels and is currently populated with qualifications between EQF levels 2 to 7. Qualification levels in the NSK are described in terms of competences. The level descriptors of the NSK, although not divided into knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy, were developed in close connection with the eight levels of the EQF and are compatible with the EQF descriptors (NÚV, 2015). They reflect the complexity of work activities. Each qualification included in the NSK is described by a qualification standard (a list of expected learning outcomes) and an assessment standard (set of evaluation criteria).

<sup>157</sup> The *Strategic plan for the scholarly, scientific, research, development, innovation, artistic and other creative activities of higher education institutions for 2016–20* is available in English at: [www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/tertiary-education/strategic-plan-for-higher-education-institutions-2016-2020?lang=2](http://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/tertiary-education/strategic-plan-for-higher-education-institutions-2016-2020?lang=2)

<sup>158</sup> For more information on the NSK: [www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/](http://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/)

They are drafted by employers and are based on the descriptions of occupations in the national system of occupations<sup>159</sup>.

The draft NQF for higher education covers three levels, corresponding to levels 6 to 8 of the EQF. It includes academic qualifications (bachelor, master and doctoral degrees), but excludes tertiary vocational education (DiS) degrees. The architecture of the framework has two layers: the general (national) descriptors and the education (subject area) descriptors. Descriptors are divided into professional knowledge, professional skills and general competences. This division is compatible with the overarching framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) and also with the EQF descriptors. There is currently no link between the NSK and the draft qualifications framework for higher education: apart from the possibility to achieve vocational qualifications through validation, existing arrangements do not offer opportunities to access programmes through different pathways. The *maturita* exam (upper-secondary leaving examination) is a compulsory requirement to enter higher education, although higher education institutions can also decide to use specific entry examinations.

A set of level descriptors for primary and secondary education (EQF levels 1 to 4) was also drafted in 2012, based on core curricula. In this proposal, descriptors were grouped into three categories: knowledge, specific study and work skills, and transferable skills.

In 2013, a group of experts from education and the labour market drafted a proposal for national comprehensive descriptors, reflecting both the EQF descriptors and the existing national sectoral descriptors. This proposal was updated in 2016.

The learning outcomes<sup>160</sup> approach is widely used, although applied and interpreted slightly differently across education levels and subsystems. The Education Act<sup>161</sup>, which came into force in 2005, introduced learning outcomes in national core

<sup>159</sup> The national system of occupations: [www.nsp.cz](http://www.nsp.cz)

<sup>160</sup> Due to linguistic reasons and to the fact that terminology in education and training is not unified in Czechia, several terms are used with reference to learning outcomes. Ranging from 'learning/teaching outcomes' to 'outputs' to 'results of education', they are broadly compatible with the European definition and notion of learning outcomes. However, in some cases, several terms can be used to depict the same concept, or the same term can be understood differently by different stakeholders (Cedefop, 2016).

<sup>161</sup> Act No 561/2004: [www.msmt.cz/uploads/VKav\\_200/Act\\_561\\_2011/edu\\_act\\_2011.doc](http://www.msmt.cz/uploads/VKav_200/Act_561_2011/edu_act_2011.doc)

curricula for all levels below tertiary. The use of learning outcomes as a starting point at all levels of the education system is also one of the aims of the *Strategy for education policy until 2020* (Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2014).

Core curricula for primary and secondary education make the distinction between knowledge and skills and emphasise key competences (learning, problem solving, communication, social and interpersonal interaction, civic involvement and work skills) and their practical use. Expected learning outcomes are defined in terms of activities, practice-oriented, usable in everyday life and verifiable (tasks that students should be able to perform). Modularisation of courses was introduced to improve transferability between various pathways in initial and continuous education, but schools have the autonomy to choose whether or not to use modular organisation of curricula. Apart from a pilot project focused on modularisation, this is not common in practice.

A competence-based and learning outcomes-oriented approach is also found in VET and higher education and has broad political support. This is documented and confirmed by curriculum reform in vocational education (including relevant methodologies) and by the Act on the verification and recognition of results of further education. Initial VET (IVET) core curricula are increasingly being aligned with competences defined in the NSK; the holistic character of the term 'competence' is emphasised. Knowledge, skills and attitudes are not seen as 'atomised' entities which can be judged in isolation from each other (Cedefop, 2016). Higher education distinguishes between professional knowledge, professional skills and general competences. Knowledge and skills are tied to particular subjects, while competences are of more general character: they include judgment, communicative ability (including in foreign languages) and preparation for continuing learning. The use of professional knowledge and skills in a particular context, with a particular degree of autonomy and responsibility, is described as competence (NÚV, 2015).

The learning outcomes approach was used and explored in developing the national qualifications framework for higher education. Each study programme has a 'graduate profile' (general programme description) and programme goals, which are described in terms of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are defined as knowledge, skills and competences that graduates should be able to demonstrate on completion of a specific learning phase. The National Accreditation Bureau for Higher Education recommends that higher education institutions structure learning outcomes

in this way, and it is intended that, after testing and implementation, the framework will be used in the accreditation process (Cedefop, 2016).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP) has been operational since 2009, first within the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NÚOV) and since 2011 within the National Institute for Education (NÚV)<sup>162</sup>. The NCP played an important role in referencing the Czech qualifications system to the EQF, a process for which the Ministry of Education had overall responsibility. NÚV leads discussions on establishing a comprehensive NQF and provides and disseminates information on European tools.

The 2006 Act on the verification and recognition of further education results, which came into force in 2007<sup>163</sup>, sets out the basic responsibilities, powers and rights of all stakeholders in developing and awarding national vocational qualifications. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) coordinates the activities of central administrative authorities (ministries) and approves, modifies and issues a list of vocational and complete vocational qualifications. The National Council for Qualifications acts as an advisory body to the MEYS on qualifications. The national register of qualifications (NSK) is maintained and published by NÚV. Sector councils are in charge of developing qualification and assessment standards for qualifications up to level 7 included in the NSK, though most qualifications are placed at levels 2 to 5<sup>164</sup>. There are currently 29 sector councils consisting of representatives of employers, employees, qualification authorities and academic sectors.

<sup>162</sup> The National Institute for Education was founded in 2011 by merging of three institutions run by the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports: the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NÚOV), the Research Institute of Education (VÚP), and the Czech Institute for Educational-Psychological Guidance (IPPP ČR). More information is available at: [www.nuv.cz/all-about-nuv](http://www.nuv.cz/all-about-nuv)

<sup>163</sup> Act No 179 of 30 March 2006 on verification and recognition of further education results and on amendments of some other acts: [www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/further-education/the-act-on-the-recognition-of-further-education-results](http://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/further-education/the-act-on-the-recognition-of-further-education-results)

<sup>164</sup> At higher levels, sector councils define only specialised supplementary qualifications, not those awarded by higher education institutions (bachelor, master and PhD degrees). Opening up higher levels (up to level 7) for qualifications awarded outside higher education institutions is seen as an important means of supporting lifelong learning.

One important change in the past 15 years has been a transfer of powers and responsibilities to the local level. Cooperation among central government, regional government, social partners (especially employers) and parents is important. The involvement of employers is strongest in VET, where they take part in the formulation of national curricula and in the work-based training of students. Schools are responsible for setting and achieving their own goals, based on the national curriculum. However, key quality assurance mechanisms remain under the control of the Ministry of Education and, for primary and secondary education and tertiary vocational schools, the Czech School Inspectorate, which acts as external evaluator. In tertiary education, the main quality assurance mechanism is approval of programmes, which is given by the Ministry of Education, based on reports from the National Accreditation Bureau for Higher Education (university sector) and by the Accreditation Commission for Tertiary Vocational Education (tertiary vocational sector). Individual institutions at all levels of education and training are also required by law to have internal quality assurance systems in place (NÚV, 2015).

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>165</sup>

The Czech system of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is regulated by Act 179/2006 on the verification and recognition of further education results<sup>166</sup>, amended in 2012<sup>167</sup>. Validation and recognition procedures are in place for qualifications included in the national register of qualifications (NSK) and are aimed at mitigating skill shortages on the labour market. The register addresses further learning results and vocational competences (CVET), with adults as a main target group. It currently contains 1 234 vocational qualifications in 29 different sectors, ranging between EQF/NQF levels 2 to 7, with most on

levels 3 (646 qualifications) and 4 (382 qualifications) (data from April 2018).

The VNFIL system operates more or less parallel to formal education, with some connections between the two. The concept of ‘vocational qualification’ is the central principle of the VNFIL system. Qualifications are developed by sector councils, where representatives of employers, employees, qualification authorities, VET and the academic sector are involved in identifying current skills needs and shortages.

Validation and recognition procedures are based on assessment of knowledge, skills and competences gained by prior learning and work experience, and are carried out according to the qualifications and assessment standards included in the NSK. Each qualification standard – based on occupational standards – is defined in competences. The assessment is also competence-based, usually consisting of an oral examination, written part and practical demonstration of skills and competences. Over the past 10 years, more than 195 000 adult learners have passed exams and were awarded a certificate of vocational qualification (data from September 2018). Certain vocational qualifications can be combined and, after a comprehensive final exam, can lead to a full VET qualification at NSK/EQF level 3. This makes final exams a bridge between the formal and the VNFIL systems.

The main strengths of VNFIL in Czechia are the existing legal basis, information accessibility, quality assurance arrangements, and close collaboration with employers in developing vocational qualifications. The national VNFIL policy, supported by the NSK, has also been incorporated in the national active policy for employment (APE), the framework of measures stipulated by the Act 435/2004 on Employment, which links retraining offers to existing vocational qualifications. Accessibility of guidance and counselling services are aspects that could be improved; while disadvantaged groups have access to validation through public employment services, support services are typically subject to fees.

Education and training providers in general, vocational and higher education can decide to shorten a learner’s pathway in line with legal provisions. This is normally at the school principal’s discretion. However, there is no methodological framework for how this should be done and there is little data on how much it is used. Access to formal education programmes requires a formal qualification; for instance, to access higher education, students have to have achieved an upper-secondary leaving certificate (*maturita*).

<sup>165</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory of validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>166</sup> The Act on the verification and recognition of further education results (2006): [www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/further-education/the-act-on-the-recognition-of-further-education-results](http://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/further-education/the-act-on-the-recognition-of-further-education-results)

<sup>167</sup> Among the amendments: the term ‘partial qualification’ was replaced with ‘vocational qualification’; the minimum age limit for taking part in the competence assessment was removed; parts of a vocational qualification can be recognised when passing competence assessment for another vocational qualification.



Certain combined vocational qualifications obtained via the VNFIL system can, however, enable the holder to sit the *maturita* exam, for access to higher education. Higher education institutions are also able to (but do not have to) select applicants based on their own entrance exams or results from national comparative exams. In the absence of a comprehensive NQF, coordination, communication and transfer among the different subsystems remain limited.

No credit system is used in VET in Czechia. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) is used in higher education, though it is not linked to validation arrangements.

## NQF implementation

Czechia does not have a comprehensive NQF in place. While debate on its possible development continues, it is unlikely that it will be established before 2020 (European Commission et al., forthcoming). Work on qualifications has been carried out at subsystem level to varying degrees, and the main issue remains the integration of these separate developments into a single overarching framework, with a single set of level descriptors. The national register of vocational qualifications (NSK) functions as a framework for the VNFIL system, including qualifications awarded outside the formal system, awarded under the Act 179/2006 on the verification and recognition of further education results. A draft qualifications framework for higher education was also developed. In 2011, the country referenced its qualifications from secondary education, higher education, and the vocational qualifications included in the NSK directly to EQF levels.

The NSK is fully operational and has qualification and assessment standards structured on eight levels<sup>168</sup>. So far, 1 234 vocational qualifications in 29 different sectors have been included in the register (data from April, 2018), all achievable through validation. Most of these vocational qualifications are at levels 2 to 5, but a few at levels 6 and 7 have also been published. Since the establishment of the NSK, over 195 000 vocational qualifications have been awarded (data from September, 2018).

The draft qualifications framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna framework, was designed and developed in the Q-RAM project (2009–12). The Q-RAM framework covered EQF

levels 5 to 8, where level 5 was foreseen to be assigned to short-cycle programmes once this category was introduced during higher education reform. Currently there is no concept of short cycle. In 2012, the qualifications framework went through pilot implementation at 12 universities and four tertiary VET institutions (VOŠ). In 2015, the framework was revised and discussed with the representation of higher education institutions. Its scope has been reduced to EQF levels 6 to 8 and it includes only qualifications provided by universities (not VOŠ, tertiary VET schools). There were plans to introduce the qualifications framework for higher education into national legislation, in the decree on standards for accreditation in higher education, prepared in response to the amendment to the Higher Education Act<sup>169</sup> effective since September 2016. However, those plans were not successful, hindering implementation and the self-certification process.

EQF levels have been indicated on the qualifications included in the NSK since 2011, and on general education qualifications, initial VET qualifications and qualifications awarded by tertiary vocational schools and conservatories since October 2017. Including EQF levels on higher education qualifications is voluntary and has been a challenge, due to the autonomy of higher education institutions. EQF levels have been indicated on Europass certificate supplements and diploma supplements since 2012 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The EQF NCP has been disseminating information about the EQF through the EQF national website<sup>170</sup>, social media, and presentations in seminars, conferences, workshops, and education and job fairs. The main groups targeted have been policy and decision makers, experts in the different education sectors, teachers, career counsellors, learners and employers (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). It has also been leading discussions on the possibility of developing a comprehensive NQF.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Czechia referenced its national qualifications subsystems directly to the EQF levels in December 2011. In the absence of a comprehensive NQF, formal initial qualifications from secondary education were referenced, based on the classification of educational qualifications types

<sup>168</sup> The NSK database is available at: [www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/](http://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/)

<sup>169</sup> The Higher Education Act is available at: [www.msmt.cz/uploads/odbor\\_30/TF/Legislativa\\_a\\_metodicke\\_pokyny/Novela\\_2016/Zakon\\_o\\_vysokych\\_skolach\\_AJ.pdf](http://www.msmt.cz/uploads/odbor_30/TF/Legislativa_a_metodicke_pokyny/Novela_2016/Zakon_o_vysokych_skolach_AJ.pdf)

<sup>170</sup> [www.nuv.cz/eqf](http://www.nuv.cz/eqf)

(KKOV) and nationally approved curricula. CVET qualifications awarded through VNFIL and included in the NSK were also referenced. Tertiary education qualifications were linked to the EQF based on characteristics of the different levels of tertiary education set out in national legislation (NÚV, 2015). The initial referencing report (NÚOV, 2011) was updated in 2013 and 2015 following minor changes in legislation. The latest referencing report (NÚV, 2015) is published on the EQF portal<sup>171</sup>.

The draft framework for higher education has not yet been self-certified against the QF-EHEA as it has not yet been approved at national level.

### Important lessons and future plans

Partial/sectoral qualifications frameworks based on the learning outcomes approach have been developed in Czechia, specifically the national register of qualifications (NSK), which acts as a framework for the VNFIL system and is fully operational, and a draft qualifications framework for higher education, which is pending approval. Level descriptors were also developed for primary and secondary education, based on core curricula.

The main challenge and open topic of discussion in the country is development towards a comprehensive overarching NQF, with a coherent set of level descriptors. This could bring together lower and upper secondary education qualifications and the sub-frameworks for vocational qualifications and higher education. It could potentially increase connectedness and coherence between developments in the different parts of the education

system and open up access pathways. Explicit levels and a single set of descriptors would make links to EQF levels more transparent. Discussions on the purpose and potential advantages of an NQF have started along with work by experts, but reaching political agreement among stakeholders is a challenge and no decision has yet been taken.

In 2015 a working group was established by the Ministry of Education to implement the EQF. The group brings together representatives from all sections of the Ministry, from the Czech School Inspectorate and from organisations directly controlled by the Ministry: the National Institute for Education and the National Institute for Further Education. One of its tasks is to develop one comprehensive NQF as a tool to improve the orientation and coordination of the education system and provide clarity in Czech qualifications for domestic and foreign citizens<sup>172</sup>.

Successful implementation of learning outcomes requires coordination of subsystems, initiatives, measures and bodies, which is sometimes difficult. Better understanding of the approach, better cooperation, communication and coordination are prerequisites for future implementation of learning outcomes across education and training. One line of progress over recent years has been the development of informal networks of experts, teachers, researchers, policy makers and officials willing to discuss and share their experiences. All interviewees contacted for a Cedefop study on learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2016) expressed the need for better understanding of the learning outcomes concept among different sectors and a desire for better coordination of education policies.

**Table 16. Czech qualification types, NSK levels and links to EQF levels**

EQF LEVELS	CZECH QUALIFICATIONS AWARDED IN FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING	NSK LEVELS AND QUALIFICATIONS (AWARDED THROUGH VNFIL)
8	<b>Doctoral programme</b> PhD degrees three to four years beyond master ( <i>doktor</i> )	8
7	<b>Master programme</b> Mgr, MgA., Ing., Ing. arch., MUDr, MDDr, MVDr, JUDr, PhDr, RNDr, Pharm.Dr, ThLic., and ThDr degrees one to three years of tertiary education beyond bachelor or four to six years of tertiary education ( <i>magistr, inženýr, doktor</i> )	7 e.g. Senior detective ( <i>vedoucí detektiv</i> ) Chemical engineer product manager ( <i>inženýr chemie produktmanažer</i> )

<sup>171</sup> Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/referencing-reports-and-contacts>

<sup>172</sup> The main source for thinking and discussion has been the study by Nantl (2014).

**Table 16. Czech qualification types, NSK levels and links to EQF levels (Continued)**

EQF LEVELS	CZECH QUALIFICATIONS AWARDED IN FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING	NSK LEVELS AND QUALIFICATIONS (AWARDED THROUGH VNFIL)
6	<p><b>Bachelor programme</b> Bc and BcA degrees three to four years of tertiary education (bakalář) Tertiary vocational education DiS degree three to three-and-a-half years of tertiary education (diplomovaný specialista)</p>	<p>6 e.g. Career counsellor for educational and professional path (<i>kariérový poradce pro vzdělávací a profesní dráhu</i>) Independent research and development electrician (<i>samostatný elektrotechnik výzkumný a vývojový pracovník</i>)</p>
5		<p>5 e.g. Tour guide (<i>průvodce cestovního ruchu</i>) Agricultural advisor for plant production (<i>zemědělský poradce pro ochranu rostlin</i>)</p>
4	<p><b>Upper secondary education with maturita exam</b> General education (<i>Gymnazium</i>) – four years of upper secondary study</p> <p><b>Upper secondary education with maturita exam</b> Vocational education – four years of upper secondary study</p> <p>Supplementary study leading to a maturita exam Two years of study after the VET certificate</p>	<p>4 e.g. Quality management specialist in engineering (<i>technik řízení jakosti ve strojírenství</i>) Detective trainee (detektiv koncipient)</p>
3	<p><b>Upper secondary education with VET certificate</b> Vocational education – three years of upper secondary study</p>	<p>3 e.g. Glassmaker for pressed glass (<i>sklář lisovaného skla</i>) Locksmith (<i>zámkař</i>)</p>
2	<p><b>Lower secondary education</b> Completion of a lower secondary general education programme – nine years</p>	<p>2 e.g. Production of side dishes (výroba příloh) Guard (<i>strážný</i>)</p>
1	<p><b>Special education</b> Completion of an educational programme in a special school – 10 years</p>	<p>1</p>

(\*) In the absence of a comprehensive NQF, Czechia has referenced its qualifications sub-systems directly to the EQF

Source: Adapted from NÚV (2015) and the national register of qualifications (NSK): [www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/](http://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/)

### Abbreviations

CVET	continuing vocational education and training	NÚOV	Národního ústavu odborného vzdělávání (National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education)
EQF	European qualifications framework	NÚV	Národního ústavu pro vzdělávání (National Institute for Education)
NCP	national coordination point		
NQF	national qualifications framework	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework of the European higher education area
NSK	Národní soustava kvalifikací (national register of qualifications)	VET	vocational education and training
		VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

## Main sources of information

National Institute for Education (NÚV) – EQF NCP: [www.nuv.cz/](http://www.nuv.cz/)

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- NÚV (National Institute for Education; Education Counselling Centre; Centre for Continuing Education of Teachers) (2015). *National referencing report of the Czech Republic: 3rd revised edition*. [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/national\\_referencing\\_report\\_czech\\_republic\\_2015\\_eng.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/national_referencing_report_czech_republic_2015_eng.pdf)

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# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

## Introduction

The education system in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is based on the Belgian education system. Higher education was expanded in the 1990s, mostly in the private sector. Many private higher education institutions are not recognized but maintain that they are affiliated with universities or colleges located in Western Europe and North America.

There are seven ministries responsible for education in the DRC: the Ministry for Primary, Secondary and Professional Education; the Ministry of Vocational Training, Trades and Crafts; the Ministry for Higher and University Education; the Ministry for Social Affairs; the Ministry of Youth; the Ministry of Health; and the Ministry of Work and Social Security.

Consequently, this current arrangement in the DRC, particularly the separation of roles within the ministries responsible for the education system, causes a lack of coordination. In addition, education system archives are in a very poor state; their management is handled by various government ministries and institutions responsible for education, rather than being centralized in one national record. The state of the archives, therefore, varies greatly even in central government offices, with some completely disorganized and in need of rehabilitation (Du Plessis et al., 2015).

The DRC is in the early stages of developing a national qualifications framework (NQF). In March 2016 the education ministries hosted a large meeting with experts from stakeholder ministries to discuss the development of an NQF system for the DRC. The meeting concluded that a process of consensus building and planning for the development of an NQF should be established.

This workshop attracted great interest with even the army attending in connection with their training of soldiers (schools) and the National Institute for Professional Training (INPP) of behalf of the Ministry of Work and Social Security.

UNESCO's assessment and review of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in the region reported that the initiative of creating an inter-ministerial commission of TVET was commendable and very important but it remains out of operation for two reasons: there is no document for its recognition (Decree of Prime Minister), and no financial means for its operation. It is essential that it be restored.

## Policy objectives

The following are the DRC's key objectives for a national qualifications and certifications framework:

- a. develop procedures for evaluation and certification of TVET in line with both the founding principles of the current system of qualifying examinations and the future requirements of the pedagogy of integration or skills approach;
- b. ensure consistency of assessment and certification in TVET, from current pedagogical implications to those of the pedagogy of integration;
- c. introduce changes gradually, to avoid possible performance side-effects;
- d. ensure the certification at each level reached by the learner as each level corresponds to a type of skill. Therefore, even if the learner is not able to progress with the programme, he or she has certification and the opportunity to be employed in the chosen trade at an appropriate level.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

Certification in the DRC has struggled to achieve harmonization, because of the lack of adequate structures guiding the process. The classification of degrees and diplomas is currently as follows:

- a. At the early childhood or kindergarten stage, most providers issue an 'early-childhood cycle' certificate.
- b. At the basic or primary education level, both public and private schools provide a certificate of

completion of primary education. This currently grades pupils by allocating 50% to their school assessment and 50% to their performance in the national examination at the end of primary studies.

- c. At completion of secondary level, a state certificate is awarded.
- d. A state diploma is issued to those who reach a specified level of attainment in all the essential disciplines of their option. Again, this is assessed by allocating 50% of the marks to their performance in the state examination and 50% to the school internal assessment.

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Technical and financial partners supporting the development of TVET have focused primarily on the rehabilitation and/or construction of infrastructure, and provision or distribution of textbooks at primary level. They have also revisited the programme and perspective of grant development plans for TVET schools in priority areas (agriculture, mining and building public works). Other actors in TVET in the informal sector tend to be isolated from these national initiatives. Some offer their own systems of qualification and certification.

### Referencing to regional framework

The DRC NQF will be in line with the regional qualifications framework of the Southern African Development Community.

### Important lessons and future plans

The DRC has no reference text for regulating or harmonising its national qualifications and certifications framework. Several departments have responsibility for aspects of the education system; each has developed its own qualification system, leading to an incoherent national picture. As a result, exchange of information about the experiences and practices of other countries in the region could contribute to the effectiveness of implementation of an NQF in the DRC.

#### Prepared by:

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

The establishment of an NQF requires a way of thinking that will successfully harmonise existing qualification systems. Other objectives should be:

- a. to give coherence to these systems by creating a unifying framework across the country;
- b. to reinforce training throughout life;
- c. to support the involvement of politicians and other stakeholders in TVET, including communities and social partners in many countries and those in the sub-region.

Since the development, introduction and maintenance of a national qualifications and certifications framework are lengthy proceedings, there now needs to be coordination of public action and commitment for all stakeholders, as well as deep structural changes in training. These initiatives should:

- a. contribute to the cohesion, transparency and integration of all existing certification systems;
- b. establish an objective link between training, evaluation and qualification;
- c. improve targeting and access to qualifications for various social groups, including the disadvantaged and vulnerable;
- d. introduce flexibility for learners, providers and users (employers);
- e. aid the recognition and validation of all skills taught as well as those acquired through experience;
- f. promote TVET and adult education;
- g. improve the convergence of qualifications with the needs of society and the labour market;
- h. promote investment in participation in development actions in the workplace;
- i. introduce the system of certification by level;
- j. promote the value-accumulated experiences.

#### Abbreviations

DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
INPP	Institut national de préparation professionnelle (National Institute for Professional Training)
NQF	national qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

# DENMARK

## Introduction and context

Denmark is situated well above EU averages on all key education and training indicators and has exceeded EU 2020 targets for adult participation in lifelong learning, participation in early childhood education and care, percentage of early leavers from education and training, and tertiary educational attainment. Denmark continues to belong to the group of countries with the highest investment in education in the EU, despite recent falls, and generally has good education outcomes. However young people from a weak socio-economic and, particularly from an immigrant background lag seriously behind. Although vocational education and training (VET) graduates have a rate of employment above the EU average (81.7% in 2017), relatively few students see this pathway as their first choice. A tripartite agreement aiming to attract young people into VET and to increase completion rates was concluded in August 2017. Under this agreement, employers committed to offering at least 8 000 to 10 000 additional apprenticeship places by 2025. Initiatives to secure a sufficient and qualified workforce in the long run include strengthening financial incentives for companies that offer apprenticeships and the creation of subsidy programmes providing internships. In 2017, VET centres of excellence were launched. These centres have a close and formalised cooperation with other actors relevant for regional growth (European Commission, 2018).

Denmark has developed a comprehensive national qualifications framework (DK NQF) covering all types and levels of qualification awarded and quality assured by public authorities. The work on the framework started in 2006 and builds directly on the qualifications framework for higher education (NQF-HE)<sup>173</sup> established in 2006/07. Implementation of the eight-level framework has been a gradual process, starting in June 2009 when it was adopted

via an administrative decision by the Ministry for Education, the Ministry for Science, Technology and Innovation (which is now the Ministry of Higher Education and Science), the Ministry for Culture and the Ministry for Economic and Business Affairs. The national qualifications framework for higher education was self-certified to the European higher education area framework in 2010. The NQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in May 2011.

## Policy objectives

The Danish NQF provides a comprehensive, systematic overview of public qualifications<sup>174</sup> that can be acquired within the Danish education and training system.

The overall objective of the NQF, as expressed in the referencing report, is to support transparency in the Danish qualifications system and to further the opportunities for mobility and lifelong learning by:

- a. providing a comprehensive overview of qualifications approved by national authorities, while simultaneously making routes through the education system visible; thus making it easier for students and pupils to find out how to build upon the qualifications they already have;
- b. aiding mutual recognition between Danish and non-Danish qualifications.

The NQF has no regulatory functions in terms of the development and quality assurance of qualifications. Inclusion of Danish qualifications in the NQF and the quality assurance of qualifications are linked to acts and executive orders within existing legal frameworks for publicly recognised qualifications.

<sup>173</sup> The first version of the Danish NQF-HE was developed between 2001 and 2003. Following a process of external consultation, the current NQF-HE was approved by ministers and on 1 July 2008 it came into force.

<sup>174</sup> The Danish Evaluation Institute specifies this as '[...] all qualifications that have been awarded pursuant to an act or executive order and that have been quality assured by a public authority in the Danish education system' (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011, pp. 13–14).

The framework supports development of a transparent education for the purpose of mobility and recognition, training and learning system without dead ends; it supports learner progression irrespective of prior learning, age or employment situation. The purpose is also to consolidate the learning-outcome-based foundation of Danish qualifications.

The NQF adopted in 2009 is considered to be a first step in a long-term development process. Currently, the framework includes nationally regulated and quality assured qualifications from formal education and training. A process for including qualifications awarded outside formal education and training in the Danish NQF has now been initiated, with an expected outcome in summer 2019.

### Levels and use of learning outcomes

The Danish qualifications framework draws a clear distinction between levels 1 to 5 and levels 6 to 8. The latter are identical with the levels descriptors in the Danish qualifications framework for higher education at bachelor, master and doctoral levels, and contain explicit references to research related outcomes. A broader descriptor has been drawn up for level 5 in the NQF than for the corresponding level descriptor in the national qualifications framework for higher education for short cycle degrees; this makes it possible to include qualifications at level 5 acquired through certain VET or certain maritime VET programmes.

Qualifications have been assigned to NQF levels using two different principles. A qualification at levels 1 to 5 is assigned according to a 'best fit' principle where the final decision is based on overall judgement of the knowledge, skills and competences of a particular qualification (type). A principle of 'full fit' is used for levels 6 to 8, as is the case for the Danish qualifications framework for higher education; this means that qualifications at this level have to be accredited<sup>175</sup> as meeting the legal requirements set by national authorities and according to the qualifications framework for higher education for qualifications at these levels.

All current publicly recognised qualifications in the Danish education system at level 6 to 8 are included in the qualifications framework for higher education.

<sup>175</sup> The process of accreditation in Danish higher education, and how this links to the learning outcomes principle, is well documented in the 2013 report: [www.nokut.no/contentassets/a4895de04f3744f0ab9f31330ad12cd8/learning\\_outcomes\\_in\\_external\\_quality\\_assurance\\_approaches\\_noqa\\_report\\_-220413\\_250613.pdf](http://www.nokut.no/contentassets/a4895de04f3744f0ab9f31330ad12cd8/learning_outcomes_in_external_quality_assurance_approaches_noqa_report_-220413_250613.pdf)

The eight-level structure adopted for the Danish NQF is defined by knowledge (*Viden*), skills (*Færdigheder*) and competences (*Kompetencer*). Danish level descriptors have been based on a number of different sources, including existing descriptions of learning outcomes in curricula and programmes, the EQF descriptors, and the Bologna descriptors. They have been designed to be relevant to different types of qualification, theoretically as well as practically oriented. Knowledge (*Viden*) descriptors emphasise the following:

- a. the type of knowledge involved – knowledge about theory or knowledge about practice, knowledge of a subject or a field within a profession;
- b. the complexity of knowledge – the degree of complexity and how predictable or unpredictable the situation in which the knowledge is mastered;
- c. understanding – the ability to place one's knowledge in a context; for example, understanding is expressed when explaining something to others.

Skills descriptors refer to what a person can do or accomplish and reflect the following aspects:

- a. the type of skill involved – practical, cognitive, creative or communicative;
- b. the complexity of the problem-solving – the problem-solving these skills can be applied to, and the complexity of the task;
- c. communication – the communication that is required, the complexity of the message, to which target groups and with which instruments.

Competence descriptors refer to responsibility and autonomy and cover the following aspects:

- a. space for action – the type of work/study-related context in which knowledge and skills are brought to play, and the degree of unpredictability and changeability in these contexts;
- b. cooperation and responsibility – the ability to take responsibility for one's own work and the work of others, and the complexity of the cooperative situations in which one engages;
- c. learning – the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning and that of others<sup>176</sup>.

<sup>176</sup> Danish Evaluation Institute (2011), pp. 17–18.



**Table 17. Level descriptor in the Danish NQF for lifelong learning**

KNOWLEDGE ( <i>VIDEM</i> )	SKILLS ( <i>FAERDIGHETER</i> )	COMPETENCES ( <i>KOMPETENCER</i> )
<b>Type and complexity</b>	Type	Space for action
	Problem solving	Cooperation and responsibility
<b>Understanding</b>	Communication	Learning

Source: Danish Evaluation Institute et al. (2011), p. 17.

These descriptors are used to address both full and supplementary qualifications<sup>177</sup>.

The role of supplementary qualifications is particularly important for adult education and for continuing VET (CVET). A supplementary qualification can be a supplement (addition) to a qualification, a part (module) or an independent entity not related to any other qualification.

The learning outcomes approach is widely accepted in all segments of education and training and is increasingly being used to define and describe curricula and programmes. However, the descriptions are often divided according to subject, meaning that there is not always a comprehensive presentation of the overall learning outcome for the entire qualification. In VET, for example, the student must comply with both defined learning outcomes and competence objectives to gain admission to the main course after the basic course, as well as to be awarded certificates for VET programmes. In higher education all qualifications are clearly described using a learning outcome based terminology. This shift from input- to output-based steering is supported by the Danish quality assurance approach of accreditation; learning outcome is an important reference point for accreditation of new and existing programmes.

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

A broad range of stakeholders has been involved throughout the development and implementation period. The social partners have been systematically consulted and involved; their role is being described

as constructive and as a precondition for the implementation of the framework. Some social partner representatives, notably employers, have pointed out the need to move to a second and more inclusive development stage.

The Danish NQF implementation is steered by the inter-departmental National Coordination Committee for the Danish Qualifications Framework established in 2006 with representatives from the four ministries with responsibility for lifelong learning in Denmark: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs. Stakeholders are consulted through the committee for all developments regarding the framework implementation and regular update. All stakeholders have been consulted on the principles and procedures for the inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the Danish NQF.

The Danish EQF national coordination point (NCP) has taken on an active role in the day-to-day coordination of the framework. The NCP is located in the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education within the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science, which also hosts the Danish national academic recognition information centre (NARIC). The NCP informs stakeholders of the results of the national referencing process and correlation between the NQF and the EQF. It provides information about the background and purpose of establishing the EQF, administers and develops the website on the NQF and it's referencing to the EQF, and participates in dialogue with other countries about the mutual recognition of qualifications (Danish Evaluation Institute et al., 2011, p. 29). Responsibility for other areas, such as quality assurance of qualifications in the NQF and their levelling, lies with the ministries responsible for education and training. The NCP appointed by the three ministries represents the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science in the coordination committee.

<sup>177</sup> The Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning encompasses all officially accredited degrees and certificates in the Danish education system and certificates for supplementary qualifications acquired in the adult education system.

A main task for the NCP has been to coordinate stakeholders involved in framework implementation, as well as disseminating information to a wider public.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>178</sup>

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been on the policy agenda in Denmark for about 20 years and is seen as a key element in promoting lifelong learning. Competence assessment, and the possible outcomes in terms of access, exemption or acquisition of certificates, varies among the education and training sectors (VET, higher education and adult education sectors). A legal framework for validation of prior learning (VPL), based on common principles in adult education and training, has been in place since 2007.

It is acknowledged that there is a need to link VPL activity for individuals more to the development of job profiles. This means giving employers at workplace level greater responsibility in showing job perspectives to employees potentially having a VPL.

More commitment is called for from stakeholders, including employers at company level, social partners and key actors in education. This is especially the case at VET and CVET schools where the social partners are occupying all seats on the boards and where they are able to be more strategic, giving greater priority to VPL activity. Official statistics should be more comprehensive and systematic, covering all VPL activity, and should be presented in an updated version.

Since the 2016 inventory update, the main changes for VPL in Denmark are identified in relation to adult education: general adult education (AVU) and adult vocational education and training (AMU), VET and CVET. VET reform in 2015 included a separate programme for adults (vocational upper secondary education and training for persons over the age of 25 years, EUV). This required mandatory VPL for the candidate prior to education being carried out, leading to individual shortening of the VET period. An evaluation of the EUV carried out by the Danish Evaluation Institute in 2017 showed that shortening is not a primary motivation for adult learners. Based on this, the criteria were revised and VPL no longer

leads to compulsory shortening of the EUV; instead, this is optional to the individual learner.

Adult learners who do not opt for VET shortening must be offered teaching at a higher level or other relevant vocational teaching. This adjustment came into effect by 1 January 2018.

The use of VPL for adult education and CVET is prioritised by various means and incentives. For adult vocational education and training there will be a higher taximeter to the VET providers, including also for the VPL. Wage compensation is also raised from, 80% to 100% of unemployment benefit. The financial incentives aim to motivate employers and education institutions to provide more vocational education courses for adults as well as increasing recognition of prior learning. A project aiming at developing both common guidelines and digital tools for higher education institution use of VPL was launched in December 2018, scheduled to finish in 2021. A working group with labour market and higher education institutional representation has also been set up. The working group has been tasked with developing recommendations by the end of 2019 to promote the use of VPL. Though not directly addressed as 'upskilling pathways', the legal framework for validation of prior learning serves as a key instrument for upskilling pathways for adults. Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been on the policy agenda for about 20 years and is regarded as a key element in promoting lifelong learning in Denmark. In practice, validation of non-formal and informal learning in Denmark generally provides individuals with the following opportunities:

- a. to be granted access to formal education and training programmes if they do not meet formal entry requirements;
- b. to get exemptions for parts of a formal education and training programme and/or to have an individual tailored education and training programme;
- c. to acquire a 'certificate of competence' leading to access/exemptions in adult education and training programmes;
- d. to obtain 'education certificates' for parts of/or a whole education programme on the basis of validation of prior learning.

## NQF implementation

The Danish NQF has reached an advanced operational stage and is well embedded in the national education, training and qualification structure. All qualifications from VET, higher education, general education and adult education have been assigned to the NQF levels and included

<sup>178</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

in the database. The regulation on opening up the framework has been in force since January 2018<sup>179</sup> and criteria and procedures for inclusion of non-formal qualifications are expected to be adopted in summer 2019.

There is no specific legal act on the Danish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning. In higher education, it is implemented via the accreditation act<sup>180</sup>. On all other levels, it is integrated in educational orders. The description of Danish qualifications in learning outcomes forms the basis for recognition of prior learning (RPL) as well as credit transfer decisions. NQF and EQF levels are indicated in qualifications and qualification supplements being issued.

An evaluation was carried out in 2013 by the Danish Evaluation Institute<sup>181</sup> to assess the speed and quality of the formal implementation process, to check how the framework is judged by potential users, and to provide a basis for future improvements. The evaluation shows there is good awareness and understanding of, and overall satisfaction with, the Danish NQF for lifelong learning. It was seen as a necessary and valid tool for developing qualifications and programmes at all levels. However, the survey also revealed that there is a need to disseminate further the potential of the NQF to employers and for more assistance to institutions in describing programmes in learning outcomes.

The NQF is visible to the general public through two (interconnected) websites. The [ufm.dk](http://ufm.dk)<sup>182</sup> website provides information for an international target group, presenting the NQF and the qualifications it covers. The [ug.dk](http://ug.dk)<sup>183</sup> website addresses a national target group and provides comprehensive information on qualifications, programmes, and access. This website also provides comprehensive information on the NQF and the qualifications levels, and explains the concept of learning-outcomes-based levels and how these can be used by learners.

<sup>179</sup> [www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/r0710.aspx?id=198244](http://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/r0710.aspx?id=198244)

<sup>180</sup> [www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=198244](http://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=198244)

<sup>181</sup> [www.eva.dk/ungdomsuddannelse/evaluering-danske-kvalifikationsramme-livslang-laering](http://www.eva.dk/ungdomsuddannelse/evaluering-danske-kvalifikationsramme-livslang-laering)

<sup>182</sup> [https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks?set\\_language=en&cl=en](https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks?set_language=en&cl=en)

<sup>183</sup> [www.ug.dk/](http://www.ug.dk/)

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The Danish national qualifications framework was referenced to the EQF in May 2011 (Danish Evaluation Institute et al., 2011). The result shows strong convergence between the Danish framework and the EQF with a linking of Danish level 1 and 2 to EQF level 2. A particular challenge was linked to referencing qualifications at NQF/EQF levels 5, which include short cycle qualifications, and some upper secondary vocation qualifications sitting next to each other.

## Important lessons and the way forward

The Danish NQF is well known by main stakeholders, with more mixed results for employers and employment services.

It has influenced many areas. First, it has had high impact on promotion and use of learning outcomes, permeability of the education and training system and review, renewal and quality assurance of qualifications. The impact on validation of non-formal and informal learning has been good in the VET sector and growing in higher education.

It has been supportive to recognition of foreign qualifications, used in decisions as one important transparency tool, but also partly jeopardised by uneven international referencing of similar qualifications, most notably short-cycle. These qualifications raise specific challenges in terms of levelling, not in the national context but the fact that some countries have referenced short-cycle qualifications to level 6 in the EQF.

The NQF has also had some impact on dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders in education and training and between education and training and labour market stakeholders, but this has not been extensive (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Denmark has now started on the task of including qualifications awarded outside formal education and training in the NQF. This will strengthen the relevance of the framework for the labour market and the social partners. The Parliament passed new legislation on accreditation in 2017<sup>184</sup> mandating the Danish Accreditation Agency, in cooperation with relevant ministries, to develop principles and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications awarded outside formal education and training in the Danish NQF.

<sup>184</sup> [www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/r0710.aspx?id=198244](http://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/r0710.aspx?id=198244)

The aim is to establish a more open and comprehensive framework and create more transparency in line with the emphasis on lifelong learning. It also aims to create a better foundation for higher education institutions to admit students and give credits for qualifications and learning outcomes achieved outside formal education, opening up new pathways into formal education and

training. Increasing the employability of holders of qualifications awarded outside formal education and training by describing them in learning outcomes is also important, as it will help employers understand and value the content and profile of a qualification. Criteria and procedures are being developed. Implementation and dissemination of procedures and criteria is foreseen in spring 2019<sup>185</sup>.

**Table 18. Danish national qualifications framework (DK NQF)**

NQF LEVELS	CERTIFICATES AND DEGREES	CERTIFICATES FOR SUPPLEMENTARY QUALIFICATIONS (*)	EQF LEVELS
8	PhD degree ( <i>Ph.d. grad</i> )		8
7	Master degree – Candidatus ( <i>Kandidat og masteruddannelser</i> ) Master degree in arts/fine arts Master degree		7
6	Bachelor degree ( <i>Bachelor og diplomuddannelser</i> ) Bachelor degree in arts Professional bachelor degree ( <i>Professionsbacheloruddannelser</i> ) Diploma degree		6
5	VET certificate Academy profession degrees ( <i>Erhvervsakademi uddannelser</i> )		5
4	General upper secondary school certificate ( <i>Gymnasiale uddannelser</i> ) Certificate for two-year general upper secondary programme (higher preparatory examination) VET certificate	Certificate for supplementary single subject courses at upper secondary level Adult VET certificate Certificate for single subject VET	4
3	VET certificate	Basic programme VET Certificates for supplementary, single subject VET courses Higher preparatory courses, single course subjects General adult education level D Adult VET certificate Certificates for single subject courses in VET	3
2	Leaving certificate for primary and lower secondary school – 10 <sup>th</sup> grade ( <i>10. klasse afgangsprøve</i> )	Basic VET certificates General adult education (levels E and F, approximates 10 <sup>th</sup> grade) Adult VET certificate	2

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Allan Bruun Pedersen from the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education in the Cedefop magazine *Skillset and match*, Vol. 15, January 2019: A Nordic network of aspiration for qualifications. [www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/magazines](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/magazines)

**Table 18. Danish national qualifications framework (DK NQF) (Continued)**

NQF LEVELS	CERTIFICATES AND DEGREES	CERTIFICATES FOR SUPPLEMENTARY QUALIFICATIONS (*)	EQF LEVELS
1	Leaving certificate for primary and lower secondary school (ninth grade) ( <i>Folkeskolens afgangsprøve</i> )	Certificate for preparatory adult education Certificate for general adult education (level G, approximates ninth grade)	2

(\*) Acquired in adult education and training.

Source: Adapted from Danish Ministry of Higher education and Science, 2017. <https://ufm.dk/en/education-and-institutions/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks/types-of-certificates-and-degrees/hardtableview>

Abbreviations		NCP	national coordination point
CVET	continuing vocational education and training	NQF	national qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework	VET	vocational education and training
EUV	VET for adults	VPL	validation of prior learning

## Main sources of information

Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education – acts as EQF national coordination point: <https://ufm.dk/en/the-ministry/organisation/danish-agency-for-science-and-higher-education>

Danish NQF website: <http://ufm.dk/en/education-and-institutions/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks>

Register of qualifications and programmes included in the NQF: [www.ug.dk/](http://www.ug.dk/)

Danish Evaluation Institute et al. 2011. Referencing the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework: [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/DK\\_Qualifications\\_Framework\\_Referencing\\_Report\\_and\\_Self-certification\\_Report.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/DK_Qualifications_Framework_Referencing_Report_and_Self-certification_Report.pdf)

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# EGYPT

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

Instead of a separate legal act, the national qualifications framework (NQF) was introduced as an amendment to the law establishing the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) (law 82, year 2006); the amended law is currently in parliament for approval. NAQAAE is the lead body, while the Ministries of Higher Education, Education, Industry and Manpower are the main other implementing bodies.

The TVET 2 programme (see International cooperation section) will support NAQAAE in drafting the amendment of its current executive regulations (bylaws) to correspond with the amendments of the law. The planned qualifications framework will comprise eight levels.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Egypt is a lower middle-income country with a population, in 2015, of 91 million<sup>186</sup>. The annual population growth rate is declining (at 1.6%), but there is still high demographic pressure, with young people aged 15 to 24 accounting for 20% of the total population, requiring significant public investment in education, health, employment, housing and infrastructure.

Although GDP is steadily growing (from 1.8% in 2011 to 4.2% in 2015), Egypt's economy is on shaky ground. A drop in tourism has been dragging on economic activity since late 2015. Fewer tourists and lower revenues from the Suez Canal have caused the country's international reserves to plunge. The loss of an Egypt Air flight in the Mediterranean in May and the Sinai plane crash in November 2015 have been a setback for tourism. Acute dollar shortages are restraining business activity and have negative repercussions on the wider economy. The fiscal position also worsened as financial support from oil-rich regional peers weakened with the oil price slump. Standard and

Poor Global Ratings' move to downgrade Egypt's credit outlook from stable to negative in May reflects these increasing imbalances.

That said, the government's fiscal consolidation targets recently laid out in the 2017 draft budget come as positive news. Measures to curb the deficit include a reduction in the State subsidy bill by 14% and belated implementation of value-added tax. In November 2016, the Egyptian pound was floated freely on the market, instead of being sustained by the State, which has reversed the exchange rate with the US dollar and euros. This measure is supposed to reduce the real value of the pound and attract business, but it will take some time before the positive effects can be seen. The measure was required by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as one of the conditions for the loan (they have just delivered the first instalment).

Unemployment is high and slowly increasing (from 12% in 2011 to 13% in 2014) following the country's economic difficulties. Similar to other countries in the region, Egypt is characterised by a low activity rate for females, which in the past five years has remained around 15%. Potentially active women have difficulty in finding a job and their unemployment level is almost the double of that of men (24% versus 13% in 2014). In the past two years, the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector has been under the spotlight, as most policy-makers consider it a powerful instrument for addressing unemployment and supporting economic growth. This pressure has pushed policy-makers to provide rapid answers to the main challenge of the sector, which is fragmentation and lack of a common vision. In 2016, this reform wave peaked with the creation of a Ministry of Technical Education and Training. This was not a cosmetic institutional change; the creation of the ministry brought strong centralisation. The Industrial Training Council has been moved from the Ministry of Industry to the new ministry, along with responsibility for all enterprise training partnerships (ETPs). The new Ministry of Technical Education and Training was assigned responsibility for the strategic policy orientations of vocational training centres.

<sup>186</sup> UNDP\_WPP15.

However, a few months later, the new ministry was abolished and functions, which had been centralised, returned to their original institutions. After this attempt at reform, TVET governance has remained stagnant, as have many of the challenges linked to fragmented TVET system governance and lack of coordination among existing stakeholders. The latest attempt at establishing coordination mechanisms has been the operationalisation of the TVET Executive Council, which was foreseen in Prime Minister's decree but never became active. At strategic level, new initiatives to give the country a vision for TVET reform have been put in place. The Ministry of Planning has launched the Egypt vision 2030: a sustainable development strategy, which includes a specific section for the TVET sector. UNESCO has worked with the Ministry of Education to define the pillars of a new strategy for TVET. The new EU-funded programme in VET (TVET 2) (EUR 115 million) launched by the EU delegation and the national government, will try to build on this document and achieve a fully-fledged national strategy for TVET.

The Ministry of Education is starting to reform the TVET sector through the TVET 2.0 reform initiative, similar to the reform process launched in general education through the Education 2.0 initiative. This is an ambitious plan but it does not address the fragmentation of the system. This unwillingness of stakeholders to recognise the leadership of one specific actor in one specific component of the TVET reform has still to be addressed.

Within the context of improving the business climate, a new Development Agency has been created under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The Industrial Training Council, the Social Fund for Development, and the technology centres under the Education Development Fund will be merged as per the ministerial decree of 24 March 2017. The inclusion of the Industrial Training Council in the Development Agency may have a deep impact on the Council's functions as its work on the framework of qualifications and skills standards (representing around 80% of the Council's activities) might be discontinued. In addition, the weakness of ETPs has become a serious concern for the future of the TVET sector and their function as a bridge between the demand and supply of skills. The TVET 2 programme is working to provide ETPs with a clear institutional and financial sustainability, but efforts have not yet materialised.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

Between the end of 2014 and 2015 signs of acceleration of TVET reform became evident as a

number of important policy decisions were taken or announced. The most notable developments concerned the area of governance: reshaping the governance structure of TVET through adoption of a system of cascading councils, including structures at regional level; introducing the position of Deputy Minister for Technical Education as a precursor to the possible establishment of a separate TVET ministry; upgrading TVET to the level of the Constitution (Article 20); and restructuring the Ministry of Education, including establishment of a school-to-work-transition unit and a planning and coordination unit in the TVET sector.

The priorities identified for TVET reform are:

- a. defining a vision and strategy agreed by all key stakeholders;
- b. setting up standard processes for qualifications development (NQF, occupational standards, curriculum development), which would reduce the gap between the requirements of the labour market and the outputs of technical and vocational education. Up to now different stakeholders have developed competence-based programmes in the framework of international projects. However, these initiatives have been based on different methodologies and no national standard process has been developed and approved;
- c. reinforcing current work-based learning initiatives and the establishment of new innovative ones.

### International cooperation

The main international project supporting TVET reform is the EU-funded TVET 2 programme. This is a EUR 117 million programme (EUR 50 million from the EU and EUR 67 million from the Egyptian government) aiming at systemic reform of the TVET sector. The programme has been waiting many years for its launch due to the unstable political conditions. In 2015 the programme became operational with the establishment of the Project Implementation Unit and the launch of terms of reference for main activities. In 2016 the Project Implementation Unit started putting activities in place.

Egypt participated in the regional project Qualifications for the Mediterranean (Q4M), which developed common profiles for occupations in the tourism and construction sectors.

Various EU donors and agencies (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), British Council, World Bank, International Labour Organisation and others) are working in TVET in Egypt, with some direct links with the NQF.

- a. Learning outcomes-based qualifications have been produced in the framework of

several international and national initiatives. Currently different programmes (GIZ, WISE) are cooperating at developing this core process.

- b. The Industrial Training Council also launched a continuation of the skills development project jointly funded by the World Bank and Ministry of Trade and Industry between 2004 and 2010. This initiative uses the skills-based methodology of the Scottish National Qualification Authority.
- c. The EVCC1 development and international endorsement programme, another Council initiative in partnership with employer organisations, aims to develop demand-driven and internationally endorsed vocational qualifications, according to the skills standards required in industry, tourism and construction sectors. Up to now, 350 qualifications have been developed and endorsed. The extent to which these are used and updated is not clear; future plans target 50 qualifications covering 20 trades in the industrial sector.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### Scope and structure of NQF

The Egyptian NQF is intended to support lifelong learning, covering general, vocational and higher education qualifications.

The work on the NQF has proved prolonged and complicated. At a conference organised in 2015, NAQAAE announced a model of the revisited NQF. The application and expectations of the Egyptian NQF were explained: an NQF for permeability and mobility, to assure the quality of programmes, to bridge the gap between offer and demand, to develop a sectoral qualifications framework, to provide scale of comparability and to assure that new qualifications fit in the framework. Initiatives to consult the public, to include and engage all stakeholders, to address the TVET sector, and to recognise non-formal education are in place and part of the NQF strategy.

Stages of development:

- a. awareness and mobilising stakeholders;
- b. early stages of design (agreement on conceptual framework and objectives);
- c. consultation and testing online survey (situation 2016);
- d. next step (from 2018): official establishment and implementation.

### Alignment to other classification systems

Among the objectives of the revisited NQF model presented in 2015 by NAQAAE is the development of a sectoral qualifications framework, a credit accumulation and transfer system, and a

recognition of prior learning and validation of current competences.

### NQF levels and level descriptors

The Egyptian NQF currently has eight levels. These levels are described according to three broad descriptors, namely:

- a. knowledge: described by knowledge extent and depth;
- b. skills: described as cognitive skills (including logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and professional skills (including manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);
- c. competences: described in terms of the extent of responsibility, autonomy and interaction.

### Use of learning outcomes

A national process for developing learning outcomes-based curricula exists for higher education and technical education (whether high or pre-university). Vocational education is not included and has not yet been fully approved.

Existing national qualifications are not yet defined in terms of learning outcomes but there are many examples developed in the framework of international or national initiatives. However, there is no national process for developing learning outcomes-based qualifications.

### Definition of qualification

No legal definition is used.

### Qualification standards

Occupational standards are the basis of vocational education qualifications.

### Development process of qualifications

Prior to the model derived from the European qualifications framework (EQF) and developed by NAQAAE, the National skills standard project was introduced and is still used to provide standards in training programmes for tourism, construction and agriculture with the involvement of the sectoral and regional ETPs. How far these standards have been updated is not clear, nor whether they are used in TVET.

The national core process, which is currently under development by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Industry, with the support of the TVET 2 programme, will include an important role for employers in defining occupational standards, qualifications and curricula. However this process is not yet active and, outside of qualifications developed in the framework of international projects, no mechanisms are in place to ensure that national qualifications are relevant to employers.



The Ministry of Manpower and Migration cooperated with the Industrial Training Council and the Scottish Qualifications Authority to accredit 25 out of 52 qualifications in the field of building and construction.

### **Access, progression and credit**

The establishment of progression pathways to avoid dead-ends and educational bottlenecks, as well as rules to accredit prior learning, are among key objectives of the Egyptian NQF. Up to now, no detailed rules have been defined. The fragmented vocational education landscape and the absence of a formal NQF do not allow horizontal progression pathways and progression between systems.

Nevertheless, NQF objectives and other initiatives are linking TVET and general education systems, promoting level progression and permitting horizontal mobility.

## **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

### **NQF legal basis**

There is no legislation applying directly to the NQF. Instead, Law No 82 of 2006 regulating the establishment of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) and Presidential Decree No 25 of 2007, deal with the objectives of quality assurance and accreditation.

Related laws are:

- a. Article 20 of the Constitution of 2013, stating that TVET is a priority;
- b. a National strategic plan for pre-university education 2014–20 drafted by the Ministry of Education to overcome the serious shortcomings of the education system where TVET at all levels is considered a major strategic objective;
- c. the creation of two executive councils by the Prime Minister, each one under the responsibility of either the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Manpower and Migration;
- d. the Professional Academy for Teachers created in 2008 under the authority of the Prime Minister. Its current focus on general education has to be extended to TVET as well.

### **Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF**

NAQAAE is the lead body, while the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Manpower are the main stakeholders.

Sectoral enterprise TVET partnerships, or ETPs were created to liaise between the TVET system and the private sector. They should be incorporated within the TVET governance structure. Since 2005, 12 sectoral ETPs and 19 local ETPs have been set up, each with a management board of whom two-thirds come from private businesses and one-third from the education and training providers.

### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

NAQAAE is in overall charge of the NQF. The social partners should play a significant role: sectoral enterprise TVET partnerships (ETPs) were created for that purpose. TVET 2 will work at positioning all the enterprise TVET partnerships (ETPs) established by TVET 1 within the new governance structure in order to institutionalise the engagement of employers and sectors at policy level.

The TVET sector in Egypt has multiple stakeholders, all strongly engaged in sector reform. All of them also have a vision but they have not yet agreed on a common vision for TVET. Failure in recent years to approve a TVET strategy for the whole sector and agreed by all key stakeholders is a proof of the fragmentation and instability of the sector.

In January 2013, the government approved the establishment of the National TVET Authority, which replaces the Supreme Council for Human Resources Development. The authority was never operational and the new government, appointed in 2014, established a new TVET authority under the prime minister with two executive committees, one for technical vocational education and a second for vocational training. Twenty-seven regional committees have been established to assure the link with the local vocational needs.

The two executive committees are coordinated by Ministry of Education for TVET, representing the initial vocational education and training sector, and the Ministry of Manpower and Migration for training, which represents the continuing vocational education and training sector. The regional committees are supervised by the regional governors.

### **Resources and funding**

The development of the NQF is one of the objectives of the TVET 2 programme. One of the intended results is that 'an overall national qualifications framework (NQF) for Egypt for all qualifications is designed and formally adopted by the government of Egypt, and piloted in the tourism sector in collaboration with NAQAAE and/or other relevant institutions'.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

The quality assurance framework comprises nine areas: vision and mission of the institution; leadership and governance; human and financial resources; civil society participation; quality improvement and accountability; learners; teachers; curriculum; and education environment. Each area is further defined by specific criteria and described through a set of indicators.

A major milestone towards quality assurance was the establishment of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE) in 2008 as an independent body reporting to the Prime Minister. While universities manage the process internally, the pre-university education institutions, including TVET, report directly to the Minister for Education. The authority has the responsibility to support quality units at regional and local levels (Idarras and Muddiriyas) to foster a quality culture and support schools in the process of complying and seeking accreditation by NAQAAE.

Quality assurance legislation includes Law No 82 of 2006 regulating the establishment of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE), and Presidential Decree No 25 of 2007, dealing with the objectives of quality assurance and accreditation.

The establishment of NAQAAE has given a clear institutional hub to all initiatives and responsibilities related to quality assurance and accreditation. NAQAAE has established itself as an independent body, with high-level technical competencies, which should remain a pillar of the forthcoming systemic TVET strategy. NAQAAE is mandated by law to guarantee the quality of all qualifications (including vocational education and training) and is currently working on the quality assurance system. The agency is responsible for promoting quality in educational institutions and the development of national standards in line with international standards.

NAQAAE has managed to build collaborative relationships with other international quality assurance organisations through exchange visits. As a result, NAQAAE signed a number of memoranda of understanding with the following quality assurance organisations: The Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME), the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAE), the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA), Technical and Vocational Education and Training United Kingdom (TVET-UK), Japan Accreditation Board for Engineering Education (JABEE), Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA),

and Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik (ASIIN e.V.).

NAQAAE has obtained membership with the European Foundation for Quality Assurance of E-learning (EFQUEL), the European Network for Quality Assurance of Distance and e-learning (EDEN), and the International Network for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education (INQAAHE). It has established an alliance with the Accreditation Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET).

In collaboration with stakeholders, NAQAAE has developed an integrated system to assure education quality. One of the system's outcomes is a series of guides to help higher education institutions in designing their programs to meet the accreditation requirements.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

One of the expected results and benefits of NQF implementation is support to validation of non-formal and informal learning, but no system or mechanism is yet formally in place for use by learners.

### **NQF implementation**

#### **Inclusion of qualifications in a register**

Currently, there is no register or database at national level.

#### **Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF**

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of Egypt NQF implementation have not yet been fully defined.

#### **Impact for end-users**

Learners, providers and workers are not yet using the NQF as a reference system or tool.

### **Referencing to regional frameworks**

The NQF has no relationship with regional frameworks, though an Arab qualification framework is emerging for higher education. This aims at providing a common reference point for Arab countries engaged in developing or modifying qualifications frameworks for higher education.

## Important lessons and future plans

After some years following political upheaval in the country, NAQAAE relaunched the NQF initiative in February 2015. The vision of how the NQF can support the strategic development of education (ensuring transparency, matching qualifications with companies' needs, development of validation of non-formal and informal learning) seems clear.

The NQF is also an integral part of the EU-funded TVET 2 programme. The TVET 2 support constitutes a real lever of development and implementation for an Egyptian NQF (even if ambitious). Expected results include 'development of a mechanism to integrate the skills standards and occupational profiles within the NQF, design of an overall national qualifications framework of all qualifications and formally adopted by the government (legal framework and acts), development of a register of qualifications, preparation of a document comparing the Egyptian NQF against the EQF', looking at the current EQF referencing criteria. Despite the limited involvement of companies in qualifications issues, the existing ETPs are a starting point for company commitment.

The first challenge is to complete the legal framework (laws and by-laws). The second is

to ensure the engagement of all stakeholders, particularly companies, in developing qualifications (buy-in).

Clarification of roles seems important since many ministries are involved in overlapping duties. Some tools and strategies (validation of non-formal and informal learning, credit system, register of qualifications) should be developed in designing an overall NQF. Major work is needed on this front.

### Abbreviations

ETPs	enterprise training partnerships
NAQAAE	National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education
NQF	national qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
TVET 1 and 2	EU-funded projects in vocational education and training

### Prepared by:

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

## Introduction and context

The Estonian school system is among the best performing in the EU, with the lowest percentage of underachievers in science and mathematics and the second lowest in reading, according to the 2015 Programme for international student assessment (PISA) results. The impact of socioeconomic status on the acquisition of basic skills is one of the lowest in the EU. However, national examinations show that the learning outcomes of students in schools in rural areas are lower than those of their peers in urban areas and there is a performance gap between students studying in Estonian and those in Russian-medium school. The proportion of Russian-medium basic school graduates (ISCED 1–2) with at least an intermediate level of proficiency in Estonian (B1) decreased to 57% in 2017, significantly below the 90% national target set for 2020. However, Estonian language acquisition has been improving in upper secondary. Tertiary educational achievement and adult participation in lifelong learning are above EU averages. The rate of early school leavers was 10.8% in 2017; although this is around the EU average (10.6), it is above the national target of 9.5% set in the national reform programme Estonia 2020<sup>187</sup>. Early school leaving remained virtually unchanged in recent years and is high in the context of a shrinking population, skills shortages and the need to update the skills of the population. The rate remains much higher for men (14.2%) than women (7.3%). Efforts are being made to improve the attractiveness of VET, which remains low. The share of basic school graduates who continue to VET has not increased significantly in the past ten years; it was 25% in 2017, below the national target of 35%. However, recent data shows an increasing number of young people (37%) are opting for VET three years after graduating from basic education, showing that strengthening career counselling during the last two years might have helped. The employment rate of recent VET graduates was 86.2%, above the EU average

(76.6%). The employment rate of recent graduates in higher education improved in 2017 to 83% (75.5% in 2016), placing it slightly below the EU average of 84.9% (European Commission, 2018).

On 12 December 2018, Parliament adopted amendments to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act<sup>188</sup> to link vocational programmes better with the labour market and renew the funding principles of vocational schools. Up to 20% of school operating expenses will be covered by performance-based financing, determined by school results. The aim of the performance-based financing is to motivate schools to complete their main tasks successfully. The act foresees more flexible ways to access vocational training and to update quality assessment. The way that current accreditation of vocational education is organised will be replaced by quality assessment. This change means that a study-centred approach at school will be developed and the trustworthiness of vocational education increased. The needs of local employers and the labour force are to be taken into account to a greater extent, vocational studies are to become more flexible, and new forms of study will be piloted in cooperation with local governments<sup>189</sup>.

There is a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) for lifelong learning, the Estonian qualifications framework (EstQF), established in 2008 through the Professions Act<sup>190</sup>. It has eight levels and includes all State-recognised qualifications. The overarching framework brings together four sub-frameworks; for higher education qualifications<sup>191</sup>, for vocational education and training (VET) qualifications<sup>192</sup>, for general education

<sup>187</sup> <https://riigikantslei.ee/en/supporting-government/national-reform-programme-estonia-2020>

<sup>188</sup> [www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/505022014002/consolide/current](http://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/505022014002/consolide/current)

<sup>189</sup> [www.rahandusministeerium.ee/en/local-governments-and-administrative-territorial-reform](http://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/en/local-governments-and-administrative-territorial-reform)

<sup>190</sup> The Professions Act, entered into force on 1 September 2008: [www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/501072015005/consolide](http://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/501072015005/consolide)

<sup>191</sup> Referred to as standard of higher education.

<sup>192</sup> Referred to as vocational education standard.

qualifications<sup>193</sup> and for occupational qualifications<sup>194</sup>. The sub-frameworks include specific descriptors as defined in the corresponding national educational standards, underpinning quality assurance activities.

Referencing of the EstQF to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certification to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) was completed in 2011; the joint report was endorsed in the EQF advisory group in October 2011. The referencing report was revised and updated in 2016 to include recent developments in the education system (Estonian Qualifications Authority et al., 2016).

The national lifelong learning strategy<sup>195</sup> has set five goals for 2020, aiming to tackle existing challenges in a holistic approach: a change in the approach to learning; competent and motivated teachers and school leadership; concordance of lifelong learning opportunities with labour market needs; a digital focus in lifelong learning; equal opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning.

## Policy objectives

The NQF's ambition in Estonia is twofold: to be a tool for transparency and communication and to support lifelong learning. More specifically, policy objectives addressed by the EstQF are to:

- a. improve the link between education/training and the labour market;
- b. increase consistency of the education offer and of the qualification system;
- c. provide transparency for employers and individuals;
- d. increase understanding of Estonian qualifications within the country and abroad;
- e. introduce common quality assurance criteria;
- f. support validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- g. monitor supply and demand for learning.

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<sup>193</sup> Referred to as national curriculum for basic schools and national curriculum for upper secondary schools.

<sup>194</sup> Occupational qualifications are those associated with a trade, occupation or profession, usually resulting from work-based learning, in-service training, and adult education.

<sup>195</sup> *Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020* is a document that guides the most important developments in education. It is the basis on which the government will make its decisions for education funding for the years 2014–20 and for the development of programmes that support the achievement of necessary changes: [www.hm.ee/en/estonian-lifelong-learning-strategy-2020](http://www.hm.ee/en/estonian-lifelong-learning-strategy-2020)

It is expected that implementation of an overarching NQF will increase coherence of education and training, and help introduce coherent methods for standard-setting. The referencing process has already provided a stimulus in this direction, and 'convergence of the formal educational system and occupational qualifications system has taken place', while the barriers between the two systems have been lowered (Estonian Qualifications Authority et al., 2016). The purpose of the EstQF has not been changed.

Another important policy objective is to increase the participation rate in lifelong learning activities among adults (25–64) from 15.7% in 2016 to 20% in 2020, set as a national target in the national reform programme Estonia 2020.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The comprehensive EstQF has eight qualification levels; its descriptors are identical to EQF level descriptors. They are defined in terms of learning outcomes, as knowledge (theoretical and factual), skills (cognitive skills – use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking; and practical skills – manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments) and degree of responsibility and autonomy (Estonian Qualifications Authority et al., 2016). More detailed descriptors have been developed in the four sub-frameworks for general education, initial vocational education, higher education and occupational qualifications. An EstQF level is assigned to each of the qualifications in these sub-frameworks.

Two types of State-recognised qualification are included in the EstQF:

- a. formal education qualifications, awarded after completion of educational programmes at all levels (general, vocational and higher education);
- b. occupational qualifications<sup>196</sup>, where individuals are issued a professional certificate, giving the evidence of knowledge, skills and competences required for working in a specific occupation or profession.

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<sup>196</sup> There are 570 valid occupational qualifications based on occupational standards, placed at levels 2 to 8 of the NQF. They can be gained through formal education, adult education and in-service training (Estonian Qualifications Authority and Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2016).

Qualifications in sub-frameworks are described in the corresponding national educational standards, which are learning-outcomes based:

- a. national curriculum for basic schools;
- b. simplified national curriculum for basic schools;
- c. national curriculum for upper secondary schools;
- d. standard of VET;
- e. standard of higher education<sup>197</sup>;
- f. occupational qualifications standards.

Introducing a learning outcomes approach is an important part of the national reform programme for general education, VET and higher education; the topic is covered in various regulatory acts. Linked to this is increased focus on recognition of prior learning. Higher and vocational education are more advanced in implementing the learning-outcomes approach; this approach is not yet widely applied in general education but implementation is part of the lifelong learning strategy (strategic goal: change in the approach to learning). The main challenge appears to be take-up among teachers and school administrators. While learning outcomes have been embedded in curricula for a long time, the focus in education delivery has been on process rather than learning outcomes. The role of employers could also be more extensive and constructive to derive full benefits from applying this approach (Cedefop, 2016).

Learning outcomes of different types of VET are described in the vocational education standard and correspond to levels 2 to 5 of the EstQF. The vocational education standard describes the requirements for national and school curricula, including objectives, expected learning outcomes, volumes of study and graduation requirements for different types of initial and continuous VET programmes, and requirements for pedagogical professionals. Learning outcomes are defined as occupation-specific knowledge and skills as well as transversal skills: communication; learning, social and entrepreneurial skills; self-awareness; independence and responsibility. Reform of VET curricula was launched in September 2013 and by September 2016, 20 new national VET curricula were approved (Estonian Qualifications Authority et al., 2016). Together with national curricula of the previous generation they cover the whole spectrum of specialities. VET institutions have initiated more than 600 learning-outcome-based new curricula. Since 2013, study volume in VET has been expressed using Estonian VET credit points.

The current national curricula in general education were gradually introduced between 2010 and 2013.

<sup>197</sup> In the sub-framework for higher education, general descriptors follow the logic of the Dublin descriptors, but are adjusted to national needs.

They set out goals and objectives, expected learning outcomes, assessment criteria and requirements for the learning and teaching environment, graduation and school curriculum.

New study programmes based on learning outcomes were implemented in higher education as of September 2009. The Estonian standard of higher education refers to learning outcomes at basic level (outcomes that any graduate must achieve) and achievement of learning outcomes above the minimum level is differentiated by grading. The Universities Act<sup>198</sup> and the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act<sup>199</sup> now allow for accreditation of prior and experiential learning in higher education curricula.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Ministry of Education and Research and the Estonian Qualifications Authority (*Kutsekoda*)<sup>200</sup> are the main bodies in charge of developing and implementing the EstQF. The Qualification Authority was established in 2001 to develop a competence-based professional qualifications system<sup>201</sup>, put in place in parallel to the formal education system under the Ministry of Education and Research. In 2010, by decision of the Ministry of Education and Research, the Qualifications Authority was nominated as the national EQF coordination point (EQF NCP)<sup>202</sup>. The NCP is tasked with:

- a. organising the process of referencing the Estonian qualifications to EQF levels, ensuring the involvement of stakeholders and the transparency of the process;
- b. implementing principles ensuring quality of the referencing process agreed in Europe;
- c. informing all stakeholders and the public about referencing Estonian qualifications to the EQF levels and developments involving the Estonian qualifications framework;
- d. participating in the activities of the NCPs network.

<sup>198</sup> The Universities Act: [www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/521032014002/consolide](http://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/521032014002/consolide)

<sup>199</sup> The institutions of professional higher education: [www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/504112013013/consolide](http://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/504112013013/consolide)

<sup>200</sup> *Kutsekoda* (Estonian Qualifications Authority): [www.kutsekoda.ee/en/](http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/)

<sup>201</sup> Based on the Occupational Qualifications Act in 2001, professional qualifications were referenced to a five-level professional framework where level 1 was the lowest and level 5 the highest. Today, professional qualifications are assigned to levels 2 to 8 in the EstQF.

<sup>202</sup> Currently, the day-to-day running of the EstQF is supported by two part-time employees and one full-time employee of the Qualifications Authority; the annual budget for EstQF-related activities is EUR 76 100.

A broad-based steering committee was also established to ensure the involvement of all key stakeholders in NQF-related processes. It includes representatives of the Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, State Chancellery, Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, Estonian Qualifications Authority, Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions, Estonian Employers' Confederation, Estonian Association of Pupils' Unions, Estonian Association of Student Unions, Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education, and the Estonian ENIC/NARIC Centre. The mandate of the steering committee was first limited to the referencing process, but renewed in 2017 and 2018. The new mandate was expanded to the monitoring of the implementation of the EstQF and, if necessary, making proposals for amendments. The Qualifications Authority coordinates the 14 sector skills councils and provides technical support to the board of chairmen of these councils. Typically, institutions represented in sector skills councils are: employers' organisations in the sector; trade unions in the sector; professional associations in the sector; education and training institutions; and responsible ministries. They are responsible for preparing, amending, renewing or approving professional standards, and for deciding on the linking of occupational qualifications to the EstQF. The board of chairmen of the sector skills councils coordinates cross-sectoral cooperation.

The Qualifications Authority also cooperates with other institutions, disseminates information and provides guidance and advice to various stakeholders on application of the framework. The dissemination of information and guidance on implementation of the framework are carried out mostly through partners and participants to the occupational qualifications system: the sector skills councils, professional examination committees, and experts. Different kinds of dissemination and information event are organised annually to share information with education providers, policy makers, and employer and employee organisations.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>203</sup>

Validation practices in Estonia are well developed in the formal education sector. Higher education

<sup>203</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

has been leading developments, with vocational education and training and general education following. The legal framework for validation is specific to the education level. There is no overall legislation to cover all education subsystems, regulated by sector-specific acts and regulations; each is responsible for its own development and implementation. The current model is fragmented and it could be difficult for potential applicants to find their way around the various systems that are sector-specific.

Development of the EstQF has supporting validation among its objectives, and the updated referencing report (September 2016) clearly signals this. For all qualifications included in the framework, the curricula and the relevant regulations of each subsystem<sup>204</sup> enable education providers to recognise non-formal and informal learning. A credit point system that conforms to the European credit transfer system (ECTS) is used in higher education, and a credit point system that conforms to the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) is used in VET.

In the higher education legislative framework, from 2007 there has been no limitation on how many credits can be obtained via validation but higher education institutions cannot award whole diplomas or certificates on the basis of prior and experiential learning. In practice, this means that the whole of the curriculum may be recognised on the basis of prior learning, except for the thesis or final examination. For admission to higher education, a specified level of education needs to be achieved.

In VET, validation possibilities are wider: passing a professional exam (professional certificate issued) can replace the school leaving exam. Some learning outcomes in primary school may be recognised with agreement of a student's parents and school's representatives. Full occupational qualifications can be awarded through recognition of prior learning.

Since the 2016 inventory the main focus of validation developments has been in the adult education section. The Adult education programme 2016–19 (*Täiskasvanuhariduse programme*)<sup>205</sup> has focused on adult gymnasiums and the development of validation practices for the needs of adult learners. Training has been provided to validation practitioners in adult gymnasiums, vocational education and higher education institutions, and to occupation standards providers. Overall validation data collection is one of the targeted activities.

<sup>204</sup> Standard of VET and Standard of higher education.

<sup>205</sup> *Täiskasvanuhariduse programm 2016–19*: [www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/lisa\\_9\\_taiskasvanuhariduse\\_programm\\_2016-2019.pdf](http://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/lisa_9_taiskasvanuhariduse_programm_2016-2019.pdf)

As a result of recent developments, validation is present in all sectors and, in relation to Council recommendation on validation (2012)<sup>206</sup>, it can be said that knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can be validated.

The Higher education programme 2016–19<sup>207</sup> features validation as a means for flexible study by supporting access to higher education for various groups of learners. The Vocational education programme 2016–19<sup>208</sup> states that an increase in the number of validation applications is expected and assessment quality has improved. It is expected that validation-related initiatives will be supported in the future.

## NQF implementation

The Estonian NQF has reached full operational stage. The Ministry of Education and Research and the Estonian Qualifications Authority are the main bodies involved in its implementation. A legal and institutional framework was set up by the amended Professions Act of 2008 and key responsibilities and roles of different stakeholders have been agreed. Quality criteria for inclusion and positioning of qualifications in the framework have been adopted. The framework includes all State-recognised qualifications, which have to meet two basic criteria: to be defined in learning-outcomes-based qualifications standards (curriculum or professional standards) and to be awarded by nationally accredited institutions.

The EstQF is well established, especially the sub-frameworks for VET, higher education and occupational qualifications. General education is formally connected to the overarching framework through relevant State programmes but the substantive link and common awareness about learning outcomes and qualification levels is rather weak in this subsystem.

Implementation of the overarching framework has triggered discussions between stakeholders and has been used to identify gaps and imbalances in the provision of qualifications. For instance,

EstQF level 5 was a focus of public debate from formal adoption of the overarching framework in 2008. The main discussion centred on the fact that there were no qualifications from initial education and training identified at this level, only occupational qualifications. The need for these types of qualification in the labour market, supported by different stakeholders, has impacted on policy decisions.

Following intense consultation with all stakeholders, a new VET Act came into force in mid-2013<sup>209</sup>, along with a new standard of VET. This substantially transformed the VET system and introduced qualifications at level 5 (both in initial and continuing VET); previously there were no initial education qualifications at this level. It also established a new quality assurance framework for VET and the Estonian VET credit system. It stipulates five types of VET qualification<sup>210</sup>.

The framework has also been used to revisit current provision of professional higher qualifications referenced to EstQF level 6. It informs curriculum reform in VET and fine-tuning qualification descriptions from VET and higher education with NQF level descriptors.

EstQF and EQF levels have been indicated on higher education and occupational qualifications (that meet the requirements for inclusion in the EstQF) since 2012, and on general education and VET qualifications since 2013. Including the EstQF and EQF levels on Europass diploma and certificate supplements is general practice. The levels are also indicated in national qualifications databases, such as the VET curricula database<sup>211</sup> and the register of occupational qualifications<sup>212</sup>.

There are continuing discussions and plans to include EstQF and EQF levels in the envisaged new version of the Estonian education database (EHIS2).

There is no specific communication strategy. NQF implementation is foreseen in the Estonian lifelong learning adult education programme.

<sup>206</sup> Council of the European Union (2012). Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 398, 22.12.2012, pp. 1–5. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>

<sup>207</sup> *Kõrgharidusprogramm 2016–19*: [www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/lisa\\_8\\_korghariduse\\_programm\\_2016-2019.pdf](http://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/lisa_8_korghariduse_programm_2016-2019.pdf)

<sup>208</sup> *Kutseharidusprogramm 2016–19*: [www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/lisa\\_7\\_kutseharidusprogramm\\_2016-2019.pdf](http://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/lisa_7_kutseharidusprogramm_2016-2019.pdf)

<sup>209</sup> VET Institutions Act: [www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/122122013002](http://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/122122013002)

Amended VET Act in force since January 2019: [www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/514012019002/consolide](http://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/514012019002/consolide)

<sup>210</sup> (a) VET certificate, EstQF level 2; (b) VET certificate, EstQF level 3; (c) upper secondary VET certificate, EstQF level 4; (d) VET certificate, EstQF level 4; (e) VET certificate, EstQF level 5.

<sup>211</sup> VET curricula database: <https://enda.ehis.ee/avalik/avalik/oppekava/OppekavaOtsi.faces>

<sup>212</sup> Register of occupational qualifications: [www.kutsekoda.ee/et/kutseregister/tutvustus](http://www.kutsekoda.ee/et/kutseregister/tutvustus)



The Estonian Qualifications Authority (*Kutsekoda*) conducted a poll among employers and specialists about awareness and use of the EstQF. Employers are less aware of the EstQF than qualification certificate owners: only 30% of responders were well or very well acquainted with the EstQF, although the percentage among the certificate owners was 40%. The EstQF was used as promotional tool for occupation qualification certificates by half of occupational certificate owners and employers, and was useful for people reflecting on their qualifications and compiling their CV.

Some 23% of responders have used the EstQF to guide employees to achieve a higher qualification level; 21% have used the EstQF to assess an applicant's qualification (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The results from the survey help the EQF NCP and the EQF steering group to plan their activities.

The NQF has varied influence in different areas:

- a. the EstQF has an influence on the promotion of learning outcomes, although not directly;
- b. according to available evidence and research so far, the EstQF and learning outcomes approach has not yet reached the aim of full permeability of education and training ;
- c. the impact and influence of the EstQF on the renewal and review and quality assurance of qualifications is growing;
- d. there is a moderate influence of the EstQF on dialogue with stakeholders as the level of occupation standard is negotiated between them and the level of occupational/professional standard is related to the level of qualification in the framework;
- e. the EstQF has a substantial influence in levelling foreign qualifications;
- f. there is considerable EstQF influence on the parity of esteem and comparison between different types of qualifications (European Commission; Cedefop, 2018).

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The EstQF was referenced to the EQF and self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in October 2011. Following the 2013 VET reform, the referencing report was revised and presented to the EQF advisory group in 2015. In September 2016, an updated report was submitted, following the EQF advisory group recommendations.

## Important lessons and future plans

One key objective of the EstQF is to improve comparability between formal school leaving certificates and occupational qualifications. Development of the framework and the referencing process have already contributed to this objective by building up a more coherent and responsive lifelong learning system. The process has been intense. As observed in the referencing report, 'a remarkable convergence' between the education system and the professional qualification system has taken place (Estonian Qualifications Authority et al., 2016).

Occupational qualifications that link lifelong learning with the labour market can be distributed on levels 2 to 8 of the EstQF, clearly indicating that it is not only higher education qualifications that can be assigned to levels 6 to 8<sup>213</sup>. Strict quality criteria have to be met: qualifications are based on professional standards and developed in cooperation with social partners, and awarding bodies have to be accredited. The relationship between occupational and VET qualifications was discussed in the EQF advisory group, covering how occupational qualifications differ and/or complement those awarded in the initial education system. There are two main ways to obtain vocational or occupational qualifications (*kutsequalifikatsioon*) in Estonia: either via work experience and assessment against a professional standard or via a VET programme based on professional standards and broader educational objectives. Both types of qualification have the same value on the labour market. According to the Professions Act of 2008, both VET and higher education institutions which have curricula based on professional standards and are accredited against quality standards could apply to become an occupational qualifications awarding body. Some kind of convergence of these two systems is expected.

Current activities for occupational qualifications include development and implementation of monitoring, analysis and forecasting of labour market needs (quantitative and qualitative) during 2015–20<sup>214</sup>.

<sup>213</sup> Occupational qualifications at levels 6 to 8 require mostly higher education qualifications as a basis.

<sup>214</sup> During 2015–20 the monitoring, analysis and forecasting of labour market needs are being developed and implemented through the OSKA programme (a system of labour market monitoring and future skills forecasting). Each year, the need for labour and skills is analysed and recommendations for training requirements are prepared in five or six sectors. In 2016, forecasts of the need for labour and skills were prepared in the following sectors: accounting; forestry and timber industry; information and communication technology; manufacturing of metal

A new Adult Education Act<sup>215</sup> was adopted in 2015, aimed at increasing the quality of adult learning through introducing the learning outcomes approach into curriculum design and assessment.

According to the Estonian Qualifications Authority<sup>216</sup>, the main challenge for the EstQF is recognition as a backbone of the national qualifications system and as a focal point of the system for lifelong learning. This could be addressed by increasing awareness of the EstQF among end-users.

**Table 19. Estonian qualifications framework (EstQF)**

ESTQF LEVELS	EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS	OCCUPATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctoral degree ( <i>Doktorikraad</i> )	Level 8 occupational qualification Example: chartered engineer, chartered architect	8
7	Master degree ( <i>Magistrikraad</i> )	Level 7 occupational qualification Example: diploma engineer, diploma architect	7
6	Bachelor degree ( <i>Bakalaureusekraad</i> ) Diploma of professional higher education ( <i>Rakendus kõrgharidusõppe diplom</i> )	Level 6 occupational qualification Example: engineer	6
5	VET certificate, level 5 ( <i>5. taseme kutseõppe lõputunnistus</i> )	Level 5 occupational qualification Example: master carpenter, construction site manager	5
4	Upper secondary general education certificate ( <i>Gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus</i> ) Upper secondary VET certificate ( <i>Kutsekeskhariduse lõputunnistus</i> ) VET certificate, level 4 ( <i>4. taseme kutseõppe lõputunnistus</i> )	Level 4 occupational qualification Example: IT specialist	4
3	VET qualification certificate, level 3 ( <i>3. taseme kutseõppe lõputunnistus</i> )	Level 3 occupational qualification Example: carpenter	3
2	Basic education certificate ( <i>Põhikooli lõputunnistus</i> ) Basic education certificate based on simplified curriculum ( <i>Põhikooli lihtsustatud õppekava lõputunnistus</i> ) VET certificate, level 2 (without basic education requirement) ( <i>2. taseme kutseõppe lõputunnistus</i> )	Level 2 occupational qualification Example: cook assistant	2
1	Basic education certificate based on curriculum (for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities) ( <i>Põhikooli toimetuleku õppekava lõputunnistus</i> )		1

Source: Adapted from Estonian Qualifications Authority et al., 2016; Government of Estonia, 2018.

products, machinery and equipment; and social work.  
More information can be found at: <http://oska.kutsekoda.ee/en/>

<sup>215</sup> New Education Act: [www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/529062015007/consolide](http://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/529062015007/consolide)

<sup>216</sup> Cedefop (2015). *Survey on the sustainability and visibility of NQFs* [unpublished].

### Abbreviations

ENIC	European network of information centres
EQF	European qualifications framework
EstQF	Estonian qualifications framework
NARIC	national academic recognition information centres
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

Estonian Qualification Authority EQF NCP: [www.kutsekoda.ee/en/](http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/)  
Information on qualifications and the EstQF: [www.hm.ee/en/activities/qualifications](http://www.hm.ee/en/activities/qualifications)  
VET curricula database: <https://enda.ehis.ee/avalik/avalik/oppekava/OppekavaOtsi.faces>  
Estonian education information system (EHIS): [www.eesti.ee/eng/services/citizen/haridus\\_ja\\_teadus/isikukaart\\_eesti\\_ee\\_portaali](http://www.eesti.ee/eng/services/citizen/haridus_ja_teadus/isikukaart_eesti_ee_portaali)  
Estonian register of occupational qualifications (professions register): [www.kutsekoda.ee/et/kutseregister/tutvustus](http://www.kutsekoda.ee/et/kutseregister/tutvustus)  
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### Prepared by:

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in collaboration with national experts.

# ESWATINI (FORMERLY SWAZILAND)

## Introduction and context

The Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF) was developed in 2016, by the then Swaziland Higher Education Council, now Eswatini Higher Education Council (ESHEC). This body was established by the Higher Education Act of 2013 to provide quality assurance of higher education in the country. Upon taking office, the Council realised that quality assurance cannot be effectively provided without the development and implementation of a national qualifications framework (NQF). An NQF can be defined as a comprehensive system for classification, registration and publication of articulated and quality assured national qualifications.

Later on, the process of developing the NQF commenced. A draft was presented to the Cabinet where ESHEC was given the green light to use it. Currently the ESQF is being implemented. However, as the Council interacts with the document, gaps are being identified which have compelled it to review the ESQF.

The development of the ESQF came at a time when the whole world, including the Southern African Development Community (SADC), realised the importance of NQFs. SADC developed the SADC Qualification Framework (SADCQF) that would serve as a reference qualifications framework for the region and is in the process of implementing it. One of the implementation focus areas is the alignment of the NQFs to the SADCQF, which Eswatini is actively participating in.

## Policy objectives

The decision to develop the ESQF is driven by a number of factors, including:

- Poor internal relevance. Poor vertical and horizontal articulation of programmes limit the

pathway arrangements required to facilitate trainee movement across levels of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and between TVET and higher education.

- Poor credibility and quality of existing qualifications and training programmes. There is a need to provide a stronger basis for the understanding, comparison and recognition of national and foreign qualifications, thereby improving the understanding of employers, parents and learners of the value of qualifications. This will be achieved by the development of a set of levels of learning outcomes and competences to be achieved and assigning qualifications to the levels.
- Lack of coherence and fragmented nature of qualifications systems. There is need to address the lack of consistency and reliability among qualifications.
- The need for recognition of non-formal acquired skills and facilitation of their integration into the formal system. Lifelong learning is a vital component in developing and utilizing human capital, hence the need to recognize, validate and accredit non-formal learning in the NQF. More so, because formal learning is not sufficient to facilitate and utilize the full human potential of any society.

The above challenges are anticipated to be addressed by the ESQF, which should strengthen the transparency of qualifications and clarify the mutual relations, vertically and horizontally, to enhance communication on qualifications between education and the labour market.

A situational analysis of the Ministry of Education and Training was conducted and a report was published in 2010 (The Education System in Swaziland: Training and Skills Development for Shared Growth and Competitiveness). This is where the need to develop and implement the NQF was identified. According to this report, the NQF should be used as a primary vehicle for transforming the

current education, training, and skills development sector into a seamless lifelong learning system.

The National Education and Training Improvement Programme (NETIP, 2014), identified the establishment of the NQF as one of the activities meant to improve the quality and relevance of higher education.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### Structure of the Eswatini Qualifications Framework

The ESQF has a structure of ten levels, seven of which are situated at undergraduate level and three at postgraduate level. The structure has been benchmarked against other international

and regional structures such as the SADCQF and the Transnational Qualifications Framework. The 10 levels encompass the whole education sector and ensure comparability and transparency of qualifications in different fields and learning areas. Each level represents groupings of qualifications sharing similar characteristics as described by the level descriptors.

Each level represents the complexity of the qualifications from the most basic to the most complex incrementally from levels 1 to 10. Each qualification at a given level has a generic name regardless of where the qualification was obtained. Such generic titles make it possible for all qualifications that are registered on the framework to have parity of esteem.

**Table 20. Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF) structure**

LEVELS	GENERIC TITLES	MINIMUM CREDITS	LIFELONG LEARNING
10	Doctoral Degree	360	Skills development
9	Master's Degree	180	
8	Bachelor's Honours Degree Professional Degrees Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate Certificate	120	
7	Bachelor's Degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate	360	
6	Advanced/Higher Diploma Associate Degree Foundation Degree	240	
5	Diploma (TVET, academic) Certificates	240	
4	A Level TVET Certificate	120	
3	TVET Certificate O Level, SGCSE	40	
2	Vocational Certificate Junior Certificate	40	
1	Vocational Certificate	40	

## ESQF level descriptors

Level descriptors are statements describing the characteristics of the generic outcomes of each of the ten levels in the ESQF. These characteristics consist of the knowledge, skills, competences and attributes that participants should possess or be able to demonstrate on completion of a programme, course or module.

In formulating the ESQF level descriptors, the following principles have been embraced:

- Level descriptors are broad, generic, qualitative statements that indicate specific learning outcomes at a given level on the ESQF.
- Level descriptors take account of different types of learning at the same level, including knowledge and understanding, skills and wider personal and professional competences.
- Levels are not intrinsically related to the period of study.
- Level descriptors are intended to integrate academic, TVET and professional aspects of learning and apply to all learning contexts (class work, practical work, work-based learning).
- Level descriptors are not intended to be prescriptive but rather flexible enough to provide a guideline to practitioners involved in the design and delivery of the curriculum for any field of study.
- Level descriptors are developed with the intention that the curriculum specialist will use his/her professional expertise to translate them into his/her own field of study.
- Level descriptors may be used to aid the assessment of claims for recognition of prior learning.
- Level descriptors are designed to act as a guide to locate a qualification (and its associated learning programmes) at the appropriate level on the ESQF.
- Level descriptors are formulated to help in making comparisons between qualifications in a variety of fields and disciplines that are located at the same level of the ESQF.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Higher Education Act (2013) is what establishes ESHEC and stipulates the roles and functions of actors and stakeholders. The Higher Education Regulations (2015) document is used for operationalising the Act. Upon approval, the National Qualifications Authority Bill will clearly outline the governance and institutional arrangements for the ESQF.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

See section on future plans.

### Process and procedures for recognizing foreign qualifications, including for refugees and migrants

1. For verification of a qualification, an applicant must:
  - a. submit the application in full to the Executive Secretary in the form prescribed in schedule 4 of these regulations; and
  - b. send with the application the full fee as determined by the Council.
2. If an applicant does not comply with sub-regulation 1, the Executive Secretary shall not accept the application.

### Verification process

1. Verification is an integral part of the certificate evaluation process and entails a range of checks to establish:
  - a. the status of the institution that issued the qualification in the country of origin;
  - b. the status of qualification in the country of origin (whether the qualification is registered or recognised);
  - c. the reliability of the qualification documents and/or certificate;
  - d. the genuineness of the award i.e. is the person presenting that application the person who attained the qualification;
2. Once a qualification has been successfully verified, a local equivalent is established
3. Upon completion of the process, a final report is produced and the decision communicated to the applicant.

### Maintenance of a register

A record of all submitted applications is kept by the Council.

### Appeals

1. There is an appeal process in place for all applicants who are not satisfied with the outcome of the verification process.
2. An appellant is required to pay an appeal fee before the process starts.

Over and above this, Eswatini is awaiting finalization of the SADC Qualifications Recognition Manual which will provide a clear guide on recognition of foreign qualifications including those for refugees and migrants.

Eswatini is also in the process of ratifying the Addis Convention, which, once enforced, will

encompass all issues around recognition of foreign qualifications.

## NQF implementation

This activity has yet to be embarked on. Currently, ESHEC is conducting institutional assessments in all higher education institutions for purposes of registration so that a database of all registered/recognized higher education institutions can be created. This goes hand in hand with accreditation of the programmes on offer in these institutions.

## Referencing to the regional frameworks

Eswatini is one of the pilot countries for alignment of NQFs to the SADCQF. The alignment process is as follows:

- The first alignment activity involved writing a self-assessment report. ESHEC attended an alignment capacity-building workshop organized by South Africa, which was held in July 2017, where several issues on referencing the NQFs to the SADCQF, including writing a proper self-assessment report, were discussed. During that meeting, we were also assisted on how to establish the National Alignment Committee and were given the terms of reference for the Committee.
- On 27 March 2018, the Eswatini National Alignment Committee was established and the following formed the agenda of the first meeting:
  - o the Draft National Qualifications Framework, the process of its approval and possible solutions,
  - o the alignment process, self-assessment report, work plan with target dates,
  - o the terms of reference.
- On 10 April 2018 an alignment report writing capacity-building workshop, held in South Africa, Pretoria, was attended.
- On 11 April 2018 the first draft of the alignment report was written and submitted. This draft is yet to be refined and taken for public comment before it can be submitted as a final draft to the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation Executive Committee, which is responsible for the implementation of the SADCQF and is in turn supervising the alignment of NQFs to the regional framework.

### Prepared by:

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

One challenge is that the National Alignment Committee has not had time to meet to refine the draft alignment report. This is partly because the institution driving the alignment – ESHEC – is faced with challenges mostly related to failure to transition from being a government department to being an autonomous entity. All ESHEC’s operations are frustrated due to lack of funds since the budget from the Public Enterprise Unit has not been released yet and the Ministry of Education and Training is unable to fund the entity.

## Important lessons and future plans

Future plans include:

1. Engagement of consultants to help strengthen the ESQF by revisiting the level descriptors to clarify the difference between levels, develop subject fields to help in the registration of qualifications in the ESQF, develop guidelines for registration of qualifications, and develop credit accumulations, transfer guidelines and recognition of prior learning guidelines.
2. Conducting capacity-building workshops for higher education institutions to educate them on the ESQF, its implementation implications on higher education institutions such as the need to align programme design to the notional hour credits stipulated in the ESQF and the use of learning outcomes.
3. Development of databases to reflect all registered higher education institutions, approved programmes, and all ESQF registered qualifications, with registration codes and names of the awarding institutions etc. A database for all foreign qualifications verified needs to be created as well.

One key challenge is the lack of funds for ESHEC as identified earlier.

### Abbreviations

ESHEC	Eswatini Higher Education Council
ESQF	Eswatini Qualifications Framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualification Framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

## Introduction and context

The Ethiopian national qualifications framework (ENQF) development was started by a taskforce set up in 2007 by the Ministry of Education. In 2010, the Higher Education Strategy Centre, now called the Education Strategy Centre, was mandated to coordinate the process of the ENQF development and implementation in close collaboration with the ministry and other relevant agencies (HESC, 2011). In 2012, the Council of Ministers passed Regulation 276/2012, which gave the Education Strategy Centre responsibility for developing the ENQF, evaluating its implementation and reporting to the ministry.

The ENQF was developed to address challenges relating to access, quality, relevance and equity in the education system and the lack of links between different education sub-sectors following the conceptualization of the Ethiopian technical and vocational education and training qualifications framework (TVETQF). With the creation of the ENQF, it was envisaged that the TVETQF would be integrated into an overarching framework. Since it was launched in 2010, the TVETQF has achieved a great deal in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector, including improvements in the quality and relevance of TVET training and new ways of recognizing the wide range of formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities that exist in Ethiopia (MoE, 2010). In 2009/10, Ethiopia had an estimated population of 78 million (ibid.). Its economy is predominantly agrarian. In keeping with its commitment to participate in the competitive global market economy and become a middle-income country by 2025, Ethiopia has set a human resources development agenda to raise the quality of its workforce to international standards and build a culture of entrepreneurship among graduates.

Providing adequate employment opportunities for the growing labour force, particularly for young people, constitutes a major socio-economic challenge. According to the 2007/08 census, 15- to 24-year-olds accounted for 20.5% of the

total population. A significant proportion of those young people work in the agricultural sector, followed by a far smaller number working in the wholesale and retail trades, suggesting that young people are mainly engaged in sectors characterized by low productivity and incomes (ibid.).

Ethiopia's current labour market information system, through which data about the labour market is made available, is underdeveloped, fragmented, limited in scope and out-of-date. Strengthening the labour market information system is therefore an important objective of the Ethiopian Government (OECD, 2012).

Ethiopia's TVET system is also in dire need of government attention in order to overcome the many challenges it currently faces. More specifically, the Ministry of Education's Education Sector Development Programme IV (ESDP IV) calls for better-quality TVET, both formal and non-formal; improved responsiveness of TVET to the needs of the labour market; the establishment of outcome-based approaches; and the promotion of medium-sized and small enterprises using new technologies.

Wider access to higher education, in particular to science and technology, is also seen as paramount, as is high-quality training and relevant professional inputs to improve employability. ESDP IV furthermore outlines a comprehensive development vision for the education sector, covering formal, non-formal, initial and further training, providing open access to certification, and creating pathways between the general, TVET and higher education sectors (MoE, 2010).

A number of other reform initiatives have been put forward in the last 20 years to address the challenges facing Ethiopia's education and training system. The first national TVET strategy was developed in August 2006 (MoE, 2006b). These initiatives led to better access to qualifications for previously neglected target groups (MoE, 2006c).



The national Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP I & II), adopted by the Federal Government of Ethiopia in 2016, identified education as one of the key sectors contributing to the production of high-quality skilled labour for the Ethiopian economy (Assegidew, 2012).

## Policy objectives

The ENQF aims to:

- make Ethiopian qualifications relevant to the socio-economic needs of the country;
- establish national standards of knowledge, skills and competences that are expected of graduates/receivers of all Ethiopian qualifications;
- promote the quality of development, delivery and assessment of Ethiopian qualifications and their credibility, both nationally and internationally, through the establishment of quality assurance standards;
- make the comparability of qualifications more transparent by developing progression pathways between them;
- ensure equity in, and enhanced access to, education for promoting lifelong learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings.

The ENQF builds on the objectives of the existing national TVET qualifications framework (MoE, 2006c), which are to:

- improve the transparency of the TVET qualifications system, ensuring that trainees know what they need to learn and employers know what they can expect of graduates;
- ensure flexibility, transferability and progression between different occupational and training fields and between different training venues;
- eliminate the barriers that currently block horizontal and vertical educational pathways;
- establish and maintain a levels-based system detailing the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired by trainees;
- create a single nationally and internationally accepted system against which all learning achievements may be measured and understood.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The eight-level ENQF covers general education, TVET and higher education. Descriptors exist for each level in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. All qualification types are described by qualification descriptors in terms of their purpose and characteristics.

**Table 21. Ethiopian national qualifications framework (ENQF) levels**

ENQF LEVELS	SUB-FRAMEWORK FOR GENERAL EDUCATION	SUB-FRAMEWORK FOR TVET	SUB-FRAMEWORK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION	ENQF LEVELS
8			Doctoral Degree	8
7			Postgraduate Diploma Master's	7
6			Bachelor Professional Graduate Diploma	6
5		TVET Certificate 5		5
4	Diploma in Teaching	TVET Certificate 4		4
3		TVET Certificate 3		3
2		TVET Certificate 2		2
1		TVET Certificate 1		1

Source: Draft National Qualifications Framework Regulation (Education Strategy Centre, 2014)

Level descriptors in the national TVET qualifications framework are supported by mechanisms for standard-setting, assessment and certification, developed in cooperation with employers, as well as a competence-based assessment system to support the validation of non-formal and informal learning (MoE, 2006c).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

In June 2004, an inquiry into governance, leadership and management in higher education produced the Higher Education System Overhaul (HESO) report. It recommended that a national qualifications framework (NQF) for Ethiopia be developed that was focused on post-secondary certification (post Grade 12) and provided mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning and for skills upgrading in the workplace (MoE, 2004).

The endorsement of Higher Education Proclamation No 351/2003 (FDRE), which was repealed and replaced by Proclamation No 650/2009, constituted a major step forward in education policy-making. The new Proclamation states that 'the Ministry [of Education], the [Higher Education Strategy] Centre, and the [Higher Education Relevance and Quality] Agency shall also guide institutional quality enhancement efforts as well as curricula development through a national qualifications framework that shall, as the case may be, determine or indicate core learning outcomes or graduate competences' (Assegidew, 2012). At the same time, Proclamation 690/2010 that was issued to determine the power and duties of implementing bodies demanded that the Ministry of Education formulate and implement the NQF. In addition, tools for public sector reforms, such as Business Process Re-Engineering<sup>217</sup> and Balanced Score Card<sup>218</sup>, created a need for the ENQF (HESC, 2011).

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Strengthening progression pathways between non-formal post-primary education and the TVET qualifications framework is one of the key objectives of the ENQF. The Federal Ministry of Education

developed the non-formal TVET implementation framework to facilitate this (MoE, 2006a).

Mobility in the TVET system takes place horizontally and vertically. Horizontal mobility involves trainees moving from one programme to another in a different occupational field but at the same qualification level (for example, from accounting level II to plumbing level II). Vertical mobility involves trainees moving from one certification level to another or from a certificate level to a diploma level in the same occupational field (MoE, 2006c).

While progression pathways are relatively easy to identify and maintain within a single sub-framework, the matter becomes more complicated in the context of an overarching ENQF covering all three educational sectors. Here, effective coordination between stakeholders is crucial, as the different sectors may fall under different jurisdictions. Additionally, a common language is essential in order to facilitate the transfer of credits from TVET to higher education (Assegidew, 2012, p. 92).

## NQF implementation

Limited progress was made with the ENQF in the period between 2004 and 2008, despite several attempts to maintain momentum through strategy papers, consultative documents and implementation plans (*ibid.*). The reason for this was that Ethiopia's education and training policies continued to emphasize formal education to the detriment of non-formal and informal learning. As a result, awareness of the ENQF was low in both the public and private sectors, and there was little interaction between education and training providers and the labour market. Moreover, an overwhelming variety of models and suggestions from other countries ended up complicating rather than facilitating the ENQF design process. Various organizations, such as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the Development Partnership in Higher Education (DeLPHE), the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation (NUFFIC), and the European Union's Tuning Project for engineering and technology programmes, offered different NQF models and proposed different orientations (British, American, German and Australian) for the education system (*ibid.*, p. 90).

In January 2011, SAQA was appointed to provide technical assistance to the ENQF team. It also prepared a roadmap for the further development and implementation of ENQF (ESC, 2011) with the financial support of NUFFIC. The project aimed to:

<sup>217</sup> Business Process Re-Engineering is a tool for strengthening the managerial capacities of public institutions.

<sup>218</sup> Balanced Score Card is a tool to measure and analyse organizational and individual performance data to ensure timely and informed decision-making in public institutions.

- consider how best to harmonize existing national qualifications;
- regulate national standards of knowledge and skills by defining qualification levels with descriptors based on learning outcomes;
- create a system for comparing qualifications, making them more comprehensible to learners, providers and employers, and thus increasing confidence in the national qualifications system;
- investigate procedures to improve access to learning and possibilities for credit transfer and progression;
- look into the establishment of dedicated agencies to manage, monitor and evaluate the ENQF and support further reform;
- hold discussions with all relevant stakeholders in order to ensure a common and deep understanding of all matters relating to the ENQF;
- develop a consultative document for the development of an NQF for Ethiopia (ENQF Taskforce, 2008).

The most recent developments in ENQF-related policy have had a direct effect on the implementation of the ENQF (Assegidew, 2012), leading to a roadmap and strategy for the establishment of an ENQF Advisory Group, a Technical Working Group and an ENQF Management Information System.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The Annex to the East African Community Common Market Protocol on the Mutual Recognition of Academic and Professional Qualifications recommends that qualifications frameworks in the region have 10 levels. An audit covering regulated qualifications issued by national examination and awarding bodies in the East African Community also resulted in the recommendation of a 10-level framework for academic and vocational qualifications.

Partner states have agreed to harmonize all national qualifications within the East African Community. The harmonization of East African education systems and training curricula is still ongoing.

## Important lessons and future plans

Overall, the prospects for implementing ENQF seem bright. Political will, policy directives and global influence are in place, and reform initiatives are already emphasizing the importance of improving educational quality and economic growth in Ethiopia.

One of the main strengths of the ENQF development process is that it provides a platform for dialogue between stakeholders who do not usually interact with one another (Assegidew, 2012, p. 92). For example, the relationships and linkages between the different sectors (general education, TVET and higher education) were underdeveloped. In addition, there were limitations in communication and collaboration of education providers and the economic sectors (industries) in setting standards for the type of qualifications needed, training delivery and assessments of competencies. The Government of Ethiopia introduced the ENQF not as a standalone reform, but as an integral part of other reform initiatives. Making the ENQF operational has therefore been the objective of many different reform initiatives. To this end, the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018–30) considers the ENQF to be one strategy for reforming the education system (ESC/MoE, 2018). ENQF as one of the reform tools was therefore endorsed by the government through proclamations 650/2009 and 691/2010. Subsequently, positive outcomes have been achieved, including a push towards the completion of its development and the strengthening of the TVET framework. However, work on developing other education sectors (general and higher education) has faced delays. In response, more research on the higher education sector to identify gaps has resulted in a recommendation to implement the ENQF as a quality assurance mechanism.

An ENQF determination document was produced in 2013. A plan has been drafted and submitted to the Council of Ministers in order to facilitate and regulate the implementation of the framework. However, it has still to be approved and the implementation process has not yet started. The ENQF implementation requires commitment, determination and hard work. It entails the cooperation of national and regional governments and other relevant stakeholders, as well as an understanding among all concerned parties of how the proposed changes are to be achieved (Teshome, 2005). It is often tempting to favour 'quick-fix solutions', but NQF developments in other countries have repeatedly demonstrated that NQFs are instruments of 'communication, collaboration and cooperation' that entail an iterative development process and take time to become familiar and accepted (SAQA, 2012).

A recent study on the critical factors in ENQF implementation (Assegidew, 2012) made the following recommendations:

- More attention should be given to programme design and curriculum development.

- Labour market linkages should be strengthened and comparability of qualifications improved.
- There should be greater involvement of experienced and knowledgeable academics in research.
- Communication strategies should be developed for ‘buy-in’ of policy-makers’ involvement, commitment and persistence.
- The language of the ENQF should be made more comprehensible to the public.
- A strong institutional support base should be established at the level of both manpower and infrastructure.
- An implementation and monitoring plan should be developed.

#### Abbreviations

ENQF	Ethiopian national qualifications framework
ESDP	Education Sector Development Programme
NUFFIC	Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
TVET	technical and vocational education and Training

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## Introduction and context

Finland has a well-functioning education and training system. According to the 2015 Programme for international student assessment (PISA), student performance in reading is the best in the EU; it is second best in mathematics and science. Socioeconomic factors impact student achievements to a lesser degree compared to other EU countries; however, there are inequalities reflecting gender and migrant background, with boys and foreign-born children performing worse. While the rate of participation of children above age four in early education and care is among the lowest in the EU (87.4% in 2016), the percentage of early leavers from education and training is relatively low (8.2% in 2017) but shows a gender imbalance (9.5% for males and 6.9% for females). A new and comprehensive initiative in school education, including new curricula at all education levels, learner-centred pedagogy and a collaborative teacher development programme, aims to address inequalities and further increase education quality. Tertiary education attainment reached 44.6% in 2017, exceeding the EU 2020 target. However, employment among recent tertiary graduates is below the EU average (77%, compared to 80.2%). Among the priorities in higher education are to increase the internationalisation and labour market relevance of programmes, the latter through more emphasis on generic skills. Participation in vocational education and training (VET) is substantially higher than in other EU countries (71% compared to 49%) and apprenticeship schemes are increasingly offered. A new act on VET was adopted in 2017 aiming for comprehensive reform, including a move towards a demand-driven system and individualised pathways to qualifications. Participation of adults in lifelong learning is among the highest in the EU, reaching 27.4% in 2017 (European Commission, 2018).

Work on the Finnish national qualifications framework (FiNQF) has taken longer than originally foreseen. It started in August 2008 and, following two public consultations in 2009 and 2010, the

government presented a proposal to parliament in autumn 2010. According to this, the national qualifications framework (NQF) would cover officially recognised qualifications (general, VET and higher education) at all levels. After a change of government in 2011, the original proposal was slightly revised and resubmitted to Parliament in May 2012 (Act on a national framework for exam-based and other competences). Due to resistance within parliament, this proposal was never taken forward and offered up for voting. Following elections and yet another change of government, a third proposal was submitted to parliament in mid-2016 and was accepted. The Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and other Competence Modules<sup>219</sup> and the Government Decree on the National Framework for Qualifications and other Competence Modules both came into force in March 2017<sup>220</sup>. The FiNQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in December 2017.

The FiNQF is a comprehensive framework covering the full range of national qualifications, including those awarded outside the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture (for example related to defence, police and border-guards). The law also allows for extensive competence modules, the extent of which may be less than that of a qualification, to be levelled and included in the framework.

A qualifications framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna process, was developed in 2005 and now forms an integrated part of the NQF. Finland has carried out referencing to the EQF and self-certification to the European higher education area as one process.

<sup>219</sup> Act 93/2017 of 10 February 2017, Helsinki: [www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182270\\_act\\_93-2017.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182270_act_93-2017.pdf)

<sup>220</sup> Act 120/2017 of 27 February 2017: [www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182107\\_government\\_decree\\_120-2017\\_27.2.2017\\_.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182107_government_decree_120-2017_27.2.2017_.pdf)

## Policy objectives

The FiNQF reflects the current system of qualifications and so specific policy strategic targets have not been set. However, the FiNQF is used as a tool for promoting the learning outcomes-based approach, mobility and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences.

The main objectives are to strengthen the learning outcomes-based approach and improve the transparency of the qualifications and system of education.

The FiNQF is used in combination with other initiatives, including policies on transfer and progression, validation of non-formal and informal learning, and quality assurance. Certain rights, such as access to further study, were guaranteed through other legislation prior to the adoption of the NQF. Implementation of these policies is at an advanced stage.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The Finnish learning-outcomes-based framework includes qualifications from all levels of the education system that are part of the general education, VET and higher education sectors. In addition to qualifications awarded within the remit of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the FiNQF also includes those from other ministries' remits, such as the police, fire and rescue services, and national defence. Other competences (qualifications and competence modules) will be addressed in a second phase. All qualifications in the framework are regulated by national legislation.

The Finnish education and qualifications system is designed so that there are no dead ends; vocational qualifications give access to all forms of higher education.

The NQF act and government decree introduced an eight-level framework reflecting the knowledge, skills and competence components of the EQF. While the descriptors were inspired by the EQF, they have also been adapted to suit the national context. The explicit distinction between knowledge, skills and competence used by the EQF is dropped and replaced by one 'integrated' column summarising the requirements for each level, integrating knowledge, skills and competences, and their interrelationships<sup>221</sup>. This is seen as more

in line with the way learning outcomes actually are written in Finland.

While the requirements for knowledge and skills are closely aligned to those of the EQF, the descriptors related to competences reflect national objectives in these areas (for example related to key competences for lifelong learning and language skills). A good illustration is the descriptor for level 4, where personal and social competences are described as follows (FiNQF Government Decree, annex):

- Has a good command of the knowledge base of his/her field of work or study in broad contexts in and certain cognitive and practical skills as well as expression skills, and makes use of such knowledge and skills when solving problems specific to his/her field and carrying out tasks in the field. Works independently in operating environments that are usually predictable, but are subject to change.
- Takes responsibility for completion of his/her tasks and works safely and responsibly within a work community. Works in an economical, productive and systematic manner, and organises his/her work taking other actors into consideration. Is able to supervise routine tasks performed by others. Has the ability to work in an entrepreneurial manner in someone else's service or as an independent entrepreneur in the field. Evaluates his/her competence and scope of duties and improves actions relating to work or studies. Develops himself/herself and his/her work.
- Has the ability for lifelong learning. Acts in a way that complies with ethical principles when interacting with different people in learning and working communities and other groups and networks. Communicates diversely and interactively in different situations and produces varied and also field-specific texts in his/her mother tongue. Communicates in the second national language and interacts in his own field in at least one foreign language, also internationally.

The example shows that, while the aspects of 'autonomy' and 'responsibility' are highlighted (as in the EQF), explicit reference is also made to the ability to work as 'an independent entrepreneur', to be able to 'evaluate his/her competence and scope of duties', to pursue 'lifelong learning', 'to act in a way that complies with ethical principles', 'to communicate diversely and interactively', and 'interact in his own field in at least one foreign language, also internationally'.

Developments within the Finnish education system have long been parallel with the objectives of the

<sup>221</sup> See annex to the Government Decree 120/2017: [www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182107\\_government\\_decree\\_120-2017\\_27.2.2017\\_.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182107_government_decree_120-2017_27.2.2017_.pdf)

EQF; vocational competence-based qualifications were introduced in the mid-1990s and learning-outcomes-based vocational qualifications in the late 1990s. In higher education, Finland has actively and at an early stage complied with what was agreed in the Bologna process. The shift towards learning outcomes in higher education has been slower than in other sectors of education, but the progression has been systematic and it has intensified in recent years.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The FiNQF has been formally adopted, and came into force in 2017, by the Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and other Competence Modules and the Government Decree on the National Framework for Qualifications and other Competence Modules.

A broad range of stakeholders was involved in the early, preparatory stages of the NQF developments. The delays encountered with the legal proposal between 2012 and 2016 meant that systematic dialogue on the role of the framework stopped but the relaunch in 2016 was supported by broad consultation.

It is significant that higher education institutions have supported the development of the NQF from the start and have contributed to the framework design. This seems to reflect the existing Finnish education and training system, where interaction between general, vocational and higher education and training institutions seems to operate more smoothly than in many other countries. This may partly be explained by the role played by professionally oriented higher education, promoting professional training at bachelor and master level. A qualifications framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna process, was developed from 2005 and is now an integrated part of the new comprehensive FiNQF.

The Ministry of Education and Culture is the national authority responsible for the FiNQF and the further development of this framework. The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)<sup>222</sup> is a government agency working under the Ministry of Education and Culture. EDUFI is responsible for developing education and training, early childhood education and care, and lifelong learning, as well as for promoting internationalisation. As a national development agency, EDUFI has a wide

<sup>222</sup> [www.oph.fi/english](http://www.oph.fi/english)

range of tasks, one of which is to advise higher education institutions in matters concerning diploma supplements. Currently, in its role as the national Europass centre, EDUFI guides the higher education institutions on the diploma supplement references to qualifications frameworks. The agency guides and supports cooperation between stakeholders, working life Committees<sup>223</sup> and validation of non-formal and informal learning providers.

In 2008, the Ministry of Education and Culture issued a regulation in which the following tasks were assigned to EDUFI as the national coordination point for the European qualifications framework: participation in the development and implementation of the EQF; disseminating information to stakeholders about the EQF, the NQF and the placement of qualifications to the framework; giving guidance and advice to stakeholders in using the qualifications framework; taking part in national and international collaboration on qualifications frameworks and promoting cooperation; and other tasks assigned by the ministry. In 2009, the Ministry of Education and Culture also asked EDUFI to represent Finland in the network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks (European higher education area qualification framework (EHEA QF)).

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>224</sup>

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has relatively long and established roots in Finland and the legislation and policies are well developed and detailed. As in many other countries, there is no one single law on validation of non-formal and informal learning, but laws and regulations for each field of education define validation separately. These fields include general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, and higher education.

<sup>223</sup> Qualification committees no longer exist in the new VET system, but there are ca. 40 sectoral working life committees responsible for organising competence demonstrations for candidates, monitoring the quality of assessment practices, and feedback and follow-up for VET providers. The committees decide on rectifying an assessment in the case of an appeal. The committees are involved in the development of qualifications in their respective sectors.

<sup>224</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has gone through relatively profound changes since the 2016 inventory on non-formal and informal learning<sup>225</sup>. In 2015, major VET reform planning commenced and was enforced on 1 January 2018<sup>226</sup>. The biggest changes brought by the reform concern increasing flexibility of the VET system, overall simplification of the system in terms of legislation (one law, Act on Vocational Education<sup>227</sup>), reduction in the number of qualifications (164 qualifications instead of 351) and one uniform funding system (instead of several sources of funding).

The working life committees are tripartite bodies (sometimes quadripartite), composed of representatives of employers, employees and/or self-employed persons, and the education sector.

Validation has not been widely used in general upper secondary education. A proposal for a new Act on General Upper Secondary Education<sup>228</sup> appears to strengthen the potential of validation in this sector: First, general upper secondary education will start using credit points, which facilitates recognition of prior learning. Second, it is proposed that practices for identifying and recognising competence acquired elsewhere before and during general upper secondary studies would be improved.

In all other sectors (VET and higher education) validation arrangements are in place and typically cover the four validation stages: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. VET qualifications are modular and units of qualifications are awarded in increasing numbers. In VET – both initial (IVET) and continuing (CVET) – there are national standards (qualification requirements) and validation arrangements are well defined in laws and policies. The VET sector has applied a competence-based approach since 1994 and the qualification requirements are defined in terms of learning outcomes.

<sup>225</sup> Karttunen, A.; Cedefop (2016). *European inventory of informal and non-formal learning: country report: Finland*. [https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/2016\\_validate\\_FI.pdf](https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/2016_validate_FI.pdf)

<sup>226</sup> Learn more: <https://minedu.fi/en/reform-of-vocational-upper-secondary-education>

<sup>227</sup> The Act on Vocational Education and the Act on Vocational Education for Adults were joined into one single law: Act on Vocational Education 531/2017 of 11 August 2017, Nädendal: [www.finlex.fi/sv/laki/alkup/2017/20170531](http://www.finlex.fi/sv/laki/alkup/2017/20170531)

<sup>228</sup> Learn more: [https://minedu.fi/en/artikkeli/-/asset\\_publisher/esitys-uudeksi-lukiolaiksi-julki-vahva-yleissivistysta-tiivistyvaa-korkeakouluuyhteistyota-ja-panostuksia-lukiolaisten-hyvinvointiin](https://minedu.fi/en/artikkeli/-/asset_publisher/esitys-uudeksi-lukiolaiksi-julki-vahva-yleissivistysta-tiivistyvaa-korkeakouluuyhteistyota-ja-panostuksia-lukiolaisten-hyvinvointiin)

The Universities of applied sciences Act (932/2014, §37) (*Ammattikorkeakoululaki*) and the Universities Act (558/2009, §44) (*Yliopistolaki*) state that a student may – in accordance with the decision of the higher education institution – have his/her prior studies accredited when studying for a degree or specialisation studies. A student may also have prior non-formal or informal learning demonstrated in some other manner substituted for studies belonging to a degree or specialisation studies syllabus, or counted towards a degree or specialisation studies.

Validation arrangements in higher education are relatively young in comparison with the VET sector. However, most of the curricula are described in terms of learning outcomes, the validation methodologies are continuously developing, and validation is increasing in popularity as it is relatively well known among students. New initiatives and projects promoting and developing validation arrangements are carried out in different areas of higher education.

The labour market has a central role in the Finnish validation system, especially in VET; however, there are few examples where labour market organisations would independently carry out validation activities in the full meaning of the process. The VET qualifications system is built to serve the labour market and ensure hands-on participation in validation processes.

Some 120 737 individuals were registered in the competence-based qualifications system in 2015: VET students registered to complete a VET qualification or a module belonging to such a qualification. There is little or no research or statistics on the actual benefits of competence-based qualifications but the number of individuals keeps growing. The EDUFI has collected data on the perceived benefits of the VET qualification system using, for example, the national feedback system of students and candidates (AIPAL). In 2015/16 students and graduates reported that they viewed that previously acquired competence significantly shortened the preparatory training and the time needed to complete qualification (75% of candidates). A similar number of respondents reported that it had been possible to organise the competence test in their own workplace (76%). Some 80% viewed that they had received enough guidance for preparing for the competence test.

## NQF implementation

The FiNQF reached full operational stage when the legal basis came into force on 1 March 2017.



The Finnish national coordination point has a communication strategy that involves providing up-to-date information about the FiNQF on their website<sup>229</sup> and producing other information materials. The national coordination point will continue to develop and maintain communication with relevant partners. Generally, all information disseminated is intended for the general public and designed to be accessible on the web.

The FiNQF is well known and comprehensively used by education and training institutions. It is also well known by recognition authorities and bodies, but less so by guidance and counselling practitioners; for the general public it varies. Promotional work is required to increase awareness by labour market stakeholders.

The Finnish National Agency for Education maintains a portal – Studyinfo.fi<sup>230</sup> – which provides information on study programmes and about applying for studies. The information provided in this portal is designed to meet the needs of the individual learners, education providers, officials and study counsellors. The portal also contains the requirements for all syllabi and qualifications prepared at EDUFI<sup>231</sup>.

In 2019, the Ministry of Education and Culture will prepare the legislative changes needed to the Act and Decree identified by the committee that worked in 2018 on expanding the scope of the FiNQF and levelling of new qualifications to the framework.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

FiNQF was referenced to the EQF in December 2017.

FiNQF and EQF levels are currently not included in the qualifications databases. Information about qualifications, the qualification requirements, and their FiNQF and EQF levels is available on the e-perusteet/e-grunder website<sup>232</sup> maintained by EDUFI. For VET and general education, both EQF and NQF levels are indicated in the qualification certificate and certificate supplement. For higher education EQF and NQF levels are indicated in diploma supplements.

<sup>229</sup> FiNQF webpage: [www.oph.fi/mobility/qualifications\\_frameworks](http://www.oph.fi/mobility/qualifications_frameworks)

<sup>230</sup> <https://studyinfo.fi/wp2/en/>  
<https://opintopolku.fi/wp/fi/>  
<https://studieinfo.fi/wp/sv/>

<sup>231</sup> <https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/fi>  
<https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/sv>

<sup>232</sup> Same as above.

The scope of the FiNQF will be expanded in 2019, with new types of qualification included. An update of the referencing to the EQF advisory group could be expected at the earliest at the end of 2019.

## Important lessons and future plans

The key challenge so far in implementing the FiNQF has been that the legislative process took longer than anticipated. The FiNQF is a framework that describes the qualifications as they were; it is not intended as a tool for revising the qualifications or the qualification structure. The qualification requirements were also drafted prior to the adoption of the FiNQF so that they are compatible with the level descriptors. The regulations on issuing certificates were revised due to the implementation of the FiNQF.

The Finnish Ministry of Education and the Finnish National Agency for Education will continue to increase awareness of the FiNQF, and most important, the FiNQF level descriptors.

Providing the right kind of information to different audiences that support the use of qualifications frameworks requires careful planning and mapping of people's needs. This is challenging since FiNQF is not considered a tool for change but one that provides information and supports developing education in Finland to place the focus on learning outcomes, increased mobility and improved access into further study. One of the specific challenges is to articulate that the framework does not describe learning outcomes of the individual learner, but provides a general description of the type of knowledge, skills and competence the types of qualification give.

Implementation of the FiNQF is now, as envisaged, entering its second phase. The Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland appointed a working group with the mandate to prepare and coordinate the extension of the NQF to other competences (qualifications and competence modules). The task of the working group was to specify the criteria determined in the current Act on the national framework for qualifications and other competence modules and its justifications for the competence modules to be placed in the framework. The working group was also responsible for charting the extensive competence modules of different administrative sectors. The working group will hand over the report to the Minister of Education and Culture by the end of 2018.

**Table 22. Finnish national qualifications framework (FINQF)**

FINQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
<b>8</b>	Doctor degrees & Post-graduate Licentiate degrees – universities and the National Defence University’s scientific and artistic postgraduate degrees <i>(Lisensiaatin ja tohtorin tutkinnot)</i> General staff officer degree <i>(Yleisesikuntaupseerin tutkinto)</i> Specialist degree in veterinary medicine <i>(Erikoiseläinlääkärin tutkinto)</i> Specialist training in medicine <i>(Erikoislääkärikoulutus)</i> Specialist training in dentistry <i>(Erikoishammaslääkärikoulutus)</i>	8
<b>7</b>	Master degrees – universities <i>(Ylemmät korkeakoulututkinnot)</i> Master degrees – universities of applied sciences <i>(Ylemmät ammattikorkeakoulututkinnot)</i>	7
<b>6</b>	Bachelor degrees – universities <i>(Alemmat korkeakoulututkinnot)</i> Bachelor degrees – universities of applied sciences <i>(Ammattikorkeakoulututkinnot)</i>	6
<b>5</b>	Specialist vocational qualifications <i>(Erikoisammattitutkinnot)</i> Sub-officer qualification – fire and rescue services <i>(Alipäällystötutkinto – Pelastusala)</i> Vocational qualification in air traffic control <i>(Lennonjohdon perustutkinto)</i>	5
<b>4</b>	General upper secondary school leaving certificate <i>(Lukion oppimäärä)</i> Matriculation examination <i>(Ylioppilastutkinto)</i> Upper secondary vocational qualifications <i>(Ammatilliset perustutkinnot)</i> Further vocational qualifications <i>(Ammattitutkinnot)</i> Basic examination in prison services <i>(Rikosseuraamusalan tutkinto)</i> Fire fighter qualification <i>(Pelastajatutkinto)</i> Emergency response centre operator qualification <i>(Hätäkeskuspäivystäjätutkinto)</i>	4
<b>3</b>		3
<b>2</b>	Basic education certificate (9 years) <i>(Perusopetuksen oppimäärä)</i>	2
<b>1</b>		1

Source: Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017.

### Abbreviations

EDUFI	Finnish National Agency for Education
EQF	European qualifications framework
FiNQF	Finnish national qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

Finnish National Agency for Education – acts as the national coordination point for the EQF: [www.oph.fi/qualificationsframework](http://www.oph.fi/qualificationsframework)

Database of VET, general education and higher education programmes: <https://studyinfo.fi/wp2/en/>

Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture: [www.minedu.fi/OPM/?lang=en](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/?lang=en)

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## Legislation

Government proposal 204/2016 of 20 October 2016 to the Parliament for an Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and other Competence Modules.

Act 93/2017 of 10 February 2017 on the National Qualifications Framework and other Competence Modules. [www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182270\\_act\\_93-2017.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182270_act_93-2017.pdf)

Government Decree 120/2017 of 23 February 2017 on the National Framework for Qualifications and other Competence Modules. [www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182107\\_government\\_decree\\_120-2017\\_27.2.2017\\_.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182107_government_decree_120-2017_27.2.2017_.pdf)

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## Introduction and context

Participation in education and training in France is above EU averages and EU targets, with universal early childhood education and care, a declining percentage of students who leave education early (8.9% in 2017), and relatively high rates of tertiary education attainment and adult participation in lifelong learning (44.3% and 18.7%, respectively, in 2017). However, the percentage of 15-year-olds who underperform in reading, maths and science is slightly above the EU average. The basic skills of pupils in primary education are also low. Gaps in performance and the type of secondary school-leaving qualification obtained are strongly correlated with socioeconomic background. Recent initiatives aim to reduce inequalities and improve basic skills by lowering the starting age of compulsory education from six to three (from September 2019), reducing class sizes, and improving teacher competences to deliver differentiated teaching. Upper secondary and tertiary education reforms are subject to wide consultation and approached in a coordinated manner. The general and technological *baccalauréat* (upper secondary school-leaving examination)<sup>233</sup> is being revised (to be in place by 2021), including a more flexible curriculum and increased guidance to prepare students better for higher education or the labour market. A new higher education law<sup>234</sup> was adopted in 2018, aiming to increase the completion rate at bachelor level (*licence*) through educational support, more flexible programmes and new teaching methods. Employment rates of vocational education and training (VET) graduates have started to increase; 48% of recent graduates from school-based VET and 69% from work-based VET found a job in 2017. A major reform of VET and apprenticeships was

initiated in 2017 and continues. A new national skills agency, France Compétences, was set up in 2018, aiming to simplify funding mechanisms and governance of continuing VET (CVET) and apprenticeships. Readjustment in the joint management of VET by the State, the regions and social partners is also part of the reform, with the regions taking on more responsibility in guidance and less in steering of apprenticeships (European Commission, 2018).

The French national qualifications framework (NQF) can be seen as belonging to the first generation of European qualifications frameworks. Its establishment was signalled by the setting up, in 2002, of the National register of vocational and professional qualifications (Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles (RNCP)), now considered as the technical support of the framework, and the National commission for vocational and professional qualifications (Commission nationale de la certification professionnelle (CNCP)), the body responsible for managing and updating the RNCP until 2018<sup>235</sup>. The NQF is linked to the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning (*validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE)) and supported by a competence orientation in designing curricula covering the entire vocational system. The structure that was in use up to 2019 was underpinned by a classification of training levels developed back in 1969 as part of a systematic public planning policy which gradually aligned the structure of the nationally recognised qualifications (*diplômes*) to that of occupations and jobs on the labour market (Paddeu et al., 2018). It covered vocationally and professionally oriented qualifications, including those from higher education, while excluding secondary general education qualifications.

<sup>233</sup> Besides the general and technological *baccalauréats*, which are being revised, there is also a third type of upper secondary school-leaving examination: the professional/vocational *baccalauréat*.

<sup>234</sup> Law 2018-166 of 8 March 2018 on student orientation and success [Loi n° 2018-166 du 8 mars 2018 relative à l'orientation et à la réussite des étudiants]. *JORF*, No 0057, 9.3.2018. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2018/3/8/ESRX1730554L/jo/texte](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2018/3/8/ESRX1730554L/jo/texte)

<sup>235</sup> Law No 2002-73 of 17 January 2002 on social modernisation [Loi n° 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002 de modernisation sociale]. *JORF*, 18.1.2002, p. 1008. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000408905&dateTexte=&categorieLien=id](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000408905&dateTexte=&categorieLien=id)

As the French qualification system has developed considerably<sup>236</sup> over recent decades, and more closely aligned the NQF to the European qualifications framework (EQF), different proposals to revise the five level structure (in use until 2019) were put forward. Revision has been a lengthy process, as qualification levels were linked to wider collective bargaining agreements in the country. The 2018 law for the freedom to choose one's professional future<sup>237</sup> and subsequent legislation<sup>238</sup> strengthened the legal basis of the NQF and defined a new eight-level structure and level descriptors in three categories, similar to those of the EQF: complexity of knowledge, skills and know-how, and degree of responsibility and autonomy.

The five-level structure in use until 2019 was referenced to the EQF in October 2010.

## Policy objectives

The French NQF covers four main types of vocationally and professionally oriented qualifications (Paddeu et al., 2018):

- a. diplomas and degrees<sup>239</sup> issued on behalf of the state, legislated by French ministries and created on recommendation and in cooperation with tripartite consultative vocational committees (commissions professionnelles consultatives)<sup>240</sup>;
- b. qualifications issued on behalf of the state but where no consultative committee is in place<sup>241</sup>;

- c. qualifications awarded by public or private bodies in their own name, such as higher education institutions, chambers, and private education providers;
- d. sector-specific or industry-level qualifications (*certificats de qualification professionnelle*).

Qualifications from general education (including the general *baccalauréat*<sup>242</sup>) were not included in the RNCP. There is also a less clear distinction between VET and higher education compared to many other European countries. Higher education qualifications are considered to be qualifications with a vocational/professional purpose<sup>243</sup> and therefore included in the framework (Paddeu et al., 2018), signalling an orientation promoting vocationally and professionally-oriented qualifications at all levels<sup>244</sup>.

The initial aim of implementing a classification of vocational and professional qualifications<sup>245</sup> in France between 1972 and 2002 was to promote social justice, reaching parity of esteem of qualifications awarded as a result of adult training with educational qualifications through levelling. Policy objectives started to shift in the 1990s towards combating unemployment. The goal of accreditation was no longer recognising the duration of training programmes, but their learning outcomes, with a focus on assessment of competences (Paddeu et al., 2018).

<sup>236</sup> One important trend witnessed over the last 40 years is diversification of the nationally recognised qualifications and an increase in requests for registering of qualifications by private providers.

<sup>237</sup> Law No 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 for the freedom to choose one's professional future [Loi n° 2018-771 du 5 septembre 2018 pour la liberté de choisir son avenir professionnel]. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000037367660&dateTexte=20190227](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000037367660&dateTexte=20190227)

<sup>238</sup> Decree No 2019-14 of 8 January 2019 on the national framework of vocational qualifications [Décret n° 2019-14 du 8 janvier 2019 relatif au cadre national des certifications professionnelles]. *JORF*, No 0007, 9.1.2019. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?jsessionid=6A9D2FCF7FB127AC6021BD782B475904.tplgfr34s\\_2?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000037964754&dateTexte=&oldAction=rechJO&categorieLien=id&idJO=JORFCONT000037964593](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?jsessionid=6A9D2FCF7FB127AC6021BD782B475904.tplgfr34s_2?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000037964754&dateTexte=&oldAction=rechJO&categorieLien=id&idJO=JORFCONT000037964593)

<sup>239</sup> These are secondary and higher education qualifications and continuing training qualifications issued by the Ministry of labour.

<sup>240</sup> These committees are advisory bodies involving representatives of employers, employees, local authorities and professionals.

<sup>241</sup> For example, qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Defence or Ministry of Culture are not developed through, and following recommendation from, advisory bodies.

<sup>242</sup> While not included in the RNCP, the general *baccalauréat* was placed at level IV in the classification of training levels.

<sup>243</sup> In France, the concept of 'vocational qualification' refers to a qualification 'that results from a qualification process and that therefore brings with it some kind of recognition in the labour market and, to some degree, ensures access to it' (Paddeu et al., 2018). This is also sometimes referred to as a 'full qualification' (*qualification complète*).

<sup>244</sup> Since the 1970s, vocational courses and programmes have been an important and integrated part of traditional universities; professional bachelor and master degrees are common. Outside universities, specialist technical and vocational schools, run by different ministries, by chambers of commerce and industry or by private providers, offer high level courses and certificates. *Ingénieurs* from these institutions or students in business schools hold qualifications at a high level, equivalent to those from universities with a master degree. The Ministry of Higher Education delivers the bachelor and master degrees and recognises the diplomas, which has an integrating effect on the diplomas awarded by other ministries such as Culture or Industry.

<sup>245</sup> The development of this classification was closely related to labour market needs and a need for a statistical tool to measure the shares of the population to be enrolled at different levels of education. The hierarchy of *diplômes* was used as a starting point for the classification, as it had more stable definitions. It was then transposed into training levels linked to corresponding occupations and jobs, facilitating statistical analysis (Paddeu et al., 2018).

Since its introduction in 2002, the RNCP has had an important role in quality assurance of qualifications and promotion of lifelong learning with a view to the integration of people into the labour market (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The RNCP aims to ensure quality and transparency of vocational and professional qualifications through a publicly accessible register of qualifications formally recognised by the State and social partners. It is a single reference tool for all stakeholders concerned with occupations and training within the country and internationally, enabling the identification of qualifications ‘for vocational and professional purposes’ and aiding understanding of the French qualifications landscape. The 2002 law on social modernisation that established the RNCP introduced a logic centred on competences that progressively replaced that centred on knowledge (CNCP, 2010). In addition, the French framework directly influences access and progression in the education and training system and in the labour market, as well as funding and quality assurance<sup>246</sup>. The levels of education and training, which became the levels of the NQF, were linked in many cases to agreed wage rates. Despite a diversification of recognised qualifications since the 1970s, the French state is the only entity responsible for quality assurance (Paddeu et al., 2018).

Recent policy initiatives and reforms continued to emphasise the need to give high priority to employability and equip candidates with competences better aligned with the needs of the labour market. Education and training providers at all levels (including universities) have been obliged to reformulate and clarify their qualifications, also in terms of labour market relevance. The 2018 law for the freedom to choose one’s professional future<sup>247</sup>, which aims to transform the vocational training and apprenticeship system in France, including its governance and financing, establishes the NQF on an eight-level structure and redefines the general principles for vocational and professional qualifications, for their levelling, and inclusion in the RNCP. The revision of the level structure and its descriptors reflects this labour market and competence focus.

<sup>246</sup> Stephanie Allais argues that ‘the French framework, where labour markets were the most regulated and collective bargaining had the widest reach, had the clearest relationships between qualifications and work. However, the qualifications framework did not seem to be the cause, but rather the effect of such relationships’ (Allais, 2017).

<sup>247</sup> Law No 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 (see footnote 237 above).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The classification of training levels introduced in 1969 was used as the basis for referencing the French framework to the EQF in 2010. The five-level structure, with level V being the lowest and level I the highest, was referenced to EQF levels 3 to 8, with no French qualifications at EQF levels 1 and 2. Given that the French qualification system has developed considerably since 1969, a number of stakeholders have pointed to the need for an updated level structure. Revision of the level structure and accompanying descriptors was a lengthy process and considered politically sensitive; existing levels are used as reference points for salary agreements and changes could influence these. There was also some scepticism towards an extension of the framework to include certificates at lower levels (equivalent to EQF 1 and 2), also linked to labour agreements, such as negotiations on minimum wages.

A new eight-level structure was recently adopted through Decree No 2019-14 of 8 January 2019 on the national framework of vocational qualifications<sup>248</sup>, more closely aligned to the EQF. Levels are defined using learning outcomes in three categories:

- a. complexity of knowledge associated with carrying out the corresponding professional activity;
- b. level of skills and know-how;
- c. level of responsibility and autonomy.

The first level of the new framework covers basic competences resulting from an agreement between social partners and the government; it is not linked to qualifications included in the RNCP. The newly introduced level 2 covers simple activities and limited autonomy. Levels 3 to 8 cover qualifications previously included at the five levels of the RNCP. The previous level I was dissociated into the new levels 7 and 8, distinguishing between master and doctoral qualifications<sup>249</sup>. According to the 2019 decree on the national framework of vocational and professional qualifications, reclassification of level I qualifications to the new levels 7 and 8 should be completed by January 2020.

<sup>248</sup> See footnote 238 above.

<sup>249</sup> Ministry of higher education, research and innovation (2019). Law of 5 September 2018 on the freedom to choose one’s professional future: main provisions in terms of certification [Loi du 5 septembre 2018 pour la liberté de choisir son avenir professionnel: principales dispositions en matière de certification]. Presentation in the EQF AG, 5 February 2019, Brussels.

**Table 23. Level descriptors in the French national qualifications framework**

LEVELS	LEVEL DESCRIPTORS
8	Level 8 attests the ability to identify and solve complex and new problems involving a variety of fields, using the most advanced knowledge, skills and know-how, to design and pilot research and innovation projects and processes. The national doctoral degree is classified at this level of the national framework
7	Level 7 attests the ability to develop and implement alternative strategies for carrying out the professional activity in complex professional contexts, as well as to assess the risks and consequences of one's activity. Master degrees are classified at this level of the national framework.
6	Level 6 attests the ability to analyse and solve unforeseen complex problems in a specific field, to formalise skills and know-how and methods and to build upon them. Bachelor degrees ( <i>licence</i> ) are classified at this level of the national framework.
5	Level 5 attests the ability to master skills and know-how in a field of activity, to develop solutions to new problems, to analyse and interpret information using concepts, to transmit skills, know-how and methods.
4	Level 4 attests the ability to carry out activities that require using a wide range of aptitudes, adapting existing solutions to solve specific problems, organising one's work autonomously in generally predictable but potentially changing contexts, and to participate in the evaluation of activities. The national Baccalaureate diploma is classified at this level of the national framework.
3	Level 3 attests the ability to carry out activities and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information in a known context, as well as the ability to adapt the means of execution and one's behaviour to the circumstances.
2	Level 2 attests the ability to carry out simple activities and solve common problems using simple rules and tools by using vocational skills and know-how in a structured context. The associated vocational/professional activity is carried out with a limited level of autonomy.
1	Level 1 of the national framework for vocational and professional qualifications corresponds to the mastery of basic knowledge.

Source: Decree No 14 of 8 January 2019 on the national framework of vocational and professional qualifications [unofficial translation].

The notion of competence was introduced in French VET in the 1970s and in general education in the 1980s. It is now explicitly referred to in curriculum documents in all sub-systems of education and training (Cedefop, 2016). The learning outcomes approach was strengthened by the 2002 Law on social modernisation and subsequent decrees that set up the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning (*validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE)), and its emphasis on validation and certification of competences, based on learning outcomes, for awarding any kind of qualification. The learning outcomes descriptions form the basis on which all qualifications are approved for registration into the RNCP.

Initial vocational qualifications are defined in terms of skills, knowledge and competences, but different forms of VET provision differ in

how learning outcomes are assessed. In higher education, the law of August 2007 on the freedoms and responsibilities of universities<sup>250</sup> created the obligation for universities to set new services dedicated to employability, requiring them to improve their learning outcomes descriptions, both for employers and students. Revision of the learning outcomes of bachelor and master degrees was carried out in 2016 with the aim of reducing the number of national qualifications and ensuring stronger national consistency between the different titles. The main learning outcomes for doctorate degrees have been published in the RNCP.

<sup>250</sup> Law No 2007-1199 of 10 August 2007 on the freedoms and responsibilities of universities [Loi n° 2007-1199 du 10 août 2007 relative aux libertés et responsabilités des universités]. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000824315](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000824315)

The notion of ‘units/blocks of competences’ (*blocs de compétences*) was introduced in 2014<sup>251</sup>, as an organisation of competences in qualification standards following the logic of socially meaningful activities. A unit/block of competences is an ‘identified part of a vocational qualification’, defined as a ‘homogeneous and coherent set of competences contributing to carrying out a professional activity autonomously, and which can be assessed and validated’ (Labour Code, Art. L6113-1).

From 2019, qualification awarding bodies who want to register their qualifications in the RNCP have to provide a presentation of the units/blocks of competences corresponding to the different parts of qualifications. The value of having qualifications divided into units/blocks of competences corresponding to typical activities is to increase flexibility of qualification pathways, and to support mobility and progression, either through training or validation (VAE), by supporting modularisation of training provision (European Commission et al., forthcoming). The new commission within France *Compétences* that replaces the CNCP may also make it mandatory for qualification providers to share the units/blocks of competences to facilitate lifelong learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The National register of vocational and professional qualifications (RNCP) was introduced in 2002 through the law on social modernisation<sup>252</sup>, along with the National commission for vocational and professional qualifications (Commission nationale de la certification professionnelle (CNCP)), responsible for supervising the system of vocational qualifications and for managing the register. The CNCP carried on the work of the previous Technical Commission for the Accreditation of Diplomas and Certificates (Commission technique d’homologation (CTH)), with the mission to:

- a. ensure the coherence of, and promote pathways between, qualifications;
- b. supervise the renewal of qualification documents and their adaptation to changes in qualifications and work organisation;

<sup>251</sup> Law 2014-288 of 5 March 2014 on *vocational training, employment and social democracy* [Loi n° 2014-288 du 5 mars 2014 relative à la formation professionnelle, à l’emploi et à la démocratie sociale]. *JORF*, No 0055, 6.3.2014, p. 4848. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2014/3/5/ETSX1400015L/jo/texte](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2014/3/5/ETSX1400015L/jo/texte)

<sup>252</sup> Law No 2002-73 of 17 January 2002 (see footnote 235 above).

- c. update the RNCP;
- d. inform the public and companies about the qualifications listed in the RNCP and those recognised in the member states of the European Union;
- e. issue recommendations for awarding bodies;
- f. draw up a new classification covering levels of certification in relation to jobs held.

The CNCP was a platform for cooperation between all ministries involved in the design and award of qualifications (education, higher education, labour, social affairs, agriculture, culture, youth and sports, defence, finance, health) and the social partners and other stakeholders (such as chambers and representatives of the regions) involved in the qualifications system. Given the increasing diversity of qualifications in France over recent decades, the broad composition of the CNCP<sup>253</sup> was necessary to ensure quality, credibility and ownership. CNCP was entitled to be informed about vocational qualifications created by social partners, even when these were not intended for registration in the RNCP.

The concept of a ‘national qualifications framework’ came into use in the context of EQF implementation. Through an agreement at government level, endorsed by the *Secrétariat général des affaires européennes* (under the authority of the prime minister), it was decided that the RNCP would be the French NQF, with the CNCP acting as EQF national coordination point. With the 2018 Law for the freedom to choose one’s professional future<sup>254</sup>, which created a new article in the Labour Code<sup>255</sup>, the French NQF became formally embedded in legislation, as distinct from the RNCP. Its levels and characteristics are defined by the 2019 Decree on the national framework of vocational qualifications<sup>256</sup>.

The recent legislative changes also brought a new national authority for the regulation and financing of continuing VET and apprenticeships, France

<sup>253</sup> The CNCP consisted of a chairperson, 16 ministerial representatives, 10 social partners, 3 elected representatives of the consular chambers, 3 elected representatives of the regions, and 12 qualified persons, a general rapporteur and 2 deputy rapporteurs. The members were appointed by the French prime minister, for a renewable five-year term (CNCP, 2010).

<sup>254</sup> Law No 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 (see footnote 237 above).

<sup>255</sup> Labour Code, Article L6113-1. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do?sessionId=497C720EED8B07EC2A0784DB96C5D6FC.tplgfr37s\\_3?idSectionTA=LEGISC TA000037374052&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006072050&dateTexte=20190301](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do?sessionId=497C720EED8B07EC2A0784DB96C5D6FC.tplgfr37s_3?idSectionTA=LEGISC TA000037374052&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006072050&dateTexte=20190301)

<sup>256</sup> Decree No 2019-14 of 8 January 2019 (see footnote 238 above).



Compétences<sup>257</sup>, with a quadripartite structure representing the State, the regions, the employers and the employees. In January 2019, responsibility for the French NQF, the RNCP, and the ‘specific register’ (previously known as ‘the inventory’) was transferred to the new authority, which encompasses and replaces a number of structures previously involved in the governance of vocational training and certification<sup>258</sup>, including the CNCP.

A commission for vocational and professional qualifications will operate within France Compétences, with the following tasks<sup>259</sup>:

- a. harmonising the terminology used by the ministries and other awarding bodies in relation to the titles of vocational/professional qualifications, the activities envisaged, and the competences they certify;
- b. ensuring the quality of information provided to individuals and companies about vocational/professional qualifications, and ensuring that the standards of qualifications registered in the RNCP are publicly accessible;
- c. contributing to international work on the quality of qualifications;
- d. addressing all issues related to vocational / professional qualifications raised by the ministries and the national committees for employment of professional branches.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>260</sup>

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in France is strongly articulated to lifelong learning,

training and employment policies. Its development builds on longstanding practices of identification and recognition of prior learning and professional experience. While different procedures and mechanisms for identification, documentation and assessment of non-formal and informal learning have been developed<sup>261</sup> this section is concerned with the system of validation of acquired experience (*validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE)), whose goal is obtaining a qualification. VAE includes, by definition, the stages of identification, documentation, assessment and certification.

The French VAE system is now integrated in the Labour and education code and procedures are defined by legislation<sup>262</sup>, ensuring consistency

<sup>261</sup> In addition to VAE, there is a mechanism for the recognition of professional and personal experience granting access to a programme through exemption from normal requirements (at higher education level, this procedure known as validation des acquis professionnels et personnels (VAPP); the skill audits or *bilan de compétences* aimed at identifying skills and competences acquired during one's professional life without targeting certification and without an assessment procedure; and other types of competence portfolios developed outside of validation procedures.

<sup>262</sup> Law No 2002-73 of 17 January 2002 on social modernisation (see footnote 235 above).  
Law No 2007-148 of 2 February 2007 on the modernisation of public service [Loi de modernisation de la fonction publique 2007-148 du 2 février 2007]. *JORF*, 6.2.2007. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000465739](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000465739)  
Decree No 2007-1470 of 15 October 2007 on continuing vocational training of public servants [Décret 2007-1470 du 15 octobre 2007 relative à la formation professionnelle tout au long de la vie des fonctionnaires de l'Etat]. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000469540](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000469540)  
Decree No 2002-1459 of 16 December 2002 concerning the responsibilities of employers with regards to the validation of acquired experience and modifying title V of Book IX of the Labour Code (second part: Decrees in the State Council) [Décret 2002-1459 du 16 décembre 2002 relatif à la prise en charge par les employeurs des actions de validation des acquis de l'expérience et portant modification du titre V du livre IX du Code du travail (deuxième partie: Décrets en Conseil d'Etat)]. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000005633663&dateTexte=20181218](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000005633663&dateTexte=20181218)  
Decree No 2002-1460 of 16 December 2002 regarding the verification of bodies that assist candidates in the validation of acquired experience and modifying title IX of book IX of the Labour Code (second part: Decrees in the State Council) [Décret 2002-1460 du 16 décembre 2002 relatif au contrôle des organismes qui assistent des candidats à une validation des acquis de l'expérience et modifiant le titre IX du livre IX du code du travail (deuxième partie: Décrets en Conseil d'Etat)]. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000005633664&dateTexte=20180821](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000005633664&dateTexte=20180821)  
Circular No 2003-127 of 1 August 2003 on the organisation of validation of acquired experience [Circulaire n° 2003-127 du 1er août 2003 sur l'organisation

<sup>257</sup> [www.francecompetences.fr/](http://www.francecompetences.fr/)

<sup>258</sup> In addition to the CNCP, the bodies replaced by France Compétences include: the National council for employment, vocational training and guidance (Conseil national de l'emploi, de la formation et de l'orientation professionnelles (CNEFOP)), the Joint fund for securing professional career paths (Fonds paritaire de sécurisation des parcours professionnels, (FPSPP)) and the National inter-professional committee for employment and training (Comité paritaire interprofessionnel national pour l'emploi et la formation (COPANEF)).

<sup>259</sup> Decree No 2018-1172 of 18 December 2018 on the conditions for registering vocational and professional qualifications and certifications and authorisations in the national registers [Décret no 2018-1172 du 18 décembre 2018 relatif aux conditions d'enregistrement des certifications professionnelles et des certifications et habilitations dans les répertoires nationaux]. *JORF*, No 0294, 20.12.2018. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/decret/2018/12/18/2018-1172/jo/texte](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/decret/2018/12/18/2018-1172/jo/texte)

<sup>260</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

across sectors. VAE allows 'the award of whole or parts of qualifications with a vocational and professional orientation and purpose (*finalité professionnelle*) at all levels' (European Commission et al., forthcoming, p. 2), without the need to go through formal training. Thus, both full and partial validation are possible, the latter resulting in a document taking stock of the units of competences validated by the candidate. However, it is not possible to apply for VAE based solely on learning outcomes: it is required to have carried out at least one year of activity directly related to the activities outlined in the qualification standards.

The focus on certification is considered a strength of the VAE system, whose development was simultaneous to the restructuring of the qualifications system in 2002. Qualifications obtained through VAE are the same as those awarded via initial or continuous formal education and training or apprenticeship and they must be registered in the RNCP. Qualification standards (*référentiels de certification*) in the RNCP describe skills, knowledge and know-how defined in relation to occupation standards (*référentiels d'activités*). A VAE procedure must be in place for all qualifications registered in the RNCP (with the exception of those linked to 'regulated professions', where carrying out activity without having previously obtained the qualification is not legal). Thus, VAE is considered a fourth route to qualifications<sup>263</sup>. In higher education, VAE is used in conjunction with the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS).

Since 2002, more than 330 000 full qualifications awarded by ministries have been obtained through VAE, mostly in the health and social sectors. However, the number of applications has been gradually decreasing across all ministries. Data are not available for other type of awarding bodies.

In comparison with systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning in other European countries, the French VAE system is very well developed. Legislative initiatives over the past five years resulted in substantial changes addressing some of the challenges that had been identified: the need to broaden access,

diversify candidate profiles, shorten the length of the process, encourage its use across a wider range of qualifications, and improve stakeholder coordination. The system was considered demanding, especially for candidates with low skills and low levels of qualification. The 2014 Law on VET, employment and social democracy<sup>264</sup> broadened access to VAE for individuals without a qualification at EQF level 3, recognising as 'experience' training periods undertaken in a work context; it introduced the personal training account (*compte personnel de formation*) for easier financing, improved support to candidates, clarifying the role of various stakeholders involved, and included provisions for statistical monitoring of VAE pathways. The 2016 Law on work, modernising social dialogue and securing career paths<sup>265</sup> reduced the minimum duration of required experience from three years to one, strengthened the support and guidance offered to candidates, simplified procedures, and removed the timeframe for the validity of parts of qualifications obtained through VAE. The latter aspect is linked to the use of units/blocks of competences (*blocs de compétences*), which remain valid without a time limit and which facilitate the articulation of VAE with training. The governance of the VAE system, considered one of its weak points, is being reorganised along with the governance of vocational training following the new 2018 Law for the freedom to choose one's professional future<sup>266</sup>. The new governing body, France Compétences, replaces institutions previously involved in the coordination of the VAE system, including the *National council for employment, vocational training and guidance* (Conseil national de l'emploi, de la formation et de l'orientation professionnelles (CNEFOP)), so far in charge of the statistical monitoring of the use of VAE.

de la validation des acquis de l'expérience]. *Official bulletin*, No 32, 4.9.2003. [www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2003/32/MENE0301761C.htm](http://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2003/32/MENE0301761C.htm)

<sup>263</sup> According to Law No 2002-73 of 17 January 2002 on social modernisation (Article 134), qualifications (the *diplômes* or qualifications with a vocational/professional purpose) are obtained via the following routes: school and university, apprenticeship, continuing vocational training or, in whole or in part, by validation of acquired experience (VAE).

<sup>264</sup> Law No 2014-288 of 5 March 2014 (see footnote 251 above).

Decree No 2014-1354 of 12 November 2014 on measures regarding the validation of acquired experience [Décret n° 2014-1354 du 12 novembre 2014 portant diverses mesures relatives à la validation des acquis de l'expérience]. *JORF*, n° 0263, p. 19184, 14.11.2014). [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/decret/2014/11/12/ETSD1417561D/jo](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/decret/2014/11/12/ETSD1417561D/jo)

<sup>265</sup> Law No 2016-1088 of 8 August 2016 on labour, modernisation of social dialogue and securisation of professional career [Loi n° 2016-1088 du 8 août 2016 relative au travail, à la modernisation du dialogue social et à la sécurisation des parcours professionnels]. [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000033000929&dateTexte=20160908](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000033000929&dateTexte=20160908)

<sup>266</sup> Law No 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 (see footnote 237 above).

## NQF implementation

The French qualifications system is a mature one, and the NQF – up until 2019 identified with the five level structure of the RNCP (CNCP, 2010) – is fully operational. Its implementation has been closely linked to that of the system for validating non-formal and informal learning (VAE), the two being mutually supportive: all qualifications included in the RNCP<sup>267</sup> can be acquired through validation and need to have a VAE procedure specified. Requirements for inclusion of qualifications in the RNCP are specified in legislation<sup>268</sup>, aiming for national coherence and the overall quality and transparency of qualifications. As of 2019, these requirements include:

- a. definition of qualifications using an occupational standard (*référentiel d'activités, de métiers ou d'emplois*); a competence standard (*référentiel de compétences et de connaissances*) specifying competences and knowledge, including transversal ones; and an assessment standard (*référentiel d'évaluation*) defining the criteria and methods for assessing learning outcomes;
- b. structure of qualifications using units/blocks of competences<sup>269</sup> that can be assessed and validated;
- c. classification by field of activity and allocation of an NQF level.

Registration in the RNCP signals that all stakeholders, as represented in the CNCP and, since 2019, in the corresponding commission within France Compétences, underwrite the validity of a particular qualification. Registration is necessary to:

- a. receive funding;
- b. finance validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- c. exercise certain professions and occupations;
- d. enter apprenticeship schemes.

<sup>267</sup> From 2013 to 2015, 9 907 active qualifications were registered in the RNCP. A main distinction is made between diplomas, degrees and qualifications issued on behalf of the state and referring to national laws (Ministries of National Education and Higher Education, Agriculture); they are included by entitlement and eligible for automatic inclusion and 'private' qualifications included by request (i.e. on demand) awarded by education and training providers, chambers and social partners in their own name. In the first category there are 7 423 qualifications, in the second 2 484 (Paddeu et al., 2018).

<sup>268</sup> Decree No 2018-1172 of 18 December 2018 on the conditions for registering vocational qualifications and certifications and authorisations in the national registers (see footnote 259 above).

<sup>269</sup> For more information on units of competences, please see the section *Levels and use of learning outcomes* above.

The introduction of the RNCP in 2002<sup>270</sup> opened the possibility for inclusion of industry or sectoral qualifications (certificats de qualification professionnelle (CQPs)), diversifying the range of qualifications that could be nationally recognised. However, CQPs<sup>271</sup> did not have a level; at the same time, other qualifications, such as the general education *Baccalauréat*, were classified at a particular level (level IV in this case), but could not be included in the RNCP. This gave rise to questions and left open to interpretation which qualifications are part of the NQF (Paddeu et al., 2018). With the recent reform of the VET system, the 2018 Law for the freedom to choose one's professional future<sup>272</sup> and the 2019 Decree on the national framework of vocational qualifications<sup>273</sup> strengthen the legal basis of the NQF and define it as distinct from the RNCP. Qualifications under the responsibility of social partners (CQPs) will also be levelled and included in the NQF, clarifying uncertainties around their status.

The RNCP continues to act as technical support to the NQF<sup>274</sup> and it is one of the two qualification databases in the country. The second register (or inventory, *Inventaire*) was set up by the CNCP in 2014<sup>275</sup> to include awards that could not be levelled as they were not directly associated with an occupation recognised through an industry-level agreement<sup>276</sup> (Paddeu et al., 2018). The two registers make it possible to give an overview of all labour market relevant diplomas and certificates, with or without a level. An evaluation of the policy for vocational certification from November 2016<sup>277</sup>,

<sup>270</sup> Law No 2002-73 of 17 January 2002 on social modernisation (see footnote 235 above).

<sup>271</sup> The number of CQPs included in the register is quite small, but slowly growing in some sectors.

<sup>272</sup> Law No 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 (see footnote 237 above).

<sup>273</sup> Decree No 2019-14 of 8 January 2019 (see footnote 238 above).

<sup>274</sup> The RNCP database is available at: [www.rncp.cncp.gouv.fr/](http://www.rncp.cncp.gouv.fr/)

<sup>275</sup> Law 2014-288 of 5 March 2014 on *vocational training, employment and social democracy* (see footnote 251 above).

<sup>276</sup> Examples include accreditations resulting from a legal obligation and required to work in a particular profession (e.g. electrician accreditations); those highly valued in certain fields and recommended by social partners or certain bodies (e.g. qualification in copper welding as per standard NF EN ISO 9606-3); and those related to a homogeneous set of competences required in one or more occupations and that help to access the labour market (e.g. certificat Voltaire (spelling skills)).

<sup>277</sup> Inspection générale des Affaires sociales; Inspection générale de l'Administration de l'Éducation nationale et de la Recherche (2016). *Évaluation de la politique de certification professionnelle – propositions de « scénarios de transformation »* [General Inspection of Social Affairs; General Inspection of National Education and Research Administration (2016). Evaluation of the policy for

found that measures had to be taken to avoid the proliferation of qualifications, by giving more authority to the commission in charge of the RNCP, a recommendation that has been reflected in the recently introduced governance arrangements.

NQF levels are indicated on all qualification documents issued for VET and higher education qualifications, and on private and international qualifications included in the RNCP; EQF levels are included only on some qualification documents. Both NQF and EQF levels are included on Europass certificate supplements<sup>278</sup>, but not on diploma supplements.

The French NQF is known and used by education and training institutions and providers in France. Employers are aware of the levels, though they may not be aware of the NQF itself. Guidance and counselling practitioners and recognition authorities are aware of the framework due to cooperation between the EQF national coordination point and the National office for guidance (Office national d'information sur les enseignements et les professions (ONISEP) and ENIC NARIC France. There is also interest in the NQF among the general public (pupils and parents), as registration of a qualification in the RNCP is seen as proof of recognition by the state. The main channels for disseminating information on the NQF and the EQF have been the EQF national coordination point website<sup>279</sup>, the RNCP database itself, and interviews for the media. A communication campaign to inform on the new NQF levels is expected to be organised by France Compétences or the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue. In particular, one challenge identified so far in communicating about the French NQF has been conveying to end users the notion that a level in the RNCP reflects parity of esteem between qualifications for the labour market, but not automatic recognition by universities (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

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vocational certification – proposals for 'transformation scenarios']. [www.igas.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2015-125R2.pdf](http://www.igas.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2015-125R2.pdf)

<sup>278</sup> The French inventory of certificate supplements is available through the RNCP database: [www.rncp.cncp.gouv.fr/](http://www.rncp.cncp.gouv.fr/)

<sup>279</sup> The CNCP website, which hosted the EQF national coordination point until 1 January 2019: [www.cncp.gouv.fr](http://www.cncp.gouv.fr)

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The French NQF, as defined by the RNCP, was referenced to the EQF in October 2010 (CNCP, 2010). The process involved all ministries, social partners and other stakeholders represented in the CNCP.

The lack of low-level vocational qualifications posed a particular challenge. Members of the EQF advisory group argued that the absence of lower level qualifications in the French framework (in a worst case scenario) could prevent migrants holding qualifications at EQF level 1 or 2 from entering the French labour market, given lack of equivalents in the French system. Following the referencing process, work was resumed on a new classification.

An updated referencing report covering the new level structure and governance arrangements introduced in 2018 will be presented to the EQF advisory group. There is no set date for this yet, as implementation of the recent reforms will take time (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Important lessons and future plans

One of the oldest in Europe, the French NQF is embedded in the national context, characterised by 'a long history of labour organisation and social dialogue' (Allais, 2017, p. 465). Its main distinctive feature is the strong labour market focus and, consequently, the exclusion of secondary general education qualifications. Up until 2018, the framework was shaped by the classification of training levels developed in 1969, which created a hierarchy for nationally recognised qualifications, and the National register of vocational and professional qualifications (RNCP), which ratified the separation between qualifications and the training courses that may lead to them (Paddeu et al., 2018). The setup of the RNCP was closely interlinked with that of the validation system, supporting the acquisition of qualifications through validation of prior learning and work experience. Given that the French qualifications system and, in particular, relationships between qualifications, were gradually shaped by stakeholder negotiations and agreements linking qualification levels to occupations and wage levels, updating the level structure was a challenging and lengthy process. The new eight-level structure and learning-outcomes-based level descriptors, adopted recently as part of wider VET reforms, bring the

French framework closer to the EQF, increasing comparability between French qualifications and those in other European countries. Implementation of recent reforms will take time, and the degree to which the French NQF will maintain its distinctiveness as an ‘occupational framework’ (Allais, 2017) remains to be seen.

Developments related to the French NQF since 2002 illustrate the need for NQFs to evolve continuously to stay relevant. Two main trends have been noted (Paddeu et al., 2018) in the evolution of the qualifications system: the remarkable diversification of the range of qualifications recognised by the state, and the shift in the object of recognition from duration of training to learning outcomes. The conception of what can be considered a qualification in France may also be subject to change. Departing from the strong emphasis on ‘full qualifications’ (*qualifications complètes*), developments in recent years included several initiatives to make qualification and training pathways more flexible: the introduction of units/blocks of competences as identifiable parts of

qualifications that can be assessed and validated independently; the personal training account (*compte personnel de formation*), which follows the same logic of breaking down qualifications into blocks of learning outcomes that can be acquired gradually; and the introduction of a new qualifications register – in addition to the existing RNCP – for inclusion of smaller awards.

The role of the CNCP until recently and, since 2019, that of the new commission within France Compétences replacing the CNCP, as ‘gatekeeper’ of the French framework has been important for two reasons: it has supported the credibility of registered qualifications and ownership of registration decisions across a wide range of stakeholders due to the quadripartite composition of these structures. However, a 2016 evaluation of the vocational certification policy has recommended that measures are needed to avoid the proliferation of qualifications. This illustrates the difficulty balancing the task of achieving increased flexibility in the qualifications system while maintaining the value and credibility of qualifications.

**Table 24. French national qualifications framework (NQF/RNCP)**

FRENCH NOMENCLATURE	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
<b>I-Doctorat</b>	Doctoral programmes ( <i>Doctorats</i> )	8
<b>I-Master</b>	Master degrees ( <i>Master</i> ) Degrees in engineering ( <i>titre d'ingénieur</i> ) Qualifications on demand at level I	7
<b>II-Grade de Licence</b>	Bachelor programmes ( <i>Licences</i> ) Vocational bachelor ( <i>Licence professionnelle</i> ) Qualifications on demand at level II	6
<b>III</b>	Undergraduate technician certificates ( <i>Brevet de technicien supérieur – BTS</i> ) Undergraduate technician certificates in agriculture ( <i>Brevet de technicien supérieur agricole – BTSA</i> ) Undergraduate certificates in technology ( <i>Diplôme universitaire de technologie – DUT</i> ) Master qualifications issued by the chambers of trades ( <i>Brevets de maîtrise – Chambre des métiers</i> ) Qualifications on demand at level III	5
<b>IV</b>	Vocational baccalaureates ( <i>Baccalauréats professionnels</i> ) Technological baccalaureates ( <i>Baccalauréats technologiques</i> ) Professional certificates ( <i>Brevets professionnels</i> ) Applied arts certificates ( <i>Brevets des métiers d'art</i> ) Technician certificates ( <i>Brevets de technicien</i> ) Qualifications on demand at level IV	4

(Continued)

**Table 24. French national qualifications framework (NQF/RNCP) (Continued)**

FRENCH NOMENCLATURE	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
<b>V</b>	Secondary vocational certificates ( <i>Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle – CAP; Brevet d'études professionnelles – BEP (*)</i> ) Secondary vocational certificates in agriculture ( <i>Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle agricole – CAPA; Brevet d'études professionnelles agricoles – BEPA (*)</i> ) Qualifications on demand level V	3
	No French qualifications and certificates at these levels	2
		1

This table presents the level structure of the French NQF as referenced to the EQF. A new level structure was adopted by Decree No 2019-14 of 8 January 2019 on the national framework of vocational qualifications.

(\*) BEP and BEPA are intermediary qualifications granted to young people who have passed the BEP exam and are preparing for the baccalauréat professionnel.

Source: CNCP, 2017.

Abbreviations			
CNCP	Commission nationale de la certification professionnelle (national committee on vocational qualifications)	NQF	national qualifications framework
CQP	certificat de qualification professionnelle (professional qualification certificate)	RNCP	répertoire national des certifications professionnelles (national register of vocational qualifications)
EQF	European qualifications framework	VAE	validation des acquis de l'expérience (validation of non-formal and informal learning)
		VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

EQF national coordination point – hosted by France Compétences as of 1 January 2019:  
[www.francecompetences.fr/](http://www.francecompetences.fr/)

CNCP website, which hosted the EQF national coordination point until 1 January 2019: [www.cncp.gouv.fr/](http://www.cncp.gouv.fr/)  
National register of vocational and professional qualifications (RNCP): [www.rncp.cncp.gouv.fr/](http://www.rncp.cncp.gouv.fr/)

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- Paddeu, J.; Veneau, P.; Meliva, A. (2018). French national qualification framework: its genesis, working and new challenges. *Céreq Études*, Vol. 9, November 2018. [www.cereq.fr/publications/Cereq-Etudes/French-national-qualification-framework-its-genesis-working-and-new-challenges](http://www.cereq.fr/publications/Cereq-Etudes/French-national-qualification-framework-its-genesis-working-and-new-challenges)

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## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The Georgian national qualifications framework (NQF) was adopted by ministerial decree in 2010. In 2017–18 a major revision of the NQF took place, to improve coherence and better linkages between the sub-systems (general education, vocational education and training (VET), and higher education) and compatibility with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). As a result, in October 2018 the Parliament adopted the NQF-related amendments to the Law of Georgia on the Development of Quality of Education, setting the main objectives and principles of the new NQF. The ongoing reform of the NQF is expected to deepen the coherence with the 2017–18 reforms of the education quality assurance system, enhance transparency and evidence-based decision-making on the NQF implementation, and support inclusion of quality-assured qualifications for lifelong learning awarded outside of the formal education sector.

The National Centre for Education Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) is in charge of managing NQF implementation, reviewing and updating the legal basis, and monitoring its impact. The NQF and the education and training quality assurance framework are closely linked.

Georgia has participated since 2005 in the Bologna Process, but has not yet presented a self-certification report. It is at the structured stage of NQF development.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

According to the 2014 census, the population was 3 729 635 (as of January 2015), which shows a striking decrease (by 14.7%) compared with 2002. High emigration, as well as Russia's aggressive military actions and annexation of Georgian territory justify this situation. Over 57% of the population is urban, and Tbilisi alone has 30% of the whole population. The share of the age group 15–24 slightly declined to 20.2% in 2015.

The country has been participating in several rounds of international students' assessments, and results help decision-makers and the education community orient the focus of reforms and continuous improvement. Georgia was among the 21 countries that improved their average achievement in mathematics in the 2015 round of TIMSS 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and ranked 37 (out of 49) with 463 points (618 was the top performance). The country's average achievement in TIMSS science 4<sup>th</sup> grade (2015) remained unchanged and Georgia ranked 39 (out of 47), with 451 points (590 was the maximum). In PISA 2015, Georgian 15-year-olds visibly improved their average scores in all three subjects (science, reading and mathematics); nonetheless more and consistent effort will be necessary to decrease the 'share of low achievers in the three subjects' (country result was 36.3) and to elevate the average score in each of these subjects.

The population of Georgia has relatively high educational attainment (62.1% have ISCED 97 level 3–4 and 33.5% have level 5–6). Younger age groups have expanded participation in higher education, however with equity divides (based on e.g. income, urban-rural residence).

The government has implemented unstable policies towards VET in the last 10 years, but since 2014 there has been a clear reorientation to promote and reinforce the VET system through increased public expenditure, extensive reforms to modernise curriculum and teaching and to widen access. The share of upper-secondary students in VET has increased, but remains way too low, when compared with the other Eastern Partnership countries.

The STEP survey of the World Bank<sup>280</sup> identified the most important employability skills that young workers lack most often. Only those skills are shown, which are reported as missing among young workers by at least 25% of firms.

<sup>280</sup> World Bank (2013), *Workforce Skills in the Eyes of the Employers: Results of the Georgia STEP Employer Skills Survey*



Occupation-specific technical skills are considered critical for employability by employers, and at the same time a high proportion of firms say that young workers frequently lack them. Workers also often lack higher-order cognitive skills (problem solving) and some key socio-behavioural skills (problem solving, ability to work independently and in teams). Another source<sup>281</sup> reveals that skills on demand are analytical, communication, interpersonal and digital skills. Employers also value teamwork and a flexible 'can do' attitude. A recent national employers' survey shed light on the factors behind the perceived hiring difficulties, among which skill mismatch (by field of study, level of qualification), but also unattractive employment conditions (wages).

Georgia has adopted and implements a number of strategies and policies targeting various angles of competitiveness, employability and inclusion, notably the National VET Strategy (2013–20) and the Labour Market Strategy (2013–24) with associated actions plans. Regular labour market (employers) surveys have been carried out since 2015 under the umbrella of the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, to identify trends in demand for skills and prospective employment.

In 2014, Georgia put in place the Georgian National Youth Policy, aiming to encourage establishment of the relevant environment for comprehensive youth development, enabling youth to fully fulfil its potential and be actively involved in any sphere of social life. The policy is supported by an action plan (to 2020) and covers multiple dimensions: participation in social, cultural and political life; high quality education and training, employment and professional development; healthy life style; and friendly environment for youth. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs plays the leading role in coordinating the youth policy. Moreover, the public employment service (Social Service Agency) implements training programmes for unemployed people/ job seekers and promotes career guidance via an online portal.

In February 2017, the European Parliament approved Georgia visa waiver, which brings Georgia closer to the EU. The visa waivers apply to all EU Member States (except Ireland and the UK), plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

### **Economic context**

Georgia is a lower-income country with a growing GDP per capita reaching USD 9 379 in 2015

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<sup>281</sup> ILO, *Enabling Environment for Sustainable Enterprises* (Georgia)

(purchasing power parity, current international dollars).

The geopolitical context affects growth in the Eastern Partnership region. Georgia's economy remains resilient to shocks and is the only one for which the World Bank leaves positive predictions of growth unchanged. Georgia is among the best performers among the Eastern Partnership countries as far as GDP growth is concerned (4.6% in 2014 and 2.7% in 2015).

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent 96% of all enterprises, but their contribution to GDP is relatively modest (21.1% in 2014). Over two fifths of the employed people are in SMEs (2014).

Tourism is one of the dynamic sectors of the economy and continues to grow, contributing 23.5% to GDP and 20.1% to employment (direct and indirect in the sector). The share of agriculture in GDP slightly decreased to 9.2% in 2015, while the contribution of the industry increased to 24.5%. The service sector contributes 66.3% to GDP and maintains its predominance.

Georgia ranked 66 (out of 144) in the Global Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum. According to the Doing Business 2017 report, Georgia is ranked 16<sup>th</sup> among 190 nations. In the 2016 report, Georgia held the 24<sup>th</sup> position among 189 countries. Georgia has improved its position in many categories, particularly in terms of institutional structure and regulatory environment. However, major weaknesses remain, such as lack of support for research and education by the government and the private sector, and limited use of innovation in business.

### **Labour market indicators**

Georgia's labour market indicators have shown continuous improvement in the last years, but challenges persist that will require the continuation of coherent policies to promote job creation, to minimise qualifications mismatch and support access to timely labour market information for all jobseekers, employers and learners.

The employment rate has increased by 5.6 percentage points between 2010 and 2015 (68.8%), but youth employment (age group 15–24) remains nonetheless modest (27.3%). The unemployment rate declined visibly by 4.3 percentage points (12% in 2015) in the same period, but youth unemployment (15–24) remains a challenge (30.8%). The proportion of long-term unemployment is not the highest among the Eastern Partnership countries, but deserves

continuous attention (42.7% in 2015), given the known adverse impact on people's skills and motivation to stay in the labour market.

The rate of persons not in employment, education or training (NEETs, age group 15–29) is of concern, but in 2013–15 Georgia showed a visible improvement, with a reduction of over 9 percentage points of the total NEETs rate). However, we notice that unlike other countries of the region, the NEETs rate of Georgian young women exceeds by 14 percentage points the rate of young men.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

As a country which is undergoing a transition from the former Soviet system to a market economy, Georgia is implementing reforms in education and training, qualifications and employment policies aimed at simultaneously addressing growth and competitiveness, employment and social inclusion. Social policy objectives and renewed attention to employment have been reinforced since the 2013 elections. Unemployment has been a high priority for the new government, as the steady economic growth in the past decade has not been accompanied by commensurate job creation.

Stakeholders have high expectations of the NQF as a catalyst for implementation of essential reforms in education and training. The socioeconomic context justifies the emphasis placed on employability, and continuing reform of education and training contributes to this. The NQF in action is expected to contribute to improving permeability between subsectors, to helping match qualifications and labour market needs, to supporting quality assurance of education and training, and increasing the transparency of learning outcomes.

In October 2018, the Parliament adopted the major legal act of the new NQF, as an amendment to the Law of Georgia on the Development of Quality of Education. In addition, four main subordinate acts were ready for approval in 2018, as ministerial orders. A closer look at the new legal base is provided in the section 'NQF legal basis' below.

1. A new section dedicated to the NQF in the Law of Georgia on the Development of Quality of Education<sup>282</sup> (amendment to the Law): chapter IV2; the three articles cover the NQF

- and its goals; the NQF management and development; and the classifier of fields of study
2. An Order of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport on the new NQF and its structure, level descriptors and typical qualifications by level
3. An Order of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport on the new classifier of fields of study, based on ISCED-F 2013
4. An Order of Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport on governance and monitoring of the NQF

According to the first document – amendment to the Law on Development of Quality of Education – the goals of the draft new national qualifications framework will be as follows (Article 24)<sup>283</sup>:

- a. 'classification of qualifications by protection of the following key principles of the national qualifications framework: compliance of learning outcomes, quality assurance, availability of qualification-related information;
- b. interconnection of general, vocational and higher education, its management and development;
- c. promoting lifelong learning;
- d. supporting quality assurance system;
- e. ensuring compatibility, comparison ability and transparency of qualifications at international level;
- f. promoting mobility;
- g. supporting recognition of formal education obtained during learning period;
- h. supporting recognition of informal education;
- i. providing public with information on current qualifications;
- j. reflection of permanently changing requirements in the education system and stimulation of renewable qualifications description relevant to it.'

Comparing with the NQF 2010, this set of goals reflects a renewed vision of the NQF, which will now explicitly be open to such novel topics as non-formal education; transparency in understanding the professional profiles for all types of users; and responsiveness to changing requirements and renewal of qualifications. The new NQF is increasingly seen as a bridge between the subsectors of formal education, as well as between formal and non-formal learning.

### International cooperation

Georgia has been a full member of the Bologna Process since 2005 and participates in the

<sup>282</sup> Current (not yet amended) version of the Law available at: <http://eqe.gov.ge/res/docs/2014120816015474706.pdf>

<sup>283</sup> According to the non-edited translation of the amended Law, as of December 2018.

ministerial meetings and regular reporting. The EU-Georgia Association Agreement was signed on 26 September 2014 and entered into provisional application in September 2014. Chapter 16 of the agreement refers to cooperation towards recognition of qualifications. Annex XXXII lists the *acquis* to be adopted by the country, including the EQF Recommendation. Article 96 refers to mutual recognition (negotiation of mutual recognition agreements)<sup>284</sup>.

Georgia ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 1999. The NCEQE represents Georgia in the ENIC-NARIC Networks. The NCEQE's Department of International Education is responsible for providing ENIC-NARIC Networks' representatives with the relevant and reliable information about the Georgian education system as well as educational institutions and credentials. The NCEQE closely cooperates with ENIC and NARIC in the process of recognition of foreign education in Georgia.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### NQF scope and structure

The amended Law of Georgia on the Development of Quality of Education defines the NQF as an instrument that classifies qualifications for the education sub-systems' (general, vocational and higher education, informal education) integration and coordination, as well as improvement of qualification quality, transparency, availability and development, taking the labour market and social interests into consideration.

The NQF includes quality-assured qualifications from general, vocational and higher education systems.

The new legal base adopted in October 2018 acknowledges the place for qualifications awarded outside of the formal education system, and the new VET Law (2018) places high priority on lifelong learning (training and retraining for better employability). This process of developing the legal base supporting implementation of the VET Law is in its initial phase.

### Alignment to other classification systems

All occupational standards are linked with the national classification of occupations, based on ISCO-08. The approved template for occupational standards includes a field for the relevant code from ISCO-08.

The new classifier of fields of study is one of the legal acts following the adoption of the NQF-related amendments to the Law on the Development of Educational Quality. This new classifier is in the approval process. It is structured in accordance with ISCED-F 2013.

### NQF levels and level descriptors

The new NQF has three categories of descriptors: knowledge and understanding, skills, and responsibility and autonomy. The new NQF is structured in eight levels; the first and second levels include the programmes for the development of key competences for those adults who have not received mandatory nine-year general education. By the completion of these programmes they will have the opportunity to continue their learning on the third or fourth level of vocational education. The basic education of general education (ninth grade certificate) is placed on the second level of the framework.

*Qualifications at level 1* require general basic knowledge, basic skills to perform simple tasks – identification of simple tasks and ability to evaluate and solve them; basic skills of using books and mathematical literature, oral and written communications, information technologies; in a homogenous environment, communication and exchanging of information on simple issues in foreign language.

*Qualifications at level 2* require basic factual knowledge in the field of learning and activities; basic cognitive and practical skills for the use of relevant information in the field of learning and/or work, simple tasks and methods to perform tasks and to solve routine problems; the ability to understand one's and others' actions, adapt to new situations, verbal and written communications and argumentative discussions about familiar activities; ability to find, process, store, share and analyse information using information and communications technologies on specific issues.

Since the new NQF acts as a system reform instrument, particularly important to minimize existing dead-ends between VET and higher education pathways and qualifications, certain qualifications are yet to be developed and assigned to the new NQF structure.

Qualifications from formal vocational education are placed on the third, fourth and fifth levels of the framework. The general education programme is integrated in the secondary vocational programme of the fourth level, which gives the right to an individual holding the ninth grade certificate to add the learning outcomes of the vocational diploma with equal level to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade certificate

<sup>284</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/association\\_agreement.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/association_agreement.pdf)

(NQF level 4). This is a very important reform, but issues remain as to the practical reorganisation of this new secondary VET qualification of NQF level 4.

*Qualifications at level 3* require knowledge and interpreting basic facts, principles, processes and general concepts characteristic of learning and/or field; the combination of analytical and practical skills for solving tasks and solving problems, using appropriate information, tools, selection of materials and basic methods; evaluation of its activities in relation to the relevant standards; oral and written communication on issues related to studies and activities; use of relevant information and communication technologies; communication in everyday, familiar issues in foreign language, including terminology related to the field of activity.

*Qualifications at level 4* require a wide context of actual and theoretical knowledge characteristic of learning and/or activities; the combination of cognitive and practical skills required to solve specific problems that are characteristic of learning and/or activities; seeking information to solve specific problems, critically analysing, selecting appropriate approach, reviewing alternatives and reasoning; oral and written communication on general issues, including relevant information and communication technologies, as well as in foreign language.

*Qualifications at level 5* require specialised, comprehensive and theoretical knowledge and understanding of its capabilities (boundaries) in the field of learning and/or activities; applying wide-range cognitive and practical skills to solve individual problems creatively; identification, analysis and evaluation of clearly defined abstract and concrete problems data; structural and consistent transmission of ideas and information by using qualitative and quantitative information for specialists and non-specialists; use of modern information and communication technologies.

In Georgia level 5 qualifications have seen a relatively good pace of development. Some 30% of all new VET qualifications adopted between 2015 and 2018 are of level 5. As of December 2018, the total number of approved quality-assured modular VET programmes included in the register is 97, in 62 sectors and 3 NQF levels (3, 4 and 5).

The higher education programme of the fifth level will be a short-cycle qualification (associate degree), which will be connected with the first-level educational programme of higher education. The credits of short-cycle qualifications will be recognised for the goals of Bachelor and integrated Master programmes. The volume of short-cycle qualification is 120/180 credits.

Higher education qualifications are placed on levels 6, 7 and 8 of the NQF. These levels are not open to other types of qualifications, such as from certain professional bodies, but only for quality-assured academic qualifications.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

Introducing a learning outcomes approach is an important part of the national reform programme for general education, VET and higher education, as indicated in the key legal acts. Linked to this is an increased interest for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Higher education and vocational education are more advanced in implementing the learning-outcomes approach; in general education this approach is more recent. The learning outcomes approach is an established and generalised principle in the Georgian education and training system, albeit with varied degrees of quality in different sub-sectors and education institutions. The application of the learning outcomes approach is a mandatory requirement of the legislation on quality assurance of education, notably in authorisation and accreditation.

The new VET Law (2018) defines learning outcomes as a fundamental principle:

'Learning outcome – a statement regarding the “knowledge and understanding” (which implies results of assimilation of information, facts, principles, theory, theoretical and practical methods of learning or activities) and “skills” (which implies the ability of using the appropriate knowledge to carry out specific assignment and solve the problems), and/or the “responsibility and autonomy” (which means the use of knowledge and skills by the person through appropriate level of values and independence).'

Since the modularisation of the VET programmes started, in 2013, all educational standards, as well as modular programmes are based on learning outcomes. Learning outcomes-based qualification levels were to strengthen the outcomes dimension and give learning outcomes a prominent role in planning education provision.

In higher education, learning outcomes and the comparison between learning outcomes abroad and in the country are a key basis for recognition of acquired knowledge (Article 50 of the Law on Higher Education). The Law also prescribes to use learning outcomes for recognition of knowledge and skills acquired for a different qualification.

Learning outcomes are fundamental elements of quality assurance of higher education, mentioned in both authorisation and accreditation standards. Authorisation standards require clearly defined learning outcomes aligned with NQF level descriptors. Programme accreditation has among its main functions to check the outcomes' feasibility, relevance and correspondence to the existing NQF.

The Ministerial Decree on Regulation of Calculation of Credits for Educational Programmes (Ministerial Decree/Order No 3) defines details of use of ECTS credits in Georgian academia and the use of learning outcomes as mandatory for higher education. The decree defines ECTS as a student-centred system, which relies on learning outcomes and transparency of the learning process. It further defines details of assessment for the entire system, including regulations on mandatory intermediate assessment and thresholds for each type of assessment. The assessment should measure learning defined in the programme/course. The decree prescribes (Article 4.5) to align/introduce adequacy of assessment for the envisioned learning outcomes.

### **Definition of qualification**

The amended Law of Georgia on the Development of Quality of Education defines 'qualification' as a formal result of evaluation and approval of a learning outcome that is asserted with a state-recognised certificate, a state document confirming higher or vocational education – diploma, or a state document confirming general education. This definition applies to qualifications from all sub-sectors: general, vocational and higher education.

The new VET Law (2018) defines qualifications as follows:

'Qualification – formal outcome of assessment and confirmation of the achievement of the learning outcome by the authorised institution(s) which is confirmed by state-recognised certificate, by the state document confirming higher or vocational education – diploma, or by the state document certifying the general education.'

Educational standards in Georgia differ according to education sub-systems:

- National Curriculum for general education;
- vocational education standards for vocational education;
- sector documents (benchmarks) on regulated programmes of higher education, which can be developed for other fields of study as well.

The new VET Law (2018) defines standards as follows:

'Professional standard – a combination of tasks and responsibilities related to a particular profession.'

'Vocational education standard – a document that defines the qualification/ qualifications to be granted, number of credits required for the relevant qualification/qualifications, learning outcomes to be achieved, the combination of those modules the learning outcomes of which are necessary to achieve for the qualification/qualifications to be granted, and prerequisites for admission and implementation of the relevant education programme/programmes, as well as the areas of employment and requirements for development and implementation of educational programme/programmes (if any).'

'Vocational education programme – a combination of learning objectives, learning outcomes, module/modules, relevant credits, teaching methods, assessment forms and organisational characteristics. The vocational education programme is completed with awarding the qualification relevant to the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> level of the national qualification framework and issuance of the diploma.'

The law includes important orientations on VET qualifications of all NQF levels (2–5) and types. Article 6 of the law provides explanation on vocational training and re-training programmes.

'Vocational education is implemented:

- through a vocational training programme that prepares a person to perform individual tasks and obligations related to the profession. Learning outcomes under the vocational training programme may conform to the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> level of the national qualifications framework;
- through a vocational re-training programme aimed at acquiring and/or developing competences in the same field for professional activities. The learning outcomes provided by the vocational re-training programme may comply with the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> level of the national qualifications framework.'

The law distinguishes two types of programme: vocational education programmes, and vocational training and re-training programmes.

*Vocational education programmes/qualifications* conform to the NQF levels 3–5 and have the following characteristics:

- These programmes are implemented within the education system, i.e. by the institution holding an educational institution status.
- The admission right to these programmes is based on education system qualifications.
- Studying at this type of programme, as a rule, precedes the employment period.
- Educational programme/qualification reflects all categories of the NQF-aligned level descriptors.
- Holding this qualification makes it possible to pursue studies at a higher level, within the education system.

*Vocational training/re-training qualifications* conform with the NQF levels 2–5 and have the following characteristics:

- These programmes are implemented and qualifications are awarded by legal entities outside education system. The entity is not required to get an educational status, although it must be authorised to implement a programme and award a qualification. These programmes may be implemented by educational institutions as well.
- These programmes aim at meeting labour market demands rapidly. A person starts studying at the programme after starting a job: it is oriented on a little academic workload or on upgrading current skills.
- Admission right is not based on general education qualifications. For example, it is impossible to require minimum basic education qualification for admission to level 2 training/re-training qualification, because these two qualifications are placed at the same level. However, professional experience or vocational education are required for participating in these programmes.
- The learning outcomes of the programme/qualification fail to reflect all the categories/aspects of the relevant NQF level. Learning outcomes of vocational training/re-training programmes, outside the purpose of the programme, might be focused on the only category of the NQF level, for example, on

acquiring the necessary skills for the labour market.

- This qualification makes horizontal progression possible at NQF same level in correspondence with the recognition of formal education, stipulated by legislation, which provides a possibility to pursue studies at vocational education programme and acquire relevant qualification.

The National Curriculum is an educational standard of general education. Learning outcomes of basic and complete general education shall correspond with the National Curriculum in compliance with the set rule of legislation. The National Curriculum comprises subject standards of basic and upper (full) secondary education. According to its glossary of terms, 'subject standard' determines the obligatory minimum of knowledge a student must have upon completion of the level. It provides answers to the following questions: what should a learner know, what is a learner able to do and what are the values a learner should share within the scope of a specific subject.

The National Curriculum stipulates that learning outcome is knowledge, which is defined by the glossary of terms as synergy of three categories of knowledge – declarative, procedural and conditional, answering questions of three types: what do I know, how do I perform and when, why, in what case is knowledge applied. The National Curriculum provides a broad definition of 'knowledge' and the NQF provides a narrow definition of knowledge, as knowledge of only facts, principles, theories, concepts, theoretical and practical knowledge. This definition corresponds with the 'declarative knowledge' of the National Curriculum.

#### **Development process of qualifications**

In VET the linkage between various standards and qualifications is as follows: occupational standards, educational standards, VET qualifications. One educational standard can lead to several VET qualifications.

The information published on educational standards leading to specific VET qualifications is comprehensive and regularly updated. The description of educational standards provides the following information – for example:

- Name of the educational standard: Web programmer

- Direction (grouped in 11 directions): information and communication technologies
- Number of registration: 06108
- Level: V
- Entry requirements: secondary education
- Credits: 170
- Compulsory VET modules: 20 modules
- Elective VET modules: 1 module
- General compulsory modules: 9 modules

All the modules, with detailed description of aim, credit, level, learning outcomes, organisation of teaching and assessment approach, are attached to the document.

### Access, progression and credit

The Ministerial Decree on Regulation of Calculation of Credits for Educational Programmes (Ministerial Decree/Order No 3) defines the details of use of ECTS credits in the Georgian education system. The decree defines the ECTS as a student-centred system, which relies on learning outcomes and transparency of the learning process.

The decree prescribes the hours or range of hours for each ECTS as 25–30 hours, and defines the workload for an academic year as 60 ECTS, with a maximal amount of 75 ECTS in individual programmes. It further defines details of assessment for the entire system including regulations on mandatory intermediate assessment and thresholds for each type of assessment. The assessment should measure learning outcomes defined in the programme/course.

Credits are allocated to qualifications and modules based on their size. According to the VET Law

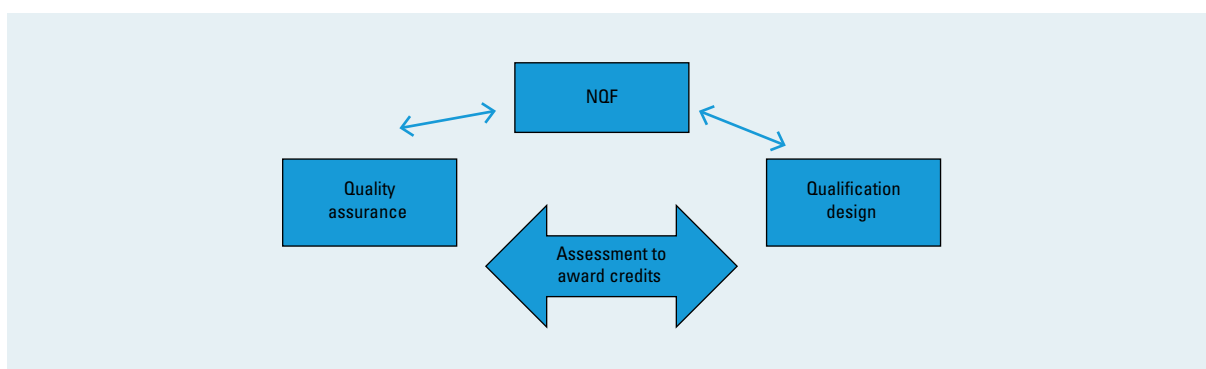
(2010), a credit expresses the amount of work to be done by a vocational student to master one subject. In the revised law, a credit expresses the educational workload for a vocational student/listener, which can be obtained through achieving the learning results.

Credits are allocated by Curriculum Working Group members to the educational standards and modules. A one-year programme is about 60 credits in VET as well as in higher education. In the process of credit allocation to individual modules in VET, the working groups use the complexity of the learning outcomes. The sum of the credit values of all modules should be very close to the value of the full qualification; if the sum is not the same the working groups revisit the allocation of the credits. If the programme leading to the qualification is much shorter than other full-time VET programmes, a lower credit value may need to be considered. However, national VET qualifications delivered in schools will be of similar duration and, therefore, of the same credit value. VET providers use educational standards in the process of credit allocation to their educational programmes.

In higher education 240 credits are allocated at Bachelor level (first cycle), 120 at Master level (second cycle) and 180 at Doctor level (third cycle).

The NQF supports the credit system in two ways. First, credit accumulation and transfer are built into the NQF's requirements for qualifications for approval within the framework. Second, the NQF defines quality assurance requirements that include monitoring the quality of the assessment that helps to build the reliability of the credits awarded.

**Figure 7. Integration of the credit system within the NQF**



## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

### NQF legal basis

The first Georgian NQF was adopted by ministerial decree in 2010 and has affected the panorama of qualifications in Georgia through its level structure and descriptors. This NQF was sub-divided into three sub-frameworks (general, vocational and higher education). In 2017–18, a major revision of the NQF took place to improve coherence and better linkages between the sub-systems of education, and compatibility with the EQF. As a result, in October 2018 the Parliament adopted the NQF-related amendments to the Law of Georgia on the Development of Quality of Education.

There is no single law fully dedicated to the new NQF. Instead Georgia decided to insert a new chapter in an existing law: Chapter IV2 (three articles) of the amended (2018) Law of Georgia on the Development of Quality of Education sets the goals and levels of the new NQF, and the role of the new classifier of fields of study.

Simultaneously, in 2017–18 a package of new legal acts supporting the implementation of the new NQF were drafted in consultation with the stakeholders. The main subordinate acts in form of orders of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (see <http://mes.gov.ge/index.php?lang=eng>), and rules and methodologies to be approved by the NCEQE's director, developed in 2018 and 2019, are listed below.

In 2018 – for approval:

- Ministerial Order on the eight-level structure of the NQF, level descriptors and list of typical qualifications;
- Ministerial Order on the classifier of fields of study, based on ISCED-F 2013;
- Ministerial Order on governance and monitoring of the NQF.

In 2019 – planned for finalisation and approval:

- Ministerial Order on rules for development of education programmes aligned with the NQF levels;
- Rules for recognition of non-formal education, and related regulations on quality assurance of the education and training institutions delivering such programmes and credentials;
- Methodology for levelling programmes' learning outcomes;
- Concept and technical specifications for the new online register of qualifications;
- Rules for VET educational standards (to be developed).

The ongoing reform of the NQF is expected to deepen the coherence with the 2017–18 reforms of the education quality assurance system, enhance transparency and evidence-based decision-making on the NQF implementation, and support inclusion of quality-assured qualifications for lifelong learning awarded outside of the formal education sector.

### Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The National Centre for Education Quality Enhancement (NCEQE)<sup>285</sup> manages the NQF. Its functions include implementing quality assurance measures; maintaining the register of occupational standards and register of accredited programmes, and facilitating social partner engagement, such as in the development of occupational standards.

The Ministry of Education and Science defines policy, oversees validation arrangements, authorises the establishment of VET providers, and oversees the recognition of vocational education received in a foreign country.

Sector councils identify particular components of vocational qualifications, modules and need for development of frameworks/modules of vocational standards; they submit relevant proposals to the NCEQE. To date, 11 sector councils have been established in fields including humanities; business, administration and law; engineering; industry, food processing; construction, engineering; information and communication technologies; agriculture, forestry, fishing, veterinary; and healthcare and social care. Each council is composed of seven to nine members. Social partners are represented.

In 2017 and 2018, the debates to improve governance of the new NQF led to the proposal of creating a new consultative NQF body, composed of varied stakeholders: the NQF Advisory Board. The mission and full set of functions of this advisory board are defined in the new draft subordinate act on NQF governance and monitoring, as follows:

- a. review strategic directions of the NQF development, elaborate proposals on the amendments to be made and provide recommendations to the director for approval;
- b. review the draft action plan for the NQF implementation of its correspondence with the strategic directions of development, elaborate proposals for the changes to be made and provide recommendations to the director for approval;

<sup>285</sup> <https://eqe.ge/eng>



- c. review the performance report of the annual action plan, elaborate proposals for the next action plan and provide recommendations to the director to consider them;
- d. review the results of periodic, comprehensive monitoring and the draft of a roadmap of further development and implementation of the NQF, elaborate proposals for amendment and provide recommendations to the director for approval;
- e. review other issues related to the NQF development and elaborate relevant proposals.

Once this subordinate act is approved, the NCEQE and the new NQF Advisory Board will work together to further develop the NQF structure and content, develop learning outcomes-based programmes and respective qualifications, transparent inclusion of qualifications into the NQF, defining the format of the electronic qualifications register, and disseminating information for key stakeholders, users and the wider public.

The NCEQE was established as a legal entity of public law by Ministerial Order No 89/5 of 14 September 2010 to support the promotion of educational quality assurance and improvement. It has independent management of its functional organisation, staffing and human resources development, and budget.

The NCEQE performs its activities on the principles of transparency and publicity. Its activities can be grouped in three main components: (a) quality assurance of educational programmes and institutions; (b) support to quality improvement to educational institutions via information and advice; and (c) qualifications development and improvement. Furthermore, the NCEQE hosts the Georgian ENIC-NARIC centre and recognises foreign qualifications. The ministry supervises the NCEQE's activities in accordance with the procedure envisaged by the Law of Georgia on Legal Entities of Public Law. Since 2013, the NCEQE has the status of affiliated member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)<sup>286</sup>.

The governance of the NQF, as a key policy instrument for transparency of qualifications and facilitation of recognition and mobility, is a matter for further debate and development. The new phase of the Georgian NQF opens new opportunities to include qualifications of different types beyond those from formal education, to promote closer links between education and the market demands, and to be better used by all stakeholder groups.

These perspectives will require more participative governance and decision-making, and more active dissemination and information among stakeholders.

The NCEQE's Strategy Document 2016–20 takes account of lessons from the activities carried out in 2013–16 and responds to international experts' reviews, notably those conducted in the framework of the NCEQE's application for full membership of the ENQA, as well as in the framework of cooperation with the European Framework for Quality Management<sup>287</sup>. This strategy defines key strategic landmarks for organisational development, indispensable to respond to challenges, raise effectiveness, service quality, customer satisfaction, sustainability and reliability as an institution. The strategy aims to:

1. improve organisational management systems and build capacity of the NCEQE, strengthen its institutional independence according to state policy, government priorities and international standards;
2. develop outcomes-oriented quality assurance systems for educational institutions and programmes and improve relevant services;
3. improve services to support educational institutions;
4. implement the principle of lifelong learning in qualification systems, using best international practice to optimise and improve education recognition services;
5. raise awareness about Georgia in the European higher education area and support internationalisation of education.

### **Resources and funding**

The state budget is the main source of funding of the past and ongoing activities related with NQF operations – coordination, steering and decision making, – exercised chiefly by the NCEQE.

The development of the new NQF has benefited from some support from international partners, who contributed since 2017 to the debate on the new NQF, through knowledge sharing and analysis. The European Training Foundation has been the major partner of the NCEQE since 2017, supporting the review of the drafts of the new NQF legal base, the development of concept and policy notes and draft subordinate acts, the basis of the register of qualifications and of the NQF handbook.

From 2019 a new EU twinning project will support the NCEQE in further developing the key elements of the quality assurance framework of education (all

<sup>286</sup> [www.enqa.eu/index.php/enqa-agencies/affiliates/](http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/enqa-agencies/affiliates/)

<sup>287</sup> [www.efqm.org/](http://www.efqm.org/)

sub-sectors) and the new NQF. This cooperation will focus on reviewing the legal and regulatory base of quality assurance and the NQF, methodology packages, reinforce capacity, and develop the conceptual and technical specifications of the new NQF online register and portal.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

In 2005, Georgia joined the Bologna Process and took the responsibility to harmonise its educational system with the European higher education area and to implement a higher education quality assurance system. In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Science established a quality assurance agency – the National Centre for Educational Accreditation (Order N222), – which was authorised to conduct institutional accreditation of higher education institutions of Georgia. The system was reformed in 2010 to strengthen the role of external quality assurance and extend the mandate of the quality assurance body.

In this regard, the Law on Educational Quality Enhancement was introduced. By this law, an independent quality assurance body – the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), – was established in 2010 as a legal successor of the National Centre for Educational Accreditation. The core functions of the NCEQE are as follows: implementation of external quality assurance mechanisms of all educational institutions (higher education institutions, vocational education institutions and general education institutions) operating in the country, at both institutional and programme levels; development of the NQF; and recognition of foreign education.

In order to implement and develop external quality assurance mechanisms for higher education institutions, the NCEQE continuously works on the development of the education quality concept, creates and maintains up-to-date quality assurance standards and procedures, and ensures relevant mechanisms for their proper implementation. In this regard, several external reviews of the agency's activities and the external quality assurance mechanisms have been conducted by international peers. The recommendations of the reviews have been considered for the development of the quality assurance system.

Currently, two main external quality assurance mechanisms – authorisation of educational institutions and accreditation of educational programmes – are in place.

The authorisation of higher education institutions is obligatory to be allowed to carry out educational activities and to issue a diploma that is

recognised by the state. The procedure identifies the compatibility of educational institutions with authorisation standards. The term of the authorisation is six years after which the higher education institutions are obliged to go through the re-authorisation procedure to continue their activities.

The accreditation of educational programmes determines the compatibility of educational programmes with accreditation standards. Programme accreditation is mandatory only for doctoral programmes and programmes of regulated professions (medicine, law, teacher education, veterinary, and maritime). However, due to the fact that state funding goes only to accredited programmes, 98% (1 950 accredited programmes) of all academic programmes are accredited.

To ensure the continuous development of education quality and the consideration of the external evaluation results by the higher education institutions, the NCEQE carries out follow-up monitoring procedures for both educational institutions and educational programmes. Furthermore, the NCEQE supports the development of internal quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions through providing various capacity building activities, including provision of guidelines, consultations and workshops.

In 2015–17, the NCEQE revised the system of higher education quality assurance to strengthen the development-oriented and outcome-based function of quality assurance and to ensure its compliance with the requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). Specifically, the quality assurance standards and procedures were revised; a formal procedure of complaints and appeals was introduced; students, employer representatives and international experts were involved in the review panels; and evaluation reports became publicly available.

In order to foster the proper implementation of the revised quality assurance system, the NCEQE carried out pilot evaluations of higher education institutions, provided capacity-building activities to higher education institutions and experts, and developed review process guidelines. A special programme under the project 'Study in Georgia' has been designed to support the above-mentioned activities.

In 2018, the NCEQE started the system-wide implementation of the revised quality assurance standards and procedures at higher education institutions. The key elements of the revised and

reinforced quality assurance framework in VET are listed below.

- The main objective of quality assurance reform in VET is to revise authorisation standards and procedures to bring them in compliance with EQAVET principles and consider context of modular, competence-based teaching and assessment approaches including dual education principles.
- New draft authorisation standards are mainly based on EQAVET principles.
- The agreed changes in VET quality assurance will include:
  - o The new draft quality assurance standards, besides programmes, material and human resources, will consider some important issues as strategic planning and development, student services, information resources and financial stability of an institution.
  - o New procedures will introduce institution's 'partial compliance to the standards' assessment, which will enable institutions to work on further development without losing an authorisation.
  - o New requirements to institutions' self-assessment will be introduced, which will enable the NCEQE to observe institutions' progress between self-assessment periods.
  - o Verification of student assessments will be introduced as an additional quality assurance mechanism.
- Milestones for development of VET quality assurance are:
  - o New standards and procedures will enter into the force after adoption of the new VET Law by the Parliament by 2019.
  - o New self-assessment process piloting will take place in 2019 and self-assessment reporting for TVET providers will be mandatory in 2020.
  - o Assessment verification was under piloting in 2018. In 2019 the piloting will cover most of providers and in 2020 it will become official quality assurance mechanism.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Georgian legislation uses the term 'informal education' for both non-formal and informal learning. The new VET Law defines informal education in its Article 3: 'Informal education – a part of a lifelong learning system that implies acquisition of "knowledge and understanding" and/or "skills" and/or "responsibility and autonomy" beyond formal

education.' The new VET Law (2018) establishes a clear link between the development of the NQF and the creation of validation mechanisms of non-formal learning (Article 2). The amended Law of Georgia on the Development of Quality of Education acknowledges the recognition of informal learning as a key objective of the new NQF, while the new VET Law (2018) gives high priority to lifelong learning (training and retraining for better employability).

In 2018 a policy proposal was drafted on the recognition of non-formal education, to pave the way for further development of a legal base to quality-assure programmes and providers in this domain, and include such qualifications in the NQF.

A decree by the Minister of Education and Science #8/n of 3 February 2011 on 'Approving the Conditions and Procedures for Recognising Non-formal and Informal Vocational Education' sets out framework regulations with regards to the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Georgia. The decree allows for recognition of vocational education at levels 1–3, defines the bodies responsible for recognising informal/non-formal education and describes the framework for recognition and formation of validation/examination committees. The decree delegates the definition of exact procedures and rules for validation of evidence (work experience, prior non-formal qualification) and assessment of competences to bodies responsible for recognition (VET institutions that deliver respective formal education).

The concept paper on the validation of non-formal and informal learning developed in 2013, and revised in 2016, a draft guide to recognition and amendments to the decree and two pilots (in information technology and agriculture) were launched. The United Nations Development Programme and MCA project (USA) supports Georgia in improving the regulatory framework and the pilot implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In practical terms, the validation (recognition) of non-formal education in Georgia is currently possible and carried out at general and vocational education levels.

### General education

A citizen having acquired general education independently may receive a state document verifying general education through so called 'externat' rule. This means that any person can apply to relevant authorised body for taking school-leaving examinations and gain qualification.

## Vocational education

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved by non-formal learning is available at the following levels:

- for vocational education qualifications – NQF levels 3–5;
- for vocational training/re-training qualifications – NQF levels 2–5.

It should be noted that, according to Georgian legislation, definition of non-formal learning implies informal learning as well.

In further discussing and developing non-formal learning validation, the following issues are important:

- possibilities of validation of non-formal education in Georgia;
- bodies authorised to carry out the different phases of validation;
- interconnections and specific features of the phases of validation;
- outcomes of validation and link to the NQF.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

All VET qualifications together with occupational standards and educational standards in formal education are placed on [www.vet.ge](http://www.vet.ge) and [www.eqe.ge](http://www.eqe.ge). These registers are for public use. As of December 2018, the total number of approved quality-assured modular VET programmes (qualifications) included in the register is 97, in 62 sectors and 3 NQF levels (3, 4 and 5).

As of November 2017, the total number of higher education programmes (qualifications) included in the NCEQE register is 1 940, in 12 sectors and all relevant levels. The large majority are in the three cycles (Bachelor, Master, Doctoral). This register is not open for public use.

The concept for the new common digital qualifications register was developed in 2018 and will be followed by a new IT system and platform open for users. The concept defines the common structure for any qualification to be inserted in the register, which is fully in line with Annex 6 of the EQF Recommendation (revised in 2017). Different compulsory and elective fields are defined for qualifications of different sub-systems, but the common information for all qualifications is as follows:

1. Name of the programme
2. Title of the qualification

3. Field of study (ISCED-F 2013)
4. Country code (ISO standard, only in English form)
5. Level of the qualification (NQF level)
6. Description of the qualification
  - 6.1 Learning outcomes: knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy, or
  - 6.2 Open text field, describing what the learner is expected to know, understand and able to do upon completion of the educational process
7. Name, address and web address of the awarding institution
8. Credits (ECTS or ECVET)
9. Internal quality assurance processes (not mandatory)
10. External quality assurance: agency ensuring quality assurance; address, web address
11. Date of authorisation/accreditation and validity terms
12. Additional information about the qualification
13. Source of additional information
14. Qualification URL
15. Access and entry requirements
16. Ways to acquire the qualification
17. Opportunities for pursuing studies
18. Terms of validity
19. Qualification-relevant fields of employment: according to ISCO-08 for vocational education, training and re-training qualifications.

Information about individual qualifications should be entered in the Electronic Register of the NQF on the basis of the external quality assurance procedures, defined by legislation and after acquiring authorisation to grant a specific qualification by an educational institution or another legal person. Inclusion of a qualification in the NQF is automatically reflected in the Qualifications Electronic Registry. The procedure of registering qualifications in the Qualifications Register is determined by the Ministerial Order on governance and monitoring of the NQF. The NCEQE is responsible for registering all quality-assured qualifications. The register will be bilingual (Georgian and English).

### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

A new subordinate act supporting the implementation of the NQF was to be approved in 2018; it defines the modes of governing and monitoring the NQF. The new NQF monitoring will comprise two complementary dimensions: ongoing, annual monitoring; and periodic, comprehensive monitoring.

The *ongoing monitoring* aims to support good implementation of tasks defined in the NQF annual action plan. It will also include the evaluation of

activities performed according to assessment criteria.

The *periodic, comprehensive monitoring* will support further NQF development and will be carried out every four to five years. A specially formed group will plan and coordinate the activities and analysis. The plan for further NQF development is based on the results and conclusions of comprehensive monitoring. Indicative questions for comprehensive monitoring:

- To what extent does the level descriptor correspond to requirements of educational and employment spheres?
- Do NQF levels correspond to the wide variety of qualifications in the country?
- Is it necessary to introduce new types of qualifications?
- To what extent are the qualifications defined by legislation compatible with the country's requirements?

### Impact for end-users

The NQF is an important driver of the learning outcomes approach for all sub-sectors of education and training, and it is increasingly acting as a linkage between formal and non-formal education and training and between the sub-sectors of the formal education system. The experience of NQF implementation has also contributed to interconnecting quality assurance and inclusion of qualifications in the NQF, and to identifying areas of difficult permeability in the education and training continuum.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Georgia has participated in the Bologna Process since 2005, but has not yet presented a self-certification report. The structure and level descriptors of the new NQF are fully aligned with the EQF and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area. The new EQF Recommendation, adopted in May 2017, provides for comparison of third-country NQFs with the EQF. The EQF advisory group, which steers implementation of the recommendation, shall agree criteria and procedures for this comparison. Georgia is more advanced than other European Neighbourhood countries in readiness to link or benchmark its NQF in this way.

## Important lessons and future plans

In 2017–18, the NQF regained a new impetus as the NCEQE and the Ministry of Education led the debate and stakeholders consultation on the new NQF and its implementation mechanisms.

The 2010 NQF<sup>288</sup> is undergoing a substantial reform in conceptual and structural terms. In 2018, the legislator was expected to adopt the NQF-related amendments to the Law of Georgia on the Development of Quality of Education<sup>289</sup>. The NCEQE management recognises that implementation of the revised NQF legislation will require effective planning of key steps; coherence and coordination with the quality assurance reforms; as well as improved capacity at the NCEQE (human resources, instruments and information) to ascertain that the NQF stimulates the transparency of qualifications, permeability and the necessary interaction between qualifications and the world of work (demand for skills and qualifications).

The governance of the NQF, as a key policy instrument for the transparency of qualifications and facilitation of recognition and mobility, is a matter for further debate and development. These perspectives will require more participative governance and decision-making, and more active dissemination and information among stakeholders.

The NCEQE coordinates the activity of the sector councils, which need further support and reorganisation to strengthen their capacity to deliver the expected contribution for high quality programmes and qualifications. The future legal status and sustainability of these councils is yet to be decided.

The NCEQE prepares the new quality assurance rules and procedures, and is responsible for the adequate implementation of accreditation and authorisation processes with participation of the relevant actors (experts' teams and decision-making councils). But effective implementation of the new and revised procedures is challenging, as it requires enhanced capacity at the NCEQE, efficient procedures, improved information and support documentation (handbooks and methodological support) for the stakeholders and practitioners; and the establishment of monitoring instruments to gather feedback and data necessary for the review and recalibration of the new quality assurance mechanisms.

The reforms of quality assurance and the NQF have commonalities, as both concern the entire system of education and training, and express the country's determination to improve the compatibility with similar developments in the EU and beyond.

<sup>288</sup> The key legal acts of the NQF 2010, now being reformed, are accessible at: <http://eqe.ge/eng/static/125/education-system/national-qualifications-framework>

<sup>289</sup> Current (not yet amended) version of the law available at: <http://eqe.gov.ge/res/docs/2014120816015474706.pdf>

The NCEQE is the key implementing body of education quality assurance and the NQF, and its resources (human, technical), organisation and leadership will be under pressure to deliver the expected improvements in processes and outcomes.

The NCEQE is called to join and cooperate with a range of international developments related to

the recognition of qualifications, driven by the digital revolution (credentials from online courses and programmes) as well as by mass movement of people (migrants and refugees), such as the recognition of qualifications of refugees without documented qualifications. Some of these issues will be discussed/developed in the frame of the upcoming EU twinning project (from 2019).

<b>Abbreviations</b>			
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system	ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training	ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
ENIC	European Network of Information Centres	NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centres
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	NCEQE	National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training	NEETs	(young people) not in employment, education or training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework	NQF	national qualifications framework
		SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
		VET	vocational education and training

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# GERMANY

## Introduction and context

Germany has one of the highest employment rates for recent graduates in the EU. Employment of recent vocational education and training (VET) graduates reached 91.3 % in 2017 and 93.0% for highly qualified individuals (ISCED levels 5–8) in 2017). Participation in early childhood education and care, tertiary education attainment and participation of adults in lifelong learning have increased in recent years, but the last two indicators remain below EU average levels. Despite this high employability rate and a long tradition, participation in VET slightly decreased to 46% in 2016, now below the EU average of 49%. The proportion of 15 year olds underachieving in reading and science has increased (fallen in maths) in 2017 compared to 2014, though still below the EU average. Early leaving from school (10.1 % in 2017) is close to the EU target and slightly below the EU average. Socioeconomic background has a strong impact on educational outcomes; integration of high numbers of recently arrived refugees – many being young and poorly qualified – has been a major challenge. The Integration Act of 2016 aims to aid refugee access to work, vocational training and university education (European Commission, 2018).

Germany has an eight-level national qualifications framework (NQF) for lifelong learning based on learning outcomes (German qualifications framework for lifelong learning (*Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen* (DQR)). The framework is fully operational. It was given official status in May 2013 by the joint resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers for Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the conference of Ministers for Economics of the Länder and the Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy<sup>290</sup>. This resolution was the basis for administrative regulations such as

indicating NQF/EQF levels on certificates and diplomas. The DQR manual was drafted in 2013 to support inclusion of qualifications<sup>291</sup>. Initially, the DQR included most VET and higher education qualifications, but inclusion of qualifications from general education was postponed for a later stage. Following subsequent discussions, general education qualifications and most of those from regulated further training have been assigned to DQR levels and included in the DQR database<sup>292</sup>. The upper secondary general education school leaving certificate (*Allgemeine Hochschulreife*) was allocated to DQR/EQF level 4. Qualifications from the non-formal sector have not yet been allocated to the framework, but the possibility of developing suitable procedures for the non-formal sector is currently being discussed.

The DQR is the result of lengthy development work which started in 2006, when the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers for Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (Kultursministerkonferenz (KMK)) agreed to work together on it in response to the emerging European qualifications framework. Following extensive preparatory work, a proposal for a German NQF was published in February 2009. The development and implementation of the DQR has been a widely supported initiative in which social partners and business organisations have played a fundamental role through the German qualifications framework working group (*Arbeitskreis DQR*).

The DQR was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in 2012.

<sup>290</sup> Joint resolution on the German qualifications framework for lifelong learning: [www.bmbf.de/files/Gemeinsamer\\_Beschluss\\_final\\_ohne\\_Unterschriften.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/files/Gemeinsamer_Beschluss_final_ohne_Unterschriften.pdf)

<sup>291</sup> *Handbuch zum Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen [Manual for the German qualifications framework]*. [www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2013/130823\\_Handbuch\\_mit\\_nicht-barrierefreier\\_Anlage\\_MAM.pdf](http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2013/130823_Handbuch_mit_nicht-barrierefreier_Anlage_MAM.pdf)

<sup>292</sup> Available at: [www.dqr.de/content/2316.php](http://www.dqr.de/content/2316.php)

## Policy objectives

Germany has actively supported the EQF initiative from the start and the extensive effort put into developing the DQR reflects this. The DQR focus on learning outcomes is seen as a catalyst for strengthening the coherence and overall permeability (*Durchlässigkeit*) of German education and training (Büchter et al., 2012), linking and integrating various subsystems and improving progression possibilities. Learners should be allowed to move between levels and institutions according to their knowledge, skills and competences, and be less restrained by formal, institutional barriers.

The objectives of the DQR are the following<sup>293</sup>:

- a. increase transparency in German qualifications and aid their recognition elsewhere in Europe;
- b. support learner and employee mobility between Germany and other European countries and within Germany;
- c. improve visibility of equivalence and differences between qualifications and promote permeability;
- d. promote reliability, transfer opportunities and quality assurance;
- e. increase skills orientation of qualifications;
- f. reinforce learning outcomes orientation of qualification processes;
- g. improve opportunities for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- h. encourage and improve access to, and participation in, lifelong learning.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

An eight-level structure has been adopted to cover all main types of German qualifications.

Level descriptors describe the competences required to obtain a qualification. The overall structure is guided by the established German terminological and conceptual approach, referring to the ability to act (*Handlungskompetenz*) (BMBF and KMK, 2013; Gehmlich, 2009). The DQR differentiates between two categories of competence: professional and personal. The term competence lies at the heart of the DQR and signals readiness to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and methodological competences in work or study situations and for occupational and personal development. Competence is understood in this sense as comprehensive action competence (Table 25). Methodological competence is understood as a transversal competence and is not separately stated in the DQR matrix. The DQR expresses only selected characteristics; the comprehensive and integrated notion of competence, underlying the DQR, has a strong humanistic and educational dimension<sup>294</sup>.

Descriptors are partly expressed as alternatives, such as 'field of study or work' and 'specialised field of study or field of occupational activity'. The broad and inclusive nature of level descriptors, using parallel formulations if necessary, makes it possible to open up all levels to different kinds of qualification; higher levels are not restricted to qualifications awarded within the Bologna process.

**Table 25. Level descriptors in the German qualifications framework for lifelong learning**

LEVEL INDICATORS*			
STRUCTURE OF REQUIREMENTS			
PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE		PERSONAL COMPETENCE	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Autonomy
Depth and breadth	Instrumental and systemic skills, judgment	Team/leadership skills, involvement and communication	Autonomous responsibility/responsibility, reflectiveness and learning competence

(\*) This is just an analytical differentiation; the interdependence between different aspects of competence is emphasised (DQR, 2011, p. 5).

Source: *The German qualifications framework for lifelong learning* (DQR, 2011).

<sup>293</sup> *German EQF referencing report* (BMBF and KMK, 2013). [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eaceqf/files/German\\_EQF\\_Referencing\\_Report.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eaceqf/files/German_EQF_Referencing_Report.pdf)

<sup>294</sup> The ability to act (*Handlungskompetenz*) in vocational school curricula is not restricted to the world of work, but implies individual ability and readiness to act adequately socially and be individually responsible.



The table of level descriptors (DQR matrix) and a glossary are included in the DQR outline.

Each reference level maps comparable/equivalent rather than homogeneous, qualifications. One key principle of DQR is that ‘alignment takes place in accordance with the principle that each qualification level should always be accessible via various educational pathways’ (DQR, 2011, p. 6).

Orientation to learning outcomes is increasingly becoming standard in education, vocational training and higher education (BMBF and KMK, 2013, p. 96). All subsystems of education and training have taken important steps since 2009, though to varying degrees (Cedefop, 2016).

In VET, continuous development of the ‘ability to act’ concept (*Handlungskompetenz*), introduced in the 1990s, has gradually assumed a key role in qualifications definition, with clear input requirements about place, duration and content of learning in formalised learning programmes. The input-based governance approach in VET remains (Gössling, 2016). Competence-based training regulations and framework curricula structured in ‘learning fields’ have been developed. In recent years, digital skills have been strengthened in VET in cooperation with companies, chambers and universities (BMBF, 2018).

Competence orientation is also characteristic of reform in general education and development of national educational standards (*Bildungsstandards*). These currently exist for German and mathematics in primary education; for German, mathematics and first foreign language (English/French) for the secondary general school certificate (*Hauptschule*); for German, mathematics, foreign language (English/French), biology, chemistry and physics for the intermediate leaving certificate (*Realschule*); and for German, mathematics and first foreign language (English/French) for the general higher education entrance qualification at the end of grade 12/13 (*Allgemeine Hochschulreife, Abitur*) (BMBF and KMK, 2013, p. 99). Using the educational standards, a pool of *Abitur* examination tasks in the subjects of German, mathematics and advanced foreign languages - common for all *Länder* - has been established to guarantee the comparability and high quality of *Abitur* examinations. Curricula have been reformed to reflect educational standards and subject-specific requirements for the *Allgemeine Hochschulreife* since the beginning of 2014/15 and apply for the *Abitur* examinations as of the 2016/17 school year (KMK, 2017).

In higher education, the implementation of a learning outcomes orientation was strengthened

through the Bologna process, in general, and through the NEXUS project and the Quality Pact for teaching, among others.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Development and implementation of the DQR is characterised by a bottom-up and consensus-seeking approach (Klenk, 2013). A national steering group (*Bund-Länder-Koordinierungsgruppe*) was jointly established by the BMBF and the KMK at the beginning of 2007. This coordination group appointed a working group (*Arbeitskreis DQR*) which comprises stakeholders from higher education, school education, VET, social partners, public institutions from education and the labour market, as well as researchers and practitioners. Decisions are based on consensus and each of the members works closely with their respective constituent institutions and organisations.

The body in charge of implementation is the coordination point for the German qualifications framework (*Bund-Länder Koordinierungsstelle (B-LKS)*), set up by a joint initiative of the federal government and the *Länder*. This body, which emerged from the former *Bund-Länder-Koordinierungsgruppe*, also assumes the function of the national coordination point for the EQF. It has six members, including representatives from BMBF, the Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy, the KMK and the Conference of Ministers for Economics of the *Länder*. Its main role is to monitor allocation of qualifications to ensure consistency in the overall DQR structure.

The work of the B-LKS is supported by the appropriate units of the BMBF and the Secretariat of the KMK. The units collaborate in performing their tasks.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning pathways<sup>295</sup>

Implementation of DQR, with its focus on learning outcomes, has also strengthened work on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Various arrangements permit full or partial recognition of informally or non-formally acquired competences. Validation of non-formal and informal

<sup>295</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

learning occurs in all education sectors but with different, tailor-made approaches using various instruments. Such validation also supports the transition from one education sector to another.

Legislation for validation of non-formal and informal learning is in place in VET. This includes the external students' examination (*Externenprüfung*) under Paragraph 45(2) of the Vocational training Act<sup>296</sup> and Paragraph 37(2) of the Crafts code. These arrangements lead to award of a full qualification (equal to those formally acquired) in a recognised apprenticeship. Admission to the external students' examination is subject to specific employment requirements: this is usually 1.5 times the length of the formal programme or equally long periods of initial training in another training occupation; applicants may also convincingly demonstrate that they have acquired vocational competence.

Similar to the external students' examination within initial VET, admission to further training examinations in the context of qualifications such as *Industriemeister* (industrial master) and *Handwerksmeister* (master craftsman) is also possible via validation. This means that access to the examination is granted by work experience only. Preparatory training for this examination is not compulsory. General education school leaving certificates can be also acquired through an external examination (*Schulfremdenprüfung, Externenprüfung*) in all Länder, fulfilling the residence and minimum age requirements as well as evidence of appropriate examination preparation.

The Vocational Qualifications Recognition Act (BQFG), introduced in April 2012, provides individuals with the right to have their foreign-acquired qualifications matched to a German qualification by an appropriate authority. This act also includes, in Paragraph 14, other procedures for determining equivalence when no proof of prior learning can be provided; this opens opportunities for validation of non-formal and informal learning. The act applies to initial vocational education and training (IVET) as well as further vocational education and training (CVET). The implementation and impact of the BQFG are evaluated regularly<sup>297</sup>. The *Qualifikationsanalyse* (qualification analysis) instrument was developed to support practical implementation. This has developed methodological

standards and tools for validating professional knowledge, skills and competences.

The instrument has been further developed in the *ValiKom* project<sup>298</sup> from 2015 and implemented for different target groups. *ValiKom* is a reference project to set up a validation system in Germany, addressing adults who acquired skills and competences through work but lack a formal qualification and a certificate. The development of procedure is based on standards for assessing the equivalence of non-formally/informally acquired skills with reference to formal qualifications and 'reference occupation' (recognised training or further training qualifications). It addresses not only low-skilled adults working in Germany but also employees from a variety of backgrounds who wish to access further training. At the end of 2018, BMBF started *ValiKom-Transfer* involving up to 30 chambers and opening the validation process to more occupations. Using the results of this new initiative, possibilities of embedding the validating procedure in a law will be examined.

Two KMK decisions provide the basis for validation in higher education. The first refers to access to higher education for qualified workers and has been in place since March 2009: those holding certain vocational qualifications, without a proper upper secondary qualification, can be admitted to higher education. The second refers to granting credits for competence acquired at work. According to these decisions, knowledge and skills acquired outside higher education can be recognised up to a maximum of 50% if content and level are equal to the equivalent in formal qualifications. Procedures to credit non-formal and informal learning were developed and tested in the *Transitions from VET to higher education* initiative (*Übergänge von der beruflichen in die hochschulische Bildung (ANKOM)*)<sup>299</sup>.

There are also several other initiatives and research projects on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (BIBB)) has concluded the project Implementation of methods for the validation of non-formal and informal learning – requirements and possible courses of action<sup>300</sup>.

<sup>296</sup> Berufsbildungsgesetz (BBiG). [www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bbig\\_2005/BBiG.pdf](http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bbig_2005/BBiG.pdf)

<sup>297</sup> BMBF (2017). *Bericht zum Anerkennungsgesetz 2017 (Report on the Recognition Act 2017)*. [www.bmbf.de/pub/Bericht\\_zum\\_Anerkennungsgesetz\\_2017.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/Bericht_zum_Anerkennungsgesetz_2017.pdf)

<sup>298</sup> *ValiKom/Valikom-Transfer* project: [www.validierungsverfahren.de](http://www.validierungsverfahren.de)

<sup>299</sup> The ANKOM initiative: <http://ankom.dzhw.eu/beschluesse>

<sup>300</sup> See BIBB (2018).

The German public employment service, in cooperation with Bertelsmann Stiftung, started a large-scale ICT-based assessment project to develop and implement digital tests for the assessment of competences gained at work in the MySKILLS project<sup>301</sup>. So far tests for eight professions have been completed and are available for use within placement processes.

## NQF implementation

The DQR has reached its fully operational status. Key documents and responsibilities for its implementation have been agreed by main stakeholders and published:

- a. the joint resolution of 1 May 2013 paved the way to full operation of the DQR<sup>302</sup>;
- b. a DQR website<sup>303</sup> and a comprehensive database, including all allocated qualifications, are operational<sup>304</sup>;
- c. the DQR manual<sup>305</sup> describes responsibilities, procedures<sup>306</sup>, standards and methods of qualification allocation. A description of the procedure for allocating qualifications from non-formal learning contexts will be added when agreed.

Most qualifications from VET, higher education, general education and from regulated further training have been assigned to DQR levels and included in the DQR database. An important characteristic of DQR is that each qualification level should always be accessible via various education pathways. VET qualifications were allocated from levels 1 to 7. One example is allocation of the bachelor and master craftsman qualification to level 6, which shows that higher DQR levels are open to qualifications from different education sectors and regarded as comparable<sup>307</sup>.

Developing and implementing criteria and procedures to include qualifications from outside formal education and training is an important goal but also challenging, as criteria and procedures need to be agreed by all stakeholders<sup>308</sup>.

The DQR is a non-regulatory framework and its integration into policies of different education sectors is an evolutionary process. First references to the DQR and its categories have already been made in regulatory instruments of the formal sector, as in the new framework curricula for part-time vocational schools (*Berufsschule*) of the *Länder*, VET training regulations have been designed as more competence-oriented since 2015. The DQR has also been a driving force to strengthen further/higher VET and improve its quality<sup>309</sup>. Increasing interest is observed from providers of non-formal qualifications to use the DQR level descriptors when designing qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The DQR is also used in the academic sector within procedures to credit competences acquired in other education sectors.

BMBF, with the Federal Institute for VET (BIBB), social partners and universities, carried out a project exploring the possibilities of joint descriptions of learning outcomes and development of joint curricula based on DQR level 5. Two subprojects analysed the level 5 qualifications 'IT specialist' and 'motor vehicle service technician' in comparison with higher education study programmes. The aim was to aid permeability between VET and higher education in both directions<sup>310</sup>. One of the findings was that the DQR, with its learning outcomes approach, is a helpful basis for joint development of curricula across education sectors. The project showed that, while DQR level 5 can be an important bridge from VET into higher education, more challenges remain in bridging the pathway from higher education into VET.

Implementation of the DQR is a joint process involving a whole range of stakeholders in different parts of education and training and on the labour market; all stakeholders use their channels to communicate the DQR to their target groups. Evidence on the awareness and use of the DQR is growing. An online survey of the Association

<sup>301</sup> [www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/topics/aktuelle-meldungen/2018/maerz/myskills-new-test-makes-professional-knowledge-visible/](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/topics/aktuelle-meldungen/2018/maerz/myskills-new-test-makes-professional-knowledge-visible/)

<sup>302</sup> See the joint resolution on the German qualifications framework for lifelong learning: [www.bmbf.de/files/Gemeinsamer\\_Beschluss\\_final\\_ohne\\_Unterschriften.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/files/Gemeinsamer_Beschluss_final_ohne_Unterschriften.pdf)

<sup>303</sup> DQR website: [www.dqr.de/](http://www.dqr.de/)

<sup>304</sup> DQR database: [www.dqr.de/content/2316.php](http://www.dqr.de/content/2316.php)

<sup>305</sup> BMBF (2013). *Handbuch zum Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen [Manual for the German qualifications framework]*. [www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2013/130823\\_Handbuch\\_mit\\_nicht-barrierefreier\\_Anlage\\_MAM.pdf](http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2013/130823_Handbuch_mit_nicht-barrierefreier_Anlage_MAM.pdf)

<sup>306</sup> See [www.dqr.de/content/2445.php](http://www.dqr.de/content/2445.php)

<sup>307</sup> See [www.bmbf.de/press/3574.php](http://www.bmbf.de/press/3574.php)

<sup>308</sup> European Commission and Cedefop (2018). *Survey on implementation, communication and use of NQF/EQF* [unpublished].

<sup>309</sup> An important milestone was the BIBB Recommendation No 159 of 12.03.2014 on structure and quality assurance of State regulated further VET: [www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/HA159.pdf](http://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/HA159.pdf)

<sup>310</sup> See [www.bibb.de/de/25789.php](http://www.bibb.de/de/25789.php)

of German Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2016<sup>311</sup> revealed that 20% of company representatives had heard about the DQR, 6% more than in 2014. The relevance of the DQR for comparability of qualifications was seen as particularly positive by 51%. Companies use the DQR for various purposes, such as recruiting staff, though less for individual career and personnel development. However, there is a need to inform employers more about the benefits of the DQR. A recent study carried out in Germany on the potential use of the German qualifications framework (Hochschule für angewandtes Management et al., 2016) identifies several areas where the DQR can add value. It can be used to support human resource development (recruitment and development of employees); this applies especially to small and medium-sized enterprises with limited human resource capacity, but will require capacity building and awareness raising.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The joint steering committee set up by the federal government and the *Länder* in 2007 is in charge of referencing. The referencing report was presented in December 2012 (BMBF and KMK, 2013).

Gradually, from January 2014, EQF and DQR levels are featuring on VET certificates, certificate supplements and higher education diploma supplements. Since 2018 there has been work on indicating DQR and EQF levels on general education diplomas (in line with the practice of 16 *Länder*). DQR/EQF levels are also indicated in the qualification database<sup>312</sup>. For example, German master craftsperson certificates have indicated the NQF/EQF level since 2014; like the bachelor degree, they are related to level 6. From an education and training policy perspective, this is considered a milestone<sup>313</sup>. Allocation to level and reference on certificates signal the high value and quality of this qualification. German VET qualifications are placed on nearly all NQF/EQF levels except level 8, with three-year apprenticeships leading to level 4.

<sup>311</sup> Available at: [www.dqr.de/media/content/DIHK\\_Aus\\_und\\_Weiterbildung\\_2016.pdf](http://www.dqr.de/media/content/DIHK_Aus_und_Weiterbildung_2016.pdf)

<sup>312</sup> Available at: [www.dqr.de/content/2316.php#qs-result](http://www.dqr.de/content/2316.php#qs-result)

<sup>313</sup> See the relevant press release of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research: [www.bmbf.de/press/3574.php](http://www.bmbf.de/press/3574.php)

## Important lessons and future plans

Development of the DQR is embedded in a broader context of reforms to strengthen the outcome orientation of German education and training. It is also linked to initiatives to support permeability within VET and between VET and higher education, such as the ANKOM initiative, that involves stakeholders from VET and higher education supporting recognition of learning outcomes.

DQR development is also characterised by a comprehensive vision and coherent set of level descriptors, spanning all levels of education and training. The comprehensive nature of the framework has been strengthened with the inclusion of general education qualifications in 2017, now encompassing all sectors of formal education and training (VET, higher education, general education). Discussions on criteria and procedures to include qualifications awarded outside regulated education and training system are continuing. The comprehensive nature of level descriptors and scope of the framework makes it possible to identify and understand better the similarities and differences between qualifications in different areas of education and training. A permeable system, with better horizontal and vertical progression possibilities, is at the heart of DQR developments, as is parity of esteem between VET and general education and efforts to include non-formal and informal learning.

NQF development and implementation is also characterised by strong and broad involvement of stakeholders from all subsystems of education and training (general education, school and work-based VET, higher education), and from the labour market, ministries and *Länder*. Creating and sustaining mutual understanding and trust between stakeholders from different education sectors is seen as a key condition and a challenge for further implementation of the DQR (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Stakeholders also agree that alignment of qualifications within German education to reference levels of the DQR should not replace the existing system of access. Achieving a DQR reference level does not provide automatic entitlement to access the next level. Achievement of a reference level has also not been considered alongside implications for collective wage bargaining and the Law on Remuneration (DQR, 2011, pp. 5–6).

**Table 26. German national qualifications framework (DQR)**

DQR LEVELS	QUALIFICATIONS	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctorate ( <i>Doktor</i> )	8
7	Master degree ( <i>Master</i> ) Strategic IT professional (certified) ( <i>Strategischer IT Professional (Geprüfter)</i> ) Other further vocational training qualifications according to Vocational Training Act and Handicraft Code (level 7)	7
6	Bachelor degree ( <i>Bachelor</i> ) Commercial specialist (certified) ( <i>Fachkaufmann (Geprüfter)</i> ) Business management specialist (certified) ( <i>Fachwirt (Geprüfter)</i> ) Master craftsman (certified) ( <i>Meister (Geprüfter)</i> ) Operative IT professional (certified) ( <i>Operativer IT Professional (Geprüfter)</i> ) Trade and technical school (State-certified) ( <i>Fachschule (Staatlich Geprüfter)</i> ) Other further vocational training qualifications according to Vocational Training Act and Handicraft Code (level 6)	6
5	IT specialist (certified) ( <i>IT-Spezialist (Zertifizierter)</i> ) Service technician (certified) ( <i>Service-techniker (Geprüfter)</i> ) Other further vocational training qualifications according to Vocational Training Act and Handicraft Code (level 5)	5
4	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate ( <i>Allgemeine Hochschulreife (AHR)</i> ) Qualification entitling holder to study particular subjects at a higher education institution ( <i>Fachgebundene Hochschulreife (FgbHR)</i> ) Qualification entitling holder to study at a university of applied sciences ( <i>Fachhochschulreife (FHR)</i> ) Dual VET (three-year and three-and-a-half-year training courses) Full-time vocational school (regulated under <i>Länder</i> law) ( <i>Berufsfachschule</i> ) Full vocational qualification (full-time vocational school) ( <i>Berufsfachschule</i> )	4
3	General education school leaving certificate after 10 years at <i>Realschule (Mittlerer Schulabschluss)</i> Dual VET (two-year training courses) Full-time vocational school (general education school leaving certificate obtained on completion of grade 10 at <i>Realschule</i> or, under certain circumstances, at other lower secondary school types) ( <i>Mittlerer Schulabschluss (Berufsfachschule)</i> )	3
2	Lower secondary school leaving certificate after 9 years ( <i>Hauptschulabschluss</i> ) Vocational training preparation ( <i>Berufsausbildungsvorbereitung</i> ) Employment agency measures ( <i>Maßnahmen der Arbeitsagentur</i> ) Year of pre-vocational training ( <i>Berufsvorbereitungsjahr</i> ) Introductory training for young people ( <i>Einstiegsqualifizierung</i> ) Basic vocational training ( <i>Berufliche Grundbildung</i> )	2
1	Vocational training preparation ( <i>Berufsausbildungsvorbereitung</i> ) Employment agency measures (vocational preparation schemes) ( <i>Maßnahmen der Arbeitsagentur</i> ) ( <i>Berufsvorbereitende Bildungsmaßnahmen</i> ) Year of pre-vocational training ( <i>Berufsvorbereitungsjahr</i> )	1

Note: The DQR database can be accessed at: [www.dqr.de/content/2316.php](http://www.dqr.de/content/2316.php)

The updated list of qualifications included in the DQR is available at: [www.dqr.de/media/content/2018\\_DQR\\_Liste\\_der\\_zugeordneten\\_Qualifikationen\\_01082018.pdf](http://www.dqr.de/media/content/2018_DQR_Liste_der_zugeordneten_Qualifikationen_01082018.pdf)

Source: German Ministry of Education and Research; EQF national coordination point, 2018.

<b>Abbreviations</b>			
ANKOM	Übergänge von der beruflichen in die hochschulische Bildung (transitions from vocational high school education)	DQR	Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen (German qualifications framework for lifelong learning)
BIBB	Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (Federal Institute for VET)	EQF	European qualifications framework
B-LKS	Bund-Länder Koordinierungsstelle (national coordination point)	IT	information technology
BMBF	Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (Federal Ministry of Education and Research)	KMK	Kultusministerk Konferenz (Standing Conference of the Ministers for Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder)
		NQF	national qualifications framework
		VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

Federal government/*Länder* coordination point – assumes the function of EQF national coordination point.  
DQR website and qualifications database: [www.dqr.de](http://www.dqr.de)  
BMBF and KMK (2013). German EQF referencing report: [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/German\\_EQF\\_Referencing\\_Report.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/German_EQF_Referencing_Report.pdf)

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## Introduction and context

Ghana's National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Qualifications Framework (NTVETQF) came into effect on 3 September 2012 under the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET) Act. The eight-level framework is tailored to the present realities of the Ghanaian education system and labour force. Its qualifications are designed to complement Ghana's existing qualifications while providing the improvements and modernization necessary to take Ghana's education system into the future. The qualifications framework provides space for apprenticeships in the informal sector and is also designed to accommodate recognition of prior learning (RPL).

The education and training currently on offer in Ghana is failing to meet the needs of the country's labour market. The majority of graduates lack the skills required for effective participation in industry. In a recent NUFFIC (the Dutch organization for internationalisation in education) report, a spokesperson for Ghana's Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare reflected that, 'the fact that our educational system continues to pour unskilled, semi-skilled, and unemployable young graduates into a job market with comparably few job opportunities shows there is a need for sober reflection and deeper thoughtfulness on the kind of policy interventions which will be needed to overcome the challenges' (Gondwe and Walenkamp, 2011, p. 41).

The government has responded to these developments and has equipped some technical universities with learning systems that integrate seamlessly into any manufacturing and production setup and cut across various technical fields. These learning systems are equally effective for technicians, engineers, production workers and anyone needing further skills in a variety of areas. Several reforms have also been put into motion, including the new technical and vocational education and training (TVET) governance structure, measures to align all TVET institutions with the Ministry of

Education, and the implementation of the Strategic Plan for TVET Transformation.

The NUFFIC report concludes that 'even if these graduates who enter the labour market were perfectly aligned and suited to the requirements of the labour market, the labour market would still have a problem since 90% of the workforce would still not have passed through the education system at an advanced enough level, or at all, to benefit from improvements' (ibid).

Together with the numerous African heads of state and ministers of education who attended the last meeting of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)<sup>314</sup> in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Ghana expressed the belief that national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) should no longer be reserved for formal qualifications, as is currently the case in most countries in the region, but should also take into account the informal and non-formal means by which many people acquire technical and vocational skills. NTVETQF qualifications are therefore modular or assessed in units of competences; outcome-based; and not restricted to academic attainment.

## Policy objectives

The objectives of the NTVETQF are to:

- bring all occupation-oriented qualifications together under a unified qualifications framework;

<sup>314</sup> Every two or three years, ADEA organizes a major conference on key educational challenges facing African countries. At the 2012 conference in Burkina Faso, which brought together 650 representatives of some 45 countries including four heads of state and 33 ministers of education, participants strongly agreed that the time had come to move away from the traditional dichotomies between post-primary education and TVET, and between TVET and alternative paths to technical and vocational skills development.



- facilitate access to further education and training for individuals in technical and vocational occupations;
- improve product and service quality by ensuring uniform standards of practice in the trades and professions;
- promote access to lifelong learning for all, especially those working in the informal economy.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The NTVETQF is an eight-level NQF for TVET. Levels 1 and 2, covering informal apprenticeships, are the lowest and least demanding, while Level 8 (doctorate in technology) is the highest and most demanding (see [Table 27](#)).

**Table 27. Ghana's national TVET qualifications framework**

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION	STATUS	CERTIFYING INSTITUTION
8	Doctor of Technology	Formal	Universities
7	Master of Technology	Formal	Universities
6	Bachelor of Technology	Formal	Technical universities/Universities
5	Higher National Diploma	Formal	Technical universities/Polytechnics
4	Certificate II	Formal	Ghana Educational Service TVET institutes
3	Certificate I	Formal	Ghana Educational Service TVET institutes
2	Proficiency II	Informal/Non-formal	National vocational training institutes/ Informal trade associations
1	Proficiency I	Informal/Non-formal	National vocational training institutes/ Informal trade associations

Source: COTVET Legislative Instrument LI 2195 (2012)

**Table 28. Level descriptors of Ghana's national TVET qualifications framework**

LEVEL	QUALIFICATIONS	KNOWLEDGE (I.E., ENABLES LEARNERS TO...)	REQUIREMENTS (SKILLS AND ATTITUDES)
1	National Proficiency I		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Basic trade and craft skills and the ability to perform routine and predictable tasks</li> <li>2. Repetitive and familiar tasks</li> <li>3. Close supervision</li> <li>4. Practical and oral tests for qualification</li> </ol>
2	National Proficiency II	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrate basic numeracy, literary and IT skills, e.g. carry out a limited range of simple data processing tasks</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Competence in the handling of hand tools and machinery components</li> <li>2. Performance of varied activities that are routine, predictable and non-complex in nature</li> <li>3. Limited supervision</li> <li>4. Practical and oral tests for qualification</li> </ol>

(Continued)

**Table 28. Level descriptors of Ghana's national TVET qualifications framework (Continued)**

LEVEL	QUALIFICATIONS	KNOWLEDGE (I.E., ENABLES LEARNERS TO...)	REQUIREMENTS (SKILLS AND ATTITUDES)
3	National Certificate 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrate a broad knowledge base incorporating some technical concepts</li> <li>2. Demonstrate knowledge of the theoretical basis of practical skills</li> <li>3. Demonstrate basic numeracy, literacy and IT skills</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A wide range of technical skills</li> <li>2. Skills are applied in a variety of familiar and complex contexts with minimum supervision</li> <li>3. Collaboration with others in a team</li> </ol>
4	National Certificate 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrate specialized knowledge base with substantial depth in area(s) of study</li> <li>2. Analyse and interpret a range of data and be able to determine appropriate and communicate appropriate methods, procedures and outcomes accurately and reliably to deal with a wide range of problems</li> <li>3. Demonstrate numeracy, literacy and IT skills commensurate with this level</li> <li>4. Present results of study accurately and reliably</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Specialized skills pertaining to different tasks in varied contexts</li> <li>2. Wide and specialized technical and/or supervisory skills in different contexts</li> <li>3. The ability to adapt and apply knowledge and skills to specific contexts in a broad range of work activities</li> <li>4. Minimal supervision</li> </ol>
5	Higher National Diploma (HND)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrate considerable theoretical knowledge and solid practical skills in area(s) of study</li> <li>2. Integrate, contextualize and apply knowledge to a range of complex technical or professional activities</li> <li>3. Have a command of planning, analytical, supervisory and management functions under minimal direction</li> <li>4. Display qualities and transferable skills for employment</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A wide range of highly specialized technical and /or management and/r conceptual or creative skills</li> <li>2. Qualities and transferable skills necessary for formal and self-employment</li> <li>3. Some level of organizational ability, resource management and personal responsibility</li> </ol>
6	Bachelor's (professional/ technical)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrate high level of conceptual knowledge in a broad range of complex and changing contexts</li> <li>2. Demonstrate basic research skills</li> <li>3. Undertake tasks involving high-level organizational ability, resource management and personal responsibility</li> <li>4. Demonstrate a significant degree of strategic thinking and judgment</li> <li>5. Have a high level of supervisory and management capabilities</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Application of methods, techniques and modes of practices learned and reviewed, to consolidate, extend and apply knowledge and understanding to initiate and carry out projects</li> <li>2. Promotion of further training, development of existing skills and acquisition of new competences that enable the qualification holder to assume responsibilities within an organization or when self-employed.</li> <li>3. Qualities and transfer of skills necessary for formal and self-employment</li> </ol>

**Table 28. Level descriptors of Ghana's national TVET qualifications framework (Continued)**

LEVEL	QUALIFICATIONS	KNOWLEDGE (I.E., ENABLES LEARNERS TO...)	REQUIREMENTS (SKILLS AND ATTITUDES)
			4. Ability to communicate information in a variety of formats appropriate to both specialist and non-specialist audiences
<b>7</b>	Master's (professional/ technical); technically-oriented research Master's	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have a systematic understanding of knowledge and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights in academic discipline, fields of study or area of professional practice</li> <li>2. Possess a comprehensive understanding of relevant techniques in research or advanced scholarship</li> <li>3. Demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of established research techniques</li> <li>4. Critically evaluate current research, methodologies and advanced scholarship in the discipline and, where appropriate, propose new hypotheses</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The ability to resolve complex issues and make sound judgments in the absence of complex data, and communicate these conclusions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences</li> <li>2. Self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and the ability to act independently in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level</li> <li>3. Ongoing advancement of knowledge and understanding, and development of new skills to a high level</li> <li>4. Promotion of qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment, initiative and personal responsibility; decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations; and the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development</li> </ol>
<b>8</b>	Doctoral degree (professional/ technical)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create new knowledge through research that extends the discipline</li> <li>2. Demonstrate a substantial acquisition of knowledge that is at the forefront of technology or area of professional practice</li> <li>3. Ability to conceptualize, design and implement a project to generate new knowledge, or applications at the forefront of technology or professional practice</li> <li>4. Comprehensive and detailed knowledge and application of research methodology applicable to complex inquiry</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The ability to make informed decisions on complex issues in the area of technology or professional practice, often in the absence of complete data; and the capacity to communicate ideas and conclusions clearly to specialists and non-specialists in the discipline</li> <li>2. Qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable situations</li> </ol>

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET), a semi-autonomous body under the Ministry of Education, is responsible for coordinating and overseeing TVET and skills development across the formal and informal, and public and private sectors. It answers to a 15-member board made up of stakeholders from various sectors, including industry.

Act 718 of 2006, which established COTVET, has been mandated to set up three standing committees to support its activities. The following committees are currently operational:

1. the Industry Training Advisory Committee, which is responsible for national occupational standards development;
2. the National Training Quality Assurance Committee, which is responsible for quality delivery in the TVET sector;
3. the National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Qualifications Framework Committee, which is responsible for overseeing the NTVETQF, taking into account non-formal and informal learning.

Two committees of the board provide additional support:

1. the National Apprenticeship Committee, which is responsible for the preparation of apprenticeship policy to support the national apprenticeship programme;
2. the Skills Development Fund Committee.

COTVET has teamed up with a number of leading employers to develop competency-based training (CBT) programmes. The CBT approach is currently being rolled out on a national scale and has been successfully piloted in three TVET institutions: Accra Polytechnic (HND in Plant Engineering, Level 5); Accra Technical Training Centre (Certificate 2 in Welding and Fabrication, Level 4); and the National Vocational Training Pilot Centre in Accra (Certificate 1 in Electronics, Level 3).

Currently, 64 institutions have been accredited to run CBT programmes across the country.

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Participation from industry stakeholders in creating CBT programmes and in training and assessing students has so far been limited. Many TVET institutions have neither the infrastructure nor the teaching staff they need to deliver CBT programmes, and coordination problems across

the many different ministries implementing the programmes are rife. Partly as a result of these difficulties, the quality of students admitted to CBT programmes is variable at best.

COTVET is making efforts to develop a demand and supply analysis to support the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Ghana.

General education qualifications in Ghana fall within the ambit of the Ministry of Education, whereas tertiary qualifications are coordinated by the National Council on Tertiary Education and the National Accreditation Board, both of which are semi-autonomous organizations overseen by the Ministry of Education. The National Council on Tertiary Education has the financial authority to approve programmes for public universities, while the National Accreditation Board, which was established through the National Accreditation Board Act 744 of 2007, provides quality assurance for programmes in both public and private tertiary institutions.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Within the general education system, transfer from one programme to another remains difficult. By contrast, the recently approved TVET qualifications framework is designed to offer learners who opt for the TVET pathway the possibility of transferring credits and progressing from the lowest to the highest qualification level in all subject areas.

The validation of informal and non-formal learning is a key component of Ghana's lifelong learning strategy. National regulations on RPL have been developed and are in the process of legal formalization. As a first step, the lowest two qualifications, National Proficiency I and II, recognize competences gained from traditional informal apprenticeships, which are an important means of training in Ghana. The new RPL policy will enable informal and non-formal learners to benefit from both formative and summative assessments. Some RPL mechanisms are already in use, such as oral, observation and demonstration-based assessments.

Equivalency programmes that allow non-formal learners to re-enter formal education, leading to a basic certificate in education, are currently permitted only in primary or junior high school (nine years of schooling) (Ministry of Education, 2010). Similarly, recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the TVET sector is currently possible only within national vocational training institutes leading to trade test grades I and II (TVET Final Report, 2007).

The NTVETQF will reform this situation, allowing employees to work towards new qualifications on the job through workplace-based assessments. Employees in industry may choose to work towards specific modules only in order to ensure that their skills keep pace with changes in technology.

## NQF implementation

COTVET and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency are currently working together to introduce demand-oriented, competence-based TVET curricula that will incorporate creative and innovative skills acquired through work and informal learning. It is hoped that these curricula will produce students who are more capable of responding to the practical demands of a wide variety of workplace challenges.

Besides the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, COTVET is working with other development partners, including the World Bank, the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the African Development Bank and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit/KfW Bankengruppe

These partners supported the development of CBT quality assurance manuals and tools to guide its implementation. Other activities implemented under the Ghana Skills and Technology Development Project include:

- retooling and minor renovation of 10 TVET institutes across the country selected through a complete process;
- development of institutional development plans;
- promotion of the Skills Development Fund;
- institutional strengthening of science and technology development at the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation;
- development of a Workplace Experience Learning policy;
- establishment of a TVET guide;
- development of quality assurance and RPL policies.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

ADEA leads the regional referencing of qualifications frameworks in Africa. At the second meeting of the Inter-Country Quality Node on Technical and Vocational Skills Development held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 19 to 21 September 2011, the ministers and representatives of the 20 countries present decided to create thematic groups on the following three topics:

- the transition to work;
- NQFs;
- the role of trade and business associations in the field of technical and vocational skills development.

ADEA held a seminar on NQFs on 8 and 9 July 2013 in Abidjan. The seminar produced a final synthesis of the regional referencing of qualifications frameworks in Africa, which was adopted by all participating countries and submitted to the ministerial meeting of the Inter-Country Quality Node on Technical and Vocational Skills Development in mid-September 2013.

## Important lessons and future plans

The following lessons have been learned over the four-year period that Ghana has been working on the NTVETQF (Baffour-Awuah, 2013).

It is important to hold regular discussions with all stakeholders so that they feel a sense of trust and ownership of the framework. Setting up a comprehensive NQF needs to be done incrementally; although Ghana has so far only initiated a sub-framework in the TVET sector, it is hoped that general education will be integrated into a full framework in the future.

Policymakers need to decide which levels of a qualifications framework are the most important. In a country like Ghana, where approximately 80% of all basic skills and 82% of economic activity are to be found in the informal economy (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012), the focus needs to be on Levels 1 and 2.

When setting up the COTVET committees, it was important to find the right people with the requisite expertise. Committee members must be motivated, and should be well remunerated in order to maintain their motivation.

Obtaining parliamentary approval for the development of the NTVETQF was a vital step that could not have been taken without the commitment of the ministry responsible for TVET. The Minister of Education was instrumental in passing Law LI 2195, which laid the foundation for the framework.

It is essential that governments provide the necessary financial resources to support the establishment and implementation of an NQF. Most of the funding to set up the NTVETQF came from development partners in Ghana, without whose aid COTVET could not have achieved any meaningful results.

**Abbreviations**

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa	NTVETQF	National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Qualifications Framework
CBT	competency-based training	NUFFIC	Dutch Organization for Internationalisation in Education
COTVET	Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training	RPL	recognition of prior learning
NQF	national qualifications framework	TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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## Introduction and context

Greece has one of the lowest percentages of students who leave education and training early in the EU (6.0% in 2017, compared to the 10.6% EU average). However, spending on education is not sufficient as it was severely affected by the crisis. There are disparities in student performance and in the early school leaving rate, linked to socioeconomic background and migrant status. Integration of refugee children in mainstream education has been challenging, especially on the islands where most refugee children still lack access to education, but significant efforts have been made by the Greek government in this respect. The Greek population lacks basic digital skills (46% in 2017) and the country remains in 25<sup>th</sup> position within the EU. While the rate of tertiary attainment at 43.7% in 2017 exceeds the EU average of 39.9%, only 55.8% of recent tertiary graduates have a job, compared to 84.9 % across the EU, and the mismatches between qualifications and positions held in employment are frequent. There is also a strong outflow of highly skilled university graduates.

In order to strengthen the provision of vocational education and training (VET), the apprenticeship system was expanded. Greece introduced an optional fourth apprenticeship year for upper secondary VET graduates, which gives access to EQF level 5 qualifications. Following the 2016 national strategic framework to improve the quality of VET and apprenticeships<sup>315</sup> the apprenticeship year of vocational upper secondary school (*Epagelmatiko Lykeio* – EPAL) was regulated and the quality framework for VET curricula and apprenticeships was set. From October 2017, following an initiative of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs<sup>316</sup>, *A new beginning for EPAL*, basic skills-enhancing measures, socio-psychological support and integration actions were piloted as further support to first grade EPAL students. Nevertheless, ensuring the attractiveness

<sup>315</sup> Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (2016).

<sup>316</sup> Hereafter referred to as ministry of education.

of VET and raising participation in adult learning remained a challenge (European Commission, 2018).

Greece has developed a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) for lifelong learning, the Hellenic qualifications framework (HQF), aiming at a coherent and comprehensive system of qualifications from all parts and levels of education and training. The qualifications framework for higher education is a part of the overarching NQF. The Greek authority responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes (HQAAA)<sup>317</sup>, uses, as evaluation criteria, the learning outcomes approach and expected competences in accordance with the qualifications framework for higher education<sup>318</sup>. In the Greek legal framework, the main types of higher education qualification are connected to NQF levels<sup>319</sup>.

The NQF developments build on the Act on lifelong learning (3879/10)<sup>320</sup>, which introduced levels and the learning outcomes concept as essential elements of qualifications and awards. The act provided the basis for a more coherent and integrated approach to lifelong learning, as coordination of relevant issues is now under the ministry of education. The NQF also forms an integrated part of the overall national qualification system, including links to the relevant legislation in different policy areas, such as the National strategic plan for the improvement of vocational education and training and of apprenticeship, issued in April 2016<sup>321</sup>.

<sup>317</sup> HQAAA portal: [www.adip.gr](http://www.adip.gr)

<sup>318</sup> This is anticipated by Law 3879/2010, Article 16, Paragraph 4, point (d), as supplemented by Article 46 of the present law.

<sup>319</sup> This is mentioned in Article 19 of Law 4521/2018, which connects bachelor degrees to level 6, and in the ministerial decrees on master and doctorate degrees connecting them to level 7 and 8 respectively (Ministerial Decree 3686/2018 and 1127/2018).

<sup>320</sup> Law 3879/2010 on the development of lifelong learning and other provisions. *Official Gazette*, 163A/2010. [www.edulll.gr/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/nomos\\_-3879\\_2010.pdf](http://www.edulll.gr/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/nomos_-3879_2010.pdf)

<sup>321</sup> See Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (2016).

The presidential decree – under development – will further strengthen the legal basis of the NQF. The draft has been submitted to the Minister for Education, Research and Religious Affairs for formal adoption, which is still pending.

## Policy objectives

Apart from responding to the European qualifications framework (EQF) initiative, HQF work is directly linked to the country's efforts to develop a framework for improving lifelong learning policies and practices, which will allow recognition and certification of all kinds of education and training and learning more generally. The aim of HQF is to create a coherent and comprehensive system of classification of all qualifications obtained from formal, non-formal education and informal learning in Greece to aid transparency and comparability of qualifications and promote mobility of learners and workers. This will be done gradually. In the first phase, the objective is the classification of qualifications within the formal education system of the country. At a later stage a classification system will be developed for qualifications acquired through non-formal education and informal learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Compared to other EU countries, participation of adults in lifelong learning in Greece remains low and has tended to stagnate over time: it stood at 4.5% in 2017, compared to an EU average of 10.9% (European Commission, 2018) and systematic and coherent policies have largely been lacking. The 2015 National reform programme<sup>322</sup> recognised that Greece was still in need of a long-term strategic vision for improving access to lifelong learning. Strengthening the learning outcomes dimension in all parts of education and training is considered a precondition for moving towards lifelong learning. This will not only provide the basis for a more transparent and open qualification system, it will also allow individuals to have their learning validated and recognised throughout their lives. The Act on lifelong learning 3879/10 was an important milestone in these developments. Within the context of developing and updating the HQF<sup>323</sup> in

line with recent social and economic developments, the HQF aims to:

- improve transparency of quality procedures for qualifications and qualification titles;
- increase horizontal mobility (within and outside the country), as well as vertical mobility (showing pathways that a person can follow to move from one level to another);
- support lifelong learning.

HQF is a communication and transparency framework, but is also intended to be reforming. In recent years it has become a main level for reforming the Greek education system. For example, the vocational upper secondary school degree of level 5 – post-secondary cycle (one year of apprenticeship class after three years of vocational upper secondary school of level 4) – has been regulated with relevant laws<sup>324</sup>.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

An eight-level structure has been developed for the HQF, reflecting the existing formal education and training system in Greece. Levels are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Work on level descriptors for HQF and on a qualifications framework for higher education has taken place separately, but the final objective is to have a comprehensive framework, covering all levels and types of qualification. HQAAA is responsible for elaborating the qualifications framework for higher education, based on HQF qualification types and level descriptors, developed by the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP). Strengthening the learning outcomes approach is seen as an important dimension of current reforms in primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Following European education policies, since 2006 Greece has developed – by Ministerial Decree 110998<sup>325</sup> – a methodology for analysing occupational profiles (standards) incorporating the learning outcomes approach<sup>326</sup>. This was an early effort to create a methodology for modularising VET curricula and part of a broader strategy aimed at upgrading VET. It was also seen as a precondition for setting up a system for validating informal and

<sup>322</sup> Hellenic Government (2015). *National reform programme (NRP) for 2015*. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file\\_import/nrp2015\\_greece\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrp2015_greece_en_0.pdf)

<sup>323</sup> This section draws on input from a note by the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (the designated national coordination point for EQF): *Latest developments of the Hellenic qualifications framework: response to the EQF advisory group, 2015*. Available online at: [www.esos.gr/arthra/47414/ta-8-epipeda-toy-ethnikoy-plaisioy-prosonton](http://www.esos.gr/arthra/47414/ta-8-epipeda-toy-ethnikoy-plaisioy-prosonton)

<sup>324</sup> These laws are: 4283/2014, 4310/2014, 4521/2018, 4559/2018 and ministerial decrees, for example 26381/2017, 90050/Y2/2018 and F7/15572/d4/2018.

<sup>325</sup> Common Ministerial Decision 110998/2006 on the accreditation of occupational profiles. *Official Gazette*, 566/B of 2.5.2006.

<sup>326</sup> See Mile (2015).



non-formal learning and for accrediting training programmes. The decision was taken to shift from task (used in the past) to function, as it has been argued that function provides a broader perception for the content of the outcomes. Authorities developed 202 job profiles based on learning outcomes; updating and renewing outcomes in occupational profiles is a necessity, according to labour market research, surveys, and evaluation of existing curricula. This is a major task for all stakeholders, most importantly for social partners. The relevant legislative framework is under development.

Working groups were formed under the auspices of the ministry of education to draft learning outcomes of qualifications provided in subsystems of formal education, and to suggest their allocation to the eight levels of the HQF. Reforms in general education and VET were initiated under Law 4186/2013<sup>327</sup> on restructuring secondary education<sup>328</sup>. Higher education qualifications are included in the HQF register and general descriptors of higher education programmes have been developed in cooperation with higher education institutions. Evaluation of higher education institutions has been completed<sup>329</sup> and self-certification against the framework of qualifications of the European higher education area is in progress<sup>330</sup>.

The reforms that were initiated with Law 4186/2013 brought about developments in curriculum reform on the basis of learning outcomes. These developments have intensified over the last two years, starting from the post-secondary year/apprenticeship class. The ministry of education cooperated with the Finnish organisation OMNIA (2016/17) under an EU structural reform support services joint project for the implementation of the national strategic framework for the upgrading of VET and apprenticeship<sup>331</sup> in Greece. One of the project deliverables was the training of counsellors and teachers to reform curricula

<sup>327</sup> Law 4186/2013 stipulates that vocational education and apprenticeship programmes will include clearly formulated learning outcomes and will be analysed in knowledge, skills and competences per subject, field and specialty.

<sup>328</sup> Law 4186/2013 on restructuring of secondary education and other provisions. *Official Gazette*, 193/A, 17.9.2013. [www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/100472/120536/F1637832161/GRC100472%20Grk.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/100472/120536/F1637832161/GRC100472%20Grk.pdf)

<sup>329</sup> In June 2016, HQAAA finished the evaluation of 36 higher education institutions.

<sup>330</sup> Information on internal and external evaluation of higher education institutions can be found at: [www.adip.gr/en/insteval-reports.php](http://www.adip.gr/en/insteval-reports.php)

<sup>331</sup> Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (2016).

based on learning outcomes. In 2017, a ministerial decision on a quality framework for VET curricula was adopted<sup>332</sup>. The content of the decision included the definition of learning outcomes, the connection with occupational profiles, and issues regarding the design of VET curricula. Other ministerial decisions<sup>333, 334</sup> taken were related to the curricula of the apprenticeship classes, based on learning outcomes, the apprenticeship certification scheme<sup>335</sup> and assessment of apprenticeship courses<sup>336</sup>. Currently the development of vocational education curricula (400 subjects) based on learning outcomes is a major task to be undertaken by the Institute for Educational Policy<sup>337</sup>.

The shift to learning outcomes represents a significant change in the Greek system, which, until now, has mainly relied on an 'input' approach. The outcomes-based HQF is expected to support design of outcomes-based qualifications. One anticipated benefit of the HQF is to promote open dialogue and collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders; it will also help clarify and reinforce the relationship between education and training and the labour market.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The ministry of education is the competent authority, responsible for coordinating and monitoring the HQF. The National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) was set up in 2011 to develop and put the HQF into practice, link the HQF to EQF, as well as put the HQF and procedures for validation

<sup>332</sup> Ministerial Decision 26412/2017 on the quality framework of VET curricula. *Official Gazette*, 490B/2017, 20.2.2017. [www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/kyamathiteias.pdf](http://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/kyamathiteias.pdf)

<sup>333</sup> Ministerial Decision Φ2/181534/Δ4. *Official Gazette*, 3820B/2017, 31.10.2017. [www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/01\\_11\\_17epal\\_metalykeiako.pdf](http://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/01_11_17epal_metalykeiako.pdf)

<sup>334</sup> Joint Ministerial Decision 90050/Y2. *Official Gazette*, 2007A/2018, 4.6.2018. [www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2018/KYA\\_PISTOP\\_MATH\\_EPAL.pdf](http://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2018/KYA_PISTOP_MATH_EPAL.pdf)

<sup>335</sup> In this scheme, the process verifies whether the graduate participating in the theoretical and practical part of the exam can answer questions that cover the learning outcomes of the curriculum.

<sup>336</sup> Presidential Decree 40/2018. *Official Gazette*, 76A/2018, 30.4.2018. [www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2018/CE%A0%CE%94\\_40\\_2018\\_%CE%91%CE%BE%CE%B9%CE%BF%CE%BB%CF%8C%CE%B3\\_%CE%9C%CE%B1%CE%B8%CE%B7%CF%84%CF%8E%CE%BD\\_%CE%95%CE%A0%CE%91%CE%9B\\_%CE%9C%CE%B1%CE%B8%CE%B7%CF%84%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%B1%CF%82\\_%CE%A6%CE%95%CE%9A\\_76%CE%91\\_30.04.2018.pdf](http://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2018/CE%A0%CE%94_40_2018_%CE%91%CE%BE%CE%B9%CE%BF%CE%BB%CF%8C%CE%B3_%CE%9C%CE%B1%CE%B8%CE%B7%CF%84%CF%8E%CE%BD_%CE%95%CE%A0%CE%91%CE%9B_%CE%9C%CE%B1%CE%B8%CE%B7%CF%84%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%B1%CF%82_%CE%A6%CE%95%CE%9A_76%CE%91_30.04.2018.pdf)

<sup>337</sup> Institute of Educational Policies: <http://iep.edu.gr/en/>

of learning outcomes into practice and assure quality in lifelong learning. EOPPEP operates as the national coordination point for the EQF and is the awarding body in relation to one qualification type in the framework: vocational training diploma, level 5. EOPPEP cooperates with HQAAA<sup>338</sup> on quality issues in higher education and is the EQAVET national reference point, so there is coordination of the respective activities of the two national points regarding the quality subjects that arise from the implementation of NQF. The work programme of the national coordination point 2018–20 will include an integrated communication strategy developed among EOPPEP and quality assurance agencies such as HQAAA.

An advisory committee, comprising representatives from public administration, the education and academic community, social partners and external consultants, was established to support EOPPEP in developing and implementing the HQF. The members of the advisory committee were appointed by the ministry of education, by social partners, by the National Centre for Public and Local Administration and by Cedefop. Greece is planning to reform the HQF advisory committee, which will be consulted for further development. A new advisory committee will be formalised by the Greek ministry of education. Till then, the main work of HQF's implementation is done by EOPPEP.

An independent administrative authority, the Authority for Quality Assurance in Primary and Secondary Education (ADIPPDE), has been established<sup>339</sup> and is responsible for quality assurance both in general and vocational education. It is fully operational (qualifications at levels 1–4) and is working closely with the ministry of education.

Involvement of social partners is very important for the framework. Their representatives are members of the governing board of EOPPEP, the Central Examination Board for the Certification of Vocational Training (KEEPEK)<sup>340</sup> responsible for the accreditation of post-secondary initial VET (IVET), as well as of the committees for the development of occupational profiles/VET curricula. Social partners also take part in the new National Apprentice Coordination Body (ESOM), an advisory body

<sup>338</sup> [www.adip.gr/en/index.php](http://www.adip.gr/en/index.php)

<sup>339</sup> Law 4142/2013.

<sup>340</sup> KEEPEK consists of members of EOPPEP, representatives of the ministry of education, the Ministry of Labour, the Confederation of Greek Employers (SEB), the Employees' associations (GSEE) and the Greek Chamber of Finance and Commerce. Source: EQAVET national reference point of Greece (2016). *Report on Greece: summer 2016*. [www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-EL\\_final\\_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf](http://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-EL_final_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf)

on apprenticeship issues established by Law of 26 February 2018<sup>341</sup>. ESOM can cooperate with chambers, foundations and research organisations and other bodies to fulfil its purpose.

The National Council of Education (ESYP) has been reformed into the National Council for Education and Human Resources Development (ESEKAAD)<sup>342</sup>, which now includes many representatives closely involved with VET issues. Its mandate has been extended to the overall link between education and the labour market<sup>343</sup>.

A significant number of private education bodies have engaged with EOPPEP and expressed interest in the inclusion of their awards (from formal or non-formal education) in the framework. A dialogue has also started with the Greek recognition and equivalence committees and competent authorities<sup>344</sup> on the role and contribution of the framework to the recognition and equivalence of awarded qualifications.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>345</sup>

There has been slow progress in Greece in developing a framework for validation that can encompass non-formal and informal learning gained through work experience. A national system for the certification of outputs started development in 2016, expected to boost employment, but progress has not been quick. In 2018, this system remains one

<sup>341</sup> ESOM's purpose is to provide the ministry of education and the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity, with suggestions on improving the institutional framework for apprenticeship and designing, implementing and evaluating apprenticeship programmes.

<sup>342</sup> Law 4452/2017, Article 18.

<sup>343</sup> EOPPEP, ESOM and ESEKAAD operate under the supervision of the ministry of education, which is responsible for deciding the type of cooperation among relevant authorities

<sup>344</sup> These are: the Hellenic NARIC (DOATAP) responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications of higher education; the Directorates of Secondary Education, responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications of general education; the Agency of the Technological Educational Institutes, responsible for the recognition of qualifications of tertiary – not higher – education that are no longer awarded; the National Council for the Recognition of Vocational Qualifications (SAEP); and EOPPEP, which acts as the committee for the recognition of foreign and Greek qualifications of secondary and tertiary vocational education and training.

<sup>345</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

of the strategic objectives of EOPPEP. Once it is in place, certification of learning outcomes/outputs will follow criteria and processes that will ensure that the certified learning outcomes will lead to qualifications that correspond to the requirements of the relevant occupational profiles (*Epaggelmatiko perigramma*).

During the past two years, continuing vocational education and training (CVET) has been the policy priority making the biggest progress. A regulatory framework has been developed for the operation of lifelong learning centres (*Kentra dia viou mathisis*), which offer continuous vocational training, general adult education, vocational guidance and lifelong counselling.

According to Law 4186/2013, the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning of the ministry of education is responsible for licencing and monitoring institutes of vocational training (IEK) and EOPPEP is responsible for accreditation of their training programmes, to boost quality assurance and enable progression pathways. During 2018, around 40 IEK programmes were accredited, by decision of EOPPEP's Board of Directors.

Legislative provision for a new type of diploma at level 5 of the HQF and EQF has recently been prepared. This relates to the development of two-year, post-secondary vocational training programmes (*Κέντρα Επαγγελματικής Εκπαίδευσης*)<sup>346</sup> provided by universities, in 10 specialisations as of September 2018. The curriculum will provide specialised knowledge and skills for highly qualified technicians. Access to these programmes is foreseen just for upper secondary school leaving (EPAL) graduates (Cedefop, 2018b). According to Law 4485/2017 and Law 4521/2018, these training programmes lead to level 5 qualifications: they are not described as short cycle HE programmes and their qualification type descriptors have not yet been developed. These programmes will be accredited by higher education directly (the council of each university will submit them to the ministry of education for final approval). The criteria for EPAL graduate enrolment to the programmes will be decided by each council; in addition to the final degree grade, their

<sup>346</sup> This is foreseen by Law 4521/2018, Chapter 2, Article 8, Paragraph 2, according to which higher education institutes may establish two-year vocational training programmes for vocational lyceum (EPAL) graduates. Accreditation will be carried out by the universities, without the involvement of the validation authority (EOPPEP). [www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/document\\_pdf/345552](http://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/document_pdf/345552)

working experience and other social criteria will be considered

An example of validation of non-formal learning in Greece started since 2014, with adult trainers in non-formal learning. These trainers need to have certified educational competence/proficiency to train in non-formal learning programmes funded by public resources<sup>347</sup>. More specifically, enrolment for the examinations means meeting certain criteria regarding educational attainment or proven professional experience. The updated system foresees three pathways:

- a. direct certification of conditions and criteria;
- b. participation in an assessment process, and then certification;
- c. enrolment in training programmes and subsequent certification<sup>348</sup>.

Currently, a sectoral focus is in place for the certification of private security personnel.

Progress has been made on the upskilling pathways recommendation<sup>349</sup> in terms of offering opportunities for basic skills training to low-skilled adults. A memorandum of cooperation is planned to be signed between EOPPEP (the validation authority) and the Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED) which is the Greek public employment service. Stakeholders have come together on occasions during the first half of 2018 to develop their dialogue on upskilling pathways and validation; this dialogue is set to continue during 2019.

On a final note, the apprenticeship year attached to initial VET (*Mathiteia* IEK) has been initiated and a quality framework has been developed<sup>350</sup>.

Although these are significant steps for the country, validation of non-formal and informal learning is not yet as developed in Greece as in other EU countries. Even though informal and non-formal learning is gaining importance, such learning is not adequately valued and recognised in society. A cultural shift

<sup>347</sup> Law 4115/2013.

<sup>348</sup> All the details of the assessment stage are explicitly described and analysed on EOPPEP's website: [www.eoppep.gr/index.php/en/](http://www.eoppep.gr/index.php/en/)

<sup>349</sup> Council of the European Union (2016). Council recommendation of 19 December 2016 on upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 484, 24.12.2016, pp. 1–6. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224(01)&from=EN).

<sup>350</sup> Ministerial Decree 26412/2017. *Official Gazette*, 490B/2017. [www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/ky\\_mathiteias.pdf](http://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/ky_mathiteias.pdf)

would also be required in favour of learning outcomes, to support steps towards recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

## NQF implementation

The ministry of education is responsible for HQF implementation, with EOPPEP as the main actor. The framework is at an early operational stage. A draft presidential decree entitled *Terms of formulation and implementation of the HQF: referencing to the EQF* has been prepared and submitted to the Minister for Education, Research and Religious Affairs to strengthen its legal basis. This is an important step in moving into a full operational stage. The legal framework for the validation of non-formal education and informal learning also need to be finalised and approved.

Inclusion of qualifications in the framework is defined through qualification type specifications. They include title, level, awarding body, summary descriptor, volume of learning, purpose, education sector, learning outcomes, employment relevance, and progression possibilities. Having already developed qualification types, which is a key element in the framework, the country is now placing in each one the individual (named) qualifications expressed in learning outcomes. For example, in level 7 of the HQF, there is the type 'master degree'<sup>351</sup>. EOPPEP has also established a qualifications register<sup>352</sup>, which already includes 724 qualifications of the formal education system expressed in learning outcomes; it is linked to the European Commission's portal on learning opportunities and qualifications<sup>353</sup>. This has been done in cooperation with the respective education institutions. The register has been used as a pilot project to link the learning outcomes of the qualifications to the relevant ESCO pillar<sup>354</sup>.

<sup>351</sup> a. Master degree (MSc) in renewable energy systems (Department of mechanical engineering of the Faculty of applied technology of the Technological Educational Institute of Western Greece); b. Master degree in science and technology of food and human consumption (Department of food science and human nutrition of the Faculty of food, biotechnology and development of the Agricultural University of Athens); c. Master degree in techno-economic management and security of digital systems. Directions: techno-economic management of digital systems/digital systems security. (Department of digital systems of the School of information and communication technologies of the University of Piraeus).

<sup>352</sup> Greek qualification register: <http://proson.eoppep.gr>

<sup>353</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f\[0\]=im\\_field\\_entity\\_type%3A97#](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f[0]=im_field_entity_type%3A97#)

<sup>354</sup> The qualifications pillar is one of the three pillars of ESCO. It aims at collecting existing data on qualifications to provide a comprehensive listing of the qualifications that

HQF (EQF) levels are being indicated on new certificates and diploma supplements, for instance issued by the various higher education institutions<sup>355</sup>; 205 certificate supplements have been issued so far with reference to HQF and EQF levels, mostly for IEK diplomas and EPAL apprenticeship class degrees<sup>356</sup>.

The main challenge preventing the indication of NQF and EQF levels on new certificates is the reluctance of awarding bodies (universities and other higher education institutions) to include this kind of information on their diploma supplements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). In terms of levelling, the qualifications that raise specific challenges are related to level 5. Qualifications from tertiary but not higher education coexist with qualifications in vocational training and this has become a subject of reflection among the interested parties).

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The HQF was referenced to the EQF in 2015 but has not yet been self-certified against the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (Cedefop, 2018a). EOPPEP is the statutory body for the development and implementation of the HQF and the referencing with the EQF, under the supervision of the ministry of education.

## Important lessons and future plans

The HQF is expected to have an important impact on education and training: there has been increased attention to validation of non-formal and informal learning, improvement of the transparency and quality of the Greek qualification system, and reconstruction of the qualifications register in accordance with compatibility requirements of both the EQF portal and ESCO portal. An integrated communication strategy has been designed by the Hellenic EQF national coordination point and has been updated annually to increase the use and visibility of the framework. A creative design has also been produced with infographics to strengthen the identity and branding of the framework.

are relevant to the European labour market. [https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/escopedia/Qualifications\\_pillar](https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/escopedia/Qualifications_pillar)

<sup>355</sup> University diploma supplement (e.g. University of the Peloponnese; diploma for level 6 qualification).

<sup>356</sup> The certificate supplements are available online at: <http://europass.eoppep.gr/index.php/en/certificate-en>

Involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in HQF development and implementation is seen as crucial, but remains a challenge. Other challenges include referencing international sectoral qualifications to the HQF, including non-formal qualifications and the rest of higher education qualifications to HQF levels 6–8, as well as qualifications acquired through programmes run by foreign universities which cooperate with private institutions in Greece. There is a clear division between non-university, mostly private, institutions and the university sector, which is public, charges no fees and offers entrance through national examinations in accordance with the constitution.

An updated evaluation of HQF implementation and its impact in the Greek education system will take place during 2018–20. The conclusions will help the reforms already planned by the ministry of education. The updated roadmap for 2018/19 (EOPPEP, 2016) includes the development of methodology (by EOPPEP) for classifying qualifications (knowledge, skills and competences) acquired through non-formal education in the HQF. Upon EOPPEP’s authorisation, the awarding bodies will gain access to the qualifications register with a view to updating the qualifications they award and

adding new ones. An upgraded version of HQF is expected.

Restructuring of secondary education and upgrade of the apprenticeship system<sup>357</sup> is introducing a learning outcomes approach in curriculum design and development. Although the institutional framework and the building capacity of the public bodies underline a significant shift to a learning outcomes approach in all levels and subsystems of learning, common understanding and application of learning outcomes is not yet established; developing necessary methodologies, procedures and standards remains a major challenge.

The HQF is currently a communicative framework that promotes transparency, but with an important reform role as well; qualifications types defined in learning outcomes require a review of all qualifications in terms of learning outcomes to be included in the qualifications register; further work to modernise internal and external quality assurance systems, as well as validation of non-formal and informal learning, will be needed to enhance the reform role of the framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

**Table 29. Hellenic national qualifications framework (HQF)**

HQF LEVEL	VET	GENERAL EDUCATION	HIGHER EDUCATION	EQF LEVEL
8			Doctorate (Διδακτορικό Δίπλωμα) (Universities)	8
7			Master degree (Μεταπτυχιακό Δίπλωμα Ειδικότητας) (Universities/ technological educational institutes- higher education)	7
6			Bachelor degree (Πτυχίο Ανώτατης Εκπαίδευσης) (Universities/ technological educational institutes- higher education)	6

(Continued)

<sup>357</sup> Law 4186/2013 on restructuring of secondary education and other provisions: [www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/100472/120536/F1637832161/GRC100472%20Grk.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/100472/120536/F1637832161/GRC100472%20Grk.pdf)

**Table 29. Hellenic national qualifications framework (HQF) (Continued)**

HQF LEVEL	VET	GENERAL EDUCATION	HIGHER EDUCATION	EQF LEVEL
<b>5</b>	<p>Vocational post-secondary school 'degree'*** for graduates of EPAL apprenticeship class, level 5 (post-secondary level) (Πτυχίο Επαγγελματικής Ειδικότητας, Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης Επιπέδου 5 - ΕΠΑΛ)</p> <hr/> <p>Vocational training diploma (post-secondary level) (Δίπλωμα Επαγγελματικής Ειδικότητας, Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης Επιπέδου 5) (vocational training institute) (Ινστιτούτο Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης (ΙΕΚ))</p> <hr/> <p>Vocational training diploma* (Δίπλωμα Επαγγελματικής Ειδικότητας, Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης Επιπέδου Μεταδευτεροβάθμιας Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης, ΙΕΚ) (post-secondary level)</p> <hr/> <p>Post-secondary and not higher education diploma or 'degree'*** (Δίπλωμα ή Πτυχίο Ανωτέρας Σχολής)</p>			5
<b>4</b>	<p>Vocational school (Επαγγελματικές Σχολές) (EPAS, ΕΠΑΣ) certificate (Πτυχίο ΕΠΑΣ)</p> <hr/> <p>Vocational upper secondary school (Επαγγελματικά Λύκεια) (EPAL, ΕΠΑΛ) 'degree'*** (Πτυχίο Επαγγελματικής Ειδικότητας, Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης Επιπέδου 4 - ΕΠΑΛ)</p> <hr/> <p>EPAL certificate (Απολυτήριο Επαγγελματικού Λυκείου - ΕΠΑΛ Επιπέδου 4)</p>	General upper secondary school certificate (Απολυτήριο Γενικού Λυκείου)		4
<b>3</b>	<p>Vocational training school (Σχολές Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης (ΣΕΚ)) certificate (post lower secondary level) (Πτυχίο Επαγγελματικής Ειδικότητας Επιπέδου 3 - ΣΕΚ)***</p> <hr/> <p>IEK certificate* (initial vocational training-post lower secondary level) (Πιστοποιητικό Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης, Επίπεδο 1 - ΙΕΚ)</p>			3

**Table 29. Hellenic national qualifications framework (HQF) (Continued)**

HQF LEVEL	VET	GENERAL EDUCATION	HIGHER EDUCATION	EQF LEVEL
2		Lower secondary school certificate (compulsory) (Απολυτήριο Γυμνασίου)		2
1		Primary school certificate (compulsory) (Απολυτήριο Δημοτικού)		1

(\*) This qualification is no longer being awarded since the enactment of Law 4186/2013.

(\*\*) The word 'degree' used with quotation marks is a direct translation from the Greek terminology as it appears in the legislation (*ptychio*). In Greek, the word *ptychio* is used for titles of study from different education levels (higher, secondary, etc.). It is not to be confused with its usage in the English language, where degree refers to a higher education title of study, i.e. bachelor degree.

(\*\*\*) This programme was abolished by law 4386/2016. Cohorts already enrolled at that time will be able to complete their studies and can still acquire the qualification; the last one is expected to graduate in 2018/19.

Source: Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and EOPPEP, 2018.

Abbreviations		EU	European Union
EOPPEP	National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance	HQAAA	Αρχή διασφάλισης και πιστοποίησης της ποιότητας στην ανωτάτη εκπαίδευση (Greek authority responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes of study)
EPAL	Επαγγελματικά Λύκεια (vocational upper secondary school)		
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training	HQF	Hellenic qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework	IEK	Ινστιτούτο Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης (vocational training institute)
ESCO	European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations		
ESOM	National Apprenticeship Coordination Body	NQF	national qualifications framework
		VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

EOPPEP (National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance) – designated EQF national coordination point: [www.eoppep.gr/index.php/en/](http://www.eoppep.gr/index.php/en/)

Greek qualifications register: <http://proson.eoppep.gr>

Further information about the HQF and the EQF: <http://nqf.gov.gr/>

EOPPEP (2016). Greece EQF referencing report: [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/greek\\_referencing\\_report\\_2016.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/greek_referencing_report_2016.pdf)

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# HONG KONG SAR CHINA

## Introduction and context

During recent decades, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has undergone a dramatic transformation to become a leading international financial centre. To stay ahead in an increasingly competitive market, Hong Kong must constantly upgrade the capability of its workforce. However, with a shift in Hong Kong's economy towards highly skilled activities, jobs for workers with low educational attainment are disappearing rapidly while demand for workers with higher education continues to grow. To narrow this gap, the government has taken steps to provide workers with more effective training to motivate them to increase their employment potential.

In response, the educational attainment of Hong Kong's workforce has improved significantly. The proportion of the labour force with a post-secondary education has increased from 20.4% in 1996 to 41.1% in 2016<sup>358</sup>. However, the proliferation of training programmes and qualifications could potentially leave learners unsure about which course to choose or what qualifications they need. In addition, an employer presented with an assortment of certificates may be unsure of the actual competence level of the holder.

## Policy objectives

The Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government launched the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) in 2008 to promote lifelong learning with a view to continuously enhancing the quality, professionalism and competitiveness of Hong Kong's workforce in an increasingly globalized and knowledge-based economy.

The major functions of the HKQF are to:

- clearly define the competency standards required of practitioners in different industries;
- ensure the quality of qualifications and enable citizens to obtain recognized qualifications either through education and training or through the recognition of prior learning (RPL) mechanisms;
- ensure that education and training providers, employers and the public understand the range of qualifications available and appreciate how they can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce;
- delineate the links between different types and levels of qualifications and clearly articulate the qualifications;
- recognize practitioners' existing skills, knowledge and work experience through an RPL mechanism developed for industries that have adopted Specification of Competency Standards (SCS)<sup>359</sup>;
- simplify and standardize the use of award titles through the Award Titles Scheme (ATS), which is applicable to qualifications at all HKQF levels;
- specify the size/volume of learning by introducing a qualifications framework (QF) credit, which enables learners to discern the time it will take to complete a learning programme and facilitates credit accumulation and transfer.

<sup>358</sup> Government of HKSAR (2018).

<sup>359</sup> The SCS sets out the skills, knowledge and competency standards required of the practitioners to perform various job functions in industries effectively. The SCS can be grouped together to form a qualification at a particular HKQF level.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

**Table 30. Hong Kong Qualifications Framework**

HKQF LEVEL	CHOICE OF AWARD TITLES FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS						
7	Doctor						
6	Mastert	Postgraduate diploma	Professional diploma	Advanced diploma	Diploma	Certificate	Foundation certificate*
		Postgraduate certificate					
5	Bachelor		Professional certificate	Advanced certificate			
4	Associate	Higher diploma					
		Higher certificate					
3							
2							
1							

(\*) Only applies to levels 1 and 2.

Source: HKQF website ([www.hkqf.gov.hk](http://www.hkqf.gov.hk))

Qualifications recognized under the HKQF are characterized by three key features: (1) level, which reflects the outcome standards, i.e. depth and complexity of learning leading to the qualification; (2) award title, which reveals the nature, area of studies and range of QF level of a qualification; and (3) credit, which indicates the volume of learning leading to the qualification.

Hong Kong introduced the ATS in 2012 with the aim of standardizing and simplifying the titles of HKQF qualifications. The ATS, together with the Operational Guidelines on Use of Credit and Implementation Timetable, stipulates the following:

- The 'certificate' title may be awarded for qualifications from Levels 1–6.

- Level 1 and 2 qualifications may also be called a 'foundation certificate'.
- A diploma can only be used for qualifications at QF Levels 3–6. A diploma must comprise 60 or more QF credits. There is no minimum credit requirement for a certificate programme.

The ATS specifies which qualifiers (such as foundation, higher, advanced, professional and postgraduate) providers may use in the titles of their qualifications. No qualifier is allowed for qualifications at Level 3 (i.e. certificate and diploma). Providers may choose to add 'QF Level' to the titles of their qualifications: for example, 'Professional Diploma in Business Management (QF Level 6)'. Providers may continue to use titles traditionally used for degree and sub-degree qualifications in

mainstream education (i.e., Associate Degree at Level 4, Bachelor's at Level 5, Master's at Level 6, and Doctorate at Level 7).

Providers who wish to use non-ATS specified titles for their programmes may apply for approval from the Education Bureau. The use of titles outside ATS is not encouraged, as this would be contrary to the intention and purpose of ATS. Only in very exceptional circumstances is a provider allowed to use titles not specified in ATS.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Education Bureau issued a public consultation paper, *Proposal to Set Up a Qualifications Framework and its Associated Quality Assurance Mechanism in Hong Kong* (EDB, 2002). This was followed by a series of consultations, pilot studies and seminars for industries, employers' associations, trade unions and professional bodies, culminating in the launch of the qualifications framework in 2008.

The Qualifications Framework Secretariat is the executive arm of the Education Bureau and is responsible for implementing and promoting the HKQF.

Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) or Cross-Industry Training Advisory Committees (CITACs) play a pivotal role in the implementation of the HKQF and the development of Specification of Competency Standards (SCS). The Education Bureau establishes ITACs/CITACs for respective industries/sectors. ITACs/CITACs consist of representatives of employers, employees, professional bodies, regulatory bodies and the relevant government bureaux and departments of an industry.

The ITACs have three main objectives:

1. to develop, maintain and update SCS and to formulate an RPL mechanism for the industry concerned;
2. to promote the HKQF within the industry concerned;
3. to give advice on matters relating to the development and implementation of HKQF to the Secretary for Education.

The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is an independent statutory body established under HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150). This 2007 ordinance represents a legislative amendment of the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA), and came into effect in order to expand

the scope of its services to cover accreditation of vocational qualifications. With the enactment of this ordinance, the council was renamed HKCAAVQ. In accordance with the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592), which came into operation on 5 May 2008, the HKCAAVQ is now the accreditation authority and is responsible for developing and implementing the standards and approach for accreditation of academic and vocational qualifications to underpin the HKQF. The HKCAAVQ also took on the statutory role as the Qualifications Register Authority under Cap. 592. The Qualifications Register is a web-based database containing information on qualifications and their respective learning programmes that have been quality assured and recognized under HKQF, and is available to the public free of charge.

To widen the scope of the HKQF, the Education Bureau launched an initiative in September 2018 for the recognition of professional qualifications under the HKQF. Professional qualifications recognized under the HKQF refer to qualifications granted by bona fide local organizations that are not underpinned by associated learning programmes. Individuals should meet the requisite academic qualifications and prescribed years of industry or professional experience as well as complete robust assessments in written or practical formats in order to obtain the qualifications. As of December 2018, the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the Marine Department were appointed as assessment agencies for issuing associate level qualification and seven types of certificates of competency, respectively, to be recognized under the HKQF. This initiative promotes a wider application of the HKQF and uplifts the professional image of vocational and professional education and training in Hong Kong.

To encourage people aged 18 to 60 to pursue continuing education, a continuing education fund of HKD 5 billion was set up by the government in 2002. In order to provide fair and impartial reviews of the continuing education courses concerned, the fund was reviewed by a committee of quality assurance and accreditation experts, as well as specialists from commerce, finance, education and training, and other industries, and all such courses have to be recognized under the HKQF. With the aim of enhancing the linkage between the continuing education fund and the HKQF and the relevancy of courses to industry needs, all training courses that are developed with special reference to SCS (i.e. SCS-based courses)<sup>360</sup> have been included in the reimbursable course list under the fund. The fund is

<sup>360</sup> To qualify for the labelling of a SCS-based course, at least 60% of the contents of the course (i.e. in terms of number of credits) must come from the SCS.

further expanded to cover all QF-recognized courses starting from April 2019.

A credit accumulation and transfer system provides the flexibility needed to suit individual learners' circumstances and minimize duplication of training. The system facilitates learners to accumulate credits from diverse courses and convert them into a recognized qualification. One QF credit consists of 10 notional learning hours, which takes into account the total time likely to be required by an average learner in all modes of learning, including class attendance, private study, online learning, practical learning, examination, etc. The HKQF is expected to facilitate credit accumulation and transfer arrangements between different sectors and training providers by providing a unified platform and common benchmarks.

The HKQF also plays a role in secondary education, because the Specification of Generic Competencies<sup>361</sup> developed under the HKQF serves as a useful reference for applied learning courses under the new structure for senior secondary education. These courses enable students to understand fundamental theories and concepts and to develop beginners' skills sets and generic skills through application and practice. They also help students to explore their career aspirations and orientation for lifelong learning.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways: Recognition of prior learning mechanism**

The major purpose of setting up an RPL mechanism, which represents a form of validation of non-formal and informal learning under the HKQF, is to enable practitioners of various backgrounds to receive formal recognition of the knowledge, skills and experience they have already acquired at the workplace. Whether or not to implement RPL and the suitable timing of implementation are matters to be determined mainly by the ITACs concerned.

So far there are 15 industries implementing RPL since its inception in 2008. Successful applicants will be awarded a statement of attainment (QF Level 1 to 4) issued by the relevant assessment agency appointed by the Secretary for Education on the basis industry sectors. Up to Dec 2018, around

<sup>361</sup> The Specification of Generic Competencies sets out the foundation competencies from HKQF Level 1 to QF Level 4, which covers four strands of generic skills: English, Chinese (including Cantonese and Putonghua), IT and numeracy.

30,000 practitioners successfully obtained some 55,000 RPL qualifications.

### **HKQF implementation**

The implementation of the HKQF since 2008 can be characterized in the following way:

- Stakeholders and partners from various industries have supported and participated actively in the development of the HKQF, providing the valuable human resources needed in a knowledge-based economy.
- As of December 2018, a total of 22 ITACs/CITACs for 23 industries/sectors have been set up under the HKQF, covering about 53 per cent of the total labour force in Hong Kong.
- Some industries have applied the results of the HKQF to their work, for example by designing training courses in accordance with HKQF competency standards and applying these standards to human resource management (such as in designing recruitment advertisements, commending staff, formulating job descriptions, deploying manpower and organizing internal training) or by using the standards as references for performance benchmarking.
- Around 7,300 education and training courses have been quality assured to become HKQF-recognized courses listed in the Qualifications Register.

### **Referencing to regional frameworks**

The Education Bureau is committed to developing Hong Kong SAR as the regional education hub through internationalization and diversification of the post-secondary education sector. To this end, it has increased the non-local student admission quotas of publicly funded institutions, provided government scholarships to outstanding non-local students, and relaxed employment and immigration restrictions for non-local students. The Education Bureau has also introduced various measures to support the development of the self-financing post-secondary sector; these include grant of land to training providers at nominal premium, interest-free start-up loans, quality assurance subsidies, and a HKD 3.52 billion (about USD 450 million) self-financing post-secondary education fund to provide scholarships to outstanding self-financing students.

The Education Bureau also supports worthwhile initiatives and schemes to enhance and ensure the quality of self-financed post-secondary education: in November 2014, it collaborated with the European Commission on a comparability study of the

HKQF and European Qualifications Framework (EQF) with a view to providing a translation device to understand and compare the level-to-level relationship between the two frameworks. The major objectives of the comparability study are to promote better understanding of the qualifications offered under HKQF and by European countries referenced to the EQF, and to facilitate mobility of learners and labour between the two places.

Over the years, the Education Bureau and the Qualifications Framework Secretariat have also signed memorandums of understanding with different overseas QF authorities, including the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and the Thailand Professional Qualifications Institute, to strengthen international networks and to further explore possibilities for collaboration in matters of mutual benefits and interests with overseas partners.

### Important lessons and future plans

The Education Bureau plans to step up its publicity efforts to promote the HKQF for its wider

acceptance among all sectors. Industry-specific websites should enable stakeholders in a particular industry (as well as the general public) to search for the latest information on education and training and the development of the HKQF in the industry concerned.

#### Abbreviations

AAVQ	Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
ATS	Award Titles Scheme
CITAC	Cross-Industry Training Advisory Committee
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
HKCAAVQ	Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
HKQF	Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
ITACs	Industry Training Advisory Committees
QF	qualifications framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
SCS	Specification of Competency Standards

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## Introduction and context

Employment rates of recent graduates in Hungary are above the EU average for all levels of qualification; however, skill shortages are relatively high and influenced by low levels of tertiary education enrolment and completion. One challenge in the country has been an increasing percentage of students with low achievement in basic skills, particularly in terms of problem-solving, suggesting insufficient emphasis on the application of knowledge. This triggered revision of the national curriculum that started in 2017 (European Commission, 2017). The drop in performance was the highest in the EU, and accompanied by the strongest impact of socioeconomic background on outcomes. Contrary to the general EU trend in early school leaving (10.6% in 2017), the rate has increased (12.5% in 2017), especially among students from disadvantaged groups. An action plan to tackle this was adopted in 2016, including a system for early warning and pedagogical support. Participation of adults in lifelong learning is also below the EU average (6.2% in 2017 with an EU average of 10.9%); although recent legislative changes have brought some flexibility to vocational education and training (VET) and adult education, the age of career choice is lower. Despite being associated with a high overall employment rate for recent graduates (ISCED 3 and 4) (85.9 % against an EU average of 76.6 %, in 2017), the Hungarian VET system is marked by a significant gap between its two pathways at upper secondary level, vocational secondary schools and vocational grammar schools; the former has lower achievement and employability, higher dropout rates and fewer opportunities in terms of progression routes (European Commission, 2018).

The comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) for lifelong learning was adopted in July 2012 by a government decision and published in the Hungarian official journal<sup>362</sup>. It encompasses

<sup>362</sup> So far, six government decisions dealt with the establishment of the Hungarian qualifications framework: Government Decision No 2069/2008

all State-recognised national qualifications that can be acquired in general education (primary school and secondary education, *Matura*), higher education qualifications<sup>363</sup> (BA/BSc, MA/MSc and PhD, postgraduate specialisation training) and those vocational qualifications registered in the national vocational qualifications register (NVQR, in Hungarian (OKJ) (full, partial, add-on<sup>364</sup>)<sup>365</sup>). There has been progress in recent years in social dialogue and dissemination, and linking qualifications from all education and training subsystems to the Hungarian qualifications framework (HuQF) levels. Inclusion of certain types of non-formal training for NVQR qualifications, regulated by the Act on adult training<sup>366</sup> is on the country's policy agenda.

At present, a new draft version of the government decree on the operation, governance and quality assurance of the HuQF is being formulated but has not been published yet. It is expected to be approved in 2019.

The HuQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area in 2015.

(VI.6); Government Decision No 1004/2011 (I.14); Government Decision No 1229/2012 (VII.6); Government Decision No 1791/2013 (XI.7); Government Decree No 139/2015; Government Decree No 25/2016. <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1600025.KOR&timeshift=ffffff4&txtreferer=00000001.TXT>

<sup>363</sup> Government Decree No 139/2015 on the register of qualifications acquired in higher education. Advanced VET qualifications (higher VET programmes, short-cycle) (*Felsőfokú OKJ szakképesítés*) at level 5 are included in the higher education register.

<sup>364</sup> The NVQR distinguishes partial qualifications, which cover only a limited number of modules, (full) qualifications, which cover all modules of its partial qualifications and add-on qualifications containing additional module(s) built on a full qualification.

<sup>365</sup> The Government Decree No 25/2016 (II.25) on NVQR covers State-recognised NVQR qualifications linked to the correct HuQF level.

<sup>366</sup> Act LXXVII of 2013 on Adult Training. [http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A1300077.TV](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1300077.TV)

## Policy objectives

The main aims for development of the HuQF are to have a comprehensive framework that includes all State-recognised Hungarian qualifications gained at different levels of education and training, and to strengthen the learning-outcomes approach at each level. The framework is expected to increase education and training transparency, and compatibility and transferability of qualifications between national education subsystems and between formal and non-formal pathways.

The HuQF has the following objectives (Hungarian Education Authority, 2015):

- a. to create a coherent national qualification system by bringing together regulative measures of different subsystems of education and training into a unified system, including those acquired outside the formal system;
- b. to strengthen the outcome-based approach in regulatory documents;
- c. to strengthen quality assurance systems;
- d. to recognise learning outcomes achieved in non-formal and informal settings;
- e. to strengthen coordination of education and training policies and cooperation with stakeholders;
- f. to orient better the design of new qualifications and education and training programmes, and revision of existing qualifications;
- g. to provide better support to individual career choices, as well as career guidance and counselling systems;
- h. to systematise information about qualifications and to make the system understandable to employers in a European context;
- i. to improve the relevance of qualifications in the labour market.

The NQF can also play an important role in supporting lifelong learning in Hungary. Adult participation remains a challenge, especially among the unemployed. Only 50% of the population has at least basic digital skills; the country's aim is to reach the EU average with respect to digital literacy and usage. The need to maintain and develop new skills and to adapt to structural challenges is still regarded as particularly challenging (European Commission, 2018).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The HuQF has an eight-level structure and is viewed as a 'communication framework'. The level descriptors were based on analysis of existing approaches in the relevant subsystems.

The hierarchic and cumulative nature of the level descriptions of the EQF has been taken into account and applied in the HuQF. Learning outcomes are defined in four categories: knowledge, skills, attitudes and autonomy/responsibility (Hungarian Educational Authority, 2015). The 'knowledge' and 'skills' categories are directly comparable with homologous categories in the EQF, the 'autonomy/responsibility' category shares common features with the 'competence', current autonomy and responsibility category from the EQF, while the 'attitude' category (which includes emotional, cognitive and behavioural components in relation to the object of learning) is not present as such in the EQF.

The focus on learning outcomes has received greatest support from qualification developers and in research studies in different education and training subsystems. It has been mostly driven by EU policy and the need to link the HuQF to the EQF. However, stakeholders' views differ based on their previous knowledge, information and involvement. According to a Cedefop study, a shift to learning outcomes has not been a clearly articulated policy objective in recent years (Cedefop, 2016). In practice, the education subsystems differ significantly in the extent to which they are outcome-oriented, and they apply different terminology and varying notions of competence in defining outcome requirements/standards.

General education is dominated by a curriculum-content-based approach. The core curriculum, issued in 2012, redefines key competences and broad standards in 10 subject areas as learning outcomes, or outcome requirements; these are described in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. However, general education in Hungary has placed the main emphasis on process and content regulation since 2010<sup>367</sup>, with the only outcome requirements being standards in the upper secondary school leaving examination. The General Educational Strategy, adopted in November 2014<sup>368</sup>, has been developed for the 2014–20 period with fields of intervention such as inclusive education, the teaching of heterogeneous groups of students, reducing the rate of early school-leavers and supporting the

<sup>367</sup> The national curriculum (2012) reintroduced the definition of 'mandatory minimum content' (with extensive amounts), which together with the new mandatory, centrally published framework curricula and the central selection of textbooks, leave little professional autonomy for schools.

<sup>368</sup> General No 1603/2014 (XI.4) in a government decree on the acceptance of the general educational development strategy. [www.kormany.hu/download/6/fe/20000/K%C3%B6znevel%C3%A9s-fejleszt%C3%A9s.pdf#!DocumentBrowse](http://www.kormany.hu/download/6/fe/20000/K%C3%B6znevel%C3%A9s-fejleszt%C3%A9s.pdf#!DocumentBrowse)

school success of vulnerable groups. Revision of the national core curriculum started in 2017. The new national curriculum aims at incorporating the learning outcome-based approach (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018), introducing the concept of experience-based learning that requires cross-subject cooperation. It reduces the content knowledge and provides more opportunities for introducing various teaching methods, with considerable emphasis on methods related to digital education<sup>369</sup>. However, it is not yet known what form the final version of the curriculum will take since the action is still in process.

There have been two VET reforms in the past 12 years: in 2004–06 and in 2011–12. The new Vocational training Act came into force in September 2013. As a result of the introduction of the Act, the National vocational qualifications register (NVQR) was revised and continuously renewed (the renewed NVQR was generally introduced in all VET schools from 2008). The main aim of the changes was to eliminate the overlaps and professional/content-related duplication (parallelism) among the qualifications. The previous modular principle and the competence-based approach have been kept, vocational (basic/primary) qualifications, partial qualifications and specialisations were retained, but the total number of qualifications has been reduced by about half. VET qualifications pursued in higher education have been excluded from the NVQR, since 2013 such type of training may only be launched within higher education. The development of the new NVQR was coordinated by the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry<sup>370</sup>. In the latest piece of legislation<sup>371</sup> the VET qualifications are linked to the level of the HuQF<sup>372</sup>. Vocational education and training was also reformed, both in terms of governance and the modernisation of the contents of traditional ‘skilled worker’ vocational qualifications; the training period has been shortened from four years to three years<sup>373</sup>. In September 2015, steps were also taken to bring VET closer to the labour market by transferring the supervision of VET schools under the Ministry for Innovation and Technology<sup>374</sup>

and updating the content of VET programmes<sup>375</sup>. In 2018 the amended VET Act CXCI came into force, encouraging apprenticeships, establishing sectoral skills councils and introducing mandatory requirements for practical instructors<sup>376</sup>.

One of the most significant impacts of the HuQF was the spread of the use of learning outcomes (as a means of output-based approach to training). The greatest change in this field was in higher education: learning outcomes have partly appeared in higher education qualifications requirements through regulatory measures and acts. All first and second cycle higher education programmes and qualifications in Hungary, including advanced VET qualifications, are increasingly described in terms of both input and outcome criteria. The learning requirements and outcomes for qualifications listed in the higher education qualifications register were defined in line with the HuQF level descriptors in August 2016<sup>377</sup>. These new standards describe the name and credit value of each programme, its learning outcomes, the study areas and the specific requirements for traineeship, the final thesis and foreign language skills. Requirements and outcomes apply to all higher education institutions wishing to offer a qualification. The higher education accreditation committee (HAS) – member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) – has to assess new programme proposals in accordance with HuQF-compatible outcome requirements defined in the educational and outcome requirements. As a next step, higher education institutions must adjust their curricula to the new standards and introduce them from September 2017 (European Commission, 2017). However, student-centred learning, outcomes-based orientation and use of learning outcomes in designing programmes and learning modules are still key challenges in higher education.

The descriptions of education and training programmes in adult education do not always include the term learning outcomes. The learning outcome approach is spreading gradually in this sub-system of education.

<sup>369</sup> Source: Eurydice online database: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-29\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-29_en)

<sup>370</sup> HCCI, Hungarian name and abbreviation: *Magyar Kereskedelmi és Iparkamara*, (MKIK).

<sup>371</sup> Government Decree on NVQR of 4 March 2016.

<sup>372</sup> Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/resource-centre/content/hungarian-national-qualification-register>

<sup>373</sup> Source: Eurydice online database: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments-29\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments-29_en)

<sup>374</sup> [www.kormany.hu/hu/innovacios-es-technologiai-miniszterium](http://www.kormany.hu/hu/innovacios-es-technologiai-miniszterium)

<sup>375</sup> Government of Hungary (2016). *National reform programme 2016 of Hungary*.

<sup>376</sup> Cedefop (forthcoming).

<sup>377</sup> Decree No 18/2016 (VIII.5) of the Ministry of Human Resources on the educational and outcome requirements of higher vocational programmes, bachelor and master programmes and on the modification of Decree No 8/2013 of the Ministry of Human Resources on the common requirements for teacher training and educational and outcome requirements for teacher training programmes.



## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Overall responsibility for developing and implementing the HuQF, and for initiating related legislation, is shared between the Ministry of Human Resources and the Ministry for Innovation and Technology (previously Ministry for National Economy). The Ministry for Innovation and Technology is responsible for qualifications standards in the NVQR and, together with the Ministry of Human Capacities, for VET framework curricula. The National Office of VET and Adult Learning<sup>378</sup> supervised by the Ministry for Innovation and Technology, ensures coordination and implementation of national VET and adult learning policies<sup>379</sup>.

The establishment of the HuQF and its referencing to the EQF was legislated through two government decisions, in 2008 and 2011, respectively<sup>380</sup>. Between 2011 and 2014, framework development was carried out as part of three different projects of the Social renewal operational programme: one for general education, one for higher education, and one for vocational and adult education. Each of the three projects was responsible for involving its own sector-specific stakeholders through conferences and workshops. To ensure coordination, information sharing, and harmonised working methods, an operational interministerial task force<sup>381</sup> was set up and met regularly. A government decree 2012<sup>382</sup> regulated the governance or the development phase of the HuQF while a new decree on management and quality assurance of the framework is being prepared.

Professional and secretarial support to the interministerial task force has been provided by the education authority since September 2012. In spring 2012, the national coordination point was placed within the education authority as a project unit. The national coordination point and the Tempus Public Foundation organised subsector-specific and horizontal consultations and events. Of the three education subsystems, involving stakeholders from general education remains a challenge to be addressed.

Quality assurance is regulated by legal frameworks in education and training subsystems. Quality

assurance in general education, as stated in the Law on General Education, is built on the processes of accreditation, authorisation, registration, control and evaluation. The planned government decree on the HuQF and its further operation will establish the legal basis for connecting the framework and different aspects of quality assurance in general education (Hungarian Education Authority, 2015).

The Educational Authority (*Oktatási Hivatal*)<sup>383</sup> and the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (*Magyar Akkreditációs Bizottság*)<sup>384</sup> support the minister responsible for education in higher education monitoring and evaluation. The Hungarian Accreditation Committee plays an important role in quality assurance. However, since the HuQF government decree on the operation, governance and quality assurance is still pending, reference to higher education quality assurance processes is missing.

The Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as a public body, has decisive powers in adult education; in some cases it has exclusive decision-making competences. The National Office of Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning<sup>385</sup> determines whether the quality assurance systems submitted to it can be matched to the quality assurance framework set out in the Minister's decree.

The new Act CXCII, which came in force in 2018<sup>386</sup>, reinforces the role of employers in education and training by establishing sectoral skills councils. They will take over the tasks of the National Qualification Committees in monitoring economic, labour-market and technological developments in their sectors, making proposals for modifying the NVQR and the improving training programmes. Their mandate started in July 2018 when the national legislation came into force. Sectoral skills councils representatives will take part in the National Council for VET and Adult Learning, a forum for reconciling professional interests, representing the sectors vis-à-vis the Hungarian Government<sup>387</sup>. VET students will have the option to acquire a VET qualification

<sup>383</sup> [www.oktatas.hu/](http://www.oktatas.hu/)

<sup>384</sup> [www.mab.hu/web/index.php?lang=en](http://www.mab.hu/web/index.php?lang=en)

<sup>385</sup> [www.nive.hu/](http://www.nive.hu/)

<sup>386</sup> This act aims at supporting practical training in dual VET programmes. <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1700192.TV&timeshift=ffffff4&txrefereer=00000001.TXT>

<sup>387</sup> A total of 20 sectoral skills councils will be set up for 41 economic sectors. Of these, 13 sectoral skills councils (for engineering, tourism and catering, commerce, information technology, etc.) were set up in 2017, while new councils in sectors such as services, food industry, and agriculture, are being formed in 2018.

<sup>378</sup> [www.nive.hu/](http://www.nive.hu/)

<sup>379</sup> Spotlight on VET – 2018 compilation (forthcoming).

<sup>380</sup> Government Decision No 2069/2008 and No 1004/2011.

<sup>381</sup> The operational task force consisted of the projects' key experts, the Hungarian national coordination point and the Hungarian representative in the EQF advisory group.

<sup>382</sup> Government Decree No 1229/2012.

in parallel to the vocational grammar school leaving certificate (Cedefop, forthcoming).

The HuQF provides the opportunity for dialogue between various education institutions. However, there are relatively few opportunities for end-users and other employees of the education system to share experiences. Since qualifications are under the authority of two different ministries (Ministry of Human Resources, Ministry for Innovation and Technology), dialogue between the institutions is relatively slow. For this reason, the EQF national coordination point's role to ease communication at policy level is becoming very important (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). Unified coordination mechanisms and quality assurance for the whole framework operation are needed for the future.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>388</sup>

The legal framework governing VET, higher education and adult education allows for validation and recognition of prior learning, but there is no comprehensive policy on validation of non-formal and informal learning in the country. There is limited practice and sectoral approaches dominate validation development. In several recent strategies – on lifelong learning 2014–20<sup>389</sup>, mid-term strategy against early school leaving<sup>390</sup>,

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More information at: [www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/hungary-sectoral-skills-councils-linking-quality-vet-jobs](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/hungary-sectoral-skills-councils-linking-quality-vet-jobs)

<sup>388</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>389</sup> *Az egész életen át tartó tanulás szakpolitikájának keretstratégiája a 2014/2020 közötti időszakra – Az európai uniós fejlesztéspolitikáért felelős államtitkárság*, 2016.11.11 [Framework strategy for lifelong learning policy for 2014–20, by the Secretariat responsible for the development policy, 11.11.2016]. The original documents are available on the Government's website: [www.kormany.hu/download/7/fe/20000/Egész%20életen%20át%20tartó%20tanulás.pdf](http://www.kormany.hu/download/7/fe/20000/Egész%20életen%20át%20tartó%20tanulás.pdf)

<sup>390</sup> *A végzettség nélküli iskolaelhagyás elleni középtávú stratégia [Medium-term strategy against early school leaving]*. The original documents are available on the Government's website: [www.kormany.hu/download/5/fe/20000/Végzettség%20nélküli%20iskolaelhagyás%20.pdf](http://www.kormany.hu/download/5/fe/20000/Végzettség%20nélküli%20iskolaelhagyás%20.pdf)  
The strategy targeting low-educated young people and adults mentions one of the tools a 'comprehensive national recognition model/knowledge recognition system', the operation of which uses a nationally-based territorial network-based career advisory system. However, the text of the strategy does not contain any detailed information on that system.

national social catching up strategy<sup>391</sup> – validation as an objective is explicitly mentioned but there is no coherent approach to the detailed tasks, procedures and precise responsibilities. In mid-2016, the government adopted a decision on the National digital education strategy<sup>392</sup>; its implementation and validation is mentioned in the chapter on adult learning as a tool for access to training (without detailed recommendations).

Current validation practice is fragmented, while essential elements (strategic goals, funding, stakeholder participation, quality assurance, preparation for participants) are missing. The development of validation practice in each sector is done through one-off projects. In the framework of the New Hungary development plan, various sectoral development projects were launched (in public education, vocational education and higher education) that had, to varying extents, the objective of establishing a validation procedure. According to the amended Higher education Act (2011)<sup>393</sup>, at least one third of the credits in a qualification should be earned in the institution issuing the diploma. Two thirds can be acquired in another way, including through validation of non-formal and informal learning. The development of validation in higher education<sup>394</sup> was concluded in 2015 and integrated into the NQF development.

In adult training, matching previously acquired competences with training standards, evaluation (mostly test) and exemption from a given part of the training program are steps of the recognition procedure. Prior learning assessment and recognition was defined as an individual right in the first act on adult training (2011), enacted in 2013<sup>395</sup>. The new Adult training Act retained this scheme, made the assessment of prior learning an obligation

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<sup>391</sup> *Magyar nemzeti társadalmi felzárkóztatási stratégia II (2011–20)* [The National Catching Up Strategy II, 2011–20]. The original documents are available on the Government's website: [www.kormany.hu/download/1/9c/20000/Magyar%20NTFS%20II%20\\_2%20mell%20\\_NTFS%20II.pdf](http://www.kormany.hu/download/1/9c/20000/Magyar%20NTFS%20II%20_2%20mell%20_NTFS%20II.pdf)

The strategy does not give details about the interpretation of validation activity, but the target group is designated: drop-out students, Roma youth.

<sup>392</sup> *Magyarország Digitális Oktatási Stratégiája* [Digital Education Strategy for Hungary]. The original document is available on the Government's website: [www.kormany.hu/download/0/cc/d0000/MDO.pdf](http://www.kormany.hu/download/0/cc/d0000/MDO.pdf)

<sup>393</sup> Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education. [http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A1100204](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1100204). TV (in Hungarian only).

<sup>394</sup> In the framework of the Social renewal operational programme 4.1.3: Social renewal operational programme in the frame of the new Hungary national development plan.

<sup>395</sup> Act LXXVII of 2013 on Adult Training. [http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A1300077TV](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1300077TV)

in vocational education and language training but did not manage to ease the application process in the case of State-subsidised programmes (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

VET provision is modularised and the qualifications and requirements are described in terms of competences, so VET is closer to the learning-outcomes-based approach. Regulation of the VET examination system has been 'open' to validation since 1993 (Law on VET)<sup>396</sup>, making it possible for applicants to take an examination without entering a formal VET programme, though this option is not much used.

Without an overall validation policy and procedure, education institutions tend to operate validation autonomously in the framework of their given legal environment. Adapting to a learning-outcomes approach remains the major difficulty in implementing validation in Hungary as training programmes are not written in the form of learning outcomes. However, there are two very successful validation procedures in the field of single competence certification; the European computer driving licence examination scheme, which provides certification for ICT skills obtained by any means, and the foreign language proficiency examinations<sup>397</sup>.

Further NQF development and implementation is expected to assist validation through use of the learning outcomes approach and because the framework is open to including qualifications obtained through validation of prior learning achieved in non-formal and informal settings. However, no rules have been set out on the link between validation and the NQF. Validation mostly takes place in education institutions and social partners are not involved in its development.

## NQF implementation

The HuQF was formally adopted by Government Decision No 1229/2012 and is partly operational. Since the adoption of the framework, its development and implementation has been carried out in the three projects of the Social renewal operational programme: VET and adult

<sup>396</sup> Act CLXXXVII of 2011 on VET. <http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/getdoc2.cgi?dbnum=1&docid=A1100187.TV>

<sup>397</sup> These examinations have traditionally been open to learners from any learning environment; applicants can acquire certification (of the level in accordance with their actual language proficiency) without participating in any language training course (they can learn on their own in an informal way). [www.nyak.hu/default-eng.asp](http://www.nyak.hu/default-eng.asp)

learning, higher education and general education, following the logic of three education and training subsystems.

Over recent years, NQF developments were closely linked to new legal provisions in all subsystems of education and training: VET law (2011)<sup>398</sup> and amendments, law on general education (2011)<sup>399</sup>, act on adult learning (2013)<sup>400</sup> and amended law on higher education (2011)<sup>401</sup>.

A new NQF government decree is under development, aiming to streamline and formalise the governance, management and quality assurance of the HuQF.

Currently, qualifications included in the framework are State-recognised from general education, vocational qualification included in the NVQR and higher education qualification, as well as certain types of adult education certificate (type B training certificate under the Act on adult training. The qualifications not included in the framework are those of authority regulated training<sup>402</sup>, language training certificates, and 'other' training programmes (under the scope of the Adult training law), international qualifications and those awarded by private providers.

Following the legal basis for general education (Act on national general education) qualifications have been linked to HuQF levels: the leaving certificate awarded after six grades of primary school; the primary education qualification certifying the completion of the first eight grades; the secondary education qualification certifying the completion of secondary education after the 12th grade; the certificate for the secondary school leaving examination; and the two bridge programmes<sup>403</sup>. With the exception of the secondary school school-leaving exam (level 4), the HuQF levels are not indicated on certificates or diplomas of general education).

In VET, following the Act on vocational education and training, assignment of VET qualifications to HuQF

<sup>398</sup> Act CLXXXVII of 2011 on VET. <http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/getdoc2.cgi?dbnum=1&docid=A1100187.TV>.

<sup>399</sup> Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education.

<sup>400</sup> Act LXXVII of 2013 on Adult Training. [http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A1300077.TV](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1300077.TV).

<sup>401</sup> Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education. [http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A1100204.TV](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1100204.TV)

<sup>402</sup> Provided by the relevant ministries

<sup>403</sup> Bridge programmes are one-year programmes that prepare students who have not completed lower secondary studies or who performed so poorly that they were not admitted to upper secondary education to continue their studies in vocational schools.

levels started with those included in the NVQR; this used technical comparisons between qualifications and HuQF descriptors and – if needed – social judgement and examination of legal backgrounds. In 2016, a government decree<sup>404</sup> on the NVQR regulated the possibility for HuQF and EQF levels to be added to vocational education certificates. The new government decree<sup>405</sup> modifies some rules of VET and the HuQF levels are to be presented on VET certifications from 2019 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Reference qualifications from higher education and higher vocational qualifications were also assigned to HuQF levels. In higher education, the regulation<sup>406</sup> adopted made it compulsory to indicate HuQF and EQF levels in diplomas and to revisit and adjust the educational and outcome requirements for higher education study programmes in line with HuQF descriptors. Bachelor and master degrees include the relevant HuQF level. The levelling is not yet indicated on doctoral degrees.

For future stages of development, the framework is open to linking qualifications acquired in non-formal settings, training regulated by the Adult education Act, international qualifications and other certificates awarded by private providers.

Two registers have been established: VET qualifications are included in the NVQR<sup>407</sup> and higher education programmes and qualifications in the higher education register<sup>408</sup>.

The HuQF currently serves as an instrument for transparency and communication of qualifications for experts and stakeholders, and plays a role in the lifelong learning narrative, but concrete actions are still limited. Within its limited budgetary and human resources capacity, the national coordination point has carried out information and dissemination activities, and staged workshops aimed at raising awareness about learning outcomes approaches among target groups from the different education subsystems. The development of a three-year communication plan is in progress, informing in various ways about the framework, using interactive methods, and participation in public

events (job fairs, vocational exhibitions, workshops, conferences, and teacher training programmes). The communication plan focuses mostly on learners in general education, students in higher education, guidance counsellors and participants in adult education. Nevertheless, end-user knowledge of the framework is considered limited and no evaluation of the impact of the framework has yet been carried out (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The Hungarian qualifications framework was referenced to the EQF and self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area in 2015<sup>409</sup>. An updated referencing report is planned for 2020, following changes in the national qualification system, particularly in VET and inclusion of new qualifications.

## Important lessons and future plans

One main role of the NQF is to function as an interface between education and the labour market; it is crucial to get all stakeholders on board. As HuQF development has been running within three separate projects, following the three education subsystems (VET, higher education, general education), cross-subsystem cooperation remains a challenge. Adoption of the HuQF government decree (pending) streamlining and formalising its governance, and management and quality assurance of the HuQF would be an important step into full implementation of the framework. This requires further clarification of HuQF policy goals, agreeing roles and responsibilities and overall coordination of the HuQF for lifelong learning as well as intermediary implementation structures. An explicit strategic vision to integrate the HuQF in the different education subsystems is still to be defined. Future tasks include involving stakeholders from general education, as well as wider dissemination of the benefits of the framework among end-users (students, parents, employers and employees). Awareness among guidance practitioners and employment services – currently still low – could be raised through conferences and seminars (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Following the work on HuQF development and on the referencing process, use of learning outcomes is still identified as a key area for further work. HuQF development work and related work on

<sup>404</sup> Government Decree 25/2016 (II.25). [http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A1600025.KOR&timeshift=ffffff4&txrefere=00000001.TXT](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1600025.KOR&timeshift=ffffff4&txrefere=00000001.TXT)

<sup>405</sup> Government Decree 307/2018. (XII.27.)

<sup>406</sup> Government Decree No 87/2015. (IV.9) on the execution of certain provisions of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education.

<sup>407</sup> [www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=297](http://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=297)

<sup>408</sup> [www.felvi.hu/felveteli/szakok\\_kepzesek/szakleirasok/Szakleirasok/index.php/szakterulet](http://www.felvi.hu/felveteli/szakok_kepzesek/szakleirasok/Szakleirasok/index.php/szakterulet)

<sup>409</sup> The report is available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/HuQF\\_referencing\\_report.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/HuQF_referencing_report.pdf)

validation has generated more understanding of the learning outcomes approach and initiated revision of regulatory documents. Three supporting projects in school education, VET and higher education have disseminated the learning outcomes approach to a wider circle of stakeholders. However, the education subsystems are at different stages of development in this regard and strengthening the learning outcomes approach is an important step in moving

on. In line with the lessons of the referencing report on the HuQF, revision of the contents of training programmes leading to qualifications at levels 5–7 (higher vocational education and training, bachelor courses, master courses) was completed in 2016. Full implementation in practice among teachers and adult educators is an important task for the future.

**Table 31. Hungarian national qualifications framework (HuQF)**

HUQF LEVELS	TYPES OF QUALIFICATION	EQF LEVELS
8	PhD/DLA (doctor of liberal arts) ( <i>Doktori fokozat</i> )	8
7	Master degree (MA/MSc) ( <i>Mesterfokozat</i> )	7
6	Bachelor degree (BA/BSc) ( <i>Alapfokozat</i> ) Advanced VET qualifications (entry requirement is BSc degree) ( <i>Felsőfokú szakképzettség</i> )	6
5	Advanced VET qualifications (higher VET programmes – short cycle) ( <i>Felsőfokú OKJ szakképesítés</i> ) Postsecondary full and add-on* VET qualifications (based on upper secondary school leaving examination) ( <i>Érettségire épülő szakirányú OKJ szakképesítés</i> )	5
4	Certificate for upper secondary school leaving examination ( <i>érettségi bizonyítvány</i> ) General upper secondary school leaving certificate ( <i>gimnáziumi záróbizonyítvány</i> ) Vocational grammar school leaving certificate ( <i>szakgimnáziumi záróbizonyítvány</i> ) Vocational secondary school leaving certificate ( <i>szakközépiskolai záróbizonyítvány</i> ) Full/add-on* VET qualification of vocational secondary schools ( <i>szakiskolában megszerezhető teljes vagy ráépüléssel OKJ szakképesítés</i> ) Partial**/full VET qualification of vocational grammar schools ( <i>szakgimnáziumban megszerezhető rész- vagy teljes OKJ szakképesítés</i> )	4
3	Leaving certificate and VET qualification (vocational schools for SEN students) ( <i>Speciális szakiskolai záróbizonyítvány és OKJ szakképesítés</i> ) Lower secondary and secondary*** level partial**, full and add-on* VET qualifications ( <i>Alapfokú és középfokú teljes, rész- és ráépüléssel OKJ szakképesítés</i> )	3
2	Primary (general) school leaving qualification (primary level educational attainment) (eight years) ( <i>általános iskolai záróbizonyítvány</i> ) Leaving certificate of skills development (vocational schools for SEN students) eight years ( <i>Speciális készségfejlesztő szakiskolai bizonyítvány</i> ) Partial** VET qualification after Vocational Bridge Programme ( <i>Híd program tanúsítvány</i> )	2
1	Leaving certificate after six grades of primary school (for those who move to general secondary schools covering grades 7–12) ( <i>6. osztályos általános iskolai bizonyítvány</i> )	1

(\*) Add-on qualifications build on one or more full qualifications. These consist of additional modules that extend the scope of activities for which the holder is qualified.

(\*\*) Partial qualifications cover a subset of the modules included in a full qualification. They prepare the holder for simpler occupations or for a narrower scope of tasks.

(\*\*\*) Lower secondary and secondary qualifications have different access requirements.

Source: Hungarian Education Authority, 2016.

### Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework
HuQF	Hungarian qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
NVQR	national vocational qualifications register
VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

Education Authority – hosting the EQF national coordination point: [www.oktatas.hu/](http://www.oktatas.hu/)  
HuQF website: [www.oktatas.hu/kepesiteseknyito/kepesitesek/magyar\\_kepesitesi\\_keretrendszer](http://www.oktatas.hu/kepesiteseknyito/kepesitesek/magyar_kepesitesi_keretrendszer)  
Register of vocational qualifications – NVQR (OKJ): [www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=297](http://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=297)  
Register of higher education programmes and qualifications: [www.felvi.hu/felveteli/szakok\\_kepzesek/szakleirasok/Szakleirasok/index.php/szakterulet](http://www.felvi.hu/felveteli/szakok_kepzesek/szakleirasok/Szakleirasok/index.php/szakterulet)  
Hungarian Education Authority (2015). *Referencing and self-certification report of the Hungarian qualifications framework to the EQF and to the QF-EHEA*. [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/HuQF\\_referencing\\_report.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/HuQF_referencing_report.pdf)

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## Introduction and context

Over recent years, the Icelandic education system has seen improvements in several key indicators of education and training. Iceland has exceeded the EU 2020 benchmark target on tertiary educational attainment (53.7% in 2017) and the employment rate of recent graduates is the highest in Europe (94.8% in 2016). Participation in adult learning also stands out, being only exceeded by Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland. However, early school leaving is still a challenge. The proportion of early leavers from education and training in 2017 was 17.8% (22.5% for males and 12.7% for females). This is the third highest in the EU and EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries (European Commission, 2018). Iceland has developed a national framework – the Icelandic qualifications framework (ISQF) – consisting of seven learning-outcomes-based levels covering all levels and types of qualification in the formal education and training system. Work started in 2006 and has been closely linked to extensive reform of the Icelandic education system, including changes in legislation and education policy. The focus on the learning outcomes principle and the national qualifications levels was central to these changes. An earlier version of the ISQF was presented in 2013 and revised in 2016.

The main objective of the ISQF, formally adopted in October 2016, was to make sure that all formally certified education and training was referenced to a national qualifications framework (NQF) level. Compared to the 2013 ISQF, the 2016 ISQF is broader in scope as it includes qualifications from compulsory, upper secondary and tertiary education as well as from certified adult learning pathways. Level descriptors have been revised and the ISQF levels 5 and 6 split into sublevels.

The 2013 version of the ISQF was formally referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in December 2013 (Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014). It is envisaged that an updated reference report will be submitted to the EQF advisory group in 2019.

## Policy objectives

The ISQF is defined as a lifelong learning framework and aims to cover all levels and types of education and training offered in the country. The framework is designed to make the pathways through the education system clearer, to increase student mobility within the country and between countries, and to motivate further learning.

The framework builds on a set of acts on education and training<sup>410</sup>, based on the learning outcomes approach.

- a. The Compulsory School Act No 91/2008 offers the lowest level of certified training (hence level 1 in the ISQF, covers both level 1 and 2 in the EQF). Attendance is compulsory for all children aged 6 to 16 and all of them graduate formally, regardless of their grades.
- b. The Upper Secondary Education Act No 92/2008 provides for a decentralised approach to organising study programmes and curricula. Education providers have a great responsibility, and enjoy considerable autonomy, in developing study programmes and curricula in general education and vocational education and training. The learning pathways have to be accredited by the Directorate of Education.
- c. The Higher Education Act No 63/2006 refers to the Bologna process and the introduction of a three-cycle approach for Icelandic higher education.
- d. The Adult Education Act No 27/2010 only covers training for people who do not have an education qualification below ISQF level 4 (EQF 3).

No separate legislative basis has yet been developed for the ISQF: this has been deemed unnecessary due to the integration of framework developments into the acts outlined above.

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<sup>410</sup> Links to all these acts in English can be found at: [www.government.is/publications/legislation/\\$?LisasticSearch/Search/?SearchQuery=&Ministries=Ministry+of+Education+Science+and+Culture&Themes=Education&ContentTypes=](http://www.government.is/publications/legislation/$?LisasticSearch/Search/?SearchQuery=&Ministries=Ministry+of+Education+Science+and+Culture&Themes=Education&ContentTypes=)

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The Icelandic NQF, through its systematic application of learning outcomes, is seen as a tool for reviewing the overall functioning of education and training and supporting long-term reform. The ISQF consists of seven learning-outcomes-based levels, with two sub-levels at levels 5 and 6. The reason for the sub-division of levels 5 and 6 is that there are two different types of qualifications available for each of them.

The level descriptors reflect knowledge, skills and competences, and the importance attributed to key competences and transversal skills. They are presented in an integrated way, where the increase in knowledge, skills and competences from one level to the next is clear and understandable<sup>411</sup>.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

A wide range of stakeholders from education and training, and from the labour market, has been involved in developing the ISQF. In between the adoption of the two versions of the ISQF, these stakeholders worked on a proposal, which was presented to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in autumn 2016. It was approved by the Ministry and formally signed by stakeholders in October 2016.

From 2015 to 2017, the Icelandic Centre for Research – Rannís<sup>412</sup> – was in charge of NQF coordination and implementation. The national coordination point was transferred to the Directorate of Education<sup>413</sup> at the beginning of 2018. It is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. One of the main reasons for this transfer is that the Directorate has the role of certifying education provision at upper secondary level and in adult education.

The Directorate of Education will continue to encourage the use of ISQF and EQF by social partners, public employment services and education providers. An important factor in this work will be to finish the accreditation of all study programmes within upper secondary education and within both general education and vocational education and training. Within this process, which involves the work of both the formal education system

and the occupational councils, special attention is given to the link to NQF levels and is one of the prerequisites for accreditation. When developing templates for graduation certificates (diplomas) for upper secondary schools, emphasis will be on cooperation with higher education, as well as with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and members from upper secondary schools. At tertiary level, each university is responsible for assigning its offers to an NQF level (European Commission; Cedefop, 2018).

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>414</sup>

A national strategy for validating non-formal and informal learning is in place for people with low levels of education and qualifications. Most of the work undertaken on validating non-formal and informal learning has been carried out by the Education and Training Service Centre<sup>415</sup>. The target group for the work of the centre and of its validation activities is people with little formal education; around 22% of those aged 25 to 64 on the labour market have not completed upper secondary education<sup>416</sup>.

The main objective of the national validation strategy is opening pathways for people with little formal education, focusing mainly on reducing the length of studies based on curricula at upper secondary level, and where a unit-based system is in place. The process focuses on assessing competences within each curriculum subject with a specific unit value. The results are calculated as recognised credits and certified specifically as 'passed' into a general databank for upper secondary schools and formal adult learning. It is possible to obtain a full qualification through validation in some sectors, however this is rarely the case and a full qualification as a skilled worker is not granted until a trade – or journeyman's examination – is completed. Validation against standards in specific occupations has not been linked to a credit system or modularised structure of qualifications.

The Education and Training Service Centre works according to contract with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Validation of prior

<sup>411</sup> [www.government.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/frettatengt2016/Haefnirammi\\_A4\\_enska\\_anlogo.pdf](http://www.government.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/frettatengt2016/Haefnirammi_A4_enska_anlogo.pdf)

<sup>412</sup> Icelandic Centre for Research: <https://en.rannis.is/>

<sup>413</sup> The Directorate of Education: <https://mms.is/directorate-education>

<sup>414</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>415</sup> Education and Training Service Centre: [www.frae.is/um-okkur/about-us/](http://www.frae.is/um-okkur/about-us/)

<sup>416</sup> Statistics Iceland, data from 2017: [www.statice.is/](http://www.statice.is/)



learning (VPL) projects is conducted in cooperation with lifelong learning centres distributed around the country. VPL has a legal framework in Iceland and its practices are based on a regulation introduced in 2011.

Around 60 pathways at upper secondary school level have been validated against curricula at ISQF levels 2–3 (EQF levels 3–4), evenly spread between the certified trades and other sectors. In 2016–17, around 955 individuals had their competences validated: 426 within the certified trades; 404 against curricula in other sectors; and 113 against specific occupational standards, of which 86 were linked to employability skills. Only 12 individuals had their competences validated against general subjects. In 2017, 6% of participants in VPL projects were immigrants. In the Erasmus KA3 project *VISKA 2017–20* (visible skills for adults), the focus is on developing methods and processes for increasing migrants' access to VPL processes, education and work<sup>417</sup>.

There have been developments in validation linked to occupational standards in cooperation with stakeholders in the service and tourism sectors, which have been growing rapidly. Validation of occupational standards for lighting technicians and sound technicians has already been successfully introduced. Pilot projects are to be planned soon for ISQF level 4/EQF level 5. A committee has been working over the last two years on developing VPL in higher education; it presented its findings in a report in June 2018<sup>418</sup>. The committee submitted four proposals on the development of VPL in higher education based on its work:

- a. To support VPL in higher education, it is vital to coordinate a common understanding of VPL and the best practices to be used. Regulations need to be clear and it is very important to ensure a common definition of VPL and of ensuring that laws and regulations on the issue at the level of higher education are coordinated, although each education institution will devise its own implementation methods. Quality assurance is a vital part of carrying out VPL in higher education and it is important to keep track of statistics and results.
- b. The committee suggests that an independent third party, e.g. the Directorate of Education or the Education and Training Service Centre, will conduct the validation.

- c. It is proposed that each university faculty develops its VPL to shorten the study time required, hence there may be differences between faculties.
- d. The committee suggests a pilot project where VPL methods are developed in chosen faculties at university level, such as engineering, computer science and education. The methods developed in this project could be used in other faculties in the future.

Validation methodology is not used at university level, but some university departments partly consider candidates' work experience during intake procedures.

## NQF implementation

The first version of the ISQF was referenced to the EQF in December 2013. The revised ISQF was agreed upon by all stakeholders in October 2016 and can be described as having reached an early operational stage.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture coordinates developments, supported by the Directorate of Education and Rannís. Recently the national website for the NQF/EQF was transferred to the Directorate of Education<sup>419</sup>.

The Directorate of Education will work closely with education providers to ensure that all new education offers will be assigned to the relevant qualification level. The compilation of a guidebook is envisaged, where education providers will be instructed in the whole process, from the creation of learning outcomes to a formal education offer where education content is referenced to the appropriate qualification level. The guidebook is seen as a living document which will be edited and updated when needed.

The Directorate of Education will also continue supporting the setting up and use of the NQF and EQF by clearly referencing the appropriate NQF and EQF level on qualification documents. The focus will be on developing templates for graduation certificates (diplomas) for upper secondary school in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the school community (European Commission; Cedefop, 2018).

A clear focus on learning outcomes through the development of the ISQF has been beneficial for the process of validating non-formal and informal

<sup>417</sup> [www.viskaproject.eu](http://www.viskaproject.eu)

<sup>418</sup> <http://frae.is/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Raunf%C3%A6rmat-%C3%A1-h%C3%A1sk%C3%B3lastigi-ni%C3%B0urst%C3%B6%C3%B0ur-vinnuh%C3%B3ps.pdf>

<sup>419</sup> <https://mms.is/directorate-education>

learning as well as for the recognition of foreign qualifications. It is also anticipated that the framework will provide transparency of standards and will promote a more open mindset towards non-formal and informal learning.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The link between the EQF and the ISQF is described in the Icelandic referencing report, submitted to the EQF advisory group in December 2013 (Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014). It is anticipated that it will submit an updated referencing report based on the 2016 revision to the EQF advisory group in 2019.

ISQF/EQF levels are included in all formal qualifications certificates and Europass supplements (both the Diploma supplement and the Certificate supplements<sup>420</sup>). A discussion on whether to indicate the ISQF/EQF levels on certificates in adult education is currently taking place.

## Important lessons and challenges

The overarching framework of the ISQF has created a dialogue between different education providers. That in itself has created greater understanding of different types of education, training and qualifications across the sector, although there is still a considerable way to go to reach parity of esteem between types of qualifications, both inside the education system, and in the eyes of the general public. A main challenge in the next few years is to continue the process of dialogue and information.

The link to higher education seems important in the years to come. This is linked to the discussions taking place at European level on changes to the Bologna Reform process, which is expected to be adopted in 2019.

One of the main challenges for adult education is to validate learning acquired in the non-formal system for formal education. At present, there is an unclear understanding of qualifications at adult education level and one of the next steps in the process is to set up curricula development, curricula certification, quality management and certified learning outcomes in adult education. The validation of non-formal education will be a vital element in this respect and there are expectations that in the future, all adult education qualifications will be formally assigned to an ISQF level. It is anticipated that a new act on adult education (expected in 2019 or 2020) will be helpful in achieving this, as it is intended to stipulate that adult education curricula exceeding 40 hours in duration should be validated and certified. A vital part of the accreditation process of adult education curricula is the process of assigning qualifications to the correct ISQF level. Curricula in adult education has been accredited and assigned to ISQF levels since the agreement on the framework in the year 2016. The Directorate of Education and the Education and Training Service Centre are fully aware of the older curricula that have not gone through the same accreditation process and are, therefore, not properly linked to the ISQF. Dialogue is continuing on this issue.

**Table 32. Icelandic qualifications framework (ISQF)**

ISQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
7	Doctoral degree ( <i>Doktorspróf</i> )	8
6.2	Master and candidatus degree ( <i>Meistarapróf</i> )	7
6.1	Degree at master level but without a research report ( <i>Próf á meistarastigi</i> )	
5.2	Bachelor degree ( <i>Bakkalárpróf</i> )	6
5.1	Diploma degree (short cycle) ( <i>Diplómapróf</i> )	

<sup>420</sup> These supplements can be found at: [www.erasmusplus.is/menntun/stodverkefni/europass](http://www.erasmusplus.is/menntun/stodverkefni/europass)

**Table 32. Icelandic qualifications framework (ISQF) (Continued)**

ISQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
4	Additional studies of vocational subjects ( <i>Viðbótarnám á framhaldsskólastigi</i> )	5
3	Matriculation examination ( <i>Stúdentspróf</i> )	4
	Vocational examination for professional rights ( <i>Réttindapróf í starfsmenntun</i> )	
2	Upper secondary school leaving certificate ( <i>Framhaldsskólapróf</i> ) Other final examinations ( <i>Önnur lokapróf</i> )	3
1	Compulsory school final examinations ( <i>Grunnskólapróf</i> ) Diploma in adult education ( <i>Diplómapróf í fullorðinsfræðslu</i> )	2

Source: Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2017.

#### Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework
ISQF	Icelandic qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
VPL	validation of prior learning

### Main sources of information

Directorate of Education – acting as EQF national coordination point: <https://mms.is/directorate-education>

Icelandic qualifications database: [www.menntabrunnur.is](http://www.menntabrunnur.is)

Information and documents covering Icelandic developments – available on the website of the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture: <http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/>

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Statistics Iceland: [www.statice.is](http://www.statice.is)

#### Prepared by:

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# INDIA

## Introduction and context

India is one of the youngest nations in the world: more than 62% of its population is working age (15–59 years old) and over 54% is aged 25 or below. It is estimated that, by 2020, the average age of the population in India will be 29, compared to 40 in the USA, 46 in Europe and 47 in Japan (World Population Prospects, 2019). In fact, although the labour force in the more economically developed countries is expected to decline by 4% in the next 20 years, it is expected to rise by 32% in India. This poses both a formidable challenge and a huge opportunity: To reap this demographic dividend (which is expected to last for at least 25 years (MSDE 2018), India needs to equip its workforce with the skills and knowledge that is needed to contribute substantively to the economic growth of the country.

India presently faces a dual challenge of paucity of highly trained workforce, as well as non-employability of large sections of the conventionally educated youth who possess little or no job skills. According to a recent report by the country's National Sample Survey Office, only 2.2% of the population aged 15–59 have received formal vocational training and only 8.6% have received non-formal vocational training (MSDE, 2018). A skill gap study conducted by the National Skill Development Corporation from 2010 to 2014 revealed a net incremental requirement of 109.73 million skilled workers by 2022 in 24 key sectors (MSDE, 2015, p. 6). Another challenge in India the public perception of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), which is seen as a last resort for those who have been unable to progress or who have opted out of the formal academic system. Efforts have been made by the government to make skilling relevant and responsive to industry needs and attractive to the country's youth.

In response to these challenges, the Government of India has implemented over 40 skills development programmes in over 20 ministries/ departments. However, these programmes are hampered by gaps in the capacities and quality

of training of instructors, insufficient focus on workforce aspirations, lack of certifications and common standards, and a pointed lack of focus on the unorganised sector<sup>421</sup>. Recognizing the need to coordinate the efforts of all concerned stakeholders in the field of skill development and entrepreneurship, the government formed the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in 2014. The Ministry is responsible for the country's skill development agenda, which was launched in 2015 with an aim to catalysing skills development and creating a system that imparts employable skills to India's growing workforce.

That same year, the Ministry also published the 2015 *National Policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship*, which replaced the 2009 *National Skill Development Policy* and is designed to guide skills development strategies and initiatives and provide clarity and coherence on how skill development efforts across the country can be aligned with existing institutional arrangements to improve the employability and productivity of learners (MSDE, 2015). The policy aims to transcend both general and vocational education by providing a national framework for the implementation of learning activities in order to:

- align them with international standards;
- link knowledge and skills with the demands of the labour market;
- identify the various institutional frameworks that can help achieve successful outcomes.

Realizing the need to have a unified framework that covers both TVET and general education, the government's cabinet secretariat formed an interministerial committee with an aim to developing

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<sup>421</sup> 'Unorganised sector', when used in the Indian contexts defined by the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, can be interpreted as '[...] consisting of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale or production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers'.

a National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF). This new framework is implemented through the National Skills Qualifications Committee and comprises both the National Vocational Qualifications Framework and the National Vocational Educational Qualifications Framework. More specifically, the functions of the Committee are to:

- approve the national occupational standards, which sets out the performance criteria, knowledge and skills required by a certain job role;
- approve the accreditation norms developed by the Sector Skills Councils for training providers in the sector;
- prescribe guidelines for ensuring that implementing agencies, including training providers, address the special needs of disadvantaged sections of the population, including persons with disabilities and members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and other disadvantaged groups, including women and girls;
- review and resolve any issues/disputes among ministries/departments/regulatory bodies regarding the alignment of courses to the NSQF, credit transfer, etc.;
- respond to all matters requiring a cross-sectoral approach, such as credit accumulation and transfer, recognition of non-formal learning, apprenticeship, online and distance learning, lateral mobility and bridging courses;
- coordinate and align Indian qualifications to international qualifications frameworks to allow international mobility;
- address all transition issues, including developing suitable mechanisms for recognizing and aligning any qualifications that predate the implementation of the NSQF;
- map all existing certificates, diplomas and degrees and identify gaps, if any;
- determine whether progression from one level to another should be allowed for a specific course/discipline (e.g. should a progression link be established between a nursing qualification and a medical one?);
- determine progression pathways and decide how the progression will take place, i.e. how much credit would be allowed for movement from one level to the next and how such progression can be facilitated;
- determine progression links between courses and certifications that are granted by regulatory and/or professional bodies, and those that are currently unregulated;
- identify and specify bridge courses and processes, if any, which can be used to progress from one level to another;
- establish and maintain high standards for skill training in each sector.

## Policy objectives

The NSQF aims to provide for multiple pathways, horizontal as well as vertical, within both TVET and formal education, thus linking one level of learning to another. This enables learner to develop competencies, transit to the job market and acquire additional skills to upgrade their competencies later on.

More specifically, the NSQF provides:

- recognition of skill proficiency and competencies at different levels, leading to international equivalency;
- multiple entry and exit points between vocational education, skills training, general education, technical education and the job markets;
- progression pathways defined within the skills qualification framework;
- opportunities to promote lifelong learning and skills development;
- partnership with industries/employers;
- a transparent, accountable and credible mechanism for skills development across various sectors;
- increased potential for recognition of prior learning.

The objectives of the NSQF are to:

- accommodate the diversity of the Indian education and training systems;
- allow for the development of a set of qualifications for each level, based on outcomes that are accepted across the nation;
- provide structure for the development and maintenance of progression pathways in order to provide access to qualifications and enable learners to move easily and readily between different education and training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market;
- give individuals an option to progress through education and training and gain recognition for their prior learning and experiences.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The NSQF is competency-based framework composed of 10 levels, each representing a different level of complexity of knowledge, skills and aptitude, though not all of these factors are required at all levels. Level 1 of the framework represents the most basic skills a person is expected to have, while Level 10 represents skills with the greatest complexity (see [Table 33](#)). The levels are defined by descriptors in the form of

learning outcomes and are characterized by the following competences:

- professional knowledge: what the person must know at that level;
- professional skills: what the person should be able to do at that level;
- core skills: soft and interpersonal skills;
- responsibility: the degree of supervision a person needs when doing a job or the degree of supervision a person is capable of exercising over others.

These are the competences a learner must possess regardless of whether they were acquired through formal, informal or non-formal education and training. The NSQF is expected to align curricula with the skills needs of industry and enhance flexibility in the provision of vocational courses by developing a 'modular' competency-based curriculum in collaboration with industry.

Qualifications are made up of occupational standards for specific learning outcomes. This allows learners, educators, training providers and employers to gain information about the broad equivalence of qualifications across different skill sectors. The competence frameworks are expected to align curricula with the skills needs of industry. The NSQF also aims to include a range of qualifications that are currently being provided through TVET programmes run by more than 17 different ministries (MHRD, 2011). A further objective is to enhance flexibility in the provision of vocational courses by developing a 'modular' competency-based curriculum in collaboration with industry.

The NSQF aims to open up several entry and exit points between TVET and general education and facilitate movement between the two. It emphasizes industry participation in vocational education, with a specific focus on creating opportunities for learners who are not enrolled in colleges and universities. Vocational education courses are designed, assessed and certified in consultation with industry stakeholders and employers, who are encouraged to partner with educational institutions so that vocational students can work on their premises.

### **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

The NSQF is the joint responsibility of many stakeholders and each has a role to play in its development, implementation and maintenance. The main stakeholders are listed below.

- The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) is mandated to anchor and operationalize the NSQF to ensure that quality and standards meet sector-specific requirements. The NSDA also facilitates the setting up of professional certifying bodies and ensures that the NSQF acts as a quality assurance framework and facilitates capacity building.
- Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are industry-led national partnership organizations that bring together stakeholders, develop national occupational standards and qualification packs for various job roles and align them to the NSQF. SSCs work to supplement the existing vocational education system for the industry sector by ensuring the quantity and quality of the workforce. In addition, SSCs provide input to central- and state-level implementing agencies in developing curriculum packages, capacity-building of institutions and training providers, and assessment and certification of skills. SSCs are licensed and regulated by the National Skills Qualification Committee.
- Central ministries ensure that stakeholders align the programmes being offered by institutions/bodies under their aegis to the NSQF.
- State governments encourage the relative institutions/bodies to align their learning programmes to the NSQF in order to facilitate greater learner mobility. State governments also ensure that, while regional variations are provided for, they do not undermine the quality assurance associated with the NSQF.
- Regulatory institutions (e.g. All India Council for Technical Education, National Council for Vocational Training, University Grants Commission, school boards) define entry and exit competencies and qualifications in terms of the NSQF levels so that vertical progression in both general and vocational education is strengthened. Regulatory/awarding bodies also regulate their courses, programmes, affiliation and accreditation systems to ensure alignment and conformity with the NSQF.
- Training providers/institutions ensure their courses/programmes align with NSQF levels.

### **Implementation of NSQF**

The NSQF in India was notified on 27 December 2013. All other frameworks, including the National Vocational Educational Qualifications Framework released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, stand superseded by the NSQF. The NSQF has a five-year implementation schedule (MSDE 2013).

**Table 33. India's NSQF level descriptors**

LEVEL	WHAT IS EXPECTED	PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE	PROFESSIONAL SKILLS	CORE SKILLS	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>1</b>	Can perform tasks that are repetitive and require no previous practice	Familiar with common trade terminology and instructional terms	Routine and repetitive, takes safety and security measures	Reading and writing, addition, subtraction, personal financing, familiarity with social and religious diversity, hygiene and environmental awareness	No responsibility, always works under continuous instruction and close supervision
<b>2</b>	Can perform tasks that are repetitive with little application of understanding, but more of practice	Material tools and application in a limited context, understands context of work and quality	Limited service skill used in limited context, select and apply tools, assist in professional works with no variables, differentiates between good and bad quality	Receive and transmit written and oral messages, basic arithmetic, personal financing, understanding of social, political and religious diversity, hygiene and environmental awareness	No responsibility, works under instruction and close supervision
<b>3</b>	Can carry out a routine and predictable job requiring limited range of activities	Basic facts, process and principle applied in trade of employment	Recall and demonstrate practical skill, routine and repetition in narrow range of application	Written and oral communication with minimum required clarity, basic arithmetic and algebraic principles, personal banking, basic understanding of social and natural environment	Under close supervision, some responsibility for own work within defined limit
<b>4</b>	Can work in familiar, predictable, routine situations of clear choice	Factual knowledge of field of knowledge or study	Recall and demonstrate practical skill, routine and repetitive in narrow range of application, use of appropriate rules and tools, using quality concepts	Written or oral communication with required clarity, basic arithmetic and algebraic principles, basic understanding of social, political and natural environment	Responsibility for own work and learning
<b>5</b>	Has a well-developed skill, with clear choice of procedures in familiar context	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts within a defined field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Desired mathematical skill, understanding of social and political environment, some skill in collecting and organizing information, communication	Responsibility for own work and learning, and some responsibility for the work and learning of others
<b>6</b>	Has a wide range of specialized technical skills, clarity of knowledge and practice in broad range of activities involving standard and non-standard practices	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a defined field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems within a defined field of work or study	Reasonably good in mathematical calculation, understanding of social, political and natural environment Reasonably good at collecting data and organizing information, and ability to communicate	Responsibility for own work and learning and full responsibility for others' work and learning

(Continued)

**Table 33. India's NSQF level descriptors (Continued)**

LEVEL	WHAT IS EXPECTED	PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE	PROFESSIONAL SKILLS	CORE SKILLS	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>7</b>	Good command of wide-ranging specialized, theoretical and practical skills, involving variable routine and non-routine contexts	Wide-ranging, factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a defined field of work or study	Wide range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems within a defined field of work or study	Good logical and mathematical skills and understanding of social, political and natural environment Good at collecting and organizing information, communication and presentation skills	Full responsibility for output of group and its development
<b>8</b>	Comprehensive, cognitive, theoretical knowledge and practical skills to develop creative solutions to abstract problems. Undertakes self-study, demonstrates intellectual independence, analytical rigour and good communication				Exercise management and supervision in the context of work/study with unpredictable changes, responsible for development of self and others
<b>9</b>	Advanced knowledge and skills. Critical understanding of the subject, demonstrating mastery and innovation, completion of substantial research and dissertation				Responsible for decision-making in complex technical activities, involving unpredictable study/work situations
<b>10</b>	Highly specialized knowledge and problem-solving skills to provide original contribution to knowledge through research and scholarship				Responsible for strategic decisions in unpredictable complex situations of work/study

Source: Ministry of Finance, 2013



After the third anniversary (27 December 2016) date of the notification of the NSQF,

- Government funding would not be available for any training/educational programme/course, which is not NSQF-compliant.
- All government-funded training and educational institutions shall define eligibility criteria for admission to various courses in terms of NSQF levels.
- The recruitment rules of the Government of India and PSUs of the central government shall be amended to define eligibility criteria for all positions in terms of NSQF levels. The State governments and their PSUs shall also be encouraged to amend their recruitment rules on above lines.

After the fifth anniversary (27 December 2018) date of the notification of the NSQF, it is mandatory for all training/educational programmes/courses to be NSQF-compliant (MSDE, 2013).

Since its notification, 2,980 qualifications across sectors have been aligned. However, the understanding of implementation and operationalization of the NSQF is still evolving.

The NSDA has also developed the National Qualifications Register, the repository for all approved qualifications with their corresponding NSQF levels. As of January 2019, the register comprises 2,811 qualifications approved by the National Skills Qualifications Committee and has been published online for public viewing at [www.nqr.gov.in/](http://www.nqr.gov.in/). Further qualifications files are currently being brought before the Committee for approval. The NSDA follows a standard operating procedure for the NSQF alignment process, which includes sharing of the qualification files with relevant stakeholders.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

As a competency- and outcomes-based qualification framework, the NSQF will facilitate the recognition of prior learning (RPL) that is largely lacking in India. RPL is a very important associated function of the NSQF, especially in the Indian context, where majority of the workforce has not received formal training. The NSQF help individuals who have gained learning informally, such as through life, work and voluntary activities, to have this learning recognized. This will include knowledge and skills gained:

- outside of formal learning situations;
- through informal learning and training in the workplace, the community and/or the voluntary sector;
- from continuing professional development activities;
- from independent learning.

RPL enables learners who have skills but not the certificate to prove it an opportunity for personal or career development or credit towards other qualifications or learning programmes. It helps them to connect the learning they have already achieved with future learning and/or career opportunities. Benchmarking an individual's learning against the NSQF level descriptors will help them to identify the appropriate level of options for progression. This will improve their career prospects, opportunities to upgrade their skills, and facilitate the engagement of experienced practitioners as resource persons.

According to the National Skill Development Policy (2015), the 'RPL framework is an outcome-based qualification framework linked to NSQF against which prior learning through formal/informal channels would be assessed and certified. The RPL process would include a pre-assessment, skill gap training and final assessment leading to certification of existing skills in an individual. It will provide both horizontal and vertical pathways to an individual for acquiring additional skills for better livelihoods. Adequate resources will be earmarked under various government schemes for equitable access to RPL programmes' (MSDE, 2015, p. 22).

RPL is the key instrument that can help map the existing skills in the informal or unregulated economy, and integrate them into the formal economy as well as into the formal training landscape. Indeed, skills recognition and certification initiatives will provide an important pathway for the 90% of Indians who work in the so-called unorganized sector (NCEUS, 2009). However, the process of skills recognition in the informal economy will need to be supported by an RPL infrastructure that is affordable, reliable and efficient.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Given that India is expected to have a workforce surplus of 56 million by 2020, the European Union-funded India-EU Skills Development Project was developed to increase the employability and capacity for entrepreneurship of the country's population. Aligning the NSQF with the European Qualifications Framework is a major objective of the project.

In addition, India and the other seven Member States of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – finalized the SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030, which led to its adoption at the Third Meeting of Ministers of Education/Higher Education held in Male, Maldives, in 2016. Through regional collaboration and partnerships, the ministers agreed to:

- share the NSQF and develop a regional quality assurance framework for vocational/ skills education;
- undertake case studies, document country cases of qualification frameworks, and prepare a regional inventory of national qualifications frameworks in education and training;
- make technical support available to facilitate national qualifications frameworks development/ review in education and training, including national qualifications frameworks in TVET, and to develop links between national qualifications frameworks and the validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications and student mobility;
- form an expert group to review the frameworks/ procedures followed in different SAARC countries for the recognition, validation and accreditation of the outcomes of formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- establish a mechanism to develop and implement a regional framework for facilitating comparability and mutual recognition, validation and accreditation of tertiary education qualifications, and mobility of students and faculty across the South Asian region (SAARC, 2016).

## Important lessons and future plans

In an effort to realize India's demographic dividend, its workforce needs to be equipped with employable skills and knowledge so that they can contribute to economic growth in a substantive manner. In the past, most of the country's skill training needs were met through courses offered by the Industrial Training Institutes and under the Modular Employable Scheme, regulated by the National Council for Vocational Training. Since this infrastructure was not enough to meet the increasing skill requirements of the country as well as the skilling needs of the growing workforce, the

government took a number of initiatives to scale up the skilling efforts. These efforts resulted in a large expansion of training infrastructure, much of which is in the private sector. At present, there are 20 ministries/departments implementing skills development programmes mostly using private sector training providers.

However, in the absence of adequate regulatory oversight, numerous stakeholders have been offering training programmes of varying quality with multiplicity in assessment and certification systems that are not comparable. This has had serious consequences for the vocational training system and thus the employability of the country's youth. An attempt towards some measure of regulation was made with the establishment of the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) in 2013, to coordinate and harmonize the skill development efforts of the government and the private sector. The primary role of the NSDA has been to anchor and operationalize the NSQF to ensure that quality and standards meet sector specific requirements.

Subsequently, a need was felt for an overarching regulatory authority that could tend to all aspects of short- and long-term skills-based training and entrepreneurship promotion in the country to suit the needs of the industry and enable decent quality of life to the Indian population. In view of this, the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) was developed to perform the regulatory functions so far vested in the National Council for Vocational Training and the NSDA. The functions currently being carried out by the National Skill Development Corporation through the Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) will also be housed in the NCVET.

This institutional reform will lead to improvement in quality and market relevance of skill development programmes, lending credibility to vocational education and training, and encouraging greater private investment and employer participation in skills development. This in turn will help achieve the twin objectives of enhancing aspirational value of vocational education and of building a skilled workforce, thereby furthering the prime minister's agenda of making India the skills capital of the world (MSDE 2018).

The NCVET will also regulate the functioning of entities engaged in vocational education and training, both in the long and short term, and establish minimum standards for the functioning of

such entities. The primary functions of NCVET will include:

- recognition and regulation of awarding bodies, assessment bodies and skill-related information providers;
- approval of qualifications developed by awarding bodies and SSCs;
- indirect regulation of vocational training institutes through awarding bodies and assessment agencies;
- research and information dissemination;
- grievance redress.

#### Abbreviations

NCVET	National Council for Vocational Education and Training
NSDA	National Skill Development Agency
NSQF	National Skills Qualifications Framework
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SSCs	Sector Skills Councils
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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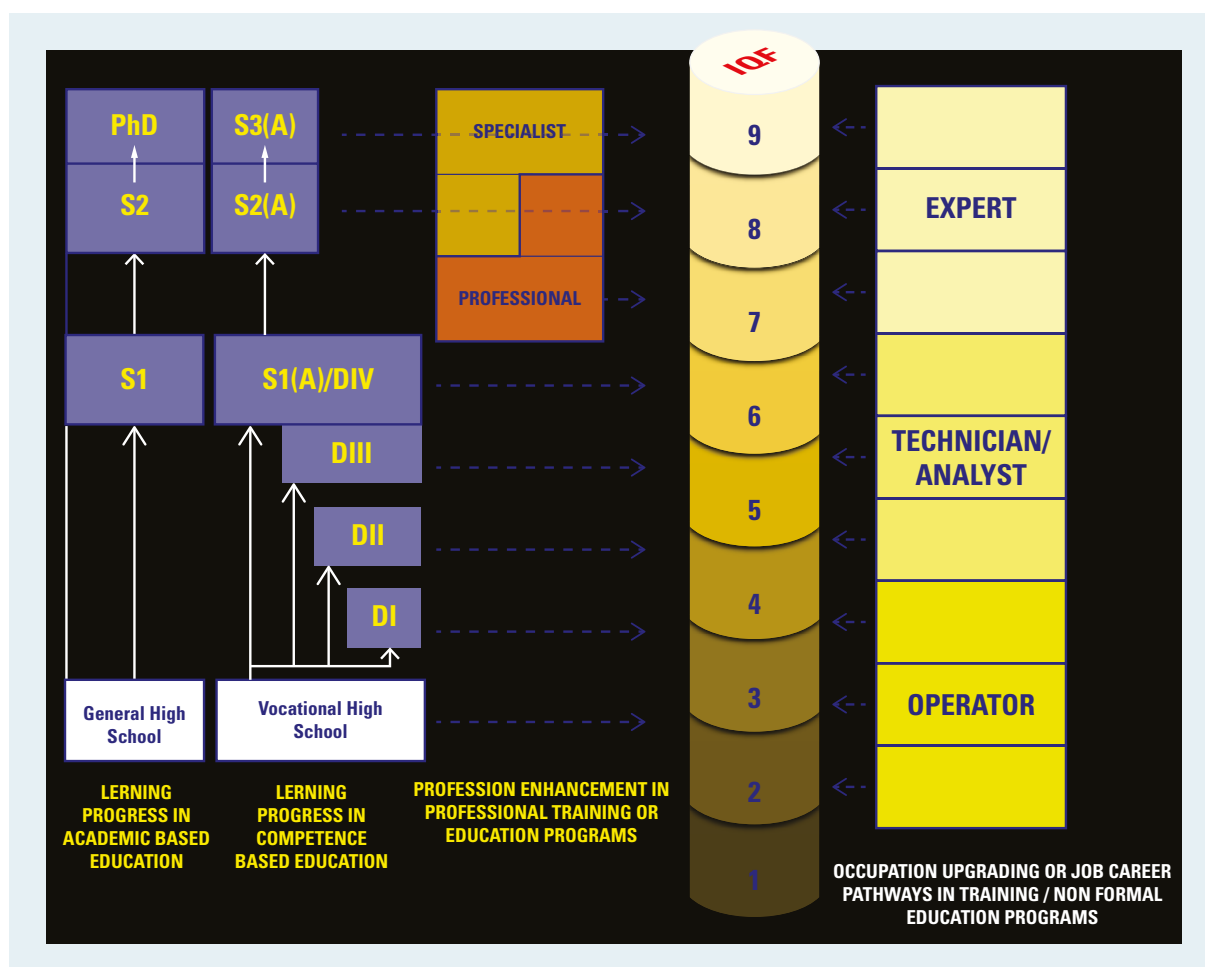
# INDONESIA

## Introduction

The Indonesian national qualifications framework (*Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia* (KKNI)) has been developed and issued in the Presidential Decree No 8/2012. It provides nine qualification levels from elementary education up to tertiary level education, with each level based in four main

dimensions: (a) job skills, (b) science or knowledge comprehension, (c) capacity to select and apply methods and knowledge, and (d) management skills. The framework has a strong focus on equivalency and recognizing all pathways to obtaining qualifications and promotes recognition of prior learning, as follows.

**Figure 8. Indonesian national qualifications framework (KKNI)**



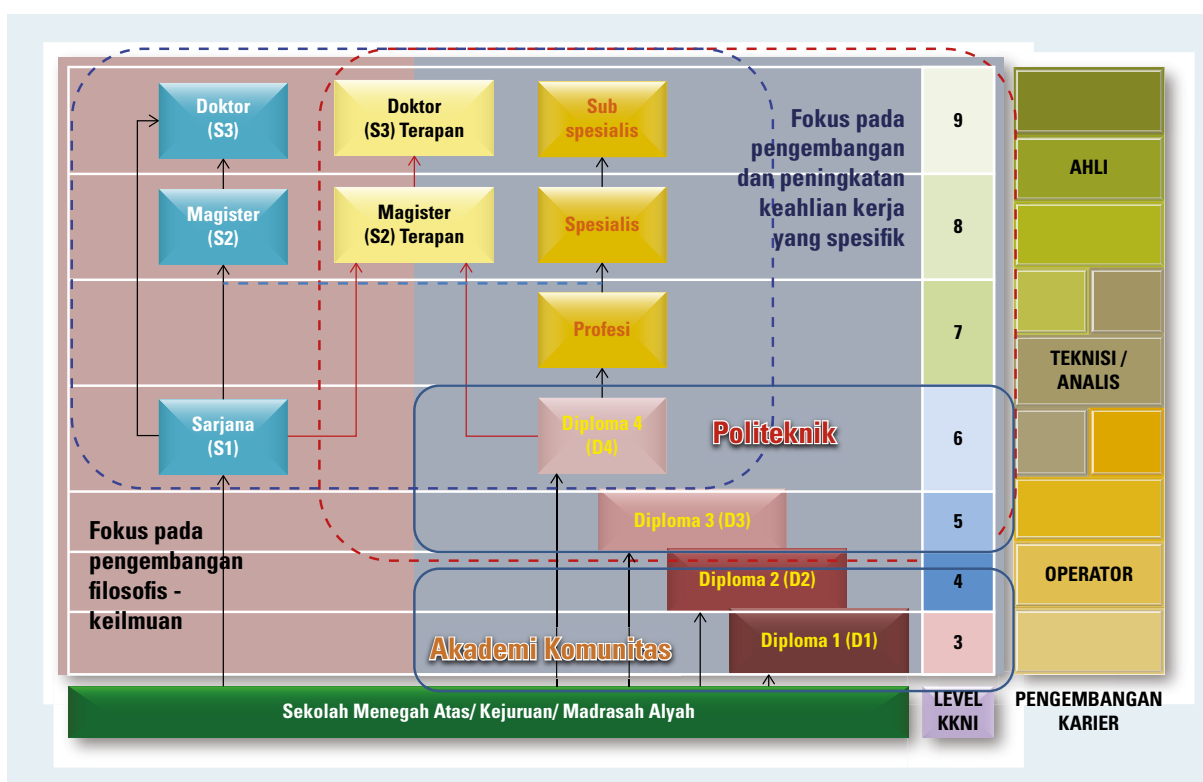
Source: <http://appskills.ilo.org>

The KKNi is a reflection of human resources quality in Indonesia, which acts as a neutral reference that can equalize learning outcomes obtained through formal education, training, work experience, and independent learning. This policy is not intended to create new social stratification, but rather to strengthen the quality and identity of Indonesian people through the national education and training system. At the international level, the KKNi serves as a device that can recognize and translate international workforce or students' qualifications to the Indonesian qualifications system.

The development of the KKNi has been carried out through a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry

of Manpower. When the Framework was issued in 2012, the Ministry of Education and Culture produced a key strategic document on *Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia – Indonesian Qualification Frameworks: Peraturan Presiden No 8 Tahun 2012*, elaborating the definition and boundaries of the KKNi especially for higher education in Indonesia. The document states that the KKNi is 'one of the national standards in the education sector from which graduates, education and training institutions under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Culture could assess their learning outcomes or certificates' proficiency in conjunction with one of the relevant qualification levels specified in the KKNi' (Directorate-General of Higher Education, n.d.).

**Figure 9. Indonesian KKNi and the higher education system**



The KKNi is intended to address the needs of an increasingly mobile and globalized higher education and job market. It provides a clear and transparent qualification for each level allowing manpower to be deployed more effectively in both formal and informal sectors of the economy. It specifies frameworks for equivalencies between Indonesian and foreign qualifications thus improving Indonesia's international competitiveness and making the country more open to global trade. Further, the KKNi is intended to provide a unified reference point for all education and training providers in Indonesia,

especially those engaged in efforts to direct workers towards appropriate job opportunities. When difficulties arise for employees to upskill, reskill and upgrade their qualifications, the KKNi will set out qualification levels against which employees can be assessed and proceed with professional development programmes. In addition, education or training providers whose learning outcomes statements do not accord with KKNi descriptors are able to carry out internal quality improvements to bring their qualifications in line with KKNi level descriptors.

## Policy objectives

As a reference for training and education of manpower, the KKNi is expected to provide:

- clear learning outcomes of qualification level achieved through formal, non-formal and informal education, and through work experience;
- a clear scheme for recognition and equivalency of education qualification based on learning outcomes;
- methods and procedures for recognition of foreign education qualifications for employment purposes in Indonesia.

The main policy objectives of the KKNi are to increase:

- the quantity of qualified Indonesian manpower for greater access to both national and international job markets;
- the contribution of all learning outcomes to national economic growth, whether achieved through formal, non-formal or informal education or work experience;
- educational mobility to foster mutual understanding and collaboration between higher education institutions across the world;
- recognition of qualification of inbound as well as outbound manpower, both regionally and internationally (Directorate-General of Higher Education, n.d.).

With the KKNi, Indonesia expects that in the long run, there will be:

- a clear scheme of qualification of Indonesian manpower to warrant international competitiveness and comparability in the international job market;
- an increased level of learning outcomes to contribute to national economic growth;
- increased academic mobility based on mutual recognition of education qualifications and collaboration between and among countries;
- increased mutual recognition at bilateral, multilateral, regional and/or international level of Indonesian education, while still maintaining the Indonesian character and way of life.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The KKNi consists of nine levels characterized by both learning outcomes and job-specific competences. Descriptors at each level specify the learning outcomes or competences that can be demonstrated by an individual at that particular level. Descriptors are divided into two categories: general and specific. The general descriptors cover personality, working attitude and ethics, and are applicable to every Indonesian citizen at every level of education. The specific descriptors describe the body of knowledge and skills mastered by the individual and are level-specific.

Table 34 illustrates the referencing scheme between the learning outcomes of different education streams and KKNi qualification levels. This scheme will make it easier to ensure that graduates of educational programmes possess the right competences at the right level.

**Table 34. Equivalences between learning outcomes from different types of education in Indonesia**

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS	IQF	TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING	
<b>S3</b>	9	S3 (Applied)	Specialist
<b>S2</b>	8	S2 (Applied)	
	7		Profession
<b>S1</b>	6	D IV	
	5	D III	
	4	D II	
	3	D I	
<b>General high school</b>	2	Vocational high school	
<b>Junior high school</b>	1	Junior high school	

Source: Directorate General of Higher Education, n.d.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Three ministries have been chiefly responsible for the development of the KKNl: the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education. Within the Ministry of Education and Culture, the KKNl has been administered by the Directorate-General of Elementary and Secondary Education Management and the Directorate-General of Early Childhood, Non-Formal and Informal Education. Within the Ministry of Manpower, the KKNl has been the responsibility of the Directorate-General of Training and Productivity Development.

Since the issuance of the KKNl in 2012, the Ministry of Manpower has issued Decree No 21/2014 on the Implementation Guideline of the KKNl, which allows each ministry to develop its own implementation strategy of the KKNl based on the provision of the general guideline and supervised by the Ministry of Manpower.

At present, education and training provision in Indonesia is devised by each sector based on the Decree of the Ministry of Manpower No 21/2014. Professional competence and skills training are managed by the *Badan Nasional Sertifikasi Profesi* (National Office of Professional Certification) under the auspices of the Ministry. Thus, workers needing a professional certificate of competence may go to the Professional Certification Body established in various higher education institutions and public workshops to take the exams and obtain the certificate. Students in higher education institutions are also expected to earn a certificate of competence upon graduation, in addition to the degree diploma granted by the higher education institution.

In 2014, higher education merged with research and technology to become the new Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education. The KKNl has four main implications in relation to the Ministry:

1. equivalency and recognition of learning outcomes of formal education against the qualification stated in various levels of the KKNl;
2. recognition of prior learning as a recognition process of learning outcomes obtained through various channels;
3. regulation on access to various levels and kinds of higher education based on the KKNl's levels;
4. quality assurance for various kinds and levels of higher education.

Within the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, the KKNl has been the responsibility of the Directorate-General of Learning and Students' Affairs. Considering the implication of the KKNl, and based on the Law of Higher Education No 12/2012, the Presidential Decree No 08/2012 on the KKNl, and the Ministry of Manpower's Decree No 21/2014, the Ministry has devised a number of implementation guidelines of the KKNl for higher education, namely:

- Ministerial Decree on National Standards for Higher Education No 44/2015, renewed with Ministerial Decree on National Standards for Higher Education No 50/2018;
- Ministerial Decree on Guideline of Recognition of Prior Learning No 26/2016;
- Guideline on Curriculum Development in Higher Education, 2016;
- Guideline on Development of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education, 2016;
- Ministerial Decree on Integrated Higher Education System (Multientry Multiexit) No 54/2018;
- Ministerial Decree on National Committee on KKNl No 49/2018.

In addition, the Ministry has also devised a number of other operational regulations for higher education to support the implementation of the KKNl.

The stakeholders consider that the KKNl should be a basis for the development of national standards of education and professional (vocational) competency standards. These will then provide a point of reference for accreditation, assessment and certification by bodies such as the National Accreditation Board and the National Professional Certification Board, as well as professional and occupational competence certification boards and private accreditation bodies.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and links with the NQF

The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education define recognition of prior learning as the process by which learning outcomes acquired through non-formal or informal education or life experiences are recognized in the formal education sector. Recognition of prior learning has two purposes: (1) to provide wider access to formal educational pathways, thus fulfilling the mandate authorized by Indonesian law for promoting

individuals' lifelong learning; and (2) to recognize learning outcomes from various forms of learning outside the formal education system for the purpose of awarding an equivalent degree. Law No 14/2005 on Teachers and Lecturers recognizes persons with expertise in a particular field, such as industry, as lecturers in higher education.

A credit transfer scheme has been designed to improve mobility across the different educational streams with the aim of developing learners' expertise in specific fields. Inbuilt into the scheme are bridging programmes, which aim to boost the performance of individuals who fail to meet the minimum requirements of the institution conferring their credits.

### **NQF implementation**

The Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education and the Ministry of Manpower believe that a quality assurance system is necessary for the KKNi to be trusted nationally and internationally. It is envisaged that the National Standards of Education Board will adopt KKNi's level descriptors in designing national standards of education for the Ministry of Education and Culture and associated assessment procedures.

The Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education has already referenced existing learning outcomes in higher education to qualifications levels in the KKNi. In the process, it analysed learning outcome descriptions from more than 1,000 study programmes within 97 higher education institutions all over Indonesia (A and B accreditation category). Selected institutions had implemented an appropriate internal quality assurance system and held a good track record in international collaborations. The referencing process was enriched by comparative studies carried out by qualifications agencies in various countries, as well as through rigorous discussions with professional associations, scientific collegium, and employers and recruiters of university graduates in Indonesia (Directorate-General of Higher Education, n.d.).

The Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education has developed its national higher education standards (Decree 44/2015) based on the

KKNi. In addition, higher educational institutions ensure the quality of graduates through their own internal quality assurance systems, which refer to the KKNi. This policy covers implementation of the KKNi across various fields, levels, and types of higher education: vocational education, academic stream higher education as well as professional education.

Moreover, the National Accreditation Board has reformed its external quality assurance procedures by taking into account learning outcomes as described in the KKNi.

### **Referencing to regional frameworks**

The KKNi was designed in response to the Indonesian ratification of the International Convention of the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok Convention), which was signed on 16 December 1983 and renewed on 30 January 2008. The ratification was legalized by Presidential Decree No 103/2007.

### **Important lessons and future plans**

Thus far, Indonesia has developed a recognition of prior learning system, a credit earning and credit transfer mechanism, the KKNi, the National Accreditation Board, the National Board for Professional Certification, and the foreign degree recognition system. Given the increasing development of the global vocational and higher education market, the government sees the KKNi as an evolving concept that needs to be continuously updated in order to maintain the highest standards. It is for this reason that the KKNi is legally enshrined in a presidential decree rather than a government regulation or law, since this allows the necessary leeway for qualifications and level descriptors to be improved and updated over time.

#### **Abbreviation**

KKNi	Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian national qualifications framework)
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## Introduction

The Iraqi Technical-Vocational Qualifications Framework (TVQF) was officially signed off by the Iraqi Inter-Ministerial Working Group, the EU and UNESCO-Iraq on 17 July 2018. However, the qualifications will only come into full force and effect once the draft Law on National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is approved by the Council of Ministers and the Parliament. For the time being, it acts as a guiding framework, supporting the piloting of new curriculum and competency-based training and assessment. The National TVET Council will have a stated mission to manage, coordinate and quality assure the development of a responsive world-class vocational education and inter-related labour-market system in Iraq. As part of the new institutional arrangements established through the law, and falling under the auspices of the National TVET Council, a Vocational Qualifications Department will be established, responsible for the TVQF and its implementation.

The development of the Iraqi TVQF is a component of the EU-funded, UNESCO-implemented project 'Reforming TVET in Iraq', which aims at: (1) increasing access to, and improving the quality of, the TVET system as well as its relevance and responsiveness to the needs of the labour market; and (2) transforming TVET into a key driver for Iraq's economic growth, employment and social cohesion.

The TVQF is aligned to, and coherent with, the fundamental principles, values and intentions of the:

- Constitution of Iraq (2005),
- Iraqi Educational Philosophy (2008),
- National Employment Policy (2011),
- Kurdistan Region National Employment Policy (2013),
- Iraqi Curriculum Framework (2012),
- National Strategy for Education and Higher Education 2012–2022,
- National Development Plan (2013–2017); and Proposed National Development Plan (2018–2022),

- Strategy for the Development of the Private Sector (2017–2030),
- TVET Strategy 2014–2023,
- Kurdistan Region Roadmap: Reforming the Economy for Shared Prosperity and Protecting the Vulnerable (2016),
- Kurdistan Region Regional Strategic Development Vision for 2020,
- UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030,
- Recommendations of the 3rd Economic Conference on the Role of Private Sector in Kurdistan Economic Development (Kurdistan Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, 2016).

Iraq, located on the eastern flank of the Middle East and North Africa region, is a federal country of 18 provinces or governorates, within which Kurdistan, comprised of three governorates, is a semi-autonomous region in the north governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government. The country has a population of almost 38 million and a population growth rate of 3% with approximately 40.2% under 15 years of age. The percentage of those of working age (aged 15–64) has increased at a sustained pace – from 48% in 1987 to 53% in 1997, 58% in 2008, and 21.5 million (approximately 57%) in 2015.

Considered in the 1970s among the fastest developing countries in the world, during the past three decades Iraq has witnessed major political, economic and social changes and turmoil. The Iraq-Iran war of 1980–88, the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the economic sanctions of 1991–2003, the 2003 Iraq war and the continued instability that followed have severely affected the economic and human development of the country.

To address these challenges, Iraq needs to develop and implement a flexible, responsive and demand-led education and training system, integrating general education, higher education, and TVET, in which the role of industry, in partnership with government, is to take the lead in shaping the system's future direction. The development of a TVQF forms part of these efforts.

In the Iraqi context, the TVQF is based on a defined set of reference points using clearly specified, and stakeholder-agreed, outcome-based statements called learning outcomes. The set of outcome statements are often expressed across a series of hierarchical levels, and supported by a series of systematic conventions, mechanisms and processes that apply, irrespective of the body awarding a particular qualification. These learning outcomes are described in terms of knowledge, skills and the application of knowledge and skills (or 'competence').

Within the context of Iraq, the main philosophy of the TVQF is to 'regulate' formally-recognized TVET qualifications in the country under the auspices of a single qualifications framework for TVET (non-academic education). Important too is that the Iraqi TVQF has regard for the interrelationship of qualifications with labour market demand and be a catalyst and pivotal instrument for reforming the education and training system towards relevant and timely delivery of quality of outcomes for the country, consistent with the national development strategy and the TVET Reform Strategy. That is, it serves as a key input to realising improvements in technological, economic and social advancement and wellbeing.

Accordingly, it is envisaged that the TVQF will ensure that the education system will be an element of socio-economic development through the delivery of qualifications that meet the requirements of labour market needs, improve international competitiveness, and the shift towards a knowledge-based economy. More importantly, it precipitates improvements in information management and the exchange of qualitative and quantitative education, and training and labour market data for a multiplicity of outcomes involving learning.

To this end, the TVQF is seen as a tool to meet the following challenges:

- diversity of TVET institutions and TVET institutional outcomes;
- increasing demand for quality;
- addressing skills gaps and anticipated future demand for skills;
- providing entry points for unemployed young people and pathways to employment and continuing studies;
- increased international competition for competent and highly skilled human resources;
- promotion of effective lifelong learning strategies and methods.

## Policy objectives

The Iraqi TVQF has been established as a normative and single referent framework covering vocational, technical, and professional education and training that can permit the recognition of existing in-country qualifications, function as a structure for the development of all new regulated qualifications, and serve as an instrument for the comparison and alignment of international qualifications. It includes a framework architecture, conventions, processes and procedures for governing and quality assuring the framework.

The objectives of the TVQF are to provide a current and flexible framework of TVET qualifications that:

- accommodates all aspects and levels of training in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region;
- contributes to national economic performance by supporting current, relevant and nationally consistent qualification outcomes, which build confidence in the qualifications;
- supports access to qualifications and assists people to move easily and readily between different training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market;
- supports prior learning and lifelong learning by providing the basis for individuals to progress through training and gain recognition of such informal/non-formal learning and experience;
- underpins national regulation and quality assurance governance for training;
- enhances national and international mobility of graduates and workers in Iraq through recognition of qualifications;
- enables the alignment with national and pan-national qualifications frameworks in the region and internationally.

Equally important is that the Iraqi TVQF is augmented by quality assurance arrangements to support its implementation and, at the same time, provide a guarantee to stakeholders within the country and the international community to have confidence in the TVQF. This quality assurance system aims, once fully implemented, to satisfy three measures: validation, accreditation and quality assurance of assessment, leading to the awarding of qualifications.

## Levels and learning outcomes

The Iraqi TVQF is a central reference point for ensuring that Iraq qualifications are awarded on the basis of achievement of learning outcomes

measured against respective qualification descriptors and assessment criteria that maintain the quality assurance of TVET in Iraq. Accordingly, the TVQF is:

1. made up of 10 levels covering all sectors of TVET interrelated with the labour market;
2. based on learning outcome statements (performance outcomes);
3. a provider of a framework of common language, based on a conceptual hierarchical structure, e.g. from basic, to complex, to advanced, to highly specialized;
4. an enabling framework of complexity and breadth from one level to another;
5. a national frame of reference to accommodate and compare all types of qualifications existing, or to be developed;
6. an enabler of alignment with other national frameworks;
7. a tool to support recognition of formal learning (structured learning achieved and formally recognized) as well as informal and non-formal learning (structured and unstructured learning achieved), and prior learning;
8. an instrument to quality assure consistency and integrity of qualifications outcomes.

As stated earlier, the Iraqi TVQF is based on learning outcomes and on a hierarchy of levels. It has been proposed that a 10-level structure be adopted for Iraq. Collectively called level descriptors, each TVQF level is expressed in terms of three

domains: knowledge, skills and competence. The competence domain is further divided into contextual facets or dimensions involving the application of the requisite knowledge and skills: autonomy and responsibility, and process and engagement.

For each of the 10 levels of the TVQF, level descriptor (learning outcome) statements for each dimension of learning are developed, accumulating to a grid of 40 learning outcomes statements. The descriptor statements are the foundation of the TVET qualifications framework, and all qualifications are to be designed and aligned against this grid of level descriptors.

The levels and their descriptors represent an agreed number of levels that best serve Iraq's economy, education system and the nation's long-term vision. Importantly, the TVQF endeavours to complement, with an eye to the future, the current educational system in the country. Its purpose is to:

1. set nationally agreed upon qualifications with the same breadth and depth across providers in Iraq;
2. reduce the constraints and strains on trying to establish equivalency across providers in Iraq;
3. enable the country's qualifications to be more easily aligned with regional and international qualifications;
4. establish TVET as an important sector in education and provide it with state and status in society.

**Table 35. Iraqi TVQF levels and employment indicators**

OCCUPATIONAL LEVEL	LEVEL	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS	VOCATIONAL TRAINING QUALIFICATIONS	TECHNICAL EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS	
Managerial/ professional	10	Vocational Preparatory Certificate	Level 5 Certificate	Technical Doctorate	
	9			Technical Master	
	8			Technical Higher Diploma	
	7			Technical Bachelor	
Technician	6			Technical Diploma	
Craftsman	5				
Skilled	4				
Semi-skilled	3				
Foundation	2				
Basic	1			Basic Education Certificate	

**Table 36. Iraqi TVQF domains of knowledge, skills and competence**

LEVEL	NAME OF QUALIFICATION	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	COMPETENCE, AUTONOMY AND RESPONSIBILITY, AND ENGAGEMENT AND PROCESS
10	Technical Doctorate			
9	Technical Master			
8	Technical Higher Diploma			
7	Technical Bachelor			
6	Technical Advance Diploma			
5	Diploma	← Level descriptors must reflect all 3 strands →		
4	Certificate 4			
3	Certificate 3		↑ Increasing level of complexity	
2	Certificate 2			
1	Certificate 1			

In the context of the Iraqi TVQF, one credit stands for approximately 25 hours of learning. The minimum, maximum and multiples for the purposes of calculating credit will be part of the design of each programme offered by providers, along with the Rules of Combination policy. Still, the TVQF will set the general report lines of credit minimums and maximums for each qualification (level). Based on credit values and allocations in the TVQF, a learner can gain one of a number of types of qualifications.

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

An Inter-Ministerial Working Group, chaired by the Prime Minister Advisory Committee comprised of members of the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Region Government, and supported by representatives from the industry and private sectors, was established in 2015. In addition, a High-Level Focal Point Committee was established (including three line ministries at federal level as well as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and the Ministry of Labour). The Committee takes responsibility for a range of activities associated with the development and approval of the proposed TVQF.

Among the key factors seen by the Inter-Ministerial Working Group as vital as the design, scope, and

purpose of the TVQF, are the national contextual factors identified by Raffe (2011), cited in Bjornavold and Pervec-Grm (2012).

In terms of transitional governance of the TVQF, it is common to incubate the development of a new qualifications framework within an existing structure or organization, with the secondment of selected staff from ministries and agencies representing the spectrum of general education, TVET and higher education, to be the ‘champions’ of the framework for their organizations. These personnel form the team needed to start implementing a ‘bridging’ type of framework, which establishes common principles across all levels but recognizes essential differences between the sub-sectors. Such an approach has been considered appropriate in Iraq.

### TVQF implementation

Under the UNESCO TVET Reform programme, it is planned to constitute a small group of technical experts with experience in curriculum development and quality assurance representing the non-formal vocational training, vocational preparatory education and technical higher education. The work of these local experts will engage in intensive liaison with their own seconding ministries, and advocacy with other organizations. After significant on-the-job training and capacity building the local experts will be able to take the governance of the framework

forward, within the final agreed governance arrangements for the TVET sector on establishment of the law.

One of the first tasks in the implementation of the TVQF will be the inclusion of qualifications in the framework. This requires the development of a tool in the form, for example, of a searchable database.

Once the framework is operational, it will be the responsibility of each registered or accredited awarding body to examine the learning outcomes associated with each of their qualifications and arrive at an opinion as to the level of the qualification, its volume of learning, and whether it conforms to a generic type.

It is recommended that this policy should not cover foreign qualifications obtained by Iraqi individuals studying abroad, developed by foreign awarding bodies working in the country, or held by expats working in the country. Rather, such qualifications should be aligned/mapped to the framework through agreements with their awarding bodies, or with national authorities in the case of the national awards of other countries.

## Recognition of prior learning

There is lack of recognition of workers' prior learning in the main education and training stream in Iraq, as well as poor articulation of the various training and education programmes. Iraq's education system does not recognize workers' knowledge acquired through alternative and less formal means, and it is difficult to move from the path of vocational education to technical education or academia. Furthermore, there is limited support for occupational and career development in the public and private sectors. The draft System and Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning, developed as a part of the TVQF, intends to improve the interconnection between various training and education programmes and address the poor public perception of current programmes through the following actions:

- classify, develop, and recognize qualifications;
- promote the integration of qualifications through the development of alternative learning pathways between the various education and training sectors;

- develop learning outcomes-based qualifications, leading to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- provide quality, robust, and multiple learning pathways that can put vocational and academic qualifications sectors on a more equal level.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Iraq is a Gulf Cooperation Council neighbouring country that shares, to a particular degree, common features in its education system. To this end, when developing the Iraq TVQF, the possible future referencing to the Gulf qualifications framework, a 10-level meta-framework approved in Riyadh in May 2014, was considered. Further consideration was given, for the purposes of mutual recognition of qualifications and enhanced mobility of the labour force, to any future alignment/referencing to other meta-frameworks or regional frameworks such as the European qualifications framework and the Asian qualifications framework.

## Lessons learned and future plans

The implementation of the Iraqi TVQF requires the establishment of a permanent technical taskforce that can ensure the understanding and implementation of the key principles of the TVQF: clarity, quality and access. While *clarity* refers to the promotion of the concept of learning outcomes in Iraq and building relationships between different qualifications that will be aligned to, or placed at, the TVQF levels, *quality* necessitates the establishment of a quality-assured system for developing, approving, and issuing the qualifications. Whereas *access* highlights the vital need for establishing clear pathways for the recognition of prior learning and creation of flexible learning opportunities for all. The taskforce should bring together all relevant stakeholders to work out proposals on institutional management and the identification of the elements each key stakeholder – particularly the three line ministries (Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research, and Labour and Social Affairs) – is engaged in and responsible for.

### Abbreviations

TVET	technical and vocational education and training
TVQF	Technical-Vocational Qualifications Framework

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# IRELAND

## Introduction and context

Ireland is well situated according to several performance indicators for education and training, surpassing EU average figures and, in some cases, EU targets. The country has one of the highest rates of tertiary education attainment in Europe (53.5% in 2017) and a low percentage of early leavers from education and training (5.1%, compared with the EU average of 10.6%). The performance of 15-year-olds in basic skills is very good. Adult participation in lifelong learning and participation in vocational education and training (VET) are, however, below EU averages. Employment rates are strongly correlated with skill levels. Current reforms have among their priorities to increase quality, relevance and achievement across all levels of the education system, to modernise curricula, increase the labour market relevance of higher education with a focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, upskilling and reskilling in further education and training, and development of the apprenticeship system. The Department of Education and Skills published its 2018 Action plan for education with more than 370 actions and sub-actions<sup>422</sup> (European Commission, 2018).

The Irish national framework of qualifications (NFQ) is among the early developed qualifications frameworks in Europe, the concept having been first proposed in legislation in 1999<sup>423</sup>. Development of the framework was undertaken by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) supported by the two main awarding bodies, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Award Council (HETAC)<sup>424</sup>. The NFQ was officially established in

2003 following extensive public consultation. The statutory basis of the framework was reaffirmed in the 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act<sup>425</sup> which also established Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) as the custodian of the NFQ, and most recently in the 2018 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (amendment) Bill<sup>426</sup>. QQI was set up as a single national qualifications and external quality assurance body for post-school education and training in Ireland, and is responsible for the promotion, maintenance, implementation, further development and review of the NFQ.

The NFQ is a comprehensive and learning outcomes-based framework, covering all subsystems and levels of qualifications. It has 10 qualification levels, defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence, capturing all learning, from initial stages to the most advanced. All qualifications awarded by the national awarding bodies in Ireland are now included in the NFQ. At the time of writing (November 2018), draft legislation is before the Irish Parliament, intended to provide for regulated access to the NFQ to qualifications issued by private, professional and international awarding bodies.

The NFQ has reached an advanced operational stage. Implementation has been carried out by agreement within the education and training subsectors, with strong support from national stakeholders. The framework is seen as an enabler of institutional reform and further policy development in education, training and qualifications. A study on the impact and implementation of the Irish NFQ covering the period between 2003 and 2008 was published in 2009 (NQAI, 2009), emphasising the long-term, cyclic and iterative nature of framework development.

<sup>422</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2018). *Action plan for education 2018: strategy statement*. [www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/action-plan-for-education-2018.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/action-plan-for-education-2018.pdf)

<sup>423</sup> Qualifications (education and training) Act No 26/1999. [www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1999/act/26/enacted/en/pdf](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1999/act/26/enacted/en/pdf)

<sup>424</sup> HETAC is the qualifications awarding body for higher education and training institutions outside the university sector.

<sup>425</sup> Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012. [www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2012/a2812.pdf](http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2012/a2812.pdf)

<sup>426</sup> Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (amendment) Bill No 95/2018. [www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/95/](http://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/95/)



An independent external evaluation of the policy impact of the framework (Indecon, 2017) was also carried out; results published in 2017 suggest that the NFQ has a positive impact on the quality and transparency of qualifications and on the mobility and employability of qualification holders; it also makes qualification pathways easier to access and understand.

In 2006 the NFQ was the first national qualifications framework to be self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area and in 2009 it was referenced to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF) (NQAI, 2009a).

## Policy objectives

A national objective of moving towards a lifelong learning society, in which learners can benefit from learning opportunities at various stages throughout their lives, was a key factor in the developments that have taken place in Ireland. Major changes were envisaged for the qualifications system to achieve coherence, relate all qualifications to each other, ensure the quality of awards and shift the focus of qualifications from inputs to outcomes. In this context, the NFQ aims to encompass in its 10 learning outcomes-based levels the entire spectrum of learning achievements. It was defined as a 'single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards' (NQAI, 2003).

Although the NFQ was conceptualised as a driver of systemic change towards the objective of lifelong learning and rationalisation of the VET qualification system, it is currently viewed more as an enabler – rather than a driver – of wider reform, with implications for setting standards, quality assurance, developing awards, teaching, assessment, and programme design.

The aims for the development of the NFQ included:

- a. to promote development of a more flexible and integrated system of qualifications and of alternative learning pathways;
- b. to establish learning outcomes as a common reference point for qualifications and for recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- c. to respond to the qualification needs of individuals, society and the economy through increasing the range of available qualifications and the recognition of diverse forms of learning (NQAI, 2009a).

The 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act reaffirms the role of the NFQ as:

- a. a system for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State;
- b. a system of levels of awards based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence to be acquired by a learner, to entitle the learner to an award at a particular level within the framework.

The potential of the Irish NFQ to fulfil its purpose is strongly linked to its integration with related policies and initiatives. This has been aided by the establishment of QQI, whose work on quality assurance reinforces key elements of the NFQ, such as the learning outcomes approach. One of the conclusions of the 2017 NFQ policy impact assessment was the need to embed the NFQ in quality assurance policy and practice; this was seen by 76% of study respondents as a high priority for the future. At the same time, stakeholders had diverse views on future policy priorities for the NFQ: communication (67% of respondents viewed this as a high priority); progression and recognition functions (60% of respondents); curriculum design function (45% of respondents); and regulatory function (41% of respondents) (Indecon, 2017).

The 2018 amendment to the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act<sup>427</sup> includes provisions giving QQI statutory powers to include in the NFQ, qualifications issued by a broader range of awarding bodies. This development is seen as strengthening the comprehensive nature of the framework and its regulatory role. Over the past 15 years, the NFQ has taken on a more regulatory role compared to what was originally intended. While classification and transparency of qualifications remain important objectives, many users of qualifications that exercise regulatory or quasi-regulatory functions in relation to access to study or to employment have used the NFQ as a regulatory tool. In addition to the NFQ being used in regulatory ways by stakeholders such as employers and funding bodies for education and training, it is also true that the implementation of the framework has assumed more of a regulatory character over time. For example, statutory quality assurance guidelines for education and training providers<sup>428</sup> make repeated reference to the NFQ and related policies, embedding the NFQ in the statutory quality assurance arrangements for post-school education

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2016). *Core statutory quality assurance guidelines*. [www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf](http://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf)

and training in Ireland. This shifting balance between the information and regulation functions of the NFO is not well understood. In time, commentators may come to understand the significance of the altered institutional settings prompted by the 2012 Act, whereby the functions of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, were subsumed into an integrated quality assurance and qualifications agency, QQI. Regardless of the causes that may have prompted rebalancing of the informative and regulatory properties of the NFO, these kinds of change are likely to have implications for its future development (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The 2017 policy impact assessment of the NFO also reports that the potential opportunities and benefits brought about by the NFO are relevant to many of the strategic objectives set out in Ireland's *National skills strategy 2025*<sup>429</sup>: active collaboration between employers and education and training providers; strengthening the role of employers in skills development; and improving career information and guidance services.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach was central to establishment of the NFO, associated legislation and system reforms. The added value of learning outcomes is seen in giving direction to what a person is expected to know, understand and be able to do at the end of a programme of study. Concerning the differing views of learning outcomes as result-oriented, measureable and objective, and learning outcomes as process-oriented, open to negotiation and only partly measurable, the country recognises that both approaches may be needed and have a role, and sees the focus on learner profile and on programme context as part of the answer to this issue.

The main building blocks of the Irish NFO are the 10 learning outcomes-based levels of the framework, level indicators and award-types<sup>430</sup>. The 10 levels of the NFO capture all learning, from initial stages to the most advanced: qualifications achieved in schools, further education and training, and higher education and training are all included, and are all quality assured. Over time, the NFO also seeks to accommodate qualifications obtained

through non-formal learning, offered by international, private and professional bodies.

Each level has a specified level descriptor (broad description of the learning outcomes at a given level) and one or more award types also expressed in terms of learning outcomes. Levels describe nationally agreed standards of learning in terms of eight sub-strands of learning outcomes grouped as follows: knowledge (breadth and kind), know-how and skills (range and selectivity) and competence (context, role, learning to learn, and insight). Knowledge, skills and competences are defined following a constructivist approach.

At VET award level, in the Common award system (CAS-2008), learning outcomes are written using the NFO sub-strands but customised to the specific vocational area. Detailed learning outcomes are written at subject specific level. This allows learning outcomes in CAS standards to vary in number and detail depending on requirements (such as broad in art and design, detailed in business, and very detailed in agriculture). Professional award type descriptors were published in 2014<sup>431</sup> to aid the levelling of qualifications from apprenticeship programmes; they are similar to those in the NFO, but with an occupational/professional focus related to specific programme context. In 2016 QQI introduced a new policy and criteria for validation of provider programmes leading to awards issued by QQI<sup>432</sup>, requiring them to develop minimum intended programme learning outcomes for the overall programme and minimum intended module learning outcomes for each module within it.

NFO award-types describe the purpose, volume and progression opportunities associated with a particular award. Each award-type includes a wide range of qualifications developed by awarding bodies. Four classes of award-type have been determined to ensure that the framework is capable of recognising all types and sizes of learning achieved by a learner:

- a. major: the principal class of awards at each level, capturing a typical range of learning achievements at the level;
- b. minor: for partial completion of the outcomes for a major award;

<sup>429</sup> The *National skills strategy 2025 – Ireland's future* is available at: [www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub\\_national\\_skills\\_strategy\\_2025.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf)

<sup>430</sup> The structure of the Irish NFO can be seen in the fan diagram available at: [www.nfq-qqi.com/index.html](http://www.nfq-qqi.com/index.html)

<sup>431</sup> QQI (2014). *Professional award-type descriptors (award class: professional) for the alignment of professional awards at NFO levels 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9*. Available at: [www.qli.ie/Publications/Publications/Professional\\_Award-types\\_PS3\\_2014.pdf](http://www.qli.ie/Publications/Publications/Professional_Award-types_PS3_2014.pdf)

<sup>432</sup> More information on validation of provider programmes is available at: [www.qli.ie/Articles/Pages/Programme-Validation07.aspx](http://www.qli.ie/Articles/Pages/Programme-Validation07.aspx)

- c. supplemental: for learning that is additional to a major award;
- d. special purpose: for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievements.

As all types of qualification involve their own unique combination of technical, social and political dimensions, the principle of ‘best fit’ was found useful for allocating qualifications to NFQ levels in Ireland. Levelling of the main school leaving certificate<sup>433</sup> and the initial levelling of qualifications linked to apprenticeships were relatively more challenging, while allocating higher education qualifications to levels, broadly mirroring the Bologna three-cycle system, was less contentious. For apprenticeship qualifications leading to advanced certificate at NFQ level 6/EQF level 5, the initial ‘block levelling’ of traditional craft apprenticeships has been revisited and largely confirmed (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The need to revisit the original levelling of certain qualifications in the light of emerging practice, experience and evidence was highlighted in the most recent (2017) NFQ policy impact assessment.

The 2009 study on framework implementation and impact (NQAI, 2009a) concluded that adopting the learning outcomes-based approach entailed a long-term cultural shift that required time and continued attention, and that implementation of learning outcomes was progressing at variable speeds in the different subsystems. The study reported that ‘although different strategic approaches have been and are being taken to the introduction of learning outcomes, there appears to be a common lag in implementation between the administrative centres within awarding bodies and institutions and those engaged in teaching, training and assessment’ (NQAI, 2009a, p. 39). The need for continued debate within and across sectors, and the need to tackle the implications of the learning outcomes approach for assessment practices, were also emphasised.

According to a Cedefop study, ‘there is no literature that explicitly sets out the definition used for learning outcomes in Ireland’, but the concept is widely used in the literature and discussions related to the NFQ (Cedefop, 2016). The learning outcomes approach has started to provide common ground for different stakeholders (general education, higher education, VET, policy-makers, students, trade unions) and has become the basis for shared dialogue on the purpose of education. Increased progression between VET and higher education is considered the biggest

achievement in the steps taken so far. A key area to be addressed is implementation of an integrated and effective quality assurance process for learning outcomes referenced qualifications, operating across institutions, sectors and levels of education and training. The NFQ and the learning outcomes approach feature prominently in statutory quality assurance guidelines<sup>434</sup> for post-school education and training in Ireland.

The 2017 policy impact assessment of the NFQ also concluded that the learning outcomes approach has become integral to the Irish education and training system. The study indicated strong agreement across all stakeholder groups on the view that the NFQ has had a positive impact on course design, teaching, assessment and the monitoring of standards.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Development of the NFQ was initially coordinated by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), established in 2001 by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, following the Qualifications (education and training) Act from 1999. Two awards councils (HETAC and FETAC) were also created under the 1999 Act. For a decade, implementation of the framework was carried out by NQAI, designated EQF national coordination point and responsible for referencing the Irish NFQ to the EQF. A national steering committee – made up of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, HETAC and FETAC – was convened by NQAI to oversee the referencing process.

A new agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), was established on 6 November 2012 under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012<sup>435</sup>, as an independent State agency of the Department of Education and Skills. It was created by an amalgamation of four bodies that had both awarding and quality assurance responsibilities: FETAC, HETAC, NQAI and the Irish Universities Quality Board. QQI has assumed all functions of the four legacy bodies while also having new statutory responsibilities in particular areas. The agency is now responsible for promotion,

<sup>433</sup> The school leaving certificate was placed at NFQ levels 4 and 5 (EQF levels 3 and 4).

<sup>434</sup> QQI (2016). Core statutory guidelines for providers of education and training. [www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Core-QA-Guidelines.aspx](http://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Core-QA-Guidelines.aspx)

<sup>435</sup> Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012. [www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills/28/acts/2012/a2812.pdf](http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills/28/acts/2012/a2812.pdf)

maintenance, implementation, further development and review of the NFO.

This was an important step in consolidating the governance structure for deepening implementation of a comprehensive framework. It also suggests that Ireland's focus on qualifications has become more systematic, with stronger coordination of qualifications and quality assurance policies. QQI also has other functions: conducting reviews of access, transfer and progression policies in education and training; approving programmes offered by a variety of education providers; and promoting and regulating the quality of programmes<sup>436</sup>. It sits at the centre of the qualification system and cooperates with ministries, higher education institutions, employers and the voluntary sector.

NFO governance is currently ensured within the broader structures of QQI, which follow two strands: corporate and operational/academic. The corporate strand includes the QQI board, appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills, and a consultative forum consisting of stakeholder representatives from further and higher education and training. The board includes 10 members, of which at least two must represent learners. The operational/academic strand includes four sub-board committees made up of experts in the areas of their remit<sup>437</sup>.

Along with the staff dedicated to NFO development, other staff across QQI contribute to its work on NFO implementation: staff in awards development, validation, quality assurance, corporate services and communication, as well as the national Europass centre and the Irish National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC), both hosted by QQI.

The 2018 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (amendment) Bill strengthens the regulatory role of QQI, giving it statutory power to include qualifications issued by a broader range of awarding bodies in the NFO. National awarding bodies offering qualifications included in the NFO are currently QQI, the State Examinations Commission, the institutes of technology, and the universities.

<sup>436</sup> QQI (2017). *Who we are and what we do*. [www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Who%20We%20Are-Booklet-August%2017.pdf](http://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Who%20We%20Are-Booklet-August%2017.pdf)

<sup>437</sup> The four sub-board committees of QQI are: programmes and awards executive committee, programmes and awards oversight committee, policies and standards committee, and approvals and reviews committee. More information about the governance of QQI can be found at: [www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/QQI-Governance-.aspx](http://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/QQI-Governance-.aspx)

The four key priorities outlined in QQI's strategy for 2019–21 are:

- a. ensuring the integrity of the NFO;
- b. analysis and impact of measures taken to improve quality in education and training;
- c. collaboration and engagement of stakeholders through strategic partnerships;
- d. building organisational capacity<sup>438</sup>.

Consultation and stakeholder involvement have been key features of the national qualifications framework (NQF) process since the beginning. The development and early implementation of the NFO drew together many actors from across the skills and education system. Awarding bodies and education and training providers from all subsystems were engaged in accordance with their statutory roles and responsibilities. Early cooperation and collaboration has arguably led to the position where the NFO reflects a strong consensus about the kind and complexity of knowledge, skill and competence associated with qualifications at each of its ten levels. As the NFO has become more settled, engagement has become more an issue of specific interests of different stakeholder groups. The risk that the NFO may become taken for granted has been acknowledged; periodic reviews and renewal of the NFO are seen as a way to regenerate stakeholder engagement, and this has already taken place (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>439</sup>

There is currently no single national strategy for validation in Ireland, but there have been positive developments towards a system for recognition of prior learning (RPL)<sup>440</sup>, including the commitment of the Department of Education and Skills, announced in the *Action plan for education 2016–19*<sup>441</sup>, to establish a national policy. *The National skills*

<sup>438</sup> QQI (2019). *Statement of strategy 2019–21: adding value to qualifications*. [www.qqi.ie/News/PublishingImages/Pages/QQI%E2%80%99s-Statement-of-Strategy-2019-2021-%E2%80%93-Adding-Value-to-Qualifications/QQI%27s%20Statement%20of%20Strategy%202019-2021.pdf](http://www.qqi.ie/News/PublishingImages/Pages/QQI%E2%80%99s-Statement-of-Strategy-2019-2021-%E2%80%93-Adding-Value-to-Qualifications/QQI%27s%20Statement%20of%20Strategy%202019-2021.pdf)

<sup>439</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>440</sup> RPL includes prior formal, informal and non-formal learning.

<sup>441</sup> Department of Education and Skills. *Action plan for education 2016–19: strategy statement*.

*strategy 2025 – Ireland’s future*<sup>442</sup>, published in 2016, also included among its objectives the development of a system for RPL and better recognition of workplace learning, supporting lifelong learning. Both the further education and training strategy and the higher education strategy called for systematic implementation of RPL in the two sectors and a national RPL framework spanning sectors.

RPL-related initiatives over recent years grew organically and with commitment to excellent practice, but they have also highlighted the complexity of the RPL concept and implementation. While RPL is established as a powerful tool for widening participation in education and training and the labour market, the lack of a national policy based on a solid theoretical foundation has raised concerns that RPL implementation should not be done very quickly.

QQI provides an overarching governing structure for the coordination of RPL and supports implementation in partnership with stakeholders. Under the 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, the agency has policy responsibility for access, transfer and progression of learners. In 2015, QQI issued a restatement of the *Policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression for providers of further and higher education and training*<sup>443</sup> – first published in 2003 – and the *Principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training*<sup>444</sup>, first published in 2005 by NQAI. Providers must comply with QQI policies on credit accumulation, credit transfer, and identification and assessment of previously acquired knowledge, skill and competence, and must establish at local level their own policies and procedures on access, transfer and progression. With the 2018 Qualifications and quality assurance (amendment) Bill, providers are to be given a more central role in application processes for RPL.

Another strength of the Irish approach to the validation of non-formal and informal learning is the

voluntary RPL practitioner network<sup>445</sup> created in 2015 and supported by major stakeholders. Aims include contributing to policy development and it has enabled collaboration and sharing of practice. These developments demonstrate a targeted and strategic approach towards RPL implementation.

Arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, linked to the NFQ and leading to full or partial qualifications and/or giving access to education and training programmes, are in place in all education and training sub-sectors except general education. Learners can achieve entry to a programme through RPL, and can gain exemptions within a programme, gain credit towards an award and attain an award. In higher education, the national forum for the enhancement of teaching and learning commissioned a research project on RPL in higher education<sup>446</sup> which showed that most institutions considered claims for RPL in relation to advanced entry to a course and module exemptions; a limited number considered claims for full awards. QQI also funded a parallel research project on RPL approaches and practices in further education and training<sup>447</sup>, which suggested that RPL is seen more appropriate at the lower levels of the NFQ (levels 1–3); at higher levels (4–6) it seems to be approached with more caution, due to more direct links at these levels to entry to the labour market.

There is also evidence that employer attitudes towards RPL are becoming more favourable, but there are important differences in the use of RPL in the education sector compared to the labour market and the third sector. Four stages of validation consistent with those in the 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>448</sup> (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) are used, but the use and combination of these stages differs in practice depending on the purpose of RPL.

Qualifications acquired through validation of non-formal or informal learning use the same standards as formal qualifications. The definition of levels of

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[www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/Department-of-Education-and-Skills-Strategy-Statement-2016-2019.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/Department-of-Education-and-Skills-Strategy-Statement-2016-2019.pdf)

<sup>442</sup> The *National skills strategy 2025 – Ireland’s future* is available at: [www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub\\_national\\_skills\\_strategy\\_2025.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf)

<sup>443</sup> The 2015 restatement of the 2003 version is available at: [www.qqi.ie/Downloads/ATP%20Policy%20Restatement%20FINAL%202018.pdf](http://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/ATP%20Policy%20Restatement%20FINAL%202018.pdf)

<sup>444</sup> The first version, published in June 2005 by NQAI, is available at: [www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Principles%20and%20Operational%20Guidelines%20for%20RPL%202005.pdf](http://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Principles%20and%20Operational%20Guidelines%20for%20RPL%202005.pdf)

<sup>445</sup> More information about the RPL practitioner network is available at: <https://rpl-ireland.ie/>

<sup>446</sup> National forum for the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education (2015). *A current overview of recognition of prior learning (RPL) in Irish higher education*. Focused research report, No 2.

<sup>447</sup> Goggin et al. (2017). *Recognition of prior learning in Irish further education and training*. A study commissioned by QQI and ETBI, available at: [www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Prior%20Learning%20Report.pdf](http://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Prior%20Learning%20Report.pdf)

<sup>448</sup> Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. *Official Journal of the European Union*. C398/1. 22.12.2012. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32012H1222%2801%29>

learning and the articulation of learning outcomes in the NQF have been found useful for RPL purposes. OECD indicated that 'RPL arrangements in Ireland that lead to qualifications in the NQF are fully integrated with existing arrangements for qualifications, e.g. they operate within the overarching funding arrangements, rules and regulations on provision, quality assurance and assessment' (Harold et al., 2008, p. 39). On the other hand, it is not yet clear how, if at all, the NQF will play a role in the current process of policy formation and implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Among the challenges that Ireland is facing are the need for common definition and understanding, as well as data collection systems and indicators, on RPL, perceived lack of resources for capacity building (especially in the further education and training and third sectors) and need for clarity around the drivers and priorities for RPL.

## NQF implementation

The Irish NQF is an inclusive framework that has reached an advanced operational stage. Initial implementation prioritised qualifications in general education, VET and higher education awarded by national public bodies, which have now all been included in the framework. The NQF is also open to fit-for-purpose qualifications offered by professional bodies and private and international awarding bodies operating in Ireland (NQAI, 2003). Work is currently under way to include qualifications awarded outside the nationally regulated qualification system, aiming to reach the NQF's original aspirations (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

QQI maintains a national database of the further education and training qualifications that it offers<sup>449</sup>. The development of a statutory comprehensive database of all qualifications included within the NQF is under way. The new national database is expected to include VET qualifications currently in the QQI database, higher education qualifications and private and international ones, pending policy development on non-formal qualifications and the interest of awarding bodies. General education qualifications are not intended to be included in any national database. NQF and EQF levels are indicated in the existing QQI database and foreseen to be included in the comprehensive national database.

<sup>449</sup> The QQI database for further education and training qualifications is available at: <https://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/Search?searchtype=awards>

Since June 2015 they have also been included on all further education and training qualifications issued by QQI (since June 2015) as well as on Europass diploma supplements in higher education and Europass certificate supplements in VET (since 2012 and 2013, respectively). However, they are not included on general education and higher education qualification documents, which are issued by autonomous bodies; this decision was the result of cost-benefit analysis. Inclusion of NQF and EQF levels on Europass supplements was facilitated by coordination at central level and is believed to have made NQF/EQF level references on qualification documents less important (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Independent measures of public awareness of the NQF and EQF suggest that both are well known (33% and 28%, respectively, of all adults are aware of the two frameworks) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The NQF is known and used extensively by education and training institutions and providers, and guidance and counselling practitioners; it is well known and reasonably well used by labour market stakeholders. It is also well known by recognition authorities and bodies within the education system, but less so by those outside the system.

Initial communication of the NQF at the time of its establishment targeted the general public with TV campaigns but, over time, communications strategies have shifted toward the use of intermediaries or brokers to promote awareness and use of the NQF. Education and training providers are the primary channel for promoting awareness of the NQF to learners, while the guidance community has also had a significant impact on promoting to end users. Other intermediaries such as the Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) disseminate the NQF in surveys, including the national census. The Central Statistics Office has adopted the framework as an official classification for collection of data and publication of statistics on educational attainment. The National Skills Council collects and reports outputs of the education and training system using the NQF in its annual publication *Monitoring Ireland's skill supply*<sup>450</sup>. In higher education, the Central Applications Office manages the applications process using NQF levels<sup>451</sup>. Evidence also suggests that the framework is now a widely used instrument in employment offices (Elken, 2016). For direct promotion, QQI relies primarily on

<sup>450</sup> The 2017 report is available at: [www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/Monitoring%20Ireland's%20Skills%20Supply%20%202017\\_FinalVersion\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/Monitoring%20Ireland's%20Skills%20Supply%20%202017_FinalVersion_WEB.pdf)

<sup>451</sup> More information is available at: [www.cso.ie/en/methods/education/](http://www.cso.ie/en/methods/education/)

the QQI website<sup>452</sup>, podcast/radio and social media, post/mail, and newsletters of various national networks. An NQF video, podcasts, infographics and other promotional materials have been produced.

A comprehensive NFQ/EQF communication strategy is currently being developed, aiming to bring the frameworks closer to the end-users. The target groups for NQF communication are education and training providers, awarding bodies, learners, government officials, advocacy bodies, researchers, legislators and social partners, with a current focus on recruiters. The QQI strategy for employers and recruiters is intended to involve participation in events and consultations with targeted stakeholders, providing insights into labour market requirements and socio-economic realities. An instrument is intended to be developed to survey employers/recruiters with a view to getting a better understanding of the role and use of qualifications in recruitment (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Two NFQ evaluation studies have been carried out so far: a 2009 study on the impact and implementation of the NFQ<sup>453</sup> and a 2017 policy impact assessment of the Irish NFQ (Indecon, 2017)<sup>454</sup>.

Although the 2009 study (NQAI, 2009) could not authoritatively determine the impact of the NFQ or identify causal contributions by the framework, it provided important insights into policy formation and implementation. Three distinct processes related to the implementation of the NFQ were discerned: placement of existing awards in the framework; introduction of framework standards and associated programme validation; and the deeper implementation of a learning outcomes approach in all aspects of qualifications. The study also indicated that progression routes into higher education and training have increased and have become more transparent since the introduction of the NFQ, and that the framework had considerable potential to be used in recruitment, in developing

career pathways, and in planning work-based learning and training. The challenges identified at that time for NQF implementation included concerns about the accurate placement of awards on framework levels, the development and use of awards at all framework levels, the need to embed the framework in quality assurance arrangements, and the challenge of raising awareness about the NFQ within the education and training system.

The 2017 policy impact assessment of the Irish NFQ (Indecon, 2017) found that the NFQ had a positive impact on the quality, transparency and comparability of qualifications, and the mobility and employability of holders of qualifications in Ireland. It also showed that there was continued strong support for the NFQ as an important element of the national skills and qualifications architecture, continued interest in a qualifications agenda and support for a national forum for knowledge exchange on all qualifications developments, including NFQ and EQF. At the same time, the risks of the NFQ becoming taken for granted and of the weakening of vigilance in maintaining the integrity of the NFQ were acknowledged, including the need to revisit the original levelling of certain qualifications in the light of emerging practice, experience and evidence. Specific recommendations included:

- a. to continue to develop and implement the NFQ as a responsive and adaptable mechanism for qualifications and skills policy;
- b. to consider initiatives to improve awareness of the NFQ among stakeholders, particularly recruiters;
- c. to revisit the operation of the NFQ for upper secondary school qualifications in Ireland and for qualifications at EQF level 5;
- d. to examine QQI's awarding function and NFQ levelling processes more generally;
- e. to ensure clarity and simplicity of communication;
- f. to include a broader range of qualifications within the NFQ;
- g. to ensure strong international engagement;
- h. to establish data to investigate transfer and progression pathways through the national qualifications system;
- i. to establish a national forum for qualifications (Indecon, 2017).

The NFQ is an outward-looking framework with a strong external dimension through engagement with non-European countries: Australia, Hong Kong, Jordan and Bahrain, Malaysia and New Zealand<sup>455</sup>.

<sup>452</sup> [www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-\(NFQ\).aspx](http://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-(NFQ).aspx)

<sup>453</sup> See NQAI (2009). *The 2009 Study on the impact and implementation of the Irish NFQ* was commissioned by the NQAI and carried out by an international study team panel based on a background paper, reports from stakeholders, case studies, reports and submission from public and consultative forum.

<sup>454</sup> See Indecon (2017). *The 2017 Policy impact assessment of the Irish NFQ* was commissioned by QQI and conducted by Indecon International Economic Consultants. It used a mixed method approach: an online survey of national stakeholders and bilateral interviews with key representative bodies.

<sup>455</sup> Information on qualification recognition arrangements between New Zealand and Ireland is available at: [www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/our-role-in-international-](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/our-role-in-international-)

The importance of maintaining the international connectedness of the NFAQ was also highlighted in the 2017 review (Indecon, 2017), while the EQF was seen as a valuable asset for promoting the international recognition of Irish qualifications abroad and of foreign qualifications in Ireland.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The Irish NFAQ was the first national qualifications framework to complete its referencing to the European qualifications framework (EQF), in 2009. The country built on experiences and conclusions of self-certification of compatibility of the Irish NFAQ with the qualifications framework for the European higher education area, completed in 2006.

Since then, significant changes in the institutional and legislative landscape have taken place. Most of the agencies that endorsed the 2009 referencing report were abolished and the 2012 Qualifications and quality assurance Act established new institutional arrangements for NFAQ governance. It introduced more coherent and strengthened provisions for the integration of the NFAQ and access, transfer and progression policies into quality assurance arrangements in post school education and training. The NFAQ has also undergone some technical changes. A new professional award type at NFAQ levels 5 to 9 (EQF levels 4 to 7)<sup>456</sup> was introduced and is now operational. A new school qualification at NFAQ level 3 (EQF level 2) has been introduced to replace the junior certificate which was last issued in 2016.

Drawing on the conclusions and recommendations of the most recent evaluation of the framework, it is envisaged to commence re-referencing of the NFAQ to EQF in 2019.

## Important lessons and future plans

Following an incremental approach to implementation, the NFAQ has reached an advanced operational stage. A combination of factors contributed to its success: a strong legislative basis; institutional reform leading to increased institutional coherence, including the establishment of QQI in 2012 as an integrated quality assurance and qualifications body; political support; and a commitment to decision-making by consensus. All these led to a better integration of the NFAQ

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education/country-specific-recognition-arrangements/ireland/

<sup>456</sup> One university is now delivering an apprenticeship programme at NFAQ level 10 (EQF level 8).

with broader education, training and labour market policies and practices.

Experience with the framework and available evidence indicate that the NFAQ has had a strong influence on the promotion of learning outcomes in Ireland and on the permeability of education and training by improving access and progression (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). It has had impact on access of non-traditional students to higher education (Elken, 2016). The 2009 study on the impact and implementation of the Irish NFAQ (NQAI, 2009) suggested that there was a common lag in learning outcomes implementation. A Cedefop study (2016) on the application of learning outcomes suggested that further work to implement the learning outcomes approach may strengthen the capacity of the NFAQ to meet its aims. Establishing an effective quality assurance process for learning outcomes, operating across institutions and levels of education and training, could be a positive step forward. The NFAQ and the learning outcomes approach feature prominently in statutory quality assurance guidelines<sup>457</sup> on post-school education and training in Ireland.

The NFAQ is also perceived as an important tool in supporting the recognition of foreign qualifications. It has had a moderate influence on the review, renewal and quality assurance of qualifications, and on increasing parity of esteem between types of education and training and qualifications. Implementation relied on strong support from, and partnerships between, different stakeholders. The NFAQ is seen as having had a strong influence on improved dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders within education and training and a moderate influence on cooperation between education and training and labour market stakeholders (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

One of the key challenges for the future implementation of the framework is ensuring the protection of standards and improving quality through developing and promoting the integrity of the Irish NFAQ. The 2017 policy impact assessment (Indecon, 2017) showed that the need to embed the NFAQ in quality assurance policy and practice was seen by the majority of responders (76%) as a high priority for the future. This is particularly important in the context of opening the Irish NFAQ for inclusion of qualifications from other awarding bodies following the 2018 amendment to the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act. Another aspect that will require careful attention

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<sup>457</sup> QQI (2016). *Core statutory guidelines for providers of education and training*. [www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Core-QA-Guidelines.aspx](http://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Core-QA-Guidelines.aspx)



in the next period is clear communication about the framework, particularly in the context of the changing role and nature of the NFQ. The use of 'jargon' was identified by a number of stakeholders as both a challenge to a broad understanding of the framework and a potential barrier to engagement with the NFQ and its associated policies (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

An important point of discussion in the country is related to demonstrating the impact of the framework. The sustainability of the NFQ depends on whether or not it can be shown to contribute to education, training and labour market national policy

agendas. The Irish experience has highlighted an important difference between framework use and framework impact. The latter is believed to be more difficult to assess and any general conclusions are still tentative and partial. What has become clear is that the NFQ on its own is capable of delivering relatively modest impact. The timely and effective deployment of the NFQ alongside, and appropriately integrated with, other policy interventions seems to concentrate its reform impact. Analysts and commentators are only beginning to understand the precise combination of conditions and interventions required for the NFQ to address real-world problems (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

**Table 37. Irish national framework of qualifications (NFQ)**

NFQ LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
10	Doctoral degree Higher Doctorate	8
9	Master degree Postgraduate diploma Professional Award	7
8	Honours bachelor degree Higher diploma Professional Award	6
7	Ordinary bachelor degree Professional Award	6
6	Advanced certificate e.g. level 6 advanced certificate in horticulture Higher certificate Professional Award	5
5	Level 5 certificate e.g. level 5 certificate in hospitality operations Leaving certificate Professional Award	4
4	Level 4 certificate e.g. level 4 certificate in engineering skills Leaving certificate	3
3	Level 3 certificate e.g. level 3 certificate in information and communication technology Junior certificate*	2
2	Level 2 certificate e.g. level 2 certificate in general learning	1
1	Level 1 certificate e.g. level 1 certificate in communications	1

(\*) The Junior certificate (NFQ level 3) was last issued in 2016. It has been replaced by a Junior cycle profile of achievement (JCPA); the formal inclusion of the JCPA within the NFQ is subject to discussion.

Source: Adapted from QQI: [www.nfq-qqi.com/index.html](http://www.nfq-qqi.com/index.html)

## Abbreviations

CAS	common award system	NFQ	national framework of qualifications
EQF	European qualifications framework	NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council	NQF	national qualifications framework
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Award Council	QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
		RPL	recognition of prior learning
		VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) – hosting the EQF national coordination point: [www.qqi.ie/](http://www.qqi.ie/)

QQI qualifications database: <https://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/Search?searchtype=awards>

National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (2009). *Referencing of the Irish national framework of qualifications to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*. [www.qqi.ie/Documents/Referencing%20Irish%20NFQ%20to%20the%20European%20QF%20for%20Lifelong%20Learning.pdf](http://www.qqi.ie/Documents/Referencing%20Irish%20NFQ%20to%20the%20European%20QF%20for%20Lifelong%20Learning.pdf)

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NQAI (2009b). *Referencing of the Irish national framework of qualifications (NFQ) to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF)*. Dublin: NQAI. [www.qqi.ie/Documents/Referencing%20Irish%20NFQ%20to%20the%20European%20QF%20for%20Lifelong%20Learning.pdf](http://www.qqi.ie/Documents/Referencing%20Irish%20NFQ%20to%20the%20European%20QF%20for%20Lifelong%20Learning.pdf)

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## Introduction and context

The Italian education system has seen improvements in several key indicators of education and training in recent years. There has been a steady decrease in the rate of early school leaving, which has fallen to 13.8%, and adult participation in lifelong learning has been increasing, reaching 8.3% in 2016. The proportion of students in vocational education and training (VET) is above the EU average (55.8% in 2016, compared to 47.3%). However, the employment rate of recent VET graduates is among the lowest in the EU. VET reforms, including a diversification of study pathways and support for the dual system, are expected to address this issue. Student performance in basic skills in the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed large regional differences between the north-east and the south, and between Italian and migrant pupils, while the overall percentages of underachievers in reading, maths and science are above EU averages. The percentage of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) is the highest in the EU (24.3% for the 15–29 age group in 2016, compared to the EU average of 14.2%). School reform is expected to improve education outcomes; student testing has been extended, mainly through formative assessment at primary and secondary level, and work-based learning is a requirement for the final three years of upper secondary school. The rate of attainment in tertiary education is the second lowest in the EU, at 26.2% in 2016, compared to the EU average of 39.1%, and is being addressed with measures to increase student financial aid. While the take-up of higher education graduates on the labour market is slower compared to other EU countries, the employment rate of recent tertiary graduates has started to recover (European Commission, 2017).

The reforms carried out since 2003 across education and training (upper secondary general education, VET and higher education), – motivated by a need to bridge education and labour market needs – anticipated the principles of a learning-outcomes-based NQF. Given the complex model of governance in the country and the fragmentation

of the education and training system<sup>458</sup>, one of the challenges has been to achieve effective inter-regional coordination to encourage recognition of the regional qualification systems and inter-regional mobility<sup>459</sup>.

Initial European qualifications framework (EQF) referencing was carried out between 2009 and 2012 linking national formal qualifications, as well as those awarded by regions within the framework of the State-Regions agreement, directly to the eight EQF levels. The first Italian referencing report was adopted in December 2012 and presented to the EQF advisory group in May 2013 (Italian technical working group, 2012).

The Italian qualifications framework for higher education (*quadro dei titoli italiani dell'istruzione superior – QTI*)<sup>460</sup> was published in 2010 by the Ministry of Education, University and Research. Self-certification to the qualifications framework for the European higher education area was completed in 2012<sup>461</sup> and decisions made about higher education qualifications were taken up in the initial EQF referencing.

Following the first referencing process (2012), a national strategy on lifelong learning was defined, which led to the adoption of Law No 92/2012 on labour market reform<sup>462</sup> and Legislative Decree No 13/2013<sup>463</sup>; this established a national system

<sup>458</sup> There are 21 regions and two autonomous provinces in Italy. With the modification of the VTitle of the Constitution in December 2001, the regions increased their competence in education, maintained their competence in the vocational training field and in the definition of professional profiles and qualifications. As a result, there is a greater need for coordination between regions.

<sup>459</sup> Cedefop (2014). *The common European tools reaching European citizens – Country studies: Italy* (unpublished).

<sup>460</sup> The Italian qualifications framework for higher education is available at: [www.quadrodeititoli.it/index.aspx?IDL=2](http://www.quadrodeititoli.it/index.aspx?IDL=2)

<sup>461</sup> National report regarding the Bologna process implementation 2012–15 – Italy, 2015. [www.ehea.info/pid34250-cid101267/italy.html](http://www.ehea.info/pid34250-cid101267/italy.html)

<sup>462</sup> Italian Government (2012).

<sup>463</sup> Italian Government (2013).

for certification of competences and a national repository of education, training and vocational qualifications awarded at national and regional levels and described in terms of learning outcomes. To enable the setting up of the national repository, stakeholder agreement was reached in 2015 on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills – the national framework of regional qualifications – followed by an inter-ministerial decree<sup>464</sup>.

These developments were also preconditions for, and served as steps towards, putting in place a comprehensive NQF through dialogue with all national stakeholders. The Italian NQF was adopted through an inter-ministerial decree in January 2018<sup>465</sup>. It is structured on eight levels described in learning outcomes in the three domains of the EQF (knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy). Sub-descriptors have also been developed by extending the EQF level descriptors to cover all qualifications available nationally. The framework covers qualifications from general education, higher education and VET qualifications administered at regional level. Professional and private qualifications are to be included in the future.

## Policy objectives

Italy has faced the challenge of integrating different levels of lifelong learning systems into a coherent national qualification system. The context for designing and awarding qualifications is complex: it is governed by multiple legislative acts under different regional and national authorities. The comprehensive NQF adopted in January 2018 represents the main tool for the description and classification of qualifications awarded within the national and regional system and for referencing Italian qualifications to the EQF.

An increasing focus on lifelong learning as a strategic lever for economic growth, social cohesion and quality of education, training and employment services was influenced by EU-level developments: the 2008 recommendation on the establishment of the EQF for lifelong learning; the 2009 Council conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020); the 2012 recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning; and, more recently, the *New skills agenda for Europe* and the 2017 recommendation on the EQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). In this context,

the NQF aims to help coordinate and strengthen the national lifelong learning systems and the services for the validation and certification of competences.

Inspired by the principles of the EQF, the objectives of the Italian national framework include (Italian Government, 2018):

- a. to improve access, transparency and permeability of the qualifications system;
- b. to promote the currency of qualifications at national and European level, including in terms of geographical and professional mobility;
- c. to promote the centrality of the person and the value of individual experiences, including through validation and certification of competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, and those acquired through work-based learning;
- d. to contribute to the quality of education and competences acquired by individuals for personal, civic, social and professional growth.

Adoption of the NQF is also expected to make referencing to the EQF easier and to help represent the Italian education and qualifications system and its relation to the labour market.

Given its aim to increase citizens' knowledge, skills and abilities in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts in line with the general rules and minimum standards set out by the Legislative Decree No 13/2013 setting up the national system for certification of competences<sup>466</sup>, the NQF is expected to be used as a 'multitasking tool' in a variety of contexts (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- a. in general education, VET and higher education for strengthening links between subsystems to reduce barriers to progression and to increase permeability of subsystems;
- b. in the validation process for the identification, assessment and certification of skills acquired in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts;
- c. in public employment services and guidance centres for skill profiling and in developing career pathways;
- d. in the labour market for recruitment, workforce development, planning of work-based learning, and for certifying skills and competences acquired in work contexts;
- e. in institutional contexts for developing actions and measures to support vulnerable groups (e.g. NEETs) or to support specific programmes (e.g. upskilling).

<sup>464</sup> Italian Government (2015a).

<sup>465</sup> Italian Government (2018).

<sup>466</sup> Italian Government (2013).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The Italian education and training system has introduced the learning outcomes approach at national and regional levels, with each subsystem having its own characteristics. The debate on using learning outcomes in the country started about a decade ago and continues, along with gradual reform of the entire education and training system. A main forum for this debate was the public consultation that preceded the adoption of the first EQF referencing report in 2012.

The eight EQF levels and level descriptors were used directly in the first Italian referencing process to link all national qualifications from formal education and training to the EQF. The starting point of the referencing process was to analyse both learning processes and learning outcomes in relation to the EQF levels, including a critical analysis of the EQF level descriptors: knowledge, skills and competence. The 'knowledge' and 'skills' descriptors of the EQF were deemed clear enough to allow correlation with Italian qualifications, while the 'competence' descriptor was divided into three dimensions: work/study context; type of tasks, problems and problem-solving approaches; and autonomy and responsibility.

The comprehensive NQF, adopted in January 2018<sup>467</sup>, was developed using the learning outcomes approach in close alignment to the structure of the EQF. It consists of eight qualification levels defined by level descriptors covering three dimensions: knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy. To ensure all national qualifications are included, sub-descriptors have also been developed, extending the EQF level descriptors. The explicit and implicit dimensions embedded in the EQF descriptors were analysed by a national technical-methodological working group, resulting in the adoption of the explicit dimensions and in making the implicit dimensions more explicit. In some cases, in particular for the 'knowledge' and 'responsibility and autonomy' descriptors, the explicit and implicit dimensions were adjusted to the national context; in other cases, especially for the 'skills' descriptors, additional elements were adopted to make the NQF descriptors more inclusive.

The framework covers qualifications from general education, higher education and VET qualifications administered at regional level, while professional and private qualifications are to be included in the future. In the current, continuing process of

allocating qualifications to NQF levels, specific attention will be given to NQF level 5, which marks the transition between secondary and tertiary education, and – from a labour market perspective – between the production and delivery of goods and services (levels 2 to 5) and the managerial levels (levels 6 to 7) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

One significant area of work in recent years has been on regional qualifications (numbering about 4 000) to enable their inclusion in the national repository of education, training and vocational qualifications. This work has been carried out through the *Atlas of work and qualifications*<sup>468</sup>, a methodological tool for the rationalisation of the high number of regional VET qualifications with different content and awarding criteria. This is based on a classification of 24 economic-professional sectors using the classification codes adopted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics concerning economic activities – ATECO 2007<sup>469</sup>, and professions – CP 2011<sup>470</sup>. The atlas is expected to be extended to all national qualifications in the future. Regions are responsible for the redesign of regional qualifications using learning outcomes and this work is continuing.

In terms of take-up of the learning outcomes approach in the different subsystems, in general education, qualifications awarded by upper secondary schools and regional qualifications awarded within the State-Regions agreement are described in learning outcomes according to a 2010 Presidential decree on general education reform. There are three main pathways at upper secondary level: general (*licei*), technical and vocational education. Each pathway lasts five years, leading to a diploma, and learning outcomes are linked to the EQF level 4.

In vocational training, where the regions have principal responsibility, there is a focus on competences, which are described in terms of learning outcomes. There are two different options for vocational training: a three-year or a four-year pathway. Both lead to a diploma and a qualification acknowledged at national level. The four-year course can open up higher education options, provided the student takes an additional year and sits a State exam. The apprenticeship system has been reformed in recent years to integrate training and

<sup>467</sup> Italian Government (2018).

<sup>468</sup> The atlas, based on the decree of 30 June 2015, is available in Italian at: <http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org>

<sup>469</sup> ATECO 2007: [www.istat.it/en/archive/17959](http://www.istat.it/en/archive/17959)

<sup>470</sup> CP 2011: [www.istat.it/it/archivio/18132](http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/18132)

employment within a dual system<sup>471</sup>. The 2011 State-Regions agreement on VET learning pathways describes 21 vocational profiles using learning outcomes. Competences are defined as the smallest units for certification defining a vocational profile, collected into codified lists based on the relevant EQF level and on a clear explanation of learning outcomes (Italian technical working group, 2012).

The higher (non-academic) technical education and training pathway (*istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore* – IFTS) used a national standard system based on competences dating from 2000; since 2008 the standards have been updated to make them more coherent with the learning outcomes approach. Following this 2008 amendment, IFTS was reorganised and a higher technical education pathway (*istruzione tecnica superiore* – ITS) was set up<sup>472</sup>. IFTS courses run for one year; ITS courses for two years. Both types of curricula are made up of units consistent with the learning outcomes approach. They are linked to EQF levels.

In academic education (universities), policy-makers reinforced the need to align diplomas and certificates with the commitments of the Bologna process. In the existing framework for higher education (QTI), Dublin descriptors<sup>473</sup> are used nationally for the cycles of higher education agreed within the Bologna process. More specific descriptors are being defined for each programme by universities but clear evidence of applying the learning outcomes approach is still missing (Cedefop, 2016). Higher education is still under reform, aiming to move the system closer to the European standards designed by the Bologna process.

However, despite the move towards a learning outcomes approach<sup>474</sup>, a gap still exists between

theory and practice. While the benefits of the learning outcomes orientation and its potential to change teaching and learning are recognised, in practice teachers continue to use a more traditional input-oriented approach. Learning outcomes implementation is mainly part of pilot projects. It is not yet possible to assess the extent to which the approach is applied or its impact on the ground.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

One of the main challenges in establishing and implementing a comprehensive NQF in Italy has been the high number of stakeholders involved and the complexity of the national education and training system, with diverse qualification repositories at national and regional level managed autonomously by the awarding bodies. The Ministry of Education, University and Research is responsible for qualifications awarded in general and higher education, while the regions and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano are responsible for VET qualifications. The Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies have been leading developments in EQF-related processes, in agreement with the regions, autonomous provinces and social partners, as laid down in several agreements.

The first Italian referencing report, linking qualifications recognised at national level directly to the EQF, was adopted in the State-Regions conference, following public consultation in 2012. A total of 150 stakeholder organisations took part in the consultation, along with universities, regions and enterprises.

A preliminary step towards developing an NQF that includes all Italian qualifications has been the complex task of rationalising and recognising at national level the diverse range of regional qualifications. This work was grounded in the National Law No 92/2012 on the reform of the labour market<sup>475</sup> and the Legislative Decree No 13/2013 on the national certification of competences and validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>476</sup>. Article 8 of this decree provides for the creation of a national repository of education, training and vocational qualifications and the definition of a minimum standard framework of services for certification of

<sup>471</sup> Italian Government (2015b). This legislative decree was set up by the ministerial decree of 12 October 2015 on the definition of vocational standards for apprenticeship and general criteria for the implementation of apprenticeship learning pathways, putting the dual system into effect.

<sup>472</sup> Higher technical education and training courses organised by higher technical institutes with qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Education.

<sup>473</sup> The Dublin descriptors used are: knowledge and understanding; applying knowledge and understanding; making judgements; communication skills; learning skills.

<sup>474</sup> Other legislative developments that take into consideration the learning outcomes orientation include: the State-Regions agreement of 24 September 2015 on the dual system in VET, which introduces the principle of learning by working and the development of work-based learning policies; the new guidelines on internships (25 May 2017), managed by the regions and aimed at (re)inclusion on the labour market, which introduce the

construction of a competence-based curriculum and the validation of competences in internships programmes (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

<sup>475</sup> Italian Government (2012).

<sup>476</sup> Italian Government (2013).

competences. For the implementation of the national repository, an agreement was reached on the operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills, adopted by the two ministries (education and labour) through the decree of 30 June 2015<sup>477</sup>.

At technical level, this work has been supported by a technical committee, composed of representatives of those authorities responsible for qualifications<sup>478</sup>. Its role is to establish partnerships and exchange technical solutions and practices with all the main institutional stakeholders involved. Its responsibilities include (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- a. setting up, implementing and maintaining the national repository of qualifications;
- b. the description and monitoring of the minimum standards for validation and certification of competences;
- c. the description of technical provisions to develop and implement the information system for the interoperability of the authorities responsible for the certification of competences.

In 2015, the EQF national coordination point (NCP), hosted at that time by the National Institute for the Development of Vocational Training (ISFOL, now INAPP), was mandated to prepare a technical proposal for the comprehensive framework. This proposal, which also benefited from the contribution of the national methodological working group, was finalised and adopted through the inter-ministerial decree of January 2018<sup>479</sup>. The decree regulates the procedures and criteria for allocating qualifications to NQF levels. The EQF NCP is responsible for implementing the comprehensive NQF, for the coordination of the allocation process, and for updating the referencing report.

Since 2017, the EQF NCP has been part of the new National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies (ANPAL), as a result of the 2015 Jobs Act<sup>480</sup>; ANPAL is the main institution implementing

active labour market policies. ANPAL's mission is to reduce unemployment and improve skills and employability. Its main tasks are to coordinate all the actors delivering employment services at local level (such as public employment centres, private providers, and other actors within the network of employment services) and to support developing skills and qualifications for entry to the labour market and for further learning. The agency has also been designated the national Europass centre and the national coordination point for Euroguidance, and is responsible for promoting all EU tools designed to contribute to employability and mobility, to support young people's transition to the labour market, and to connect jobseekers with employers. In this respect, ANPAL develops training and information actions on the use of EU tools for intermediary bodies (public employment service operators, schools and training centres, universities, enterprises) and for end users (students and workers). The activities of the EQF NCP are included in, and coherent with, ANPAL's broader mission, such as (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- a. implementing skill profiling tools: use of the OECD *Education and skills online* tool in the public employment services;
- b. implementing the unique information system: a web-portal whose aim is to provide information to both jobseekers and employers on vacancies and skills available in the labour market;
- c. adopting the EURES Regulation as a tool for the cooperation network between the European Commission and the public employment services of Member States;
- d. participating in national upskilling policies and the implementation of national skills strategies (such as the OECD *Skills strategy*).

Another body involved in work on qualifications has been the National Institute for Public Policies Analysis (INAPP, formerly ISFOL), which is currently involved as an independent evaluator in implementing and maintaining the national repository, in the allocation of qualifications to NQF levels, and in referencing the NQF to the EQF.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>481</sup>

A national legal framework on validation has been progressively developed in Italy since 2012.

<sup>477</sup> Italian Government (2015a).

<sup>478</sup> The technical committee is composed of representatives of the following national authorities: the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the regions and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, the Department for European policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (for qualifications of regulated professions), the Ministry of Economic Development and social partners.

<sup>479</sup> Italian Government (2018).

<sup>480</sup> The Jobs Act represents a major labour market reform undertaken in Italy in 2014–15, which aimed to reform employment services through active labour market policies, and to promote employment and employability-oriented initiatives.

<sup>481</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update of the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al. forthcoming).

Law No 92/2012<sup>482</sup>, for reform of the labour market, paved the way for creating a national system of competence certification and validation of non-formal and informal learning as key elements of lifelong learning. The law fixed rules and regulatory requirements (standards) concerning the characteristics of validation/certification services and the parties involved, with the aim of ensuring transparency, usability and broad accessibility. Law No 92/2012 led to the adoption of different provisions, including Legislative Decree No 13/2013 on national certification of competences and validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>483</sup>. Article 3 of the decree defined some important principles and features of the validation system:

- a. the focus is on the competences acquired by an individual in formal, non-formal or informal contexts;
- b. a whole qualification or parts of it can be obtained through validation;
- c. the system is designed to serve the individual, assuring simplicity, accessibility, transparency, accuracy, confidentiality and fairness;
- d. documents and certificates issued in the validation process are public;
- e. quality assurance for the reliability of national competence certification is based on a shared and progressive system of indicators, tools and quality standards applied at national level.

The validation system defined by Decree No 13/2013 is national and comprehensive as it covers all qualifications from general and higher education (under the authority of the Ministry of Education) and VET (under the authority of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano). It also includes professional and regulated qualifications (under the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Economic Development). Qualifications obtained through validation are the same as those obtained in the formal system. The decree defines three types of standards for validation and certification services: process standards (outlining the main steps of identification, assessment and attestation (Article 5)); attestation standards (outlining what kind of certificate must be awarded and what kind of information must be registered (Article 6)); and system standards (outlining the roles and responsibilities of actors involved (Article 7)). The standards used for the validation of non-formal and informal learning are the same as in the formal system and depend on the sector: education standards for school and higher education qualifications; occupational standards related

to qualification learning outcomes for VET; and occupational standards for regulated or unregulated professional qualifications. The decree also established the national repository of education, training and professional qualifications<sup>484</sup>, a collection of existing national, regional and sectoral repertories of qualifications referenced to the EQF, which is the single framework for the certification of competences. Over time, it is expected that progressive work of descriptive standardisation will allow greater permeability between subsystems and recognition of credits. The institutional authority in charge of setting up the validation system is the national technical committee led by the Ministry of Labour and by the Ministry of Education and comprising all qualification authorities (entitling bodies). The committee took office on 28 January 2014 and it is responsible for defining the national guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning and certification of competences. This task, which represents the final step for setting up the validation system, is yet to be completed.

Agreement on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills was reached in 2015, followed by an inter-ministerial decree signed by the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education<sup>485</sup>. This operational framework establishes a mechanism of mutual recognition for regional qualifications, and standard procedures for the process, attestation and system for validation services.

Progress in implementing this policy at regional level is currently at various stages. One significant application was in the third sector, in the *National programme of competence validation for volunteers in the civil service* under the Youth Guarantee 2015–17<sup>486</sup>. It aimed to validate the competences of over 5 000 volunteers in the civil service, in 11 regions, following the standards outlined in the decree on the national framework of regional qualifications.

Currently the regions are the only operational entitling validation body. The main challenge for the future will be to extend the new validation services to other target groups to ensure reliability and sustainability. Further development and implementation of the validation system nationally is expected once the national guidelines on the validation of non-formal and informal learning and certification of competences are defined by the national technical committee in 2019.

<sup>482</sup> Italian Government (2012).

<sup>483</sup> Italian Government (2013).

<sup>484</sup> *Repertorio nazionale dei titoli di istruzione e formazione e delle qualificazioni professionali*: [http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/atlante\\_repertori.php](http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/atlante_repertori.php)

<sup>485</sup> Italian Government (2015a).

<sup>486</sup> Data and outcomes of this project are not yet available.



## NQF implementation

Prior to the adoption of a comprehensive NQF, Italy referenced its formal qualifications recognised at national level directly to the eight levels of the EQF. The qualifications described in the first referencing report are used by almost 85% of people involved in education and training in Italy. One important aspect not covered in this early stage regarded the qualifications awarded by regional authorities, their importance, the methodologies used for developing them and their recognition beyond the regions.

A major milestone was reached in January 2018, when the comprehensive Italian NQF was adopted through an inter-ministerial decree<sup>487</sup>. The decree regulates the procedures and criteria for allocating qualifications to NQF levels, a process coordinated by the National Agency for Active Labour Policies (ANPAL) and carried out in cooperation with the National Institute for Public Policies Analysis (INAPP), which acts as an independent evaluator for levelling and referencing. The adoption decree conceptualises the NQF as a component of the technical infrastructure of the national repository of education, training and vocational qualifications, that had been established through Decree No 13/2013<sup>488</sup> as the single framework for certifying competences. The comprehensive NQF is seen as supporting the link between the national repository and the EQF. Thus, NQF implementation in Italy is part of wider education and labour market reform and current efforts are focused on implementing both decrees mentioned above.

The national repository is envisaged as a comprehensive collection of existing national, regional and sectoral repertoires, under the responsibility of the competent authorities or 'entitling bodies'. Once set up, it will serve as a comprehensive database of qualifications from the following subsystems: higher education (universities); secondary education; vocational education and training; national framework of regional qualifications; apprenticeships; the regulated professions. For each title, it is necessary to identify standard features: competent certification bodies, definition of qualifications, including the relevant competences, and correlation with the national statistical code of standard classifications of industries and occupations. To be included in the national repository, qualifications must be levelled to the NQF and referenced to the EQF. To enable referencing of regional qualifications and their inclusion in the national repository, stakeholder

agreement was reached in 2015 on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills – the national framework of regional qualifications<sup>489</sup>. The *Atlas of work and qualifications*, which is the technological infrastructure of the national repository<sup>490</sup>, has been developed by INAPP as a methodological tool for the rationalisation of the high number and diversity of qualifications characterised by their different content and awarding criteria. So far, 4 000 VET regional qualifications have been classified and included in the *Atlas of work and qualifications*. Re-description of qualifications using learning outcomes, for inclusion in the national repository, is the responsibility of the Regions. This work is currently in progress.

Given its recent adoption, the comprehensive NQF is not yet operational and it is premature to discuss its impact on the qualification system. The main tasks of the EQF NCP to support NQF implementation in the following period include:

- a. the *Guidelines for levelling and inclusion of qualifications to the national qualifications framework*, which are intended to provide the methodology and the operational procedure for the definition and levelling of qualifications to the NQF and referencing to the EQF; the guidelines are expected to be developed and ready to use in 2019;
- b. updating of the first national referencing report to the EQF.

In addition, challenges for the future include:

- a. developing procedures for the inclusion of private, sectoral and international qualifications in the NQF.
- b. implementing, maintaining and updating the NQF and its impact evaluation at national level.

To support implementation, the EQF NCP has started a dissemination campaign aimed at raising awareness of the framework among stakeholders responsible for the management of qualification repositories and for allocating qualifications to NQF levels: public authorities, social partners, public employment services, education providers, quality assurance and awarding bodies. It is intended to stimulate debate on the implementation of the NQF/EQF, and on issues related to referencing, levelling, learning outcomes, validation of competences, quality assurance, etc. by a range of communication methods. So far, the NQF is well known by

<sup>487</sup> Italian Government (2018).

<sup>488</sup> Italian Government (2013).

<sup>489</sup> Italian Government (2015a).

<sup>490</sup> The atlas, based on the decree of 30 June 2015, is available at: <http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org>

stakeholders involved in its development, while guidance and education and training providers have shown interest in NQF-related topics in relation to its use in guidance and counselling, matching demand and offer of work, designing learning pathways and validation of competences. The general public is considered a difficult target group to reach at the moment, given the complexity of this topic and because of a fragmented vision of the logic and aims of the NQF by all the actors directly involved in its implementation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

In 2017, the communication and dissemination actions of the EQF NCP included moving the existing EQF NCP page from the INAPP website to the ANPAL website<sup>491</sup> and updating its contents in accordance with the new 2017 EQF recommendation. A dedicated mailbox and a help desk service<sup>492</sup> were also set up to address questions on EQF and NQF from practitioners and end users. Cooperation with the Euroguidance NCP and with the national Europass centre was also initiated by participation in joint seminars and in the national job and career fair and exhibition. It is believed that this cooperation played an important role in increasing awareness about, and visibility of, the European tools for transparency of skills and qualifications. It has been reinforced by the submission of a joint grant agreement for the new EQF NCP communication strategy<sup>493</sup>, informed by a 'convergence-driven model', based on co-designed and joint activities of the three NCPs, aiming to maximise the impact as well as the benefits for all main target groups at political and operational/technical level. A national public conference was organised in December 2018<sup>494</sup> to present the NQF inter-ministerial decree and its future implementation. A national public event for the

<sup>491</sup> [www.anpal.gov.it/europa/European-Qualifications-Framework/Pagine/default.aspx](http://www.anpal.gov.it/europa/European-Qualifications-Framework/Pagine/default.aspx)

<sup>492</sup> Mailbox: EQF\_Italia@anpal.gov.it and Call Centre: 800.00.00.39.

<sup>493</sup> Grant agreement VS/2018/0254 – 2018/2020. The new communication strategy includes a new common homepage for the three NCPs with content specific areas for each NCP; a common smartphone application with downloadable documents on the EQF/Euroguidance/Europass; joint social media accounts for the three NCPs; a common brochure targeting practitioners and experts; and several promotional gadgets to be distributed at conferences and events.

<sup>494</sup> About 300 representatives of the national and regional institutions, European Commission, research institutes, education and VET systems, public employment centres, counselling and mobility network, professional organisations and associations, social partners and other national and local stakeholders took part in the event. More information is available at: [www.anpal.gov.it/europa/European-Qualifications-Framework/Pagine/Documentazione.aspx](http://www.anpal.gov.it/europa/European-Qualifications-Framework/Pagine/Documentazione.aspx)

presentation of the updated version of the national referencing report and the national guidelines for referencing qualifications to the NQF/EQF is planned for 2019.

Starting with the school year 2015/16, it has been compulsory to indicate the EQF level on Europass certificate supplements and diploma supplements. However, no information is available at present on which types of qualification documents indicate the NQF/EQF level. Over the next three years the EQF NCP will carry out a monitoring activity of the NQF/EQF implementation. Data will be gathered on the use and level of awareness of the NQF/EQF within the national education system. It will use a variety of research methods, such as online and face-to-face interviews, focus groups, study visits and analysis of administrative datasets.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The referencing of Italian qualifications to the EQF started in 2008; the first report was adopted in 2012 and presented to the EQF advisory group in May 2013. National qualification descriptors were analysed in terms of learning outcomes and mapped directly to EQF level descriptors. At this stage, all formal qualifications awarded by public authorities and recognized nationally (general education, higher education and initial VET qualifications awarded in the framework of State-Regions agreements) were referenced to EQF levels.

Following the adoption of the comprehensive NQF in 2018, the EQF NCP aims to present an updated referencing report in 2019. For this, the following lines of work will need to be undertaken, in dialogue with stakeholders:

- a. the levelling and inclusion of regional qualifications in the NQF and referencing to the EQF;
- b. the inclusion in the NQF of all qualifications referenced in the first national referencing report.

The country is preparing a national qualifications repository and all qualifications included in it will indicate the EQF level.

## Important lessons and future plans

Italy has been carrying out reforms consistent with EQF principles and the learning outcomes approach in various subsystems of education and training. In recent years, legislative initiatives as part of the reform of the labour market have led to

important steps forward: setting important priorities in defining national qualifications standards based on learning outcomes; developing a national public certification system; and setting out principles for developing a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The main challenge has been the complexity of the education and training system, the high degree of fragmentation of the qualification system, with different repositories managed by different awarding bodies, and the difficulty of harmonising qualifications issued at regional level. Steps to tackle these aspects included the establishment of the national repository of education, training and professional qualifications; an agreement on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills; and the creation of the *Atlas of work and qualifications* as a methodological tool for rationalising the high number and diversity of existing qualifications. Around 4 000 regional VET qualifications have been classified so far and included in the atlas, facilitating their referencing to the NQF/EQF and inclusion in the national repository.

A major milestone was reached in 2018 with the adoption of the comprehensive NQF, including all qualifications awarded nationally and in the regions. The framework is not yet operational and it is premature to discuss its impact on the qualification system. However, work toward its development has fostered dialogue and cooperation among different institutional stakeholders, primarily through the national technical committee and through efforts of resulted in the adoption of a learning outcomes orientation in a number of legislative acts<sup>495</sup>, and

further implementation of the learning outcomes approach is expected to have an impact on teaching and learning. However, the gap between formal regulations and practical implementation of learning outcomes remains a challenge. For example, curricula in VET and higher education are still influenced by the subject-based approach, despite the requisite regulations being in place. According to Cedefop (2016), more tools and incentives should be provided to teachers and a cultural change from an input to an output orientation is necessary.

NQF implementation work that is to be undertaken in the near future includes: raising awareness about the framework among stakeholders responsible for the management of qualification repositories and for allocating qualifications to NQF levels; the continuing work of levelling and inclusion of qualifications in the NQF and referencing to the EQF; setting up operational guidelines for describing and levelling new qualifications that are expected to be ready for use in 2019; updating the EQF referencing report; and developing procedures for the inclusion of private, sectoral and international qualifications in the NQF. Monitoring of the NQF/EQF implementation is also planned by the EQF NCP to take place over the following three years, focusing on both qualifications referenced to the EQF in the first stage (2012) and regional qualifications that are currently being referenced.

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<sup>495</sup> For example: the 2010 decree of the Ministry of Education on the reform of general education; Legislative Decree No 13/2013 on the setting up of the National repository of qualifications; Law No 107/2015 on school-work alternation in upper secondary schools; the State-Regions agreement of 24 September 2015 on the dual system in VET; Legislative Decree No 81/2015 on the reform of employment contracts; and the 2017 guidelines on internships.

**Table 38. Italian qualifications referenced to the EQF**

EQF LEVELS	ITALIAN FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS
<b>8</b>	Research doctorate ( <i>Dottorato di ricerca</i> ) Academic diploma for research training ( <i>Diploma accademico di formazione alla ricerca</i> ) Specialisation diploma ( <i>Diploma di specializzazione</i> ) Second level university master ( <i>Master universitario di secondo livello</i> ) Academic specialisation diploma (II) ( <i>Diploma accademico di specializzazione (II)</i> ) Higher specialisation diploma or master (II) ( <i>Diploma di perfezionamento o Master (II)</i> )
<b>7</b>	Master degree ( <i>Laurea magistrale</i> ) Second level academic diploma ( <i>Diploma accademico di secondo livello</i> ) First level university master ( <i>Master universitario di primo livello</i> ) Academic specialisation diploma (I) ( <i>Diploma accademico di specializzazione (I)</i> ) Higher specialisation diploma or master (I) ( <i>Diploma di perfezionamento o Master (I)</i> )
<b>6</b>	Bachelor degree ( <i>Laurea</i> ) First level academic diploma ( <i>Diploma accademico di primo livello</i> )
<b>5</b>	Higher technical education diploma ( <i>Diploma di tecnico superiore</i> )
<b>4</b>	Professional technician diploma ( <i>Diploma professionale di tecnico*</i> ) Upper secondary education diploma ( <i>Licei diploma liceale</i> ) Upper secondary education diploma – technical schools ( <i>Diploma di istruzione tecnica</i> ) Upper secondary education diploma – vocational schools ( <i>Diploma di istruzione professionale</i> ) Higher technical specialisation certificate ( <i>Certificato di specializzazione tecnica superiore</i> )
<b>3</b>	Professional operator certificate ( <i>Attestato di qualifica di operatore professionale*</i> )
<b>2</b>	Compulsory education certificate ( <i>Certificato delle competenze di base acquisite in esito all'assolvimento dell'obbligo di istruzione**</i> )
<b>1</b>	Lower secondary school-leaving diploma ( <i>Diploma di licenza conclusiva del primo ciclo di istruzione</i> )

(\*) Competent authority: regions.

(\*\*) Competent authority: Ministry of Education, University and Research or regions, according to type of education pathway.

Source: Adapted from Italian Ministry of Labour; ISFOL (2012).

Abbreviations	
ANPAL	National Agency for Active Labour Policies
EQF	European qualifications framework
IFTS	istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore (higher (non-academic) technical education and training pathway)
INAPP	Istituto Nazionale per l'Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche (National Institute for Public Policies Analysis)
ISFOL	Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori (National Institute for the Development of Vocational Training)
	ITS istruzione tecnica superiore (higher technical education)
	NCP national coordination point
	NEETs young people not in employment, education or training
	NQF national qualifications framework
	QTI quadro dei titoli italiani dell'istruzione superiore (Italian qualifications framework for higher education)
	VET vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies (ANPAL) – hosting the EQF NCP (as of 2017):  
[www.anpal.gov.it/europa/European-Qualifications-Framework/Pagine/default.aspx](http://www.anpal.gov.it/europa/European-Qualifications-Framework/Pagine/default.aspx)  
*Atlas of work and qualifications* – available at: <http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org>  
Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research: [www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/home](http://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/home)  
Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies: [www.lavoro.gov.it/Pagine/default.aspx](http://www.lavoro.gov.it/Pagine/default.aspx)  
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## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The technical and vocational qualifications framework (TVQF) has four levels and covers all vocational qualifications offered in Jordan. The Employment, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (E-TVET) Council (acts as the national qualifications framework (NQF) board, while operational management lies with the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA).

A new 10-level NQF has been designed by the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education Institutions (AQACHEI) at the request of the Cabinet. This new framework, not yet approved, is intended to cover the entire education and training system.

The E-TVET Council acts as the NQF board, while operational management lies with CAQA and AQACHEI. The latter has seen its role expand over the last two years.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

As a nation with a fast growing young population and a lack of natural resources, Jordan considers well-educated human resources to be one of its major priorities. Jordan's education system performs relatively better compared to its neighbours: the adult literacy rate is the highest in the region, standing at 97.9% in 2012<sup>496</sup>. Nevertheless, 59.1% of the population aged 15+ has low educational attainment in 2017, while 23.2% are medium-skilled and only 17.7% have a tertiary education. Gross enrolment rates in education are relatively high. In 2016, it had a 95% enrolment rate at basic education level (6 to 15 years) (90% when Syrian refugees and others were included)<sup>497</sup>. 82.4% enrolment rate was registered in secondary education in 2014, with a share of VET students at 3.8%. Slightly more girls than boys enrol at all

education levels, but the gender-biased subject choices narrow future careers (more girls in education, health and social services).

There are indications of quality problems in Jordan's education system. Although PISA 2015 results show some improvement compared to the results of PISA 2009 round, the share of low achievement students remains quite high and is far from optimal: in mathematics (67.5%), in reading (46.3%) and science (49.8%).

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Jordan is mainly delivered in the initial VET system (IVET). The large majority of training provision is public and consists of:

- secondary vocational education of two years' duration in comprehensive upper secondary schools under the Ministry of Education;
- vocational training (targeting 16–18-year-olds) by the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), a semi-autonomous agency under the Ministry of Labour);
- technical education after secondary comprehensive school, delivered by 26 publicly supported community colleges, which offer two-year programmes leading to a diploma;
- national education and training delivering one-year training programmes.

Jordan is an upper middle-income country and considered as emerging market with an open economy as per the World Bank income group classification. The country has scarce water supplies and limited natural resources, with a high dependency on energy imports. The GDP growth rate was 2.1% in 2017 and is expected to reach 2.4% in 2018. However, the economy remains burdened with ongoing uncertainty in Syria, slow revival of economic cooperation with Iraq, and an economic slowdown in the Gulf Cooperation Council. In addition, the economy is subject to a slow pace of structural reforms that is impeding a strong recovery in growth<sup>498</sup>.

<sup>496</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012

<sup>497</sup> Department of Statistics, 2016

<sup>498</sup> World Bank, Jordan's Economic Outlook, April 2018

Service is the most important sector in Jordan, it accounted for 66.8% of the Gross value added in 2016, followed up by industry 28.9%, while the contribution of agriculture remains quite low, only 4%. The importance of services is even much higher when it comes to employment as more than 80% are employed in this sector, compare to 17.6% in industry. Less than 2% are employed in agriculture.

The private sector is dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which represent around 94% of existing companies. SMEs account for more than 60% of economic output and employ around 31% of the labour force.

The public sector employed over half the Jordanian labour force until the late 1990s, and it continues to be the preferred option for the majority, particularly women. The phenomenon of queuing for public sector employment is very important. Public sector employment offers better job security, shorter working hours and guaranteed medical insurance; but employment opportunities in the public sector are diminishing. Nevertheless, in the first quarter of 2014, 39% of Jordanians in employment were still government employees, 52% of all employed women and 37% of employed men.

Jordan has one of the lowest economic activity rates in the world. Reasons for high general inactivity are the large number of inactive women and students, remittances, high reservation wages and early retirement arrangements (e.g. retirement after 16 years of service in the military). Female activity rates are at a record low, with a mere 13% of women participating in the labour force, in comparison to 60% of men.

In general, the high level of unemployment is explained by:

- insufficient job creation to absorb the increasing influx of job seekers and the already existing unemployed;
- mismatches between educational outputs and labour market needs;
- high job expectations and high reservation wages due to remittances from abroad;
- geographical mismatches and low mobility.

Unemployment is particularly high for young people (31%); within the youth age group (15–24 years) the female unemployment rate was as high as 55% in 2013.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

A key feature of the E-TVET ecosystem in Jordan is the proliferation of policies and strategy design,

but at the same time, the implementation of these principles is limited.

To date, and prior to the approval of the new human resources development strategy, there have been several coexisting strategies that have had an impact on TVET.

The most important one is the Jordan vision for 2025. Jordan 2025 charts a path for the future and determines the integrated economic and social framework that will govern economic and social policies based on providing opportunities for all. Its basic principles include promoting the rule of law and equal opportunities, increasing participatory policy making, achieving fiscal sustainability and strengthening institutions. Jordan 2025 is based on identifying a set of goals that Jordan aspires to, how they can be achieved through certain procedures and policies that will be adopted on the sector level according to a flexible timetable that takes into account the developments on the global and regional levels and how to adapt to those changes.

The second one is the National Employment Strategy 2011–2020 (NES), which preceded Jordan vision 2025. It put a ‘focus on employment generation: improving standards of living for Jordanians through increased employment, wages, and benefits, and productivity improvements’ (NES strategy, 2007). It promotes amongst others the gradual replacement of foreign workers with (skilled) Jordanians, gives more attention to structural unemployment, and the upgrading of the TVET system.

The National E-TVET Strategy is the national policy most closely related to TVET. It covers the period 2014–20. It is based on the following acknowledgement:

‘An effective, efficient, competitive, flexible and responsive E-TVET sector – as part of the broader system of human resources development – will re-shape the skills of the labour force and contribute to the development of Jordan’s human capital, address mismatches between supply and demand for labour, provide more employment opportunities for the Jordanian workforce, and support the values of inclusion and opportunity for all Jordanians, particularly youth and women.’ (E-TVET Council, 2014)

Lastly, in September 2016, the government adopted a new Human Resources Strategy to ‘enable the country to meet its goals for sustainable development, which includes the development of the nation in economic, cultural, social, and

environmental terms. It will ensure current and future generations develop the skills and capabilities they need to live happy and fulfilled lives, and collectively realise the ambition of a prosperous and resilient Jordan' (human resources development strategy document, 2016).

The human resources development strategy recognises that despite many initiatives and strategies implemented, 'student learning outcomes are lagging and the skills of graduates are not meeting the needs of the economy'. There is no evidence to assess the extent to which the E-TVET strategy has been implemented and has or has not achieved all or parts of its objectives. It is likewise very difficult to say how the human resources development strategy builds on the success/failure of the E-TVET strategy and how it will manage to achieve the objectives that the E-TEVT strategy failed to achieve.

### **International cooperation**

Various donors and agencies (EU, GIZ, USAID, the World Bank and others) are working in E-TVET in Jordan and both the international donors and the Jordanian Government have a responsibility to coordinate the diverse projects and initiatives to give coherent and efficient support to the reform of the sector. According to donors' interventions mapping carried out by the Ministry of Labour in April 2018, 36 projects are currently being implemented with a total budget of JOD 223 350 000 (approx. EUR 268 million). The interventions cover the areas of job placement, enhancement of workforce participation and curriculum development and career guidance. The two key target beneficiaries across all projects are women and youth.

Current policies, strategies and action plans for adult training in the TVET sector pay little attention to lifelong learning and the continuing education system. There is no vision suggesting how continuing training could become an integrated part of the TVET sector and which institutional setting would best fit the needs of the labour force and the private sector. Education and training for adults have been neglected and reforms and restructuring have focused on initial training.

The TVQF was developed in the scope of a former EU project. IT is now being implemented with EU budget support.

In October 2014, the EU and Jordan established a mobility partnership to manage mobility and migration better.

## **Levels and use of learning outcomes**

### **NQF scope and structure**

The TVQF covers all vocational qualifications offered in Jordan. A new NQF covering the whole education system has been designed but not yet adopted.

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

The TVQF has four levels. The proposed descriptors for the planned 10-level NQF are knowledge, skills and competences.

### **Definition of qualification**

TVET in Jordan is mainly delivered in the initial VET (IVET) system.

- The Ministry of Education develops secondary vocational education programmes leading to secondary education certificates. These qualifications are based on educational standards.
- The Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), a semi-autonomous agency under the Ministry of Labour develops vocational training (targeting 16–18-year-olds) leading to a VTC occupational certificate. CAQA issues occupational licenses for holders of a VTC certificate after an assessment. The assessment is based on occupational standards.
- The National Education and Training (NET), a semi-public body, provides a one-year vocational training programme that leads to qualifications, some of which have been registered by CAQA.

CAQA uses DACUM – developing a curriculum method – to produce occupational standards. To date occupational standards have been produced for six sectors. For seven other sectors occupational standards are being prepared.

The planned NQF makes a clear distinction between academic and vocational qualifications.

### **Access, progression and credit**

Entry to one type of education or another is based on grades, and the pathways from one type to another are very limited. Almost 90% of the students who complete the 10<sup>th</sup> grade of basic education are streamed on the basis of their performance either to general education (high performers) or to vocational education in the comprehensive secondary schools, while the remainder (low performers) can continue to one of the VTC institutes.



There is no accreditation to allow mobility across the system pathways, and this, together with the low-status image of TVET as an educational last resort, has a negative impact on the demand for TVET.

The rigorous General Secondary Education Certificate (GSEC) examination, or Tawjihi, determines whether students are qualified to go to university, at which public university they can enrol and in which specialism they can major. Without the Tawjihi, students have access only to the VTC, and VTC students are prevented from progressing to any form of advanced studies. Bridging from vocational to academic education is possible through Tawjihi and community colleges, but it works for only a few.

Those vocational education students who succeed in the Tawjihi have access to community colleges, where they can obtain a diploma and may then progress from community college to university. A very rough estimate is that less than 4% of the secondary VET students are able to bridge the gap and get to university.

Pathways are being opened from TVET to higher education; however, by an agreement between the VTC and the Al-Balqa' Applied University (BAU) in 2012, graduates from some VTC institutes who pass the Tawjihi can enrol in a two-year diploma programme in a community college, and VTC graduates who do not pass the Tawjihi can still have access to a one-year technical diploma at the VTC. However, this type of bridging at the technician level for VTC students is still limited.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

### NQF legal basis

No legal adoption formalised of the TVET NQF.

### Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The E-TVET Council acts as the NQF board, while operational management lies with CAQA.

### Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

While the E-TVET Council includes labour market actors, CAQA's board does not.

### Funding

CAQA currently lacks the necessary staff numbers and technical capabilities to act as a qualifications authority, so capacity-building and financial support

is required. AQACHEI is better equipped in human resources and would be entrusted with the management of the new NQF.

### Quality assurance of qualifications

Quality, efficiency and effectiveness in the TVET system are affected by the fragmentation of TVET providers. The sector is characterised by a centralised, top-down approach, with each subsector (vocational education, vocational training and technical education) having bureaucratic systems that seldom work together to improve relevance, quality or efficiency.

Three accreditation and quality assurance systems are operating within the E-TVET sector:

- the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education Institutions (AQACHEI);
- the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) for vocational training;
- the Ministry of Education for vocational education.

CAQA's cooperation with AQACHEI and the Ministry of Education towards the establishment of a system of external quality control for the whole TVET sector is essential as part of an overall external quality assurance approach for human resources development in Jordan. However, CAQA falls within the Ministry of Labour's oversight and the E-TVET Council's technical operation. To provide greater coherence and independence, by-laws for the E-TVET Council and CAQA are needed to enforce accreditation and standards across all VET providers, including those within the Ministry of Education and Higher Education Accreditation Commission's oversight. The establishment of CAQA is a considerable step towards setting up a quality assurance system in TVET, but for it to play its role in full it needs further resources and political empowerment to coordinate beyond the VTC.

The lack of a system of transparent qualifications and the limited flexibility of the current pathways for progression are persistent challenges. The focus of quality assurance also needs to shift from inputs and control to outcomes and employability for students and the performance of teachers and TVET institutes. The recent steps towards designing an NQF create an opportunity to reinforce quality assurance and at the same time make it sector-wide rather than divided into three subsystems. (Torino process report 2014).

CAQA has defined the following steps to increase the quality of TVET qualifications:

1. a validation committee is created from the employers from the private sector to validate occupational standards;
2. TVET qualifications are developed based on occupational standards;
3. occupational standards are developed by sector skills committees (these are committees established by CAQA from sector representatives who are also skilled practitioners);
4. each qualification registered on the TVQF should be based on at least one occupational standard to ensure relevance to labour market demand.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Based on CAQA by-law, procedures have been created for recognition of prior learning of workers who have experience and knowledge. The aim is to provide workers with a VET qualification (Practice License) based on their experience or knowledge. From 1 January 2016, around 6 000 workers have gone through the recognition of prior learning procedure on three levels: semiskilled, skilled and craftsman. Recognition of prior learning is also one of the indicators of EU budget support – Indicator No 6: number of people benefiting from recognition of prior learning.

### NQF implementation

#### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

Up to December 2017, CAQA had registered more than 60 qualifications in the TVET qualification framework, while AQACHEI registered 20. Registration of qualifications is one of the disbursement indicators of the current EU programme. Two institutions are in charge of registering qualifications (accrediting programmes): CAQA for the three first levels of qualifications; and AQACHEI, which covers the fourth level (technician).

#### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of TVQF implementation have not yet been defined.

#### Impact for end-users

The TVQF is currently being populated with qualifications. When Jordan revises and strengthens the integrated policy and regulatory framework governing the E-TVET sector (as part of the indicators for the EU budget support), the impact

of the TVQF for end-users will be considerable. These indicators are not limited to the number of qualifications included in the TVQF but also to the quality of provision (including learning materials, assessment criteria, instruction manuals, equipment, and facilities) and teachers' professional training and internship in companies.

### Referencing to regional frameworks

There are currently no regional qualifications frameworks in the Middle East/Arab region. Jordan has adopted the unified Arab standard classification of occupations 2008 (ASCO), which is compatible with the international standard classification of occupations (ISCO), as a general framework for occupational classification and standards in Jordan.

### Important lessons and future plans

It is important that political backing for the framework is secured; it has already been significantly delayed by disagreements or opposition from various national actors. Without stakeholder and institutional consensus, the framework will not be implemented or it will exist only on paper, as has been the fate of previous NQF initiatives.

To improve the quality and relevance of qualifications (ultimately) the social partners should be engaged at least in the sector teams, which are developing occupational standards, if they are not to sit on CAQA's board.

#### Abbreviations

AQACHEI	Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education Institutions
CAQA	Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (the qualifications and quality assurance agency)
E-TVET	Employment-Technical and Vocational Education and Training
NQF	national qualifications framework
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
TVQF	technical and vocational qualifications framework
VTC	Vocational Training Corporation

#### Prepared by:

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

# KAZAKHSTAN

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

According to the registered Joint Order 8022 of 2012, the national qualifications framework (NQF) comprises eight levels. The NQF concept was updated jointly by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development on 16 March 2016.

A National Council for Personnel Training is formally in the lead. The Main Directorate for Skills and Jobs in the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population leads the development of the national qualification system (NQS).

There is no national register or database yet, but employers have generated significant numbers of occupational standards. Kazakhstan is a member of the Bologna Process in higher education, joining in March 2011, and so bound to implement the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

### Educational, social, economic and political context

The country has a population of 18.2 million, and growing. Youth of 15 years and under account for 26% of the population. This follows low birth rates in the 1990s.

Kazakhstan has seen high economic growth and decline over the last 10 years, strongly influenced by oil and gas prices. Efforts are being made to move the country away from heavy resource-dependency, including attempts to stimulate small- and medium-sized enterprise expansion. Yet, impressively, the proportion living below the nationally-defined poverty line has fallen dramatically, from 47% in 2001 to almost 0% in 2015. Growth has thus been inclusive and prosperity quite widely shared.

There are now signs that participation in vocational education and training (VET) is improving. Pathways to higher education are complex and enrolling in higher education with a secondary VET qualification

requires taking both VET and higher education entry exams. Yet, the Ministry of Education and employers call for more VET graduates – general education graduates often struggle to find work; the Ministry continues to fund more VET places.

The Ministry is also encouraging flexibility of VET provision, so that colleges and other providers determine 25% of the curricula, as opposed to the previous system of completely centralised curricula.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

Since 2008, Kazakhstan has launched a series of initiatives aimed at modernising its education and training system, including the State Programme for Modernising Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) 2008, and the Accelerated Industrialisation and Innovation Strategy, adopted in 2010. In July 2012, the President outlined the main challenges for the changing labour market in his speech 'Social modernization of Kazakhstan: twenty steps to the society of universal labour'. This was followed by the strategy Kazakhstan 2050 that calls for attracting inward investment. The Joint Order 8022 of 19 October 2012, adopted by the Ministries of Health and Social Development and Education and Science, specified the structure of the NQS: the NQF, the sectoral qualifications framework (SQF) and occupational standards. A plan to elaborate the national system of qualifications was adopted in 2013 (governmental regulation No 616 of 18 June 2013) and in accordance with amendments to the Labour Code, the first official occupational standards were developed.

The Labour Code mentioned as well the NQF, SQFs and assessment. The Ministry of Education and Science undertook the development of 147 new VET standards and programmes based on occupational standards with support from the World Bank. The Ministry of Health and Social Development established a coordinating council for the NQS in 2014. In 2015, 147 occupational standards were approved. In 2016, in accordance

with the Labour Code and the Law on the National Chamber of Employers Atameken, the responsibility for occupational standards passed to the Chamber. The NQF was formally confirmed on 16 March 2016 by the tripartite committee for social partnership and regulation of social and labour relations. A new project was started by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection on Skills and Jobs (2016–20).

In 2017, an interdepartmental committee under the Deputy Prime Minister established the programme for productive employment and the NQS, including a new classifier for employment and 70 new occupational standards. In 2018, new methodologies for SQFs and for occupational standards development were adopted.

### **International cooperation**

The country's NQF is influenced by the European Qualifications Framework and the QF-EHEA. Progress has drawn heavily on international support, especially from the World Bank. It is now working with national authorities and actors on the KZ Skills and Jobs Project 2016–20. There are many international projects linked to specific areas of development as well. Recently, the cooperation with Russia has been intensified in the framework of the policy coordination of the countries in the Eurasian Economic Union. Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation lead in the development of qualification systems and it is expected that the coordination between the reforms in the five EAEC countries will be strengthened.

## **Levels and use of learning outcomes**

### **NQF scope and structure**

The NQF covers VET, post-secondary and higher education qualifications as well as qualifications for adults. It is an eight-level structure. Currently, levels 6–8 are reserved to degrees awarded in higher education. Levels 2–4 are reserved to qualification for TVET education. Level 5 is reserved for post-secondary education. The newly introduced Applied Bachelor Degree at Level 5 is part of technical and vocational education, but there are identical level descriptors for these qualifications as for academic bachelors awarded by higher education institutions at level 6. The applied bachelor is not in fact a short cycle qualification as the duration is typically four years.

### **Alignment to other classification systems**

Related instruments and references include the state classifier of occupations; the Union-wide classifier of workers' professions; the unified tariff

manual of workers' professions; qualifications manual; the state compulsory educational standards in TVET; and the state compulsory educational standards in higher education, both created in 2012 (with amendments in 2016).

Kazakhstan had 23 active SQFs, and their number is expected to grow up to 38 in 2020. The SQFs classify industry requirements for each qualification, levelling by complexity and demand of skills required. The SQFs are used to certify industry personnel.

Kazakhstan has an ambitious programme for developing occupational standards, 449 were developed until 2016, when the approach changed. By 2020, 560 new occupational standards should be available. Atameken coordinates the development of occupational standards.

The World Bank project KZ Skills and Jobs is used to invite sectoral bodies to develop new sets of sectoral qualifications and occupational standards.

In higher education, more than 60 universities in the country have signed the Bologna Process.

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

Descriptors are knowledge, skills and competences, competencies (personal and professional) and ways of achievement.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

Since 2012, expected learning outcomes have been systematically used in educational standards for different types of education. Occupational standards are seen as essential for defining qualifications and learning outcomes. Hence the emphasis on the development of occupational standards. While standards are mentioning learning outcomes, this does not mean that they are systematically used in teaching and learning and assessment.

### **Definition of qualification**

A qualification is defined as 'an official recognition of the value learned competences for the labour market and further education and training, giving right to carry out work' (NQF, 16 March 2016).

### **Access, progression and credit**

The framework allows for progression but links between the various sectors of education and training should be strengthened. In particular, levels 6–8 remain the preserve of higher education institutions and their qualifications.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

### NQF legal basis

The Joint Order 8022 of 19 October 2012, adopted by the Ministries of Health and Social Development and Education and Science, specified the structure of the NQS: the NQF, the SQF and occupational standards. A plan to elaborate the National System of Qualifications was adopted in 2013 (governmental regulation No 616 of 18 June 2013) and in accordance with amendments to the Labour Code the first official occupational standards were developed. The Labour Code mentioned as well the NQF, SQFs and assessment. The Labour Code has been amended several times since 2012. By Government Resolution No 616 of 18 June 2013, the Gradual Development Plan of National Qualification System was approved. The Ministry of Health and Social Development established a coordinating council for the NQS in 2014. In 2016, in accordance with the Labour Code and the Law on the National Chamber of Employers Atameken, the responsibility for occupational standards passed to the Chamber. The NQF was formally confirmed on 16 March 2016 by the tripartite committee for social partnership and regulation of social and labour relations. In 2017, an interdepartmental committee under the Deputy Prime Minister established the programme for productive employment and the NQS, including a new classifier for employment and 70 new occupational standards. In 2018, new methodologies for SQFs and for occupational standards development were adopted.

TVET and higher education is regulated by the 2015 Law on Education. The Labour Code regulates the NQS.

### Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The structures are complex and coordination is not always ensured. A National Council for Personnel Training is formally in the lead. The Main Directorate for Skills and Jobs in the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population leads the development of the NQS. The Ministry of Education and Science, with support of different entities such as Kasipkor (methodological innovation centre supporting the development of technical and vocational education) and the Centre for the Bologna Process (supporting higher education reforms), is responsible for developing competency-based education standards. Line ministries under the government work with sectoral committees or sectoral councils. Sectoral committees and sector experts of professional associations with

methodological support from Atameken and the World Bank are working in SQFs on the development of occupational standards. In the new methodology adopted in 2018, this starts with a mapping of occupations in each sectors.

The Ministry develops State Education Compulsory Educational Standards for qualifications and occupations.

Sixteen sector councils oversee skills development. They have also led development of a significant number of occupational standards. Businesses are gradually becoming more engaged in VET, including in qualifications and curricula. The National Chamber Atameken leads these developments, including the establishment of sector qualifications frameworks, the development of occupational standards and the accreditation of centres for the certification of specialists.

Sector representatives do not feel involved enough in the decision-making processes and have concerns about the use of occupational standards in education. The coordination between the key ministries and Atameken could be strengthened. The developments in the Bologna Process and those linked to developing more relevant qualifications could be better linked.

### Resources and funding

While the country is resource-rich and can fund some of its TVET initiatives, it also relies on donor support, notably in the NQF from the World Bank, that acts as well as a resource for organising targeted development of occupational standards.

### Quality assurance of qualifications

Sector-led testing and certification is now implemented in many sectors. Accreditation of providers and programmes has progressed but needs to look more at validating qualifications and at assessment procedures, paying special attention to adapting to the learning outcomes paradigm.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The system of personnel certification carried out by the centres for the certification of specialists based on occupational standards is a form of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), albeit mainly focused on personnel that is working in the sectors. The Ministry of Education and Science is also looking at a more generic use of the VNFIL;

foreign practices have been studied and a set of rules have been developed for the VNFIL that have been adopted by Ministerial Order No 508 of 28 September 2018.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

There is no national register or database yet. Atameken, the employer body, is managing three registers for occupational standards, for certification centres for specialists (both at national level) and for certificated specialists (at regional level). Some 449 occupational standards were developed before Atameken became responsible for occupational standards. Since then 88 new standards have been adopted, from 23 functioning SQFs. Many more are in the process of development. For 2019, 480 occupational standards should be developed and 38 SQFs. In total 560 occupational standards are planned until 2020. Some 34 centres for the certification of specialists exist in the register. In 2017, 6 400 specialists were certificated.

### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of NQF implementation are not clear.

### Impact for end-users

Providers are influenced by qualifications and curricula via the country's membership of the Bologna Process. Many sectoral organisations are now involved in the development of occupational standards and the certification of specialists. In VET, a number of competency-based programmes are being introduced.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Kazakhstan is a member of the Bologna Process in higher education, joining in March 2011, and so bound to implement the QF-EHEA.

## Important lessons and future plans

The country's strong economic growth and consequent need to develop relevant qualifications has propelled the NQF forward. In particular, the strength of industries in the county has contributed to a focus on labour market relevance, via occupational standards especially. The supporting role of Atameken has helped to increase the role of different sectoral stakeholders. There is a very active group of sectoral actors, but they do not feel involved enough in implementing changes in the education system.

The NQF descriptors need to be reviewed. There is a risk of fragmentation with a very high number of sector qualifications frameworks. Links between occupational standards and educational standards and programmes and the assessment of graduates need to be strengthened. Better coordination is needed. The NQS is seen as the sum of the NQF, SQFs, occupational standards and independent assessment centres, but is much more than that. It would be good if a concept for the NQS could be developed, like in Belarus or Kyrgyzstan, to clarify the links with the education and training system.

### Abbreviations

NQF	national qualifications framework
NQS	national qualification system
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
SQF	sectoral qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

### Prepared by:

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

## Introduction and context

The Kenyan National Qualifications Framework (KNQF) was developed in 2015 when the Kenyan Qualifications Framework Act was enacted. Since then a subsidiary legislation to operationalize the provisions of the Act has also been gazetted.

The Sessional Paper of 2005 (MoE, 2005) and the policy framework for education of 2012 (MoE, 2012) highlighted the need both to coordinate and to clarify Kenya's education and training. The current multiplicity of qualifications and awarding bodies makes it difficult for employers to understand what competences they can expect the holder of a particular qualification to possess. The KNQF is intended to address this situation by establishing a common regulatory system for the development, assessment and award of qualifications. A central register of qualifications is under development, which will set out clear criteria for achieving awards, detailing the knowledge and skills required in each case (MoHEST, 2014). The KNQF has created levels and linkages between various qualifications levels and pathways both vertically and horizontally.

Curricula are currently being reviewed and revised so that the qualifications are aligned to the KNQF standards. National assessment and quality assurance standards are also being developed against which the qualifications will be assessed.

## Main policy objectives

The objectives of the KNQF are set out in the KNQF Act No 22 of 2014 (MoHEST, 2014). They are as follows:

- a. to establish the Kenyan National Qualifications Authority;
- b. to establish standards for recognising qualifications obtained in and outside of Kenya;
- c. to develop a system of competence, lifelong learning and attainment of national qualifications;

- d. to align the qualifications obtained in Kenya with global benchmarks in order to promote national and transnational mobility of workers;
- e. to strengthen quality assurance systems for national qualifications;
- f. to support mobility and progression within education, training and career paths.

No institution may award national qualifications unless it is recognised or accredited in accordance with the KNQF or unless it is a university accredited in accordance with the Kenya Universities Act No 42 of 2012.

## Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The 10-level KNQF is aligned with the East African Community (EAC) qualifications framework. The EAC framework is annexed to the EAC common market protocol for mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications, to which Kenya is a signatory.

The KNQF acknowledges two separate sub-frameworks within this overarching framework: one for academic and the other for vocational qualifications. However, core generic competences involving the application of knowledge in practical situations are the same for both domains. These core competences include the ability to:

- a. analyse, synthesise and create;
- b. solve problems;
- c. organise, plan and communicate;
- d. use information communications technology;
- e. work in teams;
- f. engage in developing projects, research and innovations;
- g. work autonomously.

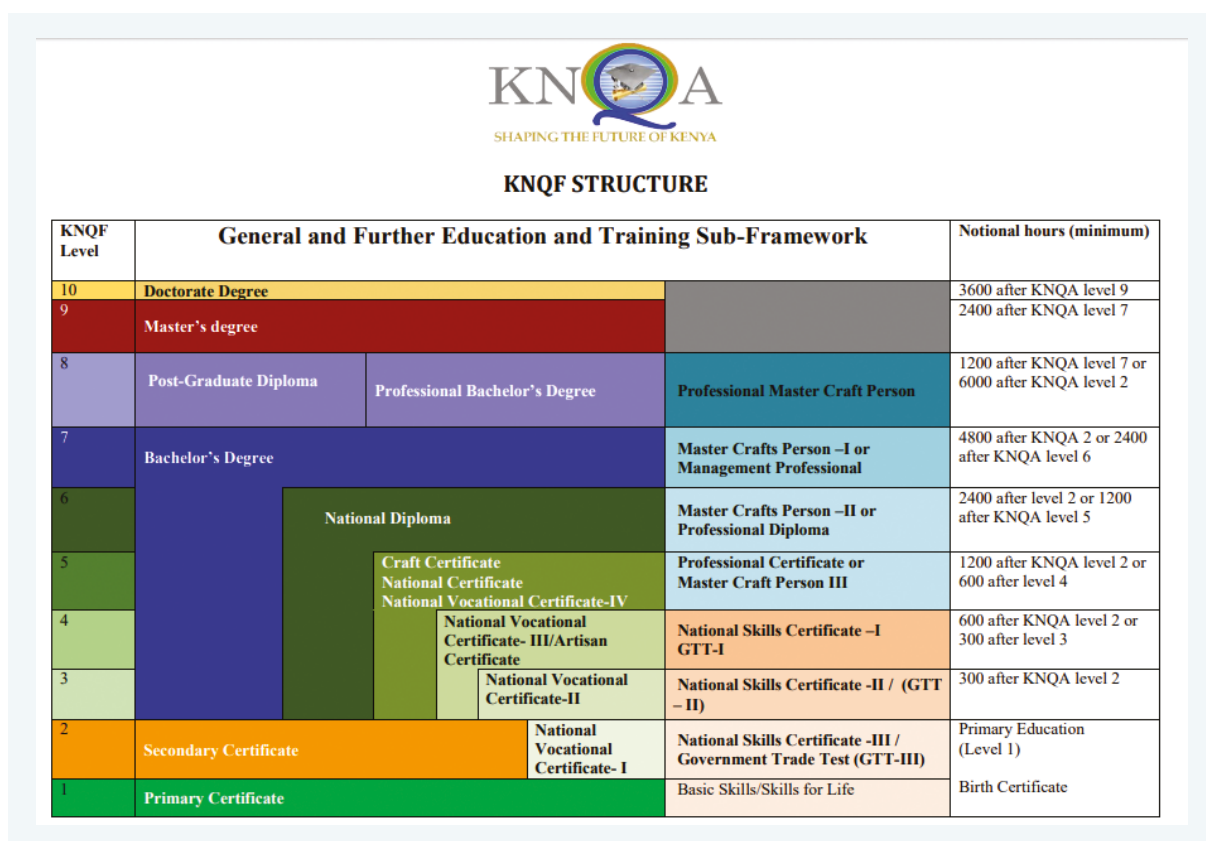
KNQF qualifications incorporate both theoretical knowledge and employability skills. Credits obtained through recognition of prior learning (RPL) are

taken into account to determine which level of qualification an individual should work towards.

The KNQF contains level descriptors at primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational

education and training (TVET) and university levels. Descriptors are also provided for 'short cycles' linked to the main TVET levels and graded 'subcycles' for artisanal skills.

**Figure 10. Kenyan national qualifications framework (KNQF) structure**



The diagram shows the KNQF structure with levels 1 to 10. Level 10 is a Doctorate Degree. Level 9 is a Master's degree. Level 8 includes Post-Graduate Diploma and Professional Bachelor's Degree, leading to a Professional Master Craft Person. Level 7 is a Bachelor's Degree, leading to Master Crafts Person -I or Management Professional. Level 6 is a National Diploma, leading to Master Crafts Person -II or Professional Diploma. Level 5 includes Craft Certificate, National Certificate, and National Vocational Certificate-IV, leading to Professional Certificate or Master Craft Person III. Level 4 includes National Vocational Certificate-III/Artisan Certificate, leading to National Skills Certificate -I (GTT-I). Level 3 includes National Vocational Certificate-II, leading to National Skills Certificate -II (GTT-II). Level 2 includes Secondary Certificate and National Vocational Certificate-I, leading to National Skills Certificate -III / Government Trade Test (GTT-III). Level 1 is a Primary Certificate, leading to Basic Skills/Skills for Life.

KNQF Level	General and Further Education and Training Sub-Framework		Notional hours (minimum)
10	Doctorate Degree		3600 after KNQA level 9
9	Master's degree		2400 after KNQA level 7
8	Post-Graduate Diploma	Professional Bachelor's Degree	1200 after KNQA level 7 or 6000 after KNQA level 2
7	Bachelor's Degree		4800 after KNQA 2 or 2400 after KNQA level 6
6	National Diploma		2400 after level 2 or 1200 after KNQA level 5
5	Craft Certificate National Certificate National Vocational Certificate-IV		1200 after KNQA level 2 or 600 after level 4
4	National Vocational Certificate-III/Artisan Certificate		600 after KNQA level 2 or 300 after level 3
3	National Vocational Certificate-II		300 after KNQA level 2
2	Secondary Certificate	National Vocational Certificate-I	Primary Education (Level 1)
1	Primary Certificate		Birth Certificate

Source: Kenya National Qualifications Authority

## Stakeholder involvement

The legal framework for KNQF is Kenya National qualifications Framework Act No 22 of 2014 and the subsidiary legislations of 2018. The KNQF is implemented by the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) which is governed by a council. The KNQA works closely with quality assurance bodies in education and assessment and examinations bodies. The education regulators are expected to play a key role in the registration of qualifications since they have to be aligned with the KNQF. The assessment and examination bodies will carry out the assessment of experiential learning against standards developed by the KNQA.

Given the importance of the international comparability of qualifications, the KNQA also

establishes standards for harmonisation and recognition of national and foreign qualifications, and promotes the recognition of national qualifications internationally. It builds confidence in the national qualifications system that contributes to the national economy and provides pathways that support the development and maintenance of flexible access to qualifications (MoHEST, 2014).

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning

One of the key goals of the KNQF is to recognise and assess the outcomes of learning in all settings, whether formal, non-formal or informal, including in the workplace. A number of measures are being taken to pursue this goal. Progression pathways from primary



to higher education in the TVET sector are being promoted through the TVET curriculum development framework, which was established in 2010 according to KNQF occupation standards. This is helping to link youth polytechnics and vocational and industrial training qualifications to formal TVET provision.

Several agencies offer courses at various levels to young people and adults. Open universities offer a range of distance learning, evening, bridging and RPL courses; such courses were previously available only at the University of Nairobi. Complementary basic education (COBET) programmes (non-formal programmes equivalent to formal education) offer children and teenagers who have dropped out of school the opportunity to reintegrate into the formal system.

Currently the KNQA is developing standards and guidelines for RPL for individuals with competences acquired through experiential learning. Individuals issued with RPL certifications will be located on the KNQF from where they will be able to progress up the qualification pathways if they so wish.

## KNQF implementation

The KNQA is working towards raising the awareness of key stakeholders, especially the qualifications awarding bodies, regarding the provisions of the KNQF and the need to register their qualifications. An information management system and database are being developed in order to seamlessly register qualifications. The criteria for registering qualifications are: meeting the KNQF requirements on volume of learning, assigning credits to modules or units of competences in a programme and inclusion of integrated assessment and examination methods. The qualifications will be assessed against registered occupational standards. A website has also been developed to provide outreach to the social media audience. It is expected that once the qualifications and qualifications bodies have been registered, labour markets actors and recruitment agencies will use the platform provided by the KNQA for credential verification.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The Annex to the EAC common market protocol for mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications has proposed a 10-level framework designed to accommodate all qualification types

and levels in the region. This framework emerged as a result of an audit of qualifications frameworks in the East African Partner States, which have agreed to harmonise the qualifications frameworks within the EAC. An exercise on harmonisation of the East African education systems and training curricula is currently in progress.

## Important lessons and future plans

The country has no central register or inventory of the various qualifications, their award criteria or the competences acquired. This often leads to the existence of qualifications in the same field that are different in terms of content, knowledge, competencies and skills. The national examinations bodies offer qualifications that are uniform and almost aligned to the KNQF. However, some public and private institutions and professional bodies offer international or their own qualifications, which are not aligned to KNQF standards. TVET is offered in a variety of formal, non-formal and informal settings, mostly with no uniform curriculum standards. In addition, every industry sector has developed its own occupational standards with some sectors keeping their standards within private mechanisms in the interest of security or as a business secret. This has created entry requirements which are not uniform leading to disparity in recognition of the final qualifications.

In this context, the Kenyan Government sees the KNQF as a tool to aid accreditation, teaching and assessment in accordance with established national curriculum development practices and standards. The KNQF has already had a number of successes. For example, mutual recognition of Kenyan and international qualifications has been greatly helped by the KNQF. Foreign qualifications can now be much more easily assessed, which has resulted in an influx of foreign teachers to Kenya.

### Abbreviations

EAC	East African Community
KNQA	Kenya National Qualifications Authority (
KNQF	Kenyan national qualifications framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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### **Prepared by:**

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

Kosovo ratified its national qualifications framework (NQF) in law in 2008. The framework comprises eight levels, embracing lifelong learning. It is overseen by a dedicated and autonomous body, the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), and is supported by other public institutions with responsibility for different education subsectors, such as higher or general education.

Implementation has begun, with more than 25 qualifications already included in the qualifications framework.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

A Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Union (EU) and Kosovo came into force on 1 April 2016. The Agreement will support the implementation of reforms and will give Kosovo an opportunity to move closer to Europe as an important anchor of stability.

It is essential to underline the EU's influence on the NQF: Kosovo intends its NQF to be compatible with the European qualifications framework (EQF), an aim reflected in the structure and nature of the framework, which is largely influenced by the EQF. The Kosovo authorities have opened discussions with the Commission on how to establish a relationship between the Kosovo NQF and the EQF.

Kosovo's NQF has to be placed within the context of the recent history of the country and its resulting economic, social and education challenges and, specifically, the continuing political uncertainty. The tense relationship with Serbia particularly hinders the country's economic growth and social stability.

Unemployment levels remain high and the country has the weakest employment record in Europe. Growth is limited, the private sector is small and foreign investment limited. The country depends largely on remittances from the many Kosovars abroad and on donor activity and support.

Approximately 57% of upper secondary students in Kosovo follow a vocational education and training (VET) pathway<sup>500</sup> (292), but the sector remains dogged by its lack of attractiveness to students and their families, with general and higher education enjoying greater prestige. Several surveys of Kosovo's education and training system have emphasised the need to make it more relevant to the labour market and to develop the education infrastructure. For example, teacher-training provision is limited and most VET instructors, for example, do not have a teaching qualification.

Opportunities for young people to access work-based learning, whether through placements, internships and apprenticeships or some other variation of professional practice, remain limited, mainly owing to the small size of the private sector and the predominance of small and medium-sized enterprises, which have scant provision to offer structured work experience.

Kosovo governments have sought to address these issues, developing strategies for human resources development and education reform. In education, the key action plan is the Kosovo education strategic plan 2011–16 (KESP), the overarching national education and training strategy. Lifelong learning and inclusiveness are the key underpinning principles of the plan. The development of the Kosovo NQF is a key element within KESP. Since 2012, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) has hosted a joint annual review conference to review the progress of KESP.

Kosovo's education and training system reflects the country's very specific circumstances. For example,

<sup>499</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence – hereinafter 'Kosovo'.

<sup>500</sup> Data from the ETF Torino Process 2016–17 Kosovo report.

it is characterised by a large international donor community and strong external influences from the USA and the EU. The centres of competence established by donors, in particular Norway and Luxembourg, in regional centres across the country are key to VET, specialising in fields such as business, medicine and agriculture. This approach is not without its critics who cite the high set-up costs of the centres and their alleged isolation from the rest of the national VET system. However, in recent years, especially in VET, donors have been either scaling down or withdrawing.

The NQF was developed by the Kosovo government in cooperation with EU support provided under various projects, including KOSVET II, KOSVET III and, finally, KOSVET V; the European Training Foundation (ETF) has also assisted and advised the Kosovo authorities. KOSVET V concluded its work at the end of 2011, and subsequently the NQA, as an autonomous agency, has been solely responsible for implementing the framework.

Strategic challenges facing the NQF are: how to contribute to the establishment of KESP, including the overall improvement of the quality of education and training provision; how to support the move to an education training system with lifelong learning at its core; and how to link higher education and VET more closely.

Specific challenges include: conducting accreditation of vocational schools and other providers; carrying out validation processes for new qualifications so that these can be registered in the NQF, and ensuring the NQF performs its quality assurance role.

### **International cooperation**

A Stabilization and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo entered into force on 1 April 2016. It will support the implementation of reforms and will give Kosovo an opportunity to move closer to Europe as an important stability anchor.

The EU assistance to Kosovo under the priority sector of education, employment and social policies (financial assistance under IPA II<sup>501</sup>) is focusing on: (i) improving the functioning of the labour market; (ii) raising education standards; (iii) promoting skills development; and (iv) restructuring the social welfare system.

Kosovo's education and training system reflects the country's very specific circumstances, for

example, a large international donor community and strong external political and economic assistance. Kosovo is receiving financial support and technical assistance from donors, including multilateral and bilateral international organizations.

Arguably, the education and training system is overly-influenced by donors, who pull in different directions, offering their funding support to Kosovo's VET sector but undermining efforts at coherent reform. Stronger donor coordination mechanisms and practices are very much needed.

## **Policy objectives**

### **Education and training reforms**

The Kosovo qualifications framework is central to the government's aim to improve the quality of the education and training system and to drive it towards EU standards. The NQF is explicitly intended as a reform instrument. Indeed, it even goes beyond other 'reforming' NQFs in being perceived as a key tool in building and structuring the national education system. It will, therefore, not only relate or link the different subsectors of the national system, but also initiate and stimulate curricular and qualifications re-design and promote institutional change.

Kosovo's vision is to develop its VET system as part of an inclusive education system, based on lifelong learning principles offering quality education to all. The government's continuing education reforms aim to increase the quality of pre-university education, develop teaching as a career, ensure that VET programmes better reflect economic demands, and expand practical elements. Reforms in the education sector are building on recent evaluation of KESP 2011–16, which has identified key achievements and the need for further interventions. Based on this evaluation and measures identified under the national development strategy, which recognise the need for investment and improvements in the education sector, including VET, to turn Kosovo's labour force into an engine for development, the government is developing a new KESP for the period 2017–21.

Since 2015, VET has been identified as the top priority among the different education sectors, confirmed by the considerable efforts of MEST in establishing both the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE) in 2014 and setting up the Council for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education. The functioning and capacity building of AVETAE as well as the Council is both a challenge and a prerequisite for creating a more coherent

<sup>501</sup> IPA – Instrument for pre-accession assistance (the EU's support programme for candidate and potential candidate countries).

approach in VET and adult education, and for bringing all relevant stakeholders together to improve cooperation between the public and private sector.

The second priority is the implementation of the NQF. Kosovo has already put in place many of the elements of a modernised qualification system. However, it needs to accelerate its development and the adoption of occupational standards for use in developing new qualifications, validate more new qualifications for inclusion in the framework and implement its developing system of validation of non-formal and informal learning, which is also one of the key issues for European education policy.

National strategies related to the NQF are as follows:

- a. Kosovo education strategy plan 2011–16;
- b. Strategy for development for pre-university education in Kosovo 2007–17;
- c. Strategy for integration of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in Kosovo (Education component 2007–17);
- d. Strategy for the development of higher education in Kosovo (2005–15);
- e. Sectoral strategy 2014–20 of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

The country also developed and adopted the Youth Employment Action Plan of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare following the recommendation of the Economic Reform Programme 2017 assessment.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### Scope and structure of NQF

The Kosovo qualifications framework is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework; its descriptors are intended to cater for all types of learning contexts and experiences: general education, higher education, VET, and formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The Qualifications Law (2008) defines the NQF as the national mechanism for classifying qualifications awarded within the national qualification system according to a set of criteria defining levels. There are six specified types of qualification recognised in the NQF:

- a. higher education qualifications under the institutional responsibility of the higher education accreditation agency (Kosovo Accreditation Agency);
- b. general education qualifications under the institutional responsibility of MEST;
- c. national combined VET/general qualifications under the institutional responsibility of the NQA;
- d. national vocational qualifications under the institutional responsibility of the NQA;
- e. qualifications based on international standards under the institutional responsibility of the NQA;
- f. tailored qualifications under the institutional responsibility of the NQA.

Qualifications are for the most part being developed along unit or modular lines, in both VET and higher education (general school compulsory education does not, however, use a modular approach).

**Table 39. NQF and qualification types in Kosovo**

NQF LEVELS	EDUCATION/TRAINING PROGRAMMES	CURRENTLY AVAILABLE QUALIFICATIONS (TYPE)	POTENTIAL WORK ROLES/ OCCUPATIONAL REQUIREMENTS	EQF LEVELS
8	Higher education – Bologna 3rd cycle (Doctorate)	Doctorate	Entry to, or continuing professional development within, senior levels of management or higher level professional occupations	8
7	Higher education – Bologna 2nd cycle (Master)	Master degree		7
6	Higher education – Bologna 1st cycle (Bachelor)	Bachelor degree		6
5	Bologna short cycle and/or post- secondary VET	Diploma of formal providers Certificates of non-formal providers		5

(Continued)

**Table 39. NQF and qualification types in Kosovo (Continued)**

NQF LEVELS	EDUCATION/TRAINING PROGRAMMES	CURRENTLY AVAILABLE QUALIFICATIONS (TYPE)	POTENTIAL WORK ROLES/OCCUPATIONAL REQUIREMENTS	EQF LEVELS
4	Preparation for progression into higher education and/or labour market entry	<i>Matura</i> certificate in general or vocational subjects Vocational education diploma	Qualified worker/supervisor	4
3	Preparation for labour market entry (young people and adults)	Vocational education certificate Certificates of non-formal VET providers	Semi-skilled worker	3
2	Progression from lower to upper secondary education (young people), preparation for labour market (adults)	No existing qualifications of formal education system identified Certificates of non-formal providers	Low-skilled worker	2
1	Basic education	No existing qualifications of formal education system identified Certificates of non-formal providers	Minimum level of basic skills, including literacy/numeracy, required for entry to lowest level of employment	1

**Alignment to other classification systems**

The NQF is the national mechanism for classifying qualifications awarded within the national qualification system according to a set of criteria defining levels.

**NQF levels and level descriptors**

The basic structure of the Kosovo qualifications framework consists of eight levels of qualifications and modules; other qualification components can be placed across the existing levels and types. According to the Law 03/L-060 of 2008, the level descriptors are defined in terms of learning outcomes. The NQF classifies a learning outcome as:

- a. knowledge: which may be theoretical or practical;
- b. skills: which may be cognitive, practical or creative;
- c. wider competences: specifically, autonomy and responsibility.

The descriptors, as well as the framework overall, are strongly influenced by the EQF and also drawn from elements of other existing NQFs, such as the

Scottish qualifications framework. They have been elaborated for Kosovo’s context.

**Use of learning outcomes**

The NQF is built on the principles of learning outcomes. The qualifications are defined through the learning outcomes, which state what the learner is expected to know and to be able to do on the successful completion of the module or of the full programme. For occupational qualifications, the learning outcomes derive directly from the competences identified in the occupational standards.

**Definition of qualification**

The definition of ‘qualification’ in the NQF (Law 03/L-060 on national qualifications, 2008) is: ‘an official recognition of achievement that recognises completion of education or training or satisfactory performance in a test or examination.’

Most qualifications are being developed as unit or modular structures for both VET and higher education. General compulsory education, however, uses a modular approach, which was introduced with the adoption of the new Core Curriculum Framework in 2011. Following pilots in a sample

of schools, the full-scale implementation of the learning outcomes curricula in general education schools only started in 2017.

Other related definitions also stated in the NQF include:

- a. A certificate is an official document attesting to a person's completion of a course, education or training programme, or the requirements for award of a qualification, or recording partial completion of a qualification.
- b. Certification is the process of recognising the achievements of candidates for qualifications through the award of a certificate or diploma.
- c. 'Diploma' means a document given upon completion of an extensive education programme.

### **Qualification standards**

Law No 03/L-060 (Article 2) defines standards as measurable indicators of achievement, defined either in terms of qualitative or in terms of quantitative criteria that are required to be achieved by candidates for the award of qualifications.

In the context of the development of a system of vocational qualifications for Kosovo, there are two main applications of the term 'standards'. Occupational standards are descriptions of expected work tasks and responsibilities in a given occupation. Learning outcomes within the adopted qualification standards are measures of assessed learning achievements.

The definition of occupational standards should be the starting point for development of curricula and assessment for outcomes-based VET qualifications and competence-based VET programmes. When submitting a qualification for validation and approval for inclusion in the NQF, the following features will be described in the qualification specification and application:

- a. qualification title,
- b. rationale for the qualification, and evidence of the need for the qualification,
- c. aims of the qualification, main target groups of learners,
- d. NQF level of the qualification and the credit value of the whole qualification,
- e. recommended access routes to enter the qualification and any entry requirements,
- f. progression routes after completion of qualification (e.g. further learning),
- g. structure of qualification,
- h. approaches to assessment for the award of the qualification,

- i. specific quality assurance requirements of the qualification,
- j. any mutual recognition agreements with other qualifications,
- k. detailed specifications (e.g. modules; programmes etc.).

The specifications for a VET qualification also include describing how the qualification links to employment structure, and evidence about consultation with labour market stakeholders. As well as providing the information required for validation, the qualification specification can ensure that relevant information is also easily available for users of the qualification, including learners and employers.

### **Qualifications development process**

The NQA is responsible for standard-setting for the validation (approval) of qualifications and the accreditation of providers (authorisation to develop, offer and assess qualifications). Qualifications/modules are developed by MEST, AVETAE, relevant ministries and other providers. Most VET qualifications are developed by the providers, then submitted for approval to the NQA.

VET qualifications have to be based on occupational standards (of which 88 now exist). Occupational standards are the starting point for outcomes-based curricula and outcomes-based VET qualifications. VET qualifications can be placed in the NQF if they are based on occupational standards.

Occupational standards should be used to provide a reference point for identifying the modules to be included in each qualification, together with the learning outcomes to be achieved for the candidate to be credited with having achieved each module. The main functions generally identified in the occupational standards will lead to the definition of modules for learning and assessment.

Modules provide building blocks for qualifications, enabling systems of credit accumulation and credit transfer to be developed. They can be offered in combination to meet the requirements of particular programmes, as elective options or individually. Vocational qualifications should normally be based on a 'core' and 'elective' structure, allowing some degree of choice with regard to the modules taken.

Occupational standards are developed in cooperation with MEST, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, other relevant ministries and social partners. They are verified by the NQA and approved by the Council for Vocational Education and Training.

To date, the NQA has validated 26 qualifications, which have been placed at NQF levels 2–5.

### **Access, progression and credit**

The NQF has been designed to enable and promote access, progression and transfer and to support the building of pathways between different subsectors of education and training, for example higher education and VET. The redesign of qualifications using learning outcomes and the structuring of courses on modular lines should, in many cases, support progression and transfer, for example where units or modules are the same or similar between different courses or qualifications.

In practice, however, direct linking of qualifications to particular types of programme in many cases is a barrier to flexible access to qualifications. Some institutions remain reluctant to be flexible in offering learner access to programmes or qualifications. Within higher education, for example, it can be difficult for students to transfer credits between universities or even across faculties at the same university. In some cases, providers are unwilling to accept assessment of the learner's previous institution.

According to the Law on national qualifications, qualifications must be 'designed to allow for the accumulation and transfer of credit'. This can be achieved through developing modular qualifications. The qualifications and individual learning modules should be developed in subject hierarchies to allow learners to progress within the NQF to their ability level.

One of the objectives of the NQF is to facilitate the accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes between different learning contexts or systems, which includes also the formal and non-formal learning. The NQA has developed a VET credit system based on ECVET recommendations. This aims to support learners' geographical and occupational mobility by enabling them to accumulate and combine learning outcomes from different settings and use them in different education pathways.

The NQA's credit system uses learning outcomes, categorises qualifications by measuring the volume of learning, and identifies providers who have a role and responsibility in allocating credit.

One credit is awarded for 10 notional learning hours. This convention was selected because it allows credit to be awarded for learning outcomes gained in very short periods of time (for example, one- or two-day training programmes). It also offered relatively easy conversion to ECTS points (2.5 ECVET points = 1 ECTS point).

The NQA regulates the credit system by accrediting providers and setting criteria to determine which providers can submit qualifications for inclusion in the NQF. These criteria include strict procedures for allocating credits, which ensures that providers have the necessary capacity and expertise. The NQF also provides the basis for cooperation and mutual recognition of VET qualifications with other countries.

A credit system has been established for the higher education sector and is aligned to the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS).

## **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

### **NQF legal basis**

Law No 03/L-060 on national qualifications, adopted on 7 November 2008, established the Kosovo NQF. Related legal and regulatory measures are the Law on primary and secondary education, the Law on higher education, the Law on adult education and training and the Law on vocational education and training. The NQA established under the provisions of this Law (03/L-060) shall also regulate the awarding of qualifications in the framework with the exception of qualifications which are regulated under the provisions of the Law on higher education, and qualifications explicitly regulated and under the provisions of other legislation.

Secondary legislation:

- a. Administrative Instruction No 28/2014 on criteria and procedures for the verification of the occupational standards;
- b. Administrative Instruction No 35/2014 on criteria and procedures for the validation and approval of national qualification and accreditation of institutions providing qualification in Kosovo;
- c. Administrative Instruction No 31/2014 for prior learning recognition;
- d. Administrative Instruction No 32/2014 on criteria and procedures for quality assurance in VET institutions internal processes.

Various laws interact with those directly linked with NQF implementation. Related legislation includes:

- a. Law on vocational education and training (No 02/L-42, 23 February 2006) defines occupational standards whereas the Law on national qualifications (No 03/L-060, 7 November 2008) provides a more general definition of standards;
- b. Law No 04/L-032 on pre-university education in the republic of Kosovo (20 August 2011) deals with the level of qualifications;



- c. Law No 04/L-037 on higher education in the Republic of Kosovo (20 August 2011) dealing with levels and the accreditation of higher education programmes and institutions is carried out by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, and the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad is carried out by MEST;
- d. Law No 02/L-42 on vocational education and training (23 February 2006) defines qualification standards, relating to the level of entry and several other definitions (student, diploma, etc.);
- e. Law No 02/L-24, on adult education and training (22 July 2005) defines certification as well as informal and non-formal learning.

Other laws:

- a. Law No 04/L-143 on adult education and training (2012);
- b. Law No 03/L-068 on education in the municipalities of Kosovo (2008);
- c. Law No 03/L-018 on final examination and State matura examination (2008);
- d. Law No 02/L-52 on pre-school education (2006);
- e. Law No 2004/37 on inspection of education in Kosovo (2004).

### **Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF**

The NQA, established in 2008, has the overall responsibility for implementing the NQF. It has a staff of six employees, and a governing board of 13 members who represent VET, general education and higher education, trade unions, employers and employers' organisations, chambers of commerce and voluntary bodies. While the NQA leads and coordinates, it shares responsibility for developing and implementing the NQF with MEST, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency for higher education and the Council for Vocational Education and Training.

The Council for Vocational Education and Training has statutory responsibility for proposing and approving standards for the VET system. It is a tripartite body (government, employers and trade unions) designed to support the development of the VET sector.

Stakeholder involvement outside the key institutions is developing but is still quite limited. However, this situation is not unique to the NQF or wider education and training; rather it reflects the position in society generally, where civic institutions are still developing.

A new actor is AVETAE, which began work in spring 2014, supported by the German government donor, GIZ. Its mandate is not completely clear yet.

The NQA is the authority responsible for developing and maintaining the NQF. According to the NQF law,

one of the key objectives of the NQF is to provide a basis for cooperation and mutual recognition between the NQF and the EQF. As such, the NQA is the national coordination point responsible for overseeing the referencing of the NQF to the EQF, which was successfully completed in December 2016.

The NQA has the responsibility for registering, within the framework, the VET and adult education qualifications developed by providers such as vocational schools or special occupational schools or academies, such as the police college. It conducts quality assurance processes relevant to the validation, assessment and certification of these qualifications to ensure they are of sufficient quality to be included in the NQF, and is responsible for the accreditation of VET providers.

MEST oversees general education qualifications and develops secondary school-level general qualifications, such as the lower secondary leaving diploma and the upper secondary matura.

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency oversees higher education provision and accredits higher education institutions as providers. Universities generally develop their own qualifications, quality assured by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency.

The Council for Vocational Education and Training intends to coordinate contributions from across the VET stakeholder community, including various ministries, but in particular the social partners. Its remit includes engaging the social partners in coordinating the development of occupational standards and initiatives to improve the quality of VET. It is the responsibility of the Council to ensure that the standards proposed meet the needs of Kosovo's labour market as well as ensuring support from all interested parties.

AVETAE has, according to the 2014 Administrative Instruction, extensive responsibilities in VET, including setting strategic priorities, and over curricula. Its relationship with the NQA and other actors and their respective remits needs to be clarified as the agency develops.

### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

Social partners are formally involved in the qualification design and development process. They are members of the NQA governing board and of the Council for Vocational Education and Training. The Council recommends the approval of programmes and occupational standards.

Social partners have been involved in the three working groups established for the referencing

process of the NQF to EQF and are acting as sectoral experts and advisors. Nevertheless, the commitment of social partners remains limited as they act more in consultative roles rather than taking a more proactive, driving role in NQF implementation.

### Resources and funding

The Law No 03/L-060 on qualifications covers resources and funding.

- Article 21: financing – The funds necessary to fulfil the responsibilities set out in the provisions of this Law shall be provided from the Kosovo State Budget. The NQA, in compliance with the provisions of this law, has the right to obtain funding from other resources including other ministries and donors according to this law. Levies and payments from education and training institutions, including fees for education services, registration fees, charges for the award of certificates and diplomas, and donations, can be used to cover the cost of activities additional to its core functions. This shall be regulated by secondary regulation, issued by MEST.
- Article 22: budget procedure – The NQA shall formulate and submit to MEST for approval an annual financial plan setting out its budget for the year. The plan shall include preliminary estimates of income and a breakdown of estimated expenditure.

### Quality assurance of qualifications

All qualifications or modules proposed for validation must follow quality assurance arrangements. This includes institutional self-assessment and monitoring, including keeping candidate records to meet requirements for internal and external quality assurance of the assessment and certification processes and to provide verifiable evidence on candidates' achievements.

Kosovo has adopted a national quality assurance framework (NQAF) in VET in line with the European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training (EQAVET) to build a functional system of quality assurance for VET qualifications and to meet the needs of Kosovo society and European standards. The NQAF has six quality principles, each of which is defined by the following quality indicators:

- a. management responsibilities (15 criteria),
- b. resource management (9 criteria),
- c. design and development (12 criteria),
- d. learning, assessment and certification (28 criteria),
- e. self-evaluation (13 criteria),
- f. continuous improvement (10 criteria).

The NQA Administrative Instruction defines the process of accreditation. The progress is evidenced by the measures taken to date.

- a. Providers implement the NQAF.
- b. More than 100 providers are involved in the quality assurance process.
- c. Self-assessment reports are produced annually.
- d. Quality assurance coordinators are appointed and trained.
- e. Providers implement the principles and criteria of accreditation according to the NQA Administrative Instruction.
- f. The NQA has accredited 36 providers/institutions.

The criteria for the evaluation and procedures for accreditation of higher education institutions include internal policies and procedures for quality assurance of their study programmes and awards.

Other important components of the quality system include:

- a. common regulation: MEST approves programmes and licenses institutions which contributes to national concepts, curricula, and vocational standards;
- b. external evaluation of vocational schools through administrative and professional inspections by the MEST Department of Inspection;
- c. quality assurance of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare's vocational training centres and mobile centres by the VET Division at the Ministry;
- d. internal evaluation of schools through the recently introduced practice of self-assessment;
- e. external tests and examinations, especially the matura and the standardised tests after year 9;
- f. the quality assurance role of the Office for Standards and Evaluation at MEST;
- g. statistical data gathering by the Education Management Information Section (EMIS);
- h. the municipalities' role according to the Law on VET for the 'supervision and inspection of the education process in accordance with guidelines established by MEST' and in other areas which impact on the quality of VET provision;
- i. the involvement of social partners and stakeholders via the Council for Vocational Education and Training.

Within this system, three kinds of quality activity can be distinguished: quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement.

Self-assessment by accredited institutions will demonstrate their commitment to the continuous

improvement of the quality of their provision. Self-assessment reports will be produced annually and should reflect the conclusions of the continuing self-assessment process. The self-assessment model used in Kosovo's NQF reflects the European common quality assurance framework model (common core quality criteria) and principles.

The legal basis for quality assurance is provided by Law No 03/L-060 on qualifications: Article 5 (NQF), Article 15 (Regulation of the award of qualifications), Article 17 (Responsibilities of assessment bodies); and Administrative Instruction No 32/2014 on criteria and procedures for quality assurance in VET institutions – internal processes.

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency – and its governing board, the National Quality Council – is the institution responsible for quality assurance in the higher education system. In addition to its main role, it is responsible for accrediting post-secondary VET colleges.

The NQA plays a major role in terms of quality assurance of VET in Kosovo. It is the institution monitoring the quality of the VET system. It has responsibility for validating and approving qualifications and modules for inclusion in the framework; accrediting and monitoring the institutions which deliver qualifications and modules, and/or assess learners for these qualifications and modules and issue certificates or diplomas; carrying out external quality assurance of assessments leading to the award of these qualifications and/or modules; and considering appeals from learners in respect of disputed assessment decisions.

MEST currently has direct responsibility for the quality of provision in vocational schools. It is responsible for licensing and regulating schools, and the Inspectorate is a department of MEST.

The role of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in the quality assurance of VET is to support and monitor the work of the vocational training centres, which are established by the Ministry.

The municipalities have a role in the supervision and inspection of the education process in accordance with guidelines established by MEST and in other areas, which impact on the quality of VET provision.

The Council for Vocational Education and Training has an important role to advise the government on matters concerning the quality and promotion of VET in Kosovo. It has both a direct and indirect responsibility for the quality of VET in a wide range of areas. It has a key role for the external evaluation of VET provision, not directly, as is the case with the

Inspectorate or NQA, for example, but indirectly. It needs to be very well informed about VET to be able to request appropriate reports and data, analyse them and make appropriate recommendations to MEST or to the government.

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency is full member of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA); and of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. Kosovo has observer status in EQAVET, the community of practice, which supports implementation of the EU Recommendation on Quality Assurance in VET.

The Kosovo NQF provides a basis for cooperation and mutual recognition of higher qualifications between Kosovo and other countries. Initially this is being achieved by ensuring compatibility with the 'Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area' developed by the ENQA.

Criteria for the validation of a qualification by the NQA for inclusion in the NQF include ensuring:

- a. delivery, assessment and certification of the qualifications are supported by an effective quality assurance system including institutional self-assessment and monitoring;
- b. candidate records are sufficient to meet the requirements for internal and external quality assurance of the assessment and certification processes and to provide verifiable evidence of candidates' achievements.

MEST is responsible for quality assurance in general education. It approves programmes and licences schools that deliver national curriculum and learning standards.

The Kosovo Curriculum Framework is aligned with the United Nation's millennium development goals and the UNESCO Education for all initiative. It aims to provide equal access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, age, social and economic background, skin colour, culture, language and beliefs. It has been developed in compliance with quality standards (in terms of both content and student achievements). It complies with quality criteria such as relevance, connectivity, balance, coherence and meaningful progression of learning in compliance with the European reference framework – key competences for lifelong learning. Kosovo Curriculum Framework's learning outcomes for general education levels are integrated into NQF level descriptors and fit within

the EQF paradigm in relation to the acquisition of the key competences.

The Office for Standards and Evaluation in MEST is responsible for the evaluation of the quality of the matura exam and other standardised exams.

### **VET and the adult education and training system**

The Kosovo NQF provides a basis for cooperation and mutual recognition of VET qualifications between Kosovo and other countries. Initially this is being achieved by ensuring compatibility with:

- a. the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF);
- b. EQF level descriptors;
- c. quality principles for VET attached to the EQF and relevant criteria for referencing NQFs to the EQF;
- d. the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET);
- e. the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS);
- f. the European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training (EQAVET);
- g. the Europass suite of tools for the transparency of diplomas, certificates and competences.

MEST is responsible for planning the development of higher education in Kosovo and for licensing higher education institutions, whereas the Kosovo Accreditation Agency is the institution that conducts external quality evaluation.

According to the Law on higher education, the responsibilities of the Agency include: undertaking the periodic quality audit of licensed higher education providers and issuing decisions on accreditation or re-accreditation including the power to award degrees and diplomas; undertaking periodic quality assessment of courses and programmes offered by accredited higher education providers; and advising with the Ministry on the results of quality assessment. According to this law, the Agency is obliged to publish its conclusions, recommendations and advice.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

The NQF, as a lifelong learning framework, should support the building of pathways between different sub-sectors of education and training, for example linking higher education and VET. The framework has been designed to take account of modern learning and career patterns, so that barriers between

sub-sectors are minimized and pathways opened up to facilitate learner progression.

Additionally, the re-design of qualifications using learning outcomes and structuring of courses on modular lines in many cases should support progression and transfer – for example where units or modules are the same or similar between different courses or qualifications.

In practice, though, the direct linking of qualifications to particular types of programme in many cases is a barrier to flexible access to qualifications. Additionally, some institutions remain reluctant to be flexible in offering learners access to programmes or qualifications. Within higher education, for example, it can be difficult for students to transfer credit between universities or even across faculties at the same university. In some cases, providers are unwilling to accept the assessments of the learner's previous institution.

Existing programmes or courses are also in some cases inflexible, being mainly designed for younger people in full-time study. Similarly, assessment methods tend to be very traditional i.e. formal written examinations, rather than comprising a range of assessment approaches, e.g. interview, oral exam, practical. This can also have discrimination issue implications.

The NQF aims to support inclusiveness and the 2008 Law on national qualifications explicitly provides for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The process of evaluation of the knowledge and skills, which an individual has previously acquired through different learning contexts. The NQA has developed a policy paper and guidelines for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. It has also developed the Administrative Instruction for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); this legislation sets general principles, responsibilities and procedures for validation of non-formal and informal learning, within the NQF. The NQA will accredit providers for validation of non-formal and informal learning

The set of RPL guidelines, which describe the conditions for recognising prior learning that will lead to award of NQF credits, or to advanced standing on a programme or course leading to an NQA-approved qualification. Indeed, one of the general criteria set by the NQA for assessment bodies is that they must ensure access and certification to candidates other than those following traditional courses and provide for validation of

non-formal and informal learning. The NQA also has a communication strategy to promote the advantages of RPL and validation among stakeholders such as employers and awarding bodies.

Some organisations in Kosovo do recognise prior learning and VET qualifications are awarded to RPL candidates. Voluntary bodies such as the training centre APPK (Employment Promotion Agency) also support adults through validation processes. However, in some cases it is reported that institutions and employers consider qualifications obtained through validation routes inferior to those acquired through the traditional, linear path.

The NQA has engaged, with the support of the ETF, a training of trainers in the perspective of training assessors, mentors and coordinators, as of 2015. A pilot of the RPL methodology and procedures was developed in 2017 in two qualifications involving public and private providers. The revised RPL policy and procedures document was adopted officially by the NQA board in December 2017.

In 2018, the NQA elaborated a legal framework for the accreditation of the RPL providers. This new administrative instruction was expected to be adopted by MEST by the end of the year, thus making possible the implementation of RPL at system level as of 2019. The cooperation with the National Employment Agency has led to the discussion of considering RPL/validation of non-formal and informal learning as a potential active labour market measure, as a way of supporting the labour market integration of unemployed registered jobseekers in the state employment offices.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

Qualifications in general education are awarded by MEST at the end of a learning programme. These qualifications are developed and quality assured by the pre-university education department of MEST based on national standards for the qualifications and their curriculum areas. As such they are automatically part of the NQF.

The formal education structure is based on a programme of education, most of which leads to tangible outcomes, defined in terms of nationally recognised standards.

VET qualifications are included in the NQF through a mechanism developed and managed by the NQA. It consists of procedures for validating and approving qualifications for inclusion at defined levels of the framework, and criteria and processes

for the accreditation of providers to offer these qualifications.

The validation process, specified in law, is transparent and consists of four stages. In stage one, the institution seeking validation of a qualification/module makes an application which clearly states the rationale for the qualification/module. In stage two, a panel of experts appointed and supported by the NQA evaluates the application. In the third stage the experts' report and recommendations are presented to the Governing Board of NQA for the final decision and in stage four, the approved qualification/modules are included in the NQF and made public.

Qualifications or modules that are proposed for validation must state the following:

- a. rationale/justification,
- b. credit value and duration,
- c. entry requirements and access,
- d. proposed level of the qualification/module in the NQF,
- e. content, outcomes and standards,
- f. assessment knowledge, skills and competences,
- g. quality assurance arrangements,
- h. progression.

Decisions on the level at which each qualification is placed in the NQF are made on the basis of their match against level descriptors. Once qualifications are validated and placed in the NQF the decision is made public on the NQA website.

The institution responsible for the implementation of the NQF descriptors in higher education is the Kosovo Accreditation Agency. The implementation of the NQF at this level is ensured through the process of accreditation, the criteria for which they are regulated by a well-established legal framework and are published on the agency's website.

The process of accreditation is carried out at the level of the higher education institution and at the level of programmes offered by the institutions. The criteria for the evaluation and the procedures for accreditation of higher education institutions are as follows:

- a. the scope and number of programmes that different types of institutions need to offer to be eligible to apply for accreditation as a specific type of higher education institution;
- b. for academic degrees, as with other institutions in the European higher education area, the comparability of studies and overall educational outcomes with those of similar institutions in the European higher education area;

- c. availability, demonstrated through legally binding contracts, of adequately qualified staff to meet international scientific, artistic and professional standards;
- d. facilities;
- e. academic freedom in research and teaching;
- f. research taken at the institution and its contribution to teaching;
- g. internal policies and procedures for quality assurance of their study programmes and awards;
- h. admission criteria and study plans (detailed curricula) and examination regulations.

Once programmes and institutions are accredited the decision is made public on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency's website.

### **Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF**

The NQA is the responsible body for development and monitoring of the NQF implementation. Regular monitoring reports are also due to the EQF Advisory Group following the completion of the referencing process.

### **Impact for end-users**

The Kosovo NQF has not yet had a wide and tangible impact on end-users. The NQF is technically operational (learning outcomes-based structure and descriptors are in place, modular or unitised qualifications are available, levels and descriptors are clearly defined, the quality assurance framework is complete, and validation of non-formal and informal learning/RPL mechanisms are being developed further. Nevertheless, the number of VET qualifications registered remains limited. It is expected that the NQF-EQF referencing process will have a wider economic and social impact in the near future.

## **Referencing to regional frameworks**

Kosovo has been a member of the EQF advisory group since 2015 and referenced its NQF to the EQF in 2016. However, Kosovo is not yet a member of the Bologna Process. It intends to join the European higher education area and is currently conducting the necessary technical measures, even if its political administrative status is still unclear.

## **Important lessons and future plans**

Kosovo is more advanced than most countries in South Eastern Europe in implementing its NQF.

From a political point of view, the NQF also occupies a central place in the government's education and training strategy. As a reform instrument, the impact of the NQF depends in part on its relationship with other policy measures and institutions. A strong legislative framework is in place to support the development of the NQF. The role of the NQA is central to the NQF's success.

From a technical point of view, the NQF is in line with European standards. The Kosovo qualifications framework consists of eight qualifications levels. It is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework so its descriptors cater for all types of learning contexts and processes: general education, higher education, and VET. It also allows for the inclusion of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities and qualifications.

The level descriptors are learning outcomes-based, divided into knowledge, skills and wider competences. There are six specified types of qualification recognised in the NQF. The quality assurance approach is well designed and supports the qualifications and NQF development.

Nevertheless, there are still challenges to face in the near future related to the extension of the number of qualifications registered in the NQF, and the impact on end-users, in terms of quality and trust in qualifications awarded. A key challenge is to reach full engagement with, and the active participation of, the various stakeholders such as departments, social partners, agencies and institutions necessary to ensure a sustained implementation of the NQF in the long term.

Key future tasks include:

- a. the addition of new qualifications to the framework: the number of VET qualifications placed in the NQF remains small (27), though the number of occupational standards validated so far (88) has increased substantially;
- b. developing and implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning/RPL mechanisms at the system level; full implementation in selected occupations and accredited providers is foreseen for 2019;
- c. engaging a diverse range of stakeholders systematically and reach out end-users;
- d. implementing fully the well-designed quality assurance mechanisms at all levels and types of qualifications.

**Abbreviations**

AVETAE	Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education	EQF	European qualifications framework
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system	KESP	Kosovo education strategic plan
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training	MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	NQA	National Qualifications Authority
		NQAF	national quality assurance framework
		NQF	national qualifications framework
		RPL	recognition of prior learning

**Prepared by:**

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

# KYRGYZSTAN

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

Kyrgyzstan adopted its national qualifications framework (NQF) by Ministerial Order on 17 March 2016. The law provides for nine levels in the NQF, the ninth level covering highly specialized post-doctoral qualifications.

Although Kyrgyzstan ratified the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of qualifications in 2004, it is outside the geographical coverage of the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Kyrgyzstan is a developing country with a population of approximately 5.7 million. People aged under 20 account for 41% of its population; those aged 20–29 are a further 20%. The economy is unable to provide adequate work for many young people, so youth unemployment is high, at 18%.

More than 600,000 Kyrgyz are outside the country. Agriculture and construction are key industries, while the service sector is expanding at the fastest rate. Remittances are an important source of revenue. High poverty levels are present; in 2016, 25.4% of the population was still below the poverty line. Poverty is most entrenched in the countryside. Educational attainment is broadly greater among urban citizens.

The informal economy is extensive, in fact it is estimated that three-quarters of all employment is in the informal sector.

Politically, the country crossed a watershed in 2010 with the establishment of a parliamentary system of government; a new government and new president were elected.

The education and training system is poorly integrated, requiring the NQF to build pathways. Vocational education and training (VET) remains a second-class option, although specialists from the VET system are in more demand from the labour market than alumni of higher educational institutions.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

The NQF is an element in the Education Development Strategy 2020; its other aims in VET include improving quality, boosting labour market relevance and increasing access.

Objectives of the NQF are to enhance transparency of qualifications; facilitate mobility of citizens to other countries; structure and integrate education and training systems in the country; enhance employability; boost lifelong learning; and link qualifications better to the labour market.

### International cooperation

NQF development in the country has been dependent on donor support, including from the EU, e.g. via Tempus in higher education or the European Training Foundation; the Asian Development Bank, DVV and the Gustav Stresemann Institute, the Soros Foundation and others. Sectoral frameworks were developed, for example in tourism and construction.

More broadly, the NQF and sectoral qualification frameworks are significantly influenced by the European qualifications framework and the Bologna Process, evident in the structures, functions, and learning outcomes basis. The Ministerial Order explicitly refers to these frameworks as influences.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### NQF scope and structure

All existing qualifications for VET, general and higher education are included.

The Ministerial Order specifies 10 levels including sub-levels 7a and 7b. Level 9 is for post-doctoral qualifications, corresponding to the former Soviet degree of Doctor of Science. Sub-level 7a also includes the former Soviet qualification type of Specialist, whereas 7b includes Masters degrees, as in the European Qualifications Framework or the Bologna framework in higher education.



### **Alignment to other classification systems**

A manual on the national classification of occupations is applied. It includes 10 consolidated groups, divided into subgroups, but these concern occupations rather than qualifications in an explicit form; the levels used in the classification correspond to educational levels. At the same time these qualification levels can be obtained outside the education system, using various approaches. In addition:

- The Law on Education indicates the levels of education in force in Kyrgyzstan. It is foreseen that in current legislative changes these will be related to the NQF.
- State educational standards are confirmed with a specific credit value.

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

The descriptors are described in learning outcomes, using three columns: knowledge and understanding, abilities and skills and personal competences (independence, responsibility).

### **Use of learning outcomes**

Learning outcomes are used in the descriptors although the Ministerial Order does not explicitly say all qualifications, at least new qualifications must be outcomes-based.

Traditionally, qualifications have been inputs-based. The state educational standards define how learners can reach specified levels of education; student attainment of such levels is confirmed by award certificates, diplomas etc.

In the EU and other internal projects, qualifications were outcomes-based.

### **Definition of qualification**

The Ministerial Order does not define qualification. However, it refers to qualification in the context of levels and study programmes based on cycle, credits and length of the study programme, for some levels. Levels are differentiated between qualification types, however further specification is needed. The structure of the NQF takes into account advanced training in short-term courses (non-formal education), but the NQF Ministerial Order lacks the concept of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The term sectoral qualifications is sometimes used in specific cases (e.g. for the food industry or in gold mining) that are not part of the formal system.

### **Access, progression and credit**

The NQF Ministerial Order includes progression as a basic principle of the framework. Credit volumes are assigned to each NQF level.

## **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

### **NQF legal basis**

Formally, the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic No 308/1 and the Order of the Ministry of Labour and Social Development of the Kyrgyz Republic No 87 of 17 March 2016.

In 2018, work began on promoting the NQF through making changes to the Law on Education: the conceptual apparatus on the national qualification system is also introduced in the amended Law on Education that passed several readings in the Parliament at the time of writing.

A Concept on the national qualification system is in preparation and there is work ongoing to update the NQF Ministerial Order. The Order is consistent with the Law on Education, the Law on Initial Vocational Training and the Labour Code of the Kyrgyz Republic.

### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

The policy lead lies with the education and labour ministries. The institutional mechanisms are being developed by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Labour and Social Development. Roles and functions are not yet defined or allocated, but actors will include the national VET agency. Currently, the Concept of the national qualification system is being developed, where the roles and functions of institutions in the implementation of the components of the system will be defined.

Beyond the institutions, stakeholder engagement in developing the NQF, or in its project forerunners, has been limited. The degree of organisation of sectoral stakeholders is one of the difficulties, with small and medium-sized enterprises dominating the economy. Some employers are aware of and understand NQF concepts via their involvement in the various EU and other donor-driven projects. Under the mandate of the Ministry of Education and Science, an interdepartmental working group and a group of experts is created that will directly deal with the development of the NQF concept, the action plan and the implementation arrangements. There is also a partially overlapping group supported by the GIZ project on employment promotion and VET that develops the system for validation.

The Ministerial Order was issued in 2016 and the relevant ministries are developing a roadmap as part of the national qualification system concept, taking into account the discussions of functions of various players.

## Resources and funding

Funding for earlier NQF-related projects came from international donors but sustained state funding, or support from social partners locally, is a challenge.

## Quality assurance of qualifications

The Ministerial Order does not refer to quality assurance, and quality measures are yet to be defined and developed for validation of qualifications and provider accreditation, for example.

The Decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic is in force, where accreditation criteria for educational institutions that wish to provide qualifications included in the NQF are specified. In 2018, most educational institutions passed the accreditation procedure through the authorized body (Ministry of Education) and other independent accreditation agencies (five independent accreditation agencies are currently operating in the country).

Moreover, in the programming documents concerning education, such as the Strategy for the Development of Education until 2020, quality assurance is important. Broader education policies place emphasis on quality assurance. GIZ is also supporting work on independent assessment.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Experiments have been carried out over the last 10 years, including with support of the Asian Development Bank in the industry for seamstresses, and more recently in the food industry where an independent certification centre has been established with GIZ support.

More systemic approaches have been developed within the framework of GIZ project Support to Employment and VET, where an interdepartmental working group, consisting of key ministries, the chamber and sectoral organisations, has been working on the development of a national system in accordance with a three-year (2017–19) plan.

In November 2018, a methodology was adopted by key stakeholders, which has been tested for several occupations in personal care, and food and catering sectors (so far 11 candidates have been certificated). Legislation has also been drafted but is not yet approved.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

Tools for registration have not been developed yet.

## Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of NQF implementation have not yet been defined. As soon as the roadmaps have been specified there could be a tool to start monitoring the implementation.

### Impact for end-users

None yet.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

No formal relationship, although Kyrgyzstan ratified the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of qualifications in 2004.

## Important lessons and future plans

Adoption in spring 2016 of the NQF law was a step forward. Initiatives such as NQF-Quadriga under Tempus have proposed methodologies to develop an NQF. Various donor-funded projects, including the Asian Development Bank and GIZ, have contributed elements of a qualification system, including occupational standards. Further, sectoral frameworks were piloted in sectors such as mining, light industry and food processing.

The Ministry of Education and Science is more engaged in the NQF now. Parliament is discussing amendments to the Law on Education. A working group bringing together all relevant stakeholders and experts is improving and operationalising a Concept for a national qualification system with international donors to develop the wider system.

Independent development of an NQF is unlikely in the near future and the country will need to draw on international support and finance to progress its NQF. Understanding of the functions and benefits of an NQF, especially among different stakeholders, remains limited among necessary actors; stakeholder involvement remains weak. While state institutions, the chamber and providers are more consistently involved, the wider involvement of stakeholders from sectors and regions needs strengthening.

### Abbreviations

DVV	German development agency, supporting adult education
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

### Prepared by:

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

## Introduction and context

In recent years Latvia has made remarkable progress in reducing its early school leaving rate, increasing participation in early childhood education and care, raising the tertiary education attainment rate, and improving basic skills attainment. It is now outperforming the EU averages for all these indicators. The employment rate of recent graduates has fallen and is now below EU level (78.0% compared to the EU average of 80.2% in 2017). Participation in adult learning (7.5%) continues to be a challenge despite measures to boost it.

The Latvian education system is making progress on quality standards. The new competence-based curriculum in upper secondary is being implemented gradually and may improve learning outcomes. The aim is to complete curriculum modernisation by 2022. Access to quality education, however, is not fully equitable, with students in larger secondary schools and gymnasiums having much better access than students in the small schools more common in rural areas. Government pressure on municipalities to streamline the school network continues and may eventually lead to a network with fewer, but larger upper secondary schools that are better able to provide quality education. Shrinking student population and an ageing teaching corps point in the same direction. A new amendment to Latvia's Education Law, planned to come into force in 2020, gives the government the right to set the minimum number of students per class in upper secondary schools.

Latvia is preparing a gradual switch to Latvian as the sole language of instruction by 2021. Amendments in the Education Law passed in March 2018 abolish the possibility to have up to 40% of instruction in the minority language in minority secondary schools. There is concern for the 25% of students whose Latvian language proficiency in writing is not sufficient and that there could be an increase in dropout rates for Russian speakers.

The government is promoting STEM<sup>502</sup> subjects in higher education by increasing the proportion of publicly financed study places in order to achieve a better balance in the supply of skills. Latvia has one of the lowest shares of tertiary educated adults with a degree in STEM fields (European Commission, 2018).

The Latvian qualifications framework (LQF) was adopted in 2010<sup>503</sup> and linked to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and the qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2011; the referencing report was published in 2012. Qualifications from formal education (vocational education and training, higher education and general education), were included in the first phase of implementation (2009–11). The second phase (2013–15) saw revision of a number of laws (Vocational education Law, Law on higher education institutions and Education Law) and was supported by several large European Social Fund (ESF) projects (focusing on aspects such as development of sectoral qualifications frameworks and evaluation of programmes). Government regulations<sup>504</sup> were amended accordingly to adapt the LQF to the current requirements of labour and education sectors. Journeyman and master craftsman qualifications are included in the sectoral

<sup>502</sup> STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

<sup>503</sup> Regulations No 990 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 2 December 2008: Regulations on the education classification of Latvia, [Appendix 1, Table 2](#) (with amendments 5 November 2010). Available at: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=184810>. Currently the regulations are no longer in force. They were replaced by new Cabinet Regulations No 322 Regulations on the education classification of Latvia (in force as of 16 June 2017). Available at: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524>

<sup>504</sup> Regulations No 322 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 13 June 2017: *Regulations on the education classification of Latvia*. It came into force on 16 June 2017. It determines the descriptions of knowledge, skills and competences corresponding to the LQF levels and the conformity of the types of education programmes with the LQF/EQF levels. Available at: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitiba-klasifikaciju>

qualifications frameworks that are referenced to the LQF, but these qualifications are not reflected in the LQF.

## Policy objectives

The main objective of the Latvian qualifications framework was setting a united scale of levels for all qualifications, comparable with the qualifications of other countries via the EQF. The LQF expands individuals' opportunities for mobility between countries and between various institutions and education levels. It complements a parallel process: recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The development of a comprehensive LQF aims to:

- a. increase transparency and consistency of qualifications;
- b. develop a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) in line with the needs of lifelong learning;
- c. strengthen the link between the labour market and education;
- d. strengthen cooperation of those involved in the design and award of qualifications;
- e. increase public understanding of national qualifications and help build links to the EQF.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

There is growing emphasis on learning outcomes at policy and practice level; they are widely used in higher education and for occupational standards. The level descriptors of the eight-level framework are based on learning outcomes and are defined as knowledge (knowledge and comprehension), skills (ability to apply knowledge, communication and general skills) and competence (analysis, synthesis and assessment)<sup>505</sup>.

Subject-based outcomes in general education have been defined in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The ESF operational programme project<sup>506</sup>, introduced in 2016, began the

development of a competence-based general education programme. A learning-outcomes-based approach has been implemented in vocational education and training since 2007. Vocational institutions must use learning-outcomes-oriented occupational standards (stipulating knowledge, skills and competences necessary to performing relevant professional activity) when developing new vocational education programmes or altering programmes which have already been accredited (Cedefop, 2016). By updating and improving the quality of occupational standards<sup>507</sup>, and by a greater focus on learning outcomes, vocational education programmes were improved (MoES, 2013b, p. 13). In addition to occupational standards mentioned above, or requirements for professional qualifications and descriptors of the sectoral qualifications frameworks, the content of vocational education programmes is defined by the State vocational education standards specified by the relevant Cabinet regulations. These standards outline the strategic aims of education programmes, the mandatory content of education, and the basic principles and procedure for evaluating that content.

The development of modular vocational education is a policy priority. The Cabinet of Ministers approved regulations<sup>508</sup> outlining measures for developing occupational standards, vocational education content, teaching/learning aids and assessment methods using the learning outcomes approach and EU tools<sup>509</sup>.

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*vispārējās izglītības saturu*]. <http://likumi.lv/ta/id/278201-darbibas-programmas-izaugsmes-un-nodarbinatiba-8-3-1-specifiska-atbalsta-merka-attistit-kompetencu-pieejabalstitu-visparejas>

<sup>507</sup> Regulations No 633 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 27 September 2016: *Procedure on the development of occupational standard, professional qualification requirements (if there is no approved occupational standard) and sectoral qualification framework*, [Latvian: *Profesijas standarta, profesionālās kvalifikācijas prasību (ja profesijai neapstiprina profesijas standartu) un nozares kvalifikāciju struktūras izstrādes kārtība*]. <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=285032>

<sup>508</sup> Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on the implementation of operational programme's growth and employment specific objective No 8.5.2: *To ensure the compliance of vocational education to the European qualifications framework* (in force since May 2016).

<sup>509</sup> The project is implemented by the National Centre for Education in cooperation with Employers' Confederation of Latvia, Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia and Latvian Agricultural Organisation Cooperation Council. During the project it is planned to elaborate 160 occupational standards/professional qualification requirements, 184 modular vocational education programmes, 80 teaching/learning aids, and the content of 210 professional qualification exams.

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<sup>505</sup> Level descriptors are included in Regulation No 322 of the Cabinet of Ministers: *Regulations on the education classification of Latvia*.

<sup>506</sup> Regulations No 670 of Cabinet of Ministers of 24 November 2015: *The implementation regulations of the operational programme 'Growth and employment', specific target 8.3.1: 'To develop competences-based general education content'* [Latvian: *Darbibas programmas 'Izaugsme un nodarbinātība' 8.3.1. specifiskā atbalsta mērķa 'Attīstīt kompetenču pieejā balstītu*

The qualifications framework for higher education is founded on three Bologna cycles, based on learning outcomes. The Law on Higher Education Institutions includes the term 'learning outcomes', and provides a brief definition of the term. The State standards for academic and professional higher education set acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences in line with EQF levels<sup>510</sup>. Other documents relating to the higher education sector, including the *National concept of the development of higher education and higher education institutions in Latvia 2013–20* (Council of Higher Education, 2013), focus on learning outcomes. The latest strategic document, *Guidelines for education development for 2014–20* (MoES, 2013a), provides continuity of policy planning from the guidelines of the previous planning period 2007–13 (MoES, 2006) with a strong focus on learning outcomes-based principles in all education subsystems.

In 2013, the Latvian national coordination point (NCP) also carried out the study *Introduction of learning outcomes in the Latvian education institutions* to assess how learning outcomes are introduced and used in education institutions in Latvia. The study revealed that work in the implementation and application of learning outcomes differs significantly by level and type of education; differences are seen also in education institutions of the same level and type. The differences could be explained by the fragmented education system, lack of common understanding, as well as the huge workload of education institution personnel and their lack of time. However, the majority of respondents saw the positive aspects of learning outcomes (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Ministry of Education and Science has the leading role in developing and introducing the LQF. The Academic Information Centre was designated the EQF NCP and played a key role in coordinating the referencing process, preparing and updating the referencing report, and communicating and

disseminating information to all stakeholders. Since February 2008 it has the following tasks:

- to reference existing national qualifications levels to the eight levels of the EQF;
- to ensure that transparent methodology is used to reference the national qualifications levels to the EQF;
- to provide access to information and guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through the national qualifications frameworks or systems;
- to promote the participation of stakeholders in the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level in accordance with national legislation and practice.

During the first stage of the referencing process (2009–11) implementation of the LQF was supervised by the referencing working group, which included the main education stakeholders: ministerial representatives, national agencies, employer organisations, trade unions, student organisations, and education quality assurance agencies. The working group evaluated materials and level descriptors prepared by experts and recommended the agreed level descriptors to the Cabinet of Ministers (approved in October 2010). The group was also involved in the consultation on the Bologna process initiated self-assessment report produced in 2011–12.

Following amendments to Vocational Education Law, Law on Higher Education Institutions and Education Law in 2015, the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 322 on the education classification of Latvia came into force in June 2017 and determined the descriptions of knowledge, skills and competences corresponding to the LQF levels and the conformity of the types of education programme with the LQF/EQF levels. With this regulation the LQF is now firmly embedded in Latvian education system.

As a result of the project *Development of sectoral qualification system and increasing efficiency and quality of vocational education*, 12 sectoral expert councils were established for the main economic sectors. They include representatives of sectoral employers' organisations, trade unions, the Ministry of Education and Science and other relevant ministries. Their main tasks include developing occupational standards, defining the content of vocational qualifications and vocational examinations requirements, and enrolment of students in vocational education programmes. Fifteen sectoral qualifications structures were developed, including core occupations; linked occupations and specialisations have been defined (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

<sup>510</sup> Regulations No 240 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 13 May 2014: *Regulations on State standard of academic education* [Latvian: *Noteikumi par valsts akadēmiskās izglītības standartu*]. <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=266187>  
Regulation No 512 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 26 August 2014: *Regulation on State standard of second level professional higher education* [Latvian: *Noteikumi par otrā līmeņa profesionālās augstākās izglītības valsts standartu*]. <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=268761>

Most higher education institution programmes, and individual courses, will have their learning outcomes defined as part of this changeover. Quality assurance is also specified at different levels in the education system: at policy, programme and institutional level. The Education Law states that all education institutions, except those with only interest-related education programmes, have to be accredited. Higher education institutions receive accreditation if at least half of the study fields they offer are accredited. Study fields are accredited for either two or six years. The Council of Higher Education (Augstākās izglītības padome) is responsible for quality assurance in higher education institutions. Since 2015 study programmes and study directions have been licensed and accredited by the Academic Information Centre–Quality Agency for Higher Education (AIKA) in line with amendments to the law on higher education institutions<sup>511</sup> and Cabinet regulations. Since 2018, AIKA<sup>512</sup> is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and has been included in the European quality assurance register for higher education (EQAR).

Stakeholders are well informed of the existence of the LQF and they are actively participating in national discussions concerning LQF and its development. The Latvian NCP has encouraged exchange of views on the LQF via several studies<sup>513</sup> and events<sup>514</sup> at national level. In 2019, the Latvian NCP will present the updated referencing report to the EQF AG, prepared on the base of the evaluation studies conducted.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>515</sup>

The system for validating professional competences obtained outside formal education became a legal requirement in February 2011, prescribing the procedure for validation of non-formal and

informal learning outcomes for acquisition of professional qualifications at LQF levels 2 to 4<sup>516</sup>. These regulations do not apply to regulated professions. Procedures for assessment and criteria for recognition of prior learning at LQF levels 5 to 7 were set up for higher education in 2012<sup>517</sup>. Validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is not carried out at LQF levels 1 and 8, for the validation of a full qualification in regulated professions, as well as for general education qualifications.

The validation process in higher education is largely decentralised, with education institutions provided with rights to conduct validation. In vocational education validation is also decentralised but to a lesser extent, with the State Education Quality Service, coordinating the process and delegating responsibility for validation of vocational competences to educational institutions and examination centres upon a formal evaluation.

Both in vocational education and higher education the occupational standards or programmes are used as a reference in validating non-formal and informal learning. To acquire a professional qualification a candidate is assessed in a professional qualification examination against requirements specified in occupational standards. Higher education institutions are allowed to assess the learning outcomes achieved in an individual's previous education or professional experience and, if they meet the programme requirements, to recognise them and to give appropriate number of credit points for it.

During the years 2011–17, 5 543 individuals acquired a certificate of professional qualification through validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes at LQF levels 3–4<sup>518</sup>. There is no

<sup>511</sup> Parliament of the Republic of Latvia (2015). *Law on higher education institutions [Augstskolu likums]*. LR Saeima 2.11.1995. <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=37967>

<sup>512</sup> The Academic Information Centre (Latvian ENIC/NARIC, Latvian NCP for EQF, national Europass centre and ReferNet) has also taken over the function of external higher education quality assurance in Latvia.

<sup>513</sup> The studies are available at: [www.nki-latvija.lv/en/publikacijas/publications-of-latvian-ncp](http://www.nki-latvija.lv/en/publikacijas/publications-of-latvian-ncp)

<sup>514</sup> Information on the events: [www.nki-latvija.lv/en/pasakumu-materiali](http://www.nki-latvija.lv/en/pasakumu-materiali)

<sup>515</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming) and from Academic Information Centre (2018).

<sup>516</sup> Regulations No 146 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 22 February 2011: *Procedure for the validation of professional competences acquired outside of formal education system*. <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/226788>

<sup>517</sup> Regulations No 36 of the Cabinet of Ministers: *Regulations regarding the validation of learning outcomes achieved in previous learning or professional experience*, as adopted on 10 January 2012 and no longer in force since 17 August 2018. Replaced by new Regulations No 505 of the Cabinet of Ministers: *Regulations for validation of competences acquired outside formal education or during professional experience an learning outcomes achieved in previous education*. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/301013-arpus-formalas-izglitiba-appguto-vai-profesionalaja-pieredze-iegutokompetencu-un-iepriekseja-izglitiba-sasnietu>

<sup>518</sup> Validation of non-formal and informal learning at LQF level 2 has not been carried out as there is no clear demand for qualifications at this level on the labour market.

centralised collection of data on the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes carried out by higher education institutions or colleges.

The main activities on the agenda concern further adjustments to the system and nationwide measures aimed at promoting the availability and accessibility of validation among candidates. However, EU funds have been allocated to promote the system, strengthen its link to the labour market and do this inclusively of the groups at risk of unemployment: young people not in employment, education or training, persons with unfinished and with education level LQF/EQF 3 or less, older than 50, and refugees. These EU funded projects will have a large impact on validation activities in Latvia, especially in the years to come, both through activities and duration of the projects that will last for five years. Most projects started in 2017, so it is still too early to evaluate the potential outcome. Project activities envisage provision of career consultations, skills audit and covering the costs of validation.

## NQF implementation

Development of the LQF started in 2009, building on reforms initiated in the 1990s, particularly the introduction of a five level structure of vocational qualifications in 1999 (through the Vocational Education Law). It was carried out in two stages: the first stage (2009–11) involved inclusion of formal qualifications in the LQF and referencing to the EQF; further development and revision took place in a second stage (2013–15). The Vocational Education Law (1999) was amended in 2015 and the initial five levels of vocational (professional) qualifications (still in use today) were referenced to the eight levels of the LQF<sup>519</sup>. The Education Law (1998) was also amended in 2015 and now includes the definition of the LQF and its general characteristics. Consequently, the Cabinet of

Ministers Regulations No 322 on the education classification of Latvia came into force in June 2017, determining the descriptions of knowledge, skills and competences corresponding to the LQF levels and the conformity of the types of education programme with the LQF/EQF levels. With this regulation the LQF is now firmly embedded in the Latvian education and training system.

The LQF is operational. Several large ESF projects have supported its implementation. Strong emphasis has been placed on increasing the quality of vocational education and developing a system for sectoral qualifications linked to the LQF.

The Latvian EQF NCP conducted a number of studies to support LQF implementation. In 2013, there was a study on the development of LQF: *Referencing of the Latvian education system to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area situation assessment*. This amongst others elaborated on a possible re-evaluation of the allocation of qualifications to LQF levels 1 to 4<sup>520</sup>. The study *International qualifications in Latvia* aimed to describe existing practice with regard to international qualifications and to raise general awareness about relating international qualifications to the LQF. The conclusions of the evaluations have already been used for the further development of the LQF (e.g. results after evaluating LQF levels 1 to 4) and proposals for change have been submitted to the respective authorities during the period since adoption of LQF. The results of the evaluation *The European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area: situation assessment in 2016* was used for preparing the updated referencing report in 2018–19. No major research has yet been conducted on the use of the LQF by the labour market (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

In 2016, the Latvian qualifications database<sup>521</sup>, an information system that contains data on qualifications referenced to the European and Latvian qualifications framework, was also established, allowing the framework to become operational.

<sup>519</sup> The Vocational Education Law (from 1999, with amendments of 23 April 2015, which came into force 16 July 2015) states how professional qualification levels are referred to the LQF levels:

- level 1 of professional qualification corresponds to the LQF level 2;
- level 2 of professional qualification corresponds to the LQF level 3;
- level 3 of professional I qualification corresponds to the LQF level 4;
- level 4 of professional qualification corresponds to the LQF level 5;
- level 5 of professional qualification corresponds to the LQF levels 6 and 7.

<sup>520</sup> One point of discussion in the referencing report was assigning EQF/LQF levels 1–3 to educational programmes of basic general education.

<sup>521</sup> Latvian qualifications database: [www.latvijaskvalifikacija.lv/en/](http://www.latvijaskvalifikacija.lv/en/)

It has been compulsory since 2013 to indicate the LQF/EQF level in diploma supplements (higher education). The Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 202 on the *Procedures by which State-recognised education documents certifying higher education are issued*<sup>522</sup> have been amended to update the content of the diploma supplements to correspond to the results of referencing LQF to the EQF; it indicates either the European/Latvian qualifications framework level or the EHEA qualifications framework level. From 1 January 2017, LQF levels are indicated on vocational education certificates and diplomas. Implementation of Europass certificate supplements is under development. No decision has been taken on including LQF and EQF levels on certificates in general education.

The Latvian NCP develops its communication strategy annually and evaluates the results of the communication activities at the end of each year.

### Referencing to regional frameworks

Latvia referenced its national qualifications levels to the EQF and self-certified to the qualifications framework for the European higher education area in October 2011; the referencing report was published in 2012. Taking into account the development of education and changes in laws and regulations, an updated report will be submitted in 2019.

**Table 40. Latvian qualifications framework (LQF)**

LQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctor diploma ( <i>doktora diploms</i> ) Professional Doctor diploma in arts ( <i>profesionālā doktora diploms mākslās</i> )	8
7	Master diploma ( <i>maģistra diploms</i> ) Professional Master diploma ( <i>profesionālā maģistra diploms</i> ) Diploma of professional higher education and Diploma of higher professional qualification ( <i>profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms and augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms</i> )	7

<sup>522</sup> Regulations No 202 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 16 April 2013: Procedures by which State-recognised education documents certifying higher education are issued [Latvian: *Kārtība, kādā izsniedz valsts atzītus augstāko izglītību apliecinājošus dokumentus*] <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=256157/>

### Important lessons and future plans

Setting up the NQF in line with the EQF and placing this issue on the policy agenda has had an impact on the education system and is one of the major driving forces for promoting the use of learning outcomes. The higher education sector is at the forefront of the changes: learning outcomes are defined in the Law of Higher Education Institutions and research shows that most universities have completed the task of describing learning outcomes for all individual courses and programmes.

Latvian ENIC/NARIC uses the LQF and other NQFs in recognising foreign qualifications.

It remains an important issue to embed the LQF in qualifications, curricula, assessment and teaching practice, the success of which will be heavily dependent on the involvement and contribution of practitioners. The experience of setting up and implementing the Latvian qualifications framework shows that understanding concepts and promoting cultural change takes time. Feedback loops need to be in place to ensure that the focus on learning outcomes and the assignment of qualifications to levels is systematically reviewed and renewed. Capacity-building on the ground seems to be the key. The views and expectations of different stakeholders need to feed back into policy development. Further work is necessary to implement policies, support teachers and include learning outcomes as part of their continuous professional development.



**Table 40. Latvian qualifications framework (LQF) (Continued)**

LQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
<b>6</b>	Bachelor diploma ( <i>bakalaura diploms</i> ) Professional Bachelor diploma ( <i>profesionālā bakalaura diploms</i> ) Diploma of professional higher education and Diploma of higher professional qualification ( <i>profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms and augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms</i> )	6
<b>5</b>	Diploma of first level professional higher education ( <i>pirmā līmeņa profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms</i> )	5
<b>4</b>	Certificate of general secondary education ( <i>atestāts par vispārējo vidējo izglītību</i> ) Diploma of vocational secondary education ( <i>diploms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību</i> ) Certificate of professional qualification (at secondary education level) ( <i>profesionālās kvalifikācijas apliecība (vidējās izglītības pakāpē)</i> )	4
<b>3</b>	Certificate of vocational education ( <i>atestāts par arodizglītību</i> ) Certificate of professional qualification (at vocational education level) ( <i>profesionālās kvalifikācijas apliecība (arodizglītības pakāpē)</i> )	3
<b>2</b>	Certificate of general basic education (9 years) ( <i>apliecība par vispārējo pamatizglītību</i> ) Certificate of vocational basic education ( <i>apliecība par profesionālo pamatizglītību</i> ) Certificate of professional qualification (at basic education level) ( <i>profesionālās kvalifikācijas apliecība (pamatizglītības pakāpē)</i> )	2
<b>1</b>	Certificate of general basic education ( <i>apliecība par vispārējo pamatizglītību</i> ) (special education programmes for learners with (severe) mental development disorders or several severe development disorders)	1

Source: Regulations No 322 of the Cabinet of Ministers: *Regulations on the education classification of Latvia*, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitibas-klasifikaciju>

#### Abbreviations

EHEA	European higher education area
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European Social Fund
LQF	Latvian qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics

## Main sources of information

Academic Information Centre – the Latvian EQF NCP: [www.nki-latvija.lv/en/par-iki](http://www.nki-latvija.lv/en/par-iki)

EQF/LQF website: [www.nki-latvija.lv/en](http://www.nki-latvija.lv/en)

Database of Latvian qualifications – available at: [www.latvijaskvalifikacijas.lv/en/](http://www.latvijaskvalifikacijas.lv/en/)

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### Prepared by:

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in collaboration with national experts.

# LEBANON

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The planned national qualifications framework (NQF) has not yet been adopted by law. So far, Lebanon has only defined levels, eight, and descriptors. In practice, work on the NQF is on hold because of the country's continuing political deadlock and the priority given to handling the presence in the country of many Syrian refugees.

Although the Ministry of Education and Higher Education led an earlier NQF project, the governance structure and the body that would manage the qualifications framework has not yet been officially decided.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Lebanon has a unique socio-political setting, due to the fragile institutional situation, the growing pressure of the Syrian crisis and the absence of a government following the elections in May 2018. The country's unique faith-based political system and challenging geopolitical environment have made it difficult for governments to implement reforms, which are often blocked or in delay due to changing priorities and problems in reaching consensus. The spill-over effects of the Syrian conflict represent an increasing threat to Lebanese internal security and impact on all aspects of socio-political and economic life.

Lebanon's total population has increased by more than 25% in six years, from 4.3 million in 2010 to just over 6 million in 2016<sup>523</sup>. The influx of an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees since 2011, in addition to the presence of Palestinian refugees caught in a protracted refugee situation (estimates vary between 174 422<sup>524</sup> and 469 331<sup>525</sup>), has

strained public finances, infrastructure and service delivery. The Syrian refugees in Lebanon are generally young; approximately 65% of all registered Syrians are under the age of 25.

Lebanon is a middle-income country with an open and largely service-oriented economy that has a strong commercial tradition of domestic free trade and investment policies. The service sector constitutes more than 70% of the country's GDP and employs around 70% of the work force. Industry amounts to one quarter of GDP and agriculture 6% (World Bank, world development indicators). Small and medium-sized enterprises remain the main form of business organisation, particularly micro and small enterprises and there is a large informal sector in the country. Economic growth was high in recent years (up to 8–9% although mostly jobless) but significantly dropped since 2011 and the forecast for the near future is not promising.

An average of 44.2% of the working-age population was estimated to be economically active in 2017 (ILO KILM), with female labour force participation rates just over 21% compared with 66.9% among males aged over 15. The low employment and low activity rates of females can be attributed to social, cultural and economic factors. The unemployment rate was estimated at 6.3% in 2017, with youth (aged 15–24) unemployment estimated at 16.5%. In addition, the country is affected by huge migration flows in terms of a high influx of foreign workers and a large number of skilled Lebanese people seeking employment abroad.

Although Lebanon's economy is characterised by a proportionately bigger private sector compared to most countries in the region, and a population known for its entrepreneurial spirit (incidence of self-employment<sup>526</sup> amounts to 30% of the total

<sup>523</sup> United Nations Development Programme, World population prospects, 2016

<sup>524</sup> According to the government's Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee census figure covering 12 refugee camps and about 150 informal Palestinian communities released in December 2017

<sup>525</sup> United Nations Relief and Works Agency figures

<sup>526</sup> This indicator measures the share of self-employers as a proportion of total employment. Self-employers includes employers, own-account workers, members of producers' cooperatives and contributing family workers.

employment), it remains extremely vulnerable to domestic and regional politics and civil unrest.

Lebanon has a relatively low-skilled<sup>527</sup> labour force, although still amongst the most highly-skilled in the region<sup>528</sup>. Almost 20% of adults have attained higher education, the third highest percentage country of the region after Israel and Palestine, while 12% of adults have not followed any education, which is much lower than the average percentage in the region. Males are slightly highly skilled than females, although the difference is not as sharp as it is for participation in the labour market.

The education and training system in Lebanon is among the best-performing in the Middle East and North Africa region. Education is traditionally highly valued. In recent years, there has been an increasing socio-political awareness of the importance of education and training for sustainable and cohesive socioeconomic growth. In this context, the Lebanese government – with the support of Unicef and the ILO – has recently launched the National Strategic Framework for Technical Vocational Education and Training 2018–22 (NSF). This proposed strategy is a key outcome of the government’s TVET initiative and seeks to widen access and improve the quality of TVET provision.

As stated in the NSF, instead of TVET being perceived as an alternative pathway to productive and decent work, young Lebanese generally associate TVET with academic failure and poor-quality provision. The association of TVET-level jobs with low wages, poor working conditions and lack of career prospects has discouraged youth from enrolling in TVET courses at secondary and post-secondary levels. As a result, just over 26% of students enrolled in secondary education opted for a vocational track in 2015.

The low attractiveness of the vocational education system may also be influenced by weak links to the labour market, which exacerbates the difficult transition young people experience from education to the labour market. One in four young people aged 15–24 (almost one in three young women) are not in employment, education or training (ILOSTAT, 2007), which, while lower than the average in the region, is significant.

<sup>527</sup> Educational attainment is frequently used as a proxy measure of the skills associated with a given level of education and available in the population, and to the labour force. Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with several positive individual and social outcomes (see also OECD Education at a Glance, 2015).

<sup>528</sup> Traditionally Lebanon retains high education standards with a large proportion of private education at all levels.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

The Lebanese NQF should be able to classify all qualifications and certificates issued by the different sectors of the education and training system. In particular, the qualifications framework should ensure:

- transparency and readability of qualifications delivered in Lebanon and their relevance for the labour market;
- recognition of qualifications based on well-defined competences whether acquired via formal, non-formal or informal education;
- mobility between different sectors of the education system;
- coherence with qualifications frameworks of other countries.

The NQF is one of the building blocks of the NSF. In 2012, the NQF was piloted in selected sectors, including education, agro-food, health, electrical works, and hospitality. Within the NSF, the development of a national qualification system, centred on a competency-based approach to training and testing allowing for better signalling of graduate skills to employers, is foreseen. The intention is to adopt the NQF with eight levels of qualifications in order to classify the various certificates and diplomas and establish pathways between them.

### International cooperation

The NQF is one of the components of the World Bank’s Education Reform programme. It is also currently being addressed for the construction sector by the EU-funded project, which is being implemented by GIZ ‘Improving quality of vocational training and education for Lebanese youth’.

The need to bring coherence to the many and diverse qualifications offered in Lebanon remains a priority. International cooperation is focused on issues linked to access and education for all, especially as a result of the need to provide education for Syrian refugees currently living in the country.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### NQF scope and structure

The Lebanese NQF is intended to be lifelong learning in scope, covering general, vocational and higher education qualifications.

### NQF levels and level descriptors

An eight-level structure is planned. The descriptors have been under the descriptors knowledge, skills and competences.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

The NQF's descriptors are outcomes-based.

### **Definition of qualification**

There is no legal definition yet as the NQF itself has not been adopted by law. Qualifications have been developed on a learning outcomes basis in the construction sector.

### **Access, progression and credit**

There has been no further development in this area.

## **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

### **Legal basis of NQF**

The NQF has not been adopted by law.

### **Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF**

At the time of the ETF-led project on the NQF, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education coordinated the project and hosted the NQF working group. However, the institutional arrangements proposed by the NQF working group were never officially approved. Therefore, no institution is currently leading the NQF.

### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

The NQF working group brought together representatives from the different sectors of the education sector but no other stakeholders participated, such as employers. Invitations were extended nonetheless.

### **Resources and funding**

Except for the earlier ETF-led project funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there has been no donor support for the development of the NQF.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

There is a traditional approach to quality assurance related to the qualifications cycle with a quality control emphasis. In vocational education, quality assurance systems operate but need to be modernised. Currently, they include internal and external evaluation of providers, addressing curricula etc. There is formal teacher training and an education inspectorate relevant to qualifications such as standards and assessment, but there are no existing mechanisms to validate quality of qualifications.

Since the NQF has not yet been adopted by law and therefore has not been implemented, the NQF has not introduced new quality assurance tools.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education, through the Directorate for Higher Education, has been working for more than 10 years on creating a quality assurance agency for higher education. However, the law to create the agency has not been approved and is currently on hold.

There is a traditional quality assurance approach with regulatory mechanisms such as accreditation, inspection, examinations etc. but no distinct legal framework per se. Ministries licence provider institutions, set standards for programmes, set exam standards, and run an inspectorate. There is no independent quality assurance agency yet. However, there have been discussions about establishing a quality assurance agency for higher education.

Lebanon participates in the ETF Forum for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training.

## **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

There is no mechanism in place for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

## **NQF implementation**

### **Inclusion of qualifications in a register**

No register has been formally adopted. The ETF-led project had developed methods and procedures.

### **Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF**

None has taken place yet, given the very early stage of development of the qualifications framework.

### **Impact for end-users**

The NQF is not functional yet.

## **Referencing to regional frameworks**

No referencing to regional frameworks has been considered yet. The Arab Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) has been a reference instrument to inform development of the Lebanese NQF.

## **Important lessons and future plans**

Progress on the NQF would be achievable via the framework of the NSF, but other conditions currently inhibit progress, in particular political stasis and the national priority accorded to responding to the Syrian refugee crisis.

**Abbreviations**

ETF	European Training Foundation	NSF	National Strategic Framework for Technical Vocational Education and Training 2018–22
ILO	International Labour Organisation		
KILM	Key Indicators of the Labour Market	TVET	technical and vocational education and training
NQF	national qualifications framework		

**Prepared by:**

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

## Introduction and context

The Government of Lesotho embarked on the development of a Lesotho qualifications framework (LQF) as a fulfilment of the Southern Africa Development Community protocol on education and training. This encourages member States to work progressively towards the equivalence, harmonisation and standardisation of education and training systems. As a result, the Ministry of Education and Training commissioned a multisectoral task force in 2001 to develop a national qualifications framework (NQF) system across the wide spectrum of training and occupations in Lesotho.

At the moment there are many providers offering a diverse range of programmes leading to qualifications at different levels, from certificate to diploma and degree. Some of these qualifications are offered by foreign institutions and/or examination bodies while others are offered by local institutions. Consequently, there is no comparability, articulation or linkage between and among courses and qualifications offered by the various bodies and institutions. As a result of these challenges, the Government of Lesotho deemed it necessary to introduce and develop the LQF.

All literacy completers receive awards through the Ministry of Education and Training. The Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre provides certificated learning for national school qualifications. All technical colleges provide nationally recognised vocational qualifications that have parity with South Africa's NQF. All tertiary institutions are in the process of planning for bridging programmes that will support entry to tertiary programmes through non-traditional routes.

The Government of Lesotho proposed the development of an LQF in the education sector strategic plan 2005–15 (Government of Lesotho, 2005a) to ensure and improve the quality of education and training. The LQF is in its final policy draft stage through the Lesotho Qualifications Authority.

## Policy objectives

The LQF:

- a. aims at supporting the nation of Lesotho in realising the full potential of its entire people by developing, monitoring and evaluating learning systems that ensure quality, coherence, comparability and recognition of education and training opportunities;
- b. will create an integrated system that brings coherence and portability between the worlds of schooling, higher education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET);
- c. provides the national economy with a skills base required for growth and poverty alleviation;
- d. facilitates access, comparability, transferability and consistency in education and training standards at identified levels;
- e. improves linkages and articulation between courses and qualifications;
- f. supports the movement towards quality attainment through criteria on referenced or standards-based education and training;
- g. allows for the recognition of a more diverse array of education and training courses and outcomes, including adult education, short courses and work-based learning;
- h. provides a basis for bringing a wide range of education and training organisations, courses and qualifications into a common standards framework;
- i. provides stronger and clearer links between courses and qualifications at regional level;
- j. contributes to the full personal, social and economic development of each learner.

## Levels and learning outcomes

The LQF is planned to have ten qualifications levels registered in accordance with an agreed set of definitions. Any educational qualification must be assigned to one of these levels. The qualification level is determined by the highest number of credits that are at or above the particular level at which the qualification is registered.

**Table 41. Lesotho qualifications framework and pathways**

LEVEL	TVET TRACK: FORMAL AND INDUSTRY-BASED TRAINING		ACADEMIC TRACK
10	Doctorate		Doctorate
9	Masters		Masters
8	Honours Bachelor, PGC, PGD		PGC, PGD, Honours Bachelor
7	Bachelor		Bachelor
6	Diploma		Diploma
5	National Craft Certificate	Trade Test A	National Certificate, A Level
4	Vocational Training Certificate	Trade Test B	O Level/LGCSE
3	Basic Vocational Certificate	Trade Test C	
2	Basic Operative Certificate	Trade Test Operative	Junior Certificate
1	Foundation Certificate	Foundation Certificate	Sub-Junior Certificate Education and Training

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Institutions responsible for managing and coordinating adult learning at national level include:

- a. Lesotho Association for Non-formal Education, which coordinates non-governmental organisation (NGO) provision;
- b. Government Non-formal Education Inspectorate, which monitors non-formal education provision and is the link between NGOs and government;
- c. Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre, which coordinates and manages adult learning and education national awards and associated events at the national level;
- d. Institute for Extra-Mural Studies at the National University of Lesotho, which coordinates open and distance learning in adult education via its four regional centres. This includes diploma, degree and postgraduate qualifications in adult education, diploma and degree qualifications in business administration, diploma qualifications in media studies, and a range of short courses and community-based workshops through the Department for Non-formal and Continuing Education.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The number of people engaged in non-formal education is quite significant: it amounts to 30% of the population in the rural mountainous regions. The main providers are NGOs, the community, private individuals and some church organizations. The Ministry of Education and Training also offers non-formal education through the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre and the Institute of Extra-Mural Studies, which is part of the University of Lesotho (Akoojee et al., 2005).

The Ministry is expected to ensure that minimum entry requirements are set in the LQF for various phases of the schooling system. These would take the form of statements of learning assumed to be in place prior to a child or young adult entering a specified phase of school learning. This practice will allow children who for various reasons have missed a phase of schooling to re-join the system without prejudice, provided they have acquired the necessary learning competences.

For general academic streams in higher education the Lesotho Qualifications Authority will require the



Council on Higher Education to design and develop a system for general academic programmes in higher education. The Council will also formulate statements of learning assumed to be in place that will be attached to each qualification registered in higher education. This statement will make explicit to learners wishing to enter a programme what the legitimate academic expectations are of them. The Department of Technical and Vocational Training administers the recognition of prior learning and the recognition of current competences to recognise prior learning or current competences for the skills obtained in the industry-based learning.

### Recognising foreign qualifications

Lesotho relies on the South African Qualification Authority for the external qualification verification. The development of the national organ is in process.

### Referencing to regional frameworks

All technical colleges provide nationally recognized vocational qualifications that have parity with South Africa's NQF-registered qualifications. The Council for Higher Education will ensure the establishment of a credit recognition and transfer system that

integrates with other Southern Africa Development Community systems. Such a system will recognize credit achieved in one institution as counting towards learning in another. This will facilitate mobility of students and portability of qualifications.

### Important lessons and future plans

The Ministry of Education and Training is reviewing the LQF with the intention to maintain the integrated structure so as to cover basic education, technical and vocational education and training, academic, professional development awards, and part-qualifications. It will also define qualifications, provide pathways for learners and sets clear parameters for registering qualifications, verifying qualifications, and evaluating foreign qualifications among other things.

#### Abbreviations

LQF	Lesotho qualifications framework
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NQF	national qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

### References

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#### Prepared by:

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

## Introduction and context

In 2011, the government laid the foundation for developing an integrating national qualifications framework for lifelong learning for Liechtenstein (NQFL), potentially covering all parts of education and training<sup>529</sup>. From the beginning, the development of NQFL was closely coordinated with Switzerland with whom Liechtenstein has established a common vocational education and training (VET) system.

In the first phase, the NQFL has been developed for formal education in higher education and vocational education. In 2013, a qualifications framework for higher education, defined in terms of learning outcomes in line with the qualifications framework in the European higher education area, was adopted and included in higher education law<sup>530</sup>. It was self-certified against the qualifications framework for European higher education area in 2013<sup>531</sup> and forms an integral part of the NQFL. The Ordinance on national qualifications framework for vocational qualifications – *Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen des Fürstentums Liechtenstein für Abschlüsse der Berufsbildung* (NQFL-BBV)<sup>532</sup> – was adopted on 19 December 2017 and put in force on 1 January 2018 paving the way to full implementation of the framework. As in Switzerland, general education is currently not included in the framework.

The NQFL was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in October 2016 with the referencing report published in 2017.

<sup>529</sup> Governmental Decree RA 2010/2909-4000.

<sup>530</sup> Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein (2013). *Qualifikationsrahmen für den Hochschulbereich im Fürstentum Liechtenstein (NQFL-HS)* [Qualifications framework for higher education in the Principality of Liechtenstein]. [www.llv.li/files/sa/pdf-llv-sa-qualifikationsrahmen\\_fuer\\_den\\_hochschulbereich\\_im\\_fl\\_nqfl\\_hs\\_2013.pdf](http://www.llv.li/files/sa/pdf-llv-sa-qualifikationsrahmen_fuer_den_hochschulbereich_im_fl_nqfl_hs_2013.pdf)

<sup>531</sup> [www.llv.li/files/sa/nqfl-hs-pruefbericht-v130710-def.pdf](http://www.llv.li/files/sa/nqfl-hs-pruefbericht-v130710-def.pdf)

<sup>532</sup> [www.gesetze.li/konso/pdf/2017396000?version=1](http://www.gesetze.li/konso/pdf/2017396000?version=1)

## Policy objectives

The NQFL, and certificate and qualification supplements, aim at improving the transparency and comparability of qualifications from Liechtenstein and referencing them to the EQF.

More specifically, the NQFL aims to (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 25):

- describe adequately the education system, improving the transparency, the clarity and the comparability of qualifications in VET, higher VET and higher education;
- support, in terms of labour market needs, an employer's assessment of the skills of vocational graduates from Liechtenstein and enable a similar process for graduates with qualifications from abroad;
- improve the employability of Liechtenstein-educated specialists and managers in the country and abroad.

In the longer term, NQFL is seen as a tool to support lifelong learning through better understanding of qualifications and learning opportunities, improved access to and participation in education and training, and valuing all learning outcomes, in formal, non-formal and informal settings.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The NQFL comprises eight levels. Competence-oriented descriptors describe requirements for each level; these are closely aligned with the EQF descriptors, but also adjusted to suit specific national features. Level descriptors<sup>533</sup> are identical to level descriptors of the Swiss NQF-VPET.

<sup>533</sup> Level descriptors are included in Annex 1 of the ordinance on NQFL-BBV.

**Table 42. Main elements of the descriptors in NQFL-BBV**

<b>Knowledge</b>	Knowledge
	Understanding
<b>Skills</b>	Procedural skills
	Sensorimotor skills
<b>Social competence</b>	Professional competences
	Personal competences:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• autonomy</li> <li>• social competences</li> <li>• leadership competences</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein (2017).

Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences. Knowledge refers to declarative knowledge and is further subdivided into knowledge and understanding. Skills refer to the capacity to apply knowledge and solve problems: a distinction is drawn between procedural and sensorimotor skills. Competences express application of knowledge and skills in the work context and are subdivided into professional and social competences.

All subsystems have taken important steps in implementing a learning outcomes approach, but to varying degrees. Learning outcomes already play an important accreditation role in higher education; a qualifications framework for higher education was implemented in 2013. In general education, standards were introduced in 2010 and subsequently tested for grades 3, 4, and 8. A competence-based approach is being strengthened in teaching and evaluation of general education. In line with the amended VET law in 2008<sup>534</sup> qualifications and curricula have been revised with stronger focus on competences and equipping students with the competence to act (*Handlungskompetenz*) (Cedefop, 2016).

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The NQFL is supervised by the Ministry of Education. The National Agency for International Education Affairs (AIBA)<sup>535</sup> has been appointed the EQF national coordination point (NCP) to carry out

<sup>534</sup> Article 6 of the Vocational Training Act. Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein (2008). Berufsbildungsgesetz [Vocational Training Act]. Liechtenstein law gazette, 412.0, No 103. [www.gesetze.li/konso/pdf/2008103000?version=3](http://www.gesetze.li/konso/pdf/2008103000?version=3)

<sup>535</sup> AIBA is an independent institution, supervised by the Ministry of Education, see website: [www.aiba.li/](http://www.aiba.li/)

administration and coordination tasks connected with the NQFL.

Liechtenstein started the Bologna process several years ago and this is now an integral part of the University of Liechtenstein. The NQFL builds on experience in developing the qualifications framework for higher education.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>536</sup>

Since the 2016 Inventory on non-formal and informal learning, no major changes have been made. Validation approaches have been developed in initial VET and higher education, taking into account different target groups, responsibilities and methods. The Vocational Training Act determines that admission to any examination or qualification does not depend on undertaking specified educational programmes; those who have at least five years' work experience can participate in the final examinations. The validation process in VET is based on a similar process to that developed by Switzerland, following a similar series of steps. However, due to the small size of the country, only the first step (information and advising) is performed in Liechtenstein; after that the candidates are sent to Switzerland.

Most development in higher education has occurred in the past five years. The Education Authority (*Schulamt*) regards development of the national qualifications framework for higher education (*Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen Fürstentum Liechtenstein für den Hochschulbereich*) (NQFLHS) as an opportunity for anchoring lifelong learning more within higher education, and for improving validation and recognition of prior learning achieved outside the higher education system. The legal bases for admission to higher education have been formalised. The Law on higher education regulates conditions and process of admission without a *matura* certificate<sup>537</sup> and limitation of crediting learning acquired outside the higher education system. It is possible to recognise non-formal and

<sup>536</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>537</sup> Article 24 of the Higher Education Act. Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein (2005). Gesetz über das Hochschulwesen (Hochschulgesetz; HSG) [Law on higher education (Higher Education Act; HSG)]. Liechtenstein law gazette, 414.0, No 2. [www.gesetze.li/lilexprod/lgsystpage2.jsp?formname=showlaw&lglid=2005002000&gueltigdate=07032017](http://www.gesetze.li/lilexprod/lgsystpage2.jsp?formname=showlaw&lglid=2005002000&gueltigdate=07032017)

informal learning as contribution to achieving a qualification, up to a maximum of one sixth of the necessary workload (European credit transfer and accumulation system credit points) for the whole qualification.

Standards used in VET and higher education for validation, are those of existing programmes. The NQFL offers opportunities to integrate further non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However, the NQFL-BBV was adopted in 2017 with no plans to include non-formal and informal learning.

## NQF implementation

Liechtenstein has committed to an integrating national qualifications framework for lifelong learning for Liechtenstein (NQFL) (Ministry of Education (2017). The first phase of implementation focuses on formal education in VET and higher education, underpinned by two sectoral qualifications frameworks: one encompassing higher education qualifications (NQFL-HS), adopted in 2013 and one for vocational education (NQFL-BBV), in force since January 2018. As in Switzerland, general education qualifications are not included in the NQFL.

An important characteristic of the NQFL is that levels 6 to 8 are also open to higher vocational qualifications awarded outside higher education

as a separate strand next to higher education qualifications.

The process of assigning vocational and professional qualifications a level is carried out by Switzerland. By January 2019<sup>538</sup> a total of 474 formal vocational and professional qualifications had been attributed levels in Switzerland: 207 IVET qualifications mostly distributed to levels 3 and 4; and 264 professional qualifications, most at levels 5 to 7; and three to level 8. The process is expected to continue<sup>539</sup>.

As defined in the ordinance on NQFL-BBV (Article 7), the Liechtenstein Government has to approve the inclusion and the level of a qualification, in a separate procedure, and can take into account those qualifications assigned by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) in Switzerland. So far, the Liechtenstein Government has approved the first 37 qualifications. The NCP – the National Agency of International Education Affairs – will publish the necessary documents on the website at the end of March 2019. No database has yet been set up.

The NQF for higher education (NQFL-HS) is already operational.

For public involvement and information, the NQFL website (*Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen Fürstentum Liechtenstein*) was established in spring 2013, providing information and updates<sup>540</sup>.

**Figure 11. Y-Model of NQFL**



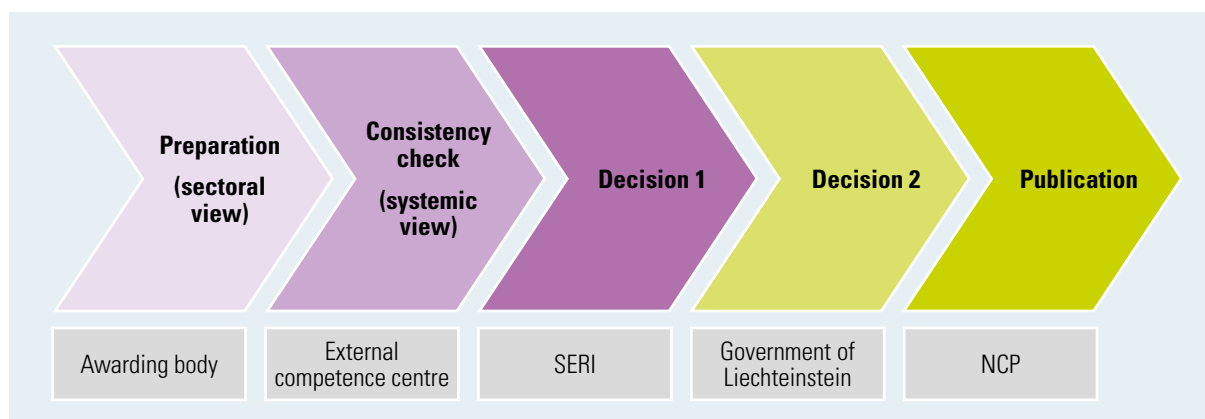
Source: Ministry of Education (2017).

<sup>538</sup> [www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20151046/index.html](http://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20151046/index.html)

<sup>539</sup> For more information, please consult the chapter on Switzerland in the NQF European inventory 2018.

<sup>540</sup> NQFL (*Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen Fürstentum Liechtenstein*) website: [www.nqfl.li/](http://www.nqfl.li/)

**Figure 12. Main steps of the levelling process**



Source: Ministry of Education (2017), p. 29.

### Referencing to regional frameworks

The NQFL was referenced to the EQF in October 2016 and the referencing report was published in 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2017).

The qualification framework for higher education (NQFL-HS) is fully operational and well embedded in the higher education sectors. Having both sectoral frameworks as part of integrating the NQFL offers opportunities to integrate further non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

### Important lessons and future plans

With the first qualifications approved by the Liechtenstein Government and included in the NQFL-BBV, the framework for vocational qualifications has entered an early operational stage.

One important task of the EQF NCP is to make the NQFL more visible to end-users: students, employers, guidance practitioners and training providers. The NQFL homepage is currently under construction and will be available by the end of March 2019.

**Figure 13. Indication of qualification types included in the NQF-VPET and approximate levels**

NQF VPET levels	Qualification type			EQF levels
8			Advanced federal diploma of higher education	8
7				7
6		Federal diploma of higher education	College of higher education diploma	6
5		Federal VET diploma		5
4				4
3	Federal VET certificate			3
2				2
1				1

Notes: Federal certificate of vocational education and training – two-year VET programmes; Federal diploma of vocational education and training – three- and four-year VET programmes; Federal diploma of higher education – part-time tertiary level professional education and training (federal professional examination); Advanced federal diploma of higher education issued by a college of higher education (federal professional examination); Advanced federal diploma of higher education – formal study programme.

Source: SERI, 2018.

<b>Abbreviations</b>			
EQF	European qualifications framework		
NCP	national coordination point		
NQF-VPET	Swiss national qualifications framework for vocational and professional education and training		
NQFL	national qualifications framework for Liechtenstein	NQFLHS	Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen Fürstentum Liechtenstein für den Hochschulbereich (national qualifications framework of the Principality of Liechtenstein for higher education)
NQFL-BBV	Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen des Fürstentum Liechtenstein für Abschlüsse der Berufsbildung (national qualifications framework of the Principality of Liechtenstein for vocational education)	SERI	State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (Staatssekretariat für Bildung, Forschung und Innovation)
		VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

National Agency for International Education Affairs (AIBA) – the EQF NCP: [www.aiba.li/](http://www.aiba.li/)

NQFL website: [www.nqfl.li/](http://www.nqfl.li/)

Ministry of Education (2017). *Referencing report for the Principality of Liechtenstein* (NQFL).

[https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/nqfl-referencing\\_report\\_liechtenstein\\_en2017.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/nqfl-referencing_report_liechtenstein_en2017.pdf)

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[https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/nqfl-referencing\\_report\\_liechtenstein\\_en2017.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/nqfl-referencing_report_liechtenstein_en2017.pdf)

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*referencing report*. [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/e\\_referencing\\_report\\_final\\_ch.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/e_referencing_report_final_ch.pdf)

### Prepared by:

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in collaboration with national experts.

## Introduction and context

Key indicators for education and training show a mixed picture in Lithuania. On the one hand, the country has the one of the lowest percentages of early leavers from education and training in the EU (5.4% in 2017, compared to the 10.6% EU average) and the highest rate of tertiary education attainment (58.0% in 2017, compared to the 39.9% EU average). The employment rate of recent graduates is also above the EU average, and one of the highest in the EU for tertiary education graduates (91.5% in 2017). In contrast, rates of investment on education and training that are among the highest in Europe are not translated into excellence and equity. The school system and the higher education sector are faced with quality and efficiency challenges, especially in light of a shrinking school population. The proportion of 15 year-old students with underachievement in mathematics, reading and science is relatively high and the share of top performers has declined.

Student performance is strongly linked to school location and socioeconomic status, with especially large disparities between urban and rural areas. Participation in vocational education and training (VET) is substantially below the EU average. Among the points of focus in the country are increasing the quality of teaching and the attractiveness of the teaching profession, reforming VET curricula to increase their labour market relevance, and increasing participation in adult learning. Reforming the tertiary education sector is also high on the agenda, including a plan for restructuring and consolidation of universities and measures to promote quality and efficiency, adopted in 2017 (European Commission, 2018).

The Lithuanian qualifications framework (LTQF) was formally adopted through a government resolution on 4 May 2010<sup>541</sup>. The LTQF is based on

eight learning- outcomes-based levels, and covers all officially recognised qualifications in general (primary and secondary) education, VET and higher education. Two amendments to the resolution (June and August 2011) clarified the role and function of the framework. A joint referencing/ self-certification to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) was completed in late 2011 and the referencing report was published in 2012.

## Policy objectives

The development of the LTQF forms part of a (more than) decade-long effort to reform and modernise Lithuanian education and training. The national education strategy for 2003–12 stressed the need for flexible and open education structures, for better coordination between general education and VET, and for stronger links to non-formal and informal learning<sup>542</sup>. The LTQF supports this strategy and addresses five main objectives.

- a. The framework should play a role in better adapting qualifications to the needs of the labour market and society.
- b. It should help to improve the clarity of qualifications design to improve assessment and recognition.
- c. It should increase transparency of qualifications and assist individuals in using them.
- d. It should support national and international mobility.
- e. It should encourage lifelong learning and allow individuals to build on outcomes of non-formal and informal learning (QVETDC, 2012, p. 33).

The LTQF aims have not changed over time (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

<sup>541</sup> Government of Lithuania (2010). *Resolution on approving the description of the Lithuanian qualifications framework*. [www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/LTQF\\_official\\_translation.pdf](http://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/LTQF_official_translation.pdf)

<sup>542</sup> Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania (2003). *Provisions for the national education strategy 2003–12*, No IX-17000, 4 July 2003. <http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2003/lithuania-resolution-provisions-national-education-strategy-2003-2012-no-ix-1700-4-july-2003>

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The eight levels of the LTQF combine the existing structure of the Lithuanian qualifications system with the descriptor principles introduced by the EQF. Two existing level arrangements (the five vocational education levels introduced in 1997 and the three levels (cycles) of higher education introduced in 1992) directly influenced the design of the LTQF. The level descriptors are defined according to two parameters: focusing on activity characteristics and on types of competence.

labour market needs and they are linked to the LTQF (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

During 2010–15, the Centre for the Development of Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training carried out the European Social Fund (ESF)-funded project *Development of qualifications and creation of the modular VET system*. This had the goal of developing the national system of qualifications through sector-based occupational standards and corresponding national modular VET curricula. Ten sectoral standards have been designed. Project follow-up was launched at the end of 2016, aiming

**Table 43. Level descriptors in the Lithuanian NQF**

PARAMETERS		
	CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTIVITIES	TYPES OF COMPETENCE
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complexity of activities</li> <li>• Autonomy of activities</li> <li>• Variability of activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive competences</li> <li>• Functional competences</li> <li>• General competences</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from QVETDC, 2012

While the distinction between cognitive, functional and general competences broadly reflects the EQF distinction between knowledge, skills and competence, now autonomy and responsibility, the activity criteria can be seen as a further development and specification of the third EQF pillar, focusing on autonomy and responsibility. The combination of the two parameters allows for detailed description of each level<sup>543</sup>.

The learning outcomes (competence) approach is broadly accepted and implemented in all areas of Lithuanian VET system (Lauzackas et al., 2009). VET has used a learning outcomes or competence approach for several decades, partly linked to the introduction of VET standards in the early 1990s<sup>544</sup>. Sectoral qualifications standards and descriptions of study fields aim to improve education's link to

for the development of occupational standards for the remaining 14 economic sectors.

The methodology for designing occupational standards has been based on a combination of competence and work-process analysis approaches. It involved an important shift from functional analysis, which was previously applied in the design of initial VET standards, to work-process analysis. One of the key advantages of this latter approach is potentially identifying and covering all qualifications required for the execution of work processes in the economic sector, as well as mapping the links and interrelationships between the qualifications inside the sector and between the sectors.

At the beginning of 2018, only one standard had been officially approved, with nine (already developed earlier with ESF support) undergoing revision and 14 still needing to be developed. It is planned that standards revision and design of new ones will be completed by mid-2019. Adoption of a modular approach to VET curricula has gained speed, with 27% of VET learners enrolled in modular programmes in 2017 compared to just 11% the year before. However, challenges remain: ensuring the timely update of standards; completing the corresponding revision of VET programmes; and promptly launching the programmes' implementation (European Commission, 2018).

<sup>543</sup> QVETDC, 2012, pp. 36–41.

<sup>544</sup> VET standard is designed for a qualification and comprises three interrelated components: parameters characterising occupational activities, training objectives and assessment parameters. The first VET standards were developed in 1998. There were 77 standards that regulated VET qualifications. In 2007 it was decided to change VET standards gradually to sectoral qualification standards. Sectoral qualifications standards are being developed for a specific sector of the economy and describe the most important qualifications in this sector at all levels of the LTQF.



This revision of standards also covers professional qualifications at levels 6 and 7, signalling that the learning outcomes approach is being adopted in higher education as well as in traditional VET. The level descriptors of the LTQF are used as an explicit reference point for this exercise and help to improve consistency between single qualifications and across the different sectors.

The traditional university sector is also progressing in adopting the learning outcomes approach. LTQF descriptors are taken into account when designing study field descriptors and are used as reference points for the development, review and renewal of university programmes and qualifications. Descriptions of study fields aim to link higher education and labour market needs better<sup>545</sup>. Implementation of the LTQF is seen as an important part of a strategy to move towards a more consistent and comprehensive use of learning outcomes across education and training levels and types. Initiatives taken to address the use of learning outcomes in general education exemplify this. In 2015, a description of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary programmes was approved (with changes in April 2016); work continues to develop general education curricula statements at levels 1–4 in accordance to LTQF. This is one of the reasons that levelling of general education qualifications at these levels remains unfinished.

Until recently there was no political consensus on level 5 qualifications, considering if they should be attributed to VET or to short-cycle programmes within EHEA, or to both (European Commission; Cedefop, 2018). In November 2018 the Law on Science and Higher Education legitimated short-cycle studies that should lead to level 5 qualifications. Implementation issues remain unclear, as well as the relationship to level 5 VET qualifications and programmes.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Work on the LTQF was initiated by the Labour Market Training Authority of Lithuania, which

<sup>545</sup> They define benchmark statements for different discipline areas (for example informatics, technologies, engineering), developed in cooperation between representatives from higher education institutions and employers. Descriptions should serve as guiding documents for study programmes development, implementation and evaluation. It is expected that study programmes will better correspond to labour market needs. 53 drafts have been developed during the period 2012–14; the majority came into force in 2015 (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

launched an ESF-funded project for national qualifications framework (NQF) design in 2006. Following extensive technical work, a National Authority of Qualifications was established in 2008 to coordinate LTQF implementation. This authority was abolished in 2009, following the election of a new Parliament in late 2008. The Ministry of Education and Science then took over the main responsibility for LTQF development in 2009 and has retained this role since. The Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC)<sup>546</sup> has been responsible for day-to-day coordination since 2009 and was also appointed as national coordination point for the EQF at this point. National coordination points' tasks are:

- to reference existing national qualifications levels to the eight levels of the EQF;
- to ensure that a transparent methodology is used to reference the national qualifications levels to the EQF;
- to provide access to information and guidance to stakeholders concerning issues on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through the national qualifications systems;
- to promote the participation of stakeholders (education institutions, social partners, sectors and experts) in the process.

The Qualifications and VET Development Centre is also the ReferNet contact point and the quality assurance reference point for VET in Lithuania. A current ESF-funded project for 2016–20 is developing a framework of sectoral qualification standards and vocational training curricula in line with the Lithuanian and European qualifications frameworks. In 2013, the Centre for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (SKVC)<sup>547</sup> was officially delegated to take part in the coordination and implementation of the LTQF, with a particular focus on universities and universities of applied sciences. The Centre is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and listed in the European assurance register for higher education (EQAR).

The influence of labour market stakeholders has been strengthened by the involvement of the Central Professional Committee (abolished in 2018 following a change to the Law on VET) in referencing the LTQF to the EQF. The Committee played a key role in LTQF implementation, notably in planning a framework of sector-based occupational standards. It was a tripartite committee, established under the Law on VET in 2007, signalling the need for active

<sup>546</sup> QVETDC: [www.kpmc.lt/kpmc/en/](http://www.kpmc.lt/kpmc/en/)

<sup>547</sup> SKVC: [www.skvc.lt/en/](http://www.skvc.lt/en/)

involvement of stakeholders outside education and training. There were also established sectoral professional committees: multilateral bodies at economic sector level, mainly responsible for the assessment and quality assurance of occupational standards and qualifications. With an amendment to the law on VET in 2017, the role of sectoral professional committees has increased and they have overtaken the functions of the central professional committee.

While some progress has been made in coordinating VET and higher education, general education involvement in the LTQF is limited and needs to be strengthened.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>548</sup>

Validation in Lithuania is an integral part of the lifelong learning system and is covered by national strategies and programmes. In 2014, a national framework was set up, with implementation decentralised at training provider level. A number of Lithuanian laws recognise the rights of individuals to access validation initiatives. The law on VET amended in 2017 defines that the competence acquired outside formal education may be recognised as a qualification of an appropriate LTQF level or part thereof. In higher education prior learning may be recognised as part of a programme; the maximum credit is 75% of a total study programme volume.

Since 2012 significant progress has been achieved in validation of non-formal and informal learning. Lithuania has put in place validation arrangements, which make it possible to assess non-formal or informal learning in VET and higher education. The skills and competences acquired outside formal education are assessed against standards or programmes used in formal education. The results of validation are recognised by the education system and may lead to a formal qualification linked to the national qualifications framework. Those wishing to formalise their non-formal and informal learning must apply to an appropriate VET or HE provider; each of these has an internal quality system which also applies to the assessment of learning outcomes. Arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET and higher education include all the elements specified in the

<sup>548</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

Council recommendation of 2012<sup>549</sup> (identification, documentation, assessment and certification).

However, there is still room for improvement. There is no evidence that validation is used in general education. Although the level of awareness of validation of non-formal and informal learning amongst the public is rather poor, it is not currently among strategic priorities and lacks necessary funding. Information about validation users is not monitored. There is also a lack of validation reference material, methodologies and tools. There is no provision for the development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process. The quality of VET student competences assessment, which also covers validation of non-formal and informal learning, is insufficient (QVETDC, 2017).

Further developments of the validation system include the introduction of a new cumulative assessment approach (that shall cover learning outcomes outside formal education) into general education (Lithuanian Government, 2017). It is also planned to create a digital tool to inform about the possibilities to validate non-formal and informal learning and direct an applicant to a certain validation provider. This tool shall also allow initial testing and monitoring of applicant competences.

### NQF implementation

LTQF was formally adopted through a government resolution in 2010 and further refined with amendments in 2011. It has been embedded in the relevant strategies (the 2017–20 Action plan for the development of lifelong learning system; the 2014–20 Employment development programme; the 2013–22 National education strategy) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The LTQF level descriptors are considered as the basis for formulating qualifications and ensuring their integrity among different levels. Qualification standards, modular programmes, and higher education benchmark statements are written in line with qualification level descriptors. The LTQF has had positive impact on the parity of esteem between types of education and training and qualifications. The framework contributes to increasing the integrity, comparability and transparency of qualifications. Qualifications standards define

<sup>549</sup> Council of the European Union (2012). Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 398, 22.12.2012, pp. 1–5. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF>

titles, levels and content of qualifications (in terms of units of qualifications and competences) and also provide a clear landscape of qualifications in a particular sector, with mobility options for holders of qualifications. However, there is a lack of coordination on other initiatives: application of the LTQF in access, transfer and progression policies; quality assurance; and validation of non-formal and informal learning policies. The influence on support to recognition of foreign qualifications has also been minor.

To achieve full operation of the LTQF, revision and update of all VET programmes, study programmes and the qualifications register has to be finalised. In addition, the revision of general education curriculum statements in line with the LTQF level descriptors is to be finalised and the issues of level 5 qualifications (including their implementation provisions) need to be solved. Award of qualifications using validation of non-formal and informal learning still needs to be developed to function on a larger scale. (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018)

Lithuania was one of the first countries (together with Denmark) to start indicating NQF and EQF levels in the annexes of VET certificates and diplomas, starting in 2016. As of today LTQF and EQF levels are included on certificates and diplomas for VET and higher education qualifications and Europass supplements.

A national register of qualifications and programmes has been set up, including VET and higher education qualifications and indicating LTQF and EQF levels<sup>550</sup>.

The LTQF has been used as a reference point for developing post-secondary VET qualifications at level 5 of the framework. The development and implementation of the LTQF demonstrated this missing link in the national education and training system and has directly influenced reform and modernisation of the system. Only VET qualifications for ballet and modern dance are presently awarded at LTQF level 5. Discussions on whether these qualifications should be awarded solely within the European higher education area or outside it have strengthened in 2017–18; at the end of 2018, the law on science and higher education legitimated short-cycle qualifications leading to level 5 qualifications. Still, implementation provisions for qualifications at this level have not been clarified.

The LTQF is well known to education and training providers but to a lesser extent to other sectors and stakeholders. The main communication channels and tools used for disseminating information on the LTQF and the EQF are the national coordination point's website and newsletter, seminars, conferences, training events and production of informal material. Education and training institutions and employer representatives have been the prioritised target groups but no communication strategy has been developed. Though no analysis of awareness has been done, the general public needs to be more informed about the LTQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Discussions about opening up the framework to qualifications outside the formal education system were initiated, and Ministry of Economy and Innovation plans to create and pilot schemes for including non-formal labour market qualifications into LTQF in 2019–20.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The Lithuanian NQF was referenced to the EQF in November 2011, with one integrated report covering both the EQF and QF-EHEA, published in 2012. The report outlines a one-to-one relationship between LTQF and EQF levels.

## Important lessons and future plans

No evaluation has so far been carried out. There have been discussions about the need for such activity, but no final decision has been reached. Implementation of qualification standards, revision of VET curricula and reform of the framework of higher education qualifications degrees might call for an updated referencing report, but no such update is planned as yet.

The key challenges have been level 5 qualifications and systemic coordination of efforts among different departments of the Ministry of Education and Science, Qualifications and VET Development Centre and Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. The Qualifications and VET Development Centre has been delegated a managing function for the LTQF, but it has no real power on higher education issues (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

<sup>550</sup> [www.aikos.smm.lt/Puslapiai/Pradinis.aspx](http://www.aikos.smm.lt/Puslapiai/Pradinis.aspx)

**Table 44. Lithuanian national qualifications framework (LTQF)**

NOF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctoral diploma ( <i>Daktaro diplomas</i> )	8
7	Master diploma ( <i>Magistro diplomas</i> ) Certificate of residency ( <i>Rezidentūros pažymėjimas</i> )	7
6	Bachelor diploma ( <i>Bakalauro diplomas</i> ) Professional bachelor diploma ( <i>Profesinio bakalauro diplomas</i> )	6
5	VET diploma ( <i>Profesinio mokymo diplomas</i> )* Study certificate ( <i>Studijų pažymėjimas</i> ) – short-cycle higher education programmes	5
4	VET diploma ( <i>Profesinio mokymo diplomas</i> ) <i>Matura</i> diploma ( <i>Brandos atestatas</i> )** (on completion of the upper secondary education programme and passing <i>matura</i> examinations)	4
3	VET diploma ( <i>Profesinio mokymo diplomas</i> ) Lower secondary education certificate ( <i>Pagrindinio išsilavinimo pažymėjimas</i> )** (completion of lower secondary education programme and testing learning outcomes) (grades 5 to 10)	3
2	VET diploma ( <i>Profesinio mokymo diplomas</i> )	2
1	VET diploma ( <i>Profesinio mokymo diplomas</i> )	1

(\*) Presently only VET qualifications for ballet and modern dance are awarded at NQF level 5.

(\*\*) The legislation defining provisions for general education curricula stipulates that learning outcomes of lower secondary education programmes are referenced with a third NQF level, whereas learning outcomes of upper secondary education programmes are referenced with a fourth NQF level.

Source: Qualifications and VET Development Centre, 2018.

Abbreviations		NQF	national qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework of the European higher education area
ESF	European Social Fund		
LTQF	Lithuanian qualifications framework	VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

Qualification and VET Development Centre – appointed EQF national coordination point: [www.kpmc.lt/kpmc/en/](http://www.kpmc.lt/kpmc/en/)

LTQF/EQF website: [www.kpmc.lt/kpmc/en/information/qualifications-framework-2](http://www.kpmc.lt/kpmc/en/information/qualifications-framework-2)

Qualifications register: [www.aikos.smm.lt/Puslapiai/Pradinis.aspx](http://www.aikos.smm.lt/Puslapiai/Pradinis.aspx)

QVETDC (2012). *Referencing the Lithuanian qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area: national report 2012*. [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/LTQF\\_EQF\\_report\\_ENG.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/LTQF_EQF_report_ENG.pdf)

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- QVETDC (Qualifications and VET Development Centre) (2017). *Profesinio mokymo būklės apžvalga 2017* [Overview of the vocational education and training status in 2017]. [www.kpmc.lt/kpmc/](http://www.kpmc.lt/kpmc/)

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# LUXEMBOURG

## Introduction and context

Luxembourg has the highest average spend on education by student per year among EU countries. Other strengths of the education and training system are a high rate of participation in early childhood education and care, the second highest of tertiary education attainment in the EU (52.7% in 2017 compared to the EU average of 39.9%), a rate of employment of recent graduates which is also above the EU average, and a very high percentage of adults participating in lifelong learning (17.2% in 2017, compared to the EU average of 10.9%). In contrast, student performance in school is a challenge, influenced by the ability of children to cope with the trilingual education system in the country. Levels of underachievement in reading, maths and science among 15-year-olds are significantly higher than EU averages. The percentage of pupils leaving education and training early is low (7.3% in 2017), though national sources indicate that the figure is on the rise, with 13.5% of students dropping out in 2015 (European Commission, 2018). Grade repetition is a widespread phenomenon in the country, particularly in the vocational education and training (VET) sector. While it is often considered a measure of quality assurance, it has been shown to be a strong factor in school dropout and to have negative psychological impact on students. The VET Law was amended in 2016 and two new laws, one on secondary education and one on guidance, were adopted in July 2017. The new legislation aims to meet better the needs of learners and to improve student outcomes through a diverse set of measures (European Commission, 2017).

Starting in 2009, and based on an initial government go-ahead, detailed work continued during 2010 and 2011, resulting in an eight-level comprehensive Luxembourg qualifications framework (*Cadre luxembourgeois de qualifications* (CLQ)) covering all types and levels of qualification.

The framework was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in 2012. Implementation of the CLQ was slow during

2013–14, partly reflecting the lack of a clear legislative basis and an agreed strategy shared by all stakeholders on how to proceed. The adoption, in November 2016, of a law on recognition of professional qualifications<sup>551</sup>, established the CLQ as the formal reference point for recognition of professional qualifications acquired outside Luxembourg. This integration into the legislative structure signals official commitment to the framework and represents an important step towards full operational status.

## Policy objectives

Increased transparency of qualifications is a key objective underpinning the CLQ, seen as contributing to the overall modernisation of national education and training. The CLQ also serves as guidance for stakeholders across the education and training system and the labour market. The philosophy of the CLQ is to show that lifelong learning is not fragmented and that it should not be restricted to formal qualifications (INFPC, 2016). The initial scope of the framework, acting as a non-binding and a guiding tool for lifelong learning, has not changed: individuals will be able to position their qualifications in relation to others, in the context of lifelong learning. Providers of education and training, as well as certification bodies, will find it easier to position learning outcomes with a view to offering the learner training, or even a qualification, at the same level or higher (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

One element in favour of the CLQ is the geographic and labour market location of Luxembourg. Being host to a large number of workers from neighbouring countries like Belgium, Germany and France, Luxembourg sees the development of the CLQ as a way to aid comparison and recognition.

<sup>551</sup> Loi du 28 Octobre 2016 relative à la reconnaissance des qualifications professionnelles [Law of 28 October 2016 on the recognition of professional qualifications]. *Journal Officiel*, A231, 18.11.2016. <http://data.legilux.public.lu/file/eli-etat-leg-memorial-2016-231-fr-pdf.pdf>

The adoption of the 2016 law on recognition of professional qualifications (op. cit.) confirms this objective and establishes the CLQ as the main reference point to which foreign qualifications should be compared (see Articles 68 to 70). When the work started in 2009, development and implementation of the EQF was originally seen as an opportunity to make explicit the existing education and training levels and the relationships between them. This was considered important not only for qualifications users (to support lifelong learning for individuals and to enable employers to see the relevance of qualifications), but also for education and training providers. The explicit levels of learning outcomes introduced by the framework are expected to function as a reference point for curriculum development and may help to improve overall consistency of education and training provision.

## Level descriptors and learning outcomes

Luxembourg has introduced an eight-level reference structure. While the number of levels corresponds with the EQF, the descriptors reflect the national tradition and context. At each level, descriptors are differentiated according to knowledge, skills and attitude (*connaissances, aptitudes, attitudes*). While the level of detail is higher, the relationship to the EQF can be clearly identified. This is, for example, the case for the third (attitude) column, which is based on the principles of responsibility, autonomy and context<sup>552</sup> as with the EQF<sup>553</sup>. The CLQ level descriptors are included as annex of the regulation of 17 February 2017 on the recognition of professional qualifications<sup>554</sup>.

The decision to use the aforementioned concepts reflects gradual development of a learning-outcomes or competence-based approach in VET; the competence-based approach has a prominent

position in VET reform. Use of learning outcomes (or *compétences*) in education and training has varied between subsectors; there is a different degree of implementation in different education and training systems, most advanced in compulsory and vocational training (particularly following the Law on VET reform, 2008<sup>555</sup>). Competences for primary education are formulated in the *socle de compétences* (skills base)<sup>556</sup>; whereas for secondary and VET education competences are elaborated in the *acquis d'apprentissage* (Cedefop, 2016).

Recent years have brought about a change; most qualifications are described through learning outcomes. In initial vocational education, all qualifications have been described using learning outcomes and can be accessed via the register of the education ministry<sup>557</sup>.

In secondary VET, development of programmes (in cooperation with chambers) is based on the occupational profile<sup>558</sup>, on the training profile<sup>559</sup> and on the training programme based on the training profile which:

- a. defines the learning outcomes for each competence and regroups them by learning domain;
- b. organises the learning domains and outcomes in modules and credits;
- c. for curriculum, determines the content of the different modules (INFPC, 2016, p. 28).

Further work on standards and training profiles based on explicit learning outcomes will support coherence between qualifications and CLQ levels.

Higher education is organised in courses lasting one semester, each constituting assessable modules allocated credit points (European credit transfer

<sup>552</sup> Attitudes refer to 'personal and social dispositions in work or study situations and for professional or personal development. Personal abilities are characterised by an autonomous, responsible disposition that allows critical consideration of one's own actions and the actions of other people; they also define the scope of a person's own development through either study or practice' (Ministry of Higher Education and Research; Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth, 2014, p. 19).

<sup>553</sup> Descriptors defining levels in the EQF: <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/descriptors-page>

<sup>554</sup> Règlement grand-ducal du 17 février 2017 relatif à la reconnaissance des qualifications professionnelles [Regulation of 17 February 2017 on the recognition of professional qualifications]. *Journal Officiel*, Mémorial A241, 6.3.2017. <http://data.legilux.public.lu/file/eli-etat-leg-memorial-2017-241-fr-pdf.pdf>

<sup>555</sup> The law of 19 December 2008 implementing vocational education reform modernises Luxembourg's system of initial and continuing vocational education and training. The main points of the reform consist of the reorientation of initial vocational education (IVET) towards a modular and competence-oriented structure. Luxembourg's Vocational Education and Training Act of 2008 defines competences as the totality of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary in order to practise an occupation.

<sup>556</sup> The *socle de compétences* defines a set of key competences referring to subject-independent competences, and should be seen as the 'core set' of competences (KeyCoNet, 2013).

<sup>557</sup> See <http://programmes.myschool.lu>

<sup>558</sup> An occupational profile lists the areas of activity as well as the activities and tasks of future occupations after two to three years of workplace experience (INFPC, 2016).

<sup>559</sup> A training profile is based on the occupational profile by areas of competence: occupational and general competences (INFPC, 2016).

and accumulation system). These courses are increasingly defined and described using learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are included in the new law regarding the organisation of the University of Luxembourg<sup>560</sup>, which lays down that each programme requires specific objectives, based on the acquisition of certain knowledge, competences and transversal skills. Further, the obligation to define learning outcomes is also included in the 2010 Grand-Ducal decree<sup>561</sup> on the organisation of short-cycle programmes and related student graduation.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The LQF development and implementation is being coordinated by the Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth, which also acts as EQF national coordination point in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education and Research. As the bodies responsible for formal qualifications, both of these ministries (in conjunction with the bodies mentioned below) are responsible for quality assurance of the relevant qualifications. Apart from the national coordination point's natural connection with the Ministry of Higher Education, which ensures the link with all the parties involved, including the University, there is also a link with the social partners. Consultation and active involvement of the various parties concerned has benefitted from this centralised situation (Ministry of Higher Education and Research; Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth, 2014).

Although framework responsibilities are clearly defined, there is cooperation among the various stakeholders on different aspects of the framework. Qualifications referenced at levels 1 to 4 are the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth<sup>562</sup>, while at levels 6 to 8 they are the responsibility of the Ministry for Higher Education and Research; at level 5 they are the responsibility of the Ministry for National Education,

Children and Youth together with the Chamber of Trades for the master craftsman's diploma (Ministry of Higher Education and Research; Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth, 2014). Social partner involvement is a core principle in VET policy; the professional chambers<sup>563</sup> are independent policy institutes and with the 2008 reform their role is reinforced (Cedefop, 2017). Chambers act as partners for official consultation and are directly associated with the legislative and executive procedure of the Grand Duchy.

The Department for Coordination of Educational and Technological Research and Innovation (SCRIPT) – under the authority of the education ministry – and its School Quality Development Agency (Agence pour le développement de la qualité scolaire, ADQS) are responsible for quality assurance of school education (INFPC, 2016). External evaluation of the education system is outsourced to the University of Luxembourg. A National Observatory of School Quality<sup>564</sup> was also created in January 2018 at the Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth to report on the school system; it produces findings based on research and recommendations (Cedefop, forthcoming).

Quality assurance in higher education uses external evaluation as there is no national quality assurance agency. Instead, the Ministry of Higher Education and Research has outsourced this process to foreign agencies and experts. The University of Luxembourg is evaluated every four years<sup>565</sup>, with the focus of evaluation alternating between research and learning and teaching. The Minister of Higher Education and Research commissions a foreign EQAR-registered<sup>566</sup> agency to perform the institutional evaluation<sup>567</sup>. The 2009 Law<sup>568</sup>

<sup>560</sup> Loi du 27 juin 2018 ayant pour objet l'organisation de l'Université du Luxembourg [Law of 27 June 2018 on the organisation of the University of Luxembourg]. *Journal Officiel*, Mémorial A587, 11.7.2018. <http://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/loi/2018/06/27/a587/jo>

<sup>561</sup> Règlement grand-ducal du 23 février 2010 relatif à l'organisation des études et à la promotion des étudiants des formations sanctionnées par l'obtention du brevet de technicien supérieur [Decree of the Grand Duchy of 23 February 2010 regarding the organisation of short cycle programmes in higher education]. *Journal Officiel*, Mémorial A30, 8.3.2010. <http://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/rgd/2010/02/23/n1/jo>

<sup>562</sup> Previously described as Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.

<sup>563</sup> The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg has five professional chambers: three chambers of employers (chamber of commerce, chamber of trades, chamber of agriculture) and two chambers of employees (chamber of employees and chamber of civil servants and public-sector employees).

<sup>564</sup> Observatoire national de la qualité scolaire: [www.men.public.lu/fr/actualites/articles/communiqués-conference-presse/2018/02/08-observatoire/index.html](http://www.men.public.lu/fr/actualites/articles/communiqués-conference-presse/2018/02/08-observatoire/index.html)

<sup>565</sup> Loi du 27 juin 2018 ayant pour objet l'organisation de l'Université du Luxembourg [Law of 27 June 2018 on the organisation of the University of Luxembourg]. *Journal Officiel*, Mémorial A587, 11.7.2018. <http://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/loi/2018/06/27/a587/jo>

<sup>566</sup> EQAR is the European quality assurance register for higher education.

<sup>567</sup> The bachelor, master and PhD programmes offered by the University of Luxembourg, created by law, are automatically recognised.

<sup>568</sup> Loi du 19 juin 2009 portant organisation de l'enseignement supérieur [Law of 19 June 2009 on the organisation of higher education]. *Journal Officiel*, Mémorial A153, 1.7.2009. <http://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/loi/2009/06/19/n1/jo>



on the organisation of higher education provides for external quality assurance of private higher education institutions and their programmes, as well as the short-cycle programmes of secondary schools. Private higher education institutions and their programmes are also evaluated every five years by a foreign EQAR-registered agency commissioned by the Minister of Higher Education and Research<sup>569</sup>. Short-cycle programmes offered by secondary schools are evaluated by an expert group nominated by the Minister of Higher Education and Research, which is an ENQA<sup>570</sup> affiliate member. For both foreign private higher education institutes and their programmes, and short-cycle programmes in secondary schools, only accredited programmes and institutions are officially recognised by the state.

The VET Law of 2008, which lays down the basic objectives of vocational education and training and also covers the main aspects of quality assurance, is currently under revision, expected to be completed by 2020 (Cedefop, forthcoming).

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>571</sup>

The development of validation systems in Luxembourg has been closely related to national lifelong learning strategy. Legislation recognises an individual right for all individuals to benefit from the validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning, (under some conditions)<sup>572</sup>. This process is known as ‘validation of prior experiential learning’ or *validation des acquis de l’expérience* (VAE) and has been operational since 2010<sup>573</sup>. The current legal framework on validation consists of several laws, covering secondary technical and vocational education, advanced technician diplomas and the University of Luxembourg. VAE arrangements are in place for formal qualifications awarded through

the ‘general secondary education’ system in Luxembourg (including technical and vocational education, to be distinguished from ‘classical secondary education’, not covered by VAE)<sup>574</sup>, post-secondary non-tertiary education qualifications such as master craftsperson certificates, and higher education qualifications (both short-cycle degrees and qualifications awarded by the University of Luxembourg). Since 2016, new legal provisions<sup>575</sup> guarantee the right to individualised guidance to VAE candidates for qualifications under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education.

Vocational and technical qualifications can be acquired through validation. An exception is the secondary general school leaving certificate (*Diplôme de fin d’études secondaires générales*) that cannot be acquired through validation. In higher education, qualifications at levels 6 to 8, only parts of qualifications or modules can be recognised through validation. Any type of prior experiential learning relevant to the targeted qualification, whether it is the result of formal, non-formal or informal learning activities in the education and training sector, the labour market or the third sector, can be used to apply for validation.

The Ministry of National Education takes responsibility for the implementation of VAE in relation to secondary level vocational and technical qualifications as well as master craftsperson certificates.

In higher education, the Ministry of Higher Education holds general responsibility for validation arrangements, but VAE procedures are

<sup>569</sup> Based on the evaluation report of the agency, the Minister decides on accreditation and refusal of accreditation.

<sup>570</sup> ENQA is the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

<sup>571</sup> This section draws mainly on input from European Commission et al. (forthcoming).

<sup>572</sup> Validation can lead to access to, or acquisition of, full or partial qualifications, provided that the candidate can supply evidence that the total length of prior experiential learning amounts to at least 5 000 hours over a minimum of three years and is effectively related to the targeted qualification.

<sup>573</sup> VAE has become a known way of obtaining a formal qualification based on formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes or, in other words, based on the individual life and work experience of the person. Even if the procedure is not perfect, the path one has to follow is clearly set up (see Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth (2019)).

<sup>574</sup> Following adoption of the law of 29 August 2017, the Luxembourgish secondary education includes both ‘classical’ secondary education (*enseignement secondaire classique*) and ‘general’ secondary education (*enseignement secondaire général*), corresponding to vocational and technical education, the latter giving access to higher education. Source: Eurydice online database: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/secondary-and-post-secondary-non-tertiary-education-32\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/secondary-and-post-secondary-non-tertiary-education-32_en)

<sup>575</sup> Loi du 24 août 2016 modifiant la loi modifiée du 19 décembre 2008 portant réforme de la formation professionnelle [Law of 24 August 2016 modifying the amended law of 19 December 2008 on the reform of vocational training]. *Journal Officiel*, Mémorial A175, 1.9.2016. <http://data.legilux.public.lu/file/eli-etat-leg-memorial-2016-175-fr-pdf.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-12,318> and

Règlement grand-ducal du 15 décembre 2017 portant sur l’accompagnement par entretiens personnalisés du candidat sollicitant la validation des acquis de l’expérience [Regulation of the Grand Duchy of 15 December 2017 on the personalised interviews of the candidate seeking the validation of acquired experience]. *Journal Officiel*, Mémorial A1080, 18.12.2017. <http://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/rgd/2017/12/15/a1080/jo>

decentralised, with a key role played by the short-cycle higher education providers (*lycées*) for the advanced technician diplomas (*brevet de technicien supérieur*, BTS) and the University of Luxembourg for bachelor, master and PhD programmes. The new law on the University of Luxembourg, affecting VAE, was being discussed at the parliament and came into force on 1 August 2018.

The small size of the country aids informal coordination between different validation stakeholders. Validation is a regular topic of discussion in Luxembourg, with changes to the legislative framework on validation and improvements in the provision of orientation and guidance to validation candidates being considered. The value of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal contexts is largely accepted in Luxembourg. This is due to the high value attributed to lifelong learning and to the consensual political culture of Luxembourg, with social partners and stakeholders involved in the validation process at all stages (Houot, 2016).

Changes are expected in the coming years, creating an overarching legal framework with general principles for validation for all sectors.

## NQF implementation

The CLQ was adopted by the Government Council in September 2010. Following completion of the referencing of the national qualifications framework (NQF) to the EQF in mid-2012, implementation has slowed. While the CLQ can be described as having reached an early operational stage, the lack of a clear legislative basis was considered a draw-back. In November 2016, an important milestone was reached with the adoption of the Law on recognition of professional qualifications, which establishes the CLQ as the formal reference point for recognition of professional qualifications acquired outside Luxembourg (Cedefop, 2018). The education ministry has been using the CLQ since 2016 for the registration/recognition of foreign diplomas, in which the national diploma register decides for each recognised diploma on an equivalent NQF level<sup>576</sup>. The ministry also requests the inclusion of an NQF/EQF level on each issued diploma supplement.

Some qualifications posed challenges in terms of levelling. The vocational aptitude diploma (*diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle*, DAP) that can be acquired through apprenticeships has been assigned to the CLQ/EQF level 3, and the master

<sup>576</sup> This is done according to national and European standards.

craftsman qualification<sup>577</sup> to CLQ/EQF level 5 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). This is different in the frameworks of the German-speaking countries where these types of qualification were referenced to EQF levels 4 and 6 respectively.

A comprehensive national database of qualifications has not yet been set up. It will be possible to create a database when qualifications acquired outside formal education and training are aligned to the framework. Currently there are registers of available VET programmes/qualifications<sup>578</sup> and higher education programmes and diplomas<sup>579</sup>. Only Europass supplements<sup>580</sup> include an NQF/EQF level and there are no immediate plans to indicate NQF and EQF levels on new certificates and diplomas.

So far, the CLQ's communication efforts have not been oriented towards the general public as the framework is known to a certain number of actors in education and the labour market. In order to assist short-cycle programme providers with the concept of learning outcomes, the ministry (in cooperation with a national expert) organised a workshop on this topic in 2017. Within the framework of the revision of the (national) diploma supplement template, the ministry has informed higher education stakeholders about the importance of learning outcomes, providing related material. Disseminating CLQ on a wider level and to larger target groups is the key challenge for the next period.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Luxembourg referenced its qualifications levels to the EQF and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in June 2012; a referencing report was published in 2014.

## Important lessons and future plans

While a solid basis for the NQF has been established in Luxembourg, implementation

<sup>577</sup> The master craftsman qualification (*brevet de maîtrise*; ISCED 453, EQF 5) entitles the holder to settle in the craft industry as self-employed and to train apprentices. The qualification confers the title of master craftsman in the particular trade. The master craftsman qualification does not give any access right for higher education; progression opportunities depend on the certificate gained at secondary level (INFPC, 2016).

<sup>578</sup> [www.lifelong-learning.lu/Detail/Article/Diplomes/registre-des-titres-et-homologation/en](http://www.lifelong-learning.lu/Detail/Article/Diplomes/registre-des-titres-et-homologation/en)

<sup>579</sup> Register of higher education diplomas: [www.mesr.public.lu/enssup/registre\\_des\\_titres/index.html](http://www.mesr.public.lu/enssup/registre_des_titres/index.html)

<sup>580</sup> The Europass website is directly linked to the website of the national Erasmus+ agency, which is also the national Europass Centre.

slowed following the referencing to the EQF in 2012. This was caused by the lack of a clear legal basis and some uncertainty among stakeholders over the role to be played by the CLQ at national level. The CLQ can be considered to have reached an early operational stage. Adoption of the 2016 Law on recognition clarified the position of the CLQ at national level and provided the basis for a development towards more advanced operational

status. Discussions continue on strengthening the role of the CLQ as a lifelong learning tool while no political decision has been taken yet.

The development of procedures for inclusion of qualifications from outside the formal education and training system and setting up a comprehensive national database of qualifications are being considered.

**Table 45. Luxembourg qualifications framework (CLQ)**

NQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctoral diploma (Phd) ( <i>Doctorat</i> ) Certificate following specific training course in medicine ( <i>Diplôme de formation spécifique en médecine générale</i> )	8
7	Master diploma ( <i>Master</i> )	7
6	Bachelor diploma ( <i>Bachelor</i> )	6
5	Master craftsman diploma ( <i>Brevet de maîtrise</i> ) Advanced technician diploma ( <i>Brevet de technicien supérieur</i> ) Specialised advanced technician diploma ( <i>Brevet de technicien supérieur spécialisé</i> )	5
4	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate ( <i>Diplôme de fin d'études secondaires</i> ) Technical secondary school leaving certificate ( <i>Diplôme de fin d'études secondaires techniques</i> ) Technician diploma ( <i>Diplôme de technicien</i> )	4
3	Vocational aptitude diploma ( <i>Diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle</i> ) Certificate attesting completion of middle cycle technical secondary education ( <i>Certificat de réussite du cycle moyen de l'enseignement secondaire technique</i> ) Certificate attesting completion of five years secondary education ( <i>Certificat de réussite de cinq années d'enseignement secondaire</i> )	3
2	Vocational capability certificate ( <i>Certificat de capacité professionnelle</i> )	2
1	Certificate attesting completion of lower cycle, technical secondary education ( <i>Certificat de réussite du cycle inférieur de l'enseignement secondaire technique</i> )	1

Source: Law 231/2016 on the recognition of professional qualifications. *Official Journal of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg*, No 4263, 18.11.2016. <http://data.legilux.public.lu/file/eli-etat-leg-memorial-2016-231-fr-pdf.pdf>

Abbreviations		EQF	European qualifications framework
CLQ	Cadre luxembourgeois des qualifications (Luxembourg qualifications framework)	NQF	national qualifications framework
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education	VAE	validation des acquis de l'expérience (validation of non-formal and informal learning)
		VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth – acts as EQF national coordination point:  
[www.men.public.lu/fr/index.html](http://www.men.public.lu/fr/index.html)  
Luxembourg qualifications framework: [www.men.public.lu/fr/actualites/grands-dossiers/formation-adultes/clq/descripteurs-niveaux/index.html](http://www.men.public.lu/fr/actualites/grands-dossiers/formation-adultes/clq/descripteurs-niveaux/index.html)  
Information on IVET qualifications: <http://portal.education.lu/programmes>  
Register of VET programmes/qualifications: [www.lifelong-learning.lu/Detail/Article/Diplomes/registre-des-titres-et-homologation/en](http://www.lifelong-learning.lu/Detail/Article/Diplomes/registre-des-titres-et-homologation/en)  
Register of higher education diplomas: [www.mesr.public.lu/enssup/registre\\_des\\_titres/index.html](http://www.mesr.public.lu/enssup/registre_des_titres/index.html)  
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- KeyCoNet (2013). *KeyCoNet 2013 literature review: key competence development in school education in Europe*. [http://keyconet.eun.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=060f39a1-bd86-4941-a6ca-8b2a3ba8548e&groupId=11028](http://keyconet.eun.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=060f39a1-bd86-4941-a6ca-8b2a3ba8548e&groupId=11028)
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### Prepared by:

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# MADAGASCAR

## Introduction and context

Madagascar does not have a national qualifications framework (NQF). However the national employment and vocational training policy (Politique nationale de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle – PNEFP) provides a framework for the future development and implementation of an NQF (UNEVOC, 2015, p. 10). The Malagasy qualifications framework (Cadre national de certification) was already one of the objectives of the 2010 technical and vocational education and training (TVET) strategy.

In February 2016, the PNEFP came into force. Since then, the Ministry of Education has been working together with other stakeholders, technical and financial partners on the implementation of the policy, including the development and implementation of the NQF.

The PNEFP proposes the set up of a NQF committee, which will play the role of a new qualification authority. Both the private and the public sectors will be represented in this committee. Five priority economic sectors have already been identified and become actively involved in the process.

## Policy objectives

The policy objectives of the NQF are currently under discussion.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The proposed NQF will comprise ten levels, defined by descriptors in five domains: knowledge, know-how, autonomy, ICT and cognitive capacities.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The key role players are the Ministries of Employment, Agriculture and Industry (which is in

charge of private sector development), and, for the private sector, the Malagasy Association of Directors of Human Resources, representatives of the social partners and five economic priority sectors (building and construction, ICT, tourism, textiles). The main challenges are inter-ministerial dialogue and the support of professional associations. Developing a participatory approach from the start is considered a way to overcome those challenges.

Important changes are currently taking place. TVET is now managed by the Ministry of Education. The management of the new training fund has moved from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Employment. The issue on whether vocational training will migrate from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Employment is still under debate.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The NQF will allow recognition of current competences to enable individuals to obtain qualifications through either training or recognition of prior learning. The related decree was published in December 2018.

## Important lessons and future plans

The following main activities are proposed for the development of the NQF in the near future:

1. the setting up of an inter-ministerial commission that will be responsible for the governance and piloting of the NQF. Under this overarching commission, thematic sectoral commissions will be in charge of referencing particular qualifications within their domain of competence to the NQF;
2. the piloting of the NQF and associated quality assurance mechanisms in one economic sector.

**Abbreviations**

NQF	national qualifications framework		employment and vocational training policy)
PNEFP	Politique nationale de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle (national	TVET	technical and vocational education and training

**References**

UNEVOC (2015). *World TVET database: Madagascar*. [www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv:82427](http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv:82427)

**Prepared by:**

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

## Introduction

The Malawi formal education system is based on an 8:4:4 structure, which specifies eight years for primary education, four for secondary and four for tertiary education. The non-formal education system comprises early childhood development (i.e. nursery schools, crèches, community-based child care centres and pre-schools), complementary basic education (which offers a second chance education to out-of-school youths), and adult literacy classes. Currently, Malawi does not have a national qualifications framework (NQF) but efforts are underway to establish one. A draft bill has been developed by the government to establish the Malawi Qualifications Authority, which will have powers and functions for, among others, the development and implementation of an NQF, the regulation and coordination of qualifications-awarding bodies and connected matters. The Malawi Qualifications Authority's draft bill is undergoing review by the Ministry of Justice and will be tabled in the National Assembly to enact it into law. Simultaneously, efforts are being made to refine and develop the various components of the NQF. The technical, entrepreneurial and vocational education and training (TEVET) policy of 1999, developed following the enactment of the TEVET Act No 6 of 1999 that led to the establishment of the TEVET Authority (TEVETA) in July 1999, was reviewed in 2013. Similarly, the TVET qualifications framework (TQF), which was set up in 2004 has been reviewed. TQF levels and level descriptors have been redefined and developed. Similar efforts are being made in higher education. Following the enactment of the Higher Education Act No 15 of 2011, the National Council for Higher Education was established to regulate the higher education sub-sector with a primary purpose of providing accreditation and quality assurance services in higher education institutions in Malawi. Efforts are being made to develop the national higher education qualifications framework (HEQF). A draft HEQF is being developed through a series of national consultations with input from international experts. Both the TQF and the HEQF are being aligned to regional and international frameworks.

## Main policy objectives

The objectives of the NQF are to:

- improve national education and training in order to determine the quality of education required for all students;
- make national education systems easier to understand through an integrated national framework for learning achievement;
- improve permeability of education and training by clarifying and strengthening the horizontal and vertical links within existing systems;
- support lifelong learning by making learning pathways visible and by aiding access, participation and progression;
- strengthen the links and improve communication between education and training and the labour market;
- open up national qualification systems to qualifications awarded outside formal education and training (for example awarded by sectors);
- provide a reference point for quality assurance.

## Level descriptors and learning outcomes

Because Malawi does not yet have an NQF system, level descriptors and learning outcomes are being developed. This section reports on the levels in the TQF which are in place and are being developed.

### Technical, entrepreneurial and vocational education and training

In TEVET, occupational competency levels go up to TQF level 4, which is seen as equivalent to a diploma. A level 1 certificate holder (foundation level) is described as an assistant operative, a level 2 certificate holder (intermediate level) as an operative, a level 3 certificate holder (advanced level) as an artisan, and finally a level 4 certificate holder (diploma) as a technician (Heitmann, 2012).

According to Sheqafrica.com (Furter, 2011) Malawi's TQF actually comprises eight levels as shown in Table 46. However, this is being realigned with the draft HEQF within the overall NQF.

**Table 46. Malawi's vocational education and training qualifications framework**

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
8	Executive, doctoral
7	Specialist, master's
6	Professional, bachelor's
5	Managerial, higher diploma
4	Technician, diploma
3	Artisan, higher certificate
2	Operative, intermediate certificate
1	Assistant operative, foundation certificate

### Higher education

The draft HEQF which is being aligned to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional qualifications framework goes up from level 5 to level 10 as shown in Table 47 (Source: draft HEQF).

**Table 47. Malawi's higher education qualifications framework**

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
10	Doctorate
9	Master's
8	Honours
7	Bachelor's
6	Diploma/Advanced Diploma
5	Certificate

### Stakeholder involvement

The main key players in the development and implementation of the Malawi NQF are the National Council for Higher Education, TEVETA, the Department of Human Resources, Management and Training, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Labour, Youth, Sports and Manpower Development, and the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs. The relevant departments in the ministries responsible (i.e. Department of Higher Education and Department

of Inspectorate and Advisory Services in the Ministry of Education; the Department of Technical Education and Vocational Training in the Ministry of Labour; and the Department of Quality Assurance in TEVETA) link the various stakeholders and subcommittees. Stakeholders that are closely involved in the qualifications framework include the technical qualifications committees, sector advisory committees, occupational working groups, service centres and training providers, universities (both public and private), the Malawi National Examinations Board, and employers and employees.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and links with the NQF

As noted, these aspects are not yet relevant to a full NQF since none exists. However, the TQF also touches on these aspects, in ways that are briefly noted below.

In technical and vocational education and training (TVET) non-formal training is offered through a variety of private training providers and non-governmental organisations. Course duration and subject areas covered vary between institutions. Private providers of sector-specific training also exist, such as the National Construction Industry Council and the Bankers' Association of Malawi. Companies may also offer training to their employees, and when courses are regulated by TEVETA, it refunds half of the training expenses. Larger companies have their own training centres, and others sponsor staff to attend external courses. A large part of workplace training is on-the-job. Informal training is provided mainly through traditional apprenticeships in the informal sector, whereby a trainee enters into an agreement with a master craftsperson. This type of TVET is by far the largest in terms of student numbers. Traditional apprenticeships are mostly in traditional and typically male-dominated trades, including bicycle repair, boat-building, construction, mechanics, welding, woodworking and shoe repair (UNEVOC, 2012).

Malawi has been slow to adopt recognition of prior learning in higher education due to the absence of the NQF. The draft HEQF, however, provides for the recognition of recognition of prior learning and acknowledges that it is one of the reforms that could be considered within the framework and that more work needs to be done within the context of open and distance learning.



## Referencing to regional frameworks

The NQF system is being developed along the lines of the SADC Protocol on Education and Training of 1997 and the SADC Qualifications Framework 2017. Although Malawi has not yet ratified the Addis Ababa Convention on Higher Education and the Global Convention on Higher Education, the aim of the development of the NQF is to reform and develop a qualifications framework that is compatible with regional and international standards. This, in part, is in response to the liberalized education system which has seen a lot of growth and development in education providers, both local and international, with different philosophies, approaches, demands and intents resulting in different requirements and levels of qualifications considered.

## Important lessons and future plans

Good coordination, strong leadership and availability of funding have enabled the planned activities in

the development of NQF to meet the schedule. A task team has been formed to champion the development of the NQF and is led by the Department of Inspection and Advisory Services in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The bill for the establishment of the Malawi Qualifications Authority has now been drafted and is ready for submission to parliament.

### Abbreviations

HEQF	higher education qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TEVET	technical, entrepreneurial and vocational education and training
TEVETA	Technical, Entrepreneurial and Vocational Education and Training Authority
TQF	TVET qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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UNEVOC (2012). *World TVET database: Malawi*. [www.unevoc.unesco.org/wtdb/worldtvtdatabase\\_mwi\\_en.pdf](http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/wtdb/worldtvtdatabase_mwi_en.pdf)

### Prepared by:

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

# MALAYSIA

## Introduction

In Malaysia, higher and vocational education and training institutions contribute to the nation's social, economic and political development through the production of quality citizens, a highly skilled and talented workforce and new knowledge. These developments have been guided broadly by the National Education Philosophy. Empowering the actualization of the policy is the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education), which outlines the strategies, plans, key performance indicators, responsible departments, institutions and agencies within a number of strong enabling legal frameworks.

The Malaysian qualifications framework (MQF), which was first introduced in 2007 under the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) Act, 2007, has a key role within these complex arrangements, i.e. to set qualification standards for all qualifications in the higher education and training sectors. The MQF serves as an overarching framework for all post-secondary qualifications, with a set of objectives to be served and serviced by the MQA. The framework is 'development-oriented', and enabled by strong government policies and regulations, centrally mandated for the MQF and its stakeholders and in partnership with higher education and training institutions. It sets the national classifications of qualifications, levels of learning achievements based on learning outcomes, academic load at each level and is associated with qualification nomenclature. The implementation of the MQF is underpinned by quality assurance and accreditation practised by the MQA and other competent bodies in Malaysia.

In 2017, the MQF was revised to strengthen and address the developing needs for access and responsiveness towards emerging skills or knowledge needs and to ensure coherency within the higher education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector. The revised MQF is now a unified and comprehensive framework to enhance the standards of qualifications and to ensure it continues to serve

the National Education Philosophy; the various policy goals stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education); and the 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysian Development Plans which focus on a stronger quality TVET workforce with qualifications to be driven by the requirements of the industry; and strengthening the external comparability and recognition of Malaysian qualifications, especially with the increasing mobility of learners and workers across borders.

## Policy objectives

The objectives of the MQF, as specified in the Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007, are:

1. to secure standards of qualifications and reinforce policies on quality assurance;
2. to promote accuracy or consistency of nomenclature of qualifications;
3. to provide mechanisms for the progression or inter-relation between qualifications, including non-degree and degree qualifications;
4. to encourage collaboration between public and private sector higher education providers and skills training providers;
5. to encourage parity of esteem among academic, professional, technical, vocational, and skills qualifications;
6. to establish a credit system to facilitate credit accumulation and transfer, which is acceptable within and outside Malaysia;
7. to provide clear and accessible public information on programmes or qualifications in higher education;
8. to promote, where applicable, the presentation of qualifications in forms that facilitate their evaluation by any key stakeholders; and
9. to articulate links with qualifications from outside Malaysia.

## Levels and learning outcomes

The MQF provides eight levels of outcome-based qualifications organised hierarchically. The

framework enables clear progression along these levels, beginning with basic level knowledge and skills up to very complex and specialised knowledge and sophistication of practice. It reflects the accumulation of knowledge and skills from each level progressively.

Each level in MQF is provided with a generic descriptive statement in qualitative terms, which describes learning achievement at a particular level. The level descriptors define the expected knowledge, capabilities and/or competences of learners on successful completion of learning programmes in the context of work and study. The broad statements account for the content-free nature of learning standards in the MQF. It is within the specific programme design that the descriptors are translated and contextualized, by the specific discipline, technical and vocational, and professional fields. The levels and qualification types are seen in [Table 48](#).

Learning outcomes orientation is integral in the implementation of the MQF. The MQF outlines a set of generic learning outcomes, which are critical across field outcomes, and generic and relevant to different types and levels of programmes. These

generic learning outcomes are clustered into the following five categories:

1. Knowledge and understanding
2. Cognitive skills
3. Functional work skills with focus on:
  - Practical skills
  - Interpersonal skills
  - Communication skills
  - Digital skills
  - Numeracy skills
  - Leadership, autonomy and responsibility
4. Personal and entrepreneurial skills
5. Ethics and professionalism.

The application of the learning outcomes in each level is situation-based, and depends on the complexity of tasks, study and work to be performed. The level descriptors broadly explain the context of application of the learning outcomes and are often influenced by levels of autonomy and responsibility.

As a general practice, individual programme designs should address the clusters of learning outcomes appropriately. They describe the general and specific content for knowledge and skills in a subject(s) and

**Table 48. Malaysian qualifications framework (MQF)**

MQF LEVEL	MINIMUM GRADUATING CREDIT	ACADEMIC SECTOR	TVET SECTOR
<b>8</b>	No credit rating	PhD by Research Doctoral Degree by Mixed Mode & Coursework	
<b>7</b>	No credit rating	Master's by Research	
	40	Master's by Mixed Mode & Coursework	
	30	Postgraduate Diploma	
<b>6</b>	20	Postgraduate Certificate	
	120	Bachelor's degree	
	66*	Graduate Diploma	
<b>5</b>	36*	Graduate Certificate	
	40	Advanced Diploma	5
<b>4</b>	90	Diploma	4
<b>3</b>	60	Certificate	3
<b>2</b>	30	Certificate	2
<b>1</b>	15	Certificate	1

related field(s), the level of cognitive skills, and, where relevant, the specialised technical skills. The other generic skills are capabilities that all learners should develop in the course of further study and training, which is either integrated in the teaching or learning strategies or available through specialised courses.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The MQF is administered by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), with the involvement of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Human Resources as well as other stakeholders such as professional bodies. The Department of Higher Education, under the Ministry of Education, is responsible for the approval and licensing of higher education institutions while the MQA is responsible for the accreditation of higher education and TVET qualifications. The Department of Skills Development, Ministry of Human Resources is responsible for the approval of skills providers and performs accreditation of skills qualifications based on the national occupational skills standards. For professional qualifications, the MQA performs joint accreditation with the professional bodies through joint technical committees to ensure synchronization of accreditation processes and results.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The MQF provides multiple learning pathways with flexible points of entry, opportunities for advanced standing and recognition of prior learning and experiences. The provisions for pathways, articulation and lifelong learning under the MQF include:

1. A credit transfer system for vertical or horizontal transfers between programmes, institutions and sectors. This includes the articulation policy and mechanisms for mobility between academic and TVET sectors and vice versa. This is usually evidenced by policy and/or agreements on articulation between institutions.
2. Stackable qualifications for the TVET sector from Level 1 to 4 which allows multi-entry and multi-exits and which also provides credit transfers from Level 1 to 4.
3. Flexible access to quality assured provisions of flexible, open and online learning.
4. The accreditation of learning acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning, which can provide access to as well as advanced

standing in a programme. The accreditation of prior experiential learning is applied to both the academic and the TVET sectors, although the assessment approach must be fit for purpose.

5. The accumulation of credits and learning outcomes, which is possible through partial qualifications, professional certifications, modularisation of programmes, short courses, micro learning and MOOCs. Such credits can be considered for transfer to a full programme. The provision of a bridging programme exists to suit circumstances where it may be necessary to prepare individuals to undertake higher level programme or where there may be other entry requirements set by higher education providers.

## Recognising foreign qualifications

Quality assurance or accreditation of qualifications performed by national competent bodies is key in facilitating acceptance and recognition of qualifications. In general, foreign qualifications which satisfy this basic requirement are accepted and recognized for the purpose of further studies and employment in Malaysia. However, they may still be subject to additional requirements by employers, higher education providers, professional bodies as well as other relevant laws and regulations.

The MQA offers equivalency assessment services of foreign qualifications vis-a-vis the MQF which serves as an advisory statement to the relevant parties.

## NQF implementation

The MQA is responsible for the accreditation of higher education and TVET qualifications. It establishes joint accreditation with key professional bodies for the accreditation of professional programmes. The Department of Skills Development, Ministry of Human Resources is responsible for the accreditation of skills qualifications.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The MQA has undertaken several comparability projects on qualification and quality assurance systems with other international organizations. The accreditation system of the MQA which underpinned the MQF implementation was endorsed in 2013 as aligned to the Guidelines of Good Practices of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. In 2016, the MQA and the New Zealand Qualifications

Agency completed the comparability process of Malaysian and New Zealand's Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral degrees. The MQA has also completed accreditation comparability with the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan in 2012 and with the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation of Japan in 2017. Currently, the MQF is being referenced to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) and the process is expected to be completed in 2019.

and strengthening innovative and lifelong learning culture.

The MQF, as the national standard of qualifications, has improved the international visibility, comparability, acceptance and recognition of Malaysian qualifications. Various and continuous benchmarkings, engagements and interactions with international counterparts over the years have strengthened common expectations on standards and practices and have reinforced mutual interest in quality learning.

## Important lessons and future plans

The experience of implementing the first version of the MQF in 2007 and the revised version in 2017 shows the importance of MQF-related policies and standards remaining dynamic in addressing new emerging forms of learning and learners as well as growing demands of more flexible learning environments. As the system continues to evolve in response to these changes, the MQF must be able to retain its grit and agility in promoting, supporting

### Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
MOOCs	massive open online courses
MQA	Malaysian Qualifications Agency
MQF	Malaysian qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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### Prepared by:

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

## Introduction and context

The Maldives National Qualifications Framework (MNQF) was established by the Maldives Accreditation Board (MAB) in September 2001. The MAB was replaced by the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA) on 17 May 2010. The process to revise the MNQF began in 2005, and was completed in February 2009 (MAB, 2009) and implemented on 1 September 2011.

The MNQF addresses two main issues.

1. The Maldivian higher education sector is growing rapidly, with an increasing number of private providers entering the sector to meet demand. This has resulted in a need to assure the quality of qualifications awarded for educational attainment (ibid.).
2. Cross-border higher education is both an opportunity and a challenge. International recognition of Maldivian qualifications, especially in the Asia and Pacific region, is emerging as a major concern as more and more students enrol in higher education abroad. Information needs to be gathered about overseas qualifications, institutions and academic programmes, and the status of institutions needs to be clarified with respect to the recognition and credibility of qualifications.

## Policy objectives

The government sees the revised MNQF as a tool to bring all recognized qualifications together under a single, unified structure. The main policy objectives of the strengthened MNQF are to:

- establish national competency standards;
- assure the quality of teaching, assessment and certification;
- promote student and learner support and reporting;
- allow for a possible future interface with secondary education;
- allow technical and vocational education and training (TVET) graduates to progress seamlessly

to advanced technical, professional and postgraduate learning;

- provide an internationally benchmarked suite of higher education qualifications from associate and foundation degrees through bachelor's and master's degrees to higher technical and professional diplomas and doctorates;
- allow valid international higher education qualifications to be recognized in the Maldives;
- promote mobility and recognition for Maldivian citizens abroad;
- establish a national technical and vocational qualifications system based on national competency standards, allowing flexibility in worker skills acquisition.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The MQA assigns qualifications by means of a 10-level framework using the descriptors for Levels 3-to-12 of the Scottish credit and qualifications framework (ibid.).

**Table 49. Maldives national qualifications framework (MNQF)**

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION
10	Doctoral degree Higher Professional Diploma Higher Professional Certificate
9	Master's degree Advanced Professional Diploma Advanced Professional Certificate
8	Graduate/ Postgraduate Diploma Graduate/ Postgraduate Certificate
7	Bachelor's Honours degree Bachelor's degree Professional Diploma, Professional Certificate
6	Advanced Diploma/ Associate degree/ Foundation degree

**Table 49. Maldives national qualifications framework (MNQF) (Continued)**

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION
5	Diploma
4	Certificate IV/ Advanced Diploma
3	Certificate III
2	Certificate II
1	Certificate I

Source: Maldives Accreditation Board, 2009

Certificate I recognizes the acquisition of core entry-level skills for a new worker. Certificates II, III and IV recognize increasing levels of competence up to the full range of skills required to qualify as a tradesperson. Diplomas, advanced diplomas and higher diplomas recognize technical-, managerial- and professional-level knowledge and skills.

The MNQF level descriptors set out the learning outcomes at each level. They provide a general understanding of each level and allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. The learning outcomes fall into five categories:

- knowledge and understanding;
- practice: applied knowledge and understanding;
- cognitive skills;
- communication, ICT, and numeracy skills;
- autonomy, accountability and working with others.

Through benchmarking already undertaken by the multinational education and examination body Edexcel, it is possible to assign General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) Grades D–G to Level 2, GCSE Grades A–C to Level 3, and A-levels to Level 4 of the MNQF (ibid.).

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

From 2010, the MQA has been the official accrediting agency of the Maldives. Prior to this, it was known as the MAB, formed by the president of the Maldives in 2000. Before the establishment of the MAB, the qualification recognition process was carried out by the Department of Public Examinations.

The functions of the MAB were handed over to the MQA on 17 May 2010. During the first meeting of the regulatory board of the MQA on 30 August 2010, it was decreed that all rules, regulations and procedures of the former MAB would be adhered

to by the MQA until otherwise decreed by the regulatory board (ibid.). The MQA's mandate is to assure the quality of post-secondary qualifications awarded for educational attainment (MQA, 2016). The process of revising the framework began in 2005 and was concluded in February 2009 after extensive research and discussion with experts and relevant authorities. The strengthened MNQF came into effect after the MAB formally endorsed it in September 2009. In September 2011, the MAB verified that all qualifications submitted for approval were consistent with the new national system.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The assigning of levels to all MQA-approved courses and the inclusion of all post-secondary qualifications under one banner – from initial certificates to advanced academic, technical and professional qualifications – facilitates students' progression pathways and encourages lifelong learning. All qualifications, regardless of subject area, can be recognized under the new competency-based framework. The MQA has included a full list of all approved local programmes on its website along with the associated levels.

Some students or workers may not achieve all of the competences required for a full technical and vocational qualification. Nevertheless, they are still able to receive an official record of that partial qualification (certificate of achievement). The credit system therefore allows students to receive credit for all achievements, no matter how modest. One credit is assigned when a learner achieves the learning outcomes for a specific 10-hour learning module. In higher education, this equates to 120 credits per academic year. The assessment system makes provision for credit accumulation and transfer, and allows for the recognition of prior learning and progress towards qualifications even without course attendance, since assessments can also be conducted in the workplace (ibid.).

### NQF implementation

Under the strengthened MNQF, trainers can modularize training in addition to developing full-time training programmes. Modular programmes offer workers part-time courses so that they can achieve a full qualification over time. The revised framework allows for a combination of theoretical instruction and workplace training, with assessment results being combined to count towards a full award.

Where qualifications are delivered through training institutions, the MAB proposes three areas of activity to support the new national qualifications arrangements:

- establishment of a quality management system at the time of registration;
- programme accreditation;
- ongoing monitoring and institutional quality audit (ibid.).

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The MQA's recognition of overseas institutions/colleges/universities is based on the following criteria:

- recognition of the institution/college/university in that particular country;
- recognition and acceptance of qualifications in the Maldives if those qualifications are issued by a government-recognized institution in the country of origin. Not all of the qualifications issued by a recognized institution/college/university are recognized by the MQA;
- the institutions/colleges/universities in question meet standards and criteria set by the MNQF.

The MQA also verifies the recognition status of academic programmes and institutions for individuals planning to enrol in a programme of study overseas.

The eight member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – unanimously adopted the SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030 at the Third Meeting of Ministers of Education/Higher Education held in Male, Maldives, in 2016. The ministers agreed that the objectives of this action plan are to establish, through regional collaboration and partnerships, a mechanism for the development and implementation of a regional framework for facilitating the comparability, mutual recognition, validation and accreditation of tertiary education qualifications, and for promoting the

mobility of students and faculty across the South Asian region (SAARC, 2016).

## Important lessons and future plans

The Government of the Maldives hopes that its strengthened MNQF will serve as a sustainable and strategic solution for the development of national and human resources. It is further hoped that the incorporation of national competency standards and a broader and more coherent technical and vocational qualifications system will allow for considerable flexibility in worker skills acquisition.

One of the lessons to be learned from the MNQF is the increase in international recognition of the qualifications, skills and knowledge of Maldivian citizens that is guaranteed by a shift to a unified qualifications system. The Maldives has been successful in making all qualifications consistent with the new national system. It has achieved this by requiring all existing qualifications to be submitted for approval by the MQA.

The MQA also plays a significant role in ensuring that students, employers, education providers and the community at large can easily understand the learning outcomes involved in various qualifications. Furthermore, the MQA has encouraged employers, parents and students to seek out only accredited programmes, while at the same time promoting quality assurance of teaching, assessment and certification.

### Abbreviations

ICT	information and communications technology
MAB	Maldives Accreditation Board
MNQF	Maldives national qualifications framework
MQA	Maldives Qualifications Authority
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation



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## Introduction and context

Malta has been investing significantly in its education and training system in recent years. The percentage of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) is smaller than the EU average (8.6% in 2016, compared to 11.5%) (European Commission, 2017) and employment rates of recent graduates are high (94.5 % in 2017, compared to the EU average of 80.2%) at all qualification levels (European Commission, 2018). However, the early school leaving rate – even if declining – is the highest in the EU at 18.6% in 2017. This may be improved in the future due to the current almost 100% rate of participation in early childhood education and care, and to specific measures taken by the government to address early school leaving. Student performance in reading, science and mathematics is below the EU averages, strongly linked to socioeconomic background and type of school. Despite government support for free access to tertiary education, the tertiary educational attainment rate of 30.0% is below the EU average of 39.9%). The country has the highest share of low-qualified adults in the EU and the foreign-born population living in Malta tends to be better qualified than the native population. Engaging low-skilled adults in lifelong learning is a challenge, with the rate of participation in adult learning at 10.1% (compared to the EU average of 10.9%). Various strategic measures have been taken to address skill shortages, encourage quality and inclusion, and improve learning outcomes. A framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning is already in place and a skills forecasting system is being developed. In the vocational education and training (VET) sector, efforts are focused on increasing the quality and societal relevance of the offer, and development of apprenticeship schemes and work-based learning. School education reforms aim to modernise curricula using a learning outcomes approach, to improve the training of teachers, and to promote proficiency in basic and digital skills (European Commission, 2018).

Malta has been putting in place its comprehensive national qualifications framework for lifelong

learning (MQF) since June 2007. It includes qualifications and awards at all levels acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. Important amendments in 2012 to the Education Act established the legal basis for the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE), replacing the Malta Qualifications Council and the National Commission for Higher Education. The NCFHE is responsible for all aspects of the MQF. In 2012, three legal notices were published: on quality assurance and licensing of further and higher education institutions and programmes<sup>581</sup>; on validation of informal and non-formal learning<sup>582</sup>; and on strengthening the legal basis of the MQF for lifelong learning as a regulatory framework for classification of qualifications and awards<sup>583</sup>. Malta was the first country to reference the MQF to two European overarching frameworks: the European qualifications framework (EQF) and the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA), as well as the transnational qualifications framework of the small States of the Commonwealth (TQF).

The referencing report was revised several times, with the latest version published in February 2016<sup>584</sup>. This report has updated the MQF by introducing two additional levels covering learning below level 1: introductory level A and introductory level B. These new levels have been introduced to recognise any prior learning, as well as to provide a stepping stone towards MQF/EQF level 1 and further learning and employment.

## Policy objectives

The Malta qualifications framework (MQF) makes the qualifications system easier to understand and review, and more transparent at national and international levels. This framework also functions as a referencing tool for describing and comparing

<sup>581</sup> See Government of Malta (2012a).

<sup>582</sup> See Government of Malta (2012b).

<sup>583</sup> See Government of Malta (2012c).

<sup>584</sup> See NCFHE (2016a).

national and foreign qualifications to promote and address the following issues:

- a. transparency and understanding of qualifications;
- b. valuing all formal, informal and non-formal learning;
- c. consistency and coherence with European and international qualifications frameworks;
- d. parity of esteem of qualifications from different learning pathways, including vocational and professional degrees and academic study programmes;
- e. lifelong learning, access and progression and mobility;
- f. the shift towards learning outcomes-based qualifications;
- g. a credit structure and units as qualification building blocks;
- h. the concept of mutual trust through quality assurance mechanisms running across all levels of the framework.

The MQF is seen as an important tool in promoting lifelong learning and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Its quality assurance function is getting stronger in line with the national quality assurance framework for further and higher education institutions<sup>585</sup>. The NCFHE has implemented its legal obligation to set up a national external quality audit system that complements the internal quality assurance mechanisms of individual further and higher education bodies. The framework provides the conceptual context for this work, and situates it in the paramount need to develop a national quality culture<sup>586</sup>.

<sup>585</sup> This framework was presented in a consultative conference with stakeholders on 25 July 2014 and was officially launched on 1 July 2015. The national quality assurance framework for further and higher education was a key deliverable of the European Social Fund (ESF) project 1.227 *Making quality visible*. <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/Quality%20Assurance/National%20Quality%20Assurance%20Framework%20for%20Further%20and%20Higher%20Education.pdf>

<sup>586</sup> According to the national quality assurance framework, self-accrediting entities shall have processes for the design and approval of their programmes that are in line with the MQF and the Malta referencing report 2012 and subsequent updates. The provider and programme/course accreditation procedures are presently being revised. At a second stage, the framework shall be expanded to incorporate adapted provider and programme/course accreditation procedures and adapted procedures for all categories of entities. In the third stage of the development of the framework, it will be reviewed to consider how best to incorporate quality assurance requirements for informal and non-formal learning (NCFHE, 2015b).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

Strengthening the learning outcomes approach has become fundamental to education and training reform and has been applied across all qualifications and levels in recent years. The education strategy framework 2014–24 – *Sustaining foundations, creating alternatives, increasing employability*<sup>587</sup> – has reinforced the intention to adopt a learning outcomes approach in all sectors of education and training linked to the MQF, and to update existing learning programmes and assessment modes. The MQF has eight learning-outcomes-based qualification levels, plus the two additional entry levels below level 1; introductory levels A and B. These two new levels have no equivalence on the EQF. The descriptors highlight specific attributes: communication, judgemental and learning skills, and the complexity, volume and level of learning expected for the particular qualification or award. Progression within the MQF is recorded in terms of:

- a. knowledge and understanding;
- b. applying knowledge and understanding;
- c. communication skills;
- d. judgemental skills;
- e. learning skills;
- f. autonomy and responsibility.

There is increased focus on the review and revision of the level descriptors of the MQF and further promotion of digital skills following input from a consultation committee on such skills<sup>588</sup>. The results arising from the review of the digital life-skills, digital workplace skills and digital expert skills required, and the extent to which these are mirrored in the level descriptors of the MQF or require revision, will be presented in a national colloquium to be held in October 2019.

The MQF includes all types of qualification, including general, vocational, higher education and adult education, acquired in formal, non-formal and informal learning; it provides a clear commitment to focus on the learning outcomes approach at policy level. The reference levels are useful for education and training providers as they describe the knowledge, skills and competences and a set of learning outcomes which indicate what the learner

<sup>587</sup> Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2014a).

<sup>588</sup> The consultation committee will be supported in its work by staff from the NCFHE, which will support the scheduling, organising and reporting of the meetings held. The results of the meetings of the consultation committee will advise the NCFHE on the review and revision of the level descriptors of the MQF, if applicable, and the further promotion of digital skills in Malta (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

would have achieved at the end of the learning process (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

One of the tasks of the NCFHE has been to introduce national standards of knowledge, skills and competences, and to ensure that these are systematically implemented, used and revised. Courses accredited by the NCFHE and those by the self-accrediting education and training providers (public, further and higher education institutions) use the learning outcomes approach.

The report *A national curriculum framework for all* outlines the role of learning outcomes in general education<sup>589</sup>. The reform of the national curriculum framework has led to the development of learning outcomes for all subjects in compulsory education; this aims to move away from a prescriptive curriculum based on standalone subjects and promote inclusion, diversity and citizenship. During 2016, a plan to introduce the learning outcomes framework was prepared by the government<sup>590</sup> to support the national curriculum framework implementation. The national curriculum framework and the learning outcomes framework together form the backbone of education programmes in Malta. The learning outcomes framework will be implemented by September 2019, under the new 2017 collective agreement<sup>591</sup>. This agreement applies to all teaching grades in state schools and also in church schools, following agreement between the Maltese Government and the Holy See<sup>592</sup>. The aim of the framework is to achieve a more learner-centred education, where learning progress is documented for each student and learning is targeted to their stage of development; new learning outcome programmes and syllabi will be introduced for kindergarten years 1, 3 and 7<sup>593</sup>. It is eventually intended to

lead to more curricular autonomy for colleges and schools, to address better the learning needs of students<sup>594</sup>. The *One tablet per child* (OTPC) project<sup>595</sup> at primary level is in its second year of implementation, while in 2018, all student-teachers received pre-service teacher training in using tablets (European Commission, 2018).

The government is also working on a reform called *My journey: achieving through different paths*, that is expected to be implemented in lower secondary school in the school year 2019/20<sup>596</sup>. The aim of this reform is to move from a 'one size fits all' system to more inclusive one catering to pupils' individual aptitudes, and to make it more equitable to reduce the number of early school leavers<sup>597</sup>. Under the current system, students are focused mainly on areas of general education, such as science and business. But, in recent years, several vocational subjects were introduced and learning outcomes developed to be offered at levels 1–3 on the MQF (European Commission, 2017).

The MQF is intended to ensure that VET curricula are focused on key competences and learning outcomes based on feedback from industry. Malta is developing occupational standards to inform the VET programmes. With the introduction of the work-based learning and apprenticeship Act that came into force in 2018<sup>598</sup>, a framework was provided for the development of effective work placements, apprenticeships and internships.

Malta also has a range of adult education courses accredited and level-rated on the MQF. These qualifications and awards enable adults to engage in lifelong learning and perhaps to progress to higher MQF levels. The programmes of

<sup>589</sup> See Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2012).

<sup>590</sup> [www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/](http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/)

<sup>591</sup> In December 2017, the Malta Union of Teachers and the Education Ministry signed a sectoral agreement for 2018–22. The agreement includes a significant salary increase for educators across the different levels; allowances for professional development and career progression based on voluntary professional development (European Commission, 2018).

<sup>592</sup> The Holy See (not the State of Vatican City) maintains formal diplomatic relations with, and for the most recent establishment of diplomatic relations with, 183 sovereign states, and also with the European Union, and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy\\_See](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_See)

<sup>593</sup> The development of the learning outcomes framework includes ten levels of achievement. In a differentiated learning context, different learners in the same classroom will naturally be progressing at different rates through these levels of attainment, and the teaching and learning will need to cater for this diversity.

<sup>594</sup> The ESF 1.228 project *Design of learning outcomes framework, associated learning and assessment programmes and related training* is intended to deliver this learning outcomes framework approach to the educators within compulsory schooling and relevant stakeholders. [www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/pages/about-the-framework](http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/pages/about-the-framework)

<sup>595</sup> This project is jointly financed by the ESF. More information at: [www.digital.edu.mt/](http://www.digital.edu.mt/)

<sup>596</sup> See Ministry for Education and Employment (2016).

<sup>597</sup> The Ministry for Education and Employment has already set up a committee of different education bodies such as the University of Malta and Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) to provide training for new and existing teachers. The Haaga Helia University of Sciences will provide training to teachers in vocational education. [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments-43\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments-43_en)

<sup>598</sup> More information at: [www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/malta-work-based-learning-and-apprenticeship-act-comes-force](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/malta-work-based-learning-and-apprenticeship-act-comes-force)

self-accrediting institutions<sup>599</sup> are subject to external quality assurance audits where they are checked for a learning outcomes base distinguishing between knowledge, skills and competences (NCFHE, 2016c).

Learning programmes being developed in higher education are remodelled based on learning outcomes. The course descriptions are the ones offered by the state VET providers, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology and the Institute of Tourism Studies, and the higher education provider University of Malta. The licensed private further and higher education institutions whose courses are accredited by NCFHE are also described in terms of learning outcomes (NCFHE, 2016a).

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

A wide range of stakeholders has been involved in developing and setting up the MQF. The Malta Qualifications Council initiated the work, following Legal Notice 347 of 2005<sup>600</sup> in cooperation with stakeholders, including ministries and the National Commission for Higher Education.

The NCFHE (under the Ministry of Education and Employment) is the authority responsible for all aspects of the MQF implementation, particularly for maintaining the Malta qualifications framework. It is also the EQF national coordination point (NCP) for Malta and runs the Qualifications and Recognition Information Centre (QRIC) which is responsible for providing the referencing and equivalence of foreign qualifications. The NCFHE acts as the competent authority for licensing, accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of providers and programmes as provided by the Act No XIII of 2012 (NCFHE, 2016a).

From a labour market sectoral perspective, the NCFHE is charged with leading the development and implementation of occupational standards in cooperation with social partners, the sector skills committee and sector skills units.

The NCFHE is also responsible for convening meetings with key stakeholders on sector skills units. It approves and ensures the publication of national standards of knowledge, skills,

competences and attitudes for selected occupations within the economic sectors for which a sector skills unit is in place.

The MQF is seen to have improved cooperation between stakeholders (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018) through meetings such as the annual national colloquium and the Network on Quality Assurance Professionals in Further and Higher Education, known as Net-QAPE<sup>601</sup>.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>602</sup>

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Malta is regulated by Subsidiary Legislation 327.432 of 2012<sup>603</sup>, which sets the principles for the process. In addition, the value and importance of validation are emphasised in several national policy documents, published during 2014–16 but remaining valid in 2018, reinforcing the potential of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Malta. These documents include: Malta's *National lifelong learning strategy 2020*<sup>604</sup> that sets a target for setting up a transparent and sustainable system within NCFHE to validate and recognise non-formal and informal learning by the end of 2016; and the *National youth policy: towards 2020*<sup>605</sup> published in 2015 and stating that the validation of non-formal and informal learning would be pursued.

The 2012 legislation designates the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) as the authority responsible for introducing a national validation system and for establishing the necessary structures. The NCFHE

<sup>599</sup> In Malta there are self-accrediting education and training institutions as identified by Subsidiary Legislation 327.433. These include the main state further and higher education institutions: the University of Malta; the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology; and the Institute of Tourism Studies.

<sup>600</sup> See Government of Malta (2012d).

<sup>601</sup> In December 2013 the NCFHE set up the Network on Quality Assurance Professionals in Further and Higher Education, known as Net-QAPE. The aim of Net-QAPE is to bring together all personnel involved in quality assurance in the education sector, to provide concrete and continuing support, upskilling and continuous professional development. Net-QAPE is a key concept in the commitment of the NCFHE to developing a National further and higher education quality assurance framework, which will be the basis for internal and external quality processes and audits. <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Documents/QA%20Communications/2014/Comm%20No%2006%202014%20-%20First%20Meeting%20of%20Net-QAPE.pdf>

<sup>602</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update of the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al. (forthcoming)).

<sup>603</sup> See Government of Malta (2012e).

<sup>604</sup> See Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2014b).

<sup>605</sup> See Parliamentary Secretariat for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport (2015).

has been responsible for providing the resources needed for validation of informal and non-formal learning to function effectively and for leading the development and implementation of national occupational standards in specified areas. The national occupational standards published by the NCFHE consist of a set of job-related standards that highlight the performance expected from an individual when carrying out a specific function.

The NCFHE extended the process to more sectors through the continuing development of sector skills units<sup>606</sup>. Validation is now available in the following sectors: hairdressing, childcare, and building and construction sectors, for which validation has started to take place. The NCFHE has also extended the number of sector skills units to eight with the introduction of the IT Sector Skills Unit in August 2018. Validation in the automotive sector started in November 2017 while discussions have taken place to start validation and introducing ECVET points with the validation awards in the tourism sector. The entities entrusted with the validation process have also been extended from Jobsplus<sup>607</sup> in childcare to the Institute of Tourism Studies. The NCFHE signed a memorandum of understanding with the Institute of Tourism Studies to carry out assessment for the hospitality and tourism sector<sup>608</sup>.

In response to labour market needs and to overcome skills gaps, the government set up the National Skills Council in 2016<sup>609</sup>. The functions of the council are stated as similar to that of a consultative committee, working on different sectors and undertaking the role of highlighting needs. One of the areas that the National Skills Council has identified is digital competences. This links to occupational standards currently being developed, including those in IT, and which can serve as a basis for the development of validation of informal and non-formal learning in the sector. In total, 27 occupational standards are

published on the NCFHE website<sup>610</sup> and another 28 are being drawn up.

The fourth edition of the referencing report of the Malta qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework<sup>611</sup>, published in 2016, reflects a move towards a more modular based concept as building blocks for qualifications. Such an approach allows for better integration of non-formal learning within mainstream education routes, as well as setting out the principles on which validation of informal and non-formal learning is to be based.

Malta has been working towards the implementation of 2012 Council recommendations<sup>612</sup>. The process has not been as fast as desired, but the extension to a number of sectors registered, as well as the full implementation of validation of non-formal and informal, learning is promising. The NCFHE has also worked on providing information and training to further and higher education and training providers on the validation of non-formal and informal learning so that they can familiarise themselves with the concept. Greater effort to extend validation to a wider number of sectors is still needed. Ensuring parity of esteem of qualifications obtained through validation in the labour market, and for further education as part of lifelong learning, remains a challenge.

## NQF implementation

The MQF is operational; key documents and responsibilities for its implementation have been agreed among stakeholders and published<sup>613</sup>. The MQF forms an integrated part of the overall national qualification system, including links to relevant legislation and policy strategies, the *National lifelong learning strategy 2020*<sup>614</sup>, the *National literacy strategy for all in Malta and Gozo 2014–19*<sup>615</sup> and the *Strategic plan for the prevention of early school leaving in Malta 2014*<sup>616</sup>.

The main body responsible for the MQF is the NCFHE (the former Malta Qualifications Council and the National Commission for Higher Education

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<sup>606</sup> A key function of the units is to develop and propose to this committee guidelines and mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning for all skills within their respective sector. They also ensure that validation institutions are meeting the required standards set out for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. These sector skills units will identify the different jobs in their particular sector, outline the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform these jobs and map them against the NQF.

<sup>607</sup> Jobsplus is the successor to the Employment and Training Corporation; its objective is to meet the needs of employers, jobseekers and employees: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/>

<sup>608</sup> More information available at: [www.cedefop.europa.eu/el/news-and-press/news/malta-vinfl-takes](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/el/news-and-press/news/malta-vinfl-takes)

<sup>609</sup> See Government of Malta (2016).

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<sup>610</sup> [https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Pages/All%20Services/vinfl\\_nos.aspx](https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Pages/All%20Services/vinfl_nos.aspx)

<sup>611</sup> See NCFHE (2016a).

<sup>612</sup> See Council of the European Union (2012).

<sup>613</sup> See the relevant legislation at the end of this report: Government of Malta (2012a, 2012b and 2012f).

<sup>614</sup> See Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2014b).

<sup>615</sup> <https://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Literacy/ENGLISH.pdf>

<sup>616</sup> <https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Policy%20Documents%202014/School%20Leaving%20in%20Malta%20June%202014.pdf>

merged in 2012); it decides which qualifications and awards to include in the framework. This agency stipulates strategic policies for further and higher education, promotes and maintains the MQF, accredits and licenses all further (post-secondary) and higher education institutions and programmes, and assists training providers in designing qualifications, assessment and certification. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (based at the Ministry of Education and Employment) is responsible for quality assurance and standards in compulsory education.

Qualifications and awards included in the MQF should satisfy the following conditions (Government of Malta 2012c):

- a. be issued by nationally accredited institutions;
- b. be based on learning outcomes;
- c. be internally and externally quality assured;
- d. be based on workload composed of identified credit value;
- e. be awarded on successful completion of formal assessment procedures.

The term 'qualification' refers to substantial courses based on learning outcomes at the respective MQF level and a required minimum number of credits, whereas 'award' refers to courses which fulfil the level of learning, but not the requirement in terms of minimum credits. The terms are used to distinguish between 'full qualifications' and shorter courses at the respective level.

Following the setting up of the ESF project 1.227 *Making quality visible*<sup>617</sup>, the NCFHE has established the national quality assurance framework (NCFHE, 2015a), which sets the standards for internal and external quality assurance for all further and higher education providers. Another key deliverable was the manual of procedures for external quality assurance<sup>618</sup>, which set out procedures for the implementation of external quality audits. In 2015, the first three pilot external audits were conducted with the University of Malta, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, and the Institute of Tourism Studies<sup>619</sup>. The outcomes of the external audit pilots contributed to the development of a quality assurance system to be adapted for validation. The quality assurance arrangements have not changed since 2016, with the NCFHE remaining the designated competent authority for licensing, accreditation and quality assurance of providers

<sup>617</sup> ESF project 1.227 *Making quality visible*. [https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/Projects/ESF%201.227%20Making%20Quality%20Visible/esf1227\\_making\\_quality\\_visible.aspx](https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/Projects/ESF%201.227%20Making%20Quality%20Visible/esf1227_making_quality_visible.aspx)

<sup>618</sup> See NCFHE (2016c).

<sup>619</sup> <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Pages/All%20Services/eqaa.aspx>

and programmes, including cross-border provision from Malta or in Malta. The Quality Assurance Department, within the Directorate for Curriculum, Lifelong Learning and Employability will also provide quality assurance support<sup>620</sup>.

A register of accredited further and higher education institutions and a national register of qualifications have been set up<sup>621</sup>. Qualifications from VET and higher education have been included in the national register, as well as non-formal and private ones. International qualifications have not yet been included. MQF and EQF levels are included in new certificates and diplomas and Europass supplements. The Malta College for Arts, Sciences and Technology and the University of Malta use NQF (and EQF) levels on certificate and diploma supplements.

The national colloquium is expected to launch the revised national qualifications database in the next year<sup>622</sup>. In November 2018, stakeholders discussed the development of a new qualification database, the introduction of the sectoral framework and the setting up of a new working group, which will also be composed of licenced educational providers as partners.

The NCFHE also maintains the register of accredited further and higher education institutions<sup>623</sup>, in accordance with Subsidiary Legislation 327.433 on licensing, accreditation and quality assurance<sup>624</sup>. The growth in licence holders from 30 in 2007 to 140 in 2016 has necessitated the publication of this register. It also includes a list of accredited courses offered by licensed institutions with reference to both the MQF and the EQF. This register highlights the level of each course accredited and is updated weekly.

An effective network to promote use of the NQF has been established with employers by the NCFHE through its qualifications recognition information centre. Both employers and individuals are invited to attend information sessions and seminars where they are given information about the MQF and other developments in further and higher education.

Other methods of informing potential users about the framework include social media and the NCFHE website, which is continuously updated, as well as

<sup>620</sup> <https://education.gov.mt/en/education/quality-assurance/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>621</sup> <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/register/Pages/register.aspx>

<sup>622</sup> This will allow for both the presentation of the findings from the review and linking it with available, accredited programmes so that individuals interested in developing their education in digital skills will find it easy to find relevant accredited programmes.

<sup>623</sup> Both registers are available at: <http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/register/Pages/register.aspx>

<sup>624</sup> See Government of Malta (2012a).

dissemination of information posters, leaflets and an explanatory video to public and private education institutions, local councils, and other government entities. Jobsplus<sup>625</sup> also uses the MQF as its main criterion for issuing work permits, and MQF levels are used in incentive schemes such as scholarships and tax rebates (Cedefop, 2017). The NCFHE intends to cooperate with the Europass and Euroguidance contact points in Malta. Employers use the MQF in their recruitment and career development practices and the public sector specifies the required MQF level in its vacancy notices (Cedefop, 2017). There is a planned communication strategy that will include the dissemination of a joint leaflet for the three networks in exhibitions and fairs and an update of the MQF's website.

The MQF is used by education and training institutions and providers, guidance and counselling practitioners, though the level of awareness differs. A study on the widespread understanding and appreciation of the Malta qualifications framework (MQF) and the European qualifications framework (EQF)<sup>626</sup> was conducted by the NCFHE in 2016. Its aim was to identify the level of usefulness and methods of use of the MQF as well as its link to the EQF. One of the key messages of the study was that while the level of awareness of the MQF was high (6.9 out of 10), the awareness of the link between the MQF and the EQF was lower (6.61 out of 10). Awareness was greater for those making regular use of the MQF. The role of academics and parents as multipliers of information on the MQF and its link to the EQF remained limited. This stresses the importance of direct and regular engagement with both frameworks to ensure good public awareness. Respondents to the survey stressed the need for the MQF to contribute to simplifying and accelerating accreditation, recognition and validation processes for the benefit of all involved (NCFHE, 2016b).

Another message was that MQF needs to strike an adequate balance between its institutional and intrinsic logic to ensure that it is flexible enough to encompass all learning. The rationale which underpins the design and implementation of the NQF should correspond to the ways in which education institutions, employers and others actually use and value qualifications (Raffe, 2009). In connection to the study, further research is to be conducted under the EQF-NCP 2018–20 project. This includes focusing on review of MQF operating procedures, the body in charge of it, and consultation with stakeholders.

<sup>625</sup> Previously known as the Employment and Training Corporation: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/>

<sup>626</sup> See NCFHE (2016b).

A consultation committee is expected to be set up to review the framework and its impact. The committee will be supported in its work by the MQF Coordinator as this will assist the scheduling, organising and reporting of the meetings held. The results of the committee meetings will advise the NCFHE on the development of a systematic review mechanism for the MQF, the implementation of impact assessment, and recommendations for revisions of the MQF arising from such an impact assessment.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

In 2009, Malta was the first Member State to prepare a single, joint report which referenced the MQF to both the EQF and the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) (Malta Qualifications Council and Maltese Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, 2009). This approach has been followed by many other countries in their own referencing process. The establishment and referencing of the MQF have led to substantial modernisation. Further editions were published in 2010, 2012 and 2016<sup>627</sup>. The last – the fourth edition – is in use and reflects the range of reforms that have taken place within the education system over the past few years (NCFHE, 2016a). The MQF is also referenced to the transnational qualifications framework of the small States of the Commonwealth (TQF). The 2016 referencing report is currently being revised to include validation of non-formal and informal learning.

## Important lessons and future plans

Development of the MQF has served as a catalyst for education reform, addressing key challenges in education, training and the labour market. Consultation on the development of the MQF and preparation for referencing to the EQF and the QF-EHEA were interrelated processes that helped bridge the gap between stakeholders from different subsystems of education and employment. The updated referencing report<sup>628</sup> and the development of the national quality assurance framework for further and higher education<sup>629</sup>, as well as the higher education strategy<sup>630</sup> which proposes further changes in the validation of informal and non-formal learning, are important reforms aimed at increasing lifelong learning, mobility and employability.

<sup>627</sup> See all four editions online: [http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/referencing\\_report.aspx](http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/referencing_report.aspx)

<sup>628</sup> See NCFHE, 2016a.

<sup>629</sup> See NCFHE, 2015b.

<sup>630</sup> See NCFHE, 2015a.



Quality assurance in further and higher education has been important in guaranteeing transparency and efficiency in both state and non-state sectors. Its function is getting stronger as it safeguards the quality of further and higher education within the economic, social and cultural context, at national, European and international levels. All courses accredited by the NCFHE are included in the national register for accredited courses with identifiable credit points, improving quality in the educational system.

Despite the improvements brought about by the development and introduction of the MQF, there are still issues to be addressed. Although there has been a move towards a more modular concept as building blocks for qualifications to support lifelong learning and non-traditional learners, the development of accreditation and quality assurance

parameters for digital/online learning is needed, as well as for work-based learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The easier movement of students between general education and vocational streams is also important, along with better integration of non-formal learning within mainstream education.

The main future challenges lie with the writing of learning outcomes in specific study programmes and further promotion of the MQF, and transitions towards online learning. Since awareness and use of the MQF appear to be interlinked, the benefit and relevance of the framework to the needs of different actors needs to be ensured and made clearer. Solid guidance tools, regular dialogue and continuous improvement based on the feedback from users, have been highlighted as important, by the study on the widespread understanding and appreciation of the MQF.

**Table 50. Maltese national qualifications framework (MQF)**

NQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATIONS	EQF LEVELS	
8	Doctoral degree	8	
7	Master degree Postgraduate diploma Postgraduate certificate	7	
6	Bachelor degree	6	
5	Undergraduate diploma Undergraduate certificate	VET higher diploma foundation degree	5
4	Matriculation certificate Advanced level Intermediate level	VET diploma (iv)	4
3	General education (level 3) Secondary school certificate grade 1–5	VET level 3 (iii)	3
2	General education (level 2) Secondary school certificate grade 6–7	VET level 2 (ii)	2
1	General education (level 1) School leaving certificate	VET level 1 (i)	1
B	Introductory level B*		
A	Introductory level A*		

(\* These are not yet included in legislation.

- (i) A full VET level 1 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as a full secondary school certificate and profile (SSC&P) Level 1.
- (ii) A full VET level 2 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as four secondary education certificate subjects at grade 6–7.
- (iii) A VET level 3 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as six secondary education certificate subjects at grades 1–5.
- (iv) A VET diploma should enjoy the same parity of esteem as the matriculation certificate.

Source: Adapted from NCFHE (2016a).

**Abbreviations**

EQF	European qualifications framework	Net-QAPE	Network on quality assurance professionals in further and higher education
ESF	European Social Fund	NQF	national qualifications framework
MQF	Malta qualifications framework	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework in the European higher education area
NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education	VET	vocational education and training
NCP	national coordination point		

**Further sources of information**

NCFHE – designated national coordination point: <http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/default.aspx>

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## Introduction

One of the most significant challenges currently facing Mauritius is the need to make education and qualifications more relevant to the world of work. To do this, it is necessary to raise the status of vocational training. According to Dr Kaylash Allgoo, director of the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA), if problems such as the skills crisis, unemployment and lack of social mobility in Mauritius are to be solved, it is vital to change the perception that vocational qualifications are for people of lesser intelligence (Allgoo, 2013).

Prior to the introduction of the Mauritius qualifications framework (MQF), there were a large number of education and training providers offering a huge variety of courses. There was no standardisation in subject area, level, duration or quality. The certificates offered by these providers often contained no information about the learning outcomes achieved in course attendance. As a result, the career pathways available to qualification holders were limited. Many were also hampered by historic regulations and bureaucracy. The system was widely seen as elitist, since only a fortunate few were able to gain entry into reputable institutions. Further, the certification system did not recognise learning, skills and knowledge acquired in informal or non-formal settings (Keevy et al., 2011, p. 57).

Lacking natural resources, Mauritius's only resource is its human capital. As in all parts of the world, rapid technological change in recent years has created a powerful demand for new skills and left the unskilled less employable. In this unforgiving labour market, the gap is widening between those who are sufficiently qualified to stay afloat and those who are not. It is essential that Mauritius gives its citizens the opportunity to gain the skills and qualifications they need to sustain themselves throughout their lives.

## Policy objectives

The MQA was developed to improve the articulation between education, training and the world of work and to ensure that training responds to the changing standards and demands set by industry.

More specifically, the MQF was established to:

- a. raise the value of vocational qualifications;
- b. integrate education and training and promote lifelong learning;
- c. improve the quality of training provision and provide quality assurance;
- d. promote the mutual recognition of Mauritian and foreign qualifications;
- e. give learners a clear indication of the level of their learning and the possibilities for further progression;
- f. recognize and formally certify competences obtained outside formal education and training.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The MQA was established as a body under the Mauritius Qualifications Authority Act 2001 and operates under the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research. The MQA is the national regulator of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector and custodian of the national qualifications framework. As such, it has the responsibility to ensure compliance with provisions for registration and accreditation of training providers, that standards and qualifications are internationally comparable and to recognize and validate competences acquired outside of the formal education and training system.

The main provider of TVET in Mauritius is the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development,

under the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, which is currently operating 22 training centres in the country. The Human Resource Development Council, also operating under the Ministry, facilitates training through the management of the training levy/grant scheme in the country.

Other stakeholders include the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, which has the mandate to organize and conduct examinations in Mauritius both for general/academic and TVET programmes.

The MQA Act was amended in 2005, giving the MQA the new function of evaluating and establishing equivalences between qualifications obtained in the primary, secondary and post-secondary sectors, and those obtained in non-formal and informal settings, for example through workplace learning. The MQA also establishes 355 equivalences between foreign and local qualifications. It has set up 20 industrial training advisory committees comprising experts from both the public and private sectors.

In the course of this work, a number of fruitful collaborations have been established to develop qualifications in particular areas. For example, the MQA has worked together with the Mauritius Institute of Health to develop qualifications in health and social care. Such collaborations have been consolidated over the years, and sustainable relationships have been built with the stakeholders involved.

Qualifications are included in the MQF based on their potential to equip learners with the skills required to meet the demands of the economy. The industrial training advisory committees oversee the quality, relevance and international comparability of MQF qualifications, making sure that they are 'fit for purpose' and accord with industry expectations.

So far the MQA has generated some 143 qualifications together with 3,710 unit standards in the following sectors: agriculture, automobiles, adult literacy, beauty and hairdressing, building construction and civil works, early childhood education and care, electrical and electronics engineering, furniture-making, handicrafts, health and social care, information and communications technology, jewellery-making, language, management, mechanical engineering, printing, seafood and marine industry, textiles and apparel, tourism and hospitality, and transport and logistics.

MQF qualifications are offered by both public and private providers.

Only nationally recognized qualifications from accredited awarding bodies are included in the MQF. At present there are four awarding bodies: the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development, the Mauritius Institute of Health, the University of Mauritius, and the University of Technology. International awarding bodies include the City and Guilds and the Association of Business Executives.

One of the functions of the MQA is to register and accredit training institutions. Currently, around 525 training providers are registered with the MQA, offering TVET programmes both with and without awards. Training institutions have to meet strict requirements regarding safety, security, finances, equipment, resources and infrastructure. The MQA has formulated a set of quality assurance standards in accordance with the MQA Act 2001, starting with the registration of training institutions and staff, and the accreditation of programmes. Institutions are registered for up to three years subject to continued compliance with conditions and regulations, in order to safeguard the interests of learners. The MQA accredits courses through a three-stage process.

- a. A self-evaluation report is prepared by the training institution based on criteria defined by the MQA.
- b. The report is validated following an on-site visit by a team appointed by the MQA.
- c. Accreditation is recommended by the accreditation committee and approved by the director of the MQA.

The MQA also approves non-award courses intended to upgrade skills and employability. Approval of non-award courses not only ensures the quality of education and training offered, but also encourages lifelong learning. However, non-award courses are not registered on the MQF.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The MQF is a 10-level framework ranging from Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC) at level 1 up to doctorates at level 10. It covers all three education sectors: primary and secondary education (levels 1–5), TVET/workplace training (levels 1–10) and tertiary education (levels 6–10). MQF levels are described with descriptors which state the expected learning outcomes thus facilitating links between the different streams.

**Table 51. Mauritius qualifications framework (MQF)**



**MAURITIUS QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**  
THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

LEVEL	PRIMARY / SECONDARY EDUCATION	TVET / WORKPLACE	TERTIARY EDUCATION	LEVEL
10			Doctorate	10
9			Masters Degrees e.g. MA, MSc, MPhil Post-Graduate Diploma, Post-Graduate Certificate	9
8			Bachelor Degree with Honours	8
7			Bachelor (Ordinary Degree)	7
6		National Diploma Level 6	Diploma	6
5	HSC / GCE 'A' Level / BAC / IBAC / HSC Professional	National Certificate Level 5	Certificate	5
4		National Certificate Level 4		4
3	SC / GCE 'O' Level	National Certificate Level 3		3
2	National Certificate of Education (NCE)	National Certificate Level 2		2
1	Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC)	National Certificate Level 1		1

**Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

A significant proportion of the Mauritian labour force have acquired skills and competences through workplace or other forms of non-formal or informal learning, without having undergone any academic or formal training.

The MQA has introduced mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) with the aim to 'recognize and validate competences for the purpose of certification obtained outside the formal education and training systems'. RPL renders visible, and rewards, knowledge and skills, no matter what learning environment they were acquired in, allowing individuals greater mobility within the labour market. People who have dropped out of the education and training system can now re-enter it without starting again at the lowest level. They can acquire qualifications from levels 2–4 of the MQF through validation of their prior learning.

The RPL process comprises four stages: pre-application, pre-screening, facilitation and

assessment. Candidates are provided with services and support in terms of advice and counselling in the first stages of the process. The MQA ensures that they are eligible to claim RPL and have selected the appropriate qualifications. In the facilitation stage candidates are assigned a facilitator who helps them to build a portfolio of evidence to be submitted for assessment. At the assessment stage, the awarding body compares this with the standards required at the level assessed before awarding a formal qualification.

The RPL model has been widely accepted by all stakeholders. Employers have welcomed RPL since it provides them with qualified and well-motivated personnel. Since the pathways for further learning have been clearly defined, some trade unions have shown greater interest in the system.

Pilot RPL projects have been funded by the National Empowerment Foundation. Training of RPL facilitators and assessors is a continuous process with the ultimate aim of implementing RPL in all sectors. Awareness campaigns have been organized throughout the island to inform the public about the development and benefits of the MQF and RPL.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Mutual recognition and harmonisation of qualifications frameworks across the globe is rapidly becoming a necessity. The MQA has signed memoranda of technical cooperation with Barbados, Botswana, Namibia, The Gambia, Ghana, Réunion, Seychelles, Tanzania and Zambia. The MQA is working in close collaboration with countries in the African region through the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, an initiative of ministers of education which aims to build human resource capacity in small Commonwealth countries to stimulate an increase in the courses they offer and to facilitate the transfer of credits and qualified people across borders.

The MQA is a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation and works towards aligning the MQA to the SADC qualifications framework.

## Important lessons and future plans

The process of designing and implementing the MQF has led to enhanced synergy between academia and the TVET sector, as well as between education and training and the world of work. This is partly due to the improved visibility of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning as a result of the MQF.

The Mauritius education and training system is currently undergoing reforms with the introduction of the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) plan implemented in 2017. The NYCBE is in line with the international commitment to the UN SDGs and aims, among others, to 'give greater recognition to the value of TVET in building human

capital that will spearhead the transformation of the Republic into a knowledge-based, skills driven economy' (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, 2016).

TVET has therefore an important role to play in the NYCBE. Entry to TVET will be delayed until the end of basic education (abolishing pre-vocational education) and new pathways at post-secondary and tertiary education will be opened for TVET graduates, notably with the establishment of polytechnics. The latter currently offer programmes in ICT, hospitality and tourism, languages, engineering and health.

Another relevant development is the introduction by the MQA of the new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for the TVET sector. It aims to ensure that the MQA and training institutions work together to enhance the quality of TVET and to have a single unified quality assurance process for the promotion of the sector. The QAF comprises the following components: (i) the QAF process; (ii) quality principles; (iii) self-assessment report; and (iv) audit (MQA, 2018).

### Abbreviations

MQA	Mauritius Qualifications Authority
MQF	Mauritius qualifications framework
NYCBE	nine-year continuous basic education plan
QAF	quality assurance framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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## Introduction and context

The Mexican qualifications framework (Marco Mexicano de Cualificaciones [MMC]) is a comprehensive framework developed by the General Directorate of Accreditation, Authorisation and Recognition (Dirección General de Acreditación, Incorporación y Revalidación [DGAIR]), within the Secretariat of Public Education (DGAIR, 2011a).

While Mexico's economic productivity has grown over the last two decades, the pace of growth today is lower than in other emerging economies. This is largely attributable to deficiencies in human capital, workforce training and education. The country was ranked 100<sup>th</sup> overall out of 148 countries, 124<sup>th</sup> in mathematics and science, 81<sup>st</sup> in information and communications technology, and 75<sup>th</sup> in the uptake of new technology in business.

Due to demographic changes and migration of many young people to the USA, a gradual aging of the population has taken place. At the same time, the proportion of people who never entered school or who left school early is higher than those who are registered in initial education. Regardless of these facts, Mexican society is credentialist and places high importance on qualification levels. Raising levels of education, skills development and social engagement are therefore seen as crucial for the continued development of a strong social and economic democracy in Mexico.

Over the last decade, capacity building in higher education has been the main concern of the Mexican higher education policy. The gross enrolment ratio of 19- to 23-year-olds was only 13% in 1991–92, yet reached 32.4 two decades later. In 2008, however, Mexico's enrolment coverage was still the lowest among the big countries in Latin America, which includes Argentina, Brazil and Chile, and was the lowest recorded by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), where most countries are well above 50 or even 70% (e.g., in the Nordic region).

Most of the growth in Mexican higher education has been at the *licenciatura* level (i.e. the first degree, requiring 4.5–5 years of study); shorter vocational higher education grew at a much slower pace (it represents only 1% of graduates in Mexico compared to an OECD average of 9%). In recent years, Mexico's attention has therefore focused more on postgraduate studies.

A major priority of the Secretariat of Public Education is to increase the contribution of higher education to the development of the country and its transition to the knowledge society. Graduates currently experience a higher than average private return on their higher education studies, with smoother access to the labour market than elsewhere in Latin America and in Europe.

## Policy objectives

The main objectives of the MMC are to:

- serve as a reference for the process of certification, which is the responsibility of the DGAIR;
- recognize partial qualifications through the accumulation and transfer of credits;
- recognize existing qualifications in the national education system in cooperation with other national bodies and institutions;
- recognize learning outcomes from formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- facilitate the readability and coherence of each qualification in the national system of education;
- improve the quality, accessibility and comparability of qualifications as well as of labour certification by explicitly classifying qualifications according to complexity of level descriptors;
- cover all sectors: general education, higher education, vocational and technical education as well as labour competences; learning in formal, non-formal and informal learning settings; as well as knowledge, skills and broader social and personal competences, aptitudes and values;



- improve comparability between different subsystems of the education system – i.e., formal, non-formal and informal – and between vocational education and training and labour competences.

The National System of Competence Standards (NSCS) is a framework for the recognition and accreditation of labour competences. It is based on six strategic principles:

- helping employers, workers, educators and the government to work together to improve economic competitiveness and growth;
- involving all sector leaders in setting agendas and making decisions;
- encouraging employers and workers to play an active role in designing the NSCS, thus fostering demand for competent workers;

- offering recognition and certification to all who require it, including private sector and self-employed workers, government workers, teachers and students;
- developing educational curricula aligned to the NSCS;
- promoting new paradigms for assessment based on demonstration of competences in addition to traditional knowledge tests.

### Levels and use of learning outcomes

The MMC has eight levels and is similar in design to the European Qualifications Framework. Competences are evaluated through the NSCS, which, in addition to providing for technical and professional education, includes five levels dedicated to vocational qualifications.

**Table 52. Mexican qualifications framework (MMC)**

MMC LEVELS	REFERENCE TO UNESCO ISCED LEVELS	REFERENCE TO THE LEVELS IN THE MMC IN THE FIELD OF GENERAL AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION
8	ISCED 8: Doctoral level education or equivalent	Doctorate
7	ISCED 7: Master level education or equivalent	Master's degree (7B) Diploma of higher specialization (7A)
6	ISCED 6: Bachelor level or equivalent	Bachelor's degree
5	ISCED 5: Short-cycle tertiary education or equivalent	Professional licence (5B) Technical licence (5B) Associate professional (5A) Superior technician (5A)
4	ISCED 4: Post-secondary non-tertiary education	Superior technician
3	ISCED 3: Upper secondary education	General secondary or equivalent (3B) Vocational secondary technician (3B) Basic technician (3A) Assistant technician (3A)
2	ISCED 2: Lower secondary education	Secondary
1	ISCED 1: Primary education	Primary
0	ISCED 1: Early childhood education	Preschool (0B) Initial education (0A)

Note: ISCED is UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (UIS, 2012).

Source: Mexican Qualifications Framework (MMC, 2014).

The five labour competence level descriptors developed by the National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labour Competences (CONOCER) are aligned with the first five levels in the MMC. CONOCER adopts a holistic approach to competences. 'Competence' may refer to any combination of the following:

- the knowledge and abilities required to execute a particular function in any service or manufacturing sector;
- social skills, including the ability to work in teams and build social networks based on relationships of trust with others;
- attitudes, including self-reliance and resilience, motivation to achieve projected goals, and the strength to fight for one's beliefs;
- intellectual competences, including the ability to generate new ideas;
- ethical competences, including core values and a sense of right and wrong.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The DGAIR is responsible for the development of the MMC; its other relevant responsibilities include: regulating and assessing the national system of accreditation and certification of studies, promoting the national and international mobility of students, regulating the operation of private providers of education, and allocating scholarships.

Stakeholders from all sectors (industry, education and civil society) have participated in the development of the MMC, and CONOCER has been active on issues related to the National System of Competence Standards (NSCS) and on equivalencies with formal educational degrees. The NSCS was created by CONOCER to organize, implement and regulate the recognition and accreditation of all learning: formal, non-formal and informal. A government organization with a three-party governance model, CONOCER provides a platform for linking education and the world of work in order to make the Mexican labour force more competitive. NSCS recognition practices are agreed by all stakeholders: employers, workers, educators and the government. They are designed to ensure that Mexican society has a competent workforce, thus promoting economic growth, educational development and social progress. Mexico's NSCS is sustained by three institutional pillars, which are:

1. sector committees;
2. mechanisms for alignment between educational curricula and on-the-job training;
3. a national structure for evaluation and certification.

Sector committees comprising employers and workers develop competence standards for the economic sector they represent. They may also adjust educational curricula and recommend the creation of ad-hoc programmes. Members are high-level executives and experts from key areas (e.g. production, logistics, sales, purchasing, human resources, research and development), as well as representatives of employers' organizations, social organizations and government institutions.

Mechanisms for aligning educational curricula with on-the-job training depend on the competence standards developed by the sector committees. These are formally enshrined in the National Register of Competence Standards, which functions as a national reference for CONOCER-certified affiliates.

The national structure for evaluation and certification is a network of training, evaluation and certification providers which assures credibility to users, both within the country and internationally.

All formal basic education and most upper-medium (baccalaureate and technological) education is coordinated by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP); however, some institutions for upper-medium education are run or recognized by autonomous universities or by the National Polytechnic Institute (Instituto Politécnico Nacional [IPN]). SEP issues nationally valid formal certificates at the end of primary, secondary, upper-medium and higher education, and confers technical titles upon completion of a specialization in upper-medium technological education. On behalf of SEP, the General Directorate of (Liberal) Professions registers and confers *títulos* (titles) upon completion of bachelor's and master's degrees, and doctorates.

In addition to this, the Secretariats of Education, Labour and Economy, which belong to the governing board of CONOCER, have been working together for some time on improving training, evaluation and certification in the workplace. This involves identifying the sectors of the economy that are most in need of greater human capital, and using competence standards to make educational curricula more relevant to the needs of these sectors.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Since the 1990s, lifelong learning has played an increasingly important role in the thinking of Mexican policymakers, and a number of measures have been introduced accordingly. The conception

and development of Agreement 286 (and the associated agreements) is a key policy response to the above challenges. It is designed to give learners access to all levels of the education system by offering an alternative pathway to that provided by the formal system. This act also allows equivalences of competence certificates with credits of formal education programmes at the vocational and professional levels. The Mexican approach distinguishes between separate pathways to the same educational or qualification outcome. The informal and non-formal pathways, though outside the traditional institutional structures, are nevertheless considered significant enough to be deemed equivalent pathways to a qualification (Campero Cuenca et al., 2008).

Mexico displays a sub-sectoral approach to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, with different approaches in primary and secondary education, higher education and the employment sector.

The Mexican national education system covers all schools in the country, public (federal and state) and private. It consists of four main levels: basic education; upper-middle (baccalaureate and technological) education, which can be either terminal or a preparation for further study; bachelor's degrees; and postgraduate degrees (including specializations, master's degrees and doctoral degrees). The system also includes training-for-work via technical diplomas. In Mexico, alternative pathways for basic education for youth and adults as well as certification are the main responsibility of the National Institute for Adult Education (Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos [INEA]).

Standards for recognizing the competences of employers and workers are developed by CONOCER, which also accredits the assessment and certification unit standards and issues official labour competence certificates. Companies, whatever their focus, are now legally obliged to provide their employees with training and skills development based on the standards of competence set out in the NSCS. Assessment is based on portfolios of evidence, observation of work performance, interviews and demonstration of knowledge. Where necessary, attitudes, behaviour and personal values may also be assessed.

Tools for assessment are designed to have a positive impact on the career development of both employers and employees, thus contributing to the success of the organization. Trainees in some international companies in Mexico are even involved in designing their own learning processes and in recognizing and validating the competences gained

from them. In most companies, however, models for assessment are still in the process of being developed. Policies for the recognition of prior learning are designed to provide value and credibility for employers, workers, educators and society in general. This involves:

1. recognizing competences that are relevant to a particular sector;
2. conducting recognition and accreditation in a way that is credible for employers;
3. providing mobility and better working conditions, including higher salaries, for employees;
4. generating information to help align educational curricula with the requirements of industrial sectors.

Certification of competences under the NSCS is largely driven by the need to make certain industries more economically competitive. Certification often occurs as a result of a personal decision by employers, trade unions, academic institutions or individuals within the industry concerned. In the case of voluntary work, certification is often mandatory in order to comply with the legal requirements of government institutions, government-funded civil organizations, or international institutions. Specific programmes for certification of competences exist for disabled people, non-Spanish-speaking indigenous people and social workers serving these sectors, as well as in the areas of childcare and women's protection. Low-skilled workers who lack formal education can have their labour competences evaluated and certified by a national programme managed by INEA and credited by CONOCER. The Secretariat of Public Education is continually engaged in identifying targets for the recognition of prior learning in particular industries and areas of the country. Employers and trade unions play a significant role in this process, both in the design of training programmes and in the evaluation and certification of workers' competences according to the NSCS framework.

## NQF implementation

The implementation of the Mexican qualifications framework benefits from the comprehensive quality assurance system and the link to the Mexican Bank of Academic Credits.

Curricula in recognized national educational institutions are set by the DGAIR and certificates awarded by the Secretariat of Public Education (De Anda, 2010, pp. 5–8). Outside the national education system, *constancias* (diplomas) are awarded for certain courses and for non-formal

**Table 53. Mexican Bank of Academic Credits**

MQF LEVELS	LEVELS	DOCUMENTATION OF CERTIFICATION (NSCS)	CREDITS
8	Doctorate		300 credits (3 years)
7	Master's degree	Diploma of higher specialization	60–120 credits (1–2 years)
6	Professional licence	Specialized diploma	240–300 (4–5 years)
5	Superior technician	Advanced diploma	120–180 (2–3.5 years)
4	Professional technician	Certificate IV	136–180 (2–3 years)
3	Bachelor's degree	Certificate III	91–135 (1–2 years)
2	Secondary	Certificate II	46–90 (3 years)
1	Primary	Certificate I	1–45 (6 years)
0	Preschool	Certificate of preschool	(3 years)

Source: DGAIR, 2011b

education. Following completion of certain legally required procedures, these diplomas can be recognized by the Secretariat of Public Education as equivalent to qualifications in the national system.

In October 2012, the Secretariat of Public Education introduced the Mexican Bank of Academic Credits<sup>631</sup>. This allows certificates of accredited certification centres, including those from CONOCER, to count towards formal educational programmes at upper-middle and higher levels.

### Referencing to regional frameworks

Both the MQF and the NSCS aspire to create links with international qualifications frameworks in order to facilitate labour mobility within the country, the region and eventually the wider world (García-Bullé, 2013).

In light of the internationalization of higher education, Mexico is developing transparency tools to facilitate mobility and academic cooperation across regions, particularly with the European Union. Historically, the emphasis of 'good-quality' higher education has been based on cooperation and mobility with the USA. Proximity and the North American Free Trade Agreements (NAFTA) play a big role in US-Mexico trade and migration relations.

<sup>631</sup> Article 8 of the Announcement published by the DGAIR on the official Mexican Government diary of 4 October 2012.

### Important lessons and future plans

While several of the reforms in qualifications and credit systems have been initiated by the DGAIR, they can only be successfully implemented with the full support of the federal government as whole.

The MMC has facilitated the work of CONOCER by setting out equivalencies between labour certificates and formal educational degrees.

The recognition model of CONOCER is succeeding in Mexico. More than 706,000 certificates were issued up to 2016 and there is an expected growth of 36% annually. The National Competence Standard System in Mexico, although promoted and regulated by government, is driven by employers and workers. Social partners (employers, trade unions, and the voluntary sector) participate in the design and development of competence standards through sector committees responsible for evaluating and certifying workers in their sectors. These standards are then utilized by the educational sector for curricula adjustments and validation.

Although the recognition of prior learning of labour competences is promoted, regulated and financed by the federal government through CONOCER, it is driven by employers, workers' associations and academic institutions.

At a deeper level, the success of the Mexican initiative is perhaps also explained by the fact that it is fundamentally motivated by a desire to increase

competitiveness in order to promote progress and prosperity. Operational issues of training, evaluation and certification, although critical, are seen as

instruments for the pursuit of this aim and not ends in themselves.

<b>Abbreviations</b>			
CONOCER	National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labour Competences	INEA	Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos (National Institute for Adult Education)
DGAIR	Dirección General de Acreditación, Incorporación y Revalidación (General Directorate of Accreditation, Authorisation and Recognition)	MMC	Marco Mexicano de Cualificaciones (Mexican qualifications framework)
		NSCS	National System of Competence Standards
		SEP	Secretariat of Public Education

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## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

Moldova adopted a national qualifications framework (NQF) in 2010 in higher education. In November, it adopted an eight-level NQF for all levels.

Moldova participates in the Bologna Process in higher education and the European area for higher education. The country has developed tools and approaches to create new qualifications and now needs to move towards implementation and delivery.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

The main factors shaping the structure of the population and demographic change in Moldova are ageing and migration. The official population figure of 3.55 million in 2017 from the National Bureau of Statistics shows a decrease of 9,000 people since 2012. However, alternative sources indicate that official statistics overestimate the actual size of the population. A Population Barometer conducted by the Demographic Research Centre suggests that the actual Moldovan population is around 2.9 million, pointing to an overestimation of over 660,000 people (16%). This difference is attributable to the official definition of migration and the related records, which include migrants no longer residing in the country, even for over a year. According to an ILO report, over 888,000 Moldovans (23% of the total population) were living outside the country in 2015 (mainly in Russia and Italy). Outward migration plays an important socioeconomic role in the country and remittances contribute substantially to consumption, accounting for an estimated 23.4% of GDP.

Demographic ageing is clearly visible in the population structure. The share of young people (aged 15–24) in the active population has declined from 20.3% in 2012 to 15.5% in 2017. The increasing dependency ratios – youth (21.3%), senior citizens (14%) – have important economic and social implications, threatening sustainable growth and the future sustainability of social protection, including

pensions. Moreover, in the following decades the population decline will continue at rapid pace. In accordance with the demographic forecast (2015–35), the annual decrease in population will fluctuate between 1.1 and 2%. The National Strategic Programme on Demographic Security (2011–25) aims at implementing demographic stabilisation policies in order to increase labour market supply and improve conditions for safety and welfare to discourage outward migration. More than half the population is rural, making Moldova a country with one of the lowest levels of urbanization in Europe.

Moldova is a small lower-middle-income economy, with rather high share of agriculture in economy and employment, and uneven territorial distribution of economic opportunities and growth, as Chisinau, the capital city, generates more than half of GDP. The main economic activities that generate revenues for GDP are manufacturing (food products constitute 37%), trade, agriculture, construction and transportation, as well as ICT and communication services.

Following the 2015 recession (due, not least, to large scale banking fraud), Moldova's economy recovered in 2017. There was a GDP growth of 4.5%, backed by a good performance in agriculture (good harvest supported export growth to +12.7%) and private consumption (increased by 4.9% in 2017) that was fuelled by remittances, strong growth in wages and the indexation of public transfers in 2016. Growth is expected to be robust and reach 3.8% in 2018 and 3.7% in 2019, still below the historical averages of 4.6%. With economic outlook in the baseline scenario subject to considerable external and internal risks, further structural reforms are needed for private sector growth and job creation.

Moldova's development path in recent years has been guided by the Association Agreement between Moldova and the European Union (signed in 2014 and fully in force from July 2016). Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), a component of the Association Agreement, provides for mutual elimination of customs duties on industrial and most agricultural products and

for further liberalization of the services market. It also addresses other barriers to trade and reforms in economic governance, with the goal of strengthening transparency and competition and adopting EU product standards.

Moldova has been spending a high percentage of its GDP on education (around 7%) in the last decade, although it has entered a trend of decline from 6.9% in 2015 to 6.4% in 2017. The relatively high levels of education expenditure pays off in terms of relatively high education attainment of active population (aged 15+). In 2017, 55.6% of population have attained medium level education, 24.5% high level education and 19.9% low level education. However, there is a negative trend of an increasing share of population with low level education (16.5% in 2012) and decreasing share with medium level of education (57.8% in 2012) and high level education (25.7% in 2012).

Moldova has relatively low enrolment rates in primary and secondary education; in 2015, net enrolment rates were 86.85% and 76.4% respectively. At the same time, gross enrolment rate in higher education is relatively high, 41.21% in 2015. Vocational education and training (VET) is well represented at the upper secondary level and enrolments in vocational programmes is increasing, reaching 48.7% in 2017, in comparison to 35.4% in 2012. Moldova has a significant problem with school dropouts, as the number of early leavers (although slightly decreasing) remains very high (one in five of those aged 18–24).

The National Development Strategy 'Moldova 2020' represents the overall strategic vision of the government for the period 2012–20. Its main policy objective is to promote sustainable economic development and poverty reduction. One of its priorities is 'aligning the education system to labour market needs in order to enhance labour productivity and increase employment in the economy'. The Strategy for Development of Education for 2014–20, 'Education 2020' stresses the importance of quality of education and lifelong learning and, in particular, relevance of the labour market. It aims at increasing access to education and lifelong learning, ensuring the relevance of studies for life, active citizenship and success in career, and developing an effective system of evaluation, monitoring and quality assurance in education.

The Education Code (2014) establishes the legal framework for organisation, implementation and development of education and provides basis for modernisation of the education and training system. The Code structures the education system

into levels and cycles following the ISCED 2011 system and establishes a new professional training system in the form of TVET (technical/vocational education) that has two paths: secondary TVET (vocational schools and centres of excellence) and post-secondary TVET (colleges and centres of excellence).

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

Dissatisfaction with the existing education and training system among the general population is one of the main reasons for the education reforms that underpin the development of the NQF in Moldova. A range of policy documents have been adopted recently to create a much clearer policy framework for education and training reforms and for the NQF. These include the Moldova 2020 strategy, the Strategy for the Development of Technical Vocational Education 2013–20, the Strategy for the Development of Education 2014–20, the new Education Code 2014, the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the EU and the Association Agenda. These policies underline the importance and need of an integrated lifelong learning approach: to develop VET and adult learning; to improve access, relevance and the quality of education; and to adapt and diversify the changes to needs identified in the labour market. The NQF is a tool for each of these policy documents. The Moldova 2020 National Development Strategy recognises that professional training is a key dimension for sustainable development. The first of the seven development priorities is 'linking the education system to labour market demands in order to increase productivity and employment'.

According to the Strategy for the Development of Technical Vocational Education 2013–20, technical vocational education has to become attractive, qualitative, and relevant to market demands; affordable, career-oriented and flexible; and must allow for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and for mobility throughout Europe in compliance with the provisions of the Copenhagen Process and the Bruges Communiqué. Graduates of the technical vocational education system should have increased employment opportunities because of the key skills, attitudes and professional competences acquired. The modernisation of professional training and the improvement of mechanisms for continuous in-work training will enable people to adapt to new labour market conditions. Strategic partnerships between the education system and the labour market should be created to allow the education system to adapt quantitatively, qualitatively and structurally to

labour demand. Technical and vocational education providers will provide training at level 3 and 4 of the NQF, merging secondary VET and secondary specialised education into one integrated system. VET graduates should expect enhanced job opportunities as a result of improved key skills, attitudes and professional competences.

A National Quality Agency should be responsible for assessment and accreditation of providers; and curricula and trainer development should be aligned with the NQF. The Strategy for Education 2020 stresses the importance of the quality of education, competences and lifelong learning and, particularly, the relevance of the labour market. It defines policies for better access, improved relevance, enhanced quality and a stronger focus on the efficiency of public expenditure in education and training. It goes beyond the VET strategy, providing a detailed analysis of the situation in each subsector of the education system and proposes concrete actions as solutions. It stresses that adult learning provision should be extended in line with social and economic needs, and better integrated with the initial education system. The structures and quality of education in Moldova should make it comparable with the European area for higher education. New policies should be tested and then improved. Solutions that have worked well elsewhere should be considered for adoption, and the role of institutions should be clarified and developed.

The Strategy for Education 2020 was adopted following the introduction of the new Education Code (2014), which provides the legal basis of the reforms, including a strong orientation towards lifelong learning that includes general, technical vocational, higher education and continuous training for adults. Learning outcomes established for eight key competences should be provided to every citizen, together with the introduction of a credit system, as well as a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

### **International cooperation**

The Association Agreement and the Association Agenda state that Moldova and the EU shall cooperate to develop an NQF to improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences.

- Article 122: 'The parties shall cooperate to promote lifelong learning and encourage cooperation and transparency at all levels of education and training, with a special focus on higher education.'
- Article 123: 'The cooperation shall focus, inter alia, on the following areas: [...] establishing a national qualification framework to improve the

transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences; promoting the aims set out in the Copenhagen process on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training.'

## **Levels and use of learning outcomes**

### **NQF scope and structure**

The national qualifications framework of the Republic of Moldova (NQFRM) is designed to support a lifelong learning approach as an eight-level framework that corresponds to the eight level descriptors defined in the European qualifications framework (EQF). The lifelong learning approach is an important facet of the EQF, as are the higher education Bologna reforms associated with the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA). However, there are various interpretations of exactly what 'lifelong learning' can mean in practice.

Two different processes can be identified in Moldova. While discussion on the higher education dimension of the national framework started in 2006, within the context of the Bologna commitments, the conceptualisation of a comprehensive NQF started relatively recently. Current progress towards developing an overarching NQF is driven by a desire to align to the EQF. Two approaches, therefore, are used to describe the structure of the NQF. The first is an occupationally-oriented set of level descriptors based on three generalised indexes of human activity: diversity of empowerments and responsibility (general competences); complexity of activity (nature of competences); and scientific intensity of activity (knowledge). The second adopts a lifelong learning approach that can be directly referenced to the EQF but goes beyond EQF descriptors by covering not only knowledge, skills and competences, but also by including a chart describing how the given level of qualification can be attained. The existence of two sets of level descriptors is not unique to Moldova. However, while the purpose of each set of level descriptors is explained, using two different sets does not promote an integrated approach to the NQF. From a technical point of view it seems feasible to integrate both sets of descriptors.

A draft Act was issued in September 2016 setting up the national qualifications framework of the Republic of Moldova, providing instructions for its implementation, functioning and administrative supervision in accordance with Articles 66 and 97 of the Education Code. The NQF is defined as 'a unique system at the national level or at the level of an education system, known and accepted by



the international community, and through which all qualifications and other achievements in the field of vocational education can be reported to each other in a coherent way through a series of concepts: qualification, knowledge, abilities, competences, skills, study outcomes, etc’.

### **Alignment to other classification systems**

The new classifier of occupations of Moldova is based on both international standards (ISCO 08), identifying nomenclatures of occupations/ professions and specialties for the education and training of staff through VET, and on the Education Code, which is a basis for institutionalising the reforms within the vocational training system. The qualifications awarded by technical vocational education institutions will be included in the national register of qualifications in professional education, developed by the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the relevant central bodies (Education Code, Article 66). The qualifications awarded in higher education will be included in the national register of qualifications in higher education, managed by the Ministry of Education (Education Code, Article 97).

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

The Moldovan NQF has eight levels, analogous to the EQF.

- a. Level 1 and 2 qualifications are awarded for general education, practical training and various forms of individual training, including workplace or education programmes for adults.
- b. Level 3 is for secondary technical vocational education.
- c. Level 4 is for post-secondary vocational and technical education.
- d. Level 5 is for post-secondary, non-tertiary technical vocational education.
- e. Levels 6, 7 and 8 are awarded for higher education qualifications: cycle I: licence (bachelor); cycle II: master; cycle III: doctorate. Qualification levels define the quantitative and qualitative parameters of professional skills that the graduate must have to carry out the job/profession or specialty, in accordance with the NQF. In VET institutions, qualifications can be obtained in accordance with the NQF nomenclature (NQFRM) of areas of vocational training and trades/professions and the nomenclature of vocational training areas, specialties and qualifications for secondary and non tertiary post-secondary VET.

NQFRM qualification levels determine the knowledge, skills and competences a person can demonstrate on completion of learning. The description of qualification level structures in relation

to study/learning outcomes is analogous to that of the EQF:

- Knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.
- Skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical thinking, intuitive and creative thinking), or practical (involving manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).
- Competences are described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

A professional qualification is based on a standardised format that describes learning outcomes in line with labour market requirements, specified in the occupational standard. Each qualification is defined by the professional competences (knowledge and skills) and transversal skills acquired during the respective level of education.

Included in the NQF for higher education in Moldova is a matrix-table covering skill levels, categories and types of skills, generic descriptors of skills and level descriptors for higher education qualifications.

### **Definition of qualification**

Occupational standards form the basis of vocational qualifications and are defined as ‘the process of formal validation of acquired skills in the formal, non-formal and informal education context, as a result of the standard assessment procedure’.

Qualifications – according to the reference framework of the university curriculum (2015) – represent official recognition of the value of individual learning outcomes both for the labour market and for continuous study and training through an education document (diploma, certificate, attestation), conferring the legal right to practice an occupation/profession. Each qualification is defined through the learning outcomes, expressed in terms of professional knowledge and competences achieved during the relevant period of study.

Qualification (in the draft Act of September 2016) is defined as an ‘official recognition of the value of individual learning outcomes both for the labour market and for continuous education and training, through a study document (diploma, certificate) awarding the legal right to practice a profession/ trade’.

### **Qualification standards**

The term ‘qualification standard’ is not used as such. According to Article 66 of the Education

Code, the qualifications in technical and vocational education shall be awarded in line with the NQF, based on occupational standards for each level of VET, in line with the EQF and the skills required for the labour market.

The methodology (approved by Government Decision No 863 of 8 October 2014) states that occupational standards are the basis for the description of qualifications and the development of educational standards related to the vocational training of workers, according to labour market requirements.

An occupational standard is a description of the specific professional duties and tasks related to professions from a particular domain and the qualitative benchmarks associated with their successful performance and professional training need to be adjusted to labour market demands. The authority responsible for the qualitative development of occupational standards is the respective sectoral committee.

#### **Qualifications development process**

According to the Education Code, professional qualifications (VET and higher education) shall be awarded in line with the NQF and developed on the basis of occupational standards. The NQF is developed by the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the relevant ministries, sectoral committees, technical vocational education institutions, economic agents and other social partners, and is approved by the government.

The qualification levels shall establish the quantitative and qualitative parameters of the professional skills a graduate needs to have to work in a particular trade/profession or specialty, in line with the NQF. According to the methodology (for the development of occupational standards for working profession No 863 of 8 October 2014) the development of occupational standards is coordinated by the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family. Ministries, and the relevant central administrative authorities, are responsible for verifying the quality of occupational standards developed in a given branch; approving occupational standards that have been developed; and cooperating with the sectoral committees to complete the development of occupational standards.

Currently six equivalent sectoral committees have been established in different economic sectors, each containing representatives of social partners at branch level. Each committee is responsible for developing occupational standards in its sector by mapping relevant occupations; approving standards in stages according to agreed methodology and an integrated management process; setting up working

groups to develop a clear occupational standard profile and commissions to evaluate and validate standards; and identifying financial resources. The general process of qualification development ultimately involves a group of stakeholders with different interests. It is the responsibility of those involved to recognise these trends and to reach an agreement and consensus in the drafting process.

According to the process for developing occupational standards set out in the methodology, the standards will be developed in the following stages:

- a. development of the occupational profile;
- b. assessment and validation of the occupational profile;
- c. development of the occupational standards according to the approved format;
- d. assessment and validation of occupational standards;
- e. approving the occupational standard.

Currently the NQF has been approved for 143 qualifications in higher education and 53 professional qualifications for VET.

#### **Access, progression and credit**

Access to VET is provided for by Article 60 of the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova No 152 of 17 July 2014.

With the emphasis on lifelong learning, the permeability and progression pathways are likely to be strengthened, although improved progression routes in education are not mentioned as a specific goal. The emphasis on the eight key competences that have been identified in the Strategy for Education is seen as an implicit condition for improved mobility and progression opportunities.

The upgrading and quality enhancement of the network of VET providers could certainly boost the reputation of VET and hence bring it closer in status to higher education. In accordance with the Education Code, the modules/subjects of the VET training programmes, which are used as the basis for awarding professional qualifications, can be expressed in credits under the European credit transfer system, based on agreements between training programme providers.

In higher education the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) shall be applied. The ECTS credits shall measure the student's workload in an academic course/subject during a time unit. The methodology for applying the credit transfer and accumulation system shall be approved by the Ministry of Education.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

### NQF legal basis

The Education Code of the Republic of Moldova No 152 of 17 July 2014 states:

- a. Article 66, paragraph 2: 'The national framework of qualifications shall be developed by the Ministry of Education, together with the relevant ministries, sector committees, vocational education institutions, businesses and other social partners, and shall be approved by the government.'
- b. Article 97: 'The national framework of qualifications in higher education shall ensure the transparency, academic mobility and the recognition of international diplomas.'

A draft Act (September 2014) set up the NQFRM and provides the basis for its implementation, functioning and administrative supervision, and is developed according to Articles 66 and 97 of the Education Code.

In addition to the Education Code several related legislative acts are linked to the NQF's implementation:

- a. Government Decision No 863 of 8 October 2014 on the development of occupational standard for specific professions;
- b. Government Decision No 191 of 22 April 2015, regulation on the organisation and functioning of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education;
- c. Order of the Ministry of Education No 1228 of 22 December 2015: approval of the Quality Management Guide in VET for ensuring the quality of VET;
- d. Order of the Ministry of Education No 550 of 10 June 2015; Official Monitor of the Republic of Moldova, 2015, No 206-210; Article 1362, 'Framework on the organisation and functioning of post-secondary and non-tertiary postsecondary VET institutions';
- e. Order of the Ministry of Education No 840 of 21 August 2015; Official Monitor of the Republic of Moldova, 2015, No 275-280; Article 1918 'on the organisation and functioning of secondary VET institutions and technical vocational education institutions';
- f. Education Development Strategy for 2014–20.

### Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The NQFRM has been developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research in collaboration with the relevant ministries, sectoral committees,

VET institutions, businesses and other social partners, and approved by the government.

In September 2018, the National Council for Qualifications, the consultative body of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, which includes representatives of the relevant ministries, sectoral committees, economic agents and educational institutions, was set up to facilitate the development of the NQF.

The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the relevant central bodies, developed the national register of qualifications for professional education in which the qualifications awarded by the technical vocational education institutions shall be included.

In higher education, the government, at the Ministry of Education's request, shall approve the nomenclature of professional training fields and specialties by mutual agreement with the relevant ministries.

The methodology for applying the credit transfer and accumulation system shall be approved by the Ministry of Education.

In higher education, the content standards and standards for competence shall be developed by the Ministry of Education by professional training fields and shall be approved by the government.

According to the Education Code, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education is responsible for developing a methodology for evaluating and accrediting providers of training programmes in VET and higher education. For secondary vocational education it will evaluate the curriculum, the education process and learning outcomes. The agency will establish criteria for the qualifying examination. This applies both to the summative assessment of formal education and to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The quality assurance agency may develop into a qualifications agency, but this has not yet been decided. The Ministry of Education will maintain the national register of qualifications.

The certification of knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal education and informal contexts can be made under a regulation approved by the Ministry of Education.

The framework regulation on the work of the sectoral committee in vocational training has been approved by Decision of the National Commission for Consultation and Collective Bargaining No 4 of 28 March 2012.

The Commission has decided that this committee will be established at the branch level as a consultative body, without legal status, on parity principles of representatives of the social partners. Not less than three members and two alternates from each will be appointed for a period of at least five years without being paid.

In 2011 a procedure and format for the development of occupational standards was established, with the full involvement of the social partners, and approved by the Prime Minister (Government Decision No 952/2011). Sector committees are in charge of drafting new and reviewing existing occupational standards. The sector committees have been established by the National Committee for Collective Bargaining and Consultation. There are currently five sector committees, covering construction, agriculture and food, transport and road infrastructure, and the recently established information and communication technologies, and trade workers and non-food sectors (both within the Ministry of the Economy).

For the development of occupational standards, the sector committees established the following working groups and commissions:

- a. the working group for occupational analysis and development of occupational profiles;
- b. the working group for developing occupational standards;
- c. the occupational standards verification and validation committee charged with verifying and validating occupational standards.

As a next step the National Council for Occupational Standards needs to examine and approve the occupational standards before they are adopted by a common order of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family.

#### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

There are currently six sectoral committees with their own rules of activity and regulation framework which operate as advisory bodies without legal status.

Article 8 of the Code of Education encourages social dialogue and partnership between education institutions and trade unions, business environments, civil society and media, and in research. The Ministry of Education plans and implements national development strategies of the education system in consultation with central government and local authorities, and social partners.

#### **Resources and funding**

Resources for implementing the NQF are:

- a. the EU budget support programme (EUR 25 million);
- b. the EU project 'Technical assistance for the education and training in Moldova' funded by the EU and implemented by a consortium led by the German company GOPA Worldwide Consultants;
- c. the State budget, where available.

#### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

All qualifications in the NQFRM must be quality-assured. In practice, effective quality assurance is still being developed. VET legislation states that quality assessment shall be carried out based on the national reference and accreditation standards and methodology developed by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education (NAQAVET) and approved by the government. It aims to improve institutional capacity, educational efficiency (including academic outcomes), and the quality of training programmes and institutional management, to achieve consistency between internal and external assessments. External assessment of the quality of TVET will be carried out by NAQAVET, as well as by other authorised structures.

Internal assessment of the quality of TVET shall be carried out by the institutional structures for quality assurance, based on the national reference and accreditation standards, as well as on institutional regulation. The Education Code (17 August 2014) defines quality assurance arrangements. A specific article of the draft Act of September 2016, which set up the NQFRM, specifies its assurance quality role.

The Government Decision No 191 (22 April 2015) approved the regulation on the organisation and functioning of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education (ANACIP). The agency's Governing Board is composed of 15 members (president, vice president, general secretary plus 12 members). The agency is composed of:

- a. three departments: Higher Education Accreditation Department (one person); Higher Education Evaluation Department (two people); VET Department (two people);
- b. two services: the economic-financial and legal service (two people); the human resources, public relations and secretariat service (two people).

The methodology for external quality assessment, for authorising the temporary functioning and accreditation of curricula (programmes) in TVET, higher education and continuing education, and the regulation for calculating charges for rendered services in the external evaluation of the quality of study programmes in TVET, higher education and continuing education, was approved by Government Decision No 616 of 18 May 2016. On 17 December 2015 in Brussels, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) accepted the National Agency for Quality Assurance in VET as an affiliate member.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is one of the policy priorities of the government. Article 123 of the Education Code provides for the certification of knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal education. Piloting in food processing and electrical repair has been carried out.

In March 2017, a government decision, regulation on continuing adult training, was adopted.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

In December 2018, a government decision approved the national register of qualifications. It is an automated information system, which records data on qualifications, qualification criteria, VET providers, learning outcomes, and qualification levels and certification mechanisms. The register will be developed in 2019 for higher education and VET qualifications.

### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

No evaluation has yet taken place.

### Impact for end-users

The NQF has not yet been used as a reference system or tool by end-users.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

A strong motivation for Moldova to develop an NQF is the link to the EQF and alignment with the qualifications framework of the European area for higher education. The country's Association Agreement with the EU refers to its NQF.

Further, the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Moldova-EU Association Agreement between 2017 and 2019, provides for the establishment of an NQF (in 2017) to improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications and professional skills and the creation of the national functional qualifications register. However, there is no reference to the EQF in the Association Agreement, despite the fact that the development of the NQF is discussed.

## Important lessons and future plans

The new Education Code incorporates all the legal, institutional and technical arrangements required for the development and settlement of an NQF for lifelong learning. Other strengths include the development of the NQFRM, aligned to the EQF, as a unique tool establishing a training qualifications structure contributing to national and international recognition of the skills achieved in the formal national education system or through non-formal and informal learning; the creation of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in VET; and the commitment of social partners through sectoral committees.

Education and training needs to better respond to current labour market demands, through the development of relevant outcomes-based qualifications. The present education system has very few VET national standards (53) that are quality-assured and meet the needs of the labour market.

There is still a challenge in moving from a focus on setting curricula to a stronger orientation on assessing achieved learning outcomes. Standards for different subsectors of the education system, and the provision of adult learning should be better aligned to improve permeability of the education and training system and facilitate lifelong learning, including through the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Migration and reintegration of migrants is a major concern in the country and the lack of transparency and transferability of skills is one among other factors preventing returning migrants' access to employment that matches their skills. VET governance structure is characterised by the concentration of policy processes and implementation functions within the Ministry of Education. Intermediary organisations have been created over the years but have only recently been strengthened. There is scope for greater involvement of the labour market and social actors in governance within clearly defined roles in particular in adult learning.

**Abbreviations**

EQF	European qualifications framework
NAQAVET	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education
NQF	national qualifications framework
NQFRM	national qualifications framework of the Republic of Moldova
TVET	technical/vocational education
VET	vocational education and training

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# MONTENEGRO

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The Montenegrin qualifications framework (MQF) was adopted by law in 2010. It is lifelong learning in scope and consists of eight qualification levels, with sublevels at levels I, IV and VII. Level and sub-level descriptors are based on three categories: knowledge, skills and competence. Learning outcomes for each qualification in the framework are described through these three categories and each higher level incorporates knowledge, skills and competence from the lower level.

The framework is managed by the Montenegro Qualifications Council, in cooperation with the National Council for Education and the Higher Education Council.

The MQF is advanced in its implementation and qualifications have been integrated into its levels. It is referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF EHEA) in November 2014.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Montenegro has a population of 622 099 (2015), which is ageing. According to preliminary data from the Montenegrin Statistical Office (Monstat), GDP growth in 2015 was 3.2%. Construction and tourism are the biggest economic sectors. Short-term indicators for the first quarter of 2016 indicate weak total economic activity due to a reduction in industrial manufacturing, even though at the same time there was increased activity in construction and tourism. According to preliminary Monstat data, real GDP growth in the first quarter of 2016 was 1.1%.

Positive trends in the labour market are visible through increased employment, declining unemployment and small wage rises overall. The employment rate (for the age group 15 to 64) shows an increase from 50.4% in 2014 to 51.4% in 2015. The unemployment rate for the same age group

decreased from 18.2% in 2014 to 17.8% in 2015. The unemployment rate of women (15 to 64) in 2015 was 17.6% (18.4% in 2014) and their employment rate was 46.9% (45.3% in 2014), which is five percentage points lower than for men.

The total NEETs rate (young people not in employment, education or training) of the 15 to 24 age group grew in 2015 to 19.1%

Performance related to ET2020 benchmarks and the headline indicators of Europe 2020 is variable. The country performs best against the following two indicators:

- Early leavers from education and training (18 to 24): at 5.7%, Montenegro stands better than the EU-28 average of 11.4% (2015).
- Attainment in tertiary education (30 to 34): at 31% in 2015, the country is close to the EU-28 average of 38.7%.

However, difficulties persist for other indicators. Adult participation in learning (25 to 64) reached 3% in 2015, against the EU average of 10.7%. Underachievement in reading, mathematics and science – measured by PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) – is at 33% in all three areas.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

The government adopted the Vocational education development strategy in Montenegro (2015–20) in December 2014. Priorities for the next two-year period are:

- a. revision of existing and development of new educational programmes, based on learning outcomes;
- b. creating conditions for work-based learning in all sectors and enhancing its quality;
- c. ensuring that students develop vocational and key competences for life and work;

- d. improving initial and continuing teacher education;
- e. defining enrolment policy reflecting labour market needs and the demands of long-term and short-term developmental policies in Montenegro.

The foundation for introducing and developing the national qualifications framework (NQF) was laid through the work carried out in setting up the NQF framework, which was adopted in law in 2010. The main reform objectives linked with the NQF are to introduce transparent learning outcomes; link education and training subsectors; facilitate the validation of non-formal learning; and to make it easier to obtain qualifications and pursue lifelong learning.

The MQF is an instrument, which regulates the entire system of qualifications at all levels of education in Montenegro. It contains a list and description of all the qualifications that can be acquired in the country and is based on learning outcomes. Its role is to reform and modernise the system of qualifications. The MQF enables the classification, comparison, development and understanding of qualifications, their connectivity and a clear overview of the different ways of acquiring qualifications for the needs of both the labour market and society.

The aims of the establishment and development of the MQF are the following:

- a. to make the system of qualifications based on learning outcomes easier to understand at both the national and international level;
- b. to increase the coherence of the system of qualifications by linking different parts of education and training;
- c. to enable the valuation of non-formal and informal learning and link them with formal education;
- d. to make the process of gaining qualifications more transparent;
- e. to encourage lifelong learning;
- f. to connect the world of education and the world of work and to ensure the greater involvement of all partners.

## International cooperation

Montenegro submitted its application for EU membership on 15 December 2008. On 17 December 2010, Montenegro was awarded candidate status by the European Council. Formal accession negotiations between Montenegro and the EU began on 29 June 2012. The first accession

chapter, Chapter 25 on science and research, was provisionally closed on 18 December 2012, while Chapter 26 on education and culture was closed on 15 April 2013.

The Lisbon Convention on recognition of higher education in the region of Europe, which was ratified in Montenegro in March 2004, was the basis for drafting the Law on the Recognition of Foreign Educational Credentials and Qualifications Equivalence, approved by the Parliament on 17 November 2011<sup>632</sup>.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### NQF scope and structure

The NQF is comprehensive (all levels) and inclusive, i.e. open for qualifications acquired through formal and non-formal/informal pathways of learning. It includes three types of qualifications: education qualifications, vocational qualifications and additional qualifications.

### Alignment to other classification systems

The NQF includes 15 sectors, including humanities, sciences engineering, construction, law, IT and agriculture. Sectors of qualifications have their qualification frameworks that include sub-sectors, fields and qualifications of all types and levels. The sector qualification framework reflects current affairs in each sector, indicating existing qualifications and their relationship. The MQF consolidates the sector qualification frameworks and interconnects them in a general systemic context.

### NQF levels and level descriptors

NQF qualifications are placed in eight qualification levels, with sublevels at levels I, IV and VII. Sublevels at levels I, IV and VII reflect the need to facilitate the placement of non-outcomes-based qualifications attained in the education system prior to adopting the MQF Law. Levels and sublevels have their descriptors, each based on three categories: knowledge, skills and competences. Each qualification included in the framework includes learning outcomes that are described through these three categories of descriptors and each higher level incorporates knowledge, skills and competences from the lower level.

The MQF includes three types of qualifications: educational qualifications, vocational qualifications and additional qualifications.

<sup>632</sup> The text of this Law is available in the English version at: [www.erasmusplus.ac.me/uploads/file/Law%20on%20Recognition%20\(2\)%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.erasmusplus.ac.me/uploads/file/Law%20on%20Recognition%20(2)%20(1).pdf)



In accordance with the MQF Law, the qualifications framework includes:

- a. qualification levels and sub-levels;
- b. descriptors for each qualification level and sub-level;
- c. types of qualifications, where qualifications can be educational qualifications, vocational qualifications and additional (other) qualifications;
- d. credit value of qualification.

The NQF is based on:

- a. defined learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competence);
- b. credit transfer;
- c. progression from one qualification to another;
- d. recognition and valuation of knowledge acquired in a non-formal and informal manner;
- e. cooperation of all stakeholders and transparency of procedures;
- f. quality assurance in the process of qualification development and attainment.

The referencing of NQF levels to the EQF established a demonstrable connection between NQF and EQF level descriptors in the following manner:

- a. NQF level 1 (1.1 and 1.2) and EQF level 1;
- b. NQF level 2 and EQF level 2;
- c. NQF level 3 and EQF level 3;
- d. NQF level 4 (4.1 and 4.2) and EQF level 4;
- e. NQF level 5 and EQF level 5;
- f. NQF level 6 and EQF level 6;
- g. NQF level 7 (7.1 and 7.2) and EQF level 7;
- h. NQF level 8 and EQF level 8.

Levels of knowledge, skills and competences progress, so that descriptors at level I, for example, represent the basic knowledge, skills and competences, while at level VIII, for example, they reflect more complex expectations in terms of depth and breadth of knowledge, skills and competences.

Knowledge is defined as a set of acquired and correlated information that is the result of learning. Skills represent the abilities to apply knowledge when solving tasks and problems and can be cognitive and manual (practical). Competence includes the ability to apply knowledge and skills that an individual demonstrates in a working or learning environment. They include autonomy and responsibility.

#### **Use of learning outcomes**

Learning outcomes are the central concept of the NQF structure. They are defined as statements that

indicate what an individual knows, understands and is able to do at the end of a learning process, regardless of the manner in which s/he learned. Qualifications are included in the NQF based on the complexity of accomplished learning outcomes, described through knowledge, skills and competence in eight levels of the qualifications framework.

Knowledge is defined as a set of acquired and correlated information that is result of learning. Skills represent abilities to apply knowledge when solving tasks and problems and they can be cognitive and manual (practical). Competence includes abilities to apply knowledge and skills that an individual demonstrates in a working or learning environment. They include the domain of autonomy and responsibility.

Level and sub-level descriptors of MQF qualifications are defined by the Rulebook on descriptors for qualification levels and sub-levels. In accordance with Article 10 of the MQF Law, descriptors for qualification levels and sublevels were discussed by the National Council for Education, the Higher Education Council, and the Qualification Council.

The Qualifications Council has adopted the Guidelines for sectoral commissions, the Guidelines for qualifications development (levels 1–5), the Methodology for assigning codes to qualifications, and the Methodology for placing qualifications in the NQF. The National Council for Education has adopted the Methodology for modularisation and credit valuation of education programmes in vocational education. With the adoption of these documents, conditions have been created to develop qualifications in compliance with the National Qualifications Framework Act, i.e. based on the learning outcomes approach.

#### **Definition of qualification**

The National Qualifications Framework Act defines three types of qualifications (groups of types of qualifications): education qualifications, vocational qualifications and additional qualifications.

An education qualification is attained on completion of a State-approved education or study programme and the attainment of the necessary qualification volume (measured by units of learning outcomes). This qualification is obtained within the formal education system and validated with a diploma. The procedures for awarding education qualifications are set by the National Qualification Framework Act in conjunction with other education acts and rulebooks.

A vocational qualification is awarded after the assessment of formally and informally attained knowledge or upon completion of a special programme of education. It may also be attained after the successful completion of part (a module) of a formal education programme that corresponds to an occupational standard. A vocational qualification is validated with a certificate. The procedures for awarding vocational qualifications are set by the National Vocational Qualifications Act and the National Qualification Framework Act.

Additional qualifications are required for undertaking a specific task or set of tasks, upon attaining basic qualifications, and are mostly demanded by employers. These qualifications do not increase the basic qualification level, but instead supplement it by indicating additional individual competences needed for progressing in the labour market, such as a professional exam for a job in education. They are validated with a certificate, confirmation or a proof, in line with the particular regulation.

#### **Development process of qualifications**

The register of qualifications currently includes 160 VET qualifications (levels 3, 4 and 5). There are separate methodologies for the development of occupational standards and for the development of qualification standards.

Qualification development at levels I to V encompasses the development of an occupational, educational or additional standard and of a qualification standard. The qualification standard is based on an occupational, educational or other standard. An education programme, special programme of education or other programmes are based on a qualification standard, on completion of which a learner is awarded the relevant qualification (education level, vocational or additional qualification).

The Vocational Education and Training (VET) Centre develops occupational and qualification standards for level V qualifications, in cooperation with social partners. These standards incorporate a basic description – the profile of a qualification that includes learning outcomes – and are presented in the qualification development initiative.

For qualifications from level VI onwards, higher education institutions develop a study programme using a description: a profile of qualification that includes basic learning outcomes, defines objectives and outcomes for specific subjects or modules, and assigns credit points programmes (subjects/modules).

#### **Access, progression and credit**

The MQF concept emphasises that the framework is a vehicle to understand and compare qualifications, to be used by learners, employers and the general public to show the links between different types and levels of qualifications, and the progression pathways available for lifelong learning.

#### *Vocational education and training*

- a. Lower vocational education (two years): completion leads to the award of a lower vocational education qualification.
- b. Secondary vocational education (three or four years): completion leads to the award of a three- or four-year secondary vocational education qualification.
- c. Post-secondary vocational education (including two years of continued secondary vocational education): completion leads to the award of a higher vocational education qualification.
- d. The master craftsman's exam is also classified as vocational education.

After successful completion of two-year education, it is possible to continue studies for a third year, by taking additional programmes. A student who completes a two- or three-year programme may continue his/her studies to a four-year programme after taking and passing additional courses. Candidates who pass the externally assessed vocational exam may enrol directly at a post-secondary vocational school. Individuals who pass the master craftsman's exam may also enrol at a post-secondary vocational school, after they take and pass additional exams (general education subjects).

An individual who graduates from a four-year vocational school and wishes to obtain the general secondary (gymnasium) matura qualification is eligible to take the matura course. An individual who graduates from the general secondary school (gymnasium) and wishes to obtain a four-year vocational school diploma is eligible to take the relevant vocational course.

#### **Higher education**

Since 2004, all higher education institutions in Montenegro have been required to apply the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS). Student workload per study year is 60 credits. Workload per subject is indicated through a numerical value corresponding to the overall workload per study year, i.e. the 60 credits.

The MQF Law introduced the Montenegrin credit transfer system, which provides for learning

outcomes achieved in one context to be taken into account in another. It is based on assessment, confirmation and recognition processes, and is aligned with the ECTS and with the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET).

One credit (Montenegrin credit transfer system) is awarded for 25 hours of work, which is fully compatible with the ECTS. Student workload per subject/course is determined by the number of hours of lectures, seminar papers needed to master a subject: achieve a set objective, including learning outcomes.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

### NQF legal basis

The Montenegrin system of qualifications is determined by the Law on the Montenegrin qualifications framework (adopted in December 2010), the Rulebook on descriptors for qualification levels and sublevels<sup>633</sup>, the Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level I to level V<sup>634</sup>, the Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level VI to level VIII<sup>635</sup>, as well as by a range of additional education regulations, including the National Vocational Qualifications Act.

The MQF Law sets out the legal basis for the establishment of a single framework covering all types and levels of qualifications. The law establishes the legal basis for new bodies to oversee the development and approval of qualifications, specifies the levels and sublevels, the types of qualification, the types of award and certification and describes the system of credit transfer.

### Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The Ministry of Education is responsible for planning, implementing and improving education policy. It calls on the professional expertise of three advisory bodies: the Qualifications Council, the National Council for Education and the Higher Education Council to support the implementation of reform.

The Qualifications Council is responsible for the development and inclusion of qualifications in the framework and the improvement of the qualifications system. It adopts basic qualification descriptions: learning outcomes, estimates of the labour market needs and international comparability, occupational standards and qualification standards. The Council also makes decisions on aligning existing qualifications for their inclusion in the qualification framework; defines criteria for nominating the members of sectoral commissions; adopts instructions and guidelines for the work of sectoral commissions; coordinates their work and makes decisions on their proposals; adopts decisions on the establishment of sectoral commissions; decides on definitions for subsectors and fields within a qualification sector at the proposal of sectoral commissions; and promotes the qualification framework.

Members of the Council are higher education institutions (public and private), Employment Agency of Montenegro, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Chamber of Economy, representative of employers' associations, representative of trade unions, Ministry of Education, Centre for Vocational Education, Bureau for Educational Services, and Examination Centre.

The Qualifications Council has set up sectoral commissions for each of the 15 qualification sectors. The sectoral commissions perform a range of tasks, including analysing the labour market, identifying the need for, and proposing, new qualifications and providing the specifications for new qualifications.

The National Council for Education determines the compatibility of qualification standards and education programmes and makes proposals for the adoption of publicly valid education programmes to the ministry. The Council is responsible for the qualification attainment process; the organisation of formal education, programmes for adults, programmes for children with special educational needs, exams at the end of educational cycles, elective subjects, textbooks and teachers.

The Higher Education Council is responsible for quality assurance in higher education, notably the accreditation procedure of study programmes and the reaccreditation of higher education institutions.

Other key institutions are the VET Centre, responsible for development, advisory support, and research in vocational education for young people and adults; and the Examination Centre, which conducts the external assessment of knowledge,

<sup>633</sup> Rulebook on descriptors for qualification levels and sublevels, *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, 51/11.

<sup>634</sup> Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level I to level V, *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, 21/12.

<sup>635</sup> Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level VI to level VIII, *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, 21/12.

skills and competences at the end of each primary education cycle, exams at the end of four-year secondary education, as well as assessments for the award of national vocational qualifications.

### **Resources and funding**

Montenegro allocates resources from the State budget to assure the operation of the qualifications unit at the Ministry of Education and in 2015, a budget was allocated to support the operation of the sectoral commissions. It has also used EU funding, for example to set up qualifications databases (2015). Several Tempus and IPA projects have supported activities and expertise related with NQF implementation and this cooperation continues.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

The legal framework of the quality assurance model in formal education and its implementation is defined in the provisions of the General Act on Education and provisions of the Rulebook on the contents, forms and methods of quality assurance of education in institutions (Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro 18/04 and 8/12) and other rulebooks indicated below.

The elements of the quality assurance framework encompass institutions as well as programmes/ qualifications, in general, vocational and higher education. Quality assurance obligations and procedures are applied at the stage of licensing of education and training institutions, and throughout the activity of the institutions (via external and internal assessment).

### **Licensing of education and training institutions**

Quality assurance at the point of entry into the educational system is ensured through a procedure of licensing institutions implementing state-approved educational programmes, i.e. through the obligation to meet requirements for establishment of institutions in the field of education, in accordance with provisions of the Rulebook on more detailed requirements for establishment of institutions in the field of education and the Rulebook on the procedure for licensing institutions in the field of education and on the method for keeping the register of licensed institutions.

These processes include public and private educational institutions and they are conducted by commissions, set up by the Ministry of Education for licensing purposes.

### **External and internal assessment – indicators**

The above-mentioned rulebook establishes that quality assessment of education in an institution has external and internal dimensions. The combination

of findings from both processes helps the institutions with in-depth understanding of the state of the quality culture and mechanisms – essential for plans and decisions for improvement.

External evaluation can be regular or extraordinary. Quality assessment is carried out in line with relevant secondary legislation (the Rulebook on the contents, form and method for quality assessment of education in institutions) at least once in four years, and external evaluation process is conducted based on the Methodology for quality assessment of education that includes 7 key indicators with 49 sub-indicators. When compared to EQAVET (European quality assurance reference framework in VET), there is a similarity with indicators 1(a), 2(a), 8(a) and 10(b).

External quality assessment is carried out by authorised advisors and educational supervisors of the Bureau for Educational Services (in general education institutions), or the Bureau for Educational Services and the VET Centre (if it is about vocational education). The report on quality assessment of an institution includes a description of factual situation with proposed measures the institution needs to implement to improve the quality. Based on recommendations from the report, the institution drafts a plan for education quality improvement, which is delivered to the Bureau for Educational Services or to the VET Centre and Ministry of Education. The report is public and is published on the institution's notice board, as well as on the web sites of the Bureau for Educational Services and the VET Centre.

Internal evaluation (self-evaluation) process is a legally defined obligation of schools, for some indicators every year and for some other indicators every second year. The same key areas and the same indicators are also used within self-evaluation, which is carried out by the educational institution's management.

A model for internal quality assurance has been in place since 2006, providing support to schools in their preparation for external evaluation which, based on a catalogue of 25 questionnaires sorted by key areas, facilitates assessment of current situation and based on which institutions are able to introduce improvements.

In line with the General Act on Education, internal evaluation has been mandatory since 2010. Since 2011, a model of VET development by way of internal evaluation in initial VET (IVET) has been implemented in vocational schools. This model comprises key indicators, quantitative and qualitative indicators relevant for the quality of

schools' work, teaching, learning and for student achievements. IVET quantitative self-evaluation indicators are aligned with EQAVET indicator 1 (a and b; IVET providers involved in quality assurance self-assessment, accredited education providers – led by the Ministry); indicator 2 (a and b; continuous in-service training of teachers, resource management); indicator 3 (students by programmes and education providers); indicator 4 (student achievement by programmes, drop-out by years of schooling, programmes and new generations); indicator 6 (a and b; destination of students after they complete education, and employer satisfaction with the level of knowledge and skills of students); indicator 7 (Monstat and Employment Agency); indicator 8 (a and c; support for students with disabilities); indicator 9 (survey of employers, the Employment Agency); and indicator 10 (b; resource management).

Up to the level of higher education, the performance educational system is also measured through external assessment of student achievements at the end of each cycle or level of education, which is the responsibility of the Examination Centre of Montenegro.

### **Programmes**

Quality assurance encompasses also the elaboration and adoption of educational programmes for different levels of education. The method for adopting educational programmes, based on which teaching process is conducted, is prescribed by the General Act on Education. The National Council for Education, established by the government, is a body responsible for adoption of educational programmes and it operates independently from the Ministry of Education. The ministry cannot modify an educational programme adopted by the National Council for Education. Educational programme development procedures are predefined and transparent and facilitate full involvement of stakeholders, including teachers associations. The Bureau for Educational Services and the VET Centre are responsible for conducting these procedures.

### **Teachers**

Quality assurance of teaching is an important element of the approach. Teachers' level of education is prescribed by the General Act on Education, while the required profile is set by an educational programme.

### **School work organisation**

Schools define quality as a model of good organisation of work with clearly defined goals and as policy making that will be accepted and supported by teachers, students, parents, partners and local community. Internal quality assurance

processes indicate the state of affairs at schools, factors influencing their work, development trends in schools and outcomes, i.e. formation of professionals for labour market needs, continuation of schooling, bringing education to a higher level and integrating it into the European educational system. Quality is the result of planning, implementation, evaluation – assessment and estimates, as well as of possible modifications, up to the level of achieving set standards.

### **School leaving exams**

The graduation exam (Matura) is taken externally, upon completion of the fourth year of general secondary school (gymnasium), in two compulsory subjects (the Montenegrin language or mother tongue and literature and mathematics or the first foreign language) and two elective subjects, with defined graduation standard. In a vocational exam, students who want to continue their education in higher education institutions take external exam in the Montenegrin language or mother tongue and literature and mathematics or the first foreign language, depending on the vocational school's profile. Vocational part of the exam, typical for a qualification profile, is organised by school, but exam material is prepared externally.

### **Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at the level of higher education**

System monitoring and evaluation at the higher education level is also carried out by means of external and internal quality assessment mechanisms, i.e. through procedures implemented in various stages, starting from initial accreditation, through monitoring of teaching process to reaccreditation of higher education institutions in Montenegro. These mechanisms are applied through a number of explicit procedures of validation or assessment regarding study programmes, teaching and conditions for work at institutions, defined in cooperation with international agencies for quality of the European higher education area, as quality assessment is defined according to the provisions of Article 8 of the Higher Education Act.

Overall improvement of higher education is the competence of the Higher Education Council, which is appointed by the government and, in accordance with provisions of Article 13 of the Higher Education Act; it is particularly responsible for achieving quality in higher education. Among other things, the Higher Education Council is authorised to undertake periodical checks of licensed institutions and is responsible for issuing certificates on initial accreditation, accreditation or reaccreditation (Article 12 of the Higher Education Act).

Monitoring and evaluation start with initial accreditation of study programmes, which represent a guarantee to interested individuals that the study programme provides quality education and fulfils applicable standards, or criteria, to ensure national quality system is applied in higher education. The Higher Education Council adopts the standards or criteria for initial accreditation of study programmes.

The initial accreditation process starts from the day of submitting the application to the Higher Education Council and lasts for not longer than six months from the day of application is received. Upon receiving the application, the Higher Education Council forms an accreditation commission, which is comprised of three to five members from a list of experts set for a specific field by the Ministry of Education and whose task is to pay a visit to the educational institution, check data from the application, prepare a report with a proposal for initial accreditation and submit it to the Higher Education Council for adoption. In its report the commission may offer suggestions for improvement of study programme quality assurance. This is the procedure for determining validity of study programmes, or institutions, and their conformity with relevant quality standards and labour market, as well as for issuing a certificate that ensures the institution's right to award a degree of education and a professional title. Initial accreditation is awarded for the period of maximum three years.

Upon being granted the initial accreditation certificate by the Higher Education Council, the licensing process starts, given that every institution established for or already providing teaching in Montenegro must have a license to work, issued by the Ministry of Education. This license identifies the type of institution, accredited study programmes, maximum number of students that can be enrolled on certain study programmes, as well as degrees and diplomas that can be awarded. The license is issued on the basis of standards and norms pertaining to:

- adequacy of premises and equipment, including classrooms, laboratories, library and computer equipment;
- number and qualifications of academic staff;
- premises for student extracurricular activities;
- financial means.

A licensed institution can make changes in the study programmes up to 30 (ECTS) credits, without accreditation. The Ministry determines standards and norms, as well as procedures for issuing, changing and divesting a license, taking into account the opinion of the Council.

In addition to these mechanisms, there are also external and internal quality assessment procedures. External quality assessment for each study programme, in line with provisions of Article 31 of the Higher Education Act, is carried out by an expert body formed by the Higher Education Council. External evaluation procedure is carried out in line with provisions of the Rulebook on reaccreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions, adopted by the Higher Education Council.

Self-evaluation and quality assessment of its own study programmes and conditions for work, in accordance with the provisions of Article 30 of the Higher Education Act, are performed continuously by each institution in line with its statute, monitoring, control and reporting on implementation of the educational process, including the monitoring of results in all courses, work of teaching staff, teaching conditions (i.e. library, laboratory, IT).

Self-evaluation is based on questionnaires and various checks, involves management and faculty councils, as well as students. Feedback from students is taken into account to improve curricula and teaching. Given the importance of involving students in the overall self-evaluation process, Article 93 of the Higher Education Act defines student right to express their opinion on the quality of teaching and work of academic staff of an institution.

An institution or a study programme is subject to reaccreditation within a period of maximum five years. Reaccreditation of an institution and a study programme is based on internal and external quality check. The results of internal and external quality check are presented in the self-evaluation report and the report on external quality check, but the Reaccreditation Commission starts from the self-evaluation report, which institutions elaborate based on standards, namely:

1. policy and procedures for assuring quality of work of the institution and study programmes;
2. business activities and development priorities;
3. organisation and management;
4. study degrees and qualifications;
5. study programme structure;
6. assessment of students;
7. inspection and valuation of teaching and exams;
8. students;
9. academic, professional and non-academic personnel;
10. scientific and research, artistic and professional work;
11. publishing activities;

12. premises, and material and technical resources;
13. institution's information system;
14. informing the public about its work;
15. cooperation and mobility;
16. financing.

The Reaccreditation Commission visits the institution, and panel discussions with institution's representatives allow deeper analysis of the quality of the institution and study programmes. Within two months after the visit the Commission's report is submitted to the Council, which takes the reaccreditation decision – for a determined period of time. The law includes provisions for the cases of denied reaccreditation of institutions/programmes.

The legal framework of the quality assurance model in formal education and its implementation is defined in the provisions of the General Act on Education and provisions of the Rulebook on the contents, forms and methods of quality assurance of education in institutions (Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro 18/04 and 8/12).

### Higher education

The Law on Higher Education and relevant rulebooks form the legal basis for application of quality assurance rules and procedures in higher education. The three councils – Qualifications Council, National Council for Education, and Higher Education Council – play a key role in quality assurance of education.

In line with the Higher Education Act, the Higher Education Council plays a key role in improving the quality of higher education, through accreditation of study programmes and external quality assurance by means of reaccreditation, in accordance with adopted official documents.

The VET Centre and the Examination Centre fulfil essential functions in assuring quality of qualifications and in external assessment of learners. The latter is responsible for external assessment of knowledge, skills and competence at completion of primary and four-year secondary education, as well as assessments for attainment of national vocational qualifications.

Montenegro's body in charge of quality assurance in higher education is neither member nor affiliate of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). According to the newly adopted Higher Education Act (2014), for the process of reaccreditation foreign agencies from the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) are appointed.

The EQF referencing report provides clarifications on the possible issues of compatibility with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in higher education, notably the status of the Higher Education Council. Montenegro does not have an independent quality assurance agency, therefore the Ministry has taken some steps to foster the capacity of the Higher Education Council, through precise regulations in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in higher education. A precise analysis of the actual situation with the recommendations for the future performance of the Council as the independent and professional quality assurance body was made in 2013, and a wide spectrum of activities has been taken to foster the capacity and quality assurance performance of the Council.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Adult learners may attain a national vocational qualification, which is verified with a certificate, in accordance with the National Vocational Qualifications Act. Attainment of a national vocational qualification means assessment and verification of knowledge, skills, and competence by the Examination Centre, regardless of the method of their attainment, after which a publicly recognised certificate is issued.

The National Vocational Qualifications Act aims to enable individuals to attain nationally recognised vocational qualification by way of an assessment, i.e. evaluation of their previously acquired knowledge, then by an assessment after they complete a programme of education, or when they complete a part or a module of a programme, if that part is based on an occupational standard. An occupational standard is an element connecting formal education and non-formal and informal learning, for qualification levels I–V.

In accordance with the National Vocational Qualifications Act, a national vocational qualification is an officially recognised qualification, developed based on an occupational standard and attained by:

- assessment after completing special programmes of education and training;
- direct assessment of previously acquired knowledge, skills and competence, regardless of the manner they are acquired;
- completion of a part/module of a programme.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

As of December 2018 the database of qualifications contains 160 qualifications (certificates and diplomas) at levels 3, 4 and 5, with a complete description of codes, learning outcomes, credit structures, progression to related qualifications, and assessment methods<sup>636</sup>.

### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

Montenegro monitors and reports on progress and issues to be solved as regards NQF implementation through the reporting procedures linked with the Riga objectives.

### Impact for end-users

The NQF is an important driver of the learning outcomes approach for all sub-sectors of education and training, and for demand-oriented qualifications development. Learners are using the qualifications in the framework and some candidates have obtained certificates via validation of non-formal learning.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Montenegro participates as a full member in the EQF process; it is a member of the EQF advisory group, the EU group which guides the EQF's implementation, and referenced the MQF to the EQF in November 2014. Montenegro is a full member of the Bologna Process and its self-certification report (QF EHEA) was presented in November 2014, in a joint report with EQF referencing<sup>637</sup>.

## Important lessons and future plans

Montenegro's development of its NQF has been influenced and supported by its EU accession goals, and indeed EU financial support, itself part of the accession preparation.

The MQF's sectoral commissions are functioning and are critical for achieving genuine implementation.

<sup>636</sup> Complete details are available at: [www.cko.edu.me](http://www.cko.edu.me)

<sup>637</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/documentation>

Montenegro continues the implementation of a wide range of measures directly related with NQF implementation and its further development, in particular those reported in the 2015 inputs to the Riga objectives report. Many of the listed measures reflect an implementation stage in which feedback from experience is mature and calls for deepening and review of a number of parameters and instruments for NQF implementation:

- analysis of the situation with regulations in different sectors and preparation of the methodological framework for classification of other (additional) qualifications in the NQF;
- classification of other (additional) qualifications in the NQF – analysis of the existing qualifications (levels II–V) and identification of needs for their modernisation and/or development of new ones;
- analysis and, according to the needs, modification of the existing methodologies for development of occupational standards, qualification standards, curricula, programmes of education and examination catalogues;
- identification of proposal for dynamics of qualifications development, for qualifications for which the initiatives and standards were adopted in 2015 and earlier;
- preparation of the plan for development of qualifications according to the sectors;
- preparation of occupational standards for qualifications of different levels and types, and in accordance with the foreseen dynamics;
- review of occupational standards;
- preparation of examination catalogues for assessments for the purpose of acquiring national vocational qualification;
- review of examination catalogues.

In its regular reporting on the Riga objectives (2015) Montenegro stressed the need to improve the matching of skills and qualifications demanded by the economy, and the qualifications available and provided by the education and training system. More and better involvement of the world of work (businesses, sectors, workers) in designing and awarding qualifications is one of the proposed solutions for this structural issue.

Continuing teacher professional development, enabling teachers to improve the application of the learning outcomes approach in various learning contexts (classroom, laboratories, workshops, work-context), is also required.



**Abbreviations**

ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system	IVET	initial vocational education and training
EQAVET	European quality assurance reference framework in vocational education and training	Monstat	Statistical Office of Montenegro
EQF	European qualifications framework	MQF	Montenegrin qualifications framework
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance	NQF	national qualifications framework
		QF EHEA	qualifications framework of the European higher education area

**Further information**

LAW on Montenegrin NQF (December 2010): [www.cko.edu.me/Library/files/Law%20on%20MQF.pdf](http://www.cko.edu.me/Library/files/Law%20on%20MQF.pdf)

NQF webportal: [www.cko.edu.me/](http://www.cko.edu.me/)

NQF video: <https://youtu.be/03OYE2AhA-4>

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## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

No national qualifications framework (NQF) legal acts have been approved to date, but work is under way to establish the appropriate NQF legal basis. The inaugural meeting of the National NQF Commission held on 23 May 2016 under the leadership of the Prime Minister took three fundamental decisions: approving the NQF governance scheme; the roadmap 2016–17 for NQF development; and the NQF concept and structure. Unlike other countries, the Moroccan NQF level descriptors are composed of six categories.

Morocco is at the initial stage of NQF development. In 2018, the new Framework Law on Education (loi cadre), approved by the government but still in discussion at Parliament, explicitly mentions the importance of the NQF to foster transparency, quality and recognition of qualifications and stipulates the establishment of a dedicated NQF Agency to manage the NQF and its instruments and processes. The NQF permanent secretariat is set to be created, under coordination of the Prime Minister's office, to pave the way towards the NQF Agency. The EU pledged support to the institutional capacity building of the NQF, through a twinning project that could be effectively launched in 2019, once the national institutional base has been set.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

#### Education and training and social context

The Moroccan government and society are aware of the important social and economic challenges to be addressed through better education and training for all. In this context, the country has developed and started implementation of a number of strategic and policy plans to improve participation, quality, governance and innovation of the whole system of education and training (Vision 2030); to strengthen the performance and outcomes of vocational education and training (VET) (National strategy VET 2021); progressed the draft of the new Framework Law on Education; and established and made

operational the new Agency for Accreditation and Evaluation of Higher Education. The vision set out in the VET strategy 2021 is: 'Quality VET for all and throughout life, to support development, valorisation of human capital and competitiveness.'<sup>638</sup>

Morocco has maintained a high ratio of education budget to GDP (between 5.5% in 2000 and 7.7% in 2013) over the past decade<sup>639</sup>. Gross enrolment rates in all levels of education improved significantly, but the persistence of high school drop-out rates (between 3.2% (ISCED 1) and 11% (ISCED 3)<sup>640</sup> remain a serious challenge in terms of social inclusion, preparedness for lifelong learning and competitiveness of the labour force.

The share of the working age population with low educational attainment remains high, despite progress. Official statistics (2013) classify 59.8% of the population over 15 years in the category 'without diploma', with a clear gender bias. Holders of higher education qualifications represent 12.8% of the population aged 15 and over, while 27.4% have medium level diplomas. Tertiary educational attainment (age group 25 to 34) was 9.8% in 2013. These indicators show a marked difference compared with EU-28 figures. The literacy of the population improved substantially, though the illiteracy rate is still high (2012)<sup>641</sup>: 25% (men) and 48% (women)<sup>642</sup>.

Enrolment in initial vocational education and training (IVET) continued to increase in 2015, particularly in the public sector: this was led by the key operator, the Office for Vocational Training and Promotion of Work (Office de la formation professionnelle et de la promotion du travail – OFPPT). Growth in VET graduates has been stronger in qualifications

<sup>638</sup> Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (2015). *Stratégie nationale de la formation professionnelle 2021* (unpublished).

<sup>639</sup> ETF (2015). *Processus de Turin 2014: Maroc*, p. 45.

<sup>640</sup> Ministry of National Education (2012).

<sup>641</sup> Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs (2015). *Bilan social 2014*, p. 9.

<sup>642</sup> Illiteracy rates in 1960 were 96% (women) and 78% (men) (Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, 2015).

of higher level (equivalent to the European qualifications framework (EQF) level 5), which reached 59% of total in 2013. Over half of graduates are concentrated in three sectors: management and commerce; metallurgy-mechanics; and construction.

The objective to increase the share of apprenticeships has not been met. Stakeholders and the government will have to put in place more effective measures to expand apprenticeships and their quality and relevance.

Aiming to improve the link of upper secondary school with vocational training, enhance permeability and curb early school leaving, the VET department, in a joint initiative with the employers' confederation (Confédération générale des entreprises du Maroc – CGEM), the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training, and several large companies, launched the professional baccalaureate in the academic year 2014/15. This pilot focuses on industrial maintenance, mechanical industry, aeronautical industry and management of agricultural land in five cities.

Morocco's population was approximately 34.4 million in 2015. In the past decade, the demographic growth rate has decreased (to 1.3% annually); the population is estimated to reach 37.5 million in 2020. The shape of the age pyramid changed, with a growing share of the population over 60 and contraction of the share of the group below 15. This demographic transition translates into lowering pressure on the capacity of the school system, on the one side, and strongly growing labour supply on the other. The age structure of the population is young; the working age population has grown steadily and doubled in three decades. In 2015, 26.6% population is young (15 to 24), 51% are women and 60.4% is urban<sup>643</sup>.

Morocco is historically a country where emigration plays an important socioeconomic role. Official data show that 3 million Moroccans are resident abroad, primarily in the EU (Spain, France and Italy), but the real figure is thought to be higher (around 4.5 million).

### **Economic context**

The economic performance of Morocco improved in the past decade, with GDP growth averaging 4.5% and, in 2015, recovering previous levels (4.5%) after two years of slowdown. The services and agriculture sectors have increased their share in GDP (to 56% and 16% respectively in 2014), unlike industry

where the share continues to fall (28%, 2014). This trend reflects problems in the competitiveness of Moroccan companies and weak resilience to the effects of the Euro crisis. Morocco's ranking in the global competitiveness index was 73rd in 2011 and 72nd in 2014.

Despite government policies, economic growth has not translated into commensurate creation of decent jobs and the rate of employment growth is low. Job creation has grown mainly in the services sector and, to a lesser extent, in agriculture. But in construction and manufacturing (including crafts) the trend is negative and has resulted in net job losses. In 2014, almost 80% of the employed are concentrated in services and agriculture.

The share of wage employment has grown, including in rural areas. In 2014, 1.1 million persons were underemployed, an underemployment rate of 10.3%<sup>644</sup>. This phenomenon is stronger in the construction sector, but is also in agriculture and fisheries, services and crafts. The most recent national statistics (2015)<sup>645</sup> confirm the growing trend of underemployment. In 2014, the employed population totalled 10 646 persons, of which 45% were wage employed.

Activity and employment rates (population 15 and over) has continued to shrink. The activity rate declined from 51.5% in 2005 to 47.4% in 2015. The rate shows a substantial gender disparity (71.5% for men, 24.8% for women, 2015), which places Morocco among the lowest performers in the Middle East and North Africa region as far as female activity is concerned. Young people (15 to 34) are 47.3% of the active population but the active youth population has been declining by an average of 0.3% annually (2000–12); the most affected are young women and the youngest of the group. Low activity affects urban Morocco more severely than rural areas. Factors explaining these trends are: discouragement of women and young people; expansion of schooling years for young people; and growing share of women in household activity<sup>646</sup>.

The employment rate continued to decline and was 41.2% in 2015 (15 to 64), marked by a strong gender difference (62.4% for men against 24.8% for women). Some of the features of employment

<sup>643</sup> Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs (2015). Bilan social 2014, p. 8.

<sup>644</sup> Ministry of Labour and Professional Integration (2015). Bilan social 2014, p. 22.

<sup>645</sup> HCP (2015). Note d'information du Haut Commissariat au Plan au sujet de la situation du marché du travail au deuxième trimestre de l'année 2015. [www.hcp.ma/La-Situation-du-marche-du-travail-au-deuxieme-trimestre-de-lannee-2015\\_a1585.html](http://www.hcp.ma/La-Situation-du-marche-du-travail-au-deuxieme-trimestre-de-lannee-2015_a1585.html)

<sup>646</sup> Ministry of Labour and Professional Integration (2015). Bilan social 2014, pp. 15–16.

highlighted by official sources – Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP)<sup>647</sup> – that will continue to be strategic issues for policies are listed below.

- a. 62% of the employed people have no qualification (diploma); 38% hold a middle or higher level qualification. Agriculture has the highest concentration of the employed without diploma.
- b. Female employment rate is 22.6% (13.9% in rural areas and 36.2% in urban).
- c. The underemployment rate is 10.3%, with large sectoral discrepancies: 17% in construction; 10% in agriculture and fisheries; 9.4% in services; 8% in industry and crafts.
- d. 62.6% of employees have no regular labour contract. This rate is highest in agriculture and fisheries (91.6%).
- e. Unpaid employment is 22.5% nationally (41.6% in rural areas).
- f. 79.5% of the employed people have no medical insurance. Considering only the paid employed people, this indicator is 58.2% nationally.
- g. 1.6% of the paid employed people (2.1% in urban areas) have participated in training paid by the employer in the past 12 months.
- h. 3% of the employed people are affiliated to a trade union (5% in rural areas). Even among the paid employed people this rate is low (6% nationally and 7% in urban zones).

The unemployment rate for people aged 15 and over had stabilised at around 8.9% in 2011, but increased to 9.7% in 2015. It is much higher in urban areas (14.8%) than in rural (4.2%)<sup>648</sup>. The unemployment rate of the age group 15 to 24 grew from 19.3% to 20.8% between 2013 and 2015. In 2014, the highest unemployment rates were among holders of higher education diplomas (20.9%)<sup>649</sup>.

The rate of young people (15 to 24) not in employment, education or training (NEET) was 27.9% in 2015, with marked gender difference (11.4% for men, 45.1% for women)<sup>650</sup>.

<sup>647</sup> HCP. Note d'information du Haut Commissariat au Plan au sujet de la situation du marché du travail en 2014, pp. 4–5. [www.hcp.ma/La-Situation-dumarche-du-travail-en-2014\\_a1503.html](http://www.hcp.ma/La-Situation-dumarche-du-travail-en-2014_a1503.html)

<sup>648</sup> HCP. La situation du marché du travail en 2014. [www.hcp.ma/La-Situation-du-marche-du-travail-en-2014\\_a1503.html](http://www.hcp.ma/La-Situation-du-marche-du-travail-en-2014_a1503.html)

<sup>649</sup> HCP. Note d'information du Haut Commissariat au Plan au sujet de la situation du marché du travail en 2014, pp. 6–7. [www.hcp.ma/La-Situation-dumarche-du-travail-en-2014\\_a1503.html](http://www.hcp.ma/La-Situation-dumarche-du-travail-en-2014_a1503.html)

<sup>650</sup> HCP. Labour force survey. Cited in ETF (2017). Processus de Turin 2016–17: Maroc – Résumé analytique.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

Stakeholders have high expectations of the NQF as a catalyst for change, as expressed in the NQF reference document:

- a. to strengthen the responsiveness of education and training programmes and qualifications to skill needs of the economy;
- b. to generalise the use of learning outcomes, which should reflect the knowledge, skills and competences required by the labour market;
- c. to serve as a 'label' of quality for qualifications allocated in the NQF;
- d. to improve permeability between different subsectors and encourage citizens' lifelong learning.

In this context, the limitations of the NQF may be a challenge for some stakeholders. The NQF contributes to improving transparency and linkages between subsectors and levels – for better individual mobility lifelong and life-wide. But the NQF alone cannot solve systemic problems related with dead-ends and limited permeability between levels/qualifications from different subsystems. Stakeholders/institutions need to define and use appropriate strategic and legal mechanisms, and pertinent technical solutions to improve pathways and assure that learning outcomes can be validated, certified and used in career, personal and professional development. The National VET strategy (2021) includes measures geared towards improvement of permeability between levels and subsystems. One such measure is the creation in 2014 of new programmes integrating general and vocational curriculum, such as the professional baccalaureate.

### International cooperation

The EU-Morocco cooperation framework is an international factor for development of the NQF and the country takes account of the EQF. A first visit of the NQF Moroccan delegation, composed of all focal points and the representative from the Prime Minister's office, to a meeting of the EQF Advisory Group took place in May 2015 (observer status).

The 'Statut avancé' (advanced status) of cooperation with the EU signed in 2008 opens up prospects for deep and comprehensive approximation. Different chapters of the Statut avancé point to approximation in areas related to higher education and the qualifications system and framework: strengthening of cooperation in qualifications, in particular to support transparency and recognition; negotiation of mutual recognition of qualifications to aid the mobility of service providers and investors;

and negotiation of mutual recognition of vocational bachelor's degrees (licences professionnelles) in the transport trade, particularly sea and air transport. Chapter 4 (human dimension) dedicates a whole section to the approximation of Moroccan higher education to VET to the European area, and to approximation of the qualification system to the EQF.

Although not a member of the Bologna Process, Morocco is reforming its higher education sector taking account of developments in the European higher education area (EHEA), implementing the three-cycle structure. It cooperates with projects funded by the EU and in 2014 the country established the national independent quality assurance body for higher education (Agence nationale d'évaluation et d'assurance qualité de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche scientifique du Maroc).

Current and planned EU programmes (sector reform contracts) include indicators and complementary assistance (twinning) targeting NQF implementation.

EU-Morocco agreements include:

- a. Association agreement signed in 1996 (entry into force in 2000) – Euro-Mediterranean agreement establishing an association between the European Communities and their Member States, on the one side, and the Kingdom of Morocco<sup>651</sup>;
- b. Statut avancé, September 2008<sup>652</sup> – The text mentions (p. 12) the possibility of approximation with the EQF, in the long term, as a result of the modernisation of the education and training system, and enhanced transparency of qualifications;
- c. alignment of the Moroccan higher education and research, and vocational training systems with the European space for higher education and scientific research, and vocational training.

This will contribute to the modernisation of the education and training systems and to the evolution of acquired qualifications. In the long term, this will permit comparison with the EQF<sup>653</sup>.

<sup>651</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/world/agreements/downloadFile.do?fullText=yes&treatyTransId=692>

<sup>652</sup> [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/morocco/documents/eu\\_morocco/feuilledeRoute-sa\\_fr.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/morocco/documents/eu_morocco/feuilledeRoute-sa_fr.pdf)

<sup>653</sup> Translated by the ETF.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The description below is based on the NQF reference document, validated on 23 February 2013 at an interministerial conference, and updated in October 2015. On 23 May 2016, the NQF Commission, chaired by the Prime Minister, approved the structure of the NQF and the level descriptors.

### NQF scope and structure

In the reference document, the NQF is defined as: 'An instrument for regulation of qualifications based on objective characteristics of quality, in view of their recognition by the labour market. It is an instrument for referencing of qualifications, whose quality is in line with a quality assurance system that takes account of learning outcomes, prescribed by the labour market following a prospective analysis.'

The objectives of the NQF are:

- a. promoting the quality of all programmes/courses across education and training;
- b. coherence between qualification subsystems;
- c. transparency and quality of all certifications;
- d. link of qualifications to the labour market;
- e. comparability of qualifications between countries, to aid mobility;
- f. lifelong learning.

The NQF is a comprehensive framework, encompassing public and private qualifications in all subsystems (national education, VET and higher education). Qualifications acquired outside the formal system are not currently being considered in the NQF.

This NQF definition appears to restrict the framework to labour market needs and objectives. Other policy and legislative documents currently in development have broadened the scope and basis of the NQF to include also the needs of societal development.

### Alignment to other classification systems

The NQF is the national instrument for structuring and classification of qualifications but it is not operational yet.

Other relevant classifications in place are:

- a. Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP): Nomenclature nationale des diplômes (June 2000)<sup>654</sup>;
- b. REM/REC (Répertoire des emplois-métiers [repertories of occupations]/Référentiel emplois-compétences [referential jobs and competences]).

<sup>654</sup> Available at: [www.hcp.ma/file/103334](http://www.hcp.ma/file/103334)

The nomenclature developed by the HCP (national statistical entity) structures all diplomas in 10 large groups, with subdivisions by large group to four-digit disaggregation. The large groups are:

- a. diplomas and certificates of fundamental education;
- b. diplomas of secondary education;
- c. higher diplomas delivered by faculties;
- d. higher diplomas delivered by 'grandes écoles' and higher institutes;
- e. diplomas of technician and medium-level personnel;
- f. diplomas of higher technicians;
- g. diplomas of professional qualification;
- h. certificates of professional specialisation;
- i. certificates of professional initiation;
- j. persons without diplomas, undeclared diplomas.

Important foundations for the NQF are the repertoires of occupations (REM) and the associated referential (standards) of occupational competences (REC), designed by sector/branche (such as textile, tourism and IT). REM and REC are developed by the VET department in cooperation with the sectoral federations/professionals and the relevant sector ministries (industry, tourism and others), and other partners. REM and REC are based on the principle of learning outcomes. REM describes key functions and activities by occupation, as well as key required competences. REC provides a fine and detailed description of tasks, skills and competences.

Together, REM and REC are management tools for the occupations (by sector) to reinforce coherence between learning outcomes (expressing enterprises' needs) and VET programmes from different provider categories. As such, REM and REC can contribute to the quality of training and qualification outcomes. They are also good foundations to establish mechanisms for validation of non-formal and informal learning, and elements of career information and guidance. REM and REC have been developed for 13 sectors<sup>655</sup>, totalling 246 and 288 fiches respectively.

The NQF is seen as a tool for quality assurance and credit recognition, hence its links with the quality assurance framework and the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS, still in its early development stage).

<sup>655</sup> Sectors: REM-REC before 2009: tourism/hotels; textile/clothing; ICT; building and public works; industrial maintenance and automotive repair; leather industry. REM-REC developed in 2009–12: offshoring; aeronautic industry; trade and distribution (Rawal plan); automotive equipment; renewable energy and energy efficiency; electronics; security and cash transportation.

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

The Moroccan NQF is composed of eight levels with no sublevels. The level structure of the NQF signals vertical progression, based on relevant criteria (level descriptors) defined by the principle of learning outcomes. Since 2015, the National Agency for the Struggle Against Illiteracy has proposed to add a level, capturing the quality-assured certificate of functional literacy. This is obtained by numerous candidates at completion of programmes and in assessment carried out under the auspices of the agency.

The level descriptors are learning-outcomes-based, formulated in six categories: knowledge, skills, complexity, autonomy/responsibility, adaptability, and communication skills.

The descriptors, as with the framework overall, are inspired by the EQF, in higher education by the framework of qualification of the European higher education area, and generally by lessons learned from different countries, particularly in Europe.

In developing the categories, stakeholders took account of certain strategic areas which will require greater attention in education and training in the future, such as communication skills.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

The NQF reference document explicitly places the concept of learning outcomes at the heart of defining level descriptors, allowing indication of vertical progression, comparison of qualifications and their referencing of qualifications to levels. Application of learning outcomes reflecting relevance to labour market needs is considered the fundamental element of NQF quality assurance.

The learning outcomes approach is well established in the APC (approche par compétence [competence-based approach]) in VET, and is applied throughout all main elements of the APC cycle of qualifications development and implementation. Schematically the APC cycle can be depicted as in [Figure 14](#). The initial design of learning outcomes for the qualification is undertaken at the stage of the analysis of work situation (occupational standard): these are specific descriptors (cognitive and motor abilities, complexity, communication and others). Deeper and finer definition of the learning outcomes corresponding to tasks and operations is done at the stage of elaboration of the standard of competences. These are multidimensional learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, attitudes and perception), used throughout the training programme and assessment guide.

Figure 14. APC cycle



### Definition of qualification

The definition of ‘qualification’ in the NQF reference document is identical to the definition given in the EQF recommendation (2008): ‘qualification’ means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.

### Access, progression and credit

Credit systems are not yet in place in Moroccan education and training. Higher education reforms started in early 2000 led to generalisation of the three-cycle structure (licence-master-doctorat (LMD)).

In 2016–17 work was undertaken towards development of an acceptable ECTS approach, which paved the way to a learning outcomes (rather than workload) orientation. Final consolidation of the ECTS principles and practice is expected to progress in 2018–20 with EU support through a 24-month twinning project, which started in February 2018.

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

#### NQF legal basis

Currently only one legal act directly related to the NQF has been enacted, the Circulaire of the Prime Minister of June 2014, establishing the National NQF Commission.

Approval by the National NQF Commission of the structure and level descriptors, the governance scheme and the roadmap for NQF development (2016–17) will be followed by publication of the approved report of the cited meeting in official channels. Implementation will require legal acts and decisions, notably concerning the establishment of the permanent secretariat, the executive committee and the NQF regulations/bylaws and procedures.

The NQF has been mentioned in two important strategic documents: the Strategic vision for reform 2015–30 (education and training)<sup>656</sup>, and the National VET strategy<sup>657</sup>.

<sup>656</sup> Pour une école de l’équité, de la qualité et de la promotion: vision stratégique de la réforme 2015–30. [www.csefrs.ma/pdf/Vision\\_VF\\_Fr.pdf](http://www.csefrs.ma/pdf/Vision_VF_Fr.pdf)

<sup>657</sup> Stratégie nationale de la formation professionnelle 2021. <http://dfp.gov.ma/images/pdfdocs/2016/Strate%CC%81gie%20Formation%20FR.pdf>

The Strategic vision 2015–30 mentions the NQF in the following terms<sup>658</sup>: ‘Establish a national system of certification enabling the organisation and classification of certificates and diplomas, on the basis of a reference structure that will be defined by the departments in charge of education, training and scientific research. Such a framework will guarantee transparency and clarity, and also comparability of diplomas on the basis of a national qualifications guide; it will improve the instruments for assessment of learning outcomes from education and training and enhance their credibility and effectiveness. It will likewise ascertain the national and international mobility of graduates.’

The same document also stipulates: ‘Establish a system of validation of skills and competences from professional experience to the benefit of workers/ personnel with experience, with the aim to allow their access to opportunities of lifelong learning.’

Under the fifth strategic axis – ‘Enhance the value of the professional pathways through a better articulation of the components of the education and training system’ (p. 38 of the main document) – the National VET strategy 2021 mentions the NQF.

The draft Framework Law on Education mentions the establishment of the NQF under an autonomous commission, as one of the measures for global reform of the mechanisms of assessment, examination and certification. The NQF is defined in broader terms, which take account of the needs of both the labour market and societal development.

### **Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF**

In the current period of gradual institution building, two institutions are operational: the National Commission and the first format of the future executive committee (called comité de pilotage [steering committee]).

The governance scheme is based on the principle of complementarity and coordination between two levels, strategic and operational:

- a. political strategy (higher decision-making): NQF Commission;
- b. operational strategy: two instances;
- c. executive committee (organisational level): based on rotating chairmanship and composed of the secretaries general of education and training (national education, VET and higher education), the employers’ confederation (CGEM);

- d. permanent secretariat (technical level): hosted by the services of the Prime Minister, has administrative autonomy, a budget and trained staff. Not yet established.

According to the Circulaire (June 2014), the National NQF Commission has the following missions:

- a. follow-up the NQF implementation, its update, evaluation of the award mechanisms, and validation of levelling decisions;
- b. link the various components of the education and training system and employment, in view of implementation of the NQF, and recommend reforms and improvements based on evidence gathered through the implementation of the NQF;
- c. ensure cooperation and links with the NQF of other countries.

The main planned missions of the NQF governance instances can be summarised as follows:

National NQF Commission:

- a. monitoring NQF implementation, endorsement of levelling decisions and registration of qualifications from public and private providers (certifying bodies) in the NQF;
- b. formulation of strategic orientations for improving the systems of education, training and employment;
- c. approval of decisions regarding alignment with other countries’ qualifications frameworks, and long-term preparation of a correspondence/link with the EQF;
- d. approval of the annual/multiannual action plan;

Executive committee:

- a. coordination between the permanent secretariat and the National NQF Commission;
- b. validation of processes of allocation/levelling of qualifications and their registration;
- c. validation of the proposals of levelling of qualifications and their registration in the NQF register;
- d. establishment of working groups and planning activities;
- e. validation of the annual/multiannual action plan;

Permanent secretariat – in charge of the NQF operational activities:

- a. coordination and preparation of the meetings of the executive committee and the working groups;
- b. elaboration and implementation of the levelling processes and registration of qualifications;

<sup>658</sup> Strategic vision 2015–30, p. 45.



- c. proposals to update/improve the NQF register of qualifications;
- d. elaboration and implementation of the communication plan and the annual/multiannual action plan;
- e. opinion on the opportunity to create new qualifications.

### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

NQF focal points include nominated representatives from the two ministries, the CGEM, and the Higher Council for Education Training and Scientific Research. Working/technical groups can be formed ad-hoc or permanently to support focal point work.

Stakeholder consultation is via the steering committee and the focal points organising/hosting workshops and events to consult and inform stakeholders groups.

The CGEM has strong outreach to all professional and branch associations and representatives and takes care of their involvement, at national and regional levels.

The development of the NQF – concepts, structure and governance scheme – is the result of several years of analysis, consultation and final approval, on 23 May 2016, of three key documents: the structure of the NQF and its level descriptors; the governance scheme; and the roadmap for NQF implementation for 2016–17. In 2015, the decision was taken to transform the temporary secretariat into a permanent secretariat, to be hosted by the services of the Prime Minister and act as the operational entity of the NQF. The legal basis of this secretariat is not yet developed/approved, which is slowing the pace of NQF implementation.

### **Resources and funding**

Financial resources for NQF functions and bodies are the State budget allocated to the ministries and departments involved, and a budget for the future permanent secretariat hosted by the services of the Prime Minister.

International partners contributing directly to develop the NQF and its instruments are the EU and the ETF.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

VET programmes and related qualifications are approved by a legal decision, which allows the award of officially recognised diplomas and certificates. Activities of private sector VET institutions are regulated by a specific law and abide by a strict set of external quality assurance requirements and procedures.

Quality assurance of VET qualifications is consistent within the APC segment, through rigorous methodology and practice for qualifications development, based on learning outcomes, identified with involvement of labour market actors. Learner assessment is carried out using the Assessment Guide; it covers the learning outcomes defined in the standard of competences and uses criterion assessment (pass or not).

In higher education, the introduction of the principle of quality assurance was based on three main measures stipulated by the Law 01.00:

- a. accreditation of the programme/qualification (filière de formation);
- b. evaluation system (of education and training, research and higher education institutions);
- c. creation of the institutions in charge of evaluation and regulation – the National Higher Education Coordination Commission in 2003, the Coordination Commission of Private Higher Education in 2005, the National Evaluation Instance in 2006, and the Coordination Council of the Higher Education Institutions not related to Universities in 2008.

Procedures and practice of accreditation are fully generalised to all cycles, programmes and higher education institutions. The accreditation system is mandatory for programmes leading to qualifications of public higher education institutions, and is optional for those of private higher education institutions. Accreditation is for a fixed period.

The principle of evaluation of institutions is another lever for higher education reform and is characterised by:

- a. global nature, regularity and ex-post approach;
- b. mandatory self-evaluation for all higher education institutions (public and private);
- c. obligation to disclose the results of evaluation to the elected bodies at national and regional levels;
- d. obligation to inform the public on the evaluation results;
- e. audits and evaluations by specialised and independent institutions.

An integrated quality assurance framework covering all forms and types of VET and institutions is yet to be created. A number of legal texts regulate parts of the VET system: Law 12.00 on apprenticeship, and Law 13.00 on private VET.

Authorisation to open VET institutions follows differentiated principles and procedures, due to incoherence in the legal basis, problems in the application of the rules, and other factors such

as low capacity of certain institutions to analyse applications promptly.

The main quality assurance bodies relevant in NQF implementation are not yet explicitly defined, though a strong role is anticipated for:

- a. in VET: department of VET (under the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training);
- b. in higher education: ANEAQ (Agence nationale d'évaluation et d'assurance qualité de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche scientifique)<sup>659</sup>, the new Agency for Evaluation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education and scientific research.

A strong point of the NQF concept in Morocco is its focus on quality of qualifications and stakeholder expectation that the allocation of qualifications in the NQF shall reflect quality based on objective criteria, such as learning outcomes and compatibility with the principles and structure of the NQF.

To reach expected transparency in allocating qualifications to the NQF a number of issues and challenges regarding NQF and qualifications quality assurance need to be addressed:

- a. the clarity of mission and interactions of future NQF governance structures, which impact on the effectiveness of NQF operations;
- b. the consistent application of the learning outcomes principle, from design of the qualification, to provision and assessment of learners' achievements;
- c. publication of the future register of NQF qualifications;
- d. publication of information for users on qualifications content and results of graduate tracking studies and other analyses of graduate employability.

In 2017 the EU supported modernisation of the quality assurance framework and procedures in higher education, through technical assistance. This cooperation contributed to further convergence with the aspects of the European higher education area and concretely developed evaluation standards for institutions, programmes/curricula, research, centres of doctoral studies and cooperation; a quality assurance procedures handbook; and an action plan 2018 for ANEAQ, the key body in charge of quality assurance in higher education.

<sup>659</sup> [www.aneaq.ma/fr/index.php](http://www.aneaq.ma/fr/index.php)

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The Strategic vision 2015–30 explicitly mentions validation of learning outcomes from experience (validation des acquis de l'expérience – VAE) as follows: 'Establish a system of validation of skills and competences from professional experience to the benefit of workers/personnel with experience, with the aim to allow their access to opportunities of lifelong learning.' In past years, the validation of learning outcomes from experience has benefited from experimentation projects and initiatives, in sectors with high demand for labour with qualifications, but there is no general framework approach and procedures accessible to all.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

The NQF is still in development.

The roadmap 2016–17 is structured in five main components, each with a list of key activities and milestones:

- a. governance: establishment of the legal basis and installation of the permanent secretariat;
- b. support to launch operations of the permanent secretariat;
- c. organisation and strengthening of the permanent secretariat;
- d. levelling of qualifications in accordance with NQF principles and registration;
- e. register of qualifications (répertoire).

In line with component 4 of the roadmap, in 2016–17 the ETF supported NQF stakeholders in preparing the methodology package and procedures to carry out transparent allocation of qualifications in the NQF. The first phase of this pilot project was focused on qualifications in two pilot sectors (construction and automobile), and developed:

- a. the draft procedures and methodology for allocation of qualifications to the NQF;
- b. two inventories of qualifications relevant for the two pilot sectors, one covering VET qualifications and the other higher education qualifications.

Following validation by NQF stakeholders, the procedures and methodology will be tested on a sample of qualifications selected from the two inventories. The second project phase will analyse lessons from the first, expand the levelling to new sectors, build the capacity of the permanent

secretariat and create a first simple integrated database of qualifications.

### **Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF**

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of NQF implementation have not yet been defined.

### **Impact for end-users**

No impact yet on end-users.

## **Referencing to regional frameworks**

The roadmap for implementation of the advanced status of EU-Morocco relations, dated 2008, includes the objective to foster approximation of the Moroccan NQF with the EQF. The format of such approximation is not defined. A first visit of a Moroccan delegation – with observer status – to a meeting of the EQF advisory group took place in May 2015.

## **Important lessons and future plans**

Success factors to date include:

- a. highly advantageous policy momentum: VET strategy, Vision 2030, draft Framework Law on Education;
- b. NQF focal points: continuity, mutual trust; commitment of actors from the business community;
- c. APC: main officially endorsed approach to develop, implement, assess and award VET qualifications is centred on learning outcomes;
- d. reforms of higher education and further steps for convergence with the European higher education area, notably introduction and generalisation of the ECTS;
- e. consolidation of operations by the National Agency for Evaluation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (2017) and effective application of new quality assurance procedures and standards, developed together with EU partners;

### **Prepared by:**

The European Training Foundation (ETF) in collaboration with national experts.

- f. support of international partners (EU, ETF and bilateral cooperation);
- g. statut avancé EU-Morocco: emphasis on modernisation of education and training, transparency of qualifications and, eventually, approximation with the EQF.

Governance of the NQF is not free from misunderstandings between partner institutions. It is expected that the upcoming publication of new legal acts related to the establishment of the executive committee and the permanent secretariat will clear the situation and prompt more effective development of the regulatory framework and of NQF instruments, and start of operations.

### **Abbreviations**

ANEAQ	Agence nationale d'évaluation et d'assurance qualité de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche scientifique (National quality assurance agency for higher education)
APC	approche par compétence (competence-based approach)
CGEM	Confédération générale des entreprises du Maroc (employers' confederation)
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
EQF	European qualifications framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
HCP	Haut Commissariat au Plan
NQF	national qualifications framework
REC	référentiel emplois-compétences (referential (standards) of occupational competences)
REM	répertoire des emplois-métiers (repertory of occupations)
VET	vocational education and training

# NAMIBIA

## Introduction and context

Introduced in 2006, the Namibian qualifications framework (NQF) is comprehensive and inclusive, spanning all certification levels from school to university and including all forms of learning: formal, non-formal and informal. The NQF is intended to be a register of all official qualifications in Namibia, as well as being a crucial tool for promoting lifelong learning. Inequality in the education system inherited from the colonial regime was one of many major challenges confronting the new government that came to power in Namibia in 1990. Following independence, large-scale education reforms were undertaken with the aim of correcting the imbalances of the past and creating an inclusive, fair and learner-centred education system for the future.

The policy directive *Towards education for all: a development brief for education, culture and training* (Republic of Namibia, 1992) highlighted the four development goals of access, equality, quality and democracy, and gave special importance to lifelong learning as an organising principle of Namibia's education sector. Other reforms included the Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training of 1999 (Republic of Namibia, 1999) and the Education and training sector improvement programme (ETSIP) of 2005 (Republic of Namibia, 2007). A key continuing challenge for Namibian education and training is the perception that learning attained via the conventional, formal route is superior to that attained in informal or non-formal settings, for example open and distance learning, workplace-based learning, and learning acquired through general life experiences. The government and concerned stakeholders are committed to changing this perception, and have developed a national recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy for this purpose.

The NQF was revised in 2013. The review exercise consisted of a consultation with all relevant stakeholders; the review concluded that the NQF should remain structurally as it is, while there were some recommendations for amendments to some of the related regulations.

## Main policy objectives

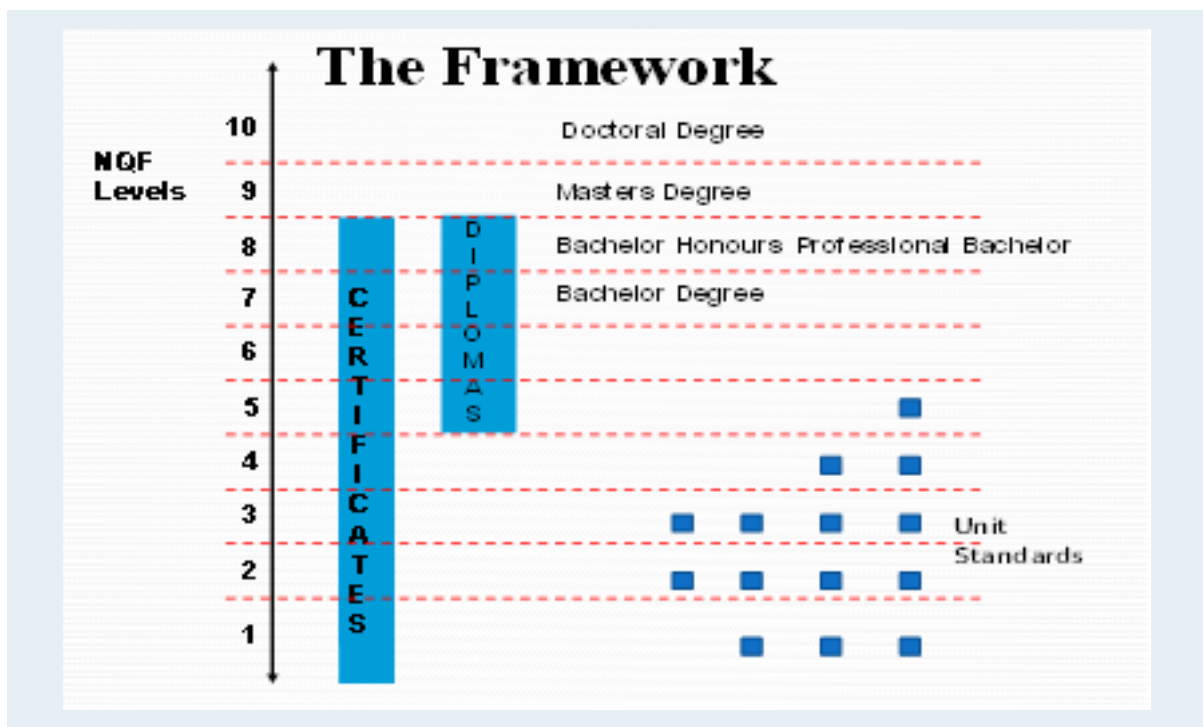
The NQF aims to:

- a. introduce unity and consistency to the Namibian qualifications system by bringing all qualifications together under one umbrella;
- b. support horizontal and vertical mobility throughout the education and training system;
- c. promote the consistent use of qualification titles;
- d. provide clear information about the knowledge and skills that can be expected of a qualification holder or an RPL learner, making it easier for both learners and employers to understand the similarities and differences between qualifications;
- e. harmonise different education and training sectors and improve their alignment with the world of work;
- f. provide assurance of the quality of education, training and assessment in Namibia;
- g. enhance the reputation of Namibia's education and training system in the regional, continental and international communities (Namibia Qualifications Authority, 2011).

## Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The NQF comprises 10 levels, covering secondary, vocational and higher education. Each level is defined by a level descriptor. Accredited institutions register all the qualifications they award on the NQF. To qualify for registration, the learning outcomes required for successful completion of a qualification must be clearly stated. Some learning outcomes are expressed as unit standards which can be awarded independently of the whole qualification. This allows learners to receive recognition for their learning achievements, even if these fall short of the requirements for the award of a full qualification. The NQF uses a credit system which consists of notional hours of learning. Ten notional hours of learning are equivalent to one NQF credit unit.

Figure 15. Namibian qualifications framework



Source: Namibia Qualifications Authority: [www.namqa.org/framework/](http://www.namqa.org/framework/)

### Stakeholder involvement

The Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) was established as a statutory body through Act 29 of 1996. Its purpose is to oversee the development and implementation of the NQF. The NQA networks with other organisations to keep abreast of current trends and developments in education and training at local, regional and international levels. It makes formal agreements with stakeholders on setting standards, accrediting education and training institutions and their courses, and facilitating student mobility and credit transfer. One agreement between the NQA and the Namibia Training Authority mandates the latter to coordinate the setting of competence standards and associated national curriculum modules and assessment criteria for vocational trades up to NQF level 5. These are made available as packages to training providers.

While the NQA has the mandate to accredit vocational training providers, the Namibia Training Authority is responsible for their registration. The NQA has signed an agreement with the National Council for Higher Education mandating the latter to register private higher education institutions. Recognised higher education programmes are those that are accredited by the NQA and other statutory bodies such as the Ministry of Education or examination boards. The NQA

maintains close working relationships with the awarding bodies. These include the Directorate for National Examinations and Assessment, the National Institute for Educational Development, the University of Namibia, the Polytechnic of Namibia, and the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). Two statutory bodies, the Namibia Tourism Board and the Roads Authority of Namibia, have developed unit standards for registration on the NQF.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning, and links with the NQF

In 2009 the Namibia Qualifications Authority and the Namibia Training Authority were assigned the responsibility of overseeing the development of a national policy on RPL. An RPL steering committee, with representatives from different sectors, was constituted to work on the draft policy. Following consultation, approval was granted by the Minister for Education. The Namibia National RPL Policy was approved in March 2015. In the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector, RPL has been piloted in three fields, in which candidates were assessed and awarded qualifications. Registered education and training providers are required to develop institution-specific policies for RPL which must be aligned to the

national policy. Once this policy is implemented, RPL candidates will be able to earn credit for unit standards or full NQF qualifications.

Two separate policies on RPL are currently in operation. One was developed by the Namibia Training Authority for TVET institutions, the other by NAMCOL. NAMCOL's policy defines RPL as 'the process of identifying, matching, assessing and accrediting the knowledge, skills and experience that candidates have gained through formal, informal or non-formal learning' (NAMCOL, 2008). NAMCOL's RPL policy is currently being applied to broaden access to the college's post-secondary programmes at certificate and diploma levels. RPL applicants to NAMCOL enter into an agreement with the college before undergoing a series of assessments designed to allow them to display their competences. The process involves pre- and post-assessment interviews, portfolio development and proficiency tests. At the end, candidates are given written feedback on the outcome of their assessment. Apart from a few institutional initiatives on RPL, as exemplified by NAMCOL, there very little horizontal or vertical movement of learners between the different education and training subsystems. One reason is that these subsystems still function in silos, with insufficient coordination leading to duplication of the programmes on offer. Another reason is that the founding acts of publicly funded educational institutions empower the latter to award their own qualifications, weakening NQF efforts to unify the system. Training bodies have been slow to register their qualifications on the NQF, creating a further obstacle to mobility. To address this, the NQA issued a directive that all qualifications must be registered on the framework by 2015. However, at the time of this research many qualifications were still being reformatted to fit NQF requirements; as a result, most are not registered. The NQA has received many applications for NQF registration of qualifications from the training providers, but a few pre-NQF qualifications still await registration, and some will never be registered as they are being phased out. From 2006 to 2013 a total of 266 qualifications were registered on the NQF, and from 2014 to 2015 192 qualifications were registered.

### Referencing to regional frameworks

The NQA represents Namibia on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) technical committee on certification and accreditation, which oversees progress towards a regional qualifications framework for the SADC. The NQA has signed formal memoranda of understanding with quality

assurance bodies in the region, with the aims of strengthening information sharing about providers and their courses, building and sharing staff expertise in quality assurance, and supporting research on matters of shared interest. Formal agreements currently exist with the Botswana Training Authority, the Tertiary Education Council of Botswana, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the National Council for Higher Education (South Africa), the Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini, the Roads Authority of Namibia, and the Mauritius Qualifications Authority.

### Important lessons and future plans

Namibia has been at the forefront of NQF development in SADC countries. It aims at facilitating assessment, certification and quality assurance as well as learner mobility across education and training systems. This has had implications for the development of post-primary education in Africa. Post-primary education and diversified secondary education are increasingly perceived to include skills development and TVET, which form elements of a coherent system of education and training that includes both theoretical and applied learning. However, while the NQF covers the whole spectrum of general education and vocational training activities, there is still work to be done to create a linked system with common structures for transferability between education and training, and vice versa. Namibia has worked on automating its evaluation of qualifications process (which has now been achieved).

There are numerous challenges that the country faces in implementing not only the NQF but also the quality assurance system in the education and training sector. One of the biggest challenges relates to capacity: human resources as well as financial and other resource requirements to ensure quality in education and training.

#### Abbreviations

NAMCOL	Namibian College of Open Learning
NQA	Namibia Qualifications Authority
NQF	national qualifications framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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### **Prepared by:**

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

# NEPAL

## Introduction and context

Nepal is a landlocked country located between China and India. It is inhabited by people of diverse social, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds – although Hindus, who comprise over 80% of its 29 million-plus population with an annual growth rate of 1.35%, make up the majority (CBS, 2011).

The national vocational qualifications framework (NVQF) of Nepal is in the process of being developed by the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training on the basis of the existing National Skills Testing Board (NSTB) certification system.

Nepal's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system is in urgent need of reform in order to tackle the many developmental challenges the country currently faces. A lack of skills development activities is considered to be at the root of the country's poverty and unemployment problems, and large numbers of Nepali are leaving the country because of the severe lack of employment opportunities. The majority of young people leave school before completing Grade 10. Opportunities for moving horizontally between general education and TVET are limited. Despite the rapid economic growth that Nepal has experienced since 1951, there are still not enough technical higher education institutions (Tulhadar, 2011).

Nepal's 14<sup>th</sup> Three-Year Plan (2016/17–2018/19) projected that, by 2018/19 the net enrolment rates in lower secondary (Grades 1–8) and secondary schools (Grades 9–12) would reach 94% and 45% respectively. Additionally, the retention rate in Grade 8 and Grade 10 would reach 80% and 50% respectively. Employment-oriented skills training in Nepal is equally in need of an overhaul. At present, there is no overarching system to govern and fund such training, meaning that what courses there are tend to be short-term and donor-driven with little return on investment. Moreover, there is no functioning system for the recognition of skills gained in informal and non-formal settings.

A further challenge concerns the recognition of foreign qualifications, which is not currently governed by any legal framework. Nepalis who have studied abroad often encounter difficulties when they return to Nepal and find that the qualifications they have gained are not recognized in their home country.

The Nepali economy has not performed well in the last decade. Gross domestic product (GDP) has grown by an average of around 4% annually, and one in four Nepali lives in poverty. The gross national income (GNI) per capita for fiscal year 2072/73 (2015/16) was USD 760. More than 60% of the population is currently dependent upon agriculture for its livelihood. However, the sector has been subject to major changes over the past decade; agriculture and industry are in decline while the service sector is on the rise. Although the official unemployment rate is negligible (2.1%), seasonal underemployment is significantly higher at almost 46% (CBS, 2011).

Over the past two decades, migration overseas for the purposes of seeking employment has become a prominent feature of Nepali economy and society. Approximately 1.9 million Nepalis work overseas, excluding India. About 5% of them are women. In 2011, at least another 800,000 (undocumented) Nepalis were working in the private sector in India, and about 250,000 in India's public sector. The highest remittances were from India (21%), followed by Malaysia (19%), Saudi Arabia (15%), Qatar (14%) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2%); other countries accounted for a further 29% in total.

## Policy objectives

In alignment with the TVET reform agenda, the NVQF aims to:

- create a skilled workforce that is recognized both in Nepal and overseas;
- provide a structured system of vocational qualifications that opens up pathways and possibilities for the individual learner.



## Levels and use of learning outcomes

Nepal has a five-level certification system, from elementary level to levels 1–4.

- Skill level – elementary:
  - o successful completion of 140 hours of vocational training in a relevant occupation/trade.
- Skills test level 1:
  - o literate, with knowledge and skills in the relevant occupation and a minimum of one year's work experience in a related occupation/trade, or
  - o successful completion of one month (160 hours) of vocational training in a relevant occupation/trade, or
  - o six months' work experience in the relevant occupation/trade, having basic knowledge and skills in a related field.
- Skills test level 2:
  - o literate, with knowledge and skills in the relevant occupation and a minimum of three years' work experience in a relevant occupation/trade, or
  - o one year's training (minimum 600 hours of theory and 800 hours of practice) in a relevant occupation/trade, or
  - o one year's work experience after completion of skills test level 1 in a relevant occupation/trade.
- Skills test level 3:
  - o literate, with knowledge and skills in the relevant occupation and a minimum of five years' work experience in a relevant occupation/trade, or
  - o two years' work experience and one year's training in a relevant occupation/trade, or
  - o one year's work experience after completion of the skills test level 2 in a relevant occupation/trade.
- Skills test level 4 (specifically for ophthalmic assistants):
  - o three years' work experience and one year's training after completion of the level 3 ophthalmic assistant skills test, or
  - o certificate in health science (ophthalmology) or equivalent with three years' experience and one year's training.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The NSTB certification system was initiated in Nepal in 1983 by an autonomous body called the Skills Testing Authority. The Authority introduced systems for the classification of occupations and the testing and certification of skills in accordance

with the guidelines of the Asian and Pacific Skill Development Programme/International Labour Organization (APSDEP/ILO). When the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training was formed in 1989, the Skills Testing Authority was replaced by the NSTB and placed under the jurisdiction of the Council, which oversees TVET in Nepal.

The NSTB is formed of representatives from government organizations and the public sector, craftspeople, trade unions, industrialists and employers. Half of its 16 members are from the public sector and half are from the private sector. Under the NSTB, various subject committees are working to develop national occupational skills standards/profiles and regulate skill-testing activities. As of January 2019, profiles for 290 different occupations have been developed. The NSTB has so far tested 452,901 craftspeople and certified 338,568. Skills tests are performance-based and require candidates to achieve occupational skills standards for their chosen trade in order to obtain a national skills certificate. An occupational skills standard is a written specification of the practical skills, knowledge and experience demonstrated by an individual in a particular occupation.

In 2013, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training signed a Memorandum of Understanding in which they pledged to work jointly to facilitate the development of sector skill committees as well as the NVQF. An sector skill committee is an informal body for a specific market sector, comprising government representatives, employers, training institutions and federations.

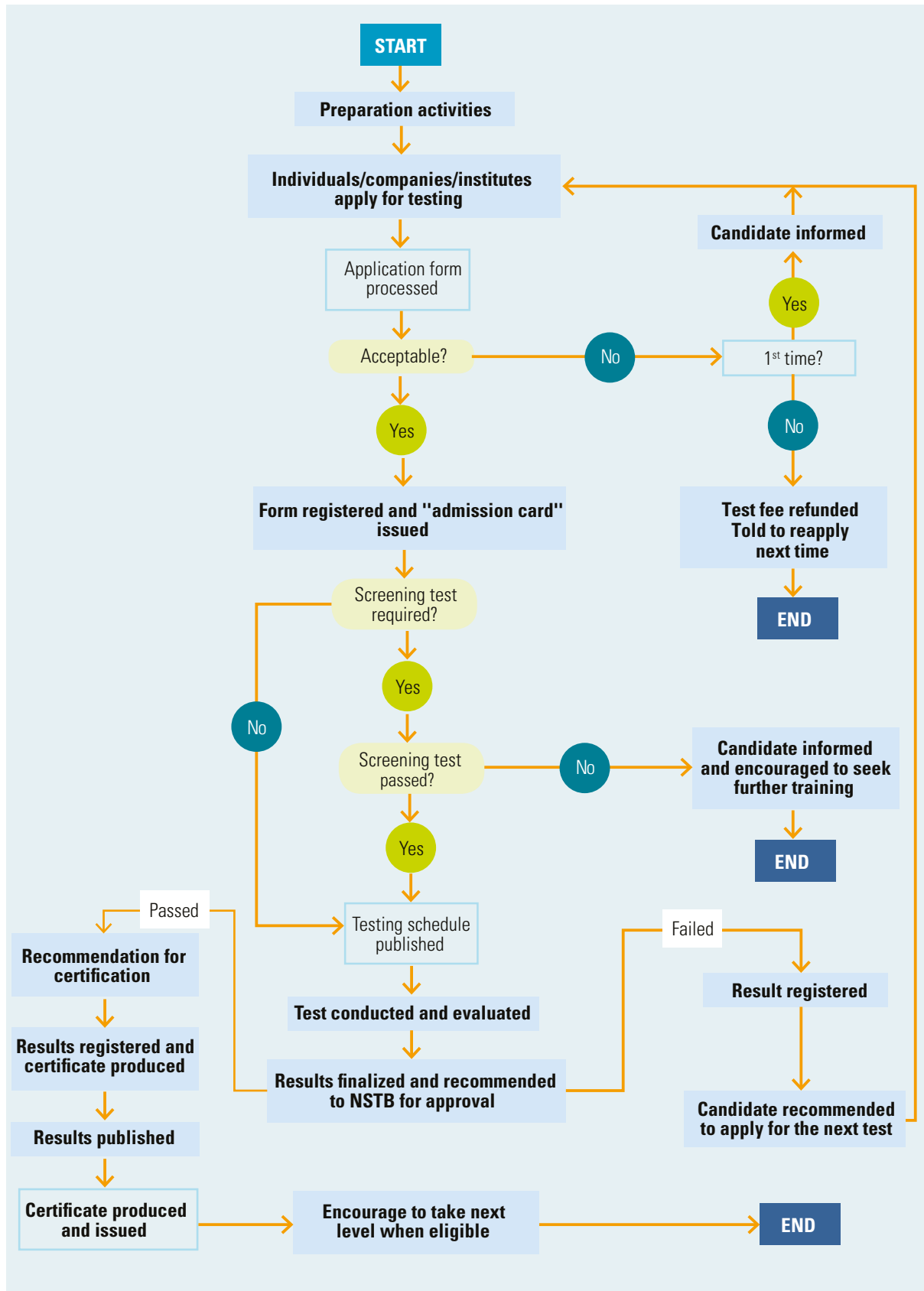
## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Skills tests conducted under the NSTB recognize prior formal and non-formal learning, competences and work experience. Skills tests are designed with three target groups in mind:

- graduates from pre-employment vocational training programmes who need help in making the transition from training to work;
- experienced workers (employed or unemployed) who lack official certification;
- workers who have completed an in-service training programme and are seeking an upgrade or additional certificate.

Figure 16 illustrates the skills testing process.

Figure 16. Nepal's skills testing procedures



Source: CTEVT, 2013.

One of the NVQF's major goals is to provide educational opportunities for young people who lack access to institution-based TVET provision. At present, TVET leading to diplomas and certificates is available only in institutions (which include constituent technical schools/training centres, affiliated technical colleges/institutes and technical education in community schools). However, plans are underway to make the TVET pathway more attractive to young people by embracing all forms of training: formal, non-formal and informal.

There are many good reasons for attempting to attract more young people to TVET. Numerous studies have shown that TVET graduates are more likely than graduates of academic programmes to find employment. Moreover, TVET is an effective pathway to jobs in the international market. Foreign employment surveys have shown that skilled workers, such as plumbers, carpenters, and mechanics, earn significantly higher wages than unskilled workers. Countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, the UK and other European nations offer attractive incentives, such as residency and work permits, to foreign workers with technical and vocational skills. Promoting international worker mobility is therefore a major priority for the NVQF.

## NQF implementation

The NVQF will be developed and implemented together with the unified national qualifications framework (NQF). With the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training will put the national vocational qualification system (NVQS) into effect. This new system will enable women and men, including those belonging to disadvantaged groups, to:

- gain access to employment and self-employment;
- work more productively;
- earn higher incomes;
- enhance their livelihoods and resilience.

It is hoped that this will reduce poverty and promote inclusive growth.

The NVQS project will be implemented in three phases. During the first phase (2015–19), planned activities to strengthen participation by stakeholders of the TVET system include policy dialogue

and formulation, and upgrades to the NSTB. Stakeholders will then be able to use the sector-specific Vocational Qualification Framework (VQF) and lay the foundation for the emerging NVQS.

During the second phase (2019–23), the NSTB will become the National Vocational Qualification Authority.

In the third and final phase (2023–25), it is expected that the qualifications offered by the National Vocational Qualification Authority will be recognized for entry to higher-level education and training, both in Nepal and abroad.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The eight member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – finalized the SAARC Framework for Action (SFFA) for Education 2030, which was adopted at the Third Meeting of Ministers of Education/Higher Education, held in Male, Maldives, in 2016. The ministers agreed that the objective of this action plan is to develop, through regional collaboration and partnerships, an expert group to review the frameworks/procedures followed in different SAARC countries for the recognition, validation and accreditation of the outcomes of formal, non-formal and informal learning (SAARC, 2016).

As a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Nepal strives to create a competent and qualified workforce comparable with those of other countries in Asia and the Pacific region and beyond.

## Important lessons and future plans

The Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training is confident that the NSTB certificates will become increasingly popular and widely recognized in both domestic and foreign labour markets.

In the long run, the Council plans to link the NVQF to a more comprehensive, overarching NQF that will encompass all education sectors rather than just TVET. This broader NQF will create greater coherence between TVET and general education, ensuring that Nepali qualifications are further adapted to respond to the changing needs of today's global economy.

**Abbreviations**

NQF	national qualifications framework	NVQS	national vocational qualification system
NSTB	National Skills Testing Board	SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
NVQF	national vocational qualifications framework	TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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**Prepared by:**

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in collaboration with national experts.

# NETHERLANDS

## Introduction and context

The Netherlands have a well-functioning education and training system, with very good performance on all key education and training indicators, reflective of a relatively high and stable level of public investment on education. The country has exceeded EU 2020 benchmarks on participation in early childhood education and care, tertiary education attainment, the employment rate of recent graduates, participation of adults in lifelong learning and the percentage of students leaving education and training early. Student performances in basic skills in reading, science and mathematics are above EU averages according to the Programme for international student assessment (PISA) 2015, though the proportion of underachievers has increased over recent years in all three domains (European Commission, 2018). Performance gaps between students are mainly related to immigrant background and to differences between schools and education tracks<sup>660</sup>. A dialogue on a national curriculum for compulsory education was initiated in 2015 and measures to increase the quality of teaching are being implemented.

In higher education, the partly grant-based system was replaced with a loan system in 2015, with the aim of investing funds saved in increasing the quality of higher education. Vocational education and training (VET) performs well and is closely linked to the labour market (European Commission, 2017). An agreement between the upper secondary vocational education (*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*, MBO) sector and the government was signed in February 2018 aiming to improve quality in initial VET and to make continuous VET more flexible, better adjusting provision to adults' needs in terms of time, place and forms of learning. In October 2017, short-cycle programmes (two years) in the form of

associate degrees were introduced as a separate level of education in higher professional education (*hogescholen*), alongside bachelor and master degrees<sup>661</sup>. They are particularly suited to graduates of a secondary vocational education programme (MBO 4) and employees, extending access to higher education and offering opportunities for continuous professional development. Adult participation in lifelong learning is almost double the EU average (19.1% in 2017 compared to 10.9%) (European Commission, 2018).

Development of a national qualifications framework (NQF) for the Netherlands (*Nederlands Kwalificatieraamwerk*, NLQF) started in 2009, building on and integrating the qualifications framework for higher education which was self-certified to the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in the same year. The resulting comprehensive framework was adopted by approval of the framework proposal by the Dutch Government and the Dutch Parliament in September 2011. The NLQF national coordination point (NCP) and its tasks were also established at that time.

The NLQF is a systematic classification of all qualifications in the country, aimed at transparency and increased comparability. It has eight levels, plus an entry level below European qualifications framework (EQF) level 1 and a sublevel at level 4 (4+). It covers two main groups of qualifications: government-regulated qualifications in the formal education and training system, and non-regulated (mainly) private qualifications awarded on the labour market. The NLQF is now operational. Since

<sup>660</sup> At the end of primary education (age 12), Dutch students are directed to different types of secondary education based on study results and advice from school (Cedefop, 2018b).

<sup>661</sup> Associate degrees had been piloted in the Netherlands since 2006. In September 2013 the qualification was formally introduced in the legal framework (revised Law on higher education and science) as a two-year segment within a four-year professional bachelor programme, allowing entry to the labour market and further study in the related bachelor programme (Cedefop, 2014). Since 2017, associate degrees no longer need to be linked to a bachelor programme.

2012, some progress has been made in levelling non-regulated qualifications to the NLQF, with 65 qualifications of this group included by February 2019<sup>662</sup>.

A revision of existing legal texts underpinning Dutch education and training was initiated in 2014, aiming to ensure that the role of the NLQF is reflected in the relevant legislation. Evaluations of different aspects of the NLQF and the NCP were also conducted<sup>663</sup>. Results of the latest study (Ockham IPS, 2017) highlighted the need to strengthen the legal basis of the framework and to widen communication among stakeholders. A legal proposal taking into account the recommendations from the evaluation is currently under development, aiming to adopt formally the NLQF, its levels and level descriptors, and to regulate the indication of NQF and EQF levels on government-regulated qualification documents. The new law on the NLQF is foreseen to be adopted in 2020.

NLQF referencing to the EQF was carried out in parallel to the development of the framework and was completed in January 2012 (van der Sanden et al., 2012).

## Policy objectives

Development of the NLQF was prompted by the 2008 recommendation on a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning<sup>664</sup>. Its purpose is to support lifelong learning and national and

international mobility of students and employees, by (van der Sanden et al., 2012):

- a. enabling people of all ages and in different situations to identify their level of education and training, and to find an appropriate education and training programme where they can use their abilities efficiently;
- b. enabling employers and individuals to understand the levels of existing national and international qualifications (through the EQF) and how they relate to each other;
- c. showing how different qualifications contribute to improving workers' skills in the labour market.

The main objectives of the NLQF are to (van der Sanden et al., 2012):

- a. increase transparency within Dutch education;
- b. increase understanding of qualifications within Europe;
- c. increase comparability of qualification levels;
- d. stimulate thinking in terms of learning outcomes as building blocks of qualifications;
- e. promote lifelong learning;
- f. increase the transparency of learning routes;
- g. increase understanding of qualifications levels across the labour market;
- h. aid communication between stakeholders in education and employment.

The NLQF is thus primarily a communication framework and aims to achieve its goals by providing a systematic classification of all existing qualifications in the Netherlands, grouped in two pillars:

- a. formal qualifications, regulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science; the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy; and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport;
- b. non-regulated qualifications, awarded outside the formal education and training system, developed by stakeholders in the labour market (from private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies).

The emphasis on the double character of the national qualifications system – where private and public providers interact and supplement each other – is an important feature in NLQF-related developments. The wide range of qualifications covered in the framework reflects the recognition that lifelong learning in the Netherlands involves different education sectors and providers, using different terms and processes to describe learning outcomes, curricula and examination requirements

<sup>662</sup> Register of qualifications awarded outside government regulation and levelled to the NLQF: [www.nlqf.nl/register](http://www.nlqf.nl/register)

<sup>663</sup> a. Ockham IPS (2013). *Implementatieonderzoek naar het NCP NLQF* [Research on the implementation of the NLQF NCP]. Available in Dutch at: [www.nlqf.nl/images/Eindrapport\\_OCKHAM\\_IPS\\_definitief\\_29112013\\_NCP\\_NLQF.pdf](http://www.nlqf.nl/images/Eindrapport_OCKHAM_IPS_definitief_29112013_NCP_NLQF.pdf)

b. Profitwise (2014). *De waarde van het NLQF – Onderzoek naar kenmerken, eigenschappen en voordelen* [The value of the NLQF - Research into characteristics, properties and benefits]. Available in Dutch at: [www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/De\\_Waarde\\_van\\_het\\_NLQF\\_-\\_Eindrapportseptember2014\\_-\\_ProfitWise.pdf](http://www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/De_Waarde_van_het_NLQF_-_Eindrapportseptember2014_-_ProfitWise.pdf)

c. Ockham IPS (2017). *Onderzoek NLQF* [NLQF Research]. Available in Dutch at: [www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2017/11/20/onderzoek-nlqf](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2017/11/20/onderzoek-nlqf)

<sup>664</sup> European Parliament and Council; Council of the European Union (2008). Recommendation of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 111, 6.5.2008, pp. 1–7. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32008H0506%2801%29>

(van der Sanden et al., 2012). The second group of qualifications, notably those awarded by the private sector, often have a strong 'qualifying' power in the labour market and their inclusion in the NLQF is expected to increase their visibility and further strengthen their value.

It has been explicitly stated (ibid.) that the NLQF has no role in reforming Dutch education and training, in regulating transfer and access, or in entitlements to qualifications and degrees. In the formal system, bridging between sectors and education pathways is regulated by law. Whether the framework will move from being a purely descriptive mechanism to an instrument supporting system-level developments remains to be seen. So far, NLQF implementation has led to the development of procedures for quality assurance to support the classification of non-formal qualifications (Ockham IPS, 2017), reflecting an influence of the NLQF beyond its descriptive role.

In a context characterised by the strong position of the learning outcomes approach and relatively widespread use of validation of non-formal and informal learning, the NLQF seeks to strengthen the role of validation and to turn it into an integrated part of the qualifications system. The framework is also expected to be instrumental in the possible development of a credit system covering all education sectors (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The NLQF has one entry level (below EQF level 1), eight qualification levels equivalent to those in the EQF, and a sublevel at level 4 (4+). The entry level was created to support low-qualified individuals in getting a certificate/diploma and to increase their motivation to participate in further learning; however, so far this has been reserved for basic education for adults with a learning disability. Level 4+ was introduced, following prolonged discussions, to distinguish the pre-university studies (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, VWO) from the upper general secondary education (*hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*, HAVO) which was classified at level 4. The possibility of inclusion of non-regulated qualifications at NLQF 5 and above was debated and initially opposed by representatives of higher education. The introduction of the associated degree as a separate level of education in higher professional education (*hogescholen*)<sup>665</sup> also generated debate concerning

<sup>665</sup> Please see *Introduction and context* section.

its placement at NLQF level 5. In the near future the levelling of some of the VET qualifications initially placed at level 4 may be brought under discussion and analysed to see if they may be more adequately covered by level 5 descriptors (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The following key principles are emphasised in the development of the NLQF (van der Sanden et al., 2012):

- a. NLQF levels do not refer to, and are not defined by, education sectors.
- b. NLQF levels are not referenced to degrees or titles (meaning, for example, that a qualification at level 6 does not automatically belong to higher education and the achievement of this qualification does not give automatic entitlement to a bachelor degree).
- c. All NLQF levels are open to all qualifications of all education sectors.
- d. The level of a qualification is determined based on a comparison of the learning outcomes of that qualification with the level descriptors in the NLQF and it is not tied to a particular study load<sup>666</sup>.

All nine NLQF levels are defined in terms of learning outcomes, using the descriptor elements presented in [Table 54](#). Since their adoption, level descriptors of the NLQF have been tested and fine-tuned in the process of classifying non-regulated qualifications; guidelines were developed to avoid different interpretations of the descriptors when classifying qualifications. This fine-tuning work has not led to changes in the initial levelling of qualifications.

[Table 54](#) demonstrates the influence of the EQF descriptors, and also some important differences resulting from an elaboration and partial reorientation of the NLQF descriptors (Cedefop, 2018). As in several other countries, making context explicit has been seen as important. The subdomains introduced for skills can be seen as a way of specifying the descriptors and making them more relevant to the Dutch context. They can also be seen as reflecting Dutch experiences in applying learning outcomes, for example in VET (upper secondary vocational education (MBO)) in recent years.

<sup>666</sup> Initially, an application for classification and inclusion into the NLQF could be made only for qualifications requiring a substantial volume of learning, set at a minimum of 400 hours of nominal study time. This requirement was withdrawn and replaced with the labour market relevance of qualifications.

**Table 54. Level descriptor elements in the Dutch national qualifications framework (NLQF)**

CONTEXT	THE CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS OF THE LEVELS ARE USED ALONG WITH THE DESCRIBED KNOWLEDGE TO DETERMINE THE GRADE OF DIFFICULTY OF THE SKILLS.
<b>Knowledge</b>	Knowledge is the totality of facts, principles, theories and ways of working related to an occupation or a knowledge domain.
<b>Skills</b>	Cognitive abilities (logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical abilities (psychomotor skills in applying methods, materials, tools and instruments) applied within a given context:
Applying knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reproduce, analyse, integrate, evaluate, combine and apply knowledge in an occupation or a knowledge domain;</li> </ul>
Problem-solving skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recognise or identify and solve problems;</li> </ul>
Learning and development skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>personal development, autonomously or under supervision;</li> </ul>
Information skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>obtain, collect, process, combine, analyse and assess information;</li> </ul>
Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communicate based on conventions relevant to the context.</li> </ul>
<b>Responsibility and independence</b>	Proven ability to collaborate with others and to take responsibility for own work or study results or of others.

Source: Adapted from van der Sanden et al., 2012.

The learning outcomes, competence-oriented approach was broadly accepted and implemented in Dutch education and training before the development of the NLQF. The Dutch referencing report to the EQF (van der Sanden et al., 2012) details a strong tradition of ‘objectives-led’ governance of education and training, which has proved conducive to a competence-based approach. Vocational education is probably most advanced in competence orientation; following extensive reform, a new VET competence-based qualifications structure has been developed and implemented; VET qualifications were revised using the NLQF level descriptors and their number was reduced. A learning-outcomes-based qualification framework for VET has been in place since 2016. The same tendencies can be observed in general and higher education, although less systematically. The introduction of the qualifications framework for higher education has contributed to the overall shift to learning outcomes, as has the involvement of single institutions in the ‘tuning project’<sup>667</sup>. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is supporting higher education providers to use learning outcomes related to the NLQF levels

<sup>667</sup> TUNING Educational Structures in Europe: [www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/](http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/)

in pilot projects aimed to develop flexible partial learning pathways<sup>668</sup>. This is thought to aid access to and participation in higher education.

The strong position of the learning outcomes approach is reflected in widespread use of validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Netherlands. The NLQF is expected to strengthen the role of validation and turn it into an integrated part of the qualifications system. Discussions have recently started on the development of an integrated credit system for all education sectors using the NLQF level descriptors (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The development of the NLQF started in 2009 and has been coordinated by the Ministry of Education,

<sup>668</sup> The Accreditation Organisation for the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) has developed a dedicated accreditation framework for these pilots, focusing on learning outcomes instead of input requirements. Currently, 700 programmes in 21 universities of applied sciences take part in the pilots.



Culture and Science, which is also the body responsible for implementing the framework. The initial structures for development and referencing of the NLQF to the EQF included: a project leader; a steering group<sup>669</sup>; an internal working group (for policy support); an expert group (for developing and testing the NLQF level descriptors); and an NLQF-EQF committee – ‘the Leijnse Committee’ – for independent advice to the Minister of Education on the development of the NLQF, referencing to the EQF, and the tasks and structure of the NLQF NCP (van der Sanden et al., 2012).

The NLQF proposal was adopted in September 2011 by the Dutch Government and the Parliament. The initial development of the framework included only limited stakeholder input beyond the three ministries directly involved (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, and Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport). However, two rounds of consultations on the proposals were carried out involving the main stakeholders, including social partners, policy makers and teachers and trainers from providers of both regulated and non-regulated qualifications. Given the openness of the NLQF to the private sector, systematic work has been carried out since 2012 informing potential stakeholders of the potential in the framework.

The need to strengthen the legal basis has been noted by stakeholders and a new NLQF act should be adopted in 2020. The legislative proposal for this new act was subject to a public consultation in 2015 and a follow-up consultation in 2016. A study was carried out (Ockham IPS, 2017) to inform the further development of the NLQF legal proposal and the implementation of the framework. It included a sounding board session, set up by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in 2018, to discuss the study results. This comprised representatives from associations of the different education sectors, social partners, other ministries, the Inspectorate of Education, the Accreditation Organisation for the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) and the umbrella organisation of providers in private education.

The day-to-day running of the framework has been delegated to a NLQF secretariat which also operates

as EQF national coordination point (the NLQF/EQF NCP)<sup>670</sup>. Initially, this was situated within the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science; since 2012 it has been hosted by the CINOP foundation<sup>671</sup>, an independent organisation funded by, and reporting to, the ministry. The main tasks of the NCP are: levelling non-formal qualifications to the NLQF (levelling of formal qualifications is the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science); maintaining the NLQF register of non-formal qualifications<sup>672</sup>; maintaining and evaluating the NLQF and its links to the EQF; monitoring implementation; communicating the NLQF and supporting its main stakeholder groups.

The NCP accomplishes these tasks through its bureau<sup>673</sup>, has nine part-time employees, and is supported by several independent external structures. A Programme Council decides on the classification of non-formal qualifications, based on advice from two commissions: the Quality Commission (which assesses the validity of applicant organisations, and is supported by a pool of auditors) and the Classification Commission (which makes recommendations on levelling of proposed qualifications based on assessment by a team of independent experts). The Programme Council and the two commissions are each composed of one representative of the labour market, one representative of the regulated education sector and one representative of the non-regulated education and training sector. An Appeal Commission has also been set up.

The NLQF builds on the qualifications framework for higher education developed (starting in 2005) in the context of the Bologna process. This culminated in the NQF for higher education in the Netherlands, which was verified by an independent external committee of peers in February 2009. The Accreditation Organisation for the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), guarantees implementation of the qualifications framework for higher education through the accreditation process, which is obligatory across formally recognised higher education.

<sup>669</sup> Comprising the directors responsible for the different education and training subsystems from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the (then) Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation.

<sup>670</sup> The website of the NLQF/EQF NCP is available at: [www.nlqf.nl/english](http://www.nlqf.nl/english)

<sup>671</sup> The website of the CINOP foundation is available at: [www.cinop.nl/1\\_3128\\_About\\_CINOP.aspx](http://www.cinop.nl/1_3128_About_CINOP.aspx)

<sup>672</sup> The register of non-formal qualifications is available at: [www.nlqf.nl/register](http://www.nlqf.nl/register)

<sup>673</sup> The NLQF NCP Bureau comprises a programme director, three consultants, communication and project support staff.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>674</sup>

A national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning, called validation of prior learning (VPL)<sup>675</sup>, has been in place in the Netherlands since 1998, driven by the need to bridge the gap between education supply and demand on the labour market. Initial efforts were directed at creating the circumstances for developing and implementing VPL and changing the learning culture, recognising that learning through practical experience can, in principle, deliver the same skills and qualifications as formal classroom-based learning. Quality assurance of the process came into focus in 2006, in an approach that included linkages to national qualifications, sector standards, function profiles, career paths and citizenship activities. A new national policy on validation was initiated in 2013, marked by an orientation towards a participative society where all stakeholders take ownership for their role in lifelong learning. The new policy, effective since 2016, aims to stimulate adult learning in combination with work, to broaden validation opportunities and to make VPL a successful tool for both learning and employment. For this, VPL is used as a dual instrument operating on two pathways (or routes): one linked to employability, career guidance and progression on the labour market, and the other linked to obtaining a qualification in the education system and shortening learning paths.

In the labour market route, VPL is aimed at career guidance and development for adults, to support employability, and to achieve a better match between employee capacities and occupational profiles or on-the-job learning programmes. Prior learning outcomes are validated against sector/industry standards. VPL tools used include the intake assessment, e-portfolio, the 'experience profile' (*ervaringsprofiel*), competence tests, and workplace observations/performance assessment. A formal VPL procedure carried out by an accredited VPL supplier results in the award of a 'certificate of experience' (*ervaringscertificaat*), and/or a 'certificate for vocational competence' (*vakbekwaamheidsbewijs*) linked to professional standards and competences, or a 'certificate for (generic and transferal) competences' (*competentiebewijs*) linked to human resources systems. The latter two documents were introduced in 2017 to provide labour market value in terms of

skills and competences. Peer-reviewing has been introduced as a quality-assurance tool for providers of VPL for the labour market.

In the education route, the goal for the learner is to validate competences gained through non-formal or informal learning against national qualification standards, to support further learning. VPL is used to grant exemptions or to acquire partial/full formal qualifications in VET and higher education, and for entry to an education programme. Legal provisions on validation are embedded in the legislation governing these two subsystems<sup>676</sup>. In VET, the focus is on the introduction of partial qualifications and on validating prior knowledge and skills for exemptions in learning units. VET schools are supported to validate competences at NLQF levels 1–4. For higher education, VPL is mainly offered in higher vocational education (*hoger beroepsonderwijs*, HBO) but less in universities, which usually accredit only formally acquired learning outcomes. Initiatives based on the learning outcomes approach have been piloted in higher education since 2016 to make learning routes more flexible for students in part-time and work-based learning programmes. The VPL tools used include intake-assessment, e-portfolio, competence tests, and principles of the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET). One change with the introduction of the dual validation approach refers to the 'certificate of experience' (*ervaringscertificaat*) awarded by accredited VPL suppliers, used to assess and recognise the vocational and general competences of a candidate in relation to sectoral or formal education standards. The 'certificate of experience' can be used in the VPL process in the education route, but it is no longer essential for obtaining exemptions or a partial/full qualification. Awarding bodies for qualifications (generally exam committees of VET schools or universities) can also use criterion-based interviews, performance assessments and other learning-independent assessment techniques. With the legal, organisational and methodological aspects in place, the focus at this stage is on turning policy into practice, increasing the quality and effectiveness of VPL services, and integrating VPL provision with use of VPL. Among the actions agreed by all stakeholders are better linking of VPL in

<sup>674</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update of the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al. (forthcoming)).

<sup>675</sup> In Dutch: *erkenning van verworven competentie*.

<sup>676</sup> In VET, the Law on adult and vocational education (*Wet Educatie en Beroepsvorming*, 1996) was the basis for developing the VPL policy in 1998. In higher education, the Law on higher education and scientific research (*Wet of het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek*) regulates the admission and exemption policy based on validation, with higher education institutions being free to translate and apply this regulation, depending on programme, in the rules on education and exams (*Onderwijs en examenreglementen*, OERs).

the two routes, the development of tailored learning options and a critical review of legal frameworks for VPL. The NLQF can aid implementation of the VPL policy in the Netherlands by making relationships between labour market qualifications and formal qualifications more transparent. NLQF levels and use of level descriptors also help to clarify the wider value of people's skills and competences than solely their performance on an occupational level. It is also possible for (sectoral) organisations to have their standards validated against one of the NLQF levels. A sector standard used for learning or career advice in the labour market route can be registered on a specific NLQF level. The next step in this process (currently in progress) is creating links between national and sector standards through the NLQF (European Commission et al., 2019).

## NQF implementation

The NLQF has been operational since 2012. Initial implementation efforts were directed towards developing procedures for the classification of non-regulated qualifications, developing profiles for (and recruitment of) the necessary experts, testing procedures and criteria with stakeholders and providers of non-regulated qualifications, and developing information materials. All government-regulated qualifications have been included in the framework *en bloc* (more than 4 500 qualifications from general education, VET and higher education), and inclusion of non-regulated qualifications from the labour market has started. The criteria and procedures for inclusion of non-formal qualifications into the NLQF are presented in [Box 1](#).

### Box 1. Inclusion of non-formal qualifications into the NLQF: criteria and procedures

Since 2012, the NLQF NCP has promoted the possibility to have a non-formal qualification included in, and levelled to, the NQF. This is presented as an opportunity for providers to achieve better overall visibility, to strengthen comparability with other qualifications at national and European level, to apply the learning outcomes approach, and to strengthen links to the labour market.

The basic conditions for inclusion of non-regulated qualifications into the NLQF are as follows:

- The qualification must be written in learning outcomes.
- The qualification must be concluded with an independent, summative assessment, independent of the learning path (courses or training concluded with just proof of participation are not accepted).
- The qualification must be labour market relevant.
- The qualification must be underpinned by quality assurance.

If a private training provider, company, sector or examination body wants to submit a qualification for classification and inclusion into the NLQF, it must undergo a two-stage procedure:

1. validity check of provider;
2. classification of qualification to an NLQF level.

The validity check is a pre-condition for step 2 and aims to ensure the trustworthiness of the organisation. Issues such as legal status, property rights, the continuity of the organisation and the existence of quality assurance arrangements are checked. A list of approved quality assurance systems is included in the guidance material (e.g. accreditation by the Dutch/Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO) or supervision by the Education Inspectorate). If the provider does not use externally validated systems, an on-site visit (organisational audit) is carried out. Validity is granted for five years, during which the applicant can submit qualifications for inclusion and levelling. Validity is assessed by the Quality Committee, and the final decision is made by the Programme Council of the NLQF NCP, which includes all major stakeholders involved in the NLQF, including ministries and social partners.

The organisation indicates the level it sees as most appropriate for the qualification, based on comparison of learning outcomes with NLQF level descriptors. In addition, the organisation must indicate the workload, the approach to assessment/examination, and the link to the relevant occupational profile. The application for classification is assessed by two independent experts and the Classification Committee, with the final decision made by the Programme Council of the NLQF NCP. Once approved, the classification is valid for six years and the qualification is included in the NQF register: [www.nlqf.nl/register](http://www.nlqf.nl/register).

Organisations must pay to use the system. Validity checks cost between EUR 1 000 and EUR 7 500, depending on whether an approved quality assurance system is in place. Submitting one qualification for inclusion is set at EUR 2 500.

There has been a growing number of applications from non-formal education providers, indicative of increasing NLQF visibility outside formal education and training. By February 2019, 65 non-regulated qualifications were assigned to NLQF levels<sup>677</sup>. Applications for inclusion of international qualifications into the NLQF have also been made and the Netherlands is part of a working group set up by the EQF advisory group looking into the possibilities for inclusion of international qualifications into NQFs and their referencing to the EQF.

Several qualification registers have been developed for different types of qualification. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has in place three registers for accredited education institutions and their qualifications: the Central register of vocational training (CREBO) for recognised secondary vocational education courses<sup>678</sup>; the Central register of higher education study programmes (CROHO) for recognised universities of applied sciences and universities<sup>679</sup>; and the register of 'non-funded education' for accredited private schools for secondary general adult education (*voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs*, VAVO)<sup>680</sup>. Non-regulated qualifications levelled to the NLQF are entered into the NLQF register of private qualifications operated by the NLQF NCP<sup>681</sup>. Work on a national register taking into account all the existing databases has started. EQF and NQF levels are currently indicated in the NLQF register of private qualifications, on Europass certificate supplements and diploma supplements for VET and higher education qualifications, and in VET qualification files (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

In 2014, the Ministry of Education initiated revision of existing legal texts underpinning Dutch education and training, and the need for a dedicated NLQF law was recognised as crucial for the further development of the framework. As a result, a first draft legislative proposal was prepared in 2015, followed by two public consultations. Three evaluation studies on different aspects of the NLQF have also been conducted<sup>682</sup>. The most recent of these studies (Ockham IPS, 2017) included an inventory of the views of key stakeholders on the

current functioning of the NLQF and the NLQF NCP, and on the new draft legislative proposal; an inventory and evaluation of objections to current practices; a risk analysis of objections to implementing the NLQF legislative proposal in its current form and its impact; and recommendations for possible adjustments to the current legislative proposal and to the implementation process, to address those objections that were well-founded<sup>683</sup>. The conclusions of this research regarding the NLQF legal basis have highlighted the need to demonstrate better the role of the NLQF for lifelong learning and mobility, to define better some of the concepts used (e.g. 'qualification', 'learning outcomes', 'NLQF classification') and to clarify the role of the Inspectorate of Education in quality assurance of non-formal qualifications. Regarding the implementation of the framework, the study concluded that a broad communication campaign is necessary to improve instructions on how the NLQF levels can be used, and suggested small improvement of the classifying procedure.

The new NLQF law, currently under development, is expected to be adopted in 2020<sup>684</sup>. The law aims to stipulate the obligation to indicate the NLQF and EQF levels on all qualification documents from the formal education system, raising the visibility of the framework among end-users. It will also formally acknowledge: the qualification levels and level descriptors of the NLQF; the generic classification of regulated qualifications; the legal status of the NLQF NCP as an independent organisation; and the possibility of classification of non-regulated qualifications and indication of NLQF and EQF level on qualification documents issued outside the formal system. It will also provide for sanctions in the event of improper use of NLQF/EQF levels and logo by providers.

The NLQF NCP has been disseminating information about the framework, in line with its annual communication plan, through its dedicated website<sup>685</sup>, e-magazine, newsletter, leaflets, an animation film, field visits and participation in conferences and interviews. The target groups prioritised so far have been employers, sector organisations, education providers and social partners. The NLQF is known by nearly all education and training providers in the Netherlands (though

<sup>677</sup> Data from the register of qualifications awarded outside government regulation and levelled to the NLQF: [www.nlqf.nl/register](http://www.nlqf.nl/register) [accessed 16.1.2019].

<sup>678</sup> [www.duo.nl/open\\_onderwijsdata/databestanden/mbo/crebo/](http://www.duo.nl/open_onderwijsdata/databestanden/mbo/crebo/)

<sup>679</sup> [www.duo.nl/zakelijk/hoger-onderwijs/studentenadministratie/croho.jsp](http://www.duo.nl/zakelijk/hoger-onderwijs/studentenadministratie/croho.jsp)

<sup>680</sup> <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0012642/2001-07-25>

<sup>681</sup> [www.nlqf.nl/register](http://www.nlqf.nl/register)

<sup>682</sup> See footnote 664 above.

<sup>683</sup> The research methods included a literature review, interviews with over 30 stakeholders, study of foreign practices, and a sounding-board session with those involved.

<sup>684</sup> It is aimed to present the legislative proposal to the Dutch Parliament in the second half of 2019, with the law and the corresponding general administrative order entering into force in 2020.

<sup>685</sup> [www.nlqf.nl](http://www.nlqf.nl)

it is not used by all), by recognition authorities and bodies and by labour market stakeholders at national level. It is less known among guidance and counselling practitioners, labour market actors at regional and local levels, and the general public. Recent research commissioned by the NLQF NCP on the use of the NLQF/EQF in vacancies on the labour market showed that there is minimal, yet increasing, use of NLQF/EQF levels, mainly in the south, in the healthcare sector. Similar research on the use of the NLQF/EQF for human resource management in companies will be conducted in the next three years (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The Netherlands referenced its NQF to the EQF in parallel to the development of the framework. The referencing report was approved in the EQF advisory group in January 2012 (van der Sanden et al., 2012). One point of debate in the process was the proposal to reference the academically-oriented secondary education (pre-university secondary education (VWO) to level 5 of the EQF. Following feedback from the EQF advisory group, the Netherlands accepted that this particular qualification should be referenced to level 4 of the EQF, but introduced a differentiation (and a sublevel) within the NQF, designating the VWO qualification as 4+.

An updated referencing report is foreseen to be presented in 2019, addressing the development of the NLQF over the past years, the results and challenges in its implementation and how it responds to the 10 EQF referencing criteria, the current structure of the NLQF NCP, the development of the NLQF law, and the updated level descriptors.

## Important lessons and future plans

The Dutch NQF has now reached an operational stage. Social partners recognise its added value, as well as the need to further develop and implement the NLQF, taking advantage of the momentum that has been created in the country through an overall policy context promoting lifelong learning and sustainable employability (Ockham IPS, 2017).

While not having a regulatory function, the NLQF has started to influence developments in education and training subsystems. In VET, the NLQF descriptors were used in the revision of qualifications and work is under way to develop partial qualifications linked to the NLQF. In higher education, the use and added value of the NLQF

were found to be less clear initially (Ockham IPS, 2017), mainly due to the use of different sets of level descriptors (Dublin, EQF, Bloom, NLQF). More recently, pilot projects were initiated aiming to develop flexible partial learning pathways using learning outcomes related to the NLQF levels to boost adult participation in higher education.

Although the number of non-formal qualifications included in the NLQF so far is still relatively low, interest in the framework from labour market stakeholders has been growing. In the meantime, efforts have been devoted to optimising procedures, which are now perceived as robust (Ockham IPS, 2017). The NLQF is seen as having contributed to raising the quality of non-formal qualifications. Given the importance of non-formal learning in the Netherlands and the wide range of labour market-oriented qualifications<sup>686</sup>, inclusion of qualifications from this group remains an important part of NLQF implementation.

While permeability between the different education and training subsystems is regulated by law in the Netherlands, the NLQF is seen as reducing barriers between sectors and institutions by increasing transparency of both regulated and non-regulated qualifications and clarifying relationships between them. This is primarily achieved through the use of learning outcomes, in a Dutch context already marked by a strong competence-based orientation, especially in VET. The framework is also seen as an aid in implementing the policy on validation of non-formal and informal learning, and it is expected to be instrumental in the future development of a credit system covering all education sectors (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

One of the key challenges and points on the current agenda is the adoption of a new NLQF law to strengthen the legal basis of the framework and its levels, highlight its policy relevance and boost further implementation actions. Taking into account findings from the latest evaluation study (Ockham IPS, 2017), the new law is expected to enter into force in 2020. Another challenge is communicating the framework to a wider audience and raising awareness about the benefits of having a NLQF level indicated on certificates and diplomas. The NLQF NCP has been dedicated to increasing familiarity with the framework among employers, employees, education providers and students, and stimulating the use of the NLQF to improve transparency of qualifications. However, it has been found that, since NLQF/EQF levels are not indicated

<sup>686</sup> In the Netherlands, 1.3 million participants take part in non-formal learning offered by more than 12 000 providers every year (NRTO: [www.nrto.nl](http://www.nrto.nl)).

on formal qualification documents, the impact of these communication efforts has been low (Ockham IPS, 2017). The new NLQF law will specifically address the inclusion of NLQF/EQF levels on qualifications from the formal system, which is expected to raise the profile of the framework. A national communication strategy is foreseen by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science,

to inform the public about the NLQF in the wider context of promoting lifelong learning. It has also been suggested that communication efforts should aim to clarify the different education pathways in the Netherlands and their characteristics, rights, duties, quality assurance instruments, to minimise confusion over different types of qualifications placed at the same level (Ockham IPS, 2017).

**Table 55. Dutch national qualifications framework (NLQF)**

NLQF LEVELS	FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS	OTHER QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctorate ( <i>Doctoraat</i> ) Designer ( <i>Ontwerper</i> ) Medical specialist ( <i>Medisch specialist</i> )		8
7	Master degree	Social studies	7
6	Bachelor degree	Examples: Anesthetist employee ( <i>Anesthesiemedewerker</i> ) Certified leader excellent level ( <i>Gecertificeerd leider uitstekend niveau</i> ) Dialysis nurse ( <i>Dialyseverpleegkundige</i> ) Secondary defence formation ( <i>Middelbare defensie vorming</i> ) Officer Royal Military police ( <i>Officier koninklijke marechaussee onderbouw</i> ) Officer Navy force ( <i>Officier korps zeedienst</i> )	6
5	Associate degree	Examples: Consultant payroll services and benefits (CPB) Hotel service management Operational technician energy production technology ( <i>Operationeel technicus energie productietechniek</i> ) Instructor 5 ( <i>Opleider 5</i> ) Trainer-coach 5	5
4+	Pre-university education (VWO) Pre-university education for adults (VAVO-VWO)		4
4	VET level 4 (MBO 4) Upper secondary general education for adults (VAVO-HAVO) Upper secondary general education (HAVO)	Examples: Instructor 4 ( <i>Opleider 4</i> ) Airport service agent Application training food technology ( <i>Applicatie opleiding levensmiddelen technologie</i> ) Industry diploma all-round beautician ( <i>Branchediploma allround schoonheidsspecialist</i> ) Industry diploma medical pedicure ( <i>Branchediploma medisch pedicure</i> )	4

**Table 55. Dutch national qualifications framework (NLQF) (Continued)**

NLQF LEVELS	FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS	OTHER QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF LEVELS
<b>3</b>	VET level 3 (MBO 3)	Examples: Dog grooming ( <i>Hondentolletteren</i> ) General investigator ( <i>Algemeen Opsporingsambtenaar</i> ) Swimming teacher ( <i>Zwemonderwijzer</i> ) Trainer-coach 3 Industry diploma pedicure ( <i>Branchediploma pedicure</i> )	3
<b>2</b>	VET level 2 (MBO 2) Basic education 3 for adults (VAVO) Pre-vocational secondary education – theoretical pathway (VMBO TL) Pre-vocational secondary education – combined theoretical pathway (VMBO GL) Pre-vocational secondary education – advanced vocational pathway (VMBO KB) Basic education 3 for adults ( <i>Basiseducatie 3</i> )	Military police security ( <i>Marechausseebeveiliging</i> ) Assistant swimming teacher ( <i>Assistent zwemonderwijzer</i> ) Sales employee ( <i>Verkoopmedewerker</i> )	2
<b>1</b>	VET level 1 (MBO 1) Pre-vocational secondary education – basic vocational pathway (VMBO BB) Basic education 2 for adults ( <i>Basiseducatie 2</i> )		1
<b>Entry level</b>	Basic education 1 for adults ( <i>Basiseducatie 1</i> )		

(\*) Non-regulated qualifications awarded by organisations outside the formal education and training system and relevant for the labour market (e.g. from private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies), included in the NLQF following quality assurance procedures. The 'size' of these qualifications varies. NLQF register for non-formal qualifications: [www.nlqf.nl/register](http://www.nlqf.nl/register)

Source: Adapted from van der Sanden et al., 2012. Additional information: [www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/Artikelen/NLQF\\_Brochure\\_Engels\\_2018\\_site.pdf](http://www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/Artikelen/NLQF_Brochure_Engels_2018_site.pdf) and [www.nlqf.nl/register](http://www.nlqf.nl/register)

**Abbreviations**

EQF	European qualifications framework	VAVO	voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs (general secondary education for adults)
HAVO	hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs (upper secondary general education)	VET	vocational education and training
MBO	middelbaar beroepsonderwijs (upper secondary vocational education)	VMBO	voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs (lower secondary general and pre-vocational education)
NCP	national coordination point	VPL	validation of prior learning
NLQF	qualifications framework for the Netherlands	VWO	voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs (pre-university secondary education)
NQF	national qualifications framework		

**Main sources of information**

EQF/NLQF NCP – hosted by the CINOP foundation: [www.ncpnlqf.nl](http://www.ncpnlqf.nl)

NLQF register of non-formal qualifications: [www.nlqf.nl/register](http://www.nlqf.nl/register)

Central register of vocational training (CREBO): [www.duo.nl/open\\_onderwijsdata/databestanden/mbo/crebo/](http://www.duo.nl/open_onderwijsdata/databestanden/mbo/crebo/)

Central register of higher education study programmes (CROHO): [www.duo.nl/zakelijk/hoger-onderwijs/studentenadministratie/croho.jsp](http://www.duo.nl/zakelijk/hoger-onderwijs/studentenadministratie/croho.jsp)

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**Prepared by:**

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# NEW ZEALAND

## Introduction

The New Zealand qualifications framework (NZQF) is the definitive source for information on New Zealand's quality-assured qualifications, covering senior secondary school and tertiary education. The NZQF is based on outcomes and sets out 10 level descriptors based on knowledge, skills and application (of knowledge and skills). It provides information on the knowledge and experience that holders of qualifications can be expected to have, and the education and employment pathways related to a qualification.

The NZQF was established in 2010. It replaced the previous qualifications system that consisted of the national qualifications framework introduced in 1991, and the New Zealand register of quality assured qualifications, which commenced in 2001.

The establishment of the NZQF followed a targeted review of the qualifications system during 2008/09. The review identified a need to make qualifications better understood by learners, reduce the number of qualifications, and ensure that they were designed to meet the needs of employers and industry.

## Policy objectives

The NZQF is designed to optimize the recognition of educational achievement and its contribution to New Zealand's economic, social and cultural success. It plays a significant role in ensuring that New Zealand qualifications are valued as credible and robust, both nationally and internationally. The core functions of the NZQF are to:

- convey the skills, knowledge and attributes of a graduate and provide high quality education pathways;
- ensure qualifications meet the needs of learners, employers, industry and the community;
- assure the quality and international comparability of New Zealand qualifications;

- contribute to Māori success in education by recognizing and advancing *mātauranga Māori*<sup>687</sup>.

The NZQF is fundamental to New Zealand's tertiary education system<sup>688</sup>. Government funding for tertiary education providers is only available for qualifications that are quality assured and on the NZQF. This principle also applies to learners who wish to access student loans and allowances, and student visas in the case of international students.

Qualifications on the NZQF are based on the principles of need and outcomes, with those at levels 1–6 also requiring flexibility and collaboration. This approach is intended to provide a simple structure for qualifications and programmes.

*Need* – The usefulness, relevance and value of a qualification is based on its relationship to the workforce and the skill needs of individuals, groups of learners, employers, industry and communities. Where appropriate, a qualification explicitly acknowledges the cultural and social aspirations of Māori, Pasifika and/or other communities.

*Outcomes* – Clear outcomes make the purpose of a qualification transparent, enable comparisons with other qualifications (both nationally and internationally) and increase the portability of the qualification internationally. They also make explicit what graduates can 'do, be and know' on completion of a qualification, and indicate pathways to further education, employment and/or a contribution to their community.

*Flexibility* – Qualifications can be achieved in different settings including the workplace and

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<sup>687</sup> Māori are the indigenous peoples of New Zealand.

*Mātauranga Māori* refers to a distinct knowledge related to the Māori worldview and experience.

<sup>688</sup> New Zealand tertiary education refers to all education after secondary school, including higher education and vocational training. Skills and knowledge from previous formal and non-formal learning can be recognized for credit towards a tertiary education qualification (see *Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways* section).

education institutions. Having programmes of study and industry training leading to a qualification allows learners to achieve it in ways most suited to their educational, work or cultural needs and aspirations. This may include credentialing learning obtained formally or informally towards the qualification.

*Collaboration* – Qualifications are developed collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders in an environment of mutual trust and accountability. The relationships between these parties are based on effective communication and collaboration. Parties can rely on the integrity of the processes used and the information provided.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The 10 levels of the NZQF demonstrate an increasing complexity of learning outcomes (level 10 is the most complex) across the domains of knowledge, skills and application (of knowledge and skills).

- *Knowledge* refers to what a graduate knows and understands. It is described as a progression from 'basic general knowledge' through to knowledge which is 'factual', 'operational', 'theoretical', 'technical', 'specialized' and 'frontier' knowledge. Complexity of knowledge is described together with breadth and/or depth in the field of study or work.
- *Skills* refers to what a graduate can do. The dimension of integration, independence and creativity is important to describing skills progression and reflects the degree of familiarity of the task/problem. Skills are described in terms of the type, range and complexity of processes, problems and solutions.

- Outcome descriptors under *application (of knowledge and skills)* are expressed in terms of self-management and leadership in a profession or responsibility for the performance of others, the context of which may range from highly structured to dynamic. The learner is progressively more autonomous and more accountable, more responsible for interacting and collaborating with, managing and leading others, within progressively less transparent, more dynamic contexts.

*Qualifications and outcome statements.* All qualifications listed on the NZQF contain an outcome statement that describes the knowledge, skills and attributes of a graduate. The outcome statement is used by prospective employers and other tertiary education providers, and for comparing qualifications. Different learners will achieve the outcomes in different ways, so the outcome statement indicates the minimum achievement expected by a graduate of a qualification. Each outcome statement includes:

- a *graduate profile* which describes what a qualification holder must be able to do, be and know. In developing the graduate profile, the qualification developer should consider the full range of capabilities and competences required;
- an *education pathway* identifying other qualifications that a graduate could enrol in after completing this qualification. Where qualifications are standalone and do not prepare graduates for further study, the outcome statement should make this clear;
- an *employment pathway* determining the areas in which a graduate may be qualified to work or contribute to their community.

**Table 56. Levels of the New Zealand qualifications framework (NZQF)**

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES
10	Doctoral degree
9	Master's degree
8	Postgraduate diplomas and certificates, Bachelor honours degree
7	Bachelor's degree Graduate diplomas and certificates
6	Diplomas
5	
4	Certificates
3	
2	
1	

Source: NZQA, 2019. [www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/publications/strategic-documents/soi-1617-1920/qualifications/](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/publications/strategic-documents/soi-1617-1920/qualifications/)

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The NZQF is established under section 248 of the Education Act 1989<sup>689</sup> ('the Act'). It was first brought in as a single unified framework on 1 July 2010 under the former section 253 (1)(c) of the Act and was fully introduced into the Act in the August 2011 legislative amendment (the new section 248).

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is responsible for the NZQF and the overarching statutory rules for the quality assurance of qualifications and the tertiary education organizations (TEOs) that provide them (section 253 of the Act).

There are two quality assurance agencies with responsibilities for separate parts of the tertiary education sector (section 159AD of the Act). The NZQA is responsible for the non-university tertiary education sector, while Universities New Zealand fulfils this function for the university sector.

### NZQA and the quality assurance of non-university TEOs

The NZQA operates an integrated quality assurance system in which all the components support each other. The quality assurance system includes the registration of private training establishments; approval of qualifications across the 10 levels of the NZQF, and training schemes. It also includes assuring the consistency of graduate outcomes of New Zealand qualifications at levels 1–6; moderation of assessment standards set by the NZQA; monitoring of programme delivery across all levels of the NZQF; conducting external evaluation and review, and risk management.

The NZQA's external evaluation and review is used to make evidence-based judgements about the quality and performance of a TEO by focusing on achievement, outcomes and key contributing processes. The NZQA uses a range of information sources to reach its conclusions including TEO self-assessment reports and information from other parts of the quality assurance system. The NZQA evaluates the TEO's educational performance and capability in self-assessment (which usually includes an on-site visit) and reports a level of confidence in both areas. The final external evaluation and review report is published on NZQA's website.

TEOs are responsible for using self-assessment to maintain and improve their own quality and the outcomes they achieve for learners

and employers. Self-assessment focuses on identifying, responding to and meeting learner and stakeholder needs, evaluating the effectiveness of organizational processes and practices, and using the understanding gained to make improvements to outcomes and learner achievement.

### Quality assurance of universities

The New Zealand Vice-Chancellor's Committee – operating as Universities New Zealand (*Te Pōkai Tara*) – is the statutory body with responsibility for quality assurance matters in the university sector under section 159AD of the Act. It has authority for university programme approval, accreditation, approving university qualifications for listing on the NZQF, training scheme approval, and ancillary powers under section 253A of the Act.

There are two bodies overseeing the quality assurance of universities: the Committee on University Academic Programmes and the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities.

- *The Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP)*  
CUAP is responsible for setting up and applying qualification and regulation approval, accreditation and programme moderation procedures across the university system. This includes running programme approval and moderation procedures, advice and comment on academic developments, and encouraging the universities to develop courses of study that will allow the transfer of learners between programmes and institutions.
- *The Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA)*  
AQA operates independently from Universities New Zealand and the universities. It supports universities to achieve excellence in research and teaching through a regular audit of the institution and by promoting quality enhancement practices across the sector.  
Quality assurance takes the form of academic audits on a cyclical basis against a framework of guideline statements. In the current cycle (Cycle 6), audits occur every seven to eight years with universities reporting on progress at the mid-cycle point and one year after an audit. Audit reports are public documents and university reports will also be public after the release of a university's Cycle 6 audit report. AQA analyses trends from audits and consults stakeholders before finalizing the focus(es) of the next audit cycle framework. Enhancement themes are topics of national significance that all universities work towards in a common time period and about which they share progress and good practice.

<sup>689</sup> [www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0080/latest/DLM185982.html](http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0080/latest/DLM185982.html)

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Section 253(1)(k) of the Act states that the NZQA may prescribe the details for credits, cross credits, recognition of prior learning, and moderation. The NZQA currently performs this function through its NZQF programme approval and accreditation rules 2018.

Education organizations in New Zealand are required to have their own administrative and practical arrangements in place for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit recognition and transfer (CRT). To assist education providers in meeting this requirement, the NZQA has published guidelines<sup>690</sup> with the following key features for effective CRT and RPL policies – TEOs should:

- integrate CRT/RPL into their overall systems, regulations, policies and practice (i.e. programme development, assessment and organizational self-assessment);
- approve appropriate quality assurance and academic regulations, policies and procedures for CRT/RPL that apply across all learning areas of the organization;
- promote to learners, through all relevant means, information about CRT/RPL;
- provide accessible academic advice and support to assist learners to apply for credit through CRT/RPL;
- ensure decisions about CRT/RPL are timely, transparent, robust, consistent, and for the maximum benefit of learners.

## NQF implementation

The NZQF qualification listing and operational rules 2016 set out the general listing requirements for qualifications at levels 1–10 on the NZQF. Sections 248(2) and 253 of the Act mandates the NZQA to make rules associated with listing requirements.

Qualification developers must seek approval to develop and list qualifications on the NZQF. The NZQA is responsible for approving and listing all non-university qualifications and CUAP is responsible for approving qualifications developed by universities.

For new qualifications at levels 7–10 on the NZQF, the NZQA considers the qualification beside the

<sup>690</sup> [www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/qualifications-and-standards/CRT-RPL-guidelines-Dec-17.pdf](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/qualifications-and-standards/CRT-RPL-guidelines-Dec-17.pdf)

proposed programme; if approved, it then accredits a provider to deliver it. Universities must submit any proposals to offer new qualifications or to make substantial changes to existing qualifications to CUAP. University qualifications must meet the published criteria set by the NZQA. These criteria apply to all qualifications offered by TEOs and are set after consulting with Universities New Zealand and others in the tertiary sector.

Within the non-university sector, there are additional listing requirements for new qualifications at levels 1–6, including a two-stage approval process to list a qualification – approval to develop and approval to list a qualification.

There are several approaches qualification developers use when deciding the level of a qualification on the NZQF. The first is to compare the descriptors of the qualification with the level descriptors on the NZQF. Another approach is to assess at what level the qualification needs to sit on the NZQF and develop the qualification based on the learning outcomes of that level.

Industry, employers and the community are involved in the development of qualifications. This is to establish the need for the qualifications and to ensure the qualification is relevant and fit for purpose.

The NZQA and the Ministry of Education are directly involved in developing some qualifications. The NZQA develops qualifications for Māori, Pasifika<sup>691</sup>, and for generic skills that are not the responsibility of an industry training organization. The Ministry of Education develops the national certificates of educational achievement for senior secondary school. Other government agencies may participate in or initiate the development of qualifications to meet particular government policy objectives.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The NZQA has completed several projects with other jurisdictions that compare the NZQF to another qualifications framework, including: the European qualifications framework (2015), the Australian qualifications framework (2015), the Irish national framework of qualifications (2010) and the Hong Kong qualifications framework (2018). The NZQA is currently working on a similar project with

<sup>691</sup> Pasifika are New Zealanders who identify with or feel they belong to one or more Pacific Island ethnicities. The seven largest ethnicities in New Zealand are Cook Island Māori, Fijian, Niuean, Samoan, Tokelauan, Tongan and Tuvaluan peoples. Refer to: [www.nzqa.govt.nz/audience-pages/pasifika/](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/audience-pages/pasifika/)

South Africa. In 2016, the NZQA and the Malaysian Qualifications Agency published a report on the comparability of New Zealand and Malaysia's Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral Degrees.

## Important lessons and future plans

The NZQA has learned that reviewing and developing a new qualification requires all parties including industry training organizations and education providers to work collaboratively to identify and understand industry, community and cultural needs. The NZQA provides a wide range of guidance and help to qualification developers and others to prevent the duplication of qualifications and ensure they are fit for purpose.

### Abbreviations

AQA	Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities
CRT	credit recognition and transfer
CUAP	Committee on University Academic Programmes
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
NZQF	New Zealand qualifications framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
TEO	tertiary education organization

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# NORTH MACEDONIA

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The Law for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was adopted in October 2013 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia No 137/2013)<sup>692</sup>.

The application of the Law effectively started from 30 September 2015. The NQF consists of eight levels. In addition, sub-levels were introduced at levels V, VI and VII. The level descriptors are defined within three domains: knowledge and understanding, skills and competence. The NQF's lead institution is the National Board for the NQF, which is supported by the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Centre, the Centre for Adult Education and the Bureau for Development of Education.

North Macedonia has been a full member of the Bologna Process or European higher education area since 2003 (initially as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). The country is a full member of the European qualifications framework (EQF) and successfully referenced the NQF to the EQF in 2016.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) legislation has been adopted in accordance with the 2012 Council Recommendation.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

As of 1 January 2017, the overall population of North Macedonia was estimated at around 2 million<sup>693</sup>.

<sup>692</sup> Main NQF legal texts available at: [http://mrk.mk/?page\\_id=531&lang=en](http://mrk.mk/?page_id=531&lang=en)

<sup>693</sup> Data are from Eurostat, at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>. There is much discussion in the country about the quality of the data on population as the last census of population was carried out in 2002. The 2012 census was stopped after many problems on the field mainly related to the ethnicity of the citizens. In particular, the Ohrid Framework Agreement that the government

There is still a positive population growth, but it has slowed down in recent years. The crude birth rate in 2016 (latest available data) was 11.1<sup>694</sup>, whereas the crude death rate was 9.9. In the last decade (2007–17), the share of young population (aged 0–19) in total population declined from 26.8% to 22.6%. In the same period the share of population aged 65+ increased from 11.2% to 13.3%.

According to the UN population data, in 2017 the stock of Macedonians living abroad was 534,720 individuals<sup>695</sup>. This number seems high relative to the size of the population; however, even in 1990 there were 430,000 emigrated Macedonians. The number of immigrants in the country in 2017 was 130,972, so the net migration stock in 2017 was 403,748 individuals.

Latest GDP data for Q1 2018 show marked slowdown of the economy. In particular, 2017 was a year of large political instability which has taken its toll on the economy. GDP growth in the first half of 2017 was negative, at -0.7%. After the new government came into power and political stability returned, growth picked up, although at a slow pace (+0.7% in the second half of 2017). The economic policies of the new government are quite different than those of the previous one and were expected to start showing their impact in 2018. However, the GDP growth in Q1 2018 was only +0.1%, with a very large decline of the construction activity

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signed after the 2001 civil conflict, prescribes special rights for the ethnic minorities based on their shares in the overall population, which has led to mis-reporting of the population living in the country (i.e. trying to count the emigrated individuals). Since then, the government has not managed to create better conditions for implementation of the census, which in many instances is used as a main critique for the official data. Moreover, the quality of the migration statistics is also quite low, which sometimes puts doubt on the labour force survey data.

<sup>694</sup> Number of live births occurring among the population during a given year, per 1,000 mid-year total population during the same year.

<sup>695</sup> [www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.shtml)

(-37% in real terms). This has led to a sizeable decline of the share of construction in value added from 13.8% in Q1 2017 to 8.6% in Q1 2018. Among the sectors with a large share in GDP, agriculture, manufacturing and trade recorded positive growth rates. Investments in Q1 2018 dropped by 9% on an annual level, as did the government consumption (-1.4%).

Despite the poor economic development, the labour market shows further improvements in declining unemployment and increasing employment rates. The level of unemployment (21.9% in Q1 2018) is still very high, especially for vulnerable categories of citizens. The employment rate in Q1 2018 slightly increased to 50.9% compared to 50% in the previous year.

The main factor supporting the decrease of unemployment has been the increase of foreign direct investment. The main tool for attracting foreign direct investment has been the establishment of 15 technological industrial development zones. These provide a number of incentives, which last up to 10 years, related to tax exemptions, grants for construction, aid for training employees and VAT exemption<sup>696</sup>. The impact of the technological industrial development zones over the overall export is more than 30%.

Approximately 58% of upper secondary students are enrolled in VET pathways, and it is estimated that over 60% of graduates continue their studies in higher education.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

The country was granted candidate status by the European Council in December 2005. The European Union began screening the readiness of the country in July 2018 to start negotiations by June 2019 on joining the EU.

Performance on the Education and training 2020 (ET 2020) benchmarks has been mixed, since the country progressed visibly in the two education-related Europe 2020 headlines (early school leaving and higher education attainment), while effort will be required to catch up with the EU28 average figures in the remaining benchmarks.

The NQF was adopted in 2013. It aims to improve education and training systems through the implementation of the learning outcomes approach; to make easier the access to learning in every context and its results made explicit for every citizen; to raise the overall level of qualifications of the population; and to strengthen the links between qualifications and employment prospects.

The level of stakeholders' awareness on the principles and goals of the NQF has grown markedly since 2015, as concrete actions for the implementation of the NQF have gained pace and visibility, namely:

- establishment and staffing of the NQF unit – under the Sector of General Affairs and Support to the Minister of Education and Science;
- launch of the NQF website (<http://mrk.mk/?lang=en>);
- publication of the comprehensive inventory of all qualifications on the NQF website;
- experimentation: analysis and levelling of existing qualifications of secondary VET, and their description in learning outcomes. Lessons from the experimentation will be used in the mainstream phase of this process of analysis and levelling;
- establishment of nine sectoral commissions;
- establishment of the NQF Board in October 2015;
- launch of the EU-supported twinning project in early 2016 dedicated to reinforcement of institutional capacities, the legal basis and the comprehensive roadmap for implementation of the NQF;
- successful presentation of the EQF referencing report on 3 February 2016, at the 37<sup>th</sup> meeting of the EQF Advisory Group, and its publication on the NQF and EQF websites;
- reforming three- and four-year VET, as well as adult education in line with the NQF in progress (EU-supported IPA project and a project coordinated by the World Bank);
- roadmap for the VNFIL developed; the activities of the first phase are being implemented with support from the European Training Foundation (ETF);
- development of post-secondary education supported by an IPA project;
- IPA project for strengthening the cooperation between the higher education institutions and the business sector.

<sup>696</sup> OECD. Tracking economic zones in the Western Balkans.

The Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2016 report placed the NQF at the centre of Measure 18: Education and Qualifications for All. The measure is oriented towards the implementation of the NQF, seen as a trigger for a change of attitudes and values on education and qualifications, benefitting individuals, the society and the labour market. The findings of the inventory and analysis of qualifications carried out with ETF support as a starting point of the EQF referencing process are used as evidence for reforms in VET and in higher education qualifications.

### International cooperation

The NQF development and implementation have been strongly influenced by the process of European integration and the country's commitment to the Lisbon Strategy, the Bologna Process, the Copenhagen Process, ET 2010, the Europe 2020 Strategy, and ET 2020.

Nationally, the reporting on the achievement of the Bruges Process short-term deliverables (2010, 2012, 2013 and 2014) and the preparation of the Strategy for Vocational Education and Training in the Context of Lifelong Learning (2013–20) have advanced the work on the NQF and its implementation. The country participates in reporting under the Riga framework and Torino Process.

The country is a full member of Erasmus+. The IPA Indicative Strategy Paper 2014–20 was approved on 19 August 2014.

North Macedonia's Ministry of Education and Science acts as the country's ENIC-NARIC focal point. Within the scope of the Regional Cooperation Council, two working groups have been established including representatives from all the six South Eastern European countries, respectively on recognition of academic qualifications and on mutual recognition of professional qualifications.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### NQF scope and structure

The Macedonian qualifications framework (MQF) is comprehensive (all levels of qualifications) and inclusive: it is open for qualifications acquired in formal education and training, as well as in non-formal and informal learning. It is based on:

- a. levels/sublevels of qualifications;
- b. descriptions of the levels and the learning outcomes for each level of qualification;

- c. types of qualifications and documents serving as evidence for the acquired qualification;
- d. volume of the qualification.

Currently the NQF includes:

- a. all qualifications from accredited higher education, described in learning outcomes;
- b. all qualifications from general education;
- c. the reformed VET-3 qualifications, which have been defined in learning outcomes, on the basis of occupational and qualification standards, notably those designed in 2012–13 within the IPA twinning project with Slovenia;
- d. on a temporary basis, conditional to their revision in line with Article 6 of the NQF Law (standard of qualifications): all qualifications from VET-4 programmes, as well as from VET-3 not yet reformed programmes;
- e. qualifications from verified non-formal adult education programmes: based on occupational standards and described in learning outcomes.

The alignment to NQF levels of qualifications from non-formal and informal learning is in development, as the country continues to clarify and strengthen quality assurance of such qualifications – notably the coherence with underlying standards of their learning outcomes (expected and achieved). Currently the Centre for Adult Education prepares measures to reinforce the quality assurance and reliability of assessment of learning outcomes of the verified non-formal adult education programmes.

### Alignment to other classification systems

The classification of qualifications by sector is related with higher education: the international Frascati classification, which applies in scientific disciplines, fields and areas.

VET sectors (16) are as follows:

1. Geology, mining and metallurgy
2. Civil engineering and geodesy
3. Graphic industry
4. Economics, law and trade
5. Electrical engineering
6. Healthcare and social protection
7. Agriculture, fishing and veterinary
8. Personal services
9. Mechanical engineering
10. Traffic, transport and storage
11. Textile, leather and similar products
12. Food service industry and tourism
13. Chemistry and technology



14. Forestry and wood processing
15. Sport and recreation
16. Arts.

## NQF levels and level descriptors

The Law defines the NQF principles as below; these principles concern the level descriptors, the levels and sub-levels and the place and use of learning outcomes, amongst others:

1. learning outcomes expressed through knowledge and understanding, skills and competence;
2. classification of qualifications at levels and sub-levels;
3. transferability of credits;
4. comparability with the EQF;
5. quality assurance in the process of development of qualifications and acquisition of qualifications;
6. providing conditions for equal access to education throughout the whole life for the acquisition and recognition of qualifications;
7. strengthening the competitiveness of the Macedonian economy that is based on human potentials; and
8. building a system for VNFIL.

The NQF consists of eight levels, with sublevels introduced at levels V, VI and VII. The sublevels reflect the specificities of the education system, the perceptions of the general public on the relative value of the qualifications and requirements of many employers. The levels cover:

- a. level I: completed primary education – on completion, participants receive a certificate (svidetelstvo);
- b. level II: vocational training lasting up to two years – on completion participants receive a certificate of vocational training (uverenie za struchno osposobuvanje);
- c. level III: VET for occupations lasting up to three years – on completion, participants receive a diploma (diploma);
- d. level IV applies to general secondary education (gimnazija), technical education or art education lasting four years – on completion, participants receive a diploma (diploma);
- e. level V:
  - level V, sublevel VB applies to postsecondary education (specialist education and craftsman exam) – participants receive a

diploma for specialist education (diploma za specijalistichko obrazovanie) and a diploma for the craftsman exam (diploma za majstorski ispit);

- level V, sublevel VA applies to short vocational study programmes in higher education – participants receive a credential (uverenie);
- f. level VI:
    - sublevel VIB applies to short vocational study programmes in higher education – participants receive a diploma (diploma), 180 ECTS (European credit transfer and accumulation system) credits;
    - sublevel VIA applies to three- and four-year undergraduate studies – participants receive a diploma (diploma), 240 ECTS credits;
  - g. level VII:
    - sublevel VIIA applies to higher education master of science studies – participants receive a diploma (diploma), a total of 60 to 120 ECTS credits are acquired at this sublevel;
    - sublevel VIIB applies to higher education specialist studies – participants receive a diploma (diploma), a total of 60 ECTS credits are acquired at this sublevel;
  - h. level VIII applies to doctorate studies – participants receive a diploma (diploma).

The acquisition of qualifications from non-formal and informal learning is foreseen by the NQF Law, but only within the range from level I to level VB. Integrated studies of first and second cycle of studies refer to qualifications leading to titles for regulated professions. Currently they are not part of the NQF, as discussion on their inclusion is under way.

The level descriptors of the NQF are based on the combination of three domains:

- a. knowledge and understanding,
- b. skills,
- c. competence.

The level descriptors have been defined taking into account:

- a. the Dublin descriptors;
- b. the EQF level descriptors;
- c. national characteristics of levels of education and training;
- d. strategic orientations for the medium term, such as growing importance of a more entrepreneurial society, creativity and innovation.

**Table 57. NQF structure and level descriptors in North Macedonia**

NQF LEVELS	KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS	COMPETENCE
<b>VIII</b>	<p>Demonstrates a systematic understanding of the field of research and perfect knowledge of research methods and skills within this field in accordance with the highest international standards.</p> <p>Possesses knowledge gained with their own research or work, thus significantly contributing to the professional and scientific field of research, but also in the related fields.</p>	<p>Displays the ability to interpret, design, apply and adapt the essential subject of the research with scientific integrity.</p> <p>Uses their knowledge as a basis for original ideas and research that exceeds the current boundaries of knowledge, developing new knowledge, valued on the level of national and international peer-reviewed publications.</p> <p>Ability for critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas, necessary for solving complex problems in the field of research.</p> <p>Ability for independent initiation and participation in national and international research networks and events with scientific integrity.</p> <p>Ability for independent initiation of research and development projects, through which new knowledge will be generated as well as skills for development in the field of research.</p> <p>Expected to be capable of promoting themselves in academic and professional frameworks and in technological, social or cultural development in a knowledge-based society.</p> <p>Capable of communicating with colleagues, wider academic community and with society as a whole within their field of expertise.</p>	<p>Takes maximum responsibility for the outcomes of own work, but also for the work of the others in the group.</p> <p>Takes responsibility for managing complex processes, while simultaneously ensuring the professional development of the individual and the group as a whole.</p>
<b>VII</b>	<p>Displays knowledge and understanding of the scientific field of study (or learning) that is built upon the first cycle, by applying methodologies appropriate for resolving complex problems, both in a systematic and creative manner which provides the basis or the possibility for originality in the development and/or application of autonomous ideas in the context of the research.</p> <p>Displays a high level of professional competence in one or more specific scientific fields.</p>	<p>Capable of critical, independent and creative problem-solving with certain originality in new or unknown environments and in multidisciplinary contexts, connected with the field of study.</p> <p>Capability to synthesise and integrate the knowledge and to handle complex issues, in a systematic and creative manner.</p> <p>Capability to evaluate and select scientific theories, methodologies, tools and general skills from the subject areas, and to put forward new analyses and solutions on a scientific basis.</p> <p>Capability to recognise the personal need for further knowledge and capability for Independent and autonomous actions when acquiring new knowledge and skills in general terms.</p>	<p>Displays significant responsibility for own and shared results, for leading and initiating activities.</p> <p>Capability for solid evaluation even of incomplete and limited information, which includes personal, social and ethical responsibilities in the application of the acquired knowledge and evaluation thereof.</p>

**Table 57. NQF structure and level descriptors in North Macedonia (Continued)**

NQF LEVELS	KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS	COMPETENCE
	<p>Possesses knowledge from one or more subject areas which, in the given scientific fields, are based on most renowned scientific research in that scientific field, as well as the capability to connect wider and deeper knowledge in related professions or fields of science.</p>	<p>Capability to exchange conclusions and proposals by arguing and rationally substantiating thereof, both with experts and non-experts clearly and unambiguously.</p>	<p>Capable of taking responsibility for further professional development and education, both for themselves and for the group with which they cooperate.</p>
<b>VI</b>	<p>Displays knowledge and understanding in the scientific field of study that is built upon previous education and training, including the domain of theoretical, practical, conceptual, comparative and critical perspectives in the scientific field according to the relevant methodology.</p> <p>Understanding of a certain area and knowledge of current issues in relation to scientific research and new sources of knowledge.</p> <p>Displays knowledge and understanding of different theories and methodologies necessary for the wider area of research.</p>	<p>Is able to apply knowledge and understanding in a manner that reflects a professional approach to the work or profession.</p> <p>Displays the ability to identify, analyse and solve problems.</p> <p>Capability to find and support arguments within the profession or the field of study.</p> <p>Capability to collect, analyse, evaluate and present information, ideas and concepts from the relevant data.</p> <p>Capability to assess theoretical and practical issues, provide explanations for the reasons and select an appropriate solution.</p> <p>Takes initiative to identify the requirements for acquiring further knowledge and study with a high degree of independence.</p> <p>Capability to communicate and discuss information, ideas, problems and solutions, when the decision criteria and the scope of the task have been clearly defined, both with experts and the non-expert public.</p>	<p>Takes responsibility for own results and shared responsibility for collective results.</p> <p>Capability for independent participation, with a professional approach, in specific scientific and interdisciplinary discussions.</p> <p>Makes the relevant judgement by taking into consideration the personal, social, scientific and ethical aspects.</p>
<b>V</b>	<p>Displays knowledge and understanding in the field of study or work that is built upon general secondary school education supported with professional literature.</p> <p>Possesses specialist theoretical and professional knowledge and understanding of individual basic theories from the narrow scientific and expertise area.</p>	<p>Applies skills that are based on understanding of theoretical principles and their application in solving problems and in the execution of complex and specific tasks in the field of work and study, with the selection and use of relevant data, methods, procedures, techniques, instruments, devices, tools and materials.</p> <p>Possesses the skills to study in order to become able to take over further research with a certain degree of independence.</p> <p>Possesses the ability to communicate and discuss with target groups from the narrow profession or area of study, with colleagues, superiors and clients.</p>	<p>Has a high degree of personal and business responsibility, and ability to evaluate own work and the work of the group based on criteria in the field of work.</p> <p>Capability of transferring knowledge to others, organising, communicating and controlling own work and the work of others.</p>

(Continued)

**Table 57. NQF structure and level descriptors in North Macedonia (Continued)**

NQF LEVELS	KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS	COMPETENCE
	<p>Possesses limited knowledge of contemporary developments in the area of work or study, which provides support to the field of work or profession, potential for personal development and basis for further studies to complete the first cycle.</p>		<p>Takes responsibility for own results, but also shares responsibility for the activities, results and work of others in the group.</p>
<p><b>IV</b></p>	<p>Knows the concepts, principles and processes from the study subjects and areas.</p> <p>Possesses systematic theoretical and professional knowledge within the specified area of work or study that includes analysing and connecting facts and theoretical principles when performing the work, while at the same time enabling further studying.</p>	<p>Possesses various cognitive, practical and creative skills, based on theoretical knowledge and principles, necessary for studying, working and solving problems in changeable conditions in a certain field of work or study.</p> <p>Trained to collect, analyse, select and use relevant information from various sources, tools, methodologies, techniques and materials in the area of study.</p> <p>Trained to perform complex procedures and use methods, instruments, tools, installations and materials in the operation.</p> <p>Communicates and cooperates with the group in changeable conditions.</p>	<p>Independently plans, organises and runs own work and conducts supervision of the mutual work.</p> <p>Independently performs complex tasks and solves problems, adjusting behaviour in accordance with given instructions, in changeable conditions.</p> <p>Responsible for own work and the work of the group, for the purpose of evaluating the results of the work and improving the quality, in accordance with predefined standards and criteria.</p>
<p><b>III</b></p>	<p>Possesses theoretical and systematic adopted professional knowledge, facts, principles, processes and general concepts for a certain area of work or study, while at the same time enabling further studying.</p>	<p>Possesses practical and creative skills that enable the solving of known (predictable) and less known (unpredictable) situations.</p> <p>Performs work and tasks of medium complexity, less standardised and relatively visible.</p> <p>Uses various devices, tools, equipment and materials in the process of production and in services.</p> <p>Communicates and cooperates with the group.</p>	<p>Plans, prepares, organises and values own work, based on predetermined instructions, within the scope of their work.</p> <p>Performs work that is not always defined in advance, with a certain degree of independence and responsibility.</p>

**Table 57. NQF structure and level descriptors in North Macedonia (Continued)**

NQF LEVELS	KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS	COMPETENCE
II	Possesses basic theoretical and professional knowledge, necessary for the requirements of the work, which can be applied when performing simple working tasks, while at the same time enabling further studying.	<p>Possesses practical and creative skills for solving simple or less complex and predefined work in known conditions and predictable situations.</p> <p>Uses simple methods, tools, instruments, devices and materials based on detailed instructions.</p> <p>Communicates and cooperates with specific persons.</p>	<p>Works independently under known conditions and under intermittent supervision and with limited responsibility for performing working tasks.</p> <p>Establishes simple communication and cooperation with some employees in known situations.</p>
I	Possesses basic knowledge of the function of certain objects and occurrences with the possibility to apply them in practice and other disciplines, while at the same time enabling further studying.	<p>Possesses basic skills for performing simple operations.</p> <p>Uses simple methods, tools and instruments with instructions and under supervision.</p> <p>Possesses general rules of communication.</p>	<p>Performs simple tasks under direct supervision.</p> <p>Takes responsibility for performing working tasks.</p>

Source: NQF Law, Article 7 (unofficial translation – for reference purposes only).

## Use of learning outcomes

Use of learning outcomes in programmes and qualifications is more advanced in higher education, in certain segments of VET (qualifications at level 3), as well as in the newly verified programmes of adult learning leading to qualifications. Higher education has generalised the use of diploma supplements, unlike VET where the introduction of certificate supplements is planned but not yet piloted or prepared on even a small/project scale. General education has been gradually embracing the approach in defining learning outcomes in curricula, particularly in critical subject areas. VET-4 programmes, designed over 2005–07, are based on learning objectives, which can be taken as proxies for learning outcomes by subject. However, the clear definition of key learning outcomes describing the important outcomes of these programmes is yet to be developed.

## Definition of qualification

The NQF Law defines qualification as the formal result of the evaluation and confirmation process, when the responsible institution certifies that

an individual has achieved learning outcomes in accordance with established standards. Article 6 of the NQF Law stipulates that the qualification standard should include the following:

- a. title of the qualification;
- b. type of qualification;
- c. level or sublevel of the qualification;
- d. code of the qualification;
- e. credit value of the qualification;
- f. description of the qualification;
- g. content of the qualification (entry requirements, number of mandatory and optional subjects: modules, method of verification and criteria for verification of the learning outcomes).

The NQF defines the parameters for classification of qualifications according to levels, types, sectors and volume. They are registered in the national database of qualifications (register). The national register is under construction, and the inventory of qualifications (2014) is its starting point. There is grouping of qualifications according to the purpose, type of documents issued, type of programmes and volume. Article 11 of the NQF Law defines two types of qualifications: educational qualifications (education level) and

vocational (occupational) qualifications. These are reflected in the MQF.

- a. Educational qualification is obtained by completing a publicly adopted educational programme within the formal education system, with necessary qualification volume, and documented with a diploma/certificate. It enables continuation of education, employment and personal development.
- b. Vocational qualification is obtained by completing part of a publicly adopted educational programme (modules, courses), a special programme for adult education, or through validation of non-formal learning. It is documented with a certificate and enables employment and personal development. It contains competences relevant for the labour market presented within one or more standards of occupations. By their nature, these qualifications do not provide access to vertical progression in the formal education system. Vocational qualifications can be acquired for all MQF levels and sublevels, except level VIII. This type of qualification corresponds to the concept of 'partial qualification'.

specialised top quality services, organisation of work, first level managerial positions, instructorship and mentorship.

Two types of pathway currently lead to qualifications at level VB: specialised education and master exam (specialised education and master craft exams), as they are expected to respond to demand from the labour market, provide advantageous career alternatives for young people, and meet the requirements of companies in many sectors for higher-level professional skills. From 2016, the country is operating a specific project, with EU support.

The standards and programmes for specialised education are proposed by the VET Centre and adopted by the Minister of Education and Science. Admission criteria are completed technical, vocational education for occupations, gymnasium or art education, with or without working experience. These programmes are provided by accredited public and private institutions: secondary schools, higher vocational schools, specialised institutions for post-secondary education and institutions for post-secondary education as part of chambers, employers' organisations, work associations and companies.

The standards and programmes for the master exam are prepared by the VET Centre and adopted by the Chamber of Crafts of the Republic of Macedonia, upon prior positive opinion by the Ministry of Education and Science.

## Qualification standards

Within level 5, the country has renewed attention on qualifications of the NQF level sublevel 5B. Post-secondary education provides deeper knowledge and understanding, skills and competence for working with more complex technology,

**Table 58. Diplomas and certificates awarded in North Macedonia's secondary education**

TYPE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION	TYPE OF SCHOOL	EXAM	TITLE OF PUBLIC DOCUMENT	INSTITUTION AWARDING THE QUALIFICATION	QUALIFICATION LEVEL ACCORDING TO NQF
Gymnasium education	Secondary school Gymnasium		Certificate for completed year <i>Svidetelstvo za završena godina</i>	School	
		State <i>matura</i>	Diploma for State <i>matura</i> <i>Diploma za državna matura</i>	School	IV
		School <i>matura</i>	Diploma for school <i>matura</i> <i>Diploma za učilišna matura</i>	School	IV

**Table 58. Diplomas and certificates awarded in North Macedonia's secondary education (Continued)**

TYPE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION	TYPE OF SCHOOL	EXAM	TITLE OF PUBLIC DOCUMENT	INSTITUTION AWARDING THE QUALIFICATION	QUALIFICATION LEVEL ACCORDING TO NQF
<b>Vocational education</b>	Secondary school (Technical education)		Certificate for completed year <i>Svidetelstvo za završena godina</i>	School	
		State <i>matura</i>	Diploma for State <i>matura</i> <i>Diploma za državna matura</i>	School	IV
		Final exam	Diploma for final exam <i>Diploma za završen ispit</i>	School	IV
	Secondary school (Vocational education for occupations)		Certificate for completed year <i>Svidetelstvo za završena godina</i>	School	
		Final exam	Diploma for final exam <i>Diploma za završen ispit</i>	School	III
	Secondary school (Vocational training)		Certificate for completed year <i>Svidetelstvo za završena godina</i>	School	
		Vocational competence exam	Certificate for vocational training <i>Uverenje za stručna osposobenost</i>	School	II
	<b>Art education</b>	Secondary school		Certificate for completed year <i>Svidetelstvo za završena godina</i>	School
State <i>matura</i>			Diploma for State <i>matura</i> <i>Diploma za državna matura</i>	School	IV
School <i>matura</i>			Diploma for school <i>matura</i> <i>Diploma za završen ispit</i>	School	IV

Source: EQF referencing report of the FYROM qualifications framework and self-certification to the QF-EHEA (December 2015), p. 27.

**Table 59. Qualifications acquired through post-secondary education in North Macedonia**

TYPE OF INSTITUTION	EXAM	TITLE OF THE PUBLIC DOCUMENT	INSTITUTION ISSUING THE QUALIFICATION	LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION ACCORDING TO NQF
<b>Accredited institution for post-secondary education</b>	Specialist exam	Diploma for specialised education ( <i>Diploma za specijalisticko obrazovanie</i> )	Accredited institution	VB
	Master exam	Diploma for completed master exam ( <i>Diploma za polozen majstorski ispit</i> )	Accredited institution	VB

**Table 60. Qualifications in North Macedonia's higher education system**

CYCLE	TYPE OF STUDIES	ECTS CREDITS	TITLE OF PUBLIC DOCUMENT	TITLE	LEVEL OF THE QUALIFICATION IN THE NQF
<b>First cycle studies</b>	Short cycle studies	60-120	Certificate		VA
	Academic studies	180-240	Diploma in the specific area	baccalaureate	VIA
	Professional studies	180-240	Diploma in the specific area	baccalaureate	VIB
<b>Second cycle studies</b>	Academic studies	60-120	Master degree diploma	master	VIIA
	Professional studies	60-120	Specialist diploma	specialist	VII B
<b>Third cycle studies</b>	Doctoral studies	At least 180	Diploma	Doctor of science/ Doctor of art	VIII

Source: EQF referencing report of the FYROM qualifications framework and self-certification to the QF-EHEA (December 2015), p. 34

### Access, progression and credit

Education policies in the past decade have resulted in visible improvement in transition to higher levels of education and training. There has also been an associated increase in educational attainment of the younger generations, notably by making secondary education compulsory. The state has also improved the progression routes of graduates, boosting programme length from VET-3 (three years) to VET-4 (four years) (NQF level IV), thus allowing VET graduates to access higher education.

Passing external exams – the state matura – is the main condition for eligibility to access higher education. Apart from vertical progression in formal education and training (and acquisition of) education level qualifications, citizens have the possibility to acquire other qualifications for employment and personal development purposes. These are vocational (occupational) qualifications. This type of qualification contributes to broadening the knowledge and skills of the holders and the acquisition of occupationally-relevant skills in new fields, but they are not designed to lead to higher levels.



The NQF Law defines three types of credit system.

- The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credits in higher education (one ECTS credit is defined as 30 working hours with duration of 60 minutes each). This definition differs from the ECTS principles (25 working hours with duration of 60 minutes each).
- The European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) credits in VET (one ECVET credit is defined as 25 working hours of 45 minutes each). Preparatory activities have been started at a small scale, but more effort is necessary to create an agreed and feasible framework of concepts and methodology for implementation.
- The Macedonian credit system for general education for credits in primary education and general secondary education (one credit is defined as 25 working hours of 45 minutes each).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

### NQF legal basis

The NQF Law was adopted in October 2013 and entered into force in September 2015. Apart from the NQF Law, other important legal acts are the Decree on the national framework for higher education qualifications and laws on higher education, VET, secondary and adult education.

### Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The NQF Law stipulates that the development, adoption, approval and classification of qualifications are under the responsibility of the National Board for the NQF, established in October 2015, and the sectoral qualifications councils, currently in the process of establishment.

The Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy coordinate the NQF, leading its development and implementation. The Ministry of Education and Science is more directly concerned with the content and technical development of the framework, covering qualification standards and EQF referencing. It also acts as national contact point for the NQF. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy develops information systems on labour market needs and forecasting; proposes development of standards of qualifications and standards of occupations, according to the needs of the labour market; adopts standards of occupations; participates in the preparation of strategic documents and analyses

relevant for the development of the MQF and monitors the employment of persons with acquired qualifications.

Other competent institutions involved in the development of qualifications are the VET Centre, the Centre for Adult Education, and the Bureau for Development of Education for levels I to VB and higher education institutions for levels VA to VIII.

The National Board for the NQF is composed of representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, VET Centre, Centre for Adult Education, Bureau for Development of Education, National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility, higher education institutions, the chambers of commerce and trades unions. Its functions include policy evaluation in VET and recommendations to link training to labour market needs more effectively. It decides on allocation of qualifications to MQF levels and proposes development of new, or improvement of existing, qualifications to the competent institutions. It also deals with the sectoral qualifications councils, including authorising their establishment.

The sectoral qualifications councils are composed of nominees from ministries, employers and trades unions, universities, the VET Centre, the Centre for Adult Education, the Bureau for Development of Education, and the competent bodies for regulated professions in the country. The councils are principally concerned with specific sector qualifications needs, identifying qualifications needs and proposing new qualifications for the relevant sector.

### Resources and funding

Financial resources for the functioning and development of NQF-related bodies and projects are shared between national and international sources. The state budget assures the functioning of the NQF unit at the Ministry of Education and Science and the other relevant state bodies (Bureau for Development of Education, VET Centre, Centre for Adult Education). A number of IPA-funded projects started in 2016 have a direct contribution to the funding of activities related to NQF implementation and qualifications reforms. Other donors include the World Bank and the British Council.

### Quality assurance of qualifications

Quality-assuring the NQF and qualifications addresses both the wider national education and training system and MQF procedures and processes.

The Ministry of Education and Science runs accreditation procedures for primary and secondary schools and programmes for adult education. The verified institutions and providers are entered in the respective database of the ministry. Programmes for secondary education, including VET, are developed by the Bureau for Development of Education and/or the VET Centre and approved by the Minister of Education and Science.

The implementation of curricula for primary and secondary education is supported and monitored by advisors from the Bureau for Development of Education, the VET Centre and the State Educational Inspectorate.

Teacher training or re-training is provided by advisors of the Bureau for Development of Education, the VET Centre and independent providers selected by the Bureau for Development of Education or the VET Centre. Continuing professional development of academic staff is inherent to the institutional strategies of the universities.

Educational institutions implement self-evaluation procedures in accordance with the legislation. The State Educational Inspectorate performs integral evaluation of primary and secondary schools on the basis of school self-evaluation reports.

For assessment, annually external assessment of students' achievements in primary and secondary education is carried out by the National Examination Centre and the schools. Secondary education is completed by passing state/school matura exam or final exam. The National Examination Centre is involved in the external part of the exams.

Participants in adult education and training are assessed on a continuous basis and through final demonstration of learning outcomes.

The (2013) reformed vocational programmes for occupations (three years) are based on learning outcomes, and are linked with qualifications standards and occupational standards. Assessments are continuous but with variations; this is the norm in adult education plus some final examination. At secondary level, students prepare for the matura, which includes both internal evaluations and some external assessment and examination by the National Examination Centre.

Higher education institutions and study programmes are accredited by the Board for Accreditation and Evaluation of Higher Education in accordance with the rulebook on criteria for accreditation and

external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes developed in accordance with the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education. The Board has been an affiliated member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA) since October 2011.

Curricula are based on learning outcomes. The Board is responsible for external evaluation of higher education institutions. The quality of the implementation of the study programmes is assessed through institutional self-evaluations. The Board is independent in decision-making and the process is performed according to the rulebook adopted by the Board. The Ministry of Education and Science provides staff for administrative and technical support. They are not included in the decision-making process. A new law for quality assurance in higher education is under preparation. It will be based upon the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area 2015. Technical and administrative support to the Board will be provided by a separate service.

The legal basis of the quality assurance framework in the qualification system is drawn from other NQF-related laws such as those on general, vocational, higher and adult education cited earlier. The main quality assurance issues and challenges for the NQF and qualifications involve practical application of the shift to the learning outcomes approach, particularly focusing more on the qualifications themselves.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

Validation processes and criteria comply with the adopted standards for vocational qualifications included in the MQF. Higher education qualifications may be awarded via VNFIL, but a quality assurance regulation is still to be adopted to implement this provision. Arrangements in the third sector are not in place yet. Limited engagement so far of stakeholders, including social partners and some state institutions, and completion of necessary enabling legislation are the main obstacles to full implementation.

In its October 2015 concept paper, the government foresees the development and implementation of a system for VNFIL by 2018. Laws on VET and adult education also allow for VNFIL. The Centre for Adult Education, jointly with stakeholders,

is currently developing a model for VNFIL and associated processes, inspired by the principles of the VNFIL EU Council Recommendation of 2012. This model is based on the four phases of validation and aims to improve the reliability and transparency of assessment, by introducing better instruments, particularly criteria allowing coherent assessment of the learning outcomes specified in the qualification standards. An information-methodology package to support practitioners (providers of VNFIL services) is at an early stage of design.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

The inventory of qualifications, completed in March 2015, is the first version of a database of qualifications<sup>697</sup>. This inventory, carried out in cooperation with the ETF, is comprehensive and exhaustive, as it covers all existing formal qualifications (accredited higher education programmes, general education, and VET), as well as verified non-formal adult education programmes. The inventory includes 241 qualifications from general education, formal VET, non-formal verified programmes, qualifications that exist in the aviation sector, and others. A few higher education qualifications (43) were integrated in the inventory, to complement the 1,147 already listed in the higher education qualifications register (created with support of a Tempus project before the start of the inventory).

### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

The roadmap for NQF implementation contains a specific work package on coordination, monitoring, and analysis of results from the roadmap, plus transfer to legislation. The NQF unit is currently in charge of coordination and reporting, but it is likely to face human resources constraints in the short run, due to upcoming retirement of the most experienced staff and limited public finance.

### Impact for end-users

Qualifications are in the framework. The NQF is technically operational – learning outcomes-based structure and descriptors, modular or unitised qualifications are available, levels and descriptors clearly defined, whereas the quality assurance framework and VNFIL/recognition of prior learning mechanisms are being developed further.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

North Macedonia has been a full member of the Bologna Process, or European higher education area, since 2003. The country is a full member of the EQF and successfully referenced the NQF to the EQF on 3 February 2016. Simultaneously, the country presented its self-certification report, demonstrating compatibility with the qualifications framework of the European higher education area. The EQF referencing report of the MQF and self-certification to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area is available on the MQF and EQF websites.

## Important lessons and future plans

Implementation of the NQF is a main priority integrated in the Comprehensive strategy of education 2016–20 and a central theme of the Economic reform programme report 2016. The NQF is high on the agenda, and this momentum is sustained by the launch in 2016 of several international projects focused on reform of VET qualifications, non-formal learning, higher education and NQF implementation. Such a multidimensional reform activity in the qualifications landscape is beneficial, but heightens demands on the ministry's capacity to coordinate the projects' approaches and outputs towards coherent outcomes. In 2016 the national NQF team and key stakeholders, with support of the EU twinning project, developed the draft roadmap for further development and implementation of the NQF. New local, national and international partnerships were initiated and developed within these activities.

Implementation of the NQF roadmap is conditional on good coordination of all planned inputs, actions and projects, and to collaboration between key bodies and stakeholders, which concur with the overall roadmap. The NQF roadmap is structured in work packages covering concepts, governance, learning outcomes implementation, VNFIL, quality assurance, levelling methodologies, and legislation.

Key challenges are ensuring effectiveness of institutions engaged in NQF implementation, resource availability, revision of existing VET qualifications to an outcomes basis, strengthening of quality assurance and building capacities of professionals, experts and stakeholders.

<sup>697</sup> The new qualification database is available at: <https://registar.mrk.mk/registri-kvalifikacij/>

**Abbreviations**

ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system	IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
EQF	European qualifications framework	MQF	Macedonian qualifications framework
ET 2020	Education and training 2020 (EU's framework for cooperation and action in education in the EU)	NQF	national qualifications framework
		VET	vocational education and training
ETF	European Training Foundation	VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

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## Introduction and context

Norwegian 15-year-olds have made clear improvements in the latest edition of the global PISA education ranking<sup>698</sup>. They performed better in science, maths and reading than they did three years ago, and are now above the OECD average in all three disciplines (OECD, 2015). Compared to the EU 2020 averages, Norwegian pupils are also well above in all three disciplines and have reached the EU 2020 benchmark target for reading. Norway has surpassed the other EU 2020 targets except the benchmark for early leavers from education and training for males. The proportion of early leavers from education is 12.8% for males and 7.9% for females, together totalling 10.4% early leavers from education and training in 2017 (EU average 10.6%). Tertiary educational attainment is one of the highest in Europe (49% in 2017, compared to the EU average of 39.9%) and the employment rate of recent graduates is exceeded only by Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Iceland, Malta and the Netherlands (European Commission, 2018).

The Norwegian national qualifications framework (NQF) developments were triggered both by the 2005 qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) and by the 2008 recommendation on the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF) and its inclusion in the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA) in March 2009 (EEA Joint Committee, 2009). After extensive preparatory work involving main stakeholders, a comprehensive Norwegian national qualifications framework (*Nasjonalt kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring* (NKR)) was adopted by the Ministry of Education and Research in December 2011<sup>699</sup> and, following amendments of the relevant laws relating

to education and training, further legally defined in a regulation in December 2017<sup>700</sup>.

The NKR consists of seven levels and covers qualifications from general, vocational and higher education. The numbering of the seven levels starts at level 2<sup>701</sup> to ensure a structure that better parallels the levels of the EQF. The question of opening up to qualifications from outside formal education and training (for example, awarded by the private sector) has been extensively discussed. The ministry appointed a committee in October 2013 with the mandate of exploring the possibility of placing qualifications acquired outside the formal education system into the NQF. The committee presented its report to the minister in April 2015. The committee was divided on several issues, such as the assessment of the need for placing non-formal qualifications into the NQF, and how placement should be done. The report, therefore, includes two different models, describing alternative approaches and solutions.

The Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries intend, in dialogue with the Master Craftsman Certificate Committee, to assess if the master craftsman qualification can be placed into the NQF<sup>702</sup>. However, the process seems to have stalled.

The NKR was referenced to the EQF in June 2014. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) has been appointed as national coordination point for the EQF.

The NKR has now reached operational status.

<sup>698</sup> Programme for international student assessment – PISA (2015).

<sup>699</sup> The Norwegian qualifications framework for lifelong learning adopted by the Ministry of Education and Research on 15 December 2011 is available at: [www.nokut.no/siteassets/nkr/20140606\\_norwegian\\_qualifications\\_framework.pdf](http://www.nokut.no/siteassets/nkr/20140606_norwegian_qualifications_framework.pdf)

<sup>700</sup> Regulation FOR-2017-11-08-1846 on the Norwegian qualifications framework and its referencing to the EQF: <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2017-11-08-1846>

<sup>701</sup> Level 1 is not part of the NQF; there are no qualifications at this level.

<sup>702</sup> Report No 9 to the Storting, 2016–17, on skilled workers for the future. [www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/f34b56ba52454667a46049aa550b42bc/no/pdfs/stm201620170009000dddpdfs.pdf](http://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/f34b56ba52454667a46049aa550b42bc/no/pdfs/stm201620170009000dddpdfs.pdf)

## Policy objectives

The NKR aims at describing the existing national education and training system in a transparent way to make it more understandable, at national and international levels. Focusing on improving the transparency of qualifications, the NKR was originally seen as a communication and information tool rather than as a tool for reform. However, through its focus on learning outcomes, an important aim of the NKR – underlined in the 2016 and 2017 white papers on vocational college education and higher education, respectively – is to support quality in education and training. The NQF is also a regulating tool for education and training through the requirement to use learning outcomes, quality assurance, and the development of curricula.

More specific objectives include the following<sup>703</sup>:

- a. improve communication and mobility within the education sector and between the education sector and the labour market;
- b. offer a description of what a pupil/apprentice/graduate is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of learning;
- c. describe the workings of the Norwegian system in a new manner, which will pave the way for improved education and career guidance;
- d. aid the comparison of qualifications from other countries, via the EQF and the QF-EHEA;
- e. open the way for the development of new instruments for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The level descriptors play a key role in clarifying the similarities and differences between qualifications and their relationships. They are a point of reference for developing and updating qualifications. In this way the framework (now supported by the regulation) acts as a tool for improving the quality and relevance of qualifications.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The NKR adopted by the Ministry of Education and Research in December 2011, and further legally embedded in 2017 regulation, establishes a framework of seven levels, reflecting the structure of existing formal education and training in Norway. The levels are described through the concepts knowledge (*kunnskap*), skills (*ferdighet*) and general competence (*generell kompetanse*).

There is broad consensus in Norway on the relevance of the learning outcomes approach. *Knowledge promotion (Kunnskapsløftet)*, a wide-ranging reform of primary, lower and upper secondary education and training, started in 2004 and implemented in 2006, has been of particular significance; it required comprehensive redefinition and rewriting of learning objectives at these levels. An important reason for using learning outcomes is to encourage curriculum consistency at national level. While adaptation is possible at local level, national consistency is important for reasons of quality and also to support validation of non-formal and informal learning. Today's curricula are based on the *Knowledge promotion* reform and include

**Table 61. Main NQF level descriptor elements defining levels 2–8 in Norway**

LEVEL DESCRIPTOR ELEMENTS		
KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	GENERAL COMPETENCE
<b>Understanding of theories, facts, concepts, principles and procedures in a discipline, subject area and/or profession.</b>	The ability to apply knowledge to complete tasks and solve problems. There are different types of skill: cognitive, practical, creative and communicative.	The ability to use knowledge and skills in an independent manner in different situations in study and work contexts, by demonstrating the ability to cooperate, the ability to act responsibly, and a capacity for reflection and critical thinking.

Source: Cedefop (2018). *Analyses and overview of NQF level descriptors in European countries*.

<sup>703</sup> Adapted from Ministry of Education and Research (2012).

the core curriculum<sup>704</sup>, quality framework<sup>705</sup> and subject curricula. The core curriculum elaborates on the aims stated in the Education Act<sup>706</sup>, designates overarching goals for education and training, and sets forth the basis for primary and secondary education and training as a whole in terms of the values, culture and knowledge in which it is grounded. The quality framework, with the learning poster, elaborate on the Education Act and its statutes and set forth the principles that schools and training establishments are to follow in their teaching and training. It must be adapted to local and individual needs and conditions. Subject curricula designate the aim, main subject areas, fundamental skills, competence aims, and criteria for making assessments in a given subject.

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training has developed a framework for basic skills which is a tool for developing and revising national subject curricula. The five basic skills – oral skills, reading, writing, digital skills and numeracy – are defined as basic to learning in school, work and social life. These skills are fundamental to learning in all subjects as well as a prerequisite for the pupil to show his/her competence and qualifications. All subject-specific curricula describe how the five basic skills contribute to developing the pupils' competence and qualifications and how these skills are integrated into the subject.

Renewal and improvement of subjects in primary and lower secondary education and in upper secondary education and training is now well under way. The renewal builds on the *Knowledge promotion* reform, ensuring continuity for teachers and pupils alike. The focus is on more in-depth learning and better understanding, measures set out in a 2016 white paper<sup>707</sup>. The white paper was adopted by the Parliament, with some amendments, in October 2016. The new curricula will be used incrementally from 2020.

The learning outcomes approach is widely accepted in education and training, as well as among social partners. The NKR is also an important part of quality assurance mechanisms and intrinsically connected to the systematic work on quality in education. All higher education institutions were requested to adopt learning outcomes in line with the descriptors for levels 6–8 of the NKR in all study programmes by the end of 2012. Mapping by NOKUT, the quality assurance agency, in 2015, and continuing revision of all higher education programmes aimed at qualifications for the health and social sectors<sup>708</sup>, show that drafting learning outcomes in line with the NQF is still experienced as challenging. For vocational college education (*fagskole*), level 5, the deadline set for the implementation of learning outcomes was the end of 2014, as work at this level started later than in higher education. In 2014 and 2015, NOKUT engaged an expert panel to assess the learning outcomes proposed in all applications for accreditation of new study programmes; this has helped the vocational colleges in developing and using learning outcomes in all programmes. Compliance with the NKR and the use of learning outcomes is included in the regulations on NOKUT's supervision and control of the quality of college education and of higher education<sup>709</sup>. This means that learning outcomes are assessed as part of all accreditations and reaccreditations of study programmes.

The NQF is indirectly providing a basis for validation of prior learning and informal competences in the Norwegian system. Arrangements related to validation of non-formal and informal learning have a thorough legal basis and are referenced to the learning outcomes of qualifications in the formal system for education and training and NQF. This has had a considerable impact on validation of non-formal and informal learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The regulation on the NQF and the referencing to EQF are linked to legislation in the education system. The regulation provides definitions,

<sup>704</sup> Ministry of Education and Research (1994). *Core curriculum for primary, secondary and adult education in Norway*. [www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/lareplan/generell-del/core\\_curriculum\\_english.pdf](http://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/lareplan/generell-del/core_curriculum_english.pdf)

<sup>705</sup> Directorate for Education and Training (2006). *National curriculum for knowledge promotion in primary and secondary education and training: the quality framework*. [www.udir.no/globalassets/upload/larerplaner/fastsatte\\_lareplaner\\_for\\_kunnskapsloeftet/5/prinsipper\\_lk06\\_eng.pdf](http://www.udir.no/globalassets/upload/larerplaner/fastsatte_lareplaner_for_kunnskapsloeftet/5/prinsipper_lk06_eng.pdf)

<sup>706</sup> Law LOV-1998-07-17-61. The Education Act (act relating to primary and secondary education). <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/1998-07-17-61>

<sup>707</sup> Report No 28 to the Storting, 2015–16, on in-depth learning and better understanding; a renewal of the Knowledge promotion reform. [www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-28-20152016/id2483955/](http://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-28-20152016/id2483955/)

<sup>708</sup> The RETHOS project 2017–20 is a joint project between the four following ministries: Education and Research (which has the project secretariat); Health and Care Services; Labour and Social Affairs; and Children and Equality. It follows a 2012 white paper on welfare education to draft revised guidelines – including learning outcomes – for all relevant study programmes.

<sup>709</sup> Regulation FOR-2017-02-07-137 on the supervision of the quality of education in higher education: <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2017-02-07-137>

indicates roles and responsibilities, states indication of NQF and EQF levels on new certificates, diplomas and/or Europass supplements, and stipulates that curricula and study programmes for qualifications should be based on learning outcomes in accordance with the descriptors for the applicable level.

The development and implementation of the NKR has been based on broad stakeholder involvement. All main education and training stakeholders, as well as representatives from the social partners, have been involved at all levels through the entire process. Stakeholders have generally been engaged in, and committed to, the process, although sometimes expressing different opinions on the role, profile and future direction of the NKR.

The involvement of labour market stakeholders has been significant and is closely linked to their role in vocational training and discussion on opening up to qualifications awarded outside of formal education and training. Norwegian social partners generally see the NKR (and the EQF process) as important and as a way to strengthen dialogue between education and training and the labour market; it is also seen as a key tool in a broader national competence strategy where the interaction between education and training and the labour market is seen as a key issue.

While the Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for the overall development and implementation of the framework, NOKUT has the role of national coordination point for the EQF. It serves as information centre, coordinates activities related to the NQF and the EQF, and is responsible for the main NKR web presentation<sup>710</sup>.

NOKUT is a government agency established in 2003. Its main responsibilities include:

- a. conducting evaluations and quality control, and stimulating quality development of education provision in Norwegian higher education and vocational college education (levels 5–8);
- b. recognising foreign higher education qualifications, vocational college education and vocational upper secondary qualifications, based on individual applications, and providing information about mechanisms for the recognition and authorisation of foreign qualifications;

<sup>710</sup> NOKUT: [www.nokut.no/en/about-nokut/international-cooperation/national-coordination-point-ncp-for-the-european-qualifications-framework-for-lifelong-learning-efq/](http://www.nokut.no/en/about-nokut/international-cooperation/national-coordination-point-ncp-for-the-european-qualifications-framework-for-lifelong-learning-efq/)

- c. being Norwegian ENIC-NARIC, information centre and national contact point for the diploma supplement and for the professional qualifications directive.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>711</sup>

There are laws and regulations on validation of non-formal and informal learning for each level of education and training covered by the NKR. Validation arrangements are based on shared basic principles across all sectors. One of these is that the validation process should be voluntary and of benefit to the individual. Although participation in validation is voluntary, the legal framework guarantees the rights of individuals to undertake it.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning, known in Norway as *realkompetansevurdering* (validation of real competence, or recognition of prior learning) is clearly defined and used as a specific term in laws, regulations and guidelines. Real competence includes formal, non-formal and informal learning. Although formal learning is not assessed separately, it is included as part of the new total assessment.

Responsibility for local provision in primary, lower and upper secondary education (levels 2–4) is decentralised to municipality and county education administrations respectively and based on the learning outcomes described in the curricula.

In vocational college education and higher education (levels 5–8), validation of non-formal and informal learning is mainly used for admission, and exemption. At these levels, each institution provides validation procedures based on the learning outcomes of the relevant study programme. Each institution is autonomous, so there are no general procedures for validation of competence at NQF levels 5 and above. However, in 2013, as a follow-up of a 2009 white paper on the education strategy<sup>712</sup>, Skills Norway – formerly Vox – developed two guidelines on assessing prior learning together with representatives from the sectors: one related to admission to vocational college education, and one

<sup>711</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al. (forthcoming)).

<sup>712</sup> Report No 44 to the Storting, 2008–09. The education strategy. [www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/stmeld-nr-44-2008-2009/id565231/](http://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/stmeld-nr-44-2008-2009/id565231/)



to recognition of prior learning in (i.e. as part of) higher education.

In lower and upper secondary education, the outcome of validation of non-formal and informal learning can be a document showing that the individual has achieved a full qualification (certificate); if the individual has not achieved a full qualification, the document awarded is a 'certificate of competence'. In vocational education and training (VET) programmes, it is not possible to obtain a full qualification based on validation of non-formal and informal learning alone. Applicants must pass the final trade examination to obtain the final VET (trade or journeyman's) certificate.

In higher education, a student who achieves some courses through validation, and others via formal learning, will not receive a grade for the validated courses (only the indication 'Pass'), whereas most other courses passed will be graded by the letters A to E. For validation students who wish to continue their studies, the lack of grades in certain courses might be a disadvantage when competing for a place at a master level.

In the Erasmus KA3 project VISKA (visible skills for adults) 2017–20, the focus is on developing methods and processes to increase the access of migrants to validation of prior learning processes, education and work<sup>713</sup>. Skills Norway is coordinating this project.

There are also validation mechanisms in enterprises (such as the 2018–21 social partner agreement on documenting workers' competence, Paragraphs 18–4<sup>714</sup>).

In the Norwegian strategy for skills policy 2017–21<sup>715</sup>, the strategy partners have agreed to make it easier to document skills acquired at work and to develop a method and model for evaluating skills acquired in the workplace. A working group appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research has developed a pilot on validation of non-formal and informal learning within the retail trade<sup>716</sup>. The pilot was coordinated by the Enterprise Federation of Norway (Virke) in cooperation with the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO), the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO)

and the Confederation of Vocational Unions (YS) in dialogue with the ministry. The pilot did not aim to compare or contrast skills acquired in the workplace with those acquired in formal education; it brought a broader understanding of the development of skills in the workplace. A follow-up evaluation by the Fafo Research Foundation recommends that the model should now be tested to ensure its applicability<sup>717</sup>.

Internal validation procedures at the workplace, linked to wage negotiations or competence development in companies, can also be found outside the formal system of validation. In these instances, validation references are based on local requirements defined by the company concerned.

A study was recently conducted by the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway<sup>718</sup>. It concludes that there is a lot more to be done, both in education and working life, before a well-functioning national system for documentation and validation is established. Another conclusion is that a good system for data collection on the use of the different validation schemes and benefit for the individual is lacking.

## NQF implementation

All qualifications in the Norwegian formal education system are included in the NKR; most formal qualifications are included *en bloc*. Quality assurance of qualifications in the formal education system is secured through the legislation on all education levels in the system. The NKR has been incorporated into these laws and regulations by explicitly referring curricula and study programmes to the relevant level descriptors.

The NKR is being used indirectly for validation of non-formal and informal learning in that validation arrangements are measured against the learning outcomes of formal qualifications.

NOKUT uses the NKR to support recognition of qualifications and aims at taking NQFs into account more systematically in methodologies for recognition of foreign education and training when possible. In autumn 2018, NOKUT carried out public consultation on proposed changes in the criteria for general recognition of higher education to bring them more in line with developments in the field; this included the recommendation on

<sup>713</sup> VISKA project: [www.viskaproject.eu](http://www.viskaproject.eu)

<sup>714</sup> *Basic agreement between the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises, 2018–21*: [www.nho.no/siteassets/publikasjoner/basic-agreement-lo-nho-2018-2021.pdf](http://www.nho.no/siteassets/publikasjoner/basic-agreement-lo-nho-2018-2021.pdf)

<sup>715</sup> *Norwegian strategy for skills policy, 2017–21*: [www.kompetansenorge.no/contentassets/06b4044721e849ed8116604f9af4faa5/norwegian\\_strategy\\_for\\_skills.pdf](http://www.kompetansenorge.no/contentassets/06b4044721e849ed8116604f9af4faa5/norwegian_strategy_for_skills.pdf)

<sup>716</sup> See Enterprise Federation of Norway (2018).

<sup>717</sup> See Jensen and Lidahl (2018).

<sup>718</sup> See Sutherland-Olsen et al. (2018).

revised criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications, a subsidiary text of the Lisbon Recognition Convention<sup>719</sup>. According to NOKUT, the recognition of upper secondary and post-secondary VET qualifications is challenging because of the great variation in VET systems at these levels. NOKUT is therefore exploring ways in which this connection can be supported better and in which the EQF can help communicate foreign qualifications.

The framework as referenced to the EQF in 2014 is generally referred to as a permanent and fully integrated part of the Norwegian education and training system, including in laws and regulations and relevant policy documents.

Mapping of the implementation of NKR is planned for 2019. Current EQF relevant databases are Utdanning.no and Study in Norway<sup>720</sup>. The database Utdanning.no gives information about education and training possibilities and programmes in upper secondary education and training, vocational college education, higher education, folk high schools (boarding schools without exams and grades), and further and continuing education (flexible courses or education offers at all levels, often based on professional experience). This database also offers different tools for use in career guidance. Study in Norway contains study programmes in English in higher education extracted from Utdanning.no.

The national coordination point has a communication strategy to improve the digital access points and online information and to create written information. For the period 2018–20, the national coordination point aims to further develop its communication strategy, mainly through seminars and workshops with stakeholders from the labour market and social partners (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Norway referenced its NQF to the EQF in June 2014, along with the self-certification to the QF-EHEA.

While the EQF advisory group considered the link between the NKR and the EQF to be transparent,

<sup>719</sup> *Revised recommendation on criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications* (adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its 5<sup>th</sup> meeting, Sèvres, 23 June 2010): [www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/Criteria%20and%20procedures\\_En.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/Criteria%20and%20procedures_En.asp)

<sup>720</sup> [www.utdanning.no/](http://www.utdanning.no/) and [www.studyinnorway.no/](http://www.studyinnorway.no/) (study programmes taught through English, extracted from [utdanning.no](http://utdanning.no)).

some questions were raised regarding the levelling of qualifications at levels 5 and 6.

The Norwegian NKR regulation provides the legal basis for the possible inclusion of NKR levels in new diplomas and certificates. Alternatively, EQF levels can be indicated on supporting documentation such as the Europass certificate supplement or the diploma supplement.

NKR levels are currently included on diplomas from vocational college education. In higher education, NKR levels are included on the diploma supplement, which is conferred automatically and free of charge to all graduates. NKR and EQF levels are included on certificate supplements in vocational upper secondary education and training.

## Important lessons and challenges

The NKR is fully operational and included in relevant regulations on education and training. It is also established as a tool for quality enhancement and quality assurance.

The NKR is widely known and systematically used among recognition authorities and bodies. It is known among social partners, but to a lesser degree among employers. Guidance and counselling practitioners have some knowledge of the framework. The student unions claim high information value for the NKR and learning outcomes in education. Both the NKR and EQF are less known by the general public.

The learning outcomes approach is widely accepted in education and training, as well as among social partners. The NKR is an important part of quality assurance mechanisms and intrinsically connected to the systematic work on quality in education. Different mobility tools, including the EQF, provide contact points between authorities and stakeholders in education and training. However, there is little evidence of particular cooperation between education and labour market stakeholders related to the NKR.

Despite all successful implementation of the different objectives, there is little reliable evidence today when it comes to the impact of EQF and NKR on mobility and transparency, or on quality.

No evaluation of the NKR has been carried out so far, but mapping is planned for 2019. Changes stemming from this evaluation might be relevant for updating the referencing report (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

**Table 62. Norwegian qualifications framework (NKR)**

NKR LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS	
8	Doctoral degrees (ph.d, dr. philos., ph.d in artistic development work (from 2018)) Diploma for artistic development programme ( <i>Diplom, kunstnerisk utviklingsprogram</i> )	8	
7	Master degree ( <i>Mastergrad</i> ) Master of arts Master of business administration (MBA) Master of international business (MIB) Master of technology management Master of laws Candidata/candidatus medicinae Candidata/candidatus medicinae veterinariae Candidata/candidatus psychologiae Candidata/candidatus theologiae	7	
6.2	Bachelor degree ( <i>Bachelorgrad</i> ) Diploma for general teacher education programme ( <i>Vitnemål fra allmennlærerutdanning, Vitnemål fra grunnskolelærerutdanning</i> )	6	
6.1	University college degree ( <i>Høgskolekandidatgrad</i> )		
5.2	Diploma for vocational college education (1.5 to 2 years, 90–120 credits) ( <i>Vitnemål fra fagskoleutdanning</i> )	5	
5.1	Diploma for vocational college education 0.5 to 1.5 years, 30–90 credits) ( <i>Vitnemål fra fagskoleutdanning</i> )		
4	A. Certificate for upper secondary vocational education and training ( <i>Vitnemål fra videregående opplæring, yrkesfaglige utdanningsprogram</i> ) Craft certificate ( <i>Fagbrev</i> ) Journeyman certificate ( <i>Svennebrev</i> )	B. Certificate for upper secondary general education ( <i>Vitnemål fra videregående opplæring, studieforberevende utdanningsprogram</i> )	4
3	Document of competence for partially completed upper secondary education ( <i>Kompetansebevis</i> )	3	
2	Certificate for primary and lower secondary education (10 years) ( <i>Vitnemål fra 10-årig grunnskole</i> )	2	
1	Not part of the NQF/no qualifications at this level	1	

Source: Adapted from NOKUT (2018). *The Norwegian qualifications framework for lifelong learning*. [www.nokut.no/en/norwegian-education/the-norwegian-qualifications-framework-for-lifelong-learning/](http://www.nokut.no/en/norwegian-education/the-norwegian-qualifications-framework-for-lifelong-learning/)

Abbreviations		NOKUT	Nasjonalt kompetansesenter for utenlandsk utdanning (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education)
EEA	European economic area		
EQF	European qualifications framework		
EU	European Union		
NKR	Nasjonalt kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring (national qualifications framework for lifelong learning)	NQF	national qualifications framework
		QF-EHEA	qualifications framework in the European higher education area
		VET	vocational education and training

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The qualifications databases: [utdanning.no](http://utdanning.no) and [Study in Norway](http://StudyinNorway.no)

Ministry of Education and Research – NKR: [www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/utdanning/voksnes\\_laering\\_og\\_kompetanse/artikler/nasjonalt-kvalifikasjonsrammeverk/id601327/](http://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/utdanning/voksnes_laering_og_kompetanse/artikler/nasjonalt-kvalifikasjonsrammeverk/id601327/) (not available in English)

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# PAKISTAN

## Introduction

The Pakistan national skills strategy 2009–13 prioritised paradigm-shifting reforms in Pakistan’s technical vocational education and training (TVET) to ensure alignment with skills demand, increase access and improve quality. The development and implementation of a Pakistan national qualifications framework (NQF) form part of the national skills strategy reform. The NQF aims to bring together all national qualifications under one coherent system (NAVTEC, 2009).

Developments, some supported by donor assistance, have occurred at national and provincial levels. The TVET reform support programme contributes to the reform of the national system and is currently being implemented in Pakistan by the German Agency for International Cooperation and Development (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ GmbH)) (GIZ, 2013; 2016) in cooperation with the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC, previously known as NAVTEC) and provincial technical education and vocational training authorities (TEVTAs). Other TVET providers, including the Punjab Vocational Training Council, Punjab Skill Development Fund, a large number of private institutes, trade testing boards and boards of technical education, are also involved. The project is jointly funded by the European Union, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Royal Norwegian Embassy. As the NQF is a part of the TVET reform support programme, it focuses on the TVET sector, and is called the national vocational qualifications framework (NVQF).

The first draft of the framework was prepared in December 2012. After a series of consultations with major stakeholders from the public and private sectors, the NVQF was approved for piloting in December 2014. The draft was further reviewed following feedback from major implementing partners including TEVTAs, trade testing boards, boards of technical education and the Punjab Vocational Training Council, as well as special

contributions from private-sector representatives. In March 2015, the NVQF was launched by the Federal Minister for Education and Technical Training (NAVTTTC, 2015).

## Policy objectives

The purposes of the NVQF are to:

- a. improve the quality of TVET by establishing clear qualification levels and by creating transparency for employers concerning applicants’ qualifications;
- b. improve the alignment between qualifications, training programmes and skills demand;
- c. establish a structured national framework for vocational and technical learning achievements based on defined levels and characteristics;
- d. standardise the system of defining the characteristics and value of qualifications and the relationships between qualifications;
- e. promote population upskilling and aid horizontal and vertical movement within the skills development system through pathways for progression and credit accumulation and transfer;
- f. aid recognition of prior learning to provide a mechanism that allows individuals to gain recognition for the skills already acquired;
- g. contribute to international recognition of Pakistani qualifications by improving the credibility, portability and recognition of NVQF qualifications nationally and internationally;
- h. establish validity and reliability through a comprehensive and coherent quality assurance system that assures the quality of qualifications, training and assessment programmes and certification;
- i. support new ways of standardising technical and vocational training.

## Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The NVQF is intended to provide a distinct pathway for TVET within the overall national qualifications

structure. It contains eight levels, plus a 'level zero' (pre-vocational) designed to meet the needs of those with little or no schooling. Levels 1–4 are certificate levels and level 5 is a diploma level, whereas levels 6–8 fall under higher education. Each level is defined by a set of approved level descriptors. These describe the broad outcomes expected of achievers at that level. The level descriptors describe the level of complexity of skills and knowledge at that level. They are used as guidelines for qualification developers and for the design of competency standards, assessment

and training programmes, course curricula and teaching and learning materials. The pathways and equivalences developed between TVET and general education will enable horizontal as well as vertical movement between these sectors. The NVQF integrates five interacting systems which, if properly coordinated, ensure the achievement of the NVQF purposes: the qualifications development system, the assessment delivery system, the training delivery system, the national skills certification system and the national quality assurance system.

**Figure 17. Pakistani qualifications framework**



### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) is the main authority working with provincial technical education and vocational training authorities (TEVTAs) to develop and implement the NVQF. The NAVTTTC was created following the Act XV of 2011 by the President of Pakistan on 25 June 2011. The Act empowers the NAVTTTC to 'provide for an autonomous organisation for regulation, coordination, and policy direction for vocational and technical training and for matters ancillary thereto or connected therewith'. Many functions of the NAVTTTC involve labour market information, for example with regard to vocational career guidance and counselling, development

or modification of occupational standards, and assessment of the quality and labour market relevance of TVET training, based on information on school-to-work transitions.

The NQF/TVET is based on the European qualifications framework, and was developed in consultation with public and private stakeholders. It defines levels, level descriptors and rules for equivalences, and makes allowances for credit transfer, assessment, and recognition of prior learning.

The GIZ-TVET reform support programme has contributed substantially to NVQF development. The NVQF forms the foundation for competency-based standards, curricula, teaching learning materials and assessment packages. Together with the NAVTTTC,

the GIZ-TVET programme has set out guidelines for the development of curricula, including a standardised national template. Most stakeholder groups were involved in the design phase; the major steps are listed below.

- a. Industry practitioners participate in developing a curriculum (DACUM) workshops; they define job tasks and duties, required equipment, and other features of a job.
- b. Private sector practitioners and TVET teachers are involved in subsequent standards development.
- c. Based on the defined tasks, duties and standards, national curricula are developed for different NVQF levels.
- d. Industry experts are tasked with endorsing the new curricula or suggesting revisions before they are forwarded to and approved by the National Curricula Review Committee – a standing committee consisting of representatives from the NAVTTC and the TEVTAs as well as selected TVET experts. Special validation workshops are performed for industrial endorsement. Final approval is given by the NAVTTC.
- e. Competency-based training (CBT) curricula have been developed in 156 trades, including beauty and personal care, hospitality, IT, agriculture, commerce, renewable energy and the service sectors.
- f. TVET institutes are currently being identified to introduce CBT programmes.
- g. To date, over 172 institutes have introduced CBT programmes across Pakistan and more than 200 institutes have been accredited with the NAVTTC to offer competency-based training.
- h. The infrastructure for 105 TVET institutes has so far been developed by the TVET reform support programme.

The capacity of the following stakeholders has been developed:

- a. 631 CBT assessors have been certified.
- b. There are now more than 350 qualified principals and managers of TVET institutes.
- c. Over 1,000 TVET teachers have been trained across Pakistan.
- d. The NAVTTC has accredited seven awarding bodies to conduct assessments of NVQF qualifications.
- e. More than 1 000 TVET institutes have also been accredited by the NAVTTC

The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry participates in technical and vocational qualification development. In consultation with its affiliated chambers and trades associations, the Federation prepares recommendations for

skills development according to current industry requirements.

In addition, the Inter-Provincial Qualification Awarding Bodies Council has been established. The main objectives of the Council are to enable the sharing of experiences among awarding bodies, coordinate in a more effective way for the purpose of harmonisation and standardization and the replication of best practices within and across the bodies' respective provinces and regions/territories.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

CBT assessment against defined NVQF standards is done regardless of the pathway (formal, non-formal or informal) an individual takes. NVQF assessment includes a diverse range of methods that clarify a candidate's skills, knowledge and attitudes. These methods may be demonstrations, simulations, presentations, assignments, projects, creations, tests or examinations. It is the assessment of an individual's performance against defined competency standards which is important: individuals are not compared against other individuals, nor do they receive scaled grades but are recognised as competent or not yet competent.

Competency-based assessment is not limited to the formal pathway. There are several pathways that individuals may take to be assessed against the defined national NVQF competency standards:

- a. participating in a training course at an accredited training institute;
- b. participating in workplace training;
- c. workplace assessment;
- d. direct assessment through recognition of prior learning or recognition of current competences.

Each pathway leads to the same end point of assessment against the defined national competency standards for NVQF qualifications.

Registered apprenticeship training is conducted in around 610 establishments, including in many state-owned utilities such as railways and airlines. Registered apprenticeship training is highly competitive, the entry requirement effectively being the secondary school certificate (vocational) even though training is at trade level. Apprenticeship schemes are based on guidelines in the Apprenticeship Training Ordinance of 1962, which is now under review. The Germany-Pakistan training initiative (GPATI) has developed a workable approach to cooperative training in which theory is taught at



two private training institutes and on-the-job training is provided by ten German and three Pakistani companies.

There are several short-term (three months to one year) courses conducted by vocational institutes, for which entry requirement is a Class 8 pass. These lead to the grade of skilled worker, but are recognised only at provincial level (through TEVTAs), not at federal level. It is envisaged that these courses will be accommodated in the NVQF at entry level. Non-formal learning initiatives such as these (including the distance learning programmes offered at open universities and through the Islamic education system, or via competence testing in the workplace) currently run parallel to the mainstream system. To incorporate these diverse learning initiatives into the NVQF will be a challenge.

CBT certification is done by the qualification awarding bodies accredited by the NAVTTC. They are mandated by the NAVTTC to award national certificates through CBT assessment. So far, seven qualification awarding bodies, including five provincial trade testing boards, the Punjab Board of Technical Education and the Punjab Vocational Training Council, have been accredited by the NAVTTC. Qualification awarding bodies issue two types of certificate: certificates of qualification are issued when an individual is declared as competent at a particular NVQF level and a certificate of achievement is issued when an individual partially completes a particular NVQF qualification as competent. The qualification awarding bodies are mandated to accredit the assessment centres across the country.

## NQF implementation

The government of Pakistan has developed version 2 of the NVQF and its operational manuals as guidelines to TVET stakeholders for the smooth implementation of the NVQF across Pakistan. These manuals are as follows:

1. NVQF operational manual No 1: developing NVQF qualifications;
2. NVQF operational manual No 2: assessment of NVQF qualifications;
3. NVQF operational manual No 3: management of the NVQF.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The eight Member States of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, finalised the

SAARC framework for action (SFFA) for education 2030, leading to its adoption at the third meeting of Ministers of Education/Higher Education held in Male, Maldives in 2016. Through regional collaboration and partnerships, the ministers agreed to develop a regional quality assurance framework for vocational/ skills education, and support mutual recognition of qualifications and student mobility (SAARC, 2016).

## Important lessons and future plans

Some of the most recent developments in the implementation of the Pakistani NQF include:

- establishment of NVQF support units in the provinces and regions have been established; these will become operational in the near future;
- establishment of a TVET Committee at the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Employers' Federation of Pakistan and promotion of private sector agenda on TVET;
- operationalization of shadow councils in the SSC;
- agreements on joint functions and agreements between TEVTAs, BIAs and enterprises facilitated in provinces;
- annual meeting of the Punjab skills forum and identification of priority sectors in technical working group meetings;
- development of a manual on workplace-based training, including working templates;
- development of a mobile application of the national skill information system/JPC;
- skilled workforce demand survey of CPEC projects;
- training of principals and managers of institutes;
- training of chief master trainers, master trainers and lead assessors;
- activation of a quality assurance system with a digitized monitoring and evaluation system.

### Abbreviations

CBT	competency-based training
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation and Development)
NAVTTC	National Vocational and Technical Training Commission
NQF	national qualifications framework
NVQF	national vocational qualifications framework
TEVTAs	technical education and vocational training authorities
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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### **Prepared by:**

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

No law has been adopted yet.

Palestine is developing an eight-level national qualifications framework (NQF), based on learning outcomes and covering all education and training sectors. The framework is still under development; no qualifications are placed in the NQF's levels.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Labour currently oversee the NQF's development, cooperating with the TVET Development Centre, which is concerned with technical issues and operational implementation.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

The population of Palestine was 4.7 million in 2017 (4.1 million in 2011)<sup>722</sup>. In addition, 1.4 million Palestinians live in Israel and 5.6 million in Arab countries<sup>723</sup>. Young people (15–24 age group) comprised 35.7% of the total population in 2017, making for one of the youngest populations not only in the region but also in the world. This in turn puts enormous pressure on social services (education, health and housing) and on the labour market.

Considering that the absorption capacity of the Palestinian labour market has not increased in the last 10 years, this rapid population growth has led to high unemployment.

The unemployment rate rose from 26.9% in 2016 to 27.4% in 2017. This is the highest level recorded in the past 15 years, and is also the highest unemployment rate among the 170 countries and territories in the world for which current estimates

are available<sup>724</sup>. Youth unemployment is very high (43.8% in 2017 for people aged 15–24), reaching a dramatic figure of 70% among young women. Poor labour market outcomes for young people combined with high early school leaving lead to a large proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), reaching 33.2% in 2017. Given the limited possibilities offered by the labour market, the main destination for the new workforce has been the public sector, but the current severe fiscal crisis has pushed policy-makers to limit employment in this sector.

More than half of Palestinians live abroad. The need to look for job opportunities outside their own country is one of the reasons for the importance that students attach to attending and completing university.

The Palestinian economy is dominated by small and micro enterprises. According to the definition used by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 90.5% of companies are micro (below four employees) and 8.38% are small (below 20 employees). The structure of the Palestinian labour market, and the inability of the formal sector to absorb employees, have led to an expansion of the informal sector.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

The main challenges that the NQF should address are the fragmentation of the education system governance, the lack of coordination among public and private providers, and the limited relevance of existing qualifications to the labour market.

<sup>721</sup> This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual position of the Member States on this issue – hereinafter 'Palestine'.

<sup>722</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (KIESE updated data)

<sup>723</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Palestine in Figures 2017, March 2018

<sup>724</sup> [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_629263.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_629263.pdf)

The draft national consultation paper for the NQF development identifies the following problems and obstacles:

- a. no clear identification of educational outcomes for individuals and employers (no clear signals);
- b. fragmented qualifications systems in all sectors (general education, higher education, vocational education and training, and non-formal and informal learning);
- c. no unified governance of the various sub-systems of education and training;
- d. imbalance of academic and vocational programmes (balance in enrolment rates between academic, vocational education and vocational training streams) regarding the needs of the labour market;
- e. no valuation and encouragement for lifelong learning, adult education and continuing education; and no recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- f. no comprehensive and efficient accreditation system;
- g. no links between education systems and the Arab occupational classification;
- h. no facilitation of labour mobility by existing education systems;
- i. no articulation between and within the different education subsystems.

The planned NQF should provide a strategic, comprehensive and integrated national framework for all learning achievement, based on lifelong learning principles. It should encompass all qualifications within the national education system, across every field of education, and should address the requirements of education systems/providers, individual learners and labour market systems/employers.

The NQF aims at:

- a. supporting the formulation of learning outcomes in terms of qualifications according to Palestinian occupational classification standards, subsequent to adaptation from Arab occupational classification standards;
- b. improving understanding of qualifications and levels of qualifications and giving a clear picture

of the relevance of educational outcomes to individuals and employers;

- c. organising and facilitating horizontal and vertical articulation across education and training by establishing credit transfer between qualifications;
- d. aiding access to education and training opportunities, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths to improve learner, labour and career mobility; making progression routes easier and creating bridges within education systems;
- e. ensuring that qualifications are relevant to perceived social and economic needs by linking the education system with the labour market through the adapted Palestinian occupational classification, and by increasing the value and enrolment rates in vocational education streams;
- f. raising education and training quality by ensuring that all standards are defined by agreed learning outcomes and applied consistently; ensuring that education and training providers meet specified quality standards;
- g. making it easier to match Palestinian NQF levels with those of other countries, securing not only local recognition but also regional and international recognition for national qualifications.

### **International cooperation**

The Palestinian ministries running the NQF have worked closely with the German development agency active in Palestine (GIZ) and with the Belgian agency for technical cooperation (BTC)<sup>725</sup>, as the two principal vocational education development agencies. GIZ has conducted much of the technical work.

## **Levels and use of learning outcomes**

### **NQF scope and structure**

The national consultation paper envisages an eight-level NQF for Palestine. These levels are referenced to the Arab occupational classification, existing general education and higher education levels and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) levels. The NQF will describe each level through descriptors covering a range of technical and social competences.

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<sup>725</sup> Belgian Technical Cooperation (active donor in Palestine)

**Table 63. Palestine NQF level descriptors and domains**

	<b>LEVEL 1</b>	<b>LEVEL 2</b>	<b>LEVEL 3</b>	<b>LEVEL 4</b>	<b>LEVEL 5</b>	<b>LEVEL 6</b>	<b>LEVEL 7</b>	<b>LEVEL 8</b>
<b>Knowledge</b>	Has basic knowledge and understanding of facts	Has basic knowledge and understanding of facts and procedures  Interprets information	Has basic knowledge and understanding of facts and procedures  Is able to explain  Selects, interprets and evaluates information	Has a wide range of knowledge and understanding  Is able to explain proficiently  Analyses and evaluates information	Has a wide range of knowledge and understanding  Applies knowledge in different contexts  Is able to report on information	Has detailed knowledge and understanding  Transfers to different contexts  Forms arguments  Reports on complex information	Combines facts and methods of different disciplines and working fields  Criticises and forms arguments  Is able to conceptualise	Criticises and forms arguments  Conceptualises information with the focus to develop new theories, concepts and models for the sector
<b>Skills and tasks</b>	Carries out well-defined, simple and routine (sub) tasks  Uses standard tools and materials	Carries out simple and routine tasks  Is able to address simple problems  Selects and applies tools and materials	Carries out several tasks at the same time  Is able to address well defined, but non-routine problems, related to tasks	Combines tasks, which are related to each other  Is able to address well-defined and complex problems of integrated tasks	Combines and integrates tasks  Plans and coordinates tasks  Is able to address complex problems	Combines different tasks  Plans, coordinates and evaluates tasks  Defines new procedures	Coordinates and has an overview of the nature and consequences of own tasks and those of others  Comes with new ideas	Understands and deals with the complexity and diversity of tasks in the sector  Develops research, development, and strategic activities
<b>Range of work</b>	Activities covering a narrow part of work (task or subtask)	Activities covering one or more tasks	Activities covering more tasks, within the profession	Activities covering a wider range of tasks, within the sector	Activities covering a full cycle of integrated tasks within the sector  Can work in a specialised field	Activities covering a full cycle of tasks, related to an entire project	Integrates different disciplines of the sector (also outside own profession)	Works in a context with the complete scope of activities (and consequences) of the sector in mind

(Continued)

**Table 63. Palestine NQF level descriptors and domains (Continued)**

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6	LEVEL 7	LEVEL 8
<b>Maintenance of information</b>	Records personally generated information	Keeps track of data generated by others	Maintains one or more information systems	Adapts/designs information systems to meet the specifications of others	Designs and develops major information systems to meet the specifications of others	Manages and develops information systems across the organisation	Implements and manages the development of information systems	Corporate responsibility for the provision of information systems for the organisation
<b>Responsibility</b>	Works under supervision	Works under supervision	Fully responsible for own tasks  Prepares and completes whole tasks	Responsible for the full cycle of several tasks, including own reflection  Limited reflection of work done by others	Responsible for the coordination of a full cycle of tasks, including reflection of tasks done by others	Responsible for the coordination or management of a whole team or project	Responsible for one or more projects, teams or the company	Responsible for strategy, vision and coordination of programmes and companies
<b>Autonomy</b>	After clear explanation and instructions	After explanation  Practises and shows autonomy	Carries out tasks autonomously (after explanation)  Shows initiative	Carries out tasks autonomously  Shows initiative and initiates own ideas	Carries out tasks autonomously  Shows initiative  Brings in new ideas and concepts	Thinks and acts independently  Shows entrepreneurial spirit	Thinks and acts independently  Proactive  Comes first with new ideas	Autonomous in thinking, acting and decision-making  Acts proactively
<b>Flexibility</b>	Steady context  Changes only under supervision	Context with limited changes  Changes after instructions	Adjusts standard procedures in limited changing contexts, within field of tasks	Adjusts procedures, methods and tools in changing contexts related to the tasks	Manages problems in continuously changing contexts	Manages problems in dynamic environment  Initiates changes and innovation	Manages problems in hard to predict environments  Designs changes	Manages problems in unpredictable environments  Focuses on innovation
<b>Public range</b>	Only he/she and colleagues	Only he/she and colleagues	Colleagues and customers	Colleagues, customers, people in the sector	Customers, specialists in the sector	Customers, specialists	All people in the company, all regional contacts	National contacts, governments

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

Palestine plans an eight-level framework.

The draft descriptors, as well as incorporating the familiar knowledge, skills and competences trinity, cover a range of technical and social competences. Examples include range of work, maintenance of information, and flexibility. These were expected to be further refined and then agreed with stakeholders between 2016 and 2017.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

Learning outcomes are the conceptual basis of the qualifications framework and future qualifications. The intention is that they act as a tool to match education provision to the framework and as a reference of relevance of learners to the labour market.

## **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

### **NQF legal basis**

No NQF law has been adopted yet on the NQF; authorities plan to include provision for the NQF in the planned TVET law.

### **Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF**

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Labour currently oversee the NQF development, cooperating with the TVET Development Centre, which is concerned with technical and operational issues.

This development is the result of a series of reforms taking place in the TVET sector. It did not start as an individual project, but as part of the wider reforms to the institutional framework which binds together all the different processes (including Palestinian occupational classification, curriculum development process), developed in the framework of the TVET strategy.

Consultation with stakeholders on current reforms has been extensive. A wide range of actors –several ministries in charge of TVET provision, social partners, public and private education providers, learners/students and their parents, employment offices, awarding bodies and quality assurance agencies were engaged in the formulation of the first proposal for an NQF in Palestine. This consultation took place in 2012 through a series of workshops with the different sectors of the education system and with the social partners.

The institutional setting for the development and management of the NQF has changed over the

years in relation to changes in the TVET governance model. Currently the NQF is not operational and no institution is formally tasked to oversee its functioning. The Higher Council for TVET has overall responsibility for defining policies in the TVET sector and will play a crucial role in the definition and approval of future NQF institutional settings.

A technical working group, which includes all key TVET stakeholders, has been created to follow up NQF developments.

### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

Representatives of the labour market and private sector participated in the preparation of the NQF. A participatory approach was also present in preparing the technical needs assessment and analysis of 40 professions under the Belgian Technical Cooperation project, with direct participation and involvement of experts from companies and the labour market. Labour market representatives participated actively in the verification process, through reviewing the curriculum and providing professional feedback.

They also participated directly in defining the work tasks and required competences for each profession, under the competence-based task approach for curricula development and learning situations methodologies. There is a consensus that employer representatives should be involved in implementing and participating in practical exams in TVET institutions.

### **Resources and funding**

Limited. There is considerable reliance on EU and other donor support.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

The Palestinian Cabinet has set up an Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission to accredit the technical education institutions and their programmes. These apply to all community and technical (post-secondary) colleges. This mandate does not apply to other TVET institutions (vocational schools and training centres).

No procedures have yet been agreed to level or place qualifications in the framework.

## **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

Improving horizontal and vertical progression routes, and establishing effective mechanisms for recognition of prior learning, are two of the main objectives in developing the NQF. Appropriate

operational mechanisms will be developed following the national consultation but priority is given to establishing the framework and mechanisms to reference qualifications to it. Validation of prior learning will be tackled at a later stage.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

There is no register or national database of qualifications yet.

### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

As the framework is still being developed, no review has taken place.

### Impact for end-users

No impact yet, as the qualification framework is not in implementation.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The readability of Palestinian qualifications among the neighbouring countries is one of the priorities identified in the national consultation paper. Specific attention will be given to the issue of regional and international recognition in the framework of the consultation process.

The planned NQF is linked to the Arab occupations classification system, which includes the following skills' arrangement:

- a. semi-skilled,
- b. skilled,
- c. craftsperson,
- d. technician,
- e. specialist.

## Important lessons and future plans

Following the national consultation conducted in 2012, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education approved the NQF concept. The decision has not yet been brought to the Cabinet. In the meantime, TVET stakeholders are working on further technical documents necessary for the operationalisation of the framework. In 2016, a pilot exercise was conducted to reference existing qualifications in the fashion design sector to the framework. Based on this exercise, TVET actors are currently developing a methodology to reference qualifications to the framework.

One of the key priorities of the Development Centre for the coming years is to revise the TVET law, which will include the NQF concept.

### Abbreviations

GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German development agency)
NQF	national qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

### Prepared by:

The European Training Foundation (ETF).



# PHILIPPINES

## Introduction

Designed in 2006 and adopted in 2012, the Philippine qualifications framework (PQF) evolved from the Philippine technical and vocational qualifications framework. It is a quality assured, national system for the development, recognition and award of qualifications based on the standards of knowledge, skills and values acquired in different ways by learners and workers in the country. The *raison d'être* for the establishment of the PQF is to describe the levels of educational qualifications and set standards for qualifications outcomes.

The establishment of the PQF came in the midst of far-reaching education reforms that include the country's shift from a 10-year basic education system to 13 years of basic education, including compulsory early childhood education, and the shift throughout the education and training system towards learning outcomes within a lifelong learning paradigm. Entailing structural and curricular changes as well as a profound change in mindsets, pedagogies and assessments, these ongoing reforms, which are expected to be fully implemented by 2024, pose a major challenge to (1) government; (2) the Filipino public; and (3) training and education providers, i.e. 7,991 technical vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, 71% of which are private, and 1,906 higher education institutions of which 88% are private.

The need to harmonize qualifications at different levels and address the mismatch between the jobs offered and the skills possessed by the workforce are among the motivations for implementing the PQF. This mismatch is said to have contributed significantly to unemployment and underemployment – which the Philippine Statistical Authority estimates as 3.8 million Filipinos (5.2% of the working population of 72,524,000)

and 11.3 million Filipinos (15.6% of the working population) respectively in 2019.

The PQF covers qualifications obtained from technical vocational training and higher education or their equivalents in an education and training system with basic education at its foundation.

## Policy objectives

The PQF aims to benefit various sectors and stakeholders of education and training by encouraging lifelong learning; providing employers specific training standards and qualifications that are aligned to industry standards; ensuring that training and educational institutions adhere to specific standards and are accountable for achieving the same; and providing the government with common standards, a taxonomy and a typology of qualifications as bases for granting approvals to stakeholders.

Its specific objectives are to:

- adopt national standards and levels of learning outcomes of education;
- support the development and maintenance of pathways and equivalencies that enable access to qualifications and assist individuals to move easily and readily between the different education and training sectors and between these sectors and the labour market; and
- align domestic qualification standards with the international frameworks and standards thereby enhancing the recognition and comparability of Philippine qualifications and supporting the mobility of Filipino students and workers.

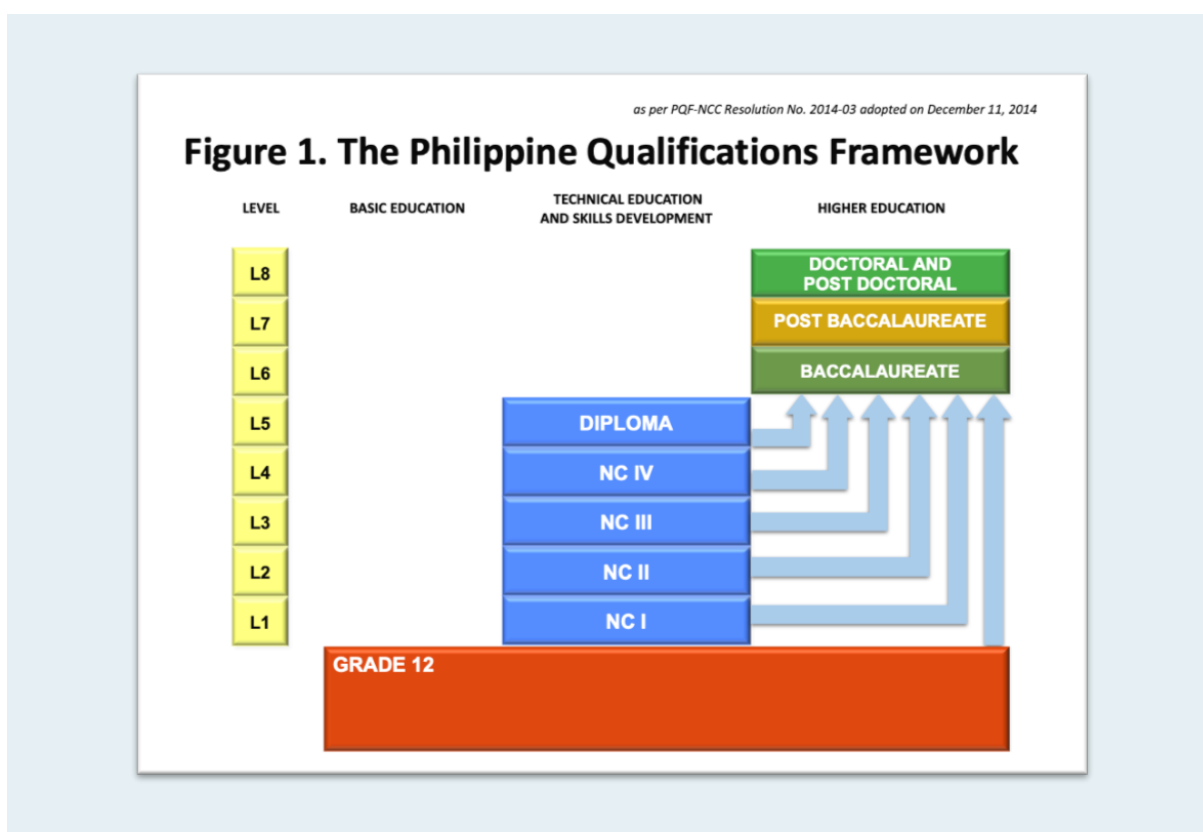
Established as part of major education reforms, the 2018 legislation on the PQF now serves as a catalyst for hastening the implementation of these reforms.

## Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The PQF has eight levels defined by descriptors of expected learning outcomes along three domains, namely: (1) +knowledge, skills and values; (2) application; and (3) degree of independence (Figure 18). These levels are aligned to the levels of the ASEAN qualifications reference framework.

The PQF is aligned with the subsystems of the education and training system. The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) subsystem covers national certificates I through IV corresponding to the first four levels, while the Commission on Higher Education subsystem covers the baccalaureate, the post-baccalaureate diploma, Master's, and doctoral degrees that correspond to levels 6 to 8. The two sub-systems interface in the provision of diplomas at level 5.

**Figure 18. Structure of the Philippine qualifications framework (PQF)**



Note: NC – national certificate

**Table 64. PQF domains and level descriptors**

<b>Grade 12 (as PQF foundation)</b>	<p><b>Knowledge, skills and values:</b> Possess functional knowledge across a range of learning areas and technical skills in chosen career tracks with advanced competencies in communication; scientific, critical and creative thinking; and the use of technologies. Have an understanding of right and wrong; one's history and cultural heritage; and deep respect for self, others and their culture, and the environment.</p> <p><b>Application:</b> Apply functional knowledge, technical skills and values in academic and real-life situations through sound reasoning, informed decision-making, and the judicious use of resources.</p> <p><b>Degree of independence:</b> Apply skills in varied situations with minimal supervision.</p>
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**Figure 18. Structure of the Philippine qualifications framework (PQF) (Continued)**

<p><b>Level 1</b></p>	<p><b>Knowledge, skills and values:</b> Knowledge and skills that are manual or concrete of practical and/or operational in focus.</p> <p><b>Application:</b> Applied in activities that are set in a limited range of highly familiar and predictable contexts; involve straightforward, routine issues, which are addressed by following set rules, guidelines or procedures.</p> <p><b>Degree of independence:</b> In conditions where there is a very close support, guidance or supervision; minimum judgment or discretion is needed.</p> <p><b>Qualification type:</b> National certificate I.</p>
<p><b>Level 2</b></p>	<p><b>Knowledge, skills and values:</b> Knowledge and skills that are manual, practical and/or operational in focus with a variety of options.</p> <p><b>Application:</b> Applied in activities that are set in a range of familiar and predictable contexts; involve routine issues, which are identified and addressed by selecting from and following a number of set rules, guidelines or procedures.</p> <p><b>Degree of independence:</b> In conditions where there is substantial support, guidance or supervision; limited judgment or discretion is needed.</p> <p><b>Qualification type:</b> National certificate II.</p>
<p><b>Level 3</b></p>	<p><b>Knowledge, skills and values:</b> Knowledge and skills that are a balance of theoretical and/or technical and practical. Work involves understanding the work process, contributing to problem solving, and making decisions to determine the process, equipment and materials to be used.</p> <p><b>Application:</b> Applied in activities that are set in contexts with some unfamiliar or unpredictable aspects; involve routine and non-routine issues, which are identified and addressed by interpreting and/or applying established guidelines or procedures with some variations.</p> <p><b>Degree of independence:</b> Application at this level may involve individual responsibility or autonomy, and/or may involve some responsibility for others. Participation in teams including team or group coordination may be involved.</p> <p><b>Qualification type:</b> National certificate III.</p>
<p><b>Level 4</b></p>	<p><b>Knowledge, skills and values:</b> Knowledge and skills that are mainly theoretical and/or abstract with significant depth in one or more areas; contributing to technical solutions of a non-routine or contingency nature; evaluation and analysis of current practices and the development of new criteria and procedures.</p> <p><b>Application:</b> Applied in activities that are set in a range of contexts, most of which involve a number of unfamiliar and/or unpredictable aspects; involve largely non-routine issues which are addressed using guidelines or procedures that require interpretation and/or adaptation.</p> <p><b>Degree of independence:</b> Work involves some leadership and guidance when organizing activities of self and others.</p> <p><b>Qualification type:</b> National certificate IV.</p>
<p><b>Level 5</b></p>	<p><b>Knowledge, skills and values:</b> Knowledge and skills that are mainly theoretical and/or abstract with significant depth in some areas together with wide-ranging, specialized technical, creative and conceptual skills. Perform work activities demonstrating breadth depth and complexity in the planning and initiation of alternative approaches to skills and knowledge applications across a broad range of technical and/or management requirements, evaluation and coordination.</p> <p><b>Application:</b> Applied in activities that are supervisory, complex and non-routine, which require an extensive interpretation and/or adaptation/innovation.</p> <p><b>Degree of independence:</b> In conditions where there is broad guidance and direction, where judgment is required in planning and selecting appropriate equipment, services and techniques for self and others. Undertake work involving participation in the development of strategic initiatives, as well as personal responsibility and autonomy in performing complex technical operations or organizing others.</p> <p><b>Qualification type:</b> Diploma.</p>

(Continued)

**Table 64. PQF domains and level descriptors (Continued)**

<b>Level 6</b>	<p><b>Knowledge, skills and values:</b> Demonstrated broad and coherent knowledge and skills in their field of study for professional work and lifelong learning.</p> <p><b>Application:</b> Application in professional/creative work or research in a specialized field of discipline and/or further study.</p> <p><b>Degree of independence:</b> Substantial degree of independence and or/in terms of related fields with minimal supervision.</p> <p><b>Qualification type:</b> Baccalaureate degree.</p>
<b>Level 7</b>	<p><b>Knowledge, skills and values:</b> Demonstrated advanced knowledge and skills in a specialized or multidisciplinary field of study for professional practice, self-directed research and/or lifelong learning.</p> <p><b>Application:</b> Applied in professional/creative work or research that requires self-direction and/or leadership in a specialized or multi-disciplinary professional work/research.</p> <p><b>Degree of independence:</b> High substantial degree of independence that involves exercise of leadership and initiative individual work or in teams of multi-disciplinary field.</p> <p><b>Qualification type:</b> Post-baccalaureate programme.</p>
<b>Level 8</b>	<p><b>Knowledge, skills and values:</b> Demonstrated highly advanced systematic knowledge and skills in highly specialized and/or complex multi-disciplinary field of learning for complex research and/or professional practice and/or for the advancement of learning.</p> <p><b>Application:</b> Applied for professional leadership for innovation, research and/or development management in highly specialized or multi-disciplinary field.</p> <p><b>Degree of independence:</b> Full independence in individual work and/or in teams of multi-disciplinary and more complex setting that demands leadership for research and creativity for strategic value added. Significant level of expertise-based autonomy and accountability.</p> <p><b>Qualification type:</b> Doctoral degree and post-doctoral programmes.</p>

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The legal basis of the PQF is the Republic Act 10968, which was legislated in January 2018. This law institutionalized the executive order that created the PQF in 2012 (Executive Order No 83) and further reinforced the PQF-related sections of another law promulgated in 2014, which aimed to strengthen the ladderized interface between TVET and higher education (Republic Act 10647).

The Republic Act 10968 established the PQF-National Coordinating Council to implement the provisions of the law. Composed of the Secretary of Education as chairperson, the Secretary of Labour and Employment, the chairperson of the Commission on Higher Education, the director general of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, the chairperson of the Professional Regulation Commission, a representative of the employer sector and a representative of industry as members, the

National Coordinating Council's powers and functions are to:

- harmonize qualification levels across basic, technical-vocational and higher education;
- align education standards and learning outcomes with the level descriptors contained in the PQF;
- promote the PQF and its elements, including the principles, key features, definitions and terminologies, structures and governance arrangements, and provide information and guidelines in the implementation of the PQF;
- rationalize the quality assurance mechanisms in Philippine education;
- develop and rationalize pathways and equivalencies;
- maintain the national registry of qualifications;
- ensure the international alignment of the PQF with the qualification framework of other countries or regions;
- create technical working groups in support of the development and implementation of the PQF;

- represent the country in international fora or negotiations in line with qualifications agreements and arrangements;
- review and update the PQF;
- submit to the Office of the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives an updated report of the progress and accomplishments in relation to the PQF; and
- perform such other functions that may be related to the implementation of the PQF.

Five working groups and a technical secretariat have been established focusing on the national qualifications register, quality assurance, pathways and equivalencies, international alignment, information and guidelines. Two more working groups are being created on lifelong learning and on industry-academe linkages.

With regard to the quality assurance of Philippine qualifications, the Department of Education, the Technical Education and Skills Development Agency (TESDA) and the Commission on Higher Education are involved in setting, monitoring, and evaluating minimum standards; supervising assessment systems leading to the award of qualifications that ensure the achievement of minimum standards; and voluntary assessments beyond compliance with minimum standards for their respective domains in the education system. The Professional Regulation Commission is involved in the quality assurance of 43 regulated professions that require licensure examinations, while the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) and the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) oversee the key processes in quality assuring qualifications in the maritime and aviation fields, respectively. Accreditation by national school-based and professional organization-based accreditation agencies as well as international accreditation bodies is voluntary.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

Lifelong learning underpins the Ladderized Education Act of 2014 which not only strengthens the ladderized interface between TVET and higher education but also aims to support the development and maintenance of pathways and equivalencies that enable access to qualifications and to assist individuals to move easily and readily between the different education and training sectors and between these sectors and the labour market.

In TVET, recognition of prior learning is conferred through validation of competencies achieved in non-formal or informal modes of learning in the Philippine competency assessment and certification system. The validation system utilizes the same competency standards required in the training regulation and uses varied assessment methods applicable to those who achieved competencies through non-formal and informal means.

In higher education, the expanded tertiary education equivalency and accreditation programme grants post-secondary and higher education credits to individuals through a compendium of competency assessment processes that culminate in the assignment of academic credits equivalent to competencies obtained outside the formal school system and in the awarding of academic degrees.

The formalization of the Philippine credit transfer system is still work in progress. Its framework and the mechanisms for determining equivalencies between learning outcomes through articulation, credit transfer and recognition of prior learning are currently being developed.

### **NQF implementation**

PQF levels 1 to 6 are operational. However, levelling qualifications with the same nomenclature, i.e. Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts to ensure that their learning outcomes are at level 6 of the PQF is still work in progress and a major challenge considering the high number of mostly private higher education providers.

The Philippine credit transfer system, which aims to provide pathways between TVET and higher education, is at the stage of public hearings before being implemented.

### **Referencing to regional frameworks**

The Philippines Qualifications Framework's National Coordinating Council submitted to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) Committee on 9 April 2019 the final Philippine referencing report to the AQRF. The iterative peer-review process adopted by the AQRF Committee in several meetings resulted in a series of revisions of the report, the 12<sup>th</sup> version of which was the document submitted to the AQRF Committee through the ASEAN Secretariat.

## Important lessons and future plans

The ongoing implementation of major education and training reforms render apropos the description of the Philippine education and training system as 'being in transition'. Against this backdrop, the implementation of the PQF must also be viewed as 'being in a similar transition' that is targeted to

end in 2024 when the major reforms and related changes would have been fully implemented and iteratively revised.

Meanwhile, despite the challenges, significant progress has been made to advance the reforms underlying the full implementation of the PQF.

### Abbreviations

AQRF	ASEAN qualifications reference framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
PQF	Philippine qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

## References

PQF-NCC (Philippines Qualifications Framework's National Coordinating Council) (2019). Philippine Referencing Report to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (unpublished report).

### Prepared by:

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

## Introduction and context

The Polish education and training system has been undergoing reform at all levels and the country performs well or is developing fast according to most EU benchmarks for 2020. Very few students leave education and training early (5.0% in 2017, compared to 10.6%, the EU average), and the high rate of participation in school is paralleled by a high rate of tertiary education attainment (45.7% in 2017, compared to the EU average of 39.9%). According to the 2015 OECD Programme for international student assessment (PISA), Polish students perform very well in reading, mathematics and science, with fewer underachievers in all three fields compared to EU averages. The employment rate of recent graduates is also above the EU average, at 82.1% in 2017. Among the areas for improvement are participation in early childhood education and care (93.1% in 2016, compared to the EU average of 95.3%), and participation of adults in lifelong learning (at 4.0% in 2017, it is far below the EU average of 10.9%) (European Commission, 2018). While participation in initial vocational education and training (IVET) is above the EU average, the sector has been faced with a number of challenges, including lack of flexible pathways, low quality of teaching and absence of a mechanism matching IVET supply with labour demand (European Commission, 2017). Comprehensive vocational education and training (VET) reform since December 2016 has introduced changes in training pathways, curricula, the financing system and improving employer involvement in VET (European Commission, 2018). A new regulation on core curricula for pre-school and primary schools was adopted in 2017, aiming to improve the quality of teaching in general education (European Commission, 2017), while the core curriculum for post-primary schools is also being reformed, with changes expected to be implemented starting with the 2019/20 school year. Reform aiming to increase the relevance of higher education for the labour market has also started, and a new Act on higher education and science was adopted in July 2018. Among other aspects, it foresees the division of universities into academic and professional schools and the creation of a new body for university governance, 'the university board' (European Commission, 2018).

Poland started developing a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) – the Polish qualifications framework (PQF) – in 2008, building on and integrating the work on the qualifications framework for higher education linked to the Bologna process. The PQF is part of the integrated qualifications system (IQS), which aims to promote lifelong learning and to support education, training and learning, responding to the needs of the labour market and society at large. The Act on the integrated qualifications system (IQS Act) was formally adopted by the Parliament on 22 December 2015<sup>726</sup> and came into force in January 2016. It introduced a series of legislative changes through approximately 20 new or modified legal acts<sup>727</sup>. The IQS consists of a number of different elements, the most important being the qualifications framework, the qualifications register and arrangements for quality assurance and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The PQF has now reached an operational stage and is embedded in other legislation that regulates formal learning. It has eight learning-outcomes-based levels applicable to all Polish qualifications, from general education, VET, higher education, and those outside the formal system, as long as they meet agreed quality criteria. The IQS Act regulates all aspects of inclusion of non-formal qualifications, and work is in progress to define administrative procedures and bodies in cooperation with stakeholders. All qualifications included in the IQS have an assigned PQF level, most of which are currently qualifications from formal education.

Level descriptors at three different levels of generality are used, in an effort to connect different sub-systems of education and training. Universal descriptors expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and social competence are the basis for the comprehensive PQF and act as a reference point for more specific descriptors: for the different

<sup>726</sup> Parliament of Poland (2015). Subsequent amendments to the act were adopted in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

<sup>727</sup> The relevant legislation can be found at: [www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/prawo-o-zsk](http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/prawo-o-zsk)

subsystems, and for sectoral qualifications frameworks for economic sectors.

The PQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in May 2013 (Educational Research Institute, 2013).

## Policy objectives

Work on the qualifications framework is an integral part of broad reform and modernisation of the Polish qualifications system, addressing all levels and all subsystems of education and training. An important part of this reform has been an overall shift to learning outcomes<sup>728</sup>. This required redesign of all programmes, standards and curricula in general, vocational and higher education and training. The framework, through its focus on learning outcomes, is seen as an important instrument for strengthening the transparency and overall consistency of education and training, which is considered by some to be fragmented and difficult to navigate.

The further development and implementation of the IQS are part of the *Strategy for human capital development*, adopted in 2013, which is currently being updated (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018), and also among the priorities outlined in the *Strategy for responsible development* (Strategia na Rzecz Odpowiedzialnego Rozwoju, or Morawiecki Plan) adopted in February 2017 (European Commission, 2017).

While some adjustments to the IQS Act are planned to improve the governance of the qualifications system, the original purpose of the PQF has not changed significantly since its creation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- a. to help integrate the various qualifications subsystems in Poland;
- b. to increase the accessibility to and quality of qualifications;

<sup>728</sup> Resolution of the Minister of National Education of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum for pre-school education and general education in individual types of schools (*Journal of Laws* 2009, No 4, item 17), replaced by the resolution of the Minister of National Education of 27 August 2012 on the core curriculum for pre-school child development and general education in specific types of schools (*Journal of Laws*, item 977); Act of 19 August 2011 on amendments to the law on the education system and certain other laws (*Journal of Laws*, No 205, item 1206); Act of 18 March 2011 on amendments to the Act – Law on higher education, the law on academic degrees and titles and on degrees and titles in the arts and on amendments to certain other laws (*Journal of Laws*, No 84, item 455 with later amendments) (Educational Research Institute, 2013).

- c. to implement more effectively the policy for lifelong learning;
- d. to fulfil the Council recommendation on the EQF for lifelong learning;
- e. to fit into the wider context of developments in qualifications systems in Europe.

The direction chosen for the PQF has relevance in a wider European setting. First, the framework is seen as a tool for reform and change, its role going beyond merely describing existing qualifications. At present, this is applicable to the adult education sector. Second, the qualifications framework does not operate alone but is used extensively in combination with several other elements in a wider policy strategy. The impact of qualifications frameworks depends on their integration with other policy initiatives. Third, while the framework introduces a coherent set of national levels and descriptors, it also identifies the need for additional learning outcomes descriptors to be used by subsystems and sectors, allowing for a more detailed fit-for-purpose approach.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The PQF has eight learning outcomes-based levels, covering all types of qualification available in the country provided they meet agreed quality criteria. Among other aspects, the IQS Act establishes the typology of qualifications, the principles of inclusion of qualifications in the qualifications register, and principles of quality assurance. Three types of qualification can be assigned a PQF level and included in the IQS, classified according to whether they refer to a level of formal education or not, and according to the legal basis that governs the process of awarding the qualification:

- a. type A: State-regulated qualifications within the formal education and training system (general education, VET and higher education);
- b. type B: State-regulated qualifications outside the formal education and training system;
- c. type C: non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications).

A distinction is also made between full and partial qualifications; full qualifications are awarded exclusively within the formal system<sup>729</sup>, where partial qualifications can also be awarded. All non-formal qualifications (both regulated and non-regulated) are considered partial qualifications.

<sup>729</sup> They give a level of education.



Originally, the PQF was envisaged as a seven-level framework, closely matching existing qualifications and degrees in the Polish system; it was later decided to introduce a new level 5 in the framework, to allow for a more appropriate placing of short-cycle academic qualifications as well as advanced vocational qualifications, for example the master craftsman (*Meister*).

Levelling of some of the master craftsman qualifications was accompanied by vivid discussion on whether to place them at PQF level 4 or 5. The debate focused on how much weight should be given to learning outcomes associated with autonomy in running a business, leadership skills and tutoring skills required to become a master craftsman, in comparison to 'typical' vocational learning outcomes. The decision was taken to place each of the ten master craftsman qualifications at PQF level 5. Challenges in terms of levelling have also been encountered with regard to diplomas awarded after post-graduate studies: so far three of these qualifications have been included into the IQS, with others rejected as qualification descriptions were found to be insufficient to allow levelling. Expert support is currently being provided to higher education institutions to improve qualification descriptions for post-graduate study programmes (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Three main sets of level descriptors are included in the PQF, with different degrees of generality and for different purposes:

- a. universal descriptors (first stage); they are the most generic and form the basis for the comprehensive PQF;

- b. descriptors for the education and training subsystems and sub-frameworks (second stage): general, vocational and higher education;
- c. descriptors for sectoral qualifications frameworks (third stage, not indicated in Figure 19); these are developed with second stage descriptors as a basis.

The basic principles behind the three sets of PQF level descriptors are illustrated in Figure 19.

The first stage (universal) learning outcomes descriptors developed for the PQF refer to the key learning domains in Table 65. These descriptors are based on an agreement between stakeholders in general, vocational and higher education and are the common reference point for developments at sector (second stage) and subsector (third stage) levels.

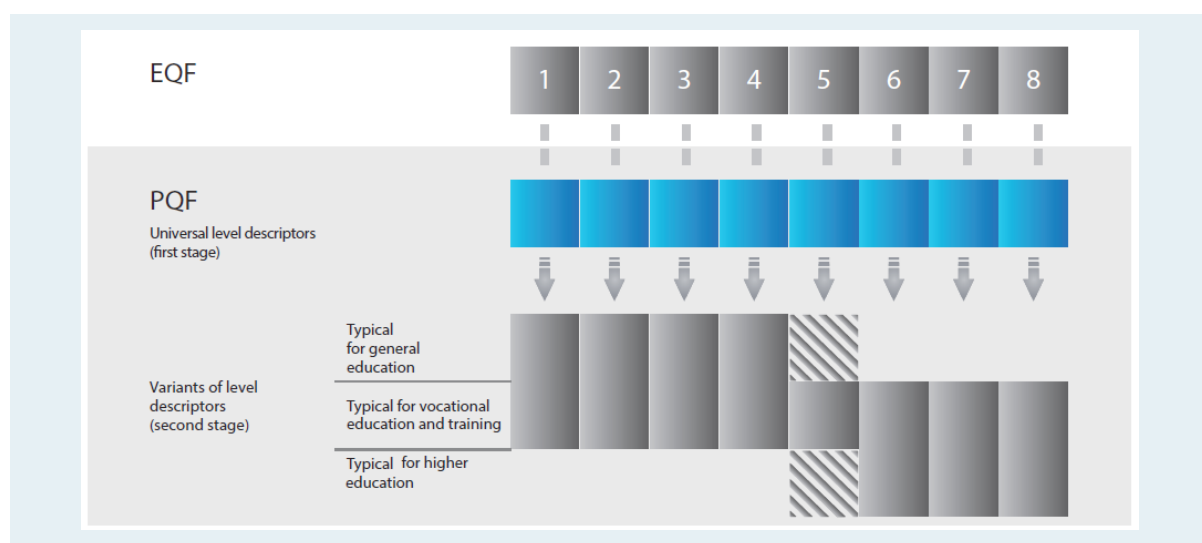
Progress has been made in defining the second stage level descriptors for the different education

**Table 65. First stage generic descriptors (universal)**

<b>Knowledge</b>	Scope
	Depth of knowledge
<b>Skills</b>	Problem-solving and applying knowledge in practice
	Learning
	Communication
<b>Social competence</b>	Identity
	Cooperation
	Responsibility

Source: Adapted from Educational Research Institute (2017).

**Figure 19. Structure of PQF level descriptors**



Source: Educational Research Institute, 2017.

**Table 66. Level descriptors main descriptive categories – general education and VET**

GENERAL EDUCATION (LEVELS 1 TO 4)	VET (LEVELS 1 TO 5)
<b>Knowledge</b>	
a. language and communication b. mathematics and natural sciences c. social functioning	a. theories/principles b. phenomena and processes c. organising work d. tools and materials
<b>Skills</b>	
a. language and communication b. mathematics and natural sciences c. social functioning d. learning	a. information b. organising work c. tools and materials d. learning and professional development
<b>Social competence</b>	
a. language and communication b. health and the environment c. social functioning	a. following rules b. cooperation c. responsibility

and training subsystems (Educational Research Institute, 2017). The basic distinction between knowledge, skills and social competence is used, but the degree of specificity differs between subsystems. For example, the main descriptive categories of the level descriptors for general education and VET are specified in Table 66.

While the coexistence of several qualifications sub-frameworks is common in most European countries, the PQF takes a step further and attempts to make these explicit within an overarching conceptual approach based on learning outcomes. For instance, the IQS Act brings the requirements for non-formal qualifications in line with those for qualifications from the formal general, vocational and higher education systems by having them based on learning outcomes, setting a standard for the manner of describing qualifications, requiring a process of validation and certification, as well as internal and external quality assurance systems (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). When, for example, the financial sector wanted to establish a specialised sectoral qualifications framework, it used learning outcomes descriptors clearly connected to the level descriptors operating at other levels of generality (including the EQF level descriptors). By moving beyond the general, national level descriptors, the PQF is better able to link to the reform of standards and curriculum development and eventually to learning and assessment.

Progress can be observed in the overall shift to learning outcomes in Polish education and training. Core curricula, formulated in terms of learning

outcomes, were introduced for all the main parts of education and training. The core curriculum for general education was gradually implemented from the 2009/10 school year and a new core curriculum was introduced starting with the 2017/18 school year. The core curriculum for vocational education was used from the 2012/13 school year; a new version, taking into account not only detailed learning outcomes but also the criteria for verifying these outcomes, will apply starting with school year 2019/20. In both general education and VET the core curriculum forms the basis for assessment criteria. Amendments to the Act on Higher Education in 2011<sup>730</sup> defined 'learning outcomes' and required all study programmes and resulting qualifications to be described in terms of learning outcomes as of the 2012/13 academic year, in compliance with the NQF for higher education. Learning outcomes were defined in eight broad areas of study. A 2016 regulation of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education<sup>731</sup> replaced the notion of learning outcomes in individual areas with the concept of

<sup>730</sup> Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 2 November 2011 on the national qualifications framework for higher education. <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20112531520>

<sup>731</sup> Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 26 September 2016 on the characteristics of the second degree of the Polish qualifications framework typical for qualifications obtained in higher education after obtaining full qualification on level 4–levels 6–8. <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20160001594>

'qualification characteristics' or 'descriptions'<sup>732</sup> in full accordance with the IQS. These developments were aimed at promoting lifelong learning and recognition of learning acquired outside the formal system (European Commission et al., forthcoming). To reduce bureaucratic burdens, a new regulation on the characteristics of levels 6 to 8 of the PQF was adopted in 2018<sup>733</sup>. This no longer defines specific learning outcomes for the eight broad areas of studies for two reasons: first, because the new Act on Higher Education and science introduced a new classification for the science and technology field, based largely on the OECD classification<sup>734</sup>; second, the qualification characteristics are more general and refer to the three levels of the PQF. The only exception is in the arts, where the field is considered specific enough as to have its own set of qualification characteristics.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

In 2010, an interministerial taskforce for lifelong learning was set up to provide overall coordination and monitoring of Polish lifelong learning policy implementation, including the national qualifications framework and register. Chaired by the Minister of National Education, it included the Ministers of Higher Education and Science, Economy, Labour and Social Policy, Regional Development, Foreign Affairs, and the Head of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. To monitor the development and implementation of the PQF in this initial phase, an NQF steering committee was created as a sub-team of and reporting to the interministerial taskforce (the interministerial team for lifelong learning and the integrated qualification system). It was coordinated by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, and included representatives from several ministries<sup>735</sup>. Other stakeholders, such

as representatives of education institutions, associations of territorial government, employer organisations and trade unions, could take part in an advisory capacity. The Educational Research Institute (IBE) was tasked to provide technical and conceptual support to the work of the steering committee and to prepare comprehensive proposals for developing the IQS and its components. At the same time, the Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange (under the Ministry of Higher Education and Science) was appointed as EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP) and it maintained this function to 2016. Since October 2016, the Minister of National Education is the EQF NCP.

Unlike many other countries, the above bodies have not directly included representatives of social partners or civil society. Seen from the outside and compared to other countries, Polish developments can be described as a combination of top-down and research-driven. However, two broad consultations have been carried out since 2011 and many meetings (more than 200) have been organised across the country addressing a wide range of stakeholders. In this way, representatives of education (both formal and non-formal) as well as worker and employer organisations were actively involved in and consulted on preparatory activities and solutions which came into force with the IQS Act in 2015<sup>736</sup>.

Formal adoption of the framework in 2015, with the IQS Act<sup>737</sup> clarified how the coordination of the qualifications system (including the framework) was to be carried out in the further development and implementation stages. The Ministry of National Education is responsible for overall coordination. The IQS Stakeholder Council was set up in September 2016 as an advisory and consultative body. The council consists of representatives of education and training providers, employers, trade unions, associations of higher education institutions, commercial training institutions, local governments, representatives of learners, and the central administration (Ministry of National Education

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<sup>732</sup> A description of the PQF level typical for qualifications obtained in higher education should be understood as a set of general statements (components of PQF level description), characterising the knowledge, skills and social competences required for qualifications at a given level (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>733</sup> Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 20 September 2018 on the disciplines of science and scientific disciplines and artistic disciplines. <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.aspx?id=WDU20180001818>

<sup>734</sup> OECD (2007). *Revised field of science and technology (FOS) classification in the Frascati Manual*. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/EconStatKB/KnowledgebaseArticle10269.aspx>

<sup>735</sup> The ministries represented in the NQF steering committee were (at that time): National Education, Economy, Labour and Social Policy, Regional Development, Foreign Affairs, Culture and National

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Heritage, Health, National Defence, Internal Affairs, Transportation, Construction and Maritime Economy; and Sport and Tourism.

<sup>736</sup> Preparatory activities conducted during the public debate (2011–13) included: a review of practices of awarding qualifications, identification of barriers for lifelong learning, and analysis of the use of the Polish qualifications framework for integration of qualifications (sub)systems in Poland. Representatives of stakeholders were actively involved in developing methods and tools for levelling qualifications, quality assurance of qualifications, methods for validation of learning outcomes, standards for describing market qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

<sup>737</sup> Parliament of Poland (2015).

and the Central Examination Board). Its role is to advise on operation, to monitor implementation, and to determine the direction of IQS-related developments, ensuring coherence of the solutions chosen. Its responsibilities include (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- a. monitoring the functioning of the IQS and proposing improvements;
- b. advising on draft regulations related to the IQS;
- c. giving expert opinions on the PQF level for regulated and market qualifications to be included into the IQS);
- d. advising on proposals to include sectoral qualifications frameworks in the IQS.

The interministerial team for lifelong learning and the integrated qualification system continue to operate, monitoring IQS implementation.

The Educational Research Institute (IBE) continues to play a key role in the qualifications system and framework, supporting the ministry with technical and organisational solutions and monitoring implementation. At present, the IBE has been nominated to support and coordinate the development and inclusion in the IQS of qualifications attained outside formal education. The IBE is also responsible for operating the integrated qualifications register and for entering the qualifications included in the IQS into the register.

Sectoral skills councils consisting of representatives of employers, employees, and sectoral public institutions have also been established since 2016; to date these cover tourism, banking, construction, health, IT, fashion, and the automotive industry. They facilitate dialogue between education and the economy, acting as a forum to discuss sector needs and how skills acquired in schools, universities, and training courses respond to the needs of employers. One of the main goals of the sector skills councils is to develop sectoral qualifications frameworks, as an extension of the PQF for specific sectors. To date (December 2018), there are sectoral qualifications frameworks for tourism and sports, and draft frameworks have been proposed for banking, construction, IT, telecommunications, development services<sup>738</sup>, the fashion industry, public health and trade (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The decision to link a sectoral qualifications framework to the IQS is made by the minister of national education, at the request of the minister responsible for the sector.

<sup>738</sup> Development services refer to training services for coaches and trainers for adults.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>739</sup>

A key element of the Polish IQS is the introduction of a more consistent and quality-assured approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). Overarching measures were introduced to integrate existing validation arrangements, while specific validation procedures for each education level are adjusted individually. The aim is to increase the flexibility of the education and training system and make it possible to acquire qualifications in different settings and throughout life. The main driver, common for all sectors, is to improve the response of education to labour market needs, particularly in the context of ever-changing demand for skills. It also aims to empower adults by encouraging them to valorise learning obtained at work and throughout life, an aspect which is particularly important given the relatively low participation in adult learning in Poland. The learning-outcomes-based PQF provides a reference point for this approach, signalling that qualifications at all levels can be acquired not only through formal education and training but also through non-formal and informal learning.

The IQS Act introduced a formal definition of validation, as 'an assessment whether a person applying for the award of a specific qualification achieved a part or all of the learning outcomes required for the given qualification, regardless of how the learning was acquired'<sup>740</sup> (Parliament of Poland, 2015). Validation in Poland covers all four stages outlined in the 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (identification, documentation, assessment and certification), though certification is treated as a distinct process since separate institutions can be responsible for validation and certification. The IQS Act and its implementing legislation specify the requirements for bodies carrying out validation and certification, the regulations for obtaining the permit to carry out certification, the principles for quality assurance in validation and certification, the scope of information collected in the national qualifications register, procedures for comparing learning outcomes for qualifications with PQF characteristics, and the rules for monitoring processes.

In general education and VET the possibility of acquiring qualifications via validation of non-formal

<sup>739</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>740</sup> Translated from Polish.

and informal learning is guaranteed by law. Since 2012, general education qualifications (confirming primary and upper secondary level, and basic and upper secondary vocational education levels for general education in vocational schools) can be attained on the basis of 'extramural examinations' that can be taken by adults without the obligation to return to school. Both initial and continuous vocational qualifications can be obtained by passing external examinations to validate professional knowledge and skills acquired in the workplace. In higher education there is a possibility of recognition of prior learning as an alternative path to gaining entry to a programme of study or to shorten the time spent studying a programme. Up to 50% of European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credits can be gained in this way, following verification of knowledge and skills developed through work experience; there is, however, a limit (20%) to the total number of students in a given programme, level and profile of study that can undergo VNFIL. In both VET and higher education, certain conditions have to be met with regard to the level of education attained and the number of years and the type of professional experience required. There are also conditions that higher education institutions have to meet to be able to carry out validation procedures (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

For non-formal qualifications included in the IQS, general arrangements for validation are a mandatory component of the description of each qualification, alongside learning outcomes and verification criteria. Each qualification may be awarded by multiple awarding bodies, which can cooperate with subcontractors organising the identification, documentation and verification stages of validation. The IQS does not impose a single model for carrying out validation to be used across the board: each qualification has its own requirements for validation and each awarding body has certain freedom in deciding on the exact course of the process and in creating its own validation tools (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Since the adoption of the IQS Act, stakeholders have been supported in developing arrangements for validation by the Ministry of National Education and the Educational Research Institute, mainly via knowledge dissemination and direct cooperation. Between 2015 and 2018 more than 40 institutions were directly supported either at the stage of developing new qualifications or in creating specific procedures for validation. A number of publications and digital tools supporting VNFIL were developed by the Educational Research Institute<sup>741</sup>.

<sup>741</sup> These include the publication *The validation of learning outcomes in Poland: new opportunities for attaining*

Some of the challenges encountered in implementing VNFIL in Poland include the relatively slow and complex process of including qualifications in the qualifications register and limited interest in validating skills acquired outside the regulated areas. These are linked to a learning culture in which formal learning was dominant, as well as the novelty of the IQS. As VNFIL arrangements have only recently started to be implemented, data on their effectiveness and impact are not yet available.

## NQF implementation

The comprehensive PQF has been established on a strong conceptual, legal and technical base and is now at an operational stage. Along with the adoption of the framework, the IQS Act<sup>742</sup> established the integrated qualifications register<sup>743</sup>, coordination of the IQS and the role of stakeholders, a typology of qualifications and the related terminology, principles for quality assurance<sup>744</sup> and principles for the inclusion of qualifications (including non-formal qualifications) in the IQS<sup>745</sup>. A revision of the IQS Act is planned for 2019, aimed at improving the governance of the qualifications system.

Different elements of the system were implemented gradually. Qualifications in the formal education system were assigned to PQF levels in a first phase, based on learning outcomes that had been already defined and adopted through legislation governing the formal education subsystems. For statutory and non-statutory (market) qualifications awarded outside the formal education system, inclusion in the register is decided by the competent minister for that qualification; in the latter case this follows a request made by the awarding body. To date, 9648 qualifications have been

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*qualifications*, and digital tools and solutions such as the catalogue of validation methods, a database of good practices in validation and quality assurance, and *My Portfolio*, a tool for creating digital portfolios.

<sup>742</sup> Parliament of Poland (2015).

<sup>743</sup> The integrated qualifications register became available online in July 2016 at: <https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/> E.g. IBE (2015). *The quality assurance of qualifications in the integrated qualifications system*. [http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac\\_css/doc\\_num.php?explnum\\_id=961](http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=961)

<sup>745</sup> The criteria and procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the IQS address relevant national and/or international awarding bodies and focus on: (a) why the qualification is needed and for whom; (b) how the qualification is linked to similar qualifications; (c) which are the target groups for the qualification; (d) conditions for validation; (e) typical use of the qualification; (f) entitlements following from the qualification; and (g) learning outcomes required for the qualification, including sets of individual learning outcomes.

included in the register<sup>746</sup>, most of which are formal qualifications from general education, VET, and higher education. PQF levels are indicated in the qualifications register and on all formal qualifications included. Work is in progress to indicate EQF levels as well. Both PQF and EQF levels are indicated on Europass certificate and diploma supplements.

The focus in the current phase of implementation is on the development, levelling and inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the IQS. This is a lengthy process involving extensive consultation with stakeholders and requiring mechanisms and tools to increase efficiency of inclusion procedures without sacrificing quality. Between 2016 and 2018, the Educational Research Institute supported the development of 100 market qualifications in line with the principles that govern all qualifications included in the IQS (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). A new two-year project that started in January 2018 aims to integrate innovative and socially needed qualifications into the IQS, and to reduce barriers to IQS development by supporting stakeholders at national and regional level (European Commission et al., forthcoming). The implementation schedule of the IQS project foresees the inclusion in the register of 200 market qualifications by 2023, with a mid-term target of 40 qualifications by the end of 2018; at this point 41 market qualifications had been included in the register, achieving the mid-term target, with many others at various stages of evaluation.

Two lines of research have been distinguished as relevant for the current stage of development and implementation of the PQF: studies on the functioning of particular structures in the system, the links between them and the assessment of processes in the IQS; and context research. The Educational Research Institute has conducted three studies that were completed in 2018 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- a. *Evaluation of the process of including qualifications in IQS*, assessing the efficiency and complexity of the process of including market qualifications in the IQS;
- b. *Case studies of external quality assurance providers*, aiming to gain knowledge about the potential of institutions that will play the role of external quality assurance institutions in the process of awarding qualifications included in the IQS;
- c. *Research of the regional demand for support in the implementation and development of the*

<sup>746</sup> Data from <https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/> [accessed 14.1.2019].

*IQS*, looking to identify the needs of particular groups of stakeholders and users of the IQS at regional level and to define the scope and forms of support needed.

The results of these studies are currently being analysed and the conclusions will be taken into account in the revision of the IQS Act in 2019.

The PQF has been communicated and promoted in Poland as part of, and along with, the entire IQS. So far, the communication strategy has focused on disseminating knowledge and building awareness about the IQS, on communicating the benefits for both stakeholders and beneficiaries, and on encouraging potential stakeholders to join in activities to develop the system. Indirectly, it is also aimed at promoting the concept of lifelong learning in the context of the IQS and the PQF; to develop awareness in society of how career pathways can be perceived, of the approach to attaining qualifications, and of expectations about the education system; and to introduce a new language when speaking about qualifications. The main channels for communicating information about the PQF have been the IQS Portal, which was launched together with the integrated qualifications register in July 2016<sup>747</sup>, the website of the EQF NCP<sup>748</sup>, public relations activities, seminars, conferences, debates, participation in industry events, publications and media materials. At present, communication efforts are mainly directed at stakeholders who are or can be involved in the development of the IQS (industry organisations, employers, sector councils, education and training providers, and the public administration); the general public will be targeted at a later stage. Currently, awareness of the PQF is highest among education and training providers, pupils, students and parents involved in the formal education system, the public employment services and the vocational counsellors employed by these services. The framework is less known among job-seekers and employers.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The PQF for lifelong learning was referenced to the EQF in 2013; the *Referencing report* is available

<sup>747</sup> The IQS portal (currently only in Polish): [www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl](http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl)

The integrated qualifications register: <https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/>

Information on implementation projects conducted by the Educational Research Institute: <http://kwalifikacje.edu.pl/?lang=en>

<sup>748</sup> The website of the EQF NCP: <http://prk.men.gov.pl/en/home-eng/>

on the EQF portal<sup>749</sup>. A separate *Self-certification report of the national qualifications framework for higher education*<sup>750</sup> to the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) was prepared at the same time. An update on PQF developments in the country was presented to the EQF advisory group in December 2016, focusing on important developments in preceding years: adoption of the IQS Act, establishment of the integrated qualifications register, fine-tuning the governance structure, the typology of qualifications, and development of methods for levelling, describing and validation of qualifications.

An updated referencing report is expected to be presented in 2020, to reflect recent changes in the Polish education system. It will cover the amendment to the IQS Act planned for the second half of 2019 and the results of the completed second stage of IQS implementation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

### Important lessons and future plans

The PQF has now reached an operational stage and is well placed – conceptually, legally and technically – to become a visible part of the Polish education and training system, fully integrated with related policies and instruments in the IQS. This requires the extensive work carried out since 2010 to be followed up by sufficient political and stakeholder commitment and resources.

PQF developments aim to combine the introduction of a comprehensive national framework with the parallel development of sector and subsector frameworks. While the coexistence of frameworks at different levels and for different purposes can be found in many countries, the Polish approach tries to introduce conceptual coherence, allowing for synergies between frameworks at different levels and in different sectors. Practical implementation of the PQF may provide a model for other countries struggling to find ways to bridge and connect education and training sectors and subsectors. Whether this complex model will work in practice, and how it can promote consistent use of learning outcomes across levels, subsystems and sectors, must be monitored in the coming period.

Implementation of the PQF as part of the IQS has been the main mechanism integrating changes introduced in the general, vocational, and higher education sectors. Prior to this, the Polish qualifications system had been centred

on standards and criteria addressing the formal education process, defined by content of education and years of formal learning (European Commission et al., 2019). The progress made in introducing the learning outcomes approach in the different subsectors of education and training provides a good basis for future developments. It also supports the development of qualifications obtained outside the formal system and their inclusion in the IQS, which is currently the main focus of implementation work. The implementation of the framework and the use of the common language of learning outcomes have also had a significant impact on cooperation between stakeholders, such as between employers and the VET sector – a key point of the VET reform – and cooperation in the context of the sectoral skills councils. PQF level 5 is considered to be the meeting area of qualifications providers from all education and training subsystems. Steps were taken to establish principles for quality assurance of qualifications and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and to support stakeholders involved with these process. The establishment of the IQS Stakeholders Council in 2016 has been an important measure aimed at ensuring coherence and direction for PQF-related developments, involving a wide range of stakeholders (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Some of the challenges encountered so far include initial scepticism about the PQF and the EQF among stakeholders and, more recently, the challenge of including non-formal qualifications in the IQS; this is a lengthy process involving extensive consultation with stakeholders and requiring adequate mechanisms and tools to increase efficiency of inclusion procedures without sacrificing quality (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). Given the variety and inconsistency of legal and organisational solutions for non-formal qualifications, comparing the value of qualifications acquired in different areas and awarded by different institutions according to their own criteria and procedures has proved difficult (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

Another challenge has been a lack of interest among non-formal learning providers, in particular international companies providing worldwide recognised training, in including their qualifications in the IQS. Qualifications in the IQS are open to bodies who want to become certifying institutions, and learning outcomes and validation processes become available in the public domain. As a result, any company may become a certifying institution after meeting specified standards and being approved by the relevant ministry; hence, the learning provider that applies for inclusion of its qualification into the IQS would no longer own the qualification once it is included (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

<sup>749</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/referencing-reports-and-contacts>

<sup>750</sup> Educational Research Institute (2014).

In addition to the development and inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the IQS, future steps in the implementation of the PQF include amendment of the IQS Act, planned for the

second part of 2019 aiming to further fine-tune IQS governance, and the establishment of sectoral skills councils and sectoral qualifications frameworks for new sectors.

**Table 67. Polish qualifications framework (PQF)**

PQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATIONS FROM THE FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM	REGULATED AND NON-STATUTORY QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF LEVELS
8	PhD Diploma ( <i>Dyplom doktora</i> ) Post-graduate qualification ( <i>Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych</i> )		8
7	Second cycle of higher education diploma (Master) ( <i>Dyplom ukończenia studiów drugiego stopnia</i> ) Integrated first and second cycle diploma ( <i>Dyplom ukończenia jednolitych studiów magisterskich</i> ) Post-graduate qualification ( <i>Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych</i> )		7
6	First cycle of higher education diploma (Bachelor) ( <i>Dyplom ukończenia studiów pierwszego stopnia</i> ) Post-graduate qualification ( <i>Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych</i> )		6
5	Certificate of professional competence in the profession ( <i>Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe</i> ) Certificate of professional qualification in the profession ( <i>Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie</i> ) Certified specialist diploma – short cycle** ( <i>Świadectwo dyplomowanego specjalisty/ specjalisty technologa</i> )	e.g. Planning, creating and distributing content marketing ( <i>Tworzenie oferty, planowanie i prowadzenie sprzedaży skierowanej do klientów biznesowych – handlowiec</i> ) Carpenter – master craftsman diploma ( <i>Stolarz – dyplom mistrzowski</i> ) Furniture carpenter – master craftsman diploma ( <i>Stolarz meblowy – dyplom mistrzowski</i> ) Confectioner – master diploma ( <i>Cukiernik – dyplom mistrzowski</i> )	5
4	Upper secondary school leaving certificate ( <i>Matura</i> ) ( <i>Świadectwo dojrzałości</i> ) Certificate of professional competence in the profession ( <i>Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe</i> ) Certificate of professional qualification in the profession ( <i>Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie</i> )	e.g. Designing computer graphics ( <i>Projektowanie grafiki komputerowej</i> ) Designing websites ( <i>Tworzenie witryn internetowych</i> )	4



**Table 67. Polish qualifications framework (PQF) (Continued)**

PQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATIONS FROM THE FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM	REGULATED AND NON-STATUTORY QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF LEVELS
<b>3</b>	<p>Certificate of professional competence in the profession (<i>Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe</i>)</p> <p>Certificate of professional qualification in the profession (<i>Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie</i>)</p>	<p>e.g.</p> <p>Assembly of construction woodwork (<i>Montowanie stolarki budowlanej</i>)</p> <p>Programming and servicing 3D printing (<i>Programowanie i obsługiwanie procesu druku 3D</i>)</p> <p>Preparing food in accordance with market trends and the principles of healthy nutrition (<i>Przygotowywanie potraw zgodnie z trendami rynkowymi i zasadami zdrowego żywienia</i>)</p> <p>Furniture carpenter – journeyman certificate (<i>Stolarz meblowy – świadectwo czeladnicze</i>)</p> <p>Auto body painter – journeyman certificate (<i>Lakiernik samochodowy – świadectwo czeladnicze</i>)</p>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<p>Lower secondary school leaving certificate*** (<i>Świadectwo ukończenia gimnazjum</i>)</p> <p>Certificate of professional competence in the profession (<i>Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe</i>)</p> <p>Certificate of professional qualification in the profession (<i>Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie</i>)</p> <p>Primary school leaving certificate (8 years)*** (<i>Świadectwo ukończenia szkoły podstawowej (8-letniej)</i>)</p>		<b>2</b>
<b>1</b>	<p>Primary school leaving certificate (6 years)*** (<i>Świadectwo ukończenia szkoły podstawowej (6-letniej)</i>)</p>		<b>1</b>

(\*) These are State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system and non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications) that have a PQF level assigned and have been included in the integrated qualification system (IQS) and the integrated qualification register.

(\*\*) Not yet available, but officially possible according to the 2018 Law on Higher Education.

(\*\*\*) According to the 2017 reform, lower secondary schools are being phased out; the last group of pupils from these schools will graduate in June 2019; pupils graduating from grade 6 of primary school continue education in grade 7 of eight-year primary schools.

Sources: NQF update presentation to the EQF AG, December 2016. The integrated qualifications register: <https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/>

<b>Abbreviations</b>			
EQF	European qualifications framework	NQF	national qualifications framework
EQF NCP	EQF national coordination point	OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
IBE	Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych (Educational Research Institute)	PQF	Polish qualifications framework
IQS	integrated qualifications system	VET	vocational education and training
IVET	initial vocational education and training	VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

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Integrated qualifications register: <https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/>

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# PORTUGAL

## Introduction and context

Over recent years, the performance of the Portuguese education and training system has improved, as shown by a number of key indicators. The rate of early school leaving has decreased significantly from 28.3% in 2010 to 12.6% in 2017. Tertiary education attainment has followed a similar positive trend, up to 33.5% in 2017 (but below the EU average of 39.9%). The 2015 results of the Programme for international student assessment (PISA) indicate improvements in students' basic skills in reading, mathematics and science. The government seeks to encourage school autonomy, to promote new quality assurance systems at school level, and student participation in policy making and school governance. The employment rate of recent graduates has increased to 80.7% in 2017, now above the EU average of 80.2%. Recent measures in higher education are aimed at increasing efficiency, attractiveness and completion rate. Cooperation between higher education and the business sector is not sufficiently incentivised. Government efforts are also focused on increasing transparency and attractiveness of the vocational education and training (VET) system and a national credit system in line with the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) has been developed<sup>751</sup>. Adult participation in adult education and training is just below the EU average, at 9.8% in 2017, and is supported through implementation of the national skills strategy (European Commission, 2018).

In the context of a need for curricular reorganisation, recent legislative developments include the endorsement of the Legislative Order on the students' profile by the end of compulsory schooling<sup>752</sup>; a common matrix for all schools and education providers in compulsory education

for planning, implementation and evaluation of teaching and learning; and Decree-Law No 55 of 6 July 2018 establishing the curriculum of basic and secondary education, the guiding principles of its conception, and operationalisation and evaluation of learning, to ensure that all students achieve the competences foreseen in the *Students' profile by the end of compulsory schooling*. Legislative orders<sup>753</sup> approving the *Essential learning of basic education* (1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles) and the *Essential learning of secondary education* were also adopted in 2018 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Major reforms in the country, starting in 2007 with the *Agenda for the reform of vocational training*<sup>754</sup>, led to the development of a national qualifications system whose main aim was to promote widespread attainment of secondary education as a minimum level of qualification. Development of the national qualifications system has been underpinned by several elements aiming to help achieve its objectives: a new institutional model, now consisting of the National Agency for Qualifications and VET (ANQEP) and the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of higher education (A3ES); a network of adult learning centres<sup>755</sup>; the national qualifications catalogue (a strategic management instrument for non-higher national qualifications

<sup>751</sup> Order No 47/2017 regulates the national credit system of vocational education and training and defines the model for an instrument of orientation and individual registration of qualifications and competences, the *Qualifica* passport.

<sup>752</sup> Legislative Order No 6478 of 26 July 2017.

<sup>753</sup> Legislative Order No 6944-A of 19 July 2018 and, respectively, Legislative Order No 8476-A of 31 August 2018.

<sup>754</sup> Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 173/2007 approved the reform of vocational training and the draft decree-law establishing the national qualifications system and creating the national qualifications framework, the national qualifications catalogue and the *Individual skills handbook*.

<sup>755</sup> Initially developed as new opportunities centres, replaced in 2013 by the centres for qualification and vocational education (Centros para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional), and since 2016 replaced by the *Qualifica* centres. More information on the *Qualifica* programme, an integrated strategy to support the training and qualification of low qualified adults, unemployed people and NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training), is available at: [www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/](http://www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/)

and a central reference tool for VET provision)<sup>756</sup>; and the national qualifications framework (NQF) (ANQ, 2011). The national system for recognising non-formal and informal learning was integrated into the NQF and reformed in 2012 to address better the validation, training and guidance of young people and adults.

The comprehensive national qualifications framework (*Quadro nacional de qualificações*, QNQ) is a single reference for classifying all qualifications awarded in the Portuguese education and training system, and acquired in formal, non-formal and informal learning. Introduced by Decree-Law No 396/2007<sup>757</sup>, which established the national qualifications system and the structures ensuring its operation, the framework was published in 2009 by ministerial order<sup>758</sup> and came into force in October 2010. It includes eight levels, with level descriptors defined in terms of learning outcomes in three categories: knowledge, skills (cognitive or practical) and attitudes. Higher education qualifications were included in the more detailed framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ-Portugal), which is part of the comprehensive framework. The NQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certified against the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2011.

## Policy objectives

The NQF is seen as ‘both a central anchoring device and a mechanism that drives forward the process of reform’ (ANQ, 2011). Development of the national qualifications system and of the NQF forms part of a broader education and training reform programme initiated in 2007<sup>759</sup>, the *New opportunities* initiative and the *Agenda for the reform of vocational training*. These reforms aimed to raise low qualification levels of the whole population.

The development of the NQF was seen as a response to the need to integrate and coordinate qualifications from the different education and

training subsystems (general education, vocational training and higher education) into a single classification framework. It also aims to improve the quality, relevance, transparency and comparability of Portuguese qualifications, along with their understanding abroad, by linking them to the EQF, to promote access to lifelong learning, and recognition of knowledge and skills (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The NQF is also seen as a crucial element in creating the conditions for a focus on learning outcomes.

Specific objectives to which the development of the national qualifications system and framework are expected to contribute include (ANQ, 2011):

- a. integration between general and vocational education and training offers, based on the principle of double certification, expected to lead to both secondary education attainment and increased employability;
- b. developing mechanisms for the certification and recognition of informal and non-formal learning, allowing flexible training pathways aimed at increasing participation in lifelong learning; the mechanism for the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) was strengthened and more people have benefitted from the process;
- c. organising education and training pathways into short modular units that can be certified independently, aimed at increasing adult learner participation and qualification levels;
- d. developing an oversight framework and quality control mechanisms, aimed at integrating education and training subsystems; this took the form of the National Agency for Qualifications (now the National Agency for Qualifications and VET (ANQEP))<sup>760</sup>, which coordinates the implementation of education and vocational training policies for both young people and adults, and manages the system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences;
- e. promoting the relevance, certification and recognition of the education and training offer in line with the needs of the labour market; the national qualifications catalogue and the sector qualification councils are among the solutions linked to this objective;
- f. strengthening integration between academic and double certification pathways through permeability mechanisms and coordination.

In parallel to the NQF, a framework for higher education was established and used as a tool to

<sup>756</sup> The structure and organisation of the national qualifications catalogue and its model for skills-based qualifications were established by Order No 781 of 23 July 2009.

<sup>757</sup> Decree-Law No 396/2007 on the national qualification system is available in Portuguese at: <https://dre.pt/application/dir/pdf1s/2007/12/25100/0916509173.pdf>; it was amended by Decree-Law No 14 of 26 January 2017, available at: <https://dre.pt/home/-/dre/105808927/details/maximized>

<sup>758</sup> Ministerial Order No 782/2009 on the NQF. [www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/boDocumentos/getDocumentos/163](http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/boDocumentos/getDocumentos/163)

<sup>759</sup> Decree-Law No 396/2007.

<sup>760</sup> Under the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security and the Ministry of Education.

support reforms and development. The main aims were to set up clear learning standards and identify progression routes through levels of learning (MCTES, 2011).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The NQF is a comprehensive framework, including all qualifications from the different education and training subsystems, regardless of means of access: basic, secondary and higher education, vocational training and the processes of recognition, validation and certification of competences obtained through formal, non-formal or informal learning. An eight-level structure was adopted, following the principles and categories of the EQF.

Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills (cognitive or practical) and attitudes. As the term ‘competence’ was already used as an overarching concept within the national qualifications system (defined as ‘recognised capacity to mobilise knowledge, skills and attitudes in contexts of work, professional development, education and personal development’), the choice was made to use ‘attitudes’ for the third category of descriptors in the NQF. This is defined as ‘the ability to carry out tasks and solve problems of lesser or greater degrees of complexity and involving various levels of autonomy and responsibility’, and is divided into the subdomains responsibility and autonomy<sup>761</sup>.

While currently there are no types of qualification that raise specific challenges in terms of levelling to the NQF, one of the areas for attention is level 5. A non-higher level qualification has already been placed at NQF level 5, the diploma in technological specialisation<sup>762</sup>, and there is a modality of short-cycle higher education, specialised advanced technical courses (CTeSP)<sup>763</sup>, designed using the learning outcomes approach but, as yet, with no assigned level. In addition, the upper secondary general education school leaving certificate giving access to higher education has been assigned to NQF/EQF level 3, to distinguish it from secondary education qualifications obtained through double certificated pathways or secondary education qualifications plus a professional internship of at least six months aimed at further study, assigned

to level 4. The fact that similar qualifications in other countries have been referenced to EQF level 4 may reopen discussions on the characteristics of levels 3 and 4 in Portugal.

The learning outcomes approach plays an important role in reforming Portuguese education and training and was an underlying principle in the development of the national qualifications catalogue<sup>764</sup>. It is seen as a more adequate response to competence needs in the labour market and of critical importance to recognition of qualifications and understanding their value. The NQF has been a driving force behind incorporation of the learning outcomes approach into the education and training system.

However, although learning outcomes are formally present in the NQF, there is a diversity of approaches and concepts and the level of implementation varies across subsystems (Cedefop, 2016). Fine-tuning learning outcomes in qualifications design with the NQF level descriptors is a challenging task and is work in progress: it includes upgrading both the national qualifications catalogue and general education qualifications.

VET has been the sector driving the introduction of learning outcomes in Portugal, with reforms aimed at developing qualifications standards and curriculum development. Qualifications obtained in VET are included in the national qualifications catalogue at levels 2, 4 and 5, and are organised in units. Each qualification at levels 2 and 4 includes a training standard (that awards a double certification) and a recognition, validation and certification of competences standard. Level 5 qualifications (diploma in technological specialisation) include a training standard. A new methodological guidebook for the design of qualifications based on learning outcomes<sup>765</sup> has been developed to be used for design of new qualifications and revision of existing ones. It applies to VET qualifications at levels 2, 4 and 5 of the NQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). Adjusting qualifications standards to the level descriptors is work in progress, with about 50% of qualifications having been updated.

The design of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes also enabled the creation of the national credit system for VET, aligned with ECVET principles and aimed at increasing permeability

<sup>761</sup> Ministerial Order No 782/2009.

<sup>762</sup> Obtained through technological specialisation courses.

<sup>763</sup> CTeSP are short-cycle higher technical courses launched during the 2014/15 academic year. Aiming to promote links between higher education and the business sector, they have a strong technical and vocational component, including on-the-job training.

<sup>764</sup> The national qualifications catalogue is available at: [www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes](http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes)

<sup>765</sup> ANQEP; DGCNQ (2015). *New methodological guidebook: design of qualifications based on learning outcomes*. [www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/boDocumentos/getDocumentos/561](http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/boDocumentos/getDocumentos/561)

between VET pathways and higher education. This enables the allocation of credit points to level 2, 4 and 5 NQF qualifications included in the national qualifications catalogue, and to certified training included in the integrated information system for the management of education and training provision (*Sistema integrado de informação e gestão da oferta educativa e formativa*, SIGO), compliant with the quality criteria in place<sup>766</sup> (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

In general education, revision of the curriculum structure for basic and secondary education over recent years led to the definition of new programmes and curriculum outcome targets (*metas curriculares*) for several subjects, introduced gradually starting with 2013/14. The curriculum outcome targets are focused on knowledge and essential skills students need to master in different school years and cycles. More recently, the 'essential learning'<sup>767</sup> of each school subject, the reference for delivering new curricula in general education, is expressed in terms of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and attitudes) allowing for learner-centred and inclusive teaching and learning practices. The 'essential learning' is based on the goals delineated in the *Students' profile by the end of compulsory schooling*, a guiding document that describes the principles, vision, values and competences that students should have on completion of compulsory schooling. A pilot project for autonomy and curricular flexibility, voluntarily undertaken by 235 Portuguese schools in the 2017/18 school year, represents a new paradigm for student-centred learning consistent with the learning outcomes approach in qualification design, and suggests that the approach is increasingly taken up in compulsory general education.

Higher education institutions are responsible for implementing the framework and learning outcomes within their study programmes, so the process differs from one institution to another. According to a Cedefop study (Cedefop, 2016), the accreditation agency A3ES for the higher education sector does not emphasise the importance of learning outcomes in the accreditation process.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

A new institutional model was developed in Portugal to support setting up the national qualifications system and framework. Initial work on the NQF was carried out by the former Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, with support from the Ministry of Education. In 2007, Decree-Law No 396/2007 was adopted, establishing the legal basis and defining the structures for implementation. An agreement was signed between the government and the social partners on key elements, tools and regulatory systems. The National Agency for Qualifications (ANQ) (now the National Agency for Qualifications and VET (ANQEP), under the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security and the Ministry of Education) was established in 2007 to coordinate implementation of education and training policies for young people and adults, and to develop the system for recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC). The National Council for Vocational Training (no longer operational) was set up as a tripartite body responsible for approving profiles and the referential system for training. At the same time, the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) was set up with quality assurance functions in higher education.

The process of referencing the NQF to the EQF brought about increased collaboration between stakeholders from the different education and training subsystems. Work during the process was coordinated by a steering committee chaired by the then ANQ and comprising bodies involved in the regulation of qualifications and quality assurance in education and training<sup>768</sup>. There was also a technical working group led by the ANQ and composed of staff drawn from the bodies represented in the steering committee. Other stakeholders were involved or consulted in the process<sup>769</sup>.

The NQF is currently under the responsibility of three ministries: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security,

<sup>766</sup> The development of the national credit system for VET is based on three complementary dimensions: (a) the attribution of credit points to formally certified learning organised in units of qualifications in the national qualifications catalogue; (b) the accumulation of credit points related to that learning; and (c) the transfer of credit points obtained through training courses.

<sup>767</sup> Legislative Order No 6944-A/2018 approving the *Essential learning of basic education* (1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles) and the Legislative Order No 8476-A/2018 approving the *Essential learning of secondary education*.

<sup>768</sup> The General Directorate for Higher Education; the former General Directorate for Curriculum Innovation and Development; the General Directorate for Employment and Labour Relations; and the Agency for the Accreditation and Assessment of Higher Education (A3ES) were also part of the steering committee.

<sup>769</sup> Other stakeholders involved in the referencing process were the central coordination unit of the Employment and Vocational Training Observatory; the oversight committee for the *New opportunities* initiative and the national qualifications system; and other public bodies, education and training providers, practitioners and experts (ANQ, 2011).

and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education. NQF coordination is now shared between ANQEP and the General Directorate for Higher Education, involved in qualifications at levels 5 to 8<sup>770</sup>. ANQEP has been nominated to host the national coordination point for the EQF (EQF NCP), the leading structure for NQF implementation.

The responsibilities of the EQF NCP include:

- a. referencing the national qualification levels to the EQF and ensuring transparency in methodology used;
- b. providing access to information and guidance on how national qualifications are referenced to the EQF;
- c. encouraging participation of all interested parties (higher education and vocational training and education establishments, social partners, sectors and experts).

Depending on the issue, the EQF NCP collaborates horizontally with other relevant bodies (such as the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training and the General Directorate for Employment and Labour Relations), working flexibly and through consultation. The body consulted on the general education qualifications is the General Directorate for Education. The current governance structure does not foresee any human resources dedicated exclusively to the EQF NCP; the staff working on the NQF are also involved in other ANQEP technical departments and services and the General Directorate for Higher Education. This arrangement allows flexibility and for synergies to develop, though the disadvantage is that it may lead to less commitment from the relevant parties (Cedefop, 2015).

ANQEP is also supported by 16 sector qualifications councils involved in defining qualifications and competences, as well as in including new qualifications in the national qualifications catalogue and updating existing ones. The councils are composed of social partners, training providers from the national qualifications system, bodies responsible for regulating professions; public structures that oversee business sectors; technology and innovation centres; and companies.

The authorities currently responsible for quality assurance of qualifications are ANQEP, the General Directorate for Higher Education, the General Directorate for Education, the General Directorate for Employment and Labour Relations, and the

Agency for the Accreditation and Assessment of Higher Education (A3ES).

The legal basis of the national qualifications system and framework was updated in 2017 (Decree-Law No 14 of 26 January 2017). Amendments are related to the establishment of the national credit system for VET, the introduction of the *Qualifica* passport and the new *Qualifica* centres, and the updating of standards in the national qualifications catalogue.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>771</sup>

A comprehensive national system for validation of prior learning, called the national system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences (*Reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências*, RVCC) was introduced in Portugal in 2001; it aimed to increase the levels of school education and of vocational qualification in the country. At the time, only competences equivalent to the ninth year of schooling could be validated and the system was intended for adults aged 18 or over (Cedefop, 2018a). During 2012–13, major changes were introduced into the system, which is now seen as a process of identification of formal, non-formal and informal competences developed across the lifespan (Cedefop, 2018b). In early 2014, 450 new opportunities centres, in charge of validation and recognition of competences (for people over 18), were replaced by a new network of centres for qualification and vocational training (*Centros para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional*, CQEP). These, in turn, were replaced in 2016 by *Qualifica* centres<sup>772</sup> that reinforce RVCC as part of a public educational and professional offer that values learning acquired throughout life in a variety of contexts. There are currently around 300 such centres carrying out RVCC, with their activity managed by ANQEP. The new network assumes similar functions as the previous new opportunities centres, but also targets young people (age 15 or over), provides guidance, counselling and validation activities to low-skilled adults, and guides/orients young people completing nine years of basic education.

The RVCC system is incorporated in the national qualifications system and framework. It integrates two main processes.

<sup>770</sup> The General Directorate for Higher Education is under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education.

<sup>771</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>772</sup> Order No 232/2016.

- a. Education RVCC process, aimed at obtaining a school leaving qualification (levels 1, 2 and 3 of the NQF/EQF) and allowing learners to pursue further studies in the education and training system: this is based on key competences standards, which are different from those used in the formal education and training system – one specific to basic education established in 2001 and updated in 2002 and 2004, and another specific to secondary education established in 2006.
- b. Professional RVCC process, aimed at obtaining a vocational qualification (offers school and professional certification at levels 2 and 4 of the NQF/EQF): the professional competences standards used for validation are part of the national qualifications catalogue and are updated as necessary. The national qualifications catalogue includes more than 300 qualifications from 41 education and training areas<sup>773</sup> in accordance with the National classification of education and training areas.

The main strength of the validation approach in Portugal is its inclusion in a national policy/strategy that covers all sectors and levels of learning. Learners can acquire basic or upper secondary level education certificates and vocational qualifications from levels 1 to 4 in the NQF that have the same value as those awarded in formal education and training.

At higher education levels (levels 5 to 8 of the NQF/EQF), validation is generally linked to the credit system and module-based structure of courses and degrees. It is up to each institution to set the specific validation procedures and these must be validated by the scientific boards of universities and polytechnics. Students can obtain European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credits through validation that can be used for granting exemptions from part of a course in the first, second or third cycles of Bologna degrees. These credits are valid only in the programme of studies in which a student is enrolled in. Legislation from 2013<sup>774</sup> sets a limit for validation processes up to one third of the total number of ECTS credits relevant for a particular course<sup>775</sup>. General rules for validation apply to all higher education institutions, complemented by specific validation procedures established by each institution.

<sup>773</sup> Data from October 2018: [www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes?Page=1&CurrentPerPage=999999&Designacao=&AreasFormacaoId=&CodigoArea=&Nivel=&NivelIQEQ=&RVCC=false&Parciais=false](http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes?Page=1&CurrentPerPage=999999&Designacao=&AreasFormacaoId=&CodigoArea=&Nivel=&NivelIQEQ=&RVCC=false&Parciais=false)

<sup>774</sup> Decree-Law No 115/2013.

<sup>775</sup> According to Decree-Law No 65/2018, a limit for validation processes up to one third of the total number of ECTS credits applies to the accreditation/validation of professional experience.

While validation of non-formal and informal learning is widely considered as an alternative route to qualifications, those obtained through RVCC are less likely to lead to an increase in salary or to finding a higher qualified job. The number of adult learners obtaining qualification through RVCC and applying for validation in higher education is relatively low compared to figures 10 years ago, but it has been increasing recently.

## NQF implementation

Three main steps were taken to support the development and implementation of the national qualifications system and framework in Portugal. First, a new institutional model was developed, as described above. Second, a national qualifications catalogue was created in 2007 as a strategic management tool for non-higher national qualifications and as a central reference tool for VET provision. Third, the national system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) that had been introduced in general and vocational education in 2001 was incorporated into the NQF from the beginning and was reformed starting in 2012.

The NQF has now reached an operational stage, and is considered a permanent feature of the national qualifications system (Cedefop, 2015). The legal framework is in place, qualifications have been assigned to levels, and quality assurance arrangements have been implemented. All VET is already organised around the NQF and access to financial support also takes the framework into consideration<sup>776</sup>.

While a comprehensive database including all qualifications within the NQF has not been set up, the national qualifications catalogue<sup>777</sup> acts as a database for non-higher national qualifications. It includes more than 300 qualifications from 41 education and training areas at NQF/EQF levels 2, 4 and 5. It also includes international qualifications, which are partial qualifications. The catalogue is continuously updated by ANQEP, in a process supported by the 16 sector qualifications councils. A database for higher education qualifications<sup>778</sup> has also been created, containing information about the institution, type of education,

<sup>776</sup> For instance, in order to access certain professional traineeships, it is mandatory to have a certain NQF level.

<sup>777</sup> The national qualifications catalogue is available at: [www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes](http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes)

<sup>778</sup> The database for higher education qualifications is available at: [www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pesquisa\\_cursos\\_instituicoes?plid=372](http://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pesquisa_cursos_instituicoes?plid=372)



area and course of study. NQF and EQF levels are indicated in the national qualifications catalogue, but they are not included in the database for higher education qualifications.

In VET and for qualifications acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning, the NQF level is indicated in all certificates and diplomas, while EQF levels are indicated only on some qualifications<sup>779</sup>. In general education, diploma and certificate templates follow an identical layout for primary, lower and upper secondary education; NQF and EQF levels are not yet indicated. One of the priorities of the EQF NCP has been the inclusion of both NQF and EQF levels on all new qualification documents in both VET and general education. A draft legislative proposal has been prepared but, following the adoption of new legislation on basic and secondary education, this proposal requires updating. As higher education institutions can autonomously approve models for their diplomas, NQF levels are indicated on some qualification documents, but this is not usually the case. It is mandatory to indicate NQF and EQF levels on certificate and diploma supplements such as Europass, though whether EQF levels are indicated is not being monitored.

The framework has become increasingly visible to, and used by, education and training institutions and providers, regulatory authorities and bodies and by the *Qualifica* centres. The main channels used by the EQF NCP to disseminate the framework have been the ANQEP website, which contains a section devoted to the European instruments, the ANQEP newsletter, leaflets and flyers, and conferences and workshops. The website of the national qualifications catalogue is currently being renewed, and a dedicated website for the NQF/EQF is expected to be developed in 2019.

A first assessment study of the impact of the NQF on the national education and training system is planned to be conducted by the EQF NCP within the scope of the 2018–20 EQF grant. It aims to analyse to what extent the NQF and related policy instruments have contributed to:

- a. improving legibility, transparency and comparability of qualifications;
- b. enhancing dual certification qualifications;

<sup>779</sup> EQF levels are indicated on qualification documents issued for professional courses, specialised artistic education, vocational courses, and certificates and diplomas issued on the basis of certificates of professional capacity (certificates of competence) from the previous certification system.

- c. changes in school culture and training practices through the introduction of learning outcomes-based qualifications;
- d. improving access to formal qualifications and recognition of skills;
- e. increase in the visibility and recognition of qualifications on the labour market and in society in general.

The key challenges for further NQF implementation include the integration of international qualifications in the framework, the continuing challenge to raise awareness of key concepts, such as learning outcomes, among different stakeholders, and the need to disseminate the NQF to a wider spectrum of stakeholders, especially on the labour market, where it is not yet well known. Revision of NQF level 5 is another issue that will require attention.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Portugal referenced its national qualifications levels to the EQF and self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2011. The process started in 2009 and the results were presented in two separate reports: the *Report on the referencing of the national qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework* (ANQ, 2011) addressed qualifications at levels 1 to 5 of the NQF, and the *Report on the referencing of the framework for higher education qualifications in Portugal* (FHEQ-Portugal) (MCTES, 2011) addressed levels 5 to 8.

There are currently no plans to present an updated referencing report to the EQF Advisory Group.

## Important lessons and future plans

Portugal took the decision to adopt the eight EQF levels and the EQF level descriptors in setting up the comprehensive NQF. Aiming to integrate and coordinate qualifications from all education and training subsystems into a single framework, to aid the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, to improve transparency and comparability of qualifications and to facilitate double certification, the NQF is believed to have reduced barriers between the different subsystems. The recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) process has been linked to the NQF from the beginning, promoting equal value of qualifications placed at the same level, regardless of how competences are acquired.

The NQF has been a crucial element in reorienting focus in the education and training system on

learning outcomes. A new methodology for designing VET qualifications, based on learning outcomes, has been created and the country is in the process of reviewing and renewing VET qualifications in the national qualifications catalogue. Implementation of the learning outcomes approach could be further supported by providing adequate training to teachers and trainers<sup>780</sup> to assist them in designing curricula and assessment methods based on learning outcomes, and by developing common understanding of learning outcomes among different education and training subsystems and stakeholders (Cedefop, 2016). In 2017, a national credit system for VET was created, aligned with ECVET principles. This enables allocation of credit points to qualifications at NQF levels 2, 4 and 5, included in the national qualifications catalogue, and to quality-assured and certified training.

There is a need to disseminate the framework to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, especially improving acceptance and use of the NQF by the labour market. In this context, the relationship between

the higher education framework and other parts of the NQF (levels 1 to 5) needs to be made explicit, especially for level 5 programmes where different ministries are involved. One of the issues to be tackled in the near future may be the review of the NQF level 5, which currently includes a non-higher level qualification (the diploma in technological specialisation), while a modality of short-cycle higher education (specialised advanced technical courses, CTeSP) has not yet been assigned to a level. Another key challenge is integration of international qualifications in the framework.

A priority area of the EQF NCP's work has been the inclusion of both NQF and EQF levels on all qualification documents from general education and VET. A draft proposal has been put forward, but the adoption of new legislation in general education has made it necessary for this proposal to be updated/renewed. The inclusion of NQF/EQF levels on all certificates and diplomas at all levels of education and training could increase awareness of the framework among end-users.

**Table 68. Portuguese qualifications framework (QNQ)**

NQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctoral degree ( <i>Doutoramento</i> )	8
7	Master degree ( <i>Mestrado</i> )	7
6	Bachelor degree ( <i>Licenciatura</i> )	6
5	Diploma in technological specialisation ( <i>Diploma de Especialização Tecnológica</i> )	5
4	Upper secondary education and professional certification ( <i>Ensino secundário obtido por percursos de dupla certificação</i> ) Upper secondary education and professional internship – minimum six months ( <i>Ensino secundário vocacionado para prosseguimento de estudos de nível superior acrescido de estágio profissional – mínimo de seis meses</i> )	4
3	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate ( <i>Ensino secundário vocacionado para prosseguimento de estudos de nível superior</i> )	3
2	Third cycle of basic education ( <i>3º ciclo do ensino básico obtido no ensino regular</i> ) Third cycle of basic education and professional certification ( <i>3º ciclo do ensino básico obtido por percursos de dupla certificação</i> )	2
1	Second cycle of basic education ( <i>2º ciclo do ensino básico</i> )	1

Source: Portuguese National Agency for Qualifications and VET, 2016.

<sup>780</sup> Between 2016 and 2018, ANQEP organised 10 training courses for VET teachers and trainers from 66 VET schools, and two workshops with the schools that attended these training courses, discussing the successes and challenges in the implementation of learning outcomes.

<b>Abbreviations</b>			
A3ES	Agency for the Accreditation and Assessment of Higher Education	EQF	European qualifications framework
ANQ	Agência Nacional para a Qualificação (National Agency for Qualifications)	EQF NCP	national coordination point for the EQF
ANQEP	Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional (National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training)	MCTES	Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Ensino Superior (Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education)
ECTS	European credit transfer system	NQF	national qualifications framework
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training	RVCC	reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências (recognition, validation and certification of competences)
		VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

National Agency for Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training – the EQF NCP in Portugal:  
[www.anqep.gov.pt/default.aspx](http://www.anqep.gov.pt/default.aspx)

National qualifications catalogue: [www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes](http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes)

Qualification database for higher education: [www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pesquisa\\_cursos\\_instituicoes?plid=372](http://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pesquisa_cursos_instituicoes?plid=372)

ANQ (2011). *Report on the referencing of the national qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework*: <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/PT%20EQF%20Referencing%20Report.pdf>

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European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (forthcoming). *European inventory for validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018: country report: Portugal*.

MCTES (2011). *The framework for higher education qualifications in Portugal: report of the international committee on the verification of compatibility with the qualifications framework of the European higher education area*. [https://wwwcdn.dges.gov.pt/sites/default/files/referencing\\_report\\_higher\\_education\\_portugal\\_qf-eha.pdf](https://wwwcdn.dges.gov.pt/sites/default/files/referencing_report_higher_education_portugal_qf-eha.pdf)

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## Introduction and context

The Romanian education and training system faces several challenges, according to key education and training indicators. The results of the 2015 programme for international student assessment (PISA) showed that the proportion of 15 year-olds with underachievement in reading, mathematics and science is almost double EU average levels (38.7%, 39.9% and 38.5%, respectively). The low levels of performance are partly linked to students' socioeconomic background and partly attributed to other educational factors, such as teaching and curricula. The percentage of pupils who leave education and training early is the third highest in the EU (18.5% in 2016), with large disparities between urban and rural areas. An early warning mechanism is being developed to tackle this issue. Integrating the Roma population in education and on the labour market has proved challenging, with 64% of the Roma young people being not in employment, education or training (NEETs). School reform has included the introduction of a competence-based curriculum in primary and secondary education, and training of teachers to use it. The rate of tertiary education attainment is the lowest in the EU (25.6% in 2016, compared to 39.1% EU average) and, coupled with a high rate of emigration, is expected to lead to skill shortages in several sectors. However, measures have been taken to improve the labour market relevance of higher education and the employment rate of recent graduates is improving. Participation in vocational education and training (VET) is above the EU average. Current reforms are focused on introducing dual VET programmes at levels 3, 4 and 5 of the national qualifications framework (NQF), for which a legal framework is being adopted. The proportion of adults participating in lifelong learning is very low (1.2% in 2016) despite a need for upskilling. While legislative measures to establish community lifelong learning centres were adopted in 2017, implementation is slow (European Commission, 2017).

In 2013, Romania adopted a learning-outcomes-based NQF for lifelong learning – the Romanian national qualifications framework (ROQF) – by

Government Decision No 918/2013<sup>781</sup>. It closely follows the eight-level structure of the European qualifications framework (EQF) and aims to bring together nationally recognised qualifications from initial and continuing vocational education and training (IVET and CVET), apprenticeship, general and higher education, and to help integrate the validation of non-formal learning into the national qualifications system.

The framework builds on reforms in VET and development of competence-based qualifications since the 1990s, including a tripartite agreement between the Government, employers' representatives and trade unions, signed in 2005, aiming to establish a coherent national system of qualifications. Parallel work was carried out in higher education, steered by the National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment. A national qualifications framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna process and the EQF, has been implemented and is a constitutive part of the comprehensive ROQF. Self-certification was completed in 2011.

One of the main challenges has been to link the development processes, structures and stakeholders from VET and higher education, and to improve links with the labour market. An important step was taken in June 2011 when the National Council for Adult Vocational Training and the National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment were merged into one single body – the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) – responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive NQF. The NQA is the national coordination point for the EQF (EQF NCP); since 2018 it has also been the National Europass Centre.

The ROQF was referenced to the EQF in April 2018.

<sup>781</sup> Government Decision No 918/2013 on the approval of the NQF, available at: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/170238>.

## Policy objectives

Romania faces a challenge in raising the quality of education; skills shortage also remains a problem for the country. There is insufficient coherence in the qualification system and a lack of progression opportunities between IVET, CVET and higher education. Validation of non-formal and informal learning within formal education, needed to support education access and mobility, is not yet possible. Qualifications should respond better to labour market needs and there is a requirement for greater transparency of learning outcomes and labour force mobility. National qualifications also need to be understood abroad and linked to the EQF, to promote mobility of learners and workers between European countries.

The ROQF aims to improve the transparency, comparability and portability of people's qualifications, to support mobility both in education and training and on the labour market. It is also seen as a tool to support national reforms and modernisation of education and training. It opens up the possibility to address several issues, such as coherence and progression in the education system, use of validation, adult participation in lifelong learning, and transitions between work and education. It is linked to a number of policy strategies in education, training and employment: the National strategy for lifelong learning 2015–20<sup>782</sup>; the Strategy for VET 2016–20<sup>783</sup>; the National strategy for tertiary education 2015–20<sup>784</sup> and the National sustainable development strategy *Horizons 2013–2020–2030*<sup>785</sup>. Developing the ROQF and better coordination between stakeholders is highlighted as a cross-cutting action contributing to two of the strategic pillars of the National strategy for lifelong learning 2015–20: Pillar 2, increasing quality and relevance, and Pillar 3, partnerships.

According to the referencing report (Ministry of Education and NQA, 2018), the process of referencing the ROQF to the EQF has contributed to the development of a qualifications culture, built on the principles of quality, transparency, transferability and progression.

<sup>782</sup> The National strategy for lifelong learning 2015–20 is available in Romanian at: [www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/\\_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2016/strategie/Strategie%20LLL%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2016/strategie/Strategie%20LLL%20(1).pdf)

<sup>783</sup> The Strategy for VET 2016–20 is available in Romanian at: <http://oldsite.edu.ro/index.php/articles/24340>

<sup>784</sup> The National strategy for tertiary education 2015–20 is available in Romanian at: [www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere%20articole/Strategie\\_inv\\_tertiar\\_2015\\_2020.pdf](http://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere%20articole/Strategie_inv_tertiar_2015_2020.pdf)

<sup>785</sup> The National sustainable development strategy is available in English at: [www.mmediu.ro/beta/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/2012-06-12\\_dezvoltare\\_durabila\\_nsdenglish12112008.pdf](http://www.mmediu.ro/beta/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/2012-06-12_dezvoltare_durabila_nsdenglish12112008.pdf)

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The ROQF comprises eight qualification levels that can be acquired in education and training and by validation of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning contexts. National level descriptors are identical to EQF level descriptors. They are defined in terms of three categories of learning outcomes: knowledge (theoretical and/or factual); skills, divided into cognitive skills (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical skills (manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments); and responsibility and autonomy<sup>786</sup>.

There is commitment to, and visible preoccupation with, strengthening the learning outcomes approach as part of the national reform programme. Changes in national policies are mainly driven by the European legislative framework, also influenced in recent years by workforce migration and student mobility. Poor results in the programme for international student assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2014) resulted in pressure for more comprehensive understanding, among practitioners in general education and teacher training (initial and continuous), of learning outcomes and use of knowledge and skills in real-life situations.

As reported for a Cedefop study on the subject (Cedefop, 2016), the learning outcomes concept is not widely shared. There are many different interpretations due to various linguistic and pedagogic concepts. For a successful shift to learning outcomes, an integrated approach to curriculum, assessment or examination, and teacher training would be required; these connections are not yet sufficiently coherent in the Romanian system.

The VET sector is at the forefront of the use of the learning outcomes approach, responding directly to social and economic needs. Initial vocational and technical qualifications have been developed since 2003, based on training standards with units of learning outcomes, in turn based on occupational standards<sup>787</sup>. Vocational training standards have been developed in collaboration with the social

<sup>786</sup> The third category of level descriptors, initially called 'competence', was recently amended to 'responsibility and autonomy' in line with the *Council recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning* (Government Decision 132/2018 modifying and supplementing Government Decision 918/2013 on the adoption of the NQF).

<sup>787</sup> The guidelines on the writing and application of learning outcomes in VET have been adopted through Order No 5293/2015 of the Minister of Education on the approval of the structure of training standards in VET.

partners, validated by sectoral committees, and approved by the Ministry of National Education. New curricula have been designed. Occupational standards are used in CVET and are based on elements of competence to be proved at the workplace. The standards are approved by the National Qualifications Authority, after validation by sectoral committees. The new occupational standards include a curriculum unique to each occupation listed in the classification of occupations.

There are two factors which keep the implementation of the learning outcomes approach in adult education at an early stage: low participation of adults in lifelong learning (1.2% in 2016) and a diversified institutional landscape with different types of institutions, programmes and organisational arrangements.

Within higher education, qualifications are linked to the credit structure of the European credit transfer system (ECTS), which is compulsory for all higher education institutions in Romania. Use of a competence-based model is part of higher education reform. However, further efforts are needed to ensure better definition of certain competences for the study programmes to aid differentiation between bachelor and master degrees. There is a challenge in using competence-based models in designing curricula, learning resources and assessment tools (Cedefop, 2016).

The implementation of learning outcomes in all education sectors is seen as an important challenge in the future implementation of the ROQF. It is yet to be clarified how – and how far – learning outcomes are to be implemented in the different sectors. The development of mechanisms for writing and implementing learning outcomes in education is envisaged through projects (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). For instance, within the project National coordinators for the implementation of the European agenda for adult learning<sup>788</sup>, the NQA has developed a guide for writing learning outcomes in cooperation with education and labour market stakeholders, and has carried out dissemination activities. The Ministry of National Education has a project including six pilot study programmes, for six key fields, based on the learning outcomes approach.

<sup>788</sup> Project National coordinators for the implementation of the European agenda for adult learning; Agreement No 2015-2770/001-001; Project No 567464-EPP-2015-1-RO-EPPKA3-AL-AGENDA. The methodological guide for the writing of learning outcomes developed as part of the project is available in Romanian at: [http://site.anc.edu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Ghid\\_Metodologic\\_privind\\_scrierea\\_rezultatelor\\_invatari.pdf](http://site.anc.edu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Ghid_Metodologic_privind_scrierea_rezultatelor_invatari.pdf)

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The involvement of stakeholders in the development of the NQF is underpinned by the National Education Law No 1/2011<sup>789</sup>. The NQF itself was adopted through Government Decision No 918/2013<sup>790</sup>, subsequently amended by Government Decision No 567/2015<sup>791</sup> and Government Decision No 132/2018<sup>792</sup>. The main body responsible for developing and implementing the comprehensive ROQF is the National Qualifications Authority, NQA (*Autoritatea Nationala pentru Calificari*, ANC). It is the national coordination point for the EQF and, since 2018, it has also been appointed as the National Europass Centre. The NQA was established in June 2011, under the coordination of the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research (currently, the Ministry of National Education), bringing together two institutions: the National Council for Adult Vocational Training, in charge of CVET qualifications, and the National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment, responsible for higher education qualifications. The bodies responsible for general education and IVET are, respectively, the Ministry of National Education and the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development.

Quality assurance in education and training, for which the NQF is seen as a relevant tool, is coordinated through the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Pre-University Education. These are responsible for accreditation of education providers and programmes in higher education and, respectively, in general education and IVET. The NQA is responsible for quality assurance in non-formal and informal learning, through the National Accreditation Centre, which is currently authorising assessment centres for competences obtained by ways other than formal. The Ministry of Labour and Social Justice is expected to be responsible for quality assurance in adult learning in the future<sup>793</sup>.

<sup>789</sup> Article 340 of the National Education Law No 1/2011, available in Romanian at: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/125150>

<sup>790</sup> Government Decision No 918/2013 on the approval of the NQF, available in Romanian at: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/170238>

<sup>791</sup> Government Decision No 567/2015, available in Romanian at: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/170190>

<sup>792</sup> Government Decision No 132/2018, available in Romanian at: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/199134>

<sup>793</sup> According to Government Emergency Ordinance No 96/2016 (which is in force but still in Parliament debate and awaiting ratification).

The National Group for Quality Assurance is an additional informal inter-institutional structure that ensures the coordination of quality assurance in VET.

Positive aspects in Romania are the clear governance structure for the development of the NQF, the strong role of the NQA as initiator of legislation, and good human resource capacity. However, the downside of the current governance arrangement is that approval and implementation of legislative proposals is slow.

The NQA has the following competences in relation to the development of the NQF:

- a. proposes elements of national policies and strategies, and drafts legislation on the NQF;
- b. develops, implements and updates the NQF;
- c. develops and updates methodologies for NQF implementation;
- d. develops instruments needed for monitoring, evaluation and control of the NQF;
- e. is responsible for the national qualifications registers;
- f. ensures compatibility of the national qualifications system with other existing qualifications systems at European and international levels.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>794</sup>

A legislative framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Romania dates back to 2004<sup>795</sup> when the process of assessment and certification of professional competences obtained in ways other than formal was first defined and described. The National Law of Education No 1/2011<sup>796</sup> reaffirms the role of validation in lifelong learning policies, and defines validation in line with previous legislation as ‘the process of assessment and certification of informal and non-formal learning’. The National strategy for lifelong learning (2015–20)<sup>797</sup> provides a direction for

developing validation mechanisms and addressing issues related to financial incentives, information, counselling and access to validation, especially for disadvantaged groups. The first action line of the Action plan 2015–20 for the implementation of the strategy includes measures related to the recognition of prior learning, including the recognition of competences acquired abroad.

The establishment in 2014 of a dedicated structure for validation within the NQA, the National Centre for Accreditation, has contributed to improving validation system coordination. This structure is responsible for authorising professional competences assessment centres and practitioners in validation of non-formal and informal learning of adults; evaluation and certifying of assessors and evaluators; and monitoring the performance of assessment centres and of individual assessors. The developments initiated by the National Centre for Accreditation over recent years focused on increasing the quality of the validation process and regulating the selection of staff involved in validation services<sup>798</sup>.

Current work on the national qualifications framework and register, including the recent adoption of legislation on the National register of professional qualifications in education, the National register of professional qualifications, and the National register of qualifications in higher education<sup>799</sup> is also expected to impact favourably on the development of validation services. The legislative basis for the ROQF states that qualifications obtained through non-formal and informal education will be included in the framework using ROQF level descriptors. The current methodology allows competence certificates to

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available in Romanian at: [www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/\\_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2016/strategii/Strategie%20LLL%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2016/strategii/Strategie%20LLL%20(1).pdf)

<sup>798</sup> Decision No 1247/2017 on instructions for the authorisation of assessment and certification centres; Decision No 210/2018 for the approval of the procedure for evaluation and certification of assessment and certification experts and their registration in the evaluation and certification experts register; Order No 3629/2018 on the approval of the methodology for establishing the criteria and procedures for evaluation and certification of professional competence of assessors, evaluators of evaluators and external evaluators.

<sup>799</sup> Order No 3023/2018 on the control of professional training standards and their registration in the National register of professional qualifications in education; Government Decision No 917/2018 regarding the approval of the National register of professional qualifications and Order No 5686/2017 regarding the modification and completion of the Methodology for registration of higher education qualifications in the National register of qualifications in higher education (approved by the Order of the Minister of National Education No 3475/2017).

<sup>794</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>795</sup> Common Order of the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour No 4543/468 of 23 August 2004 for approving the procedure on assessment and certification of competences acquired in a non-formal and informal context, based on Ordinance 129/2000 on adult learning.

<sup>796</sup> National Education Law No 1/2011 available in Romanian at: [www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/\\_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2017/legislatie%20MEN/Legea%20nr.%201\\_2011\\_actualizata2018.pdf](http://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2017/legislatie%20MEN/Legea%20nr.%201_2011_actualizata2018.pdf)

<sup>797</sup> The National strategy for lifelong learning 2015–20, adopted by Government Decision No 418/2015, is

be obtained through validation of non-formal and informal learning up to ROQF level 3<sup>800</sup>.

However, the current non-formal system in Romania operates parallel to the formal system, and the bridge between the two is still under development. It is not possible to obtain formal qualifications (full or partial) through validation of non-formal and informal learning. The validation system is mainly for adults and those who do not tend to go back to the formal system. In the ROQF, validation is linked only with occupational standards that relate to CVET qualifications. These occupational standards are not the same as the training standards used for certification in formal education and training.

Vocational skills acquired in non-formal and informal learning can be evaluated following requests from individual beneficiaries made to the relevant professional competences assessment centres, authorised and monitored by the National Centre for Accreditation. An assessment commission is responsible for applying the validation methodology and for sending the requests for certificates to the NQA. Any legal entity in Romania can apply to become an assessment centre: this involves sending a request to the NQA and providing evidence of the assessment procedures, tools and expertise in the specific qualification or competence. Education and training providers may apply for authorisation to become assessment centres for specific qualifications, but so far only a few schools and universities have done so. According to data provided by the NQA, the number of accredited assessment centres and beneficiaries that gained certificates through validation has fallen in recent years, and the national coverage of assessment centres remains a challenge. However, the quality of services provided has been strengthened as a result of quality assurance mechanisms implemented recently. According to the NQA database, there are approximately 30 active assessment centres, mainly in services, construction and social protection (data from 2018). The higher concentration of assessment centres in these sectors is the result of the sectors' interest and their specific agenda around validation.

The chapter on lifelong learning in the National Law of Education No 1/2011<sup>801</sup> creates the legal basis for developing community lifelong learning centres. These have several aims: carry out analysis of education and training needs at a local

level; increase access to non-formal and informal learning and to validation of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning through second chance programmes and certification of skills and competences; and promote partnerships with the labour market. The creation of these centres, however, is still under discussion. The methodology for their establishment has been proposed for public debate, but has not yet been approved, despite the view of many stakeholders that they may increase access to validation services of specific disadvantaged groups, especially in rural and isolated communities.

## NQF implementation

The ROQF is well embedded in national legislation and linked to policy strategies in education, training and employment<sup>802</sup>. It has been revised according to the 2017 Council recommendation on the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning<sup>803</sup> and is considered to have reached an operational stage (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). It covers all education and training sectors and is open to qualifications acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. Given its envisaged role in responding to changing labour market needs, in supporting national qualification system transparency and quality, and the recognition of qualifications needed to encourage mobility, the ROQF is expected to become a permanent feature of the national qualifications system<sup>804</sup>.

The ROQF for lifelong learning includes the framework for higher education adopted in 2011. In 2014 a ministerial order<sup>805</sup> entered into force regulating equivalence between the five qualification levels available prior to 2013 (four levels for secondary non-tertiary qualifications and one level for higher education) and the eight levels of

<sup>800</sup> According to Government Decision No 918/2013 for the approval of the national qualifications framework, amended by Government Decision No 567/2015.

<sup>801</sup> National Education Law No 1/2011, available in Romanian at: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/125150>

<sup>802</sup> The National strategy for lifelong learning 2015–20; the Strategy for VET 2016–20; the National strategy for tertiary education 2015–20; the National sustainable development strategy (for links to these documents, please see section Policy objectives above).

<sup>803</sup> Council of the European Union (2017). Council recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 189, 15.6.2017, pp. 15–27. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_.2017.189.01.0015.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2017:189:TOC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2017.189.01.0015.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2017:189:TOC)

<sup>804</sup> Cedefop (2015). *Survey on the sustainability and visibility of NQFs* (unpublished).

<sup>805</sup> Order of the Ministry of Education No 3973/2014, available in Romanian at: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/160559>



the ROQF. An amendment to the 2013 government decision on approval of the NQF was published in July 2015<sup>806</sup>. Its aim is to clarify correspondence between the NQF/EQF levels, qualifications issued and the type of education and training programmes that lead to qualifications at each level, as well as access requirements for each NQF level. The legal base was further amended in 2018<sup>807</sup>, stipulating that, as of 1 January 2019, all qualifications and qualification supplements, as well as all qualification databases, are to contain a clear reference to the corresponding NQF level. Other existing regulations refer to the inclusion of NQF levels on qualification documents in the different sectors<sup>808</sup>, though information about the number of qualifications that already specify the NQF/EQF levels is not yet available (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The sectors that were given priority in implementing the NQF were general education, higher education and VET. The establishment of a national register of qualifications in higher education was decided in 2011<sup>809</sup>; this covers qualifications from higher education at ROQF levels 6, 7 and 8. The methodology for placing higher education qualifications in the register, amended in 2014 and 2017, is based on a two-step procedure: validation and registration of qualifications. Starting in 2018, it is mandatory for registered qualifications to be described in terms of learning outcomes and to be related to at least one representative occupation from the Romanian classification of occupations. This aims to ensure the links between skills and learning outcomes acquired in education and competences on the labour market. The VET focus has been on developing training standards in line with occupational standards and labour market needs, and the procedure for their approval. The national register of professional qualifications in education, comprising qualifications from IVET, was

approved by a ministerial order in January 2018<sup>810</sup> and subsequently incorporated into the national register of professional qualifications, approved by Government Decision No 917/2018. The register shall comprise all nationally recognised qualifications corresponding to the NQF levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, obtained in education and vocational training, in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, including adult education.

The two main registers (national register of professional qualifications and national register of qualifications in higher education) are to be brought together under the umbrella of the national qualifications register<sup>811</sup>.

The framework is made visible to potential stakeholders through a variety of actions carried out by the NQA. Information campaigns using media channels (radio and TV) aim to improve awareness among the general public. The EU-funded project *National Europass Centre + EQF NCP 2018–20*, implemented by the NQA, aims to raise awareness with respect to the EQF/NQF among representatives of social partners, public employment services, education providers, quality assurance bodies and other public authorities through meetings, conferences and workshops discussing the developments related to the NQF and the use of learning outcomes. Currently prioritised target groups are higher education and the low-skilled.

As the referencing of the ROQF has been recently finalised, evaluation will be approached at a later stage. Currently, the framework is thought to have an increasing impact on promoting the use of learning outcomes; on the review and quality of qualifications through the use of learning outcomes in designing curricula and in qualification, occupational and training standards; and on facilitating contact between education sectors and increasing cooperation between sectors and between stakeholders (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Referencing to regional frameworks

A draft referencing report (Romanian Ministry of Education and NQA, 2014) was presented in June 2014. Following comments from the EQF advisory group and revision of the EQF recommendation

<sup>806</sup> Government Decision No 567/2015, available in Romanian at: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/170190>

<sup>807</sup> Government Decision No 132/2018, available in Romanian at: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/199134>

<sup>808</sup> Order No 3844/2016 approving the regulations on the status of study diplomas for secondary education; methodological norm of 8.5.2003 for enforcing the provisions of Government Ordinance No 129/2000 regarding adult learning, further amended and supplemented; Government Decision No 728/2016 approving the content and format of the study documents to be issued for 2nd cycle graduates – masters, and 1st and 2nd cycle combined graduates; Order No 3742/2016 on approving the template of the Europass supplements.

<sup>809</sup> Order of the Minister of National Education No 5703/2011, replaced by Order No 5204/2014. The register in its current form is available at: <http://site.anc.edu.ro/registru-national-al-calificarilor-din-invatamantul-superior-ncis/>

<sup>810</sup> Order No 3023/2018 regarding the verification of training standards and their entry into the national register of professional qualifications in education.

<sup>811</sup> The Government Decision regarding the national qualifications register and all its components is currently pending approval.

in 2017<sup>812</sup>, a revised referencing report (Romanian Ministry of Education NQA, 2018) was presented and approved in the EQF advisory group in April 2018. One focus in the revised report was referencing criterion 4 on the procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the NQF. The next revision of the referencing report is foreseen for 2022.

### Important lessons and future plans

Romania has focused in recent years on updating the legal base of the ROQF, developing qualification databases, clarifying procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the framework and updating methodologies. Efforts were mostly driven by the 2017 Council recommendation on the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning, and the aim of finalising referencing the ROQF to the EQF.

One key challenge to ROQF implementation so far has been the introduction of the learning outcomes approach in all sectors of education and training, which is now seen as imperative and a point of action for the future (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). Increasing efforts have been made in this regard to raise awareness about and understanding of the use and writing of learning outcomes.

A national register of qualifications in higher education has become operational. In November 2018 the national register of professional qualifications was approved by Government Decision No 917/2018, intended to include all nationally recognised qualifications linked to NQF levels 1 to 5, regardless of how they are acquired.

The approval and implementation of a national register of qualifications (RNC), aimed to bring together these two main registers, is currently pending.

It is essential to have good cooperation between different stakeholders and structures. Merging the National Council for Adult Training and the Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education into a single body, the National Qualifications Authority, responsible for the development and implementation of a comprehensive NQF, was an important step in supporting more coherent approaches. The NQA is also responsible for coordinating the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning; in 2018 it was appointed National Europass Centre. Increasing contact and enhanced cooperation between different stakeholders, supported by NQF-related projects, has also been observed.

Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning was an important driver of NQF development in Romania. Progress has been made over recent years, though it is limited to qualifications up to ROQF level 3.

The need to respond to changing labour market demands, to tackle the mismatch between the education offer and the labour market demand, and to encourage mobility across Europe are seen as opportunities for the future implementation and promotion of the ROQF. However, more information on concrete future plans and strategies for implementation of the framework are needed.

**Table 69. Romanian national qualifications framework (ROQF)**

ROQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctoral degree ( <i>Diploma de doctor</i> ) (third cycle of higher education) Certificate for postdoctoral studies ( <i>Atestat de studii postdoctorale</i> ) (postdoctoral studies)	8
7	Master degree ( <i>Diploma de master</i> ) and Diploma supplement (second cycle of higher education) Bachelor degree/Architect diploma ( <i>Diploma de licenta/Diploma de architect</i> ) and Diploma supplement (first and second cycle combined higher education study programmes)	7
6	Bachelor degree/Engineering diploma/Urbanism diploma ( <i>Diploma de licenta/Diploma de inginer/Diploma de urbanist</i> ) and Diploma supplement (first cycle of higher education) Certificate of professional* competence ( <i>Certificat de atestare a competentelor profesionale</i> ) (postgraduate university studies) Graduation certificate ( <i>Certificat de absolvire</i> ) (postgraduate university studies)	6

<sup>812</sup> See Footnote 804.

**Table 69. Romanian national qualifications framework (ROQF) (Continued)**

ROQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
5	Short cycle higher education certificate ( <i>Diploma de absolvire/calificare</i> ) and Certificate supplement (short cycle higher education) Post-secondary certificate ( <i>Certificat de calificare</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (post-secondary non-higher tertiary education)	5
4	Upper secondary school leaving certificate ( <i>Diploma de Bacalaureat</i> ) (general, technological or vocational education, four years of study) VET certificate level 4 ( <i>Certificat de calificare</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (technological/vocational high-school) VET certificate level 4/Qualification/Graduation certificate ( <i>Certificat de calificare/absolvire</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/training programme) VET certificate level 4/Qualification certificate ( <i>Certificat de calificare</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/apprenticeship programmes in the workplace)	4
3	VET certificate level 3/Qualification certificate ( <i>Certificat de calificare</i> ) and Descriptive Supplement (authorised training provider/apprenticeship programmes in the workplace) VET certificate level 3/Qualification certificate/Certificate of professional* competence ( <i>Certificat de calificare/Certificat de competente profesionale</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (accredited training centre) VET certificate level 3/Certificate of professional* competence ( <i>Certificat de competente profesionale</i> ) (authorised assessment centre) VET certificate level 3/Qualification/Graduation certificate ( <i>Certificat de calificare/absolvire</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/training programme) VET certificate level 3/Qualification certificate ( <i>Certificat de calificare</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (education unit/technological/vocational high school) VET certificate level 3/Qualification certificate ( <i>Certificat de calificare</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (education unit/vocational training programme organised in dual system) VET certificate level 3/Qualification certificate ( <i>Certificat de calificare</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (education unit/professional* education lasting at least three years)	3
2	VET certificate level 2/Qualification certificate ( <i>Certificat de calificare</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/apprenticeship programmes in the workplace) VET certificate level 2/Qualification certificate/Certificate of professional* competence ( <i>Certificat de calificare/Certificat de competente profesionale</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (accredited training centre) VET certificate level 2/Certificate of professional* competence ( <i>Certificat de competente profesionale</i> ) (authorised assessment centre) VET certificate level 2/Qualification/Graduation certificate ( <i>Certificat de calificare/absolvire</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/training programme)	2
1	Certificate of professional* competence ( <i>Certificat de competente profesionale</i> ) (authorised assessment centre) Graduation certificate ( <i>Certificat de absolvire</i> ) and Descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/training programme) Graduation Diploma ( <i>Diploma de absolvire</i> ) (basic education unit), eight years	1

*Notes:* The term 'VET' generically includes both the vocational and technological education and training (TVET) routes available in the national education system, offering qualifications at EQF levels 2–5, and the education and training offered by training providers in contexts other than the formal education system, for adult learning, also for qualification at EQF levels 2–5, preparing learners for occupations and the labour market. (\*) The term 'professional' denotes vocational and technological training aimed at the labour market.

*Source:* Romanian Ministry of Education; NQA (2018). Order No 5039/2126/2018 of the Ministry of Education, regarding the approval of the correlation between the NQF levels, study/qualification documents issued, the type of education and vocational training programme in Romania through which qualification levels can be obtained, the EQF levels and the access requirements for each qualification level.

**Abbreviations**

CVET	continuing vocational education and training	NQA	National Qualifications Authority (Autoritatea Nationala pentru Calificari – ANC)
EQF	European qualifications framework	NQF	national qualifications framework
EQF NCP	national coordination point for the EQF	ROQF	Romanian national qualifications framework
IVET	initial vocational education and training	VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

National Qualifications Authority (*Autoritatea Nationala pentru Calificari* – ANC) – the EQF NCP:  
[www.anc.edu.ro](http://www.anc.edu.ro)

National register of qualifications in higher education: <http://site.anc.edu.ro/registru-national/>

National register of professional qualifications: <http://site.anc.edu.ro/rncpe/>

Romanian Ministry of Education; NQA (2018). *Referencing the Romanian qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework* (unpublished).

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**Prepared by:**

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## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

There is no separate law or decree on a national qualifications framework (NQF), but the Federal Law N236-Φ3 of 3 December 2012 set out definitions of qualifications and occupational standards in the labour code and in the Law on Technical Regulation. The NQF comprises nine levels. The lead institution is the National Qualifications Council.

Russia is a member of the Bologna Process in higher education, joining in 2003 and so bound to implement the qualifications framework for the European higher education area.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Russia has a population of circa 144 million. Population ageing is a major challenge for employers and society. In 2013, its working-age element was calculated at 68 million, or 60% of the total. This is predicted to fall as low as 56% by 2030. Motivated by these demographic pressures, the governments seek to intensify productivity through better training and maximising technology. Migration is also increasing.

In 2018, Russia's unemployment level was estimated at 5.2%. The rate of youth unemployment is higher, as is the case in most European countries. Young graduates have problems finding jobs; the unemployment rate for 15–25 year-olds in 2018 was 14.8%.

According to the new Law on Education in the Russian Federation, vocational education and training (VET) refers to the sector of secondary VET, which trains both skilled workers (initial VET programmes) and middle-level specialists (secondary VET programmes). Hence, secondary VET implements programmes leading to workers' qualifications (level 3) and to qualifications of mid-level specialists (equivalent to EQF levels 4 and 5).

The public VET sector comprises around 2 995 public and 283 private VET institutions.

In addition VET programmes are implemented in a number of public universities (around 474). Universities amount to over 818, of which 502 are public and 316 private. About 87% of secondary school graduates opt for higher education. As in many countries, VET still suffers from negative stereotyping, as parents drive their children to compete for places in higher education, resulting in too many higher education graduates and a shortage of VET-qualified people. Key mismatches are observed in a number of rapidly-developing and innovation-based sectors. According to estimates, by 2020 Russia would need 25 million highly productive professionals to fill new jobs.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

Given globalisation, rapid technological change and the country's negative demographic trends, there is an urgent need to put in place a comprehensive system of continuing upskilling and recognition and validation of skills acquired outside formal education and training. The NQF is intended, with other measures, to address these challenges.

In particular, it should:

- a. identify changing skills and qualifications requirements and respond to them;
- b. develop an up-to-date classification of labour market occupations (the respective register has been approved by the Labour Ministry) and of qualifications, that are based on learning outcomes/competences;
- c. ensure transparency of qualifications for all target groups: students, education policy-makers, education establishments, the workforce and employers;
- d. ensure permeability between – or greater equality of – educational subsystems (such as vocational and academic education);
- e. serve as a basis for the validation of competences and qualifications, both of formal and non-formal education.

### **International cooperation**

The country's NQF is influenced by the European qualifications framework (EQF) and by the Bologna Process, of which it is a member. Russia's office for recognition or ENIC (European Network of Information Centres in the European Region) is the Main State Centre for Education Evaluation. Recognition of foreign education awards/diplomas/degrees and/or foreign qualifications in Russia is regulated by Federal law.

## **Levels and use of learning outcomes**

### **NQF scope and structure**

The regulation on an NQF has been approved by the Federal Labour Ministry under the title 'The levels of qualifications to use in developing occupational standards'. The levels are also used to develop occupational qualifications (Order of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection No 148n of 12 April 2013).

### **Alignment to other classification systems**

Through Tempus projects and at the initiative of the sector qualifications councils, regional and sectoral qualifications frameworks have been developed in a range of industries, including food, environment, land management, IT and management. Examples include a regional qualifications system for the Chelyabinsk region and sectoral qualifications frameworks in the railroads sector and welding. More sectoral qualifications frameworks are in the making, including in the commerce, hospitality and tourism sectors, jointly developed by sector employers and VET colleges.

Opportunities for recognition of non-formal learning have acquired legitimisation in the form of a law.

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

There are nine levels in the NQF legal act (the ninth level covers postdoctoral qualifications) and its descriptors are largely in line with those of the EQF. The framework is based on the following descriptors: responsibility (which correlates with the autonomy and responsibility parameter of the EQF), skills and knowledge. While this system shares some characteristics of an NQF, it differs from prevailing conceptions of NQFs in a number of ways: it has been developed without strong stakeholder participation; it has not undergone open public review processes; and it is not supported by a typology of qualifications and by a register of qualifications for all sectors.

Moreover, the newly formed register of qualifications refers only to occupational qualifications that are not related to education qualifications. Additionally, the descriptors

include the parameters 'ways of attaining the level of qualification' and 'duration of formal education programmes', that limit attainment of qualifications to formal education pathways – which is contradictory to a lifelong learning philosophy. Hence, even when provision is made to recognise practical experience, it contradicts the other parameters in the descriptors.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

New qualifications are generally outcomes-based as they are derived from competences. However, this is not an explicit legal requirement.

### **Definition of qualification**

Definitions for qualifications appear in the following regulations:

- a. the labour code: 'Qualification of worker is the level of his/her knowledge, skills and work experience.'
- b. the Federal Law N273-Φ3 on education in the Russian Federation (of 29 December 2012): 'The level of knowledge, skills and competency, characterising readiness to perform a certain type of occupational activity.'

### **Access, progression and credit**

Access to qualifications is stipulated in the constitution and the Law on Education as access to education. Access to qualifications can be acquired via compulsory vocational education programmes of secondary education (qualifications of workers and qualifications of the middle-level specialists) and programmes of higher education. Progression from level to level is traditionally consecutive. Progression to a higher level is allowed only if the lower level qualification has been achieved and is confirmed by a respective document, such as an appropriate certificate or diploma.

Article 10 of Federal Law N273-Φ3 on education allows candidates who have acquired skills non-formally, or who have completed a non-accredited study programme, to sit intermediate and final State exams at an education institution that has public accreditation, so that they can progress to higher levels of qualification.

## **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

### **NQF legal basis**

There is yet no NQF law or decree but the Federal Law N236-Φ3 of 3 December 2012 set out definitions of qualifications and occupational standards in the labour code and in the Law on Technical Regulation.

Legislation on establishing the National Council for Qualifications (Presidential Decree No 249 of 16 April 2014) and the Law on Independent Assessment of Qualifications are also relevant.

### **Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF**

Overall responsibility for coordinating Russia's NQF development, including supervision of the development of occupational standards, lies with the National Qualifications Council, which was established as an autonomous agency in April 2014. Another actor in this area is the National Agency for Qualifications Development that currently acts on behalf of the National Qualifications Council.

Agencies, ministries and official bodies engaged in NQF development are the National Qualifications Council, sector qualifications councils, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the two ministries responsible for education (the Ministry of Education, in charge of all sectors of education with the exception of higher education, and the Ministry of Education and Science), employer associations and professional bodies.

In 2012, the development of occupational standards was entrusted to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. The ministry approved the template for occupational standards development, a methodology for filling out the template, and a structure of qualifications (description of qualifications linked to educational attainment).

Under the Law on Independent Assessment of Qualifications, a system of assessment centres is being established, affiliated to the sector qualifications. Its activities are coordinated by the National Qualifications Council and supervised by the National Qualifications Development Agency. The latter runs a register of independent assessment of qualifications, as well as a database of results of independent assessment. The register of qualifications holds over 1 300 occupational qualifications for specialists with a higher education and secondary vocational education. Over 200 examination centres have been opened in Russia's regions.

### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

The initial impetus to establish the NQF came from the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, which established the National Qualifications Development Agency (NARK) in 2007.

The National Council for Occupational Qualifications was established by Presidential Decree. It is a consultative and coordinating body set up to support development of a system of

occupational qualifications. The establishment of this umbrella high-level body is intended to contribute to overcoming the fragmentation of earlier efforts and will inject a systemic character to the development of up-to-date qualifications in Russia. The Council initially approved five working groups: on the development of sector qualifications (a prototype of sector skills councils), on occupational standards development, on application of occupational standards in the system of education and training, on independent assessment of qualifications, and on analysis of best practices. Later, the groups on the development of sector qualifications and on occupational standards development merged.

These developments have contributed to progress in occupational standards, new qualifications, and sectoral qualifications frameworks. This will ultimately result in the development of a fully fledged NQF and the national system of qualifications, embracing institutional (sector qualifications councils/sector bodies), methodological (occupational standards), quality and assurance (sector bodies that coordinate assessment, validation and recognition of occupational qualifications) mechanisms.

Parallel to the above, a methodology has been developed to aid linking occupational standards, qualifications standards and education and training standards.

### **Resources and funding**

The National Qualifications Council and the sector qualifications councils are self-funded; the system of independent assessment of qualifications is supported by federal grants in its initial stage but is to be self-funded later.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

Quality in education is defined by the Law on Education. Providers and other actors must comply with the Federal State education standards. Measures include licensing, accreditation and final assessment of learners. The Federal Service for Supervision in Education (affiliated with the Russian Federation government) monitors compliance with the established procedures.

In VET and higher education, industry and employers and sectoral associations accredit programmes in terms of their labour market relevance. The aim is to determine whether VET and higher education programmes are linked to occupational requirements, including occupational standards.

Russia is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Paragraph 7, Article 10 of Federal Law N273-Φ3 on education in the Russian Federation, dated 29 December 2012, states that those who complete a study programme in the format of self-education or family education, or who have completed a study programme that lacked State accreditation, have the right to sit intermediate and final State exams at an education institution that has public accreditation, and so to progress along the chosen learning path.

Since 2016, under the Law on Independent Assessment of Qualifications, validation has been available for candidates seeking certification for vocational qualifications. These qualifications are based on occupational standards. Sector councils, employer-led, manage these assessment processes.

### NQF implementation

#### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

The national register and database are being finalised.

#### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of NQF implementation have not yet been defined.

#### Impact for end-users

Pre-requisites for the NQF are in place, the tools and instruments available allow recognition of non-formal learning and validation of competences in the interests of learners, workers and employers.

### Referencing to regional frameworks

Russia is a member of the Bologna Process in higher education, joining in 2003 and so bound to

implement the qualifications framework for the European higher education area. The adopted three-cycle structure of qualifications is in line with the Dublin descriptors.

### Important lessons and future plans

The NQF has been propelled forward by employers to a greater extent than most countries' NQFs, which are usually State-directed. Development of occupational standards is prolific. Russia enjoys the advantage of advanced industry and big employers who can engage with education and training actors.

The National Qualifications Council has coordinated development of occupational standards in all major occupational areas (over 1 200 approved to date), which provide the basis for qualifications standards and occupational qualifications, activities of sector skills councils (31 to date), and of the independent system of assessing competences and qualifications.

Outcomes approaches to defining qualifications and curricula remain partial in implementation.

#### Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

#### Prepared by:

The European Training Foundation (ETF).



# SAUDI ARABIA

## Introduction

The Saudi Arabia qualifications framework (SAQF) was developed to contribute to the reform of education and training in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and to standardize the recognition of all national registered qualifications within the country.

It is now in its last phase of official approvals from the Board of Directors of the Education and Training Evaluation Commission as per the resolution of the Council of Ministers. The Education and Training Evaluation Commission is part of a transformative executive mechanism that aims at raising the quality of education and training to competitive world-class levels. The two key objectives of the Commission are to:

- improve the quality and efficiency of education;
- support the national economy and its development by improving education outcomes.

The introduction of the SAQF into the education and training system began in 2018 as a single comprehensive and national system for registering qualifications in Saudi Arabia, which encompasses higher education, technical vocational education and training (TVET), and general education.

The development of the SAQF will contribute to the paradigm shift for the national education and training system and has been designed as an important instrument to contribute to the broader KSA's socio-economic needs aligned with the wider Vision 2030.

The National Vision 2030 will drive the diversification of the economy to where it will not only rely on the oil industry. Achievement of such an economic transformation requires deliberate planning and careful implementation of a development programme with clearly defined objectives, which include: 'We will also redouble efforts to ensure that the outcomes of our education system are in line with market needs' (KSA, 2016).

The availability of a qualified, highly efficient and productive national workforce is an essential

condition for achieving sustainable development and progress. KSA's human resource indicators already point to remarkable progress during the last two decades through expansion of education and training capacities in all regions. Nevertheless, reform is now required to make it more relevant to a more diversified economy and to increase the contribution of the national workforce.

The SAQF is designed to promote confidence, value and validity in relation to all qualifications available throughout Saudi Arabia. It has been developed as a response to the needs of the different sectors of education, training, and employers (public and private). It is also part of the context of shaping the educational and training qualifications system encompassing all kinds of learning. The SAQF promotes mechanisms for the recognition of all types of learning and facilitates progression between the technical, vocational, academic, and training sectors.

## Policy objectives

The SAQF's main objectives are to:

1. support raising the quality of Saudi qualifications for all citizens;
2. standardize qualification design and the development process in the education and training sector;
3. set national levels for qualifications to enable classification and placement, using level descriptors based upon learning outcomes defined by knowledge, skills, and competences;
4. use national levels to classify similar qualifications through standardized regulations to facilitate practical application;
5. build an integrated national framework for all education and training qualifications within the country;
6. set unified standards for the registration of Saudi Awarding Bodies that ensures quality and comprehensiveness of the qualification design;
7. articulate a common language to ensure transparency and comprehension;

8. enable comparison of different types of education and training qualifications in the country, aligning them with each other to ensure consistency and accuracy;
9. align the SAQF with other international frameworks;
10. develop flexible educational, training and employment progression routes by facilitating enrolment, progression, and transferability.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

Table 70 illustrates how existing qualification types are aligned to the SAQF architecture.

All qualifications within the SAQF have an achievement level assigned to them. There are 10 levels of achievement, from level 1 (lowest) to level 10 (highest). The 10 SAQF levels provide an indication of the complexity of qualifications and their components. Each level has its own generic 'level descriptor'. The level descriptors reflect the increase in learning demand through

the domains of knowledge, skill, and competence required to demonstrate achievement. The level of a qualification is informed by the SAQF level descriptors and, where appropriate, national occupational and skills standards or other sector and professional benchmarks.

The SAQF level descriptors are designed to act as a generic guide and tool for:

- writing learning outcomes and associated performance criteria for qualifications and their components;
- setting a qualification at an appropriate level on the SAQF, alongside purpose statements, learning outcomes and performance criteria;
- making comparisons across qualifications.

The SAQF contributes, as a tool, to the needs of the labour market by encouraging the development of qualifications that validate relevant learning outcomes suitable for the qualification.

**Table 70. Alignment of qualifications to the Saudi Arabia qualifications framework (SAQF) architecture**

	LEVEL	GENERAL EDUCATION	TECHNICAL, VOCATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL TRAINING (INCLUDING OCCUPATIONAL LEARNING)	HIGHER EDUCATION	PROFESSIONAL TRAINING
<b>Post-secondary levels</b>	10			PhD	<b>Professional development</b>
	9		Technical Master's degree	Master's degree	
	8			Higher diploma	
	7		Technical Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	
	6		Diploma	Diploma / Associate degree	
	5		Associate diploma	Associate diploma / Higher education certificate	
	4		Certificate 4		
<b>General education</b>	3	General education certificate	Certificate 3		
	2	Intermediate education certificate	Certificate 2		
	1	Elementary education certificate	Certificate 1		

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The SAQF is a national project and is being developed with support and input from multiple stakeholders across the education and training landscape and engagement from employers.

The SAQF will improve the extent to which all stakeholders are informed about national qualifications and their comparability. This transparency of qualifications improves the relationship between education, training, employers and the labour market, while supporting opportunities for individuals to move between SAQF levels and education and training sectors in support of lifelong learning.

The SAQF was developed through engagement with 91 different organizations from across the public and private sectors and with support from six ministries. The SAQF is in continuous development with the organization so far of more than 200 meetings, workshops, and seminars. In 2018, 31 capacity-building workshops were given to 933 individuals representing 41 educational and training institutions in Saudi Arabia.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The SAQF will unify all school, workplace, community, training providers, colleges and university qualifications into a single system. It is designed to clarify entry and exit points and routes for progression within and across all sectors. It is also designed to provide transparent opportunity for credit transfer between sectors.

The scope and range of the SAQF encompasses the three main public education sectors:

- general education;
- vocational education and training (including the training schemes of employers);
- higher education.

Over time, the SAQF will extend recognition to different types of formal, non-formal and informal learning, which will underpin the notion of lifelong learning and support the development of recognition of prior learning from many different contexts.

## NQF implementation<sup>813</sup>

The implementation of the SAQF has been undertaken in the following key project phases:

- phase 1: capacity-building: encompassing extensive training for organizations and individuals;
- phase 2: listing: invitation to all organizations in the education and training sector to record and list their qualifications for the purpose of data collection;
- phase 3: governance: the operational guide in association with SAQF governance;
- phase 4: official implementation: the use of tools, standards, systems and process required for new qualification design and existing developed qualifications.

IT solutions have been developed to facilitate the registration of Awarding Bodies and qualifications. The Saudi institutions will develop new qualifications which will be submitted for recognition on the Saudi Arabia national qualifications framework (NQF). The system allows organizations to formally log, assign and track these submissions from 'application' stage through to 'approval'. This process is entirely internal. Additionally, there is a requirement for the information to be made publicly accessible when a qualification level has been approved and the qualifications are made available on the NQF. In 2018, 20 entities applied for registration as Awarding Bodies, and 17 accredited universities were also registered with a total of 37 organizations recognized by the SAQF as Awarding Bodies in Saudi Arabia.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The SAQF has been designed in consideration with other regional frameworks within the region and internationally.

The priorities for referencing the SAQF will be based on regional recognition and the flux of migrant workers against the needs of the labour market to align with the creditability of foreign qualifications that will support KSA's key socio-economic drivers.

## Important lessons and future plans

The SAQF will become a significant tool of the education and training system that will support

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<sup>813</sup> Key criteria and indicators for stages of NQF implementation to be further elaborated.

the labour market and socio-economic needs of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, its successful integration cannot be achieved in a vacuum. As an educational reform mechanism, the SAQF will support and be aligned to other government policies, practices and projects, which requires full stakeholder involvement and engagement.

**Abbreviations**

KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
NQF	national qualifications framework
SAQF	Saudi Arabia qualifications framework

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**Prepared by:**

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

# SERBIA

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The Law on the National Qualifications Framework was adopted on 5 April 2018 and published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia on 6 April 2018. The national qualifications framework of Serbia (NQFS) has eight levels and four sublevels. The NQFS Law defines four qualification types:

1. general – basic education and secondary education,
2. vocational education and adult education,
3. academic – higher education,
4. vocational – higher education.

The Law on Adult Education provides opportunities to acquire parts of qualifications, but Serbia does not have partial qualifications (there are no qualifications called ‘partial qualifications’).

The NQFS Law establishes an NQF Council and a dedicated Qualifications Agency for the first time.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Serbia’s aging population continues to decrease, from 7.64 million in 2002 to 7.06 million in 2016, at which point the proportion of the population under the age of 15 was 14.4%, while the proportion aged 65 or older reached 19.2%, resulting in a high old-age dependency ratio.

The country’s GDP grew by 2.8% in 2016 and the policy focus is shifting to structural reforms to remove bottlenecks to economic growth, including stimulating private sector-led job creation and improving skills. The 2017 World Bank Doing Business report also recognises progress, with Serbia ranking 47<sup>th</sup> among 190 countries, up from 54<sup>th</sup> in 2016 and 91<sup>st</sup> in 2015.

After losing 400 000 jobs between 2008 and 2014, the labour market built on very strong performance in 2016 with further improvements in 2017, with employment increasing by an additional 119 400 from Q2-2016 to Q2-2017, 90% of which in formal

employment. Overall, the unemployment rate continues to fall, to 11.8% in Q2-2017, down 3.4 percentage points year-over-year and half the 23.9% recorded in 2012. Reports of skills shortages on a sectoral basis mean that the support of the European Training Foundation (ETF) on qualifications, work-based learning and governance to better match education and training/skills supply with labour market demand is increasingly relevant and needed in the country. This is also reflected in the increased focus on the development of a national qualifications framework (NQF) and dual education in the country.

The proportion of young people aged 15–24 who are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) has been dropping in recent years but remains relatively high (15.3% in Q2-2017), decreasing by 1.9% relative to the same period in 2016. In 2016 employment increased exclusively among persons with primary and secondary education completed, while the number of employed people with tertiary education decreased, indicating skills mismatch problems.

The IPA II sectoral budget support will provide EUR 24 million to support education reform in Serbia from 2017 to 2020. The relevant targets for ETF support are related to the NQF development and teacher training and continuing professional development but the sectoral budget support may be provided to any reform, including, for example, the highly prioritised dual education reform.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

The Employment and Social Reform Programme in the Process of Accession to the European Union (ESRP Serbia, 2016)<sup>814</sup> identifies main challenges in the areas of labour market and employment, human capital and skills, social inclusion and social protection. The Employment and Social Reform

<sup>814</sup> <http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/SIPRU-ESRP-2016-English.pdf>

Programme builds on various strategic documents such as the National Employment Strategy 2011–2020, the Strategy and Policy of the Industrial Development of the Republic of Serbia 2011–2020, and the Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2012–2020.

The main objectives set forth by the Strategy for Education Development are:

1. increasing the quality of the process and outcomes of education to the maximum attainable level – arising from scientific knowledge on education and respectable educational practice;
2. increasing the coverage of population of Serbia on all educational levels, from preschool education to lifelong learning;
3. achieving and maintaining the relevance of education, particularly education that is fully or partially funded by public sources, by aligning the educational system structure with immediate and developmental needs of individuals and economic, social, cultural, media, research, educational, public, administrative and other systems;
4. increasing the efficiency of the use of all the education resources, i.e. completion rate within the stipulated period, with minimum extended duration and reduced dropout rates.

The Action Plan<sup>815</sup> for the Implementation of the Strategy for Education Development in Serbia was adopted in 2015. It describes individual activities (actions) defined by objectives and priorities of the strategy and the method of their implementation, deadlines, key actors and facilitators, including the monitoring tools and performance indicators.

A progress report<sup>816</sup> (2018) of the Action Plan defines the adoption of the NQFS Law as one of the most important measures for improvement of the relevance of education in the country. The main goals of the NQFS are the development of qualification standards based on the needs of the labour market and the society as a whole as well as ensuring that the entire education is oriented on learning outcomes, building the competences which are defined by the standard of a given qualification, as well as the affirmation of the importance of key, general and inter-curricular

competences for lifelong learning. The progress report describes the sectoral councils provided for in the NQFS Law, as an important tool for ensuring the relevance of qualifications on the labour market. The sectoral councils, expert and advisory bodies will be established in the form of partnerships. Their main function is to determine the demand for qualifications on the labour market in the country, through dialogue and direct cooperation between the representatives of the labour and education domains. This cooperation is facilitated by the composition of such councils.

Establishment of the NQFS Council and the Qualifications Agency were among the government priorities for 2018.

### **International cooperation**

Serbia is an EU candidate country. It receives financial assistance from the EU via IPA (Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance). IPA II funds have provided sector budget support, following the sector reform contract, since 2017. The sector reform contract focus is on NQF development, teacher training, Roma and minority language education.

Serbia also adopted the Riga 2015 conclusions on a new set of medium-term deliverables (MTD) in VET for the period 2015–20 (Riga is a follow-up of the Bruges Process). MTD 3 is related to the NQF: 'Enhance access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.'

The arrangements for recognition of foreign qualifications are in transition due to new regulations in the NQFS Law, adopted in April 2018.

The ENIC-NARIC centre Serbia is currently a unit of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development. ENIC-NARIC Serbia operates in the area of higher education recognition of foreign qualifications only (academic and professional recognition).

With the implementation of the NQFS Law, ENIC-NARIC will become a department of the new Qualifications Agency (to be established). The law distinguishes recognition of foreign school documents and professional recognition of foreign higher education; both procedures shall be conducted by the ENIC-NARIC centre, as a department of the Agency.

<sup>815</sup> [www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Akcioni\\_plan.pdf](http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Akcioni_plan.pdf)

<sup>816</sup> [www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/AP-SROS-IZVESTAJ-15jun-Eng.pdf](http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/AP-SROS-IZVESTAJ-15jun-Eng.pdf)

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### NQF scope and structure

According to the NQFS website<sup>817</sup>:

- The NQFS is an instrument for identifying, creating and classifying qualifications, in accordance with the demands of the labour market, continual learning, science and society in general.
- The NQFS defines processes and institutions (bodies, organisations) responsible for defining qualifications and qualification standards, methods and conditions for acquiring, comparing and recognition of qualifications, along with other mechanisms for quality assurance.
- The NQFS contributes to the improvement of the national educational system and to the overall reform processes. The main purpose of improving the educational system is the education of competent individuals who will be able to respond to the requirements of the labour market, society, economy, and to meet their own needs in an adequate and professional manner.
- The NQFS is an integral part of the European integration process and Chapter 26 'Education and culture', with the planned referencing to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and mobility of the workforce.

The NQFS Law defines the following NQF objectives:

1. ensuring that qualifications are comprehensive and transparent and that they are interconnected;
2. developing qualification standards that are based on the needs of the labour market and society as a whole;
3. ensuring the orientation of the whole education system towards learning outcomes;
4. improving access, flexibility of pathways and mobility in the formal and non-formal education system;
5. ensuring the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
6. affirming the importance of key, general and interdisciplinary competences for lifelong learning;
7. improving cooperation between relevant stakeholders or social partners;
8. ensuring the quality of the processes of developing and acquiring qualifications;
9. ensuring the comparability and recognition of qualifications acquired in Serbia with qualifications acquired in other countries.

<sup>817</sup> <http://hoks.mpn.gov.rs/en/>

The NQFS Law defines four qualification types:

1. general – basic education and secondary education,
2. vocational education and adult education,
3. academic – higher education,
4. vocational – higher education.

### Alignment to other classification systems

The NQF law foresees the establishment of a system for classification of qualifications – KLASNOKS, which is in line with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 13-F). By introducing KLASNOKS, a unique classification system of qualifications is established, regardless of the existing classification of educational profiles of pre-university and higher education. KLASNOKS shall be established by the minister in charge of education affairs.

### NQF levels and level descriptors

The NQFS has eight levels and four sublevels; levels 6 and 7 are each divided in two sublevels. The need for sublevels comes from a communication purpose of the NQF – to clarify that qualifications of different volumes are at the same NQF level, e.g. level 6.1 180 ECTS (European credit transfer and accumulation system), level 6.2 240 ECTS.

NQFS level descriptors have been defined in terms of learning outcomes and use the following domains: knowledge, skills and abilities and attitude. These terms are not further defined in the NQFS Law. The NQFS level descriptors are included in an annex of the law.

### Use of learning outcomes

The NQFS is based on qualification standards and learning outcomes. The description of learning outcomes is one of the elements of a qualification standard.

### Definition of qualification

The definition of qualification in the NQFS Law is as follows: 'A qualification is a formal recognition of acquired competences. An individual obtains the qualification when the authorised body determines that he has achieved the learning outcomes at a certain level and according to a given qualification standard, which is confirmed by a public document (diploma or certificate).'

### Qualification standards

A qualification standard is a document containing:

- a description of the objectives and learning outcomes of the qualification;
- data of the qualification which determines the NQFS level;

- data on the connection of the qualification with the occupational standard(s), which enables the integration of data from the education system and data from the labour market;
- a classification of the qualifications in KLASNOKS that is aligned with ISCED;
- an evaluation.

The qualification standard is the basis for the development of education programmes for acquiring qualifications at all levels of education. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology shall adopt a methodology for the development of qualification standards, on a proposal by the Qualifications Agency (to be established). Examples of current qualification standards can be found in the NQFS database on the NQFS website<sup>818</sup>. The database has 140 qualifications, of which 86 with the qualifications standard (August 2018). Entry of new qualification is ongoing.

### Development process of qualifications

Currently the Institute for the Improvement of Education (IIE) develops qualification standards for secondary vocational education as well as the formal vocational education programmes for qualification levels 1–5, based on the qualification standard. The Council for Vocational and Adult Education and Training evaluates and adopts new or reformed vocational education programmes.

Once the new institutional framework is operational, the Qualifications Agency will develop the qualification standards for all NQFS levels on a proposal by the sector council and will send them to the NQFS Council for evaluation and adoption. The employees and experts of the Institute for the Improvement of Education will be taken over by the Qualifications Agency.

A higher education institution (the proponent) develops the formal education programme for qualification levels 6–8 and sends it to the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (the University Senate or the Council for Vocational Colleges) for evaluation and adoption.

Publicly recognised adult education providers (JPOA) develop the adult non-formal education programme for qualifications up to level 5. JPOA programmes are based on qualification standards. Currently the qualification standards are developed by the Institute for the Improvement of Education. With the formation of the Qualifications Agency the qualification standards for JPOA programmes will be developed by the Agency.

<sup>818</sup> <http://hoks.mpn.gov.rs/en/>

### Access, progression and credit

The NQFS Law describes three ways of acquiring qualifications – through formal and non-formal education and through the process of recognition of prior learning. In non-formal education, vocational qualifications are acquired through different adult education activities of the JPOA, after which an appropriate public document or certificate is issued in accordance with the law governing adult education or other laws.

The Law on Adult Education defines recognition of prior learning (RPL) as one of the paths for acquisition of qualifications. The NQFS Law foresees RPL procedures, based on the standard of qualifications, for qualifications at NQF levels 1, 2, 3 and 5, and exceptionally, at NQF level 4.

The NQFS Law describes the conditions for acquiring qualifications at specific NQFS levels as follows:

- levels 2, 3 and 4: the condition for acquiring this level is to have previously achieved NQFS level 1;
- level 5: the condition for gaining this level is to have previously achieved NQFS level 3 or 4, and for acquiring through non-formal education of adults, to have previously achieved NQFS level 4;
- level 6.1: the condition for acquiring this level is to have previously achieved NQFS level 4 and passed the general, professional or artistic matura, in accordance with the laws regulating secondary education and higher education;
- level 6.2: the condition for acquiring this level is to have previously achieved NQFS level 4 and passed the general, professional or artistic matura, in accordance with the laws regulating secondary education and higher education;
- level 7.1: the condition for acquiring this level is to have previously achieved basic academic studies (OAS) volume of 240 ECTS, the master academic studies (MAS) volume of at least 120 ECTS (with previously achieved OAS volumes of 180 ECTS), or master vocational studies of at least 120 ECTS credits (with previously achieved basic vocational studies (OSS) scores of 180 ECTS credits);
- level 7.2: the condition for acquiring this level is to have previously achieved completed master academic studies (MAS);
- level 8: the condition for acquiring this level is to have previously achieved completed integrated academic or master academic studies.

The NQFS Law describes progression as one of the principles of the NQFS: 'Openness – different ways of acquiring qualifications and opportunities for horizontal and vertical progression in the qualifications



system including academic mobility.' Ways of progression are not further elaborated in the law.

The NQF Law mentions credits in terms of ECTS points for higher education programmes only. The descriptions of the qualifications in the NQFS database gives volume of qualifications in years for qualifications at levels 1–5 (in years or in hours) and in ECTS points for qualifications at levels 6–8. i.e. level 6.1 (180 ECTS).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

### Legal basis of NQF

The Law on the National Qualifications Framework (only in Serbian) was adopted by parliament in April 2018. The Law on Foundations of the Education System, the Law on High Education and the Law on Adult Education are coherent with the NQFS. The NQFS Law stipulates termination of other regulations to ensure consistency with related legal acts and regulations.

### Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The NQFS Law foresees the establishment of:

- an NQFS Council for strategic management of the NQFS development and implementation – the Council will be an advisory body that gives recommendations on planning and development of human capital in accordance with public policies in the field of lifelong learning, employment, career guidance and counselling;
- a Qualifications Agency that will perform administrative and technical tasks and expert support for the Council;
- sector councils whose main function is to define the need for qualifications in the labour market in the country.

### Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

#### NQFS Council

The NQFS Council will be an advisory body that provides recommendations on the process of planning and development of human resources in accordance with public policies in the field of lifelong learning, employment, career guidance and counselling. The NQFS Law describes the main competences of the Council as follows – the Council:

1. proposes qualification standards for all levels of the NQFS;
2. proposes to the government the establishment of sectoral councils for particular sectors of work or activities;

3. monitors the work of the sectoral councils and makes recommendations for the improvement of work based on regular reports on the work of the sectoral councils;
4. gives opinions to the minister responsible for education about the recommendations of the sectoral councils regarding the enrolment policy in secondary schools and higher education institutions;
5. makes recommendations on the process of planning and development of human resources in accordance with the strategic documents of Serbia;
6. makes recommendations on improving the relation between education and labour market needs;
7. gives opinions on standards for self-evaluation and external quality assurance of the JPOA;
8. performs other duties in accordance with the law.

### Qualifications Agency

The government established the Qualifications Agency in order to perform quality assurance and professional support to the NQFS Council and other competent organisations in all aspects of the development and implementation of the NQF. The Agency has the status of a legal entity. The NQFS Law describes the main competences of the Agency as follows – the Agency:

1. considers initiatives for the introduction of new qualifications;
2. provides expert support to the sector councils and prepares proposals for the qualification standard;
3. provides administrative and technical support to the work of the sectoral councils;
4. keeps the registry and takes care of the entry of data into the appropriate sub-registries;
5. classifies and encrypts qualifications according to KLASNOKS;
6. performs recognition of foreign school documents;
7. performs the procedure for recognition of a foreign higher education document for the purpose of employment (professional recognition), in accordance with this law and the law regulating higher education;
8. performs first validation of the foreign study programme in the procedure of point 7 of this paragraph, in accordance with this law and the law regulating higher education;
9. grants approval to organisations for obtaining the status of JPOA;
10. decides on the amount of the fee for the procedures of points 6, 7 and 9 of this paragraph;

11. keeps records of professional recognition in accordance with this law and the law regulating higher education;
12. exerts an external quality control of the JPOA, once during the five-year approval period;
13. at the request of the ministry responsible for education, issues a report on the fulfilment of requirements regarding the plan and programme of adult education activities, programme implementation and staffing;
14. prepares development projects, analysis and research relevant to the development of qualifications;
15. monitors and measures the effects of the implementation of (new) qualifications on employment and lifelong learning;
16. proposes measures for the improvement of quality assurance in the entire system;
17. performs other duties in accordance with this law.

### **Sector councils**

The NQFS Law describes the competences of the sector councils as follows – sector councils:

1. analyse the existing qualifications and determine the necessary qualifications in a particular sector;
2. identify the qualifications to be modernised;
3. identify qualifications that no longer meet the needs of the sector;
4. make a decision on the drafting of standards of qualifications within the sector;
5. give an opinion on the expected outcomes of knowledge and skills within the sector;
6. promote dialogue and direct cooperation between the world of work and education;
7. promote opportunities for education, training and employment within the sector;
8. identify opportunities for training adults within the sector;
9. consider the implications of the NQF on qualifications within the sector;
10. propose lists of qualifications by level and type that can be acquired by recognising prior learning;
11. perform other duties in accordance with this law.

Sector councils are based on the principle of social partnership. The government, on the proposal of the NQFS Council, establishes sector councils. The NQFS Law stipulates that members of the sector councils represent:

- the Chamber of Commerce and representative associations of employers from the relevant sector;
- professional chambers or associations;

- the Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education;
- University Conference and Conference of Academies and Higher Schools;
- the national employment services;
- the ministries responsible for education, employment and work activities and activities for which the sector council is established;
- communities of vocational schools;
- representative branch unions, the Institute for the Improvement of Education.

### **Resources and funding**

There are resources allocated in the national budget for NQF development but they are limited. However, as development of the NQF is one of the areas covered by the IPA II budget support programmes, relevant work should also get appropriate resources.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

The NQFS document (section 3) describes quality assurance arrangements for:

- a. identification of need for qualifications;
- b. development of the qualification standard;
- c. development of the education programme for a qualification;
- d. acquiring a qualification;
- e. monitoring and evaluation of the process of acquiring qualifications.

The NQFS Law describes quality assurance as 'managing the process of developing qualifications based on standards and learning outcomes, as well as the quality system in the process of acquiring and evaluating qualifications'. The law describes specific arrangements and procedures for:

- The qualification standard: a methodology for development of the qualification standard will be adopted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology on a proposal of the Qualifications Agency. In addition to the basic qualification data, the qualification standard will also contain data on the connection of the qualification with the occupational standard(s), which enables the integration of data from the education system and data from the labour market.
- Submitting an initiative to develop and adopt a qualification standard: any legal entity can in principle submit a proposal to develop a new qualification standard. An application form will be developed. The proposal is submitted to the Qualifications Agency, which assesses whether the proposed qualification standard is covered by an existing qualification standard in the register (if so the applicant will be notified). If the proposed qualification standard is not

covered by another qualification standard in the registry, the Agency will send the proposal to the relevant sector council for a recommendation.

On a positive recommendation by the sector council, the Agency will develop the proposed qualification standard. The qualification standard is the basis for the development of education programmes for acquiring qualifications at all levels of education.

- Drafting a new qualification standard: the sector council issues a decision to the Qualifications Agency to draft a new qualification standard (based on a documented proposal and recommendation). The Agency will draft the new qualification standard and submit it within 60 days to the NQF Council. On positive advice of the Council the minister responsible for education will adopt the new qualification standard for inclusion in the register.

The NQFS register consists of a national qualifications sub-register, a qualification standard sub-register and a sub-register of JPOA with employers with whom JPOA realise practical work. The national qualifications sub-register is established in order to manage qualification data, classified according to the level and type, in accordance with KLASNOKS. The qualification standard sub-register is established in order to manage the data on qualification standards. The JPOA sub-register is established in order to manage the data on JPOA. The register shall be kept by the Agency in electronic form. The data from the register are open and accessible through the official website of the Agency, which is bilingual (Serbian and English).

The Qualifications Agency enters qualifications in the national qualifications subsector of the register.

- General and vocational qualifications of NQFS levels 1 to 5, adopted by the minister responsible for education, are directly entered in the national qualifications subsector of the register.
- Academic and vocational qualifications of NQFS levels 6.1 to 8, accredited in accordance with the law governing higher education, are registered in the national qualifications subsector of the register for receiving accreditation notifications from the National Body for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

The Qualifications Agency is the body responsible for quality assurance of the NQF implementation.

Academic and vocational qualifications of NQFS levels 6.1 to 8 are accredited by the National Body for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher

Education, in accordance with the law governing higher education

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the Council for Vocational and Adult Education are responsible for the quality assurance of vocational qualifications.

The Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) is a member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since 2013.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Validation of informal and non-formal learning – including recognition of prior learning (RPL) – in the NQFS document is one of the paths for acquisition of qualifications. It is currently regulated by the Law on Adult Education. After completion of the RPL process, acquisition of the qualification is finalised by the award of a public certificate, which is equalised with the certificate of non-formal education that gives right to work (recognised on the labour market).

The NQFS Law foresees RPL procedures, based on the standard of qualifications, for qualifications at NQF levels 1, 2, 3 and 5, and exceptionally at NQF level 4. Operational details will be regulated in a bylaw.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology maintains an electronic database of qualifications, accessible on the NQFS website. By August 2018, 140 qualifications had been entered into this database, of which 86 with the qualifications standard. Entry of new qualification is ongoing. An NQFS register is planned.

### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

The NQFS Law stipulates:

- The minister responsible for education is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the NQF law.
- The NQFS Council monitors the work of the sectoral councils and makes recommendations for the improvement based on regular reports on the work of the sectoral councils.
- The Qualifications Agency monitors and measures the effects of the implementation of

(new) qualifications on employment and lifelong learning.

### **Impact for end-users**

The NQFS Law has been adopted and sets the conditions for establishing the institutional framework. The NQF Council and the Qualifications Agency have been founded by Government Decree and sector councils are in the process of formation. A qualifications database, accessible via the NQFS website, is under development. The database will form the basis of the NQFS register.

## **Referencing to regional frameworks**

Serbia is an EU candidate country and participates in the EQF Advisory Group. Referencing the NQFS to the EQF is foreseen in 2019.

## **Important lessons and future plans**

The adoption of the Law on the National Qualifications Framework in April 2018 was a long expected and important step towards a more relevant qualification and education system. The law provides conditions for a coherent system of quality-assured qualifications with establishment of sector councils to ensure the relevance of qualifications for the labour market. An online NQFS register will give access to useful data about qualifications, the qualification standards and about the JPOA and employers with whom the JPOA realise practical work.

The IPA II sector budget support programme provides the necessary funding for implementation of the NQF Law.

Implementing the NQF Law requires new institutional arrangements, an NQF Council, a Qualifications Agency and sector councils.

Coordination of tasks and competences between new and existing institutions will be a main challenge and a condition for a successful implementation of the law. Another challenge will be to find a right balance between processes and procedures to ensure the quality of qualifications (such as the development of new qualification standards) and the flexibility required to respond quickly to changing labour market needs. This cannot be the sole task of sector councils that operate at national level. Structural arrangements to involve stakeholders at national, regional and local levels can provide a continuous insight in obstacles and opportunities on the labour market and a solid basis for the sector councils, the Qualifications Agency and the NQF Council to act upon.

### **Abbreviations**

ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
EQF	European qualifications framework
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (EU support programme)
JPOA	publicly recognised adult education providers
KLASNOKS	classification of qualifications system (in line with the International Standard Classification of Education)
NQF	national qualifications framework
NQFS	national qualifications framework of Serbia
RPL	recognition of prior learning

### **Prepared by:**

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

# SEYCHELLES

## Introduction

It has been government policy in the Seychelles since 2000 to develop a national qualifications framework (NQF), along with a national qualification authority to administer and develop it. The idea surfaced in the late 1990s in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Manpower Development and a study was commissioned to explore the feasibility of setting it up (Seychelles Ministry of Social Affairs and Manpower Development, 1999).

The qualifications framework and quality assurance of qualifications are governed by the Seychelles Qualifications Authority Act, which was enacted in 2005. This led to the establishment of the Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA) at the start of 2006. The Authority is mandated to develop and implement the NQF. The regulations of the NQF that provide its legal basis were signed into law by the Minister of Education in December 2008, becoming operative in January 2009.

The Act setting up the SQA defines the NQF as a 'framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired by learners' (Republic of Seychelles, 2005).

To develop the human resources required to meet its ambitious development goals, the government is taking steps to improve training in vocational, managerial and service skills. Training is to be restructured in alignment with internationally-recognized standards and certification processes. This will be made possible through partnerships with international institutions of higher learning, which will offer a variety of training courses to Seychelles students, from skills programmes and short courses through to full qualification programmes.

The active involvement of sectors of the economy such as tourism, fisheries and financial services will help strengthen links between training and the world of work, making the Seychelles education system more responsive to both local

and international labour market needs (Republic of Seychelles, 2008). Particular emphasis is being placed on improving the information and communications technology skills of the workforce so as to render it more competitive in today's technologically driven business environment.

The SQA had completed the first institutional accreditation exercise in seven post-secondary institutions (there are nine institutions now) by the end of September 2012. The outcome was provisional accreditation for all seven institutions. The institutional accreditation exercise for the University of Seychelles (UniSey), an institution registered under the Education Act of 2004, occurred in September 2013 and again led to provisional accreditation.

There was a second institutional audit of the University of Seychelles in July 2015 by the SQA under the Seychelles Qualifications Authority Act of 2005 (Republic of Seychelles, 2005), which led to its being granted accreditation for five years (14 August 2015 to 13 August 2020).

Accreditation is now an integral activity of the SQA, and there is at least one institutional audit each year. Two were scheduled for 2016.

## Policy objectives

The NQF formalises the requirement for both public and private education and training providers in the country to deliver quality-assured, nationally recognized and consistent standards and qualifications. It establishes the regulations and principles that guide the development of qualifications and states the criteria to be met for qualifications to be recognised nationally.

Specifically, the Seychelles qualifications framework (SQF) is designed to provide:

- a. high-quality training and qualifications;
- b. recognition and credit for prior learning and skills;

- c. parity between academic and vocational qualifications;
- d. qualifications based on unit standards linked to the requirements of industry and society;
- e. a more integrated approach to education and training;
- f. a coherent learning system offering potential for mobility between different courses and levels;
- g. qualifications that are nationally and internationally comparable and portable (SQA).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Development of the SQA and the SQF needs to be understood in the context of the major political and social changes that were taking place at the time as the Seychelles moved from a State-controlled to a market-oriented economy. This shift profoundly affected the management of key sectors of the economy and provided the impetus for the government's public sector investment programme, a branch of the broader human resource development programme instigated by the Agency for National Human Resource Development, established by the National Human Resource Act in 2006 (Republic of Seychelles, 2008).

The SQA uses fixed standards to evaluate existing training courses and position them at SQF levels 3 to 6. Although the SQA was created in 2005, this work did not begin until 2008; subsequently all providers of education and training programmes leading to the achievement of unit standards and/or full qualifications were required to become accredited by the SQA.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The SQF has 10 levels ranging from primary to doctoral and postdoctoral qualifications. The hierarchy of levels is developed on the basis of increased cognitive challenge, practical skills development and degree of autonomy. These are captured in level descriptors based on learning outcomes for each level.

Post-secondary level qualifications are categorised into types such as diplomas, associate degrees and certificates and carry a fixed minimum number of credits and notional hours in order to provide flexibility in programme design. The smallest number of notional hours for the achievement of an

SQF qualification is 1,200, amounting to 120 credits (SQA n.d.). The input-based national curriculum, rather than learning-outcomes-based qualifications, continues to be the framework for general education up to and including secondary level.

Core skills are an essential part of all SQF qualifications. These include communication skills (including the use of the English language, considered essential for promoting international mobility), numeracy and information and communications technology skills, and life skills, which include social behaviour and ethics.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The SQF offers a number of progression pathways by which candidates can move from basic to more advanced certificates. Mechanisms for recognition of prior learning (RPL) also give individuals who have gained significant experience in a particular field the opportunity to become formally qualified at a level commensurate with their abilities. Candidates may achieve partial or even whole qualifications through RPL or may qualify for credit at a higher level than that of the qualification applied for. At degree level, up to 50% of a qualification can be obtained through RPL. Once implementation of the SQF is complete, learners are able to register for a number of courses over an extended period and accumulate credits towards a recognized qualification.

RPL is not a new concept in the Seychelles: trade tests in various vocational disciplines have been conducted for more than three decades. The Employment Department sensitises its own employees to RPL so that they are able to spread the message and encourage workers in other fields to undergo assessment. The SQA has campaigned, for example, for the formation of a hairdressers' association to develop standards for the profession and encourage hairdressers to undergo RPL assessment.

The SQF recognizes all forms of adult learning: formal, non-formal and informal. A special division of the Ministry of Education, the Secretariat for Professional Centres, is responsible for linking youth and adult education to the SQF. The Seychelles Institute of Open and Distance Learning, one of the training centres of the Secretariat, offers distance programmes in collaboration with international

universities such as the University of South Africa and the Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Achieving parity between academic and vocational qualifications is considered vital for the creation of a pool of skilled labour to meet the needs of the economy and promote development (Republic of Seychelles, 2008, pp. 17–19). It is important that young people and adults studying for vocational and technical qualifications do not feel that their chosen path is inferior to that of their academic counterparts. Articulation between technical and vocational education and training and higher academic education is increasingly becoming a reality in the Seychelles, largely due to SQF-led reforms. Students of some vocational training institutions, such as the National Institute of Health and Social Studies (NIHSS), are being admitted to higher education courses based on assessment of their skills and experience (Republic of Seychelles, 2008, p. 35).

## NQF implementation

Implementation of the NQF is ongoing (see below 'Important lessons and future plans').

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Seychelles is a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and plays a part in the continuing development of the SADC qualifications framework (SADCQF). It is one of the eight SADC Member States that volunteered to pilot the alignment of their NQFs and quality assurance mechanisms to that of the SADCQF. In January 2018, the Seychelles National Alignment Committee (NAC) was appointed by the Minister for Education and Human Resource Development. The NAC consisted of representatives from a number of stakeholders including the SQA Board, the Tertiary Education Commission, professional centres, the Ministry for Education and Human Resource Development, the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Civil Status, and the University of the Seychelles. A preliminary report on its alignment work was published by the NAC in August 2018 where the process of alignment to the SADCQF, as well as evidence of alignment based on ten criteria

and conclusions, are presented and discussed (SQA, 2018).

## Important lessons and future plans

A first national policy on technical and vocational education and training is currently in the development stage. In addition, a new national policy on RPL is in preparation. This will replace the existing policy guidelines for RPL of 2009 (SQA, 2009). The new policy was developed following two pilot projects implemented in 2014–15.

The SQA is implementing the following areas of its NQF regulations: validation of programmes, standards development (for qualifications from levels 3–6), evaluation and certification of qualifications/certificates, institutional accreditation, and RPL. Several policy guidelines in relation to these areas have been developed or reviewed, including a quality assurance manual (which covers validation and institutional accreditation), a programme validation guide for providers, an internal quality assurance manual, and an internal quality assurance handbook for tertiary education institutions.

One important challenge concerns the area of quality assurance particularly as it relates to capacities at the level of providers. The SQA provides some support and training to providers to equip them to develop their internal quality assurance processes, however more support is needed to develop the capacities of providers for quality assurance of qualifications (UNESCO, 2017).

### Abbreviations

NAC	National Alignment Committee
NQF	national qualifications framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community qualifications framework
SQA	Seychelles Qualifications Authority
SQF	Seychelles qualifications framework

## Further source of information

Seychelles Qualifications Authority. The national qualifications framework: an introduction.  
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### Prepared by:

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.



## Introduction and context

Slovakia has a high rate of employment of recent graduates and a relatively low rate of early leavers from education and training (81.5% and, respectively, 9.3% in 2017) although the latter has been increasing. According to several other key indicators, the Slovakian education and training system performs less well compared to EU averages. A current challenge is the need to improve educational outcomes, to increase the quality and equity of education, particularly for the Roma population. Achievement of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science basic skills has worsened over the past years, especially among pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a high proportion of low achievers in all three fields. Improving the attractiveness of the teaching profession and the education of teachers, as well as strengthening early childhood education and care, are seen as key aspects in tackling this challenge. While still below the EU average, the tertiary education attainment rate has increased in recent years (34.3% in 2017, compared to the EU average of 39.9%). The new 10-year education strategy, the *National programme for the development of education and training 2018–27*<sup>819</sup>, was adopted in June 2018. It offers an agenda for comprehensive long-term reform at all levels of the education and training system. In higher education, the aim is to increase flexibility, strengthen quality assurance and align the system to European guidelines for accreditation. An amendment to the Higher Education Act and a new law on quality assurance in higher education were approved in 2018<sup>820</sup>. The introduction of short-cycle professionally-oriented degrees and professional bachelor programmes is advocated by labour market representatives. Figures for the participation of

adults in lifelong learning vary depending on the survey used<sup>821</sup>. There is evidence of a shortage of skilled workers. Participation in vocational education and training (VET) is significantly above the EU average. The Act on VET adopted in 2015<sup>822</sup> introduced elements of ‘dual education’ inspired by the German system, but adapted to the Slovak context, with involvement of employers in VET provision and in teacher training. Amendments to this Act, in force since September 2018, further support school-company cooperation (European Commission, 2018).

Work on the Slovak qualifications framework (SKKR) started with a 2009 government decision on the European qualifications framework (EQF) implementation<sup>823</sup>. The 2009 Act on lifelong learning and its amendment in 2012<sup>824</sup>, stipulated the legal background for development of a national qualifications system and framework. In 2011, level descriptors for a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) for lifelong learning were approved by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports, encompassing qualifications from all subsystems of formal education and training (VET, general education and higher education). This initial NQF proposal was deemed to be too much shaped around the formal education system and requiring revision.

Post-crisis labour market transformation highlighted the gap between labour market requirements and the knowledge and skills of graduates (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017). The

<sup>819</sup> Available in Slovak at: [www.minedu.sk/17786-sk/narodny-program-rozvoja-vychovy-a-vzdelavania/](http://www.minedu.sk/17786-sk/narodny-program-rozvoja-vychovy-a-vzdelavania/)

<sup>820</sup> Law No 269/2018 on the quality assurance of higher education and on amendments to Act No 343/2015 Coll. on public procurement and on amendments to certain laws and Law No 270/2018, amending Act No 131/2002 Coll. on higher education institutions and on amendments to certain acts. The text of the laws is available in Slovak at: [www.minedu.sk/12284-sk/zakony/](http://www.minedu.sk/12284-sk/zakony/)

<sup>821</sup> 3.4% in 2017, and below the EU average, according to the Labour Force Survey, while the Adult Education Survey indicates that 46.1% of adults participated in education and training against the EU average of 45.1% in 2016.

<sup>822</sup> Act No 61/2015 Coll. on vocational education and training.  
<sup>823</sup> Government Decision No 105/2009, available in Slovak at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Resolution/14796/1>

<sup>824</sup> Act No 568/2009 on lifelong learning and modifying and supplementing certain laws is available in Slovak at: [http://isdv.iedu.sk/Documents/Zakon\\_568\\_2009.pdf](http://isdv.iedu.sk/Documents/Zakon_568_2009.pdf)  
Act No 315/2012 Coll. amending and supplementing Act No 568/2009 on lifelong learning and amendments to certain laws, in force since 1 January 2013.

tasks related to the development of the SKKR became a part of the national reform programme between 2012 and 2015, a crucial phase in the development of the framework and the national qualification system. In 2013 strategies for revision were proposed, along with involvement of employers, employers' associations grouped in sector councils, and other social partners. Part of a national project under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, the State Vocational Education Institute (*Štátny inštitút odborného vzdelávania, ŠIOV*) started to develop the national qualifications register (NQR) and revised the SKKR grid of level descriptors; this work, together with the methodology for linking qualifications to the SKKR levels, was completed by the end of 2014 and piloted in 2015 on the first set of qualifications described and included in the register.

The Slovak system of qualifications now consists of two closely related pillars: the NQR, where qualifications are described in terms of qualifications standards, with related assessment standards; and the SKKR, where qualifications are assigned to levels. The SKKR has eight learning- outcomes-based levels and consists of four sub-frameworks: for general education, VET, higher education, and occupational qualifications (awarded outside the formal system, as a result of courses and work experience).

The SKKR was referenced to the EQF in October 2017.

## Policy objectives

Development of the NQF in Slovakia has been part of a broader process of reform in VET and lifelong learning<sup>825</sup>. The framework is linked to the *National programme for the development of education and training 2018–27*, a substantial part of which addresses qualifications and validation of non-formal and informal learning. A link between the national qualifications system in the context of lifelong learning and the national system of occupations is stipulated in Act No 5/2004 on employment services and on amending and supplementing certain other laws (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Apart from its main function of classifying qualifications, resulting from the hierarchical division of the qualifications system into levels, the SKKR is seen as having a threefold role:

- a. communication: to provide transparent information on national qualifications, their characteristics and relationships;
- b. transformation: gradually revising the system for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, acting as a tool for quality assurance and leading to better coordination of lifelong learning;
- c. regulation: to monitor and regulate the description of qualifications in terms of standards and their levelling, as well as the system of recognition and validation of qualifications.

There is general consensus in the country about the role of the framework in promoting lifelong learning, improving the quality of education at all levels, and promoting student and workforce mobility. Further discussion at national level on the use and function of the SKKR is, however, considered necessary (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The specific objectives of SKKR implementation are (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017):

- a. increased education system transparency, both for individuals and employers, as well as for international comparison;
- b. increased transparency of qualifications, through their description in terms of learning outcomes rather than inputs;
- c. better match between education and training and the needs of the labour market through a more demand-oriented education system;
- d. strengthened relationships between all stakeholders involved in education, and developing general principles for validation and recognition of qualifications;
- e. modernisation of education through the application of quality principles in the process of acquiring qualifications;
- f. increased quality in the processes of verification and recognition of qualifications.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The revised SKKR<sup>826</sup> is a comprehensive framework that includes qualifications from all subsystems of education and training: general education, VET, higher education, and further education. The SKKR served as a tool to develop a typology of qualifications in the national context. As a result,

<sup>825</sup> This concerns the implementation of dual education, as well as reform of the national qualifications system in the context of lifelong learning, development of the national occupation and qualifications registers.

<sup>826</sup> The website of the national qualifications system, including the SKKR, is available at: [www.kvalifikacie.sk](http://www.kvalifikacie.sk) Information on the SKKR and the national qualifications register is also available at: [www.minedu.sk/slovensky-kvalifikacny-ramec-a-narodna-sustava-kvalifikacii/](http://www.minedu.sk/slovensky-kvalifikacny-ramec-a-narodna-sustava-kvalifikacii/).

it consists of four different sub-frameworks, each characterised by a common type of qualification, reflecting the education and qualifications subsystems and pathways:

- a. general education qualifications, governed by the Act No 245/2008 Coll. on education and training (the School Act), assigned to SKKR levels 1, 2 and 4;
- b. vocational qualifications, also governed by the Act No 245/2008 Coll. on education and training (the School Act), awarded in formal VET (secondary and post-secondary), assigned to SKKR levels 2, 3, 4 and 5;
- c. higher education qualifications, governed by the Higher Education Act, assigned to SKKR levels 6, 7 and 8;
- d. occupational qualifications, governed by Act No 568/2009 Coll. on lifelong learning, awarded outside the formal system, as a result of further education, adult education and validation of non-formal learning, assigned to SKKR levels 2 to 7.

Qualifications in the first three sub-frameworks (general, VET and higher education) reflect both a level of qualification and a level of achieved education at the end of an education programme. Occupational qualifications are usually in response to the needs of the labour market and are not connected to an education level. So far, a distinction has been made between full and partial occupational qualifications, as reflected in the NQR: a full qualification entitling the holder to perform all tasks within an occupation, and a partial qualification allowing performance of one or a limited set of tasks within that occupation. The new Act on lifelong learning, expected to be adopted in July 2019, will no longer make this distinction, and a new approach based on fragmentation of qualifications into smaller units will be adopted (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017).

The SKKR is an eight-level framework, with level descriptors defined in learning outcomes, covering knowledge (general and vocational), skills (cognitive and practical) and competences (responsibility, autonomy and social competences). Qualifications were assigned to SKKR levels following analysis of the learning outcomes set in the qualification standards, and their comparison with the national descriptors. Qualifications issued by conservatories posed a challenge in terms of levelling. Conservatories provide both upper secondary vocational education (ISCED 2011: 354) and higher professional education (ISCED 2011: 554) in integrated programmes focused on music and drama (six-year programme) or dance (eight-year programme). The programmes of conservatories

lead to vocational qualifications at SKKR levels 4 (*maturita*) and 5 (*absolutorium*).

All qualifications are included in the NQR, which has qualification cards: each consists of general information on the qualification (learning pathway, relation to an occupation, evidence of certification, SKKR level), a qualification standard expressed in learning outcomes, related assessment standard (assessment criteria, methods and tools), and methodological guidance for validation and certification of learning outcomes. The basic framework for the development of the NQR was the national occupations register; synchronising the two tools is a key element in the implementation of the SKKR. The NQR also has a role in quality assurance at all levels of lifelong learning.

The learning outcomes approach has been recognised as part of the reform agenda and taken up in national discourse. A major development in the shift to learning outcomes was marked by the 2008 School Act. This strengthened quality assurance measures, introduced performance standards defined in knowledge, skills and competences, and introduced a two-level model of curriculum for both general education and VET: State curricula and school curricula. The revised Bloom taxonomy of educational objectives is recommended for defining performance standards (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017).

General education (primary and secondary) programmes have been revised to strengthen performance standards. However, substantial changes in programming and curriculum development will need more time and deeper discourse about the learning outcomes approach, and engagement at the level of education providers and teachers (Cedefop, 2016). The learning outcomes approach has been reinforced in VET through the VET Act of 2009<sup>827</sup> and the new 2015 Act on VET. Between 2013 and 2015, qualifications standards were elaborated in the frame of the European Social Fund (ESF) project *Development of the national qualifications system* by sector councils, with involvement of different stakeholders from education and the labour market (educators, employers, chambers).

In 2013, the Ministry of Education adopted the *Criteria for the accreditation of higher education*

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<sup>827</sup> Act of 23 April 2009 on VET and amendments to certain acts (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic). [www.tnuni.sk/fileadmin/dokumenty/univerzita/dolezite\\_dokumenty/Zakon\\_184\\_2009\\_o\\_odbornom\\_vzdelavani.pdf](http://www.tnuni.sk/fileadmin/dokumenty/univerzita/dolezite_dokumenty/Zakon_184_2009_o_odbornom_vzdelavani.pdf)

*study programmes*<sup>828</sup> and other documents related to the performance of higher education institutions; the learning outcomes approach is now part of the criteria for assessing the quality of higher education institutions and for obtaining study programme accreditation. In 2014, the Higher Education Act defined a field of study based on the extent of knowledge, skills and competences forming the graduate's profile. Learning outcomes in higher education are linked to the use of the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS). Important points of current and future discussion are around the use of terminology (which may be clarified with the adoption of the new Act on lifelong learning), the typology of learning outcomes originating in different sources, the formulation of performance standards in education programmes, and the formulation of learning outcomes in qualification standards. The importance of finding a balance between stability, complexity, fundamentality and objectivity in how learning outcomes are defined in qualification standards, curricula and study programmes has been recognised and reflected in the methodologies developed (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Work on the initial NQF was started following Government Decision No 105/2009 on a proposal for implementation of the EQF; it was coordinated by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic. The national coordination point for the EQF (EQF NCP) was created at that time and, until 2011, was under the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Education. An inter-ministerial group for the implementation of the EQF was set up to develop the NQF grid, and cooperation with the national team of Bologna experts was established to ensure coordination between the NQF and Bologna implementation.

The legal basis was reinforced by Act No 568/2009 on lifelong learning, and its 2012 amendment (Act No 315/2012 Coll., in force since 1 January 2013)<sup>829</sup>, which introduced the SKKR and its definition as a framework. Revision of the initial NQF was closely linked to development of the national qualifications system. Stakeholder involvement from the world of work was vital, including employers' chambers, unions, confederations and other professional associations. While the Ministry of Education

maintains overall competence and responsibility for SKKR development and implementation, a Memorandum of cooperation was signed in 2014 with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, aiming for better alignment between labour market needs and the education system (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017). Between 2011 and 2014, the EQF NCP moved to the National Institute for Lifelong Learning; since February 2014 it has been within the State Vocational Education Institute, which is also the contact point for other EU initiatives (EQAVET, ECVET). The functions of the EQF NCP include (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017):

- a. promoting the SKKR, EQF and Slovak qualifications;
- b. managing the process of referencing the SKKR to the EQF;
- c. coordinating the work of key stakeholders in developing the NQR;
- d. maintaining the NQR and its links to European portals;
- e. technical advice for developing new qualifications;
- f. European and international cooperation on NQF-related issues.

Besides the State Vocational Education Institute, which was the coordinating body of the national project for the development of the national qualifications system, several other structures were involved in the development of the SKKR, and in the definition and approval of qualifications between 2013 and 2015:

- a. the National Board for Education and Qualifications (NBEQ), a supra-sectoral national authority composed of representatives of all sectoral ministries, professional and employers' organisations, State and regional administration, and associations of schools;
- b. a national group of experts, comprising representatives of the Ministry of Education, other institutions involved in education policies<sup>830</sup>, social partners<sup>831</sup> and sector councils; it carried out its activity in several working groups, including one for the development of the NQF, comprising representatives of educational institutions and employers, who revised the

<sup>830</sup> The National Institute of Lifelong Learning, the State School Inspection, the National Institute of Education and the National Institute of Certified Measurement of Education.

<sup>831</sup> The Federation of Employers' Associations, the National Union of Employers and the Confederation of Trade Unions.

<sup>828</sup> Available in Slovak at: [www.minedu.sk/kriteria-pouzivane-pri-vyjadrovani-sa-akreditacnej-komisie/](http://www.minedu.sk/kriteria-pouzivane-pri-vyjadrovani-sa-akreditacnej-komisie/)

<sup>829</sup> See footnote 825.

- SKKR and the national descriptors, and worked on the levelling methodology<sup>832</sup>;
- c. sector councils, composed of representatives of all stakeholders (national and regional authorities, employers, representatives of trade unions, and educators).

Since 2016, the governance structure of the SKKR has been simplified and now consists of:

- a. the State Vocational Education Institute, hosting the EQF NCP and providing technical and methodological support in the further development of the qualification system;
- b. the Ministry of Education, the highest approval body for qualifications and the NQR;
- c. sector councils<sup>833</sup>; there are currently 24 sector councils in Slovakia, with a key role in developing, monitoring and updating national occupation and qualification standards and proposing their allocation to SKKR levels, developing and monitoring the national occupations register and the national qualifications register, communication between the labour market and the world of education<sup>834</sup>, and establishing partnerships for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning.

The main strength of the current governance structure of the Slovak NQF is the active participation of stakeholders, though this requires effective communication strategies yet to be developed. Activities related to the introduction and implementation of the SKKR were mainly project-based but, in 2016, the State Vocational Education Institute was provided with a budget from the Ministry of Education, ensuring sustainability and continuity of work on issues related to the further development of SKKR and the qualifications system.

<sup>832</sup> Other working groups were formed within the national group of experts: a working group for the analysis of school curricula and higher education study programmes; a working group for the analysis of the completion of education; and a working group of expert guarantors whose opinions were the main basis for approval of qualifications by the National Board for Education and Qualifications.

<sup>833</sup> The role of the sector councils is defined by Act No 5/2004 on employment services and on amendment of certain laws: [www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2004/5](http://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2004/5).

<sup>834</sup> In VET, cooperation between education and training and the labour market has been recently stipulated in the Act on vocational education and training No 209/2018 Coll. Employers and employers' associations participate in the development of graduate profiles, assessment of teaching materials, participate in or give their opinions on final exams, create lists of study and training branches with insufficient numbers of graduates. (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>835</sup>

There is currently no systemic approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in Slovakia. However, certain elements of a national model for validation have been introduced through the 2009 Act on lifelong learning, creating some of the conditions for gradual development of a validation system. These include the introduction of the national qualifications system, with a new approach to the description of qualifications based on learning outcomes, and the development of the Slovak qualifications framework (SKKR) itself. Although no direct SKKR impact on VNFIL is expected in the short term, the completion of the referencing process in 2017, the description of 1 000 qualifications aligned to the SKKR, with their related qualification standards defined in learning outcomes, and their inclusion in the NQR, are completed preconditions for the development of a VNFIL system. Qualifications required on the labour market and contained in the NQR are expected to be gradually placed into the information system of further education (ISDV) and made eligible for validation.

Current validation practices within the frame of the Act on lifelong learning (2009)<sup>836</sup> refer to:

- a. recognition of results of further education based on assessment of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through accredited programmes leading to a full or partial qualification, corresponding to all requirements of a profession or to only some of the requirements; however, individuals with five years of practice, but without prior completion of the accredited programme, can apply for the examination in the accredited institution and receive a certificate confirming compliance with qualification standards;
- b. verification of professional competence necessary for running a business regulated by the Trade Licensing Act No 455/1991 Coll. based on assessing compliance with standards, for which a formal certificate of apprenticeship is required.

The first of these mainly refers to examinations of learning outcomes achieved in accredited

<sup>835</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>836</sup> Article 17 on the verification and assessment of professional competence.

programmes and is only partly linked to non-formal learning: individuals with five years of workplace practice can apply to have their non-formal learning validated, assessed and certified without prior completion of a programme. In the second case, this certificate is not equivalent to the qualification certificate obtained through formal education; it aids access to the labour market, though not to continuing formal education. Some 439 qualifications from the NQR (the occupational qualifications pillar) are labelled as belonging to non-formal education; this is partly due to inclusion of full and partial qualifications obtained through further learning accredited programmes being included under the umbrella of 'non-formal education'.

Four sets of standards that have been developed independently are currently used in Slovakia; those used for validation are qualification standards (and assessment standards) introduced for further education by the Act on lifelong learning (Act No 568/2009 Coll.); they are registered and maintained in the Ministry of Education's information system of further education<sup>837</sup> and will be replaced by NQR standards in the future.

A new lifelong learning strategy, to be presented by the end of 2019<sup>838</sup>, and the ESF-funded project *System of verifying qualifications* (SOK), initiated in 2018, which contains a VNFIL-related component, are expected to support the development and implementation of validation in Slovakia. The SOK project follows the recommendation of the *Learning Slovakia* strategy paper to develop assessment manuals to complement existing qualification (and assessment) standards. The *National programme for the development of education and training 2018–27*, based on the strategy, includes an explicit commitment to implement VNFIL. New legislation introducing a clear conceptual framework is expected in 2020 and a new deadline for implementing VNFIL has been set for 2022.

A background study conducted in 2016<sup>839</sup> explored the conditions for implementation of VNFIL in Slovakia and offers a solid basis for understanding the necessary systemic changes. Areas that require

attention include the establishment of robust quality assurance procedures, to avoid the risk of overreliance on self-testing using online tools, as well as the development of substantial provision of guidance and counselling to individuals interested in validation of their learning. Progress has been visible in the labour sector, where methodology based on the concept of *bilan de compétences* has been implemented by public employment services, and labour office counsellors serving the unemployed have received training in the first two stages of validation (identification and documentation). Extending this methodology to the education sector is under discussion. Vocational qualifications in Slovakia are currently not based on units and a credit system is not used. However, a unit-based approach to designing qualifications, also introducing modularised provision of VET, has been advocated in ESF-funded analytical studies<sup>840</sup> and is expected to materialise within the next phases of development of the national qualifications system; this is also supported by the SOK project. The development of the VNFIL system is expected to increase parity of esteem between the different education and training subsystems and different types of qualification.

## NQF implementation

NQF development in Slovakia has been a lengthy process that involved a range of different stakeholders and was carried out within wider reforms aimed at the creation of a national system of qualifications. This system consists of two pillars, the SKKR and the NQR<sup>841</sup>; development of the two was closely related. In addition, a national occupations register<sup>842</sup> has been under development in parallel. The framework has been designed to be comprehensive, with clearly defined objectives. It has now reached an early operational stage.

Development of the SKKR grid of level descriptors was completed by the end of 2014, and a methodology for linking qualifications to SKKR levels<sup>843</sup> was tested on a first set of qualifications, then revised and approved by the National Council for Education and Qualifications in 2015. Qualifications were levelled to SKKR based on the 'best fit' principle, following analysis of learning

<sup>837</sup> <http://isdv.iedu.sk/Default.aspx>

<sup>838</sup> The lifelong learning agenda has been transferred from the National Lifelong Learning Institute to other institutions and the Slovak Academy of Sciences has been appointed to prepare a first draft of a new lifelong learning strategy for public discussion.

<sup>839</sup> Detko et al. (2016). *Validácia výsledkov neformálneho vzdelávania a informálneho učenia sa v SR* [Validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Slovak Republic]. Bratislava: ŠIOV. Available in Slovak at: [www.erasmusplus.sk/index.php?sw=31](http://www.erasmusplus.sk/index.php?sw=31)

<sup>840</sup> For example: Vantuch et al. (2014). *Analýza Európskeho kvalifikačného rámca a Národných kvalifikačných rámcov vo vybraných krajinách EÚ* [Analysis of EQF and NQFs in selected EU countries].

<sup>841</sup> The national qualifications system can be found at: [www.kvalifikacie.sk](http://www.kvalifikacie.sk)

<sup>842</sup> Available at: [http://sustavapovolani.sk/o\\_portali](http://sustavapovolani.sk/o_portali)

<sup>843</sup> Available at: [www.kvalifikacie.sk/na-stiahnutie](http://www.kvalifikacie.sk/na-stiahnutie)

outcomes defined in qualification standards and their comparison with national descriptors. This methodology was also used by the sector council members and their sectoral working groups as a tool for defining learning outcomes and better understanding of the whole process. By November 2015, one thousand qualifications aligned to the SKKR were described and included in the NQR<sup>844</sup>. Further work on expansion of the register and refinement of the standards in place is expected to be achieved through the new ESF-funded SOK project.

As the SKKR consists of four different sub-frameworks (for general education, vocational, higher education, and occupational qualifications), the key challenge so far in implementing the NQF has been in setting adequate links and communication between these sub-frameworks. A national database of qualifications has been set up<sup>845</sup>, organised following the logic of the four sub-frameworks. So far, it contains qualifications from general education, VET and higher education. The system for the occupational qualifications sub-framework has been prepared and will include international, non-formal and private qualifications. Inclusion in the SKKR of qualifications from non-formal education is the current priority.

With the referencing of the SKKR to the EQF now completed, all qualification documents that have been assigned to SKKR levels, from all education and training subsystems, as well as the Europass certificate and diploma supplements, are expected to indicate the corresponding NQF and EQF level by 2019. NQF and EQF levels are stated on secondary school leaving certificates beginning with the 2018/19 school year. The lengthy process of changing the national legislation that relates to this (the School Act, the Higher Education Act, and the Act on lifelong learning) has been a challenge.

Other key future challenges include a strengthening of the learning outcomes approach across all levels of the education and training system, further discussion among experts and end-users on the use of the SKKR, and specification of its functions and promotion of the SKKR to the main target groups: learners, teachers/trainers and employers (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Evaluation of the functionality of the SKKR, the national qualifications database, and of the levelling

process started at the end of 2015, conducted by an EQF NCP working group. A comprehensive analysis of the methodology for levelling qualifications (horizontal and vertical check) was elaborated<sup>846</sup>. This analysed 586 qualifications from the SKKR and compared the Slovak system of levelling with the systems in Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and UK-Scotland. Results were presented by the NCP working group in November 2016. They included various recommendations: to redefine terminology; to abandon the distinction between 'partial' and 'full qualification'; to set clear rules for levelling qualifications in the SKKR and differentiating in levelling occupational qualifications and those from formal education; to apply international standards strictly in tertiary education, mainly for consistent use of learning outcomes; and to fulfil consistently the communication function of SKKR. An analysis of existing measures in validation of prior learning and an overview of existing sectoral and international sectoral qualifications in Slovakia were also carried out. These recommendations, along with national level expert discussions, have been taken into account in the preparation of new legislation on lifelong learning and validation.

The EQF NCP has been disseminating information about the framework to increase its visibility. The main communication channels include sector councils, seminars and conferences for stakeholders, training courses for teachers, other national and international events, information materials, the SKKR webpage<sup>847</sup> and social media. Employers and education staff are the main target groups. The NCP has established cooperation with the Euroguidance centre, mainly in relation to the SOK project. Education and training institutions, and providers and recognition authorities and bodies, are already fully aware of the framework; so are labour market stakeholders related to sector councils, professional associations, and other organisations that have been engaged in its development. The SKKR is only partly known to other labour market stakeholders and to guidance and counselling practitioners. The next step to make the framework better known among students, parents, and other target groups will be the indication of NQF and EQF levels on certificates and diplomas.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

A draft referencing report of the Slovak qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework

<sup>844</sup> The number of qualifications distributed by SKKR levels is: SKKR level 2, 34 qualifications; level 3, 310 qualifications; level 4, 262 qualifications; level 5, 72 qualifications; level 6, 139 qualifications; level 7, 181 qualifications; and level 8, 2 qualifications.

<sup>845</sup> Available at: [www.kvalifikacie.sk](http://www.kvalifikacie.sk)

<sup>846</sup> State Vocational Education Institute (2016). *Comparative analysis of levelling qualifications to SKKR levels and national qualifications frameworks in selected EU countries* (unpublished).

<sup>847</sup> [www.kvalifikacie.sk](http://www.kvalifikacie.sk)

was presented in December 2015. Following recommendations from the EQF advisory group, the final referencing report was presented and approved in October 2017, covering developments between 2009 and 2017. It was approved by the Slovak government in November 2017. The report on the fulfilment of self-certification criteria against the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) will be presented at a later stage.

## Important lessons and future plans

Important progress has been achieved in developing the SKKR in recent years. A comprehensive framework with a clear structure and ambitious objectives has been put in place and reached an early operational stage. A national register of qualifications has also been developed. One thousand qualifications, ranging from level 2 to 8, have been described, assigned to NQF levels and included in the register. The inclusion of the first stage of primary education at SKKR level 1 has also been decided. The referencing of the SKKR to the EQF has also been completed.

However, a clearer conceptual framework is necessary, as well as better clarification of the links between different tools and systems used in the country (SKKR, NQR, national occupations register, different standards, full and partial qualifications). More time is needed to implement quality assurance procedures appropriately and better address higher education qualifications, with stronger involvement of higher education stakeholders. In 2018, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport and the State Vocational Education Institute have taken steps that will lead to improved methodologies for developing new qualifications and reviewing the existing database, simplifying the processes. They are based on existing methodologies and take into account the quality assurance principles laid down in the referencing criteria (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

One of the key challenges in developing and implementing the SKKR is its fragmentation into four sub-frameworks (for general education, VET, higher education and occupational qualifications). Establishing adequate relationships between them would help minimise any barriers that might occur between the different parts of education and training (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The further development and implementation of the SKKR is seen not only as an opportunity to unify terminology and find a common language between the different subsystems, but also to

systematise the classification of qualifications, and to achieve separation between recognition and validation processes, on the one hand, and education attainment, on the other. Some of the challenges lying ahead are to establish effective links between formal, non-formal and informal pathways to qualifications, and to develop a trustworthy system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is supported by recent developments related to the SKKR, the inclusion of qualifications and related standards in the register, and by the new ESF-funded SOK project. A conceptual framework is expected in 2020 and the VNFIL system should be implemented by 2022 (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

Since the SKKR has become operational only recently, no studies on the impact and use of the framework have yet been conducted. Verification of the levelling of qualifications to the SKKR and revision of the functionality of the framework were carried out. Further discussions with experts and stakeholders on the functions and use of the SKKR are considered necessary. An updated Act on lifelong learning is expected to be adopted in 2019, taking into account the results of this evaluation and wider discussions at national level. It will address terminological and conceptual issues, replace the distinction between full and partial occupational qualifications with a new approach based on fragmentation of qualifications into smaller units, and help set up the procedures for the VNFIL system.

Conditions in Slovakia are favourable for the implementation of the learning outcomes approach, and the philosophy is widely accepted. The main barriers are related to identification of learning outcomes and translation into practice. Deeper understanding is needed of the impact of learning outcomes on learner performance, as well as establishing correct assessment procedures. Adequate expertise, teaching materials and professional assistance are required. There is a lack of experts from the world of work able to translate workplace requirements into the language of education, and capacity-building for employers is crucial to securing relevance of learning outcomes for the labour market (Cedefop, 2016). Strengthening the learning outcomes approach across all levels of the education system is a key challenge in the implementation of the SKKR. The EQF NCP has been preparing a translation of the *European handbook on defining, writing and applying learning outcomes*<sup>848</sup> and is supporting accredited courses for teachers (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

<sup>848</sup> Cedefop (2017). *Defining, writing and applying learning outcomes: a European handbook*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/566770>



**Table 71. Slovak qualifications framework (SKKR)**

SKKR LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
<b>8</b>	Diploma ( <i>Vysokoškolský diplom</i> ) Certificate of State exam ( <i>Vysvedčenie o štátnej skúške</i> ) Diploma supplement ( <i>Dodatok k diplomu</i> )	8
<b>7</b>	Diploma ( <i>Vysokoškolský diplom</i> ) Certificate of State exam ( <i>Vysvedčenie o štátnej skúške</i> ) Diploma supplement ( <i>Dodatok k diplomu</i> ) Certificate of qualification ( <i>Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii</i> )	7
<b>6</b>	Diploma ( <i>Vysokoškolský diplom</i> ) Certificate of State exam ( <i>Vysvedčenie o štátnej skúške</i> ) Diploma supplement ( <i>Dodatok k diplomu</i> ) Certificate of qualification ( <i>Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii</i> )	6
<b>5</b>	<i>Maturita</i> certificate ( <i>Vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške</i> ) Certificate of apprenticeship ( <i>Výučný list</i> ) <i>Maturita</i> certificate ( <i>Vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške</i> ) Certificate of final post-secondary exam ( <i>Vysvečenie o absolventskej skúške</i> ) <i>Absolutorium</i> diploma ( <i>Absolventský diplom</i> ) Certificate of qualification ( <i>Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii</i> )	5
<b>4</b>	<i>Maturita</i> certificate ( <i>Vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške</i> ) Certificate of apprenticeship ( <i>Výučný list</i> ) <i>Maturita</i> certificate ( <i>Vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške</i> ) Certificate of qualification ( <i>Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii</i> )	4
<b>3</b>	Certificate of final exam ( <i>Vysvedčenie o záverečnej skúške</i> ) Certificate of apprenticeship ( <i>Výučný list</i> ) Certificate of qualification ( <i>Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii</i> )	3
<b>2</b>	Lower secondary education certificate with supplement ( <i>Vysvedčenie s doložkou</i> ) Certificate of final exam ( <i>Vysvedčenie o záverečnej skúške</i> ) Certificate of apprenticeship ( <i>Výučný list</i> ) Certificate of qualification ( <i>Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii</i> )	2
<b>1</b>	Primary education certificate with supplement ( <i>Vysvedčenie s doložkou</i> )	1

Source: Adapted from Annex 2 of the *Referencing report of the Slovak qualifications framework towards the European qualifications framework* (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017).

**Abbreviations**

EQF	European qualifications framework	SKKR	Slovenský kvalifikačný rámec (Slovak qualifications framework)
EQF NCP	national coordination point for the EQF	SOK	System overovania kvalifikácií (the ESF-funded project <i>System of verifying qualifications</i> )
ESF	European Social Fund	VET	vocational education and training
NQF	national qualifications framework	VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning
NQR	national qualifications register		
ŠIOV	Štátny inštitút odborného vzdelávania (State Vocational Education Institute)		

## Main sources of information

State Vocational Education Institute (ŠIOV) – the EQF NCP: [www.siov.sk/](http://www.siov.sk/)

Website of the national qualifications system: [www.kvalifikacie.sk/](http://www.kvalifikacie.sk/)

National qualifications register (NQR): [www.kvalifikacie.sk/kartoteka-kariet-kvalifikacii#/](http://www.kvalifikacie.sk/kartoteka-kariet-kvalifikacii#/)

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# SLOVENIA

## Introduction and context

Slovenia is well situated in relation to most European benchmarks for education and training. The country has exceeded EU targets for tertiary education attainment: at 46.4% in 2017, it is above the national and Europe target of 40% and the 2017 EU average of 39.9%. However there is a wide gap between men and women. It has one of the lowest rates of early leavers from education and training (4.3% in 2017, compared to the EU average of 10.6%). Student achievements in reading, mathematics and science are among the best in Europe and have followed a strong positive trend over recent years, according to several international comparative assessments. Improvements in equity in education have also been recorded, though disparities in performance linked to socioeconomic status and migrant background persist and the socioeconomic impact in primary school is growing. Slovenia has significantly improved the employment rate of recent graduates from upper secondary vocational education and training (VET) and from tertiary education; in 2017 these were 80.8% and 82.45% respectively, above the EU average. Participation of children in early education and care has increased and reached 90.9%, though it is still below the EU average of 95.3%. One important development in school education is the introduction of mandatory foreign language teaching starting from the second grade of primary education; this was fully implemented starting with the 2016/17 school year. Reforms are under way in higher education, with changes in accreditation procedures and quality assurance; reform of tertiary education financing has been successfully implemented. The proportion of students in VET is high and has increased from 65.9% in 2013 to 70.4% in 2016 (EU average is 49%). The (re)introduction of apprenticeship schemes, piloted from the 2017/18 school year, is expected to expand the sector further and create opportunities for the unemployed. Population aging is accentuating the need to increase participation in adult learning, in particular for the low-skilled. A total of 12% of Slovenian adults participated in adult education in 2017, slightly above the EU average of 10.9%, but at only 2.9%

it is still low among the low-skilled. A national skills strategy has been prepared in cooperation with the OECD and has entered the second phase of implementation, including an action plan (European Commission, 2018).

Following a broad national debate, Slovenia started the development of a national qualifications framework (NQF) in 2005. This development builds on a series of education and training reforms since the mid-1990s (in VET, higher education, general education and adult education), including the introduction of certification and validation of non-formal learning in 2000.

The 10-level comprehensive Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF) was developed by an interdepartmental working group, discussed with stakeholders, and finalised in May 2011 (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2014). Agreement was reached on assigning major national qualifications to SQF levels, including qualifications from formal education and training (VET, higher education, general education, adult learning) and the system of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) under the remit of the Ministry of Labour. The Slovenian qualifications framework Act<sup>849</sup> came into force in July 2016, serving as the legal basis for SQF implementation and full operationalisation.

The SQF was linked to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-referenced to the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in May 2013.

## Policy objectives

All subsystems of education and training in Slovenia have been reformed since the mid-1990s. There is a general view that the system functions well in terms of permeability; there are almost no dead-ends at upper secondary level and individuals can

<sup>849</sup> The SQF Act is available at: [www.uradni-list.si/glasilo-uradni-list-rs/vsebina/2015-01-4129?sop=2015-01-4129](http://www.uradni-list.si/glasilo-uradni-list-rs/vsebina/2015-01-4129?sop=2015-01-4129) (in Slovenian).

move vertically and horizontally without major obstacles. However, there is a need to strengthen cooperation and coordination between different education and training subsystems and increase participation in lifelong learning. It is necessary to improve the link between education and certification and the responsiveness of qualifications to the labour market and individual needs, and to have a reliable tool for assessing and recognising non-formal and informal knowledge and skills.

The SQF is primarily a communication framework whose purpose is to achieve transparency and recognisability of qualifications in Slovenia and the EU. Its fundamental objectives are to support lifelong learning; to connect and coordinate the Slovenian qualifications subsystems; and to improve the transparency, accessibility and quality of qualifications with regard to the labour market and civil society.

The framework brings added value at several levels. Along with the register of SQF qualifications, it ensures increased transparency in the qualifications system, benefitting end-users: learners, employees, employers, education providers, and career advisers. Although the SQF is not a tool for major reform, level descriptors are used in accreditation procedures for new education programmes or in their reaccreditation. The inclusion of supplementary qualifications in the SQF brings added value to employees and employers, making it easier to choose qualifications and to select candidates (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2014).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The SQF is a comprehensive framework with 10 qualification levels. The descriptor for each level has three categories of learning outcome: knowledge, skills and competences. Each qualification in the framework includes all three categories, although it is not necessarily the case that each category has equal weight within the qualification. Such a selection of categories allows capturing the full diversity of learning outcomes and qualifications that, though acquired in different settings and for different purposes, are broadly comparable in terms of learning outcomes.

The starting points for classification of qualifications in the SQF are the relevant sectoral legislation and the education and training classification system (KLASIUS). The SQF aims to establish a flexible connection between education and qualification structures. It links two concepts: educational activities/programmes and learning outcomes.

The SQF includes three categories of qualification covering all subsystems of formal education and training, as well as further learning:

- a. educational qualifications awarded after completion of formal education programmes at all levels (general, vocational and higher);
- b. national vocational qualifications awarded by an NVQ certificate, issued in accordance with the regulations governing NVQs, or another document certifying completion of training or continuing education, issued in accordance with the regulations governing technical and higher education;
- c. supplementary qualifications acquired in further and supplementary training on the labour market (linked to supplementing abilities and competences) and not issued by national authorities.

Input criteria are used in addition to learning outcomes for educational qualifications acquired after completion of nationally accredited programmes: these include access requirements, typical programme length, and input in terms of volume of learning activities in VET and higher education (defined also in credit points). For NVQs, only standards of learning outcomes are defined, not the programmes or pathways that lead to the NVQ.

The learning outcomes approach is already embedded in the Slovene education system and well accepted, following reforms carried out since the 1990s.

Education programmes have moved from content-based to an objective-based approach in the 1990s. Reforms have supported and broadened assessment of learning outcomes. A balance is sought in emphasising the role played by general knowledge and acquired key competences, sufficiently broad technical knowledge and certain pedagogical processes in defining educational outcomes.

The learning outcomes approach is seen in VET as a useful way of bringing vocational programmes and schools closer to 'real life' and labour market needs. The basis for all VET qualifications is a system of occupational profiles and standards, identifying knowledge and skills required in the labour market. National VET framework curricula define expected knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired by students. The school curriculum developed at provider level was also introduced and is an important innovation in Slovenia. It gives schools increased autonomy in curriculum planning, especially in taking the local environment and

employers' needs into account when developing the curriculum.

Assessment in VET (at NQF levels 4 and 5) is in the form of project work, testing practical skills and underpinning knowledge; written tests are also used at level 5 to test theoretical professional knowledge and knowledge of general subjects (Slovenian language, foreign languages, mathematics), which are tested externally. An accumulation and transfer credit system, compatible with the European credit system for VET (ECVET) is used in vocational education to describe the volume and weight of programmes and units/modules.

New programmes in general education (compulsory and upper secondary) include learning outcomes to be achieved either at the end of the three stages in compulsory education or at the end of upper secondary education, are tested in the external *matura* examination.

Reform and introduction of study programmes according to the Bologna declaration guidelines has taken place gradually in higher education. Starting with 2009/10, only new study programmes were made available for all three cycles. Students entering higher education in 2009/10 pursued their education in courses of the first, second and third cycles in line with the Bologna guidelines. Learning outcomes in higher education are described in terms of general and professional competences. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) has been obligatory in higher education since 2002.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

NQF supports cooperation between stakeholders across subsystems and institutions with the use of NQF levels and the learning outcomes approach as a common language for describing qualifications.

Work on establishing an NQF was initiated in 2005 through the EQF consultation process by the (then) Ministry of Education and Sport in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology<sup>850</sup> and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. In 2009, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) was appointed to manage the

Slovenian qualifications framework project<sup>851</sup>, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. The CPI was also appointed as national coordination point (NCP) for the EQF, providing technical assistance and coordinating the work of stakeholders involved in developing the SQF and during the referencing. The institute continues to be in charge of coordinating the implementation of the framework: its roles and responsibilities have been stipulated in the Slovenian qualifications framework Act. They include information and communication on matters related to the SQF and EQF, managing the process of placing qualifications in the framework, coordinating the work of other stakeholders involved in linking qualifications to the EQF via the SQF, and maintaining the register of SQF qualifications.

In its role as NCP for the EQF, the CPI collaborates with the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (NAKVIS) – the institution responsible for quality in higher education qualifications – on all issues relating to higher education. This cooperation is based on a written agreement signed by the two agencies in 2012.

The 2016 SQF Act establishes the NCP SQF-EQF expert committee, under the coordination of the NCP, which is appointed on a term of four years. This comprises seven members, appointed by the Minister for Labour for four years: three members proposed by the Ministry of Labour, one proposed by the Ministry of Education, one proposed by the Ministry of Economy, and two proposed by the Economic and Social Council (one representing employers and the other representing trade unions). Its responsibilities are to set out the criteria and to prepare proposals for inclusion of supplementary qualifications in the SQF, to monitor developments related to the SQF, EQF and QF-EHEA, and to carry out other tasks necessary for placing qualifications in the framework.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>852</sup>

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been an important issue on the Slovenian education policy agenda in the past decade. Since 2006 it has covered all education subsystems, regulated by

<sup>850</sup> The Ministry of Education and Sport and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology have been merged into one body, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

<sup>851</sup> The SQF project (2009–14) was jointly financed by the European Social Fund.

<sup>852</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

sector-specific acts and regulations. The legal basis for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the system of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) has been in place since 2000.

As yet there is no overall strategy with focus on common processes and quality assurance across all levels of education. In 2017, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET and the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education published the *Report on strategic and legal foundations for validation of non-formal and informal learning*<sup>853</sup>. The publication presents a comprehensive overview and a detailed description of developments at national level. It provides an analysis of validation at all levels of education and qualifications, and outlines further conceptual challenges and proposals for developments. The full implementation of the SQF, including all formal qualifications, the system of NVQs and supplementary qualifications, will strengthen validation. Validation arrangements are measured against the learning outcomes of education programmes in VET, higher education and general education. NVQs can be entirely acquired through recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is most advanced in VET, higher VET and adult education, but other subsystems allow certain validation possibilities. For example, people over 21 can take the *matura* exam without being enrolled in formal education. There are two types of VET qualification in Slovenia. First, educational VET qualifications are awarded after completion of formal vocational programmes; non-formally acquired knowledge and skills are taken into account to shorten the length of studies. Second, NVQs can be entirely acquired through recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The National Professional Qualifications Act (amended 2009)<sup>854</sup> connects the two systems: occupational standards are the basis for qualification and assessment standards and national VET programmes. The 'master craftsman' qualification can also be acquired through validation, though participation in preparatory programmes is possible and common.

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<sup>853</sup> CPI; Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (2017). *Report on strategic and legal foundations for validation of non-formal and informal learning*. [www.cpi.si/files/cpi/userfiles/Publikacije/CPI\\_vrednotenje-ucenja\\_3korektura.pdf](http://www.cpi.si/files/cpi/userfiles/Publikacije/CPI_vrednotenje-ucenja_3korektura.pdf)

<sup>854</sup> The National Professional Qualifications Act, amended in 2009: [www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1626](http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1626)

In higher education, the Higher Education Act (2012)<sup>855</sup> obliges institutions to prepare validation measures and form a committee for validating non-formal and informal learning. Universities are autonomous and can decide their own procedures for this; they normally use professional assessors or committees. There is evidence of universities creating frameworks to support validation measures. The result of validation in higher education can be the award of ECTS credit points for a single course or a module within a study programme.

## NQF implementation

The SQF has reached full operational stage with the entry into force of the SQF Act, in July 2016. This law summarises the main responsibilities of stakeholders in designing and awarding qualifications at different levels, and defines the tasks of the national coordination point (NCP) for EQF-SQF and the NCP expert committee. It refers to procedures and methods of allocation of qualifications from formal education and training and national vocational qualifications as defined in sectoral legislation. One important development brought by the SQF Act is the definition of procedures and quality criteria for inclusion of supplementary qualifications in the SQF.

According to the SQF Act, applications to place supplementary qualification into the SQF may be submitted by an employer/group of employers or by the Employment Service of Slovenia. An application shall contain at least the following details:

- a. needs in the labour market;
- b. the standard of the qualification and learning outcomes;
- c. the training programme leading to the supplementary qualification;
- d. a description of the procedure of assuring quality through self-evaluation;
- e. references in a relevant field of work;
- f. the contracted provider of the training programme, if this is not the proposer itself.

The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET assesses the completed application placing the supplementary qualification in the SQF and prepares opinion on the suitability of the application and training programme.

If the assessment is positive, the expert panel, nominated by ministry responsible for labour makes

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<sup>855</sup> The Higher Education Act, 2012: [www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=108446](http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=108446)

a decision on the application and drafts a proposal for the placing of the supplementary qualification into SQF.

The supplementary qualification proposal is adopted by an expert panel and the minister responsible for labour decides on placing the supplementary qualification in the SQF. The supplementary qualification is placed in the SQF for five years; three months before this period expires, the proposer may submit an application to extend the validity of the placement.

The criteria for including supplementary qualifications into the SQF include the suitability of the applicant, relations to existing qualifications, description of the learning outcomes, consistency and feasibility of the training programme, quality assurance of the training programme, and labour market needs.

Other aspects covered by the SQF Act are the referencing of NQF levels to the EQF and the QF-EHEA, funding provisions, and the maintenance of the SQF register.

The register<sup>856</sup> describes qualifications in accordance with SQF and EQF parameters: title, type and category of a qualification, credit points, access requirements, SQF/EQF level, ISCED level, learning outcomes, awarding body and transition possibilities. It is linked to the EQF portal<sup>857</sup>, as Slovenia contributed to testing compatibility of a national register with the EQF portal. The SQF register already contains around 1 570 qualifications (1 248 educational qualifications, 311 national vocational qualifications and six supplementary qualifications).

The SQF is an integral part of the national qualifications system and is well integrated into national legislation in the area of education and training that defines SQF and EQF levels on public documents, according to the SQF law<sup>858</sup>. An NQF/EQF communication strategy has been developed for different target groups to raise awareness about NQF and EQF among students, education and training institutions, employees, career counsellors, professional and recognition bodies.

Increasingly, the framework is visible and used by education and training institutions and learners with NQF/EQF levels indicated on certificates, diplomas and supplements and when preparing and renewing

education programmes. There is some evidence that employers use NQF/EQF levels in recruitment, procedures and vacancies notices; interest among the general public is spreading. The SQF and EQF levels are indicated on certificates, diplomas, and Europass certificate and diploma supplements for general education, VET, higher education, supplementary qualifications and in the online SQF register.

SQF has not yet been systematically evaluated; only an evaluation of the SQF database has been carried out<sup>859</sup>. Using a number of different research tools (focus groups and semi-structured interviews with key national stakeholders) the results of the evaluation have already been integrated into the establishment of the new NQF portal<sup>860</sup>. A more comprehensive evaluation of the understanding, awareness and use of the framework among main national stakeholders is under way and to be completed in 2020. The results will feed into the updated referencing report.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Slovenia has completed referencing of SQF levels to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certification to QF-EHEA. A joint report was presented and endorsed by the EQF advisory group in May 2013. Referencing to the two European frameworks was legislated through the 2016 SQF Act.

## Important lessons and future plans

Developments in Slovenia are using an incremental approach, with reform under way since the mid-1990s, and a good situation in education, training and qualification developments compared to EU benchmarks. However, drawbacks have been identified at system level. For example, there is a need for better linking/bridging between formal education and training governed by the Ministry of Education and the certification system (NVQ), steered by the Ministry of Labour, to help individuals to combine learning outcomes from different settings. A further point to be improved is communication between education and the labour market. Quality assurance is regarded as essential in this respect, and is increasingly focused on outputs, as in testing quality indicators such

<sup>856</sup> SQF register: [www.nok.si](http://www.nok.si)

<sup>857</sup> EQF portal: [http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f\[0\]=im\\_field\\_entity\\_type%3A97](http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f[0]=im_field_entity_type%3A97)

<sup>858</sup> European Commission; Cedefop (2018).

<sup>859</sup> Prepared by Dr Borut Mikulec. Unedited text available at: [www.nok.si/sites/www.nok.si/files/dokumenti/evalvacija\\_registra\\_kvalifikacij\\_sok\\_z\\_vidika\\_strokovne\\_javnosti.pdf](http://www.nok.si/sites/www.nok.si/files/dokumenti/evalvacija_registra_kvalifikacij_sok_z_vidika_strokovne_javnosti.pdf) (in Slovenian).

<sup>860</sup> [www.nok.si](http://www.nok.si)

as graduate destinations. The SQF is expected to strengthen the quality assurance of learning outcomes.

Adopting and putting into force the SQF Act in July 2016, setting out the practical aspects of framework implementation, has been an important milestone. It opens up the qualification system to supplementary qualifications awarded on the labour market, establishing accreditation procedures and the criteria for placement into the SQF. The first six qualifications have been already included. It also stipulates the inclusion of SQF and EQF levels on certificates, diplomas and Europass documents, enabling the country to reach the second milestone of EQF implementation. The SQF register is fully operational.

One remaining question is the decision to place the 'master craftsman' qualification at SQF level 5/ EQF level 4. In most other European countries, this qualification is placed at a higher level (EQF level 5 or 6), and the EQF advisory group raised the question of whether Slovenia is considering an upgrade of this qualification to bring it more in line with similar qualifications in Europe. Activities in connection with reform of the 'master craftsman' qualification were undertaken by the Chamber of Crafts and Small Business of Slovenia in conjunction with the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for

VET, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, and other social partners. As part of this reform, changes to the first occupational standards for the 'master craftsman' qualification were prepared in 2016, though the decision was to keep the same qualification level (SQF level 5/EQF level 4). More is being done on this.

Entering a full operational stage, the SQF is facing new challenges. The question has been raised of the contribution and added value of the SQF for different groups of stakeholders. An evaluation study – in process – will collect views and evidence on the understanding, awareness and use among main groups of stakeholders to support further implementation.

Another challenge is further development of meaningful links between the SQF and related European and national tools, such as the classification system of education and training, KLASIUS. The development of an overarching national validation strategy for non-formal and informal learning is also on the agenda.

Further planned developments will focus on strengthening cooperation between different stakeholders in developing and implementing effective lifelong learning policies and practices.

**Table 72. Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF)**

NOF LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	SUPPLEMENTARY QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF LEVELS
10	Doctoral degree ( <i>Diploma o doktoratu znanosti</i> )			8
9	** Post-graduate research Master of science degree ( <i>Diploma o magisteriju znanosti</i> )  ** Specialisation diploma following academic higher education ( <i>Diploma o specializaciji</i> )			8
8	Master degree ( <i>Diploma o strokovnem magisteriju</i> )  ** Specialisation diploma following pre-Bologna professional higher education ( <i>Diploma o specializaciji</i> )  ** Pre-Bologna diploma of academic higher education ( <i>Diploma o univerzitetnem izobraževanju</i> )  ** Higher education diploma ( <i>Diploma o visoki izobrazbi</i> )			7



**Table 72. Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF) (Continued)**

NOF LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	SUPPLEMENTARY QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF LEVELS
<b>7</b>	Academic bachelor diploma ( <i>Diploma o izobraževanju prve stopnje – univerzitetna, UN</i> )  Professional bachelor diploma ( <i>Diploma o izobraževanju visokem strokovnem, VS</i> )  ** Pre-Bologna professional higher education diploma ( <i>Diploma o visokem strokovnem izobraževanju</i> )  ** Specialisation diploma following old short cycle higher education ( <i>Diploma o specializaciji</i> )		Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF level 7)	6
<b>6</b>	Short-cycle higher vocational diploma ( <i>Diploma o višji strokovni izobrazbi</i> )  ** Old short-cycle higher vocational diploma ( <i>Diploma o višješolski izobrazbi</i> )	NVQ certificate (level 6)	Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF level 6)	5
<b>5</b>	Vocational <i>matura</i> certificate (secondary technical education, four years) ( <i>Spričevalo o poklicni mature</i> )  General <i>matura</i> certificate ( <i>Spričevalo o splošni mature</i> )  Master craftsman's examination certificate ( <i>Spričevalo o opravljenem mojstrskem izpitu</i> )  Foreman's examination certificate ( <i>Spričevalo o opravljenem delovodskem izpitu</i> )  Managerial examination certificate ( <i>Spričevalo o opravljenem poslovodskem izpitu</i> )	NVQ certificate (level 5)	Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF level 5)	4
<b>4</b>	Final examination certificate (secondary vocational education, three years) ( <i>Spričevalo o zaključnem izpitu, Srednja poklicna izobrazba</i> )	NVQ (level 4)	Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF level 4)	4
<b>3</b>	Final examination certificate (lower vocational education, two years) ( <i>Spričevalo o zaključnem izpitu</i> )	NVQ (level 3)		3
<b>2</b>	Elementary school leaving certificate (nine years) ( <i>Zaključno spričevalo osnovne šole</i> )	NVQ (level 2)		2
<b>1</b>	Certificate of completing grades 7 or 8 of elementary education ( <i>Potrdilo o izpolnjeni osnovnošolski obveznosti</i> )  Elementary school leaving certificate ( <i>Zaključno spričevalo osnovne šole</i> )			1

(\*) The inclusion of supplementary qualifications in the framework was legislated in 2016.

(\*\*) Pre-Bologna diplomas.

Source: Adapted from Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2014; EQF NCP, 2018.

**Abbreviations**

CPI	Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training	NQF	national qualifications framework
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system	NVQ	national vocational qualification
EQF	European qualifications framework	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework in the European higher education area
NCP	national coordination point	SQF	Slovenian qualifications framework
		VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET – the EQF NCP: [www.cpi.si/en/](http://www.cpi.si/en/)

SQF portal: [www.nok.si/en](http://www.nok.si/en)

SQF register: [www.nok.si](http://www.nok.si)

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# SOUTH AFRICA

## Introduction and context

South Africa has in recent years achieved a high level of macroeconomic and political stability. At the same time, the legacy of *apartheid* remains a significant challenge even today, with various formal and informal initiatives under way to improve the level of education of historically disadvantaged people. Society is profoundly unequal. While this has historical causes, the current economic environment has not been able to eliminate the large levels of social and economic inequality. Although levels of inequality remain high (Gini coefficient = 0.63)<sup>861</sup>, they are no longer based solely on racial divisions. There are high levels of unemployment, particularly in the under-30 age group, and this is higher among women than men (Samuels, 2013).

Quality provision is the focus in the entire schooling sector which currently has only pockets of high-quality provision. International comparative studies rate this sector as one which needs strengthening, predominantly in maths and science subjects. Several initiatives to address this problem are underway, including annual national assessments through which problem areas are identified, tracked and addressed. Despite these efforts, the legacy of *apartheid* is starkly evident in the schooling sector, and much more needs to be done. Approximately 4% of the population are citizens of other countries, mostly from other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries. Qualifications obtained outside South Africa are evaluated by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), with the majority of applications falling into the highly skilled grouping. Most of these highly skilled migrants originate from SADC countries; the majority, for the 2017–18 financial year, (23.5%) come from Zimbabwe.

Statistics South Africa's (2017) Quarterly Labour Force Survey reveals that there are more than 3.3 million South Africans aged between 15 and 24

who are not in employment, education and training. Furthermore, there are 10 million South Africans between the ages of 15 and 24; and over 54% of them are unemployed (ibid.).

The vocational sector, comprising 50 technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges originally known as further education and training colleges, has doubled over the past years from about 360,000 enrolments to over 706,000 in 2016. Despite significant government investment, there are still problems as TVET colleges are often viewed as a second or third choice and for those with less ability. In an attempt to strengthen this sector, some TVET colleges have been transformed into community colleges. While enrolment rates have improved in recent years, much still needs to be done to convince the broader public that the vocational route can be a first choice for many students.

The South African national qualifications framework was established in 1998 after the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act in 1995. The NQF has been designed as an integrated system with a strong transformational agenda to promote lifelong learning for all South Africans in a non-racial, non-sexist democracy. Preceding the SAQA Act, a broad and extensive consultation process took place which had, as one of its roots in the late 1980s, the labour movement's desire to recognize the tradable skills of black workers in the bargaining forums for better conditions of service. The NQF was viewed by many, particularly the Trade Union movement, as a way to legitimately and quickly eradicate unfair labour practices through such mechanisms as recognition of prior learning (RPL), which could be used to award qualifications to persons who had been denied access to education and permanent employment yet who did the work in jobs that were formally and legislatively denied them prior to 1994. RPL was also seen as a way to open access to higher education and workplace programmes for formerly disadvantaged citizens who did not possess the qualifications for admission.

The overarching purpose of the NQF is to facilitate articulation, recognition, access and redress

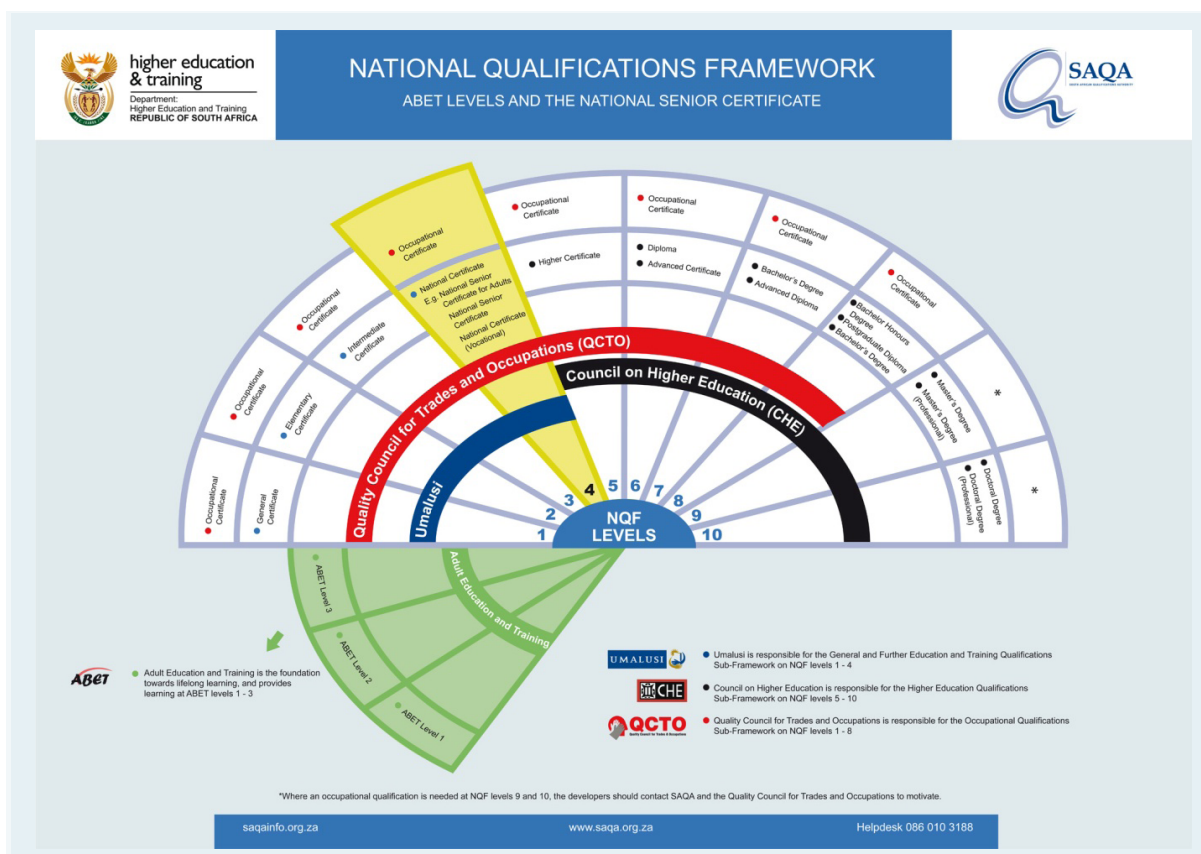
<sup>861</sup> Information accessed 25 February 2019 at: <https://data.worldbank.org>

across education, training, development and workplace learning for all South Africans. The NQF is the principal instrument through which national education and training qualifications are recognized and quality assured in South Africa. The NQF Act was promulgated in 2008 and came into effect from 1 June 2009, replacing the SAQA Act of 1995. Some of the main reasons for the review and subsequent change to the NQF environment have been debates over the integration of education and training, the different needs of the sectors in education and training, the relative importance of stakeholder and expert opinions, and strengthening relations between bodies within the NQF structure. The most important change was the establishment of three sub-frameworks as part of the comprehensive NQF: General and Further Education and Training

Qualifications Sub-Framework, Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, and Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework. Within the NQF landscape, professional bodies apply to SAQA to be recognized within the education and training system, while professional designations are also included through an agreed process between SAQA and professional bodies (SAQA, 2018).

At present the main focus is on streamlining and simplifying the implementation of the NQF and making it more responsive to South Africa's needs. SAQA and its quality partners, the three Quality Councils: Council on Higher Education, Quality Council for Trades and Occupations and *Umalusi* are working together to achieve the objectives of the NQF.

**Figure 20. South African national qualifications framework**



## Policy objectives

The specific objectives of the NQF, as outlined in the NQF Act No 67 of 2008, are to:

- create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- support access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths;

- improve education and training quality; and
- accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.

The objectives of the NQF are designed to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large. SAQA and the Quality Councils must:

- develop, foster and maintain an integrated transparent national framework for the recognition of learning achievements; and
- ensure South African qualifications are of an acceptable quality and internationally comparable.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The South African NQF is a single, comprehensive integrated system for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications. It is a 10-level system that comprises three co-ordinated qualifications sub-frameworks.

The NQF includes all South African qualifications. The learning outcome approach is enabled by relevant legislation. The level descriptors (SAQA, 2012) provide the generic outcomes and the qualification descriptors describe the specific outcomes. A nested learning outcome methodology is applied in South Africa.

There is one set of level descriptors that applies to all three sub-frameworks. The level descriptors give an indication of the general cognitive competences that should be developed by all qualifications at all levels and, therefore, give broad guidance for the development of exit level outcomes, associated assessment criteria, curriculum content, learning outcomes and assessment for qualifications at each level. The positioning of two or more qualifications on the same NQF level indicates that the qualifications are broadly comparable in terms of the cognitive level of the exit level outcomes, of the qualification, and the generic cognitive competences developed. The qualification descriptors provide more detailed information on the purpose and nature of the qualification.

The learning outcomes of qualifications take account of societal and labour market needs. A variety of stakeholders are involved in the development of qualifications and they must use the level descriptors. Qualifications, as a complete entity, are developed to meet labour market and societal needs, and the learning outcomes are directed at realising the aim and purpose of each qualification.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

In addition to changes in the NQF legislation in 2008, the government also reformed the political

and administrative structures of the education and training landscape to improve the quality of education and training. The previously single Department of Education was divided into two departments: the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Department of Basic Education. The training component was transferred from the Department of Labour to the Department of Higher Education and Training, responsible for universities, universities of technology, community colleges and TVET colleges, adult basic education and the entire training sector. Individual training colleges (for nursing, agricultural and similar specialist occupations) are still functioning under different departments. The Department of Basic Education is responsible for the formal schooling sector from primary to secondary school, as well as for the national adult literacy campaign, known as *Kha Ri Gude*.

The NQF continues to be led by a central statutory body, SAQA, with extensive input by other stakeholders. Three sector-specific Quality Councils have executive responsibility for quality assurance and standards development within their respective sectors, while SAQA registers qualifications on the NQF once they meet the stipulated criteria. The Quality Councils, namely the Council on Higher Education, the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations and Umalusi, are responsible for the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework and the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework respectively. Each Quality Council is responsible for developing qualifications in accordance with the overall criteria determined by SAQA. In turn, SAQA is responsible for the overall maintenance of the NQF and the co-ordination of the sub-frameworks. The three Quality Councils and SAQA report to the Minister of Higher Education and Training, while Umalusi, on certain aspects, also reports to the Minister of Basic Education.

Representatives from trade unions, provider bodies (including higher education, further education and general education), professional bodies, employers and experts serve on the Boards and Councils of SAQA and the Quality Councils. Within the NQF landscape, SAQA has the responsibility to recognise professional bodies and register professional designations in line with developed policy and criteria. By 31 March 2018, 106 professional bodies had already met these requirements with over 385 professional designations registered and over 350 000 people with professional designations.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The term recognition of prior learning (RPL) is used in South Africa for recognition of non-formal and informal learning and is defined as comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner, however obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification. Learning is measured in terms of specific learning outcomes for a specific qualification and may lead to achievement of credits towards the qualification. Two types of RPL have emerged in South Africa: RPL for credit, usually associated with the occupational and trades sector, and RPL for access, usually associated with higher education.

Since the implementation of the RPL policies, it has become a reality for over 63,700 people who have achieved full qualifications through RPL. Most RPL achievements, however, have been against part-qualifications where more than 96 million learner achievements have been recorded. From 'islands of excellent practice', the country continues to move towards a national RPL system. There are three main target groups for RPL. The access group comprises under-qualified adult learners wishing to upskill and improve their qualifications, and candidates lacking minimum requirements for entry into a formal learning programme. The redress group consists of workers who may be semi-skilled and even unemployed, who may have worked for many years but were prevented from gaining qualifications due to restrictive past policies. Finally, there are candidates who left formal education prematurely and who have, over a number of years, built up learning through short programmes. Most RPL candidates fall between NQF levels 2 and 4, and generally do not possess a school-leaving certificate (Samuels, 2013).

## Recognising foreign qualifications

The criteria for evaluating foreign qualifications are clearly spelt out in the *Policy and Criteria for Evaluating Foreign Qualifications within the South African NQF as amended in 2017* (SAQA, 2017). Foreign qualifications, whether held by South Africans or foreign nationals, are evaluated for the purpose of informing further study, employment, registration and professional licensing in South Africa.

The evaluation and advisory service provided by SAQA forms part of a value chain for the recognition of foreign qualifications. SAQA partners with other bodies and entities to recognize foreign

qualifications so that recognition roles and responsibilities are clear. SAQA also approved an *Addendum on the recognition of qualifications and part-qualifications for refugees and asylum seekers* for public comment. The addendum will be considered for approval for implementation in the first half of 2019.

South Africa takes the combatting of fraud very seriously with the Department of Higher Education and Training ushering in an NQF Amendment Bill through Parliament which makes it a criminal offence to forge qualifications. The Bill makes provision for the development of a register of misrepresented qualifications and a register for fraudulent qualifications. SAQA takes seriously its counter-fraud role to verify national and foreign qualifications and protect the public against misrepresented qualifications. There are a number of counter-fraud initiatives currently underway, one of which is the development of a national policy on misrepresented qualifications. In the 2017–18 financial year a total of 25,589 foreign qualifications were evaluated. Of these, 373 were confirmed to be misrepresented foreign qualifications which is 1.4% of the total qualifications evaluated.

## NQF implementation

Considerable progress has been made in implementing the NQF since 2009. Policies on level descriptors (SAQA, 2012), RPL (SAQA, 2013a), the registration of qualifications and part-qualifications (SAQA, 2013b), the recognition of professional bodies (SAQA, 2018), credit accumulation and transfer (SAQA, 2014b), assessment (SAQA, 2014a) and the evaluation of foreign qualifications (SAQA, 2017) have been completed. These policies have been agreed between SAQA and the Quality Councils. Currently, a policy on misrepresented qualifications is being developed.

To strengthen collaboration among the key agencies, SAQA has overseen the development of a system of collaboration and an NQF implementation framework which is the roadmap for NQF implementation. An NQF advisory service project has been developed to assist users to navigate the education and training system. The National Learners' Records Database, which is the national NQF repository for information on learner achievements and related matters, continues to provide important insights into the status of the education and training system in the country. By 31 March 2018 a total of 14.9 million qualifications were awarded in South Africa and the achievements recorded on the Database. Credential evaluation of both national and foreign qualifications and

fraud-combatting also remains closely integrated with the NQF. In the 2017–18 financial year, SAQA verified 79,931 national qualification records and confirmed 230 misrepresentations of national qualifications.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

South Africa, as one of the 16 Member States of SADC, has played an active role in the development of the SADC qualifications framework (SADCQF). The SADCQF, a comprehensive framework for schooling, TVET and higher education, was established in 2011 by the SADC Ministers of Education (SADC, 2017). Its purpose is to enable easier movement of learners and workers across the SADC region and internationally. It is a 10-level regional qualifications framework underpinned by learning outcomes and quality assurance principles that will provide a regional reference for qualifications and quality assurance mechanisms in SADC. The main purpose of the SADCQF is to promote mobility and, as such, it plays a key role in being the regional reference point for comparing qualifications obtained in the SADC.

Currently the SADCQF is a reference framework. Eight SADC countries are piloting the alignment of their NQFs or national qualifications systems with the SADCQF. The pilot countries are Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia. An alignment plan, roadmap and timelines were developed to assist the eight pilot countries. Support was provided via alignment capacity-building workshops hosted by SAQA.

## Important lessons and future plans

The South African NQF has become an integral feature of the national education and training landscape. Learning outcomes are widely used

across all sectors. SAQA and the three Quality Councils have become mature organizations with clearly defined mandates and who work together to implement the NQF.

Simplification of the NQF and articulation between the sub-frameworks of the NQF remains an area that needs to be improved. A national policy and a set of articulation criteria have been developed to address some of these challenges. The intention is to expand RPL through a national co-ordinated strategy (DHET, 2016). The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (DHET, 2013) is currently being implemented to ensure that the post-school sector receives attention.

SAQA has shifted its focus from policy development, which had been required by the NQF Act of 2008 and had been largely completed by 2014, towards overseeing policy implementation. This will include greater emphasis on monitoring and evaluation, as well as an increased role for SAQA in cases where unfair and discriminatory exclusionary practices occur, preventing learners' mobility.

International benchmarking between the South African NQF and other countries is consistently undertaken.

### Abbreviations

NQF	national qualifications framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	SADC qualifications framework
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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# SOUTH KOREA

## Introduction and context

The purpose of the Korean qualifications framework (KQF), to be introduced in 2019 as a regulation of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in cooperation with the Ministry of Employment and Labour (MoEL), is to set out an integrated system of levels common to academic and vocational qualifications. Since 2016 the MoEL (2010a; 2010b) and the MoE have made a full-scale effort to establish the KQF through the development of national competency standards (NCS) and the introduction of qualifications grounded in learning outcomes. These new measures are designed to strengthen links between industry, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and the qualifications system and help raise the status and significance of TVET (Seung Il Na, 2012).

One of the challenges the KQF seeks to address is the significant imbalance between vocational and academic qualifications in terms of student numbers. The primary reason for this imbalance is that Korean society places a very high value on academic qualifications, which the Korean education system separates from vocational qualifications (Jeong-Yoon et al., 2000). Vocational education is considered a second-class option (Seung Il Na, 2012).

Meanwhile, despite such a highly educated youth population, the country is facing several challenges.

- a. It has one of the highest youth unemployment rates among OECD Member States (Park, 2011); in addition, unemployment rates for college graduates reached 12.5% in 2016 (Statistics Korea, 2016).
- b. The schism between the labour market and higher education creates societal instability.
- c. The links between industry and the higher education sector are weak in terms of the level of workforce training (Woo, 2010).
- d. The skills mismatch ironically forces young people to seek more education, while employers have to invest more in on-the-job training for new recruits.

- e. Academic degrees are currently not linked to the national qualifications standards.
- f. The academic learning culture of higher education does not promote the full appreciation and value of recognizing non-formal and informal outcomes through the assessment of prior learning.

A further challenge relates to the nature of the TVET system in the country. Since TVET has traditionally focused on the high school level, post-secondary TVET and lifelong learning have been neglected in TVET policies. As the country enters a knowledge-based economy and skills requirements continue to rise, TVET in schools as well as in post-secondary and higher education institutions need to properly respond to this change.

The government is taking a number of measures to dispel the negative perception of TVET and to improve its quality. Firstly, it is trying to open pathways to higher education for vocational education graduates. Vocational high school students are being given the option of taking academic subjects so that they can later apply for admission to universities. In some schools, academic and vocational students share as much as 75% of a common curriculum. Secondly, a new type of high school, modelled on the German dual education system and known as a Young Meister High School is a new type of elite vocational high school in Korea, launched in 2008 to provide education geared towards industrial and business demands (Seung Il Na, 2012).

A further concern is the variety of the vocational qualifications in terms of types, awarding authorities, and certification procedures (KRIVET, 2001). There are three major types of qualifications in South Korea:

- a. national technical qualifications focusing on manufacturing, services and the business field;
- b. national qualifications of non-technical categories such as those for lawyers, accountants and patent experts; and

- c. private qualifications including areas such as computers, language skills, sports and health, leisure and recreation activities, social welfare, counselling and civil engineering (Framework Act on Qualifications, 2011).

The lack of coherence among vocational qualifications continues since they are issued by various government authorities. Furthermore, the criteria for vocational qualifications are too complicated and disconnected to allow comparisons with each other. Additionally, it is difficult to grasp exactly how qualifications respond to certain demands from an industry. Finally, there is a lack of incentive to increase competence through acquiring a qualification.

As a consequence of this lack of coherence, the quality, relevance and credibility of qualifications became an issue. In 2002, the country began to introduce a competency-based approach in its curricula and methods of teaching as well as developing competency standards. This was also in response to the criticism levelled at TVET in the 1990s, which claimed that it was not reflecting the skill requirements of a new economy.

## Policy objectives

The aims of the KQF and NCS are to:

- a. improve coordination among ministries responsible for TVET policy;
- b. align TVET qualifications obtained in high schools and junior colleges with national technical qualifications and underlying standards (OECD, 2009, p. 1);
- c. strengthen TVET beyond its present theoretical orientation and make it more practical and outcomes-based, so that it delivers the kind of human resources employers say they need;
- d. build ladders and pathways for occupational and educational progression, so that, for example, dental mechanics can become dentists and legal and accounting clerks can become lawyers and accountants (Jeong-Yoon, 2013);
- e. make learning and assessment activities more like real work and less like school;
- f. strengthen the competitiveness of companies and the nation by recognizing informal learning;
- g. link the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning to technical and vocational qualifications (ibid.);
- h. raise the perceived value of informal and non-formal learning by improving their quality

according to the criteria and standards in the KQF and NCS.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The KQF comprises the NCS which identify and standardize the competences required for job performance. It is a comprehensive concept including abilities such as knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to perform a job, and assessment of ability. The NCS have been developed using the following procedures:

- a. development of comprehensive plan,
- b. analysis of vocational structure and job,
- c. designing competence units,
- d. standardisation of competences and levels,
- e. evaluation of basic competences,
- f. allocation of codes,
- g. verification of vocational standards.

The NCS serve as a channel for responding to the demands of industries and for reforming the curriculum of secondary schools, colleges and the educational delivery system. This competence-based system focuses in particular on problem-solving, communicating, relationship management and teamwork.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The KQF was initiated by the MoE and the MoEL in consultation with other ministries, such as the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy.

South Korea has been developing an articulation system between its traditional higher education system and vocational education and training and qualifications systems according to the Korean skills standards and the national occupation standards. The national occupation standards have been developed and operated by the MoEL and the Korean skills standards by the MoE.

The Korean skills standards and the national occupation standards were integrated into the NCS in December 2010 by the Prime Minister's Office. These efforts are designed to link various TVET systems and vocational qualifications systems and to enhance the development of the competence-based TVET system. Furthermore, the purpose of the merger was to reinforce an overall coordinating function and to conduct effective qualifications-related policy.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Korea's mechanisms for the recognition and accreditation of prior and/or non-formal learning have developed in tandem with the KQF and NCS. Efforts are being made to reorganize the national qualifications system in such a way as to allow learners to accumulate credits towards a qualification and a college degree via the academic credit bank system (ACBS) and to establish links between the ACBS, the NCS and the NQF.

The MoE develops the basic accreditation plan and issues final approval by sending a certificate of accreditation to each institution, while the National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE) implements the plan, screens the documents and develops a final evaluation report for the MoE (Baik, 2013). The ACBS documents and recognizes outcomes from various non-formal learning activities by granting credits and conferring degrees when certain numbers of credits are accumulated. At present, six sources of credits are recognized by the ACBS:

- a. credits transferred from formal higher education institutions;
- b. credits obtained by taking part-time courses at formal higher education institutions;
- c. credits transferred from non-formal education and training courses accredited by NILE;
- d. credits recognized for 'important intangible cultural properties' (the ACBS accredits master and apprenticeship programmes in the context of artistic activities regarded as traditional and cultural heritage);
- e. credits recognized for national vocational qualifications (above the level of industrial technician);
- f. credits transferred from the bachelor's degree examination for self-education (BDES) – this system makes it possible to obtain an academic degree without attending a regular college or university by passing an examination conducted by NILE.

The first two of these six recognized sources of credits relate to universities and are mostly accepted for an academic degree regardless of when they were awarded. Most ACBS accreditation, however, concerns non-formal education and training institutions. The number of credits obtained by acquiring national technical qualifications or by passing examinations depends on the level of difficulty of the exam.

The work of the ACBS is supplemented by the lifelong learning account system, designed to

validate all types of learning by promoting the recognition and certification of both academic and vocational qualifications. The system allows individuals to accumulate lifelong learning experiences and to 'invest' these experiences in moving up the career ladder.

## NQF implementation

The MoEL and its affiliates are responsible for operating the NCS (KRIVET, 2009). The MoEL is responsible for refining vocational qualifications, improving the practicability of vocational certificates and upgrading the system for producing work-oriented tests. The MoEL also oversees the application of NCS in the labour market (KRIVET, 2009).

However, work to develop the NCS is implemented mainly by the Human Resource Development Service of Korea (HRD Korea), which must then be approved by the government, with research being conducted by the Korean Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET) as well as other national research institutes, including universities. Nine government ministries are responsible for developing NCS in 24 industry categories, including agriculture and forestry, textiles, chemicals, machinery, electronics, environment, financial services, healthcare, culture, tourism, food processing and human services. Industry sector councils help improve connections between education and training and industry, while the MoE harmonizes qualifications across the different sectors in consultation with the various stakeholders. The MoE has supported KRIVET in the development of learning modules based on the NCS since 2014. As of 2018, 947 NCS had been developed (HRD Korea, 2018). Since 2015, the MoEL and HRD Korea have supported industry sector councils in developing about 50 new NCS based on industry demands every year.

The distinction between 'fields' and 'jobs' is important to understand. For example, the medical field has four subdivisions (here, 'jobs') in the Korean NCS: clinical medicine, nursing, basic medicine and medical specialisms that support clinical medicine, such as clinical pathology and image medical sciences. It is expected that these standards will be widely used to structure TVET curriculum development.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

South Korea seeks to align its own qualifications framework with those under development in other

countries of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the ASEAN qualifications reference framework in order to allow for mutual recognition of qualifications across the region, thus enhancing educational and labour mobility.

### Important lessons and future plans

The KQF and the NCS still need to be better understood across the full range of agencies and sector authorities involved in education, training and employment. Universities in particular tend to guard their autonomy and only accept frameworks that reflect their existing practices. This attitude needs to change if the KQF and NCS are to bring about their full intended benefits. The current government and other stakeholders are fully supporting these developments and are undertaking efforts in this respect.

In the near future, links to the KQF and NCS will make the ACBS and the lifelong learning account system more reliable and convenient, not only for learners but also for employers and educators (Baik, 2013). The ACBS could play a role in facilitating an NCS-based curriculum across the education and training institutions it accredits. Credits from NCS-based education and training programmes might be a new way to link ACBS and TVET; in doing so, the ACBS might gain more leverage concerning the traditional higher education and other systems.

At present, the MoEL is carrying out the development and application of the sectoral qualifications framework (SQF) policy. SQFs have already been developed for the software, hairdressing, hotel management and electric railways sectors. The SQF development council to be established under HRD Korea will facilitate SQF policy and KQF implementation in the near future. Both the NQF and the SQF are designed with special emphasis on the alignment between education, training, qualifications and recognition of prior learning, with an expectation that they would assure the quality of NQF and SQF registered qualifications.

#### Abbreviations

ACBS	academic credit bank system
HRD Korea	Human Resource Development Service of Korea
KQF	Korean qualifications framework
KRIVET	Korean Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEL	Ministry of Employment and Labour
NCS	national competency standards
NILE	National Institute for Lifelong Education
SQF	sectoral qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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## Introduction and context<sup>862</sup>

In recent years, Spain has taken a number of measures to reform and improve the quality and relevance of education and training. Important progress has been made in reducing early school leaving, which has fallen progressively (23.6% in 2013, 20% in 2015 and 18.3% in 2017); however, rates still vary between regions and measures have been taken to reduce early leaving further as part of a national plan, including an alternative vocational education path at lower secondary level adopted in 2013. Overall participation in vocational education and training (VET) and the employment rate of recent VET graduates are below the EU averages. Measures to increase the attractiveness of VET have been taken as part of a reform in 2014 that is still under way; there are new initiatives on dual VET schemes, with harmonised criteria in all regional education administrations for the entrance exams for the three VET levels (basic, intermediate and higher VET). One persisting challenge in the country is the large disparity between regions, both in terms of skills and of participation in education and training. Grade repetition rates are still high and are not improving. National debate has been launched around a comprehensive reform and long-term legislative framework, the Social and political national pact on education. The 11 benchmarks proposed include updating the curricula and teaching methods, reforming the teaching profession, increasing school autonomy, and promoting digital skills and multilingualism. While the rate of tertiary education attainment is relatively high and above the EU average, the employment rate of recent tertiary graduates (ISCED levels 5–8), at 76.6% in 2017, has improved but is still lower than the EU average of 84.9%. The qualifications mismatch in Spain remains high and there are significant skills imbalances (European Commission, 2018).

In 2018, the Spanish Ministry of Education and VET, in cooperation with other stakeholders, concluded

<sup>862</sup> The Spanish qualifications framework fiche will be further elaborated when the referencing to the EQF has been completed.

technical work on the design of the Spanish qualifications framework for lifelong learning (*Marco Español de Cualificaciones (MECU)*)<sup>863</sup>. A royal decree is being drafted and is expected to be adopted in 2019.

The qualifications framework for higher education (*Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior (MECES)*) has been put in place separately<sup>864</sup>. This framework has been self-certified against the framework for qualifications of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) as part of Spain's continuing commitment to the Bologna process (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2014)<sup>865</sup>. The self-certification followed the procedures and criteria set down for such work within the Bologna process, and involved a committee of senior Spanish and international experts and stakeholders.

## Policy objectives

One of the main objectives in developing a national framework compatible with the European qualifications framework (EQF) and those in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) is to make Spanish qualifications easier to understand by describing them in terms of learning outcomes; it should also clarify relations between qualifications awarded by different authorities in a lifelong learning perspective. It is expected that this will improve the extent to which stakeholders are informed about national qualifications, raising trust and making mobility easier. Through MECU it should be easier to

<sup>863</sup> MECU: Spanish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning. [www.mecd.gob.es/educacion-mecd/mc/mecu/presentacion.html](http://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion-mecd/mc/mecu/presentacion.html)

<sup>864</sup> Established under royal decree: Ministry of Education (2011). Real Decreto 1027/2011, de 15 julio, por el que se establece el Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior [Royal Decree 2027/2011 of 15 July 2011, for the establishment of the Spanish qualifications framework for higher education]. *Boletín oficial del estado*, No 185.

<sup>865</sup> [www.aneca.es/Sala-de-prensa/Noticias/2014/Informe-sobre-la-Autocertificacion-del-Marco-Espanol-para-las-Cualificaciones-de-la-Educacion-Superior-MECES](http://www.aneca.es/Sala-de-prensa/Noticias/2014/Informe-sobre-la-Autocertificacion-del-Marco-Espanol-para-las-Cualificaciones-de-la-Educacion-Superior-MECES)

identify, validate and recognise all kinds of learning outcomes (including non-formal and informal learning), regardless of the way they were acquired. This will support better use of qualifications at national and European level. Another important aim is to support transition and progression possibilities within the various subsystems of education and vocational training; examples include progression from short cycle to university programmes and opening up higher education for non-traditional learners, who might have no school leaving certificate. MECU should also have an important communication role for diverse stakeholders.

The purpose of the Spanish qualifications framework for higher education (MECES) is to allow the classification, comparability and transparency of higher education qualifications within the Spanish education system. The levels within MECES are labelled 1 to 4 and correspond to the four levels of the QF-EHEA: *técnico superior* (advanced VET), *grado* (bachelor), *master* (master) and *doctor* (doctorate). Of these, the first is a non-university higher education level included to support and promote lifelong learning. Some advanced VET is considered higher education but is undertaken outside the university system; such advanced VET studies may be recognised not only for admission to university but also as ECTS credits where subjects/ learning outcomes are properly aligned.

MECU aims to include, in a first stage, all nationally recognised diplomas and certificates from the education and labour ministries, while remaining open for inclusion of official qualifications issued by other administrative sectors.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

An eight-level framework has been proposed to cover all main types of Spanish qualification. The four highest levels are compatible with the Spanish qualifications framework for higher education, based on the Dublin descriptors.

Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence<sup>866</sup>. They have been inspired by EQF level descriptors, but adopted to suit the national context. This is particularly the case for skills, where the ability to communicate in different languages and analytical skills are emphasised. Competence is defined as autonomy and responsibility, including learning skills and attitudes.

It is expected that the development of both MECU and MECES will further support the strengthening

of learning outcomes at all education and qualification levels, to make qualifications more readable and easier to compare. The Spanish Ministry of Education and VET drafted a new education organic law in 2018<sup>867</sup>, that will be submitted to Parliament in spring 2019. The law aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and increase school autonomy and the coherence of the national system in line with international standards.

The learning outcomes approach is seen as an essential part of MECU and MECES development and implementation. However, as reported for the Cedefop study on learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2016), the notion of learning outcomes is a new concept in the Spanish context and not widely shared. Competences and capacities are often referred to in policy documents, with many different interpretations due to various linguistic and pedagogic concepts.

The level of implementation also varies across subsystems; the one most developed and elaborated is in VET. The VET qualification system is defined by the Law on qualifications and vocational training<sup>868</sup> that establishes the national catalogue of professional qualifications<sup>869</sup>; this lists 680 occupational standards defined in competences and is permanently updated. Professional modules for each qualification gather the learning outcomes and the corresponding assessment criteria that show that the qualification holder knows, understands and is able to do as expected on completion of the programme. Learning outcomes are closely related to work activities and required professional competences. Occupational standards inform development of initial VET (IVET) programmes that lead to vocational diplomas as well as CVET programmes leading to professional certificates (*certificados de profesionalidad*). Since 2014, dual VET – strengthening links to the labour market – has been implemented in all autonomous communities. Revising VET curricula and strengthening key competences has been initiated though the 2015 Ministerial Decree (EDC/65/2015). The Ministry of Education and VET is drafting a Royal decree to regulate the organisation of VET, including the admission criteria for the three levels of VET (basic, intermediate and higher) and other aspects.

The Ministry of Education and VET has established in legislation national core curricula for the various levels of education: pre-primary, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and vocational training.

<sup>867</sup> Updating and improving the previous law – see Government of Spain (2013).

<sup>868</sup> See Government of Spain (2002).

<sup>869</sup> <http://incual.mecd.es/bdc>

<sup>866</sup> Based on draft MECU level descriptors (unpublished).

These are determined by central government, though regional administrations, and the schools take responsibility for developing part of the curriculum<sup>870</sup>. The core curricula determine the general objectives for each stage of education as well as specific objectives for each area or subject. They also establish the content and evaluation criteria for each area and the basic skills for each stage of compulsory education.

New higher education study programmes have to include expected outcomes and achievement of learning objectives set for the student. All study programmes have to be accredited according to national guidelines. MECES refers directly to learning outcomes (*resultados de aprendizaje* and *competencias*). Linked to MECES levels, learning outcomes are a specific requirement in, for example, the ex-post external evaluation of study programmes required for the formal accreditation/renewal of accreditation of all official degrees. Consideration of the use of learning outcomes is also a specific requirement in the external evaluation of a higher education institution's or unit's internal quality assurance systems during audit procedures.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Ministry of Education and VET, Directorate General for Vocational Training, is coordinating MECU development in cooperation with other ministries (Labour, Migrations and Social Security, Industry, Trade and Tourism, Health, Consumption and Social Welfare, Economy and Business). Development work includes a wide range of other stakeholders such as social partners (unions, Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations, Spanish Confederation of Small and Medium Enterprises), institutional coordination bodies (such as Sectoral Conference of Education, General Conference for University Policy), consultative bodies (State School Council, Vocational Training Council, Arts Education Council, University Council), agencies for evaluation and others (professional corporations and associations). Regional councils for education have been involved. Spain is seeking to create a simple and practical system that is robust, but also flexible enough to respond to the requirements of regional autonomy. However, overall responsibility for the development and implementation of MECU, in accordance with

<sup>870</sup> Central government is responsible for designing 65% of the curriculum (55% in those autonomous communities which have their own language); the additional curriculum at regional level differs between autonomous communities.

the Spanish constitution, lies with central government. The State has exclusive competence on all regulation of qualifications, an aspect correspondingly developed and revised by the 2006 and the 2013 Organic Acts<sup>871</sup>.

Cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Migrations and Social Security has been reinforced to address still high unemployment in the country.

Cooperation with the Bologna process is ensured, with members represented in both the committee for MECU and in the group for MECES to achieve methodological and structural coherence, making possible the alignment of the two frameworks. MECES was formulated by a formal committee established under Royal Decree 900/2007<sup>872</sup>.

External quality assurance in higher education is undertaken by the national agency (ANECA) and a number of agencies within some of the autonomous regions. The competences of the quality assurance agencies vary depending on the procedures being undertaken and whether or not the agency is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)<sup>873</sup> and the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)<sup>874</sup>.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>875</sup>

In recent years, the Spanish Government and regional governments have consolidated national procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning; different laws and regulations frame validation, targeting different education sectors. The Organic Law of Education and the Organic Law of Universities incorporate actions to validate non-formal and informal learning, such as access exams to VET and university studies aimed at those who do not have the required qualifications. Royal Decree 1224/2009<sup>876</sup> established recognition of skills acquired through work experience.

<sup>871</sup> Organic Acts 2006 and 2013 – see Government of Spain (2006 and 2013).

<sup>872</sup> See Government of Spain (2007).

<sup>873</sup> ENQA: [www.enqa.eu](http://www.enqa.eu)

<sup>874</sup> In addition to ANECA, six of the regional agencies (AQU in Catalonia, ACPUA in Aragon, ACSUG in Galicia, ACSUCYL in Castilla y León, AAC-DEVA in Andalucía, and UNIBASQ for the Basque Country) are members of EQAR: [www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/](http://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/)

<sup>875</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>876</sup> See Government of Spain (2009).



This decree provides the possibility of evaluating professional competences through non-traditional assessment methods; this is common to gaining qualifications from the employment administration (*certificados de profesionalidad*) and the education administration (initial VET programmes) through specific calls for validation. The procedure only validates professional competences acquired through work experience or non-formal learning pertaining to specific units of competences registered in the national catalogue of professional qualifications. Validation procedures lead either to full or partial qualifications, and/or give access to education and training programmes. Progress has been achieved in higher education; universities have developed procedures to validate and recognise working experience to access a study programme (for people over 40 years of age) or gain credits toward a degree.

Awareness of validation has increased in all sectors of society in Spain and stakeholders have become more sensitive to validation as a way of recognising learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, and through work experience. Validation is now covered by the Spanish Strategy for employment activation 2017–20 and a project *Reconoce* is in process to cover validation in the entire youth sector.

The Spanish national qualifications framework (MECU) is under construction. Once it is in place, the current procedures for validation of learning acquired through non-formal and informal learning can be used to acquire a qualification or gain access to programmes and qualifications which will be linked to the framework.

## NQF implementation

MECU is not yet operational. The royal decree on the introduction of MECU – in preparation but yet to come into force – will establish the legal basis for its implementation. The draft Royal Decree on MECU planned to be adopted in 2019 recommends establishing a MECU committee, including stakeholders such as ministries, representatives of professional associations, trade union and business representatives, and qualifications framework experts from different sectors. The committee will be mandated to decide on assignment of framework levels to the Spanish qualifications and to submit proposals to the government for approval. The national qualifications will be assigned to MECU levels based on three criteria:

- a. comparability of qualification type descriptors defined in learning outcomes and MECU level descriptors;

- b. implementation of the common quality assurance criteria for qualification in line with annex IV of the 2017 EQF recommendation<sup>877</sup>;
- c. public consultation with bodies involved in the design, award and use of qualifications in a respective field.

Qualifications from formal education and training and from the employment administration (*certificados de profesionalidad*) will be assigned first.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The qualifications framework for higher education (*Marco Español de Cualificaciones de Educación Superior* (MECES)) has been self-certified against the QF-EHEA (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2014). MECU is planned to be referenced to the EQF in 2019.

## Important lessons and future plans

Development of the Spanish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (MECU) aims to strengthen the links between education and employment but there are various challenges at different levels. Dialogue and interaction with different stakeholders from education and employment needs to continue; involving administrations that provide and award qualifications in different sectors will be part of the implementation process of MECU. Government is taking initiatives to support cooperation between universities, businesses and research centres.

Putting the framework into the lifelong learning perspective, and including non-formal and informal aspects of learning in the framework, is regarded as complex. Including qualifications resulting from non-formal or informal learning uses recognition and validation processes more broadly implemented only in recent years.

Further application of MECES is an integral part of both external and internal quality assurance mechanisms undertaken within Spanish higher education, nationally and within the autonomous regions.

NQF development in Spain also shows the importance of political processes and cycle on the implementation of European tools, such as the EQF. Adoption of the royal decree on MECU will be an important step paving the way towards implementation.

<sup>877</sup> <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/cee970-518f-11e7-a5ca-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

**Table 73. Spanish qualifications framework for higher education (MECES) and draft Spanish qualifications framework for lifelong learning (MECU) levels**

DRAFT MECU LEVELS	MECES LEVELS	HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS	QF-EHEA
8	4	Doctoral degree ( <i>Doctorado</i> )	Third cycle
7	3	Master degree ( <i>Master</i> )	Second cycle
6	2	Bachelor degree ( <i>Grado</i> )	First cycle
5	1	Advanced technician ( <i>Técnico superior</i> )	First cycle
4			
3			
2			
1			

Source: Adapted from the Royal Decree 1027/2011 of 15 July 2011 establishing the Spanish qualifications framework of higher education. [www.boe.es/boe/dias/2011/08/03/pdfs/BOE-A-2011-13317.pdf](http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2011/08/03/pdfs/BOE-A-2011-13317.pdf)

Abbreviations		MECU	Marco Español de Cualificaciones (Spanish qualifications framework)
EQF	European qualifications framework	NQF	national qualifications framework
MECES	Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior (Spanish qualifications framework for higher education)	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework in the European higher education area
		VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

Directorate General for Vocational Training (Ministry of Education and VET) – the designated EQF NCP:  
[www.educacionyfp.gob.es/ministerio.html](http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/ministerio.html)

MECU website: [www.mecd.gob.es/mecu](http://www.mecd.gob.es/mecu)

Qualifications in the education system – on the website of the Ministry of Education and VET: [www.mecd.gob.es/educacion-mecd/](http://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion-mecd/)

Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales (CNCP): <http://incual.mecd.es/bdc>

Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (2014). *Verification of compatibility of MECES (the Spanish qualifications framework for higher education) with the framework for qualifications of the European higher education area (EQ-EHEA)*. [www.aneca.es/Sala-de-prensa/Noticias/2014/Informe-sobre-la-Autocertificacion-del-Marco-Espanol-para-las-Cualificaciones-de-la-Educacion-Superior-MECES](http://www.aneca.es/Sala-de-prensa/Noticias/2014/Informe-sobre-la-Autocertificacion-del-Marco-Espanol-para-las-Cualificaciones-de-la-Educacion-Superior-MECES)

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European Commission (2018). *Education and training monitor 2018: Spain*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-spain\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-spain_en.pdf)

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- Government of Spain (2007). *Real Decreto 900/2007, de 6 de julio, por el que se crea el Comité para la definición del Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior* [Royal Decree 900/2007 of 6 July, on the establishment of the Committee for the definition of the Spanish qualifications framework in higher education]. *Boletín oficial del estado*, No 172. [www.boe.es/boe/dias/2007/07/19/pdfs/A31371-31372.pdf](http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2007/07/19/pdfs/A31371-31372.pdf)
- Government of Spain (2009). Real Decreto 1224/2009, de 17 de julio, de reconocimiento de las competencias profesionales adquiridas por experiencia laboral [Royal Decree 1224/2009 of 17 July, on the recognition of professional competences acquired through working experience]. *Boletín oficial del estado*, No 205. [www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2009/BOE-A-2009-13781-consolidado.pdf](http://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2009/BOE-A-2009-13781-consolidado.pdf)
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## Introduction and context

The Sri Lankan qualifications framework (SLQF) was established in 2012 to provide a nationally consistent framework for all higher education qualifications offered in Sri Lanka. SLQF also integrates the national vocational qualifications framework (NVQF) developed by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) in 2005. An updated third version of the SLQF, published by the Ministry of Higher Education in September 2015, supersedes all previous versions (UGC, 2015).

In line with the 2009 national policy on tertiary education, which covers all areas of higher education including universities and the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sectors, recommendations by the TVEC focused primarily on providing education and training opportunities to young people through multiple modes of delivery, including non-state accredited institutions, as well as public sector accredited courses and centres. Importance was also placed on developing links from higher education and TVET to industry, services and other sectors.

The Commission also recommended that measures be taken to make TVET a more attractive alternative to University education and to combat the widespread perception that TVET is an inferior option, as well as to encourage private sector training providers to take a more active role in both training and employing TVET graduates.

## Policy objectives

The aim of the SLQF is to create an integral national framework for learning achievements by recognising and accrediting qualifications offered by different institutions engaged in higher education and vocational training in Sri Lanka.

The objectives of the SLQF are to:

- a. increase the quality of higher education and training at all levels;

- b. support access to higher learning and so contribute to full personal development of learners and to social and economic development of the country;
- c. improve equity in higher education, training and employment opportunities;
- d. assist employers to identify the levels of knowledge, skills and competences of qualification holders;
- e. develop positive attitudes in qualification holders;
- f. aid lateral and vertical mobility, and progression within higher education and career pathways;
- g. provide guidance in comparing qualifications offered by different institutions;
- h. help in developing higher education and vocational training programmes at appropriate levels;
- i. recognise prior learning;
- j. promote lifelong learning.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The SLQF consists of 12 levels, with the demands and complexity of learning outcomes increasing with each level. Levels 1 and 2 are senior secondary level education qualifications; levels 3 to 6 are undergraduate qualifications. The other six levels (7 to 12) are postgraduate qualifications. The levels are not directly related to the years of study; they are summarised, along with the relevant qualifications awarded, in [Table 74](#), and the minimum credit requirements for each level are summarised in [Table 75](#). The comparable levels of the NVQF are also identified in the SLQF.

The SLQF comprises several qualification types: certificate and advanced certificate at senior secondary level; diploma, higher diploma, bachelor and bachelor honours at undergraduate level; and postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma, master and doctorate at postgraduate level.

The volume of learning at each level is illustrated in terms of credits. In the SLQF credit system, the student workload of a study programme is defined as 1,500 'notional learning hours' per

**Table 74. Sri Lankan qualifications framework (SLQF) and national vocational qualifications (NVQ) levels**

SLQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION AWARDED	COMPARABLE NVQ LEVELS
12	Doctor of philosophy/MD with board certification/Doctor of letters/Doctor of science	
11	Master of philosophy	
10	Master by course work and a research component	
9	Master by course work	
8	Postgraduate diploma	
7	Postgraduate certificate	
6	Honours bachelor	
5	Bachelor	7
4	Higher diploma	6
3	Diploma	5
2	Advanced certificate GCE A/L or equivalent	4
1	Certificate (GCE O/L or equivalent)	3 2

Source: University Grants Commission, 2015.

academic year, which may include direct contact hours with teachers and trainers, time spent on distance learning, preparation for and carrying out assignments and assessments (UGC, 2015).

The comparable NVQ and SLQF levels have been recognised by a panel of experts based on significant similarities in the learning outcomes stated under respective level descriptors in the two frameworks. The degree level qualification (NVQ 7) is benchmarked to internationally accepted standards for a bachelor's degree (SLQF level 5). However, the proportion of cognitive and psychomotor outcomes may differ in the two qualifications, especially in qualifications below SLQF 2 (NVQ 4). Further, the attributes of two qualification holders below degree level at comparable SLQF and NVQ levels may differ.

Learning outcomes are statements that describe what learners should know, understand and can demonstrate on completion of a course or study programme. Learning outcomes in the SLQF occur in two parts. The first part, called the 'attributes' of the qualification holder, is a set of general

statements of the wider abilities that the typical student is expected to have developed by the end of the course or study programme. These attributes could be seen as precursors to the study programme learning outcomes rather than the actual learning outcomes. The second part, called the 'level descriptor', is a set of specific outcomes that are assessed and which a student should be able to demonstrate to meet the requirements of the qualification (the specific broad abilities that the graduate should be capable of). This is significant for higher education institutions as it enables them to design and review courses or study programmes. The curriculum and assessments must provide all students with the opportunity to achieve and to demonstrate achievement of the intended outcomes stated under respective level descriptors.

The SLQF descriptors for each level provide the specifications; these include the:

- SLQF exit level;
- qualification type with designators and the qualifiers;
- number of credits required at each level;

**Table 75. Minimum volume of learning required for each Sri Lanka qualifications framework level**

SLQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION AWARDED	MINIMUM VOLUME OF LEARNING FOR THE AWARD
12	Doctor of philosophy/MD with board certification/Doctor of letters/Doctor of science	Minimum 3 years of full-time or equivalent time of original research after SLQF level 6 or above
11	Master of philosophy	Minimum 2 years of full-time or equivalent time of original research after SLQF level 6 or above
10	Master by course work and a research component	60 credit after SLQF level 5 or SLQF level 6 including a research component of minimum 15 credits
9	Master by course work	30 credits after SLQF level 5 or SLQF level 6
8	Postgraduate diploma	25 credits after SLQF level 5 or SLQF level 6
7	Postgraduate certificate	20 credits after SLQF level 5 or SLQF level 6
6	Honours Bachelor	120 credits after SLQF level 2 of which 90 credits after SLQF level 3 of which 60 credits after SLQF level 4 of which 30 credits after SLQF level 5
5	Bachelor	90 credits after SLQF level 2 of which 60 credits after SLQF level 3 of which 30 credits after SLQF level 4
4	Higher diploma	60 credits after SLQF level 2 of which 30 credits after SLQF level 3
3	Diploma	30 credits after SLQF level 2
2	Advanced certificate (GCE A/L or equivalent)	
1	Certificate (GCE O/L or equivalent)	

Source: University Grants Commission, 2015.

- d. purpose, scope and generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of each qualification;
- e. minimum admission requirements;
- f. possible progression opportunities.

The generic outcomes and attributes for each qualification reflect the capabilities expected from qualification holders defined in terms of four 'domains' of learning: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and mindset and paradigm, known as the 'K-SAM model'. 'Knowledge' is what the qualification holders know, 'skills' define what the qualification holders can do; 'attitudes, values, professionalism

and vision for life' reflects how the qualification holders think and behave; and 'mindset and paradigm' signify how the qualification holders perceive the world. K-SAM is considered an integrated model, which is a blend of more than one domain (in most cases all the domains).

Having been identified by the Ministry of Higher Education in Sri Lanka as of national importance, the 12 learning outcomes have been customised as level descriptors to suit each level of qualification. Categorisation of the learning outcomes according to the principal K-SAM components is given in [Table 76](#).

**Table 76. Categorisation of the learning outcomes according to the K-SAM model in Sri Lanka**

	CATEGORIES OF LEARNING OUTCOMES	CORE AREA
1	Subject/theoretical knowledge	Knowledge
2	Practical knowledge and application	
3	Communication	Skills
4	Teamwork and leadership	
5	Creativity and problem solving	
6	Managerial and entrepreneurship	
7	Information usage and management	
8	Networking and social skills	
9	Adaptability and flexibility	
10	Attitudes, values and professionalism	Attitudes, values, professionalism and vision for life
11	Vision of life	
12	Updating self/lifelong learning	Mind-set and paradigm

Source: University Grants Commission, 2015.

The degree of intellectual abilities, cognitive skills and soft skills are considered in describing each level. The purpose of the level descriptors for levels 1 to 12 is to guarantee consistency across learning in achieving the expected attributes of qualifications through part-qualification levels, and to help a higher education institution evaluate the comparability of qualifications and part-qualifications issued by another higher education institution. The level descriptors may also be used as a guideline to develop course materials of a particular study programme, having several course units or modules to ensure learners are able to meet the expected attributes of the relevant qualification type at the end of the course.

The learner is expected to meet or demonstrate that certain learning outcomes have been achieved; assessment of the outcomes of learning by effective and appropriate assessment methods is essential to the qualifications framework (UGC, 2015).

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Development of the SLQF was initiated in 2009 with assistance from the World Bank-funded project

Improving relevance and quality of undergraduate education (IRQUE) in Sri Lanka and continued with funding from the Higher education for the twenty-first century project (HETC). Preparatory work for the development of the SLQF was undertaken by a national committee comprising:

- a representative of the Ministry of Higher Education, nominated by the Minister for Higher Education;
- a representative of the University Grants Commission, nominated by its chair;
- the Director General of Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education (SLIATE) or his nominee;
- the Director General of the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission of Sri Lanka;
- a representative of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council;
- a representative of the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Directors.

The NVQF initiative, which was subsumed within the SLQF in 2012, was implemented in 2005 through two skills development projects supported by the Asian Development Bank (ILO, 2010b). The main goal of the first project, the Skills development project which ran from 2001

to 2007, was 'developing NVQF infrastructure and capacity'. Its other aims included 'the development of an accreditation system, assessor training and certification, the expansion of the National Trade Testing Programme and the establishment of a quality management system' (ILO, 2010a, p. 25). The second project, called the Technical education development project (2006–10), aimed to 'set up review systems for the skill standards developed in the earlier project' (ibid.).

While no new bodies were established for the purpose of implementing the NVQF, the mandates of existing bodies have been modified slightly. The bodies concerned are:

- a. the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), a statutory organisation responsible for managing the NVQF, determining occupations for skills standards development, developing national skills standards, awarding certificates to trainees, and registering assessors for competence assessments for NVQ certifications;
- b. the Registration Division of the TVEC, which oversees registration of public and private training providers, accreditation of courses, quality assurance systems, and monitoring and auditing of quality assurance systems, holds regular audits to review NVQF quality assurance mechanisms, registration and accreditation. It is certified under the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 9001:2008 certification;
- c. the Quality Assurance and Assessment Regulation division, which mainly focuses on maintaining consistency of assessments and other parameters related to the issuance of NVQ certificates;
- d. the National NVQ Steering and Coordination Committee of the TVEC, which is responsible for the implementation of the NVQF. All issues connected with the administration of the NVQF are discussed and decided on by the steering committee.

Other organisations involved in the development of standards, training of assessors and testing of applicants are the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA) and the Department of Technical Education and Training (technical colleges division). NAITA assists the TVEC with regard to competence standards and assessment resource development. The University of Vocational Technology (UNIVOTEC) assists the TVEC with regard to curriculum and learning resource development and assessor training.

While there is a strong emphasis on public education and training providers, private and non-governmental organisations and training centres have also been registered and accredited to provide NVQF courses (ILO, 2010b). Training institutions acknowledge the benefits of the NVQF; it allows them to award their trainees nationally valid certificates, enhancing their own reputation and image at the national level.

Trade unions have been involved in the development and implementation of the NVQF in the past but this involvement has diminished, with more focus being given to union members' 'bread and butter' issues such as salaries and working conditions (ILO, 2010a, p. 27).

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

One of the objectives of the SLQF is to establish pathways for obtaining different qualifications. Vertical progression between qualifications is straightforward provided that minimum stipulated requirements are met. Lateral progression is also possible at certain levels if the candidate meets the minimum requirements for admission to the target qualification.

Access to qualifications at levels 1 to 4 is possible, both directly and progressively through an accredited course or through the recognition of prior learning (RPL); this is defined as the process whereby competences acquired through industry practice or previous training are recognised towards a certificate or credits. RPL is an important instrument for promoting NVQF-aligned certification, particularly in occupations for which demand is high. So far, most certificates issued through RPL have been awarded to beauticians, hairdressers and bakers. RPL is also especially important for people who want to work or study in other countries. There is no difference between certifications resulting from accredited courses and those achieved through RPL; however, the award of a full qualification through RPL is limited to NVQF level 4. Accredited courses are expected to issue a separate certificate of participation as proof of attendance. Two institutions are authorised to conduct RPL: NAITA and the Vocational Training Authority (VTA). Established under Sri Lanka Act No 12 in 1995, the Authority consists of six national vocational training institutes, 22 district vocational training centres and 232 vocational training centres. It operates under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development and provides rural youth with skills



training combined with workshops on information technology and entrepreneurship.

To avoid corruption in RPL (attempting assessment without the necessary preparation, exerting influence over the assessors), the government has stipulated one to five years of experience as a requirement for NVQF levels 2 and 3 and a further two years for NVQF level 4. However, craftspersons with a minimum five years' experience may be considered for assessment at level 4 directly.

The prerequisite for access to level 5 diploma courses is NVQF level 3 plus academic ability equivalent to general certificate of education (GCE) ordinary level. The entry qualification for level 7, the degree programme, is NVQF level 5. To maintain links between the lower and higher levels, occupations at levels 1 to 4 and fields of study at levels 5 to 7 are clustered to provide the necessary upgrading of qualifications and competences. Industry-linked courses have been created at NVQF levels 5 to 7 to enable progression.

Integration of the NVQF into the SLQF has strengthened lateral mobility pathways between vocational education and higher education sectors. UNIVOTEC was established to provide pathways to higher education for TVET students who are unable to enter conventional universities. Students who have achieved the relevant qualifications at levels 5 and 6 can proceed from national diploma to degree programmes. Those with level 6 qualifications are eligible to receive appropriate credit transfers towards a degree programme determined by UNIVOTEC.

## **NQF implementation**

The Sri Lanka qualifications framework helps qualification holders to know the level of their qualification. It also helps potential employers to know the level of learning and the attributes of a particular qualification holder. SLQF is useful to higher education institutions (both State and non-State) in designing their courses in terms of the minimum level of learning effort and the number of credits that should be earned by a qualification holder. In this way, it contributes to strengthening the quality of higher education qualifications offered in universities and higher education institutions in Sri Lanka.

## **Referencing to regional frameworks**

The SLQF provides a clear system to develop links with higher education institutions abroad. With

the globalisation of higher education, national qualifications frameworks developed in several other countries have helped to evaluate the higher educational qualifications obtained in different countries.

Sri Lanka is part of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which cooperates in the areas of education, training and human resource development. SAARC has established a South Asian University with a Centre of Excellence to provide world-class facilities and professional faculty to students and researchers drawn from every country of the region. The eight member states of SAARC – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – unanimously adopted the SAARC framework for action (SFFA) for education 2030 at the third meeting of Ministers of Education/ Higher Education held in Male, Maldives, in 2016. Under regional collaboration and partnerships, the ministers agreed objectives of this action plan: share the national skills qualifications framework (NSQF) and develop a regional quality assurance framework for vocational/skills education; and support the mutual recognition of qualifications and students' mobility (SAARC 2016).

## **Important lessons and future plans**

The SLQF will be beneficial to all higher education stakeholders, including students, parents and employers, as well as education and training providers.

For learners, the SLQF enables recognition and evaluation of prior learning and identifies the pathways for acquiring higher qualifications. This will help them develop their full potential and contribute to the social and economic development of the country at large. The level descriptors given in the SLQF allow employers to identify the levels of competences of qualification holders. This helps in comparing qualifications so that the supply and demand for knowledge, skills and competences can be properly matched. The SLQF also enables comparison of the qualifications offered by different institutions; this, in turn, helps employers find appropriate qualification holders for their business needs. The SLQF outlines the credit requirements for each qualification level as well as the intended learning outcomes; for higher education providers, both in the State and private sectors, this helps to design academic programmes.

The SLQF enables all post-secondary education stakeholders to identify the full range of

qualifications offered in the higher education system in Sri Lanka and comparable levels of vocational education and training. This helps to clarify which qualifications are related to each other and how they contribute to the enhancement of knowledge and understanding and improve intellectual abilities including analytical skills, evaluation skills, problem solving skills and soft skills. The SLQF also encourages the general public to have access to appropriate lifelong education and training, which helps them fulfil their personal, social and economic potential. The SLQF will be useful to programme-approving agencies in their quest to identify the appropriate levels of qualifications offered by different higher education institutions. It will also help in evaluating different qualifications offered by higher education institutions, both local and foreign, which in turn affects decisions on recruitment and promotion in the academic, technical and professional sectors.

#### Abbreviations

K-SAM	knowledge, skills, attitudes, and mindset and paradigm
NAITA	National Apprentices and Industrial Training Authority
NVQ	national vocational qualifications
NVQF	national vocational qualifications framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SLQF	Sri Lankan qualifications framework
TVEC	Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UNIVOTEC	University of Vocational Technology

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## Introduction and context

Sweden invests substantially in education and training, exceeding EU targets for several key indicators. Relatively few students leave education and training early (7.7% in 2017), the rate of tertiary education attainment is one of the highest in the EU (51.3% in 2017, compared to the EU average of 39.1%) and the rate of employment of recent graduates is also high at all qualification levels. According to the 2015 Programme for International Skills Assessment (PISA), student performance in basic skills has been improving, and the proportion of underachievers in reading, mathematics and science is close to EU averages. However, student performance is increasingly linked to socioeconomic background and disparities also exist between native and foreign-born students. Early intervention to improve basic skills, the integration of the growing number of newly arrived students and support for the training of teachers are among the government's priorities. In higher education, a new quality assurance system was introduced in 2017 and the current focus of the government is on widening participation and on strengthening the links between the academia and society. In vocational education and training (VET) apprenticeships were introduced in 2011. However, participation in upper secondary VET is decreasing, despite a very high rate of employment of VET graduates (87.8% in 2017). One of the concerns of the government in recent years has been to examine ways to increase permeability between VET programmes and tertiary education. Some 30.4% of Swedish adults participate in lifelong learning, approximately three times the EU average, but this percentage is significantly lower among low-educated adults, a trend observed in many EU countries (European Commission, 2018).

Since 2017, adults have had the right to study courses within adult education at upper secondary level to meet the eligibility requirements for university studies and higher vocational education.

The legal basis supporting the Swedish national qualifications framework (SeQF) came into force

on 1 October 2015<sup>878</sup>. Appendix 2 of Decree SFS 2015:545 provides the SeQF levels for all qualifications in the Swedish formal education system. The government further decided that it would be possible to include qualifications from outside the formal education system in the framework. The added value of the SeQF, it is argued, depends on its ability to address explicitly, and include certificates and qualifications awarded by, private companies and branch/sector organisations and bodies. While the SeQF is mainly seen as a tool to increase transparency of qualifications, the framework is also seen as supporting better cooperation between the education and training system and the labour market. In this sense, the framework is not only about describing existing qualifications but also about improving education and training policies and practices. The SeQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in June 2016. Following legal adoption of the framework in autumn 2015, criteria and procedures for inclusion of non-formal qualifications have been put in place and made public. The SeQF has reached operational status.

## Policy objectives

Unlike other European frameworks, the SeQF has, from its inception in 2009, been seen as a tool for opening up to qualifications awarded outside the formal education system, particularly in the adult/popular education sector and in the labour market. This focus on the inclusive character of the framework responds to specific features of Swedish education and training.

First, the role of adult and popular education is generally very strong, largely explaining why Sweden consistently scores highly in all

<sup>878</sup> Swedish Government (2015). SFS 2015:545. *Förordning om referensram för kvalifikationer för livslångt lärande* [Decree with regulations on a national qualification framework for lifelong learning]. [www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/forordning-2015545-om-referensram-for\\_sfs-2015-545](http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/forordning-2015545-om-referensram-for_sfs-2015-545)

international comparisons on adult and lifelong learning. Other providers supply courses alongside formal education. An inclusive framework is expected to increase the overall transparency of Swedish qualifications and clarify options for progress and transfer.

Second, an important part of VET is carried out by enterprises and sectors. While upper secondary education (*Gymnasieskolan*) offers a full range of (three-year) vocational courses, acquiring a full qualification (enabling someone to practise a vocation) will sometimes require additional training and certification at work. This extensive system of labour market-based education and training is diverse and, in some cases, difficult to summarise.

Linking this non-formal sector to the national qualifications framework (NQF) is seen as crucial for increasing the overall transparency of qualifications in Sweden. The 2015 SeQF Decree with regulations authorises the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education to act as 'gatekeeper' (supported by an advisory council) and put in place the necessary procedures and criteria to allow this to happen in practice. These procedures and criteria have been publicly available since March 2016<sup>879</sup>.

The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, as the national coordination point (NCP) for the EQF, is in dialogue with the Swedish public employment service, which would like to use SeQF levels and descriptors to guarantee the quality of job applicants' skills. This is also the goal of the organisations that have successfully applied to have their qualifications placed in SeQF.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The SeQF is based on an eight-level structure where each level is described through knowledge (*kunskap*), skills (*färdigheter*) and competence (*kompetens*). It is a comprehensive framework including all qualifications in the formal education system and open to qualifications outside the formal education system by application from providers, such as sectors, labour market trainers, sports associations or liberal adult education. The explicit objective has been to develop a set of descriptors as closely aligned with the EQF as possible. While the influence of the original EQF descriptors is apparent, the level of detail has been increased. In the definition of competence, for example, the EQF emphasis on autonomy and responsibility is also

<sup>879</sup> The guidelines for applying for levelling of non-formal qualifications are available through the SeQF portal: [www.seqf.se/sv/Sa-funkar-det/Ansokan/](http://www.seqf.se/sv/Sa-funkar-det/Ansokan/)

extended to address decision-making ability and cooperation/teamwork.

The learning outcomes perspective (*Resultat av lärandet*) is an important, and largely incorporated, feature of Swedish education and training. While the term 'learning outcomes' is only gradually coming into general use, the underpinning principles are well known and broadly accepted. The core curricula for compulsory education have recently been revised, further strengthening and refining the learning-outcomes-based approach.

Universities follow national regulations on examinations, requiring the use of learning outcomes, though how these learning outcomes are interpreted by individual institutions varies. The Bologna process has been influential in this respect, as have local initiatives.

The setting up of the SeQF has contributed to the overall shift to learning outcomes and clarified the importance of the concept to stakeholders outside traditional, formal education and training. In the longer term, this may prove of particular importance, potentially supporting dialogue between education and the labour market.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Ministry of Education and Research has overall responsibility for work on the SeQF and referencing to the EQF. Supported by the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (*Myndigheten för Yrkeshögskolan* – MYH) the SeQF has full operational status.

A broad group of stakeholders, from education and training as well as the labour market, has been involved in developing the SeQF.

Several stakeholders have signalled their interest in using it as a reference for their work. The Property Promotion Branch Association formulates standards for qualifications within its sphere of influence to develop validation procedures that will assist in recruitment and improve competence training programmes for staff. The NQF is an instrument that will ensure a high level of quality in the content of existing education and training programmes. Another example is provided by the 26 institutions responsible for the qualifications of teachers and trainers in VET, which have used the NQF as an instrument to identify available pathways into teacher training and to indicate minimum requirements in prior learning and qualifications.

A third example is the construction sector, where the framework is being used to indicate alternative progression routes for those wanting to qualify as construction site managers. This approach shows that the traditional higher education pathway (civil engineer) is not the only possible alternative; several combinations of work experience and formal education (both upper secondary and post-secondary VET) are possible. A fourth example is the financial sector, where the framework is seen as an opportunity to highlight the training activities taking place within the sector, in most cases, independent of public education and training.

A set of procedures and criteria have been developed for the inclusion/levelling of non-formal qualifications to the SeQF. An advisory council (*Rådet för den nationella referensramen för kvalifikationerna*) supports the National Agency; this council consists of 14 stakeholder representatives from education and the labour market.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>880</sup>

Sweden has made significant progress between 2016 and 2018 towards fulfilling the objectives of the 2012 recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>881</sup>, particularly related to assessing and recognising immigrants' prior learning.

The National Delegation for Validation was set up by the government in 2015<sup>882</sup> to develop and promote a national policy for validation, ensuring transparency, coordination, quality, efficiency and delegation of responsibility at national and regional level. The delegation published a report in May 2018 cataloguing progress and identifying where provision was still lacking<sup>883</sup>. The main conclusions of the report are as follows:

- a. While examples of validation have generally increased, some areas (e.g. in municipal adult education) are still not providing adequate coverage.
- b. The validation system in Sweden is highly decentralised, with many actors, and even though some progress has been made in coordinating the work and assigning responsibilities, this aspect needs to be further developed.
- c. The feasibility of transferring learning outcomes between different qualifications is limited, as the learning outcomes approach has not yet been applied to all qualifications.
- d. The SeQF was introduced in 2016, and is perceived as an important tool in the context of validation, though it is still underused.
- e. Validation standards and guidelines have been developed for many areas, but have not yet been implemented everywhere.
- f. The financing of validation is still patchy, and is often characterised by short-term, ad hoc measures.
- g. Validation is now increasingly used as a strategic tool for tackling skills shortages in the labour market, with the active involvement of social partners.
- h. More immigrants and refugees are now having prior learning validated as a way of supporting their integration into the labour market, but there is still a need to reinforce efforts here.
- i. Validation statistics in Sweden are incomplete and, for some areas, non-existent.

The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education previously had the task of coordinating and supporting the national structure for validating prior learning. The Agency is now required to support the economic sectors with developing, and quality assuring, models for validation. Given that this national agency is also responsible for implementing the SeQF, a close link between the NOF and validation is seen as critical. Cooperation with education and training providers, sector organisations, social partners, universities and regional representatives has been an essential part of this work. The criteria and guidelines on validation, presented by the agency in 2012, are regularly updated<sup>884</sup>.

<sup>880</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>881</sup> Council of the European Union (2012). Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 398, 22.12.2012, pp. 1–5. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>

<sup>882</sup> [www.valideringsdelegation.se/in-english/national-strategy-validation/](http://www.valideringsdelegation.se/in-english/national-strategy-validation/)

<sup>883</sup> National Delegation for Validation (2018). *Valideringsdelegasjonens årliga redovisning, Maj 2018* [Pathways to work and education. The Validation Delegation's annual report 2018]. [www.valideringsdelegation.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/valideringsdelegationens-rliga-redovisning-maj-2018.pdf](http://www.valideringsdelegation.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/valideringsdelegationens-rliga-redovisning-maj-2018.pdf)

<sup>884</sup> National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (2014). *Kriterier och riktlinjer för validering av reell kompetens. [Criteria and guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning]*. [www.myh.se/Documents/Publikationer/Informationsmaterial/Kriterier\\_riktlinjer\\_validering\\_reel\\_kompetens.pdf](http://www.myh.se/Documents/Publikationer/Informationsmaterial/Kriterier_riktlinjer_validering_reel_kompetens.pdf)

Transferability between qualifications has been highlighted by the National Delegation for Validation as one of five priority areas. SeQF is seen as the common starting point for ensuring that skills profiles and criteria and learning objectives are formulated uniformly and to the highest standards<sup>885</sup>.

The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education has been assigned the task of developing a national standard and guidelines for sectoral validation of vocational competence<sup>886</sup>. The assignment is being carried out in collaboration with industries that have knowledge of, and experience in, constructing validation models, and has the NQF as its starting point. The purpose of this validation is to increase recruitment to industry and to support individuals' employability. A national standard will further support industry in developing quality assurance and stable validation models. The standard has been anchored in the Agency's validation network for industry. The network includes representatives of both industry and national authorities. Currently, models have been developed in 21 sectors extending over approximately 150 occupations. Only a limited part of the labour market is covered at this stage, but new developments are under way.

## NQF implementation

The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education plays a key role in implementing the SeQF. The agency was set up in 2009 with responsibility for administering what is a new and vocationally oriented strand of Swedish higher education and training. *Yrkeshögskolan* – higher vocational education – has attracted a lot of interest both among individuals and employers, offering an alternative to the traditional university sector, for example by combining theoretically and practically oriented learning. The main aim of higher vocational education is to meet the needs of the labour market for post-secondary vocational skills.

This means that coordination of framework developments is carried out by an institution

with a clear position on the role of non-academic qualifications at levels 5 and 6.

Since January 2016, awarding bodies outside the formal education system have been able to have their qualifications assessed and given an SeQF level by submitting an application to the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education. An advisory body assists the Agency in deciding the relevant level for a qualification based on particular criteria, mainly the legitimacy/acceptance of the qualification in the relevant occupational area, learning outcomes and quality assurance. An application fee of EUR 1 000 is required in advance to cover administration costs. Decisions can be appealed to the Higher Education Appeals Board. A decision on a level is valid for 10 years, after which a renewed application is required. The Agency will carry out at least one follow-up check during the 10-year period to reaffirm that the qualification corresponds to the level allocated and that it is meeting learning outcomes, and that the provider is fulfilling the requirement to guarantee systematic quality work.

Six qualifications had been included in the SeQF by November 2018<sup>887</sup>: cleaners (level 4), key account managers (level 5), authorised payroll consultants (level 5), performing artists (level 6), business administrators (level 6) and Montessori educators (level 6).

Realising that it is a key challenge to communicate the SeQF's purpose and possibilities, and to get past the first threshold of applying for non-formal qualifications to be included in the framework, the Agency is developing a common language for the NQF, and, especially, for the description of learning outcomes. This is required for transparency between different stakeholders and to provide good examples of the value of including qualifications awarded outside formal education and training. The Agency has published a manual for the design of qualifications and there are also instructions on how to write learning outcomes. However, there is a need for more detailed instructions and it is the Agency's intention to develop new guidelines on writing learning outcomes.

Sweden has developed a separate qualifications framework for higher education and separate self-certification to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) has been carried out. SeQF levels 6 to 8 also include the three levels from the qualifications framework for higher education. While the relationship between the NQF for higher education and the SeQF was

<sup>885</sup> National Delegation for Validation (2017). *En nationell strategi för validering. Delbetänkande av Valideringsdelegationen 2015–19*. [A national strategy for validation: interim report from the National Delegation for Validation 2015–19]. [www.valideringsdelegation.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/summary-sou-2017-18.pdf](http://www.valideringsdelegation.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/summary-sou-2017-18.pdf)

<sup>886</sup> National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (2017). *Standard och riktlinjer för branschvalidering av yrkeskompetens* [Standards and guidelines for sectoral validation of vocational competence]. [www.myh.se/Documents/Publikationer/Informationsmaterial/standard\\_branschvalidering.pdf](http://www.myh.se/Documents/Publikationer/Informationsmaterial/standard_branschvalidering.pdf)

<sup>887</sup> 22 applications are under assessment.

extensively discussed during initial development stages, levels 6 to 8 of the SeQF are now open both to academic and non-academic qualifications.

A communication plan has been developed, an important part of which is the inclusion of an ambassador network consisting of a range of SeQF stakeholders. However, it has been found that several of the ambassadors themselves have too little knowledge about the NQF and how it works to be able to assist. The communication plan will, therefore, be revised. The SeQF is well known to authorities and bodies, and to labour market stakeholders but awareness is more variable among education and training institutions and providers and guidance and counselling practitioners. The general public has more limited knowledge of the SeQF.

The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education has received European Social Fund (ESF) funding for a project, which aims to raise legitimacy and transferability of validated learning outcomes, and thereby increase the use and usefulness of sectoral validation. The project is being conducted with around 20 economic sectors. The starting point for the project is the SeQF and the standards and guidelines for sectoral validation of professional competencies.

Sweden does not have a database for all qualifications, but an embryo structure can be found in the database associated with the EQF NCP<sup>888</sup>. Non-formal qualifications included in the SeQF will be published here.

Most universities provide information about their education offer: authorities and businesses can download and present them in their own web services. The portal *Utbildningsinfo* (information about education) includes search tools for education paths and providers throughout the formal education system<sup>889</sup>. (European Commission; Cedefop, 2018).

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Referencing to the EQF took place in June 2016 and a finalised referencing report will be published in January 2019.

Ensuring that level placements are included in new certificates, diplomas and/or Europass supplements is continuing. They are included in certificates for diploma/advanced diploma in higher vocational education at levels 5 and 6; in certificates from the

general course at compulsory school level/at upper secondary level from folk high school at levels 2 and 4; and in all certificates for qualifications by application, provided by the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education.

## Important lessons and future plans

The SeQF has influenced the use of learning outcomes, especially for qualifications outside the formal education system. It has proved useful for validating non-formal and informal learning and for recognising foreign qualifications.

Compared to other countries, Sweden has, from the start, emphasised the need to open up to non-formal education and training and make it possible to establish links to the diverse and extensive field of continuing and popular education and training run by the private sector and non-governmental organisations. The overall success of the framework will partly depend on the extent to which the framework is seen as relevant to stakeholders outside formal, initial education and training. For this reason it is particularly important to make practical progress and move from intention to concrete results. In this respect, the Agency will: support different stakeholders in describing and applying to place qualifications in the SeQF; develop a system to ensure the quality of non-formal qualifications; and look at the possibility of modularisation of qualifications to promote individuals' lifelong learning.

Work is still required to develop a common language for learning outcomes that makes the system transparent. What further development remains is mainly related to higher education and to how employers and different sectors in the labour market describe the skills they need. Another clear requirement is to continue to inform and communicate the purpose and benefit of the NQF and the EQF to different stakeholders. To support the placement of qualifications awarded outside formal education and training, the Agency will support stakeholders: in describing their qualifications and applying for placement in SeQF; in developing ways of ensuring the quality of non-formal qualifications; and in looking at the possibility of modularisation of qualifications to promote individuals' lifelong learning.

For the SeQF to be able to operate as a comprehensive NQF, the relationship between higher education and other education sectors requires further clarification and continuous dialogue. Transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes across education sectors is not available as a general opportunity in Sweden. Discussions

<sup>888</sup> [www.seqf.se/sv/Sa-funkar-det/Kvalifikationer/](http://www.seqf.se/sv/Sa-funkar-det/Kvalifikationer/)

<sup>889</sup> *Utbildningsinfo*: [www.utbildningsinfo.se](http://www.utbildningsinfo.se)

are continuing between the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education and higher education institutions about the transfer of credits from higher

vocational education to academic higher education. However, credits from the two education sectors are different and not automatically transferrable.

**Table 77. Swedish national qualifications framework (SeQF)**

NOF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES (FORMAL EDUCATION)	AWARDED OUTSIDE FORMAL EDUCATION*	EQF LEVELS
8	Degrees, third cycle, Annex 2 to Higher Education Ordinance 1993:100 ( <i>Examina på forskarnivå enligt bilaga 2 till högskoleförordningen 1993:100</i> )  Degrees, third cycle, Annex to Regulation 1993:221 ( <i>Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitet Examina på forskarnivå enligt bilagan till förordningen (1993:221) för Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet Förordning (2017:276)</i> )		8
7	Degrees, second cycle, Annex 2 to Higher Education Ordinance 1993:100 ( <i>Examina på avancerad nivå enligt bilaga 2 till högskoleförordningen 1993:100</i> )  Degrees, second cycle, Annex to Regulation 1993:221 ( <i>Examina på avancerad nivå enligt bilagan till förordningen (1993:221) för Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet</i> )  Degrees, second cycle, Annex to Regulation 2007:1164 ( <i>Examina på avancerad nivå enligt bilagan till förordningen (2007:1164) för Försvarshögskolan</i> )		7
6	Degrees, first cycle, Annex 2 to Higher Education Ordinance 1993:100 ( <i>Examina på grundnivå enligt bilaga 2 till högskoleförordningen 1993:100</i> )  Degrees, first cycle, Annex to Regulation 2007:1164 ( <i>Examina på grundnivå enligt bilagan till förordningen (2007:1164) för Försvarshögskolan</i> )  Degrees, first cycle, Annex to Regulation 1993:221 ( <i>Examina på grundnivå enligt bilagan till förordningen (1993:221) för Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet</i> )  Advanced diploma in higher vocational education ( <i>Kvalificerad yrkeshögskoleexamen från yrkeshögskolan</i> )	Performing artist  Business administration ( <i>Marknadsekonom</i> )  Montessori educator ( <i>Montessoripedagog</i> )	6
5	Qualified graduate from upper secondary engineering course ( <i>Gymnasieingenjörsexamen från gymnasieskolan</i> )  Diploma in higher vocational education ( <i>Yrkeshögskoleexamen från yrkeshögskolan</i> )	Key account manager ( <i>Säljare</i> )  Authorised payroll consultant ( <i>Auktoriserad lönekonsult</i> )	5
4	Degree from a national programme in upper secondary education – qualification title for students starting 2011 onwards ( <i>Gymnasieexamen från gymnasieskolan</i> )  Final grades from a complete national or specially designed programme ( <i>Slutbetyg från ett fullständigt nationellt eller specialutformat program i gymnasieskolan</i> )  Degree from municipal adult education and training at upper secondary level – qualification title for students starting 2011 onwards ( <i>Gymnasieexamen från kommunal vuxenutbildning</i> )	Cleaner ( <i>Städare</i> )	4



**Table 77. Swedish national qualifications framework (SeQF) (Continued)**

	Final grades from municipal adult education and training at upper secondary level ( <i>Slutbetyg från gymnasial vuxenutbildning</i> )		
	Certificate from the general course at upper secondary level from folk high school ( <i>Intyg om godkänt resultat från allmän kurs på gymnasial nivå från folkhögskola</i> )		
<b>3</b>			<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	Final grades from compulsory school ( <i>Slutbetyg från grundskolan</i> )		<b>2</b>
	Final grades from special school at compulsory level ( <i>Slutbetyg från specialskolan</i> )		
	Final grades from municipal adult education and training at compulsory level ( <i>Slutbetyg från kommunal vuxenutbildning på grundläggande nivå</i> )		
	Certificate from upper secondary education for individuals with learning disabilities ( <i>Gymnasiesärskolebevis från gymnasiesärskolan</i> )		
	Certificate from special education for adults at upper secondary level ( <i>Gymnasiesärskolebevis från särskild utbildning för vuxna på gymnasial nivå</i> )		
	Grade from Swedish for immigrants course D, or equivalent awarded by a folk high school ( <i>Betyg från utbildning i svenska för invandrare kurs D, eller motsvarande utbildning som bedrivs vid folkhögskola</i> )		
	Grade from municipal adult education in Swedish for Immigrants course D, or equivalent awarded by a folk high school ( <i>Betyg från kommunal vuxenutbildning i svenska för invandrare kurs D, eller motsvarande utbildning som bedrivs vid folkhögskola</i> )		
	Certificate from the general course at compulsory school level from folk high school ( <i>Intyg om godkänt resultat från allmän kurs på grundskolenivå från folkhögskola</i> )		
<b>1</b>	Final grades from compulsory school for pupils with learning disabilities ( <i>Slutbetyg från grundsärskolan</i> )		<b>1</b>
	Final grades from special education for adults at compulsory level ( <i>Slutbetyg från särskild utbildning för vuxna på grundläggande nivå</i> )		

Note: (\*) These qualifications are added to the table for comparability. They will be published on the EQF NCP website.

Source: Adapted from the SeQF website (2017): [www.seqf.se/](http://www.seqf.se/)

<b>Abbreviations</b>		NQF	national qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework	SeQF	Swedish qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point	VET	vocational education and training

## Main sources of information

Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (MYH) – the designated EQF NCP: [www.myh.se/In-English/Swedish-National-Agency-for-Higher-Vocational-Education-/](http://www.myh.se/In-English/Swedish-National-Agency-for-Higher-Vocational-Education-/)  
Information about the SeQF (in English): [www.myh.se/In-English/EQF/](http://www.myh.se/In-English/EQF/)  
SeQF portal (in Swedish): [www.seqf.se/](http://www.seqf.se/)  
*Register of qualifications* via the SeQF portal (under development): [www.seqf.se/sv/Sa-funkar-det/Kvalifikationer](http://www.seqf.se/sv/Sa-funkar-det/Kvalifikationer)  
Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (2016). *Referencing report of the Swedish qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework* (unpublished).

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### Prepared by:

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in collaboration with national experts.

# SWITZERLAND

## Introduction and context

Switzerland is situated well above EU averages with regard to several key indicators in education and training and has exceeded EU 2020 targets in a number of areas. Tertiary education attainment is one of the highest (52.8% in 2017, compared to the EU average of 39.9%); employment of recent graduates at 86.2% in 2017 exceeds the EU average of 80.2%; adult participation in learning was 31.2% in 2017, the highest in Europe; and early leaving from education is among the lowest (4.5% in 2017), well below the EU average of 10.6% (European Commission, 2018).

Swiss vocational and professional education (VPET) enjoys considerable prestige and labour market relevance. Around two-thirds of all young people coming out of compulsory school opt for vocational education and training (VET) (SERI, 2018). However, many of its qualifications are relatively unknown in other countries, potentially hindering Swiss citizens seeking employment abroad. Switzerland sees the link to European qualifications frameworks – both the European qualifications framework (EQF) and the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) – as an opportunity to strengthen the transparency and comparability of its national qualifications in a European and wider international context. In 2009 Switzerland adopted a national qualifications framework (NQF) for higher education (*Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen für den schweizerischen Hochschulbereich* (NQR-CH-HS/NQF-HE))<sup>890</sup> in line with the Bologna process. The NQF for vocational and professional education and training (*Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen für Abschlüsse der Berufsbildung* (NQR-CH-BB/NQF-VPET)) was adopted on 27 August 2014<sup>891</sup> and put in

force from 1 October 2014<sup>892</sup>. This latter framework is explicitly oriented to the EQF and introduces an eight-level structure defined through knowledge, skills and competences.

The framework was referenced to the EQF in May 2015 (SERI, 2015). The NQF-VPET can be considered to have reached operational stage, given that a significant proportion of existing vocational and professional qualifications, have been included.

## Policy objectives

The NQF-VPET aims to improve transparency and comparability of Swiss vocational and professional qualifications. More specific objectives (SERI, 2015, p. 33) are to:

- map the Swiss VPET system adequately and thus improve the transparency, clarity and comparability of Swiss vocational and professional qualifications in relation to European ones;
- promote equal recognition and valuing of vocational and professional education and training in society in comparison with academic qualifications;
- aid employer understanding of the competences of graduates of Swiss vocational and professional courses and of graduates from other countries, to meet the needs of the labour market;
- strengthen, as part of an overall strategy, the recognition of Swiss higher vocational and professional education and training;
- improve the opportunities for Swiss-educated professionals to get jobs abroad and so increase overall mobility.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The level descriptors of the NQF-VPET reflect the competence approach<sup>893</sup> already in use in Swiss vocational and professional education and training.

<sup>890</sup> Information on the NQF for higher education can be found at: [www.swissuniversities.ch/en/higher-education-area/qualifications-framework-nqfch-hs/](http://www.swissuniversities.ch/en/higher-education-area/qualifications-framework-nqfch-hs/)

<sup>891</sup> Government of Switzerland (2014). *Verordnung über den nationalen Qualifikationsrahmen für Abschlüsse der Berufsbildung V-NQR-BB* [Regulation on the NQF for VET qualifications]. [www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20140910/index.html](http://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20140910/index.html)

<sup>892</sup> Information on the adoption of the framework: [www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/de/home/themen/berufsbildung/nqr.html](http://www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/de/home/themen/berufsbildung/nqr.html)

<sup>893</sup> Two models are commonly used in Switzerland to structure competence-oriented documents: competence-

**Table 78. Main elements of the descriptors in the Swiss NQF**

<b>Knowledge</b>	Knowledge Understanding
<b>Skills</b>	Procedural skills Sensorimotor skills
<b>Social competences</b>	Professional competences Personal competences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• autonomy</li> <li>• social competences</li> <li>• leadership competences</li> </ul>

Source: SERI, 2015; Swiss Government, 2014.

The main elements of the descriptors are presented in [Table 78](#).

It is emphasised that the descriptors are defined specifically in relation to Swiss vocational and professional education and training (SERI, 2015). ‘Knowledge’ relates to factual knowledge in a field of work or study and is subdivided into the categories of ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’. ‘Skills’ relate to the ability to apply knowledge to perform tasks and solve problems. A distinction is drawn here between procedural and sensorimotor skills. ‘Competences’ denotes the regular and routine application of knowledge and skills in the context of work; it is divided into ‘professional’ and ‘personal’ competences. The formulation of this descriptor gives due weight to the importance of practical experience and indicates that other competences beyond technical ones can be acquired, contributing to the development of the individual both within and outside work situations.

While it is not envisaged that any VET qualifications will be aligned to level 1, levels 2 to 5 are open to the various VET qualifications. With respect to levels 5 to 8, the NQF-VPET is compatible with the level descriptors for the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA). However, only professional qualifications are aligned to the NQF-VPET; university qualifications are assigned to the NQF-HE<sup>894</sup>.

oriented model and the competence-and-resources model. They determine how professional competences are described and structured in training plans. For more information consult appendix 6.6 of the referencing report (SERI, 2015).

<sup>894</sup> It includes diplomas from cantonal universities, federal institutes of technology, universities of applied sciences, universities of teacher education and other specialised institutions.

Professional competences are described in reference documents: ordinances, training plans for VET, the examination ordinances and guidelines for federal examinations, and framework curricula for colleges of higher education. Almost all documents are already described in competences, or are planned for revision. If a VPET qualification is not described in competences it must have undergone revision before it can be assigned an NQF-VPET level (SERI, 2015).

In VET each ordinance is based on a qualification profile, which is a basis for a training plan, defining competences as minimum standards for training.

The federal government approves the examination regulations for federal diplomas of higher education and advanced federal diplomas of higher education; these include regulating admission to examinations, legally protected title, the professional competences and the occupational profile. A qualification profile is the basis for examination ordinances and guidelines, drawn up by professional organisations in cooperation with practitioners in the profession. It includes professional competences, occupational profile and performance criteria.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Swiss NQF-VPET is legally embedded in the Ordinance on the NQF-VPET qualifications, in force from 1 October 2014. The responsibilities of bodies involved in referencing and implementing the framework are clearly defined in the Annex 6.3 of that ordinance and explanatory note to the ordinance<sup>895</sup>.

The Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)<sup>896</sup> is in charge of framework implementation. SERI plays a key role in coordinating and quality assuring the entire levelling/assignment process from proposal until publication of the level in line with the Article 2 of the Ordinance. SERI also takes on the role of national contact point for the EQF in its capacity as the expert body for the NQF-VPET. It provides all necessary information to awarding bodies and other stakeholders and assists in the assignment of qualifications. Guidelines<sup>897</sup> on the NQF-VPET (SERI, 2015, Annex 4) have been developed, that describe

<sup>895</sup> *Erläuterungsbericht*: [www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/bildung/mobilitaet/nqf-vpet.html](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/bildung/mobilitaet/nqf-vpet.html)

<sup>896</sup> SERI: [www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home.html](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home.html)

<sup>897</sup> Available in German, Italian and French: [www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/education/mobility/nqf-vpet/das-vorgehen-zur-einstufung.html](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/education/mobility/nqf-vpet/das-vorgehen-zur-einstufung.html)

in detail individual steps and the responsibilities in relation to assignment of qualifications to the NQF-VPET.

The Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (SFIVET) supports implementation with consistency checks and review of the coherence of proposed levels of qualifications in line with the methodology and guidelines.

Before the final decision on levelling is made, twice a year SERI consults the Federal Commission for Vocational and Professional Education and Training (FCVPET), in existence since 1970. This is a tripartite body involving cantons, professional organisations and colleges of higher education in the implementation of the NQF-VPET.

Quality assurance of VPET and qualifications is legally embedded in the Federal Act on Vocational and Professional Education and Training and corresponding ordinances at all levels.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>898</sup>

A number of key national factors should be taken into account when considering the Swiss perspective on validation: the federalism, the quadrilingualism and the complex articulation of responsibilities in the Swiss education area. SERI is the Swiss federal government's specialised agency for national and international matters in education and training. SERI coordinates validation projects throughout Switzerland, supporting or checking pilot projects cooperating with specific services and stakeholders. It is also the organisation in charge of implementing the NQF-VPET.

A slow, but steady increase in validation of non-formal and informal learning can be seen in Switzerland. Increasingly, validation has been an integral part of education policies and legal frameworks (e.g. Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act, the 2017 Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training, the vision 2030 of vocational training, research and education for 2017–20 guidelines) but less so of employment and youth policies and those in the third sector. Validation is not a systematic measure to fight unemployment.

<sup>898</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

Validation procedures are integrated within each education and training sector; procedures, regulation, practices are more widespread in VET and further professional training. In other sectors there are no binding rules; instead, various official documents include indications for development and diffusion of validation procedures. Access to validation is considered an individual right, and practices are optional.

Validation is formally referred to as one of several possible ways of obtaining a qualification in upper secondary VET<sup>899</sup>. Full qualifications, as well as exemptions and provision of access, can be also obtained in tertiary professional education and training. The Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET, now integrated with SERI) developed national validation guidelines in 2010 specifying five different validation phases: information and advising, self-evaluation, assessment, accreditation (or partial certification) and certification. These phases, although referring specifically to the VET upper secondary level, also act as a general indicator of other Swiss validation practices. In December 2018, a new guide for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning (including validation) in initial VET (IVET) was published<sup>900</sup>.

In higher education, regulation is normally decentralised to the institutional level; depending on the type of university (cantonal universities, universities of applied science, and university colleges for teacher education) procedures and regulations might differ. There are options for admission into a programme without a baccalaureate and the possibility to validate, partially or completely, a higher education degree.

Validation procedures, both in VET and higher education, use the standards of formal qualification/programmes as reference.

The Labour Market and Unemployment Insurance, part of the State Secretariat of Economic Affairs, has set up skills assessment centres that carry out personal *bilans* (skills audits) to identify skills

<sup>899</sup> The other ways are: structured curriculum of study (classical formal way); admission of adults to professional exams without having participated in a formal curriculum of study; shortened initial vocational training if the adult is able to demonstrate his or her knowledge within the desired professional domain.

<sup>900</sup> Available in German, French and Italian: [www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/de/home/bildung/berufsbildungssteuerung-und-politik/projekte-und-initiativen/berufsabschluss-und-berufswechsel-fuer-erwachsene/leitfaden-anrechnung-von-bildungsleistungen-in-der-beruflichen-g.html](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/de/home/bildung/berufsbildungssteuerung-und-politik/projekte-und-initiativen/berufsabschluss-und-berufswechsel-fuer-erwachsene/leitfaden-anrechnung-von-bildungsleistungen-in-der-beruflichen-g.html)

and know-how acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, and aid development of a personal or professional portfolio. There are other initiatives of this nature in Switzerland, normally integrated into career guidance practices, though it is not clear how these are connected to formal qualification standards.

## NQF implementation

Switzerland has established two sectoral qualifications frameworks: one encompassing vocational and professional education (NQF-VPET) and a separate one for qualifications in Swiss higher education (NQF-HE). The NQF-VPET became formally operational on 1 October 2014. At the start of NQF-VPET implementation, single qualifications were assigned NQF-VPET levels. However, experience has shown that most qualifications of a given type are assigned to the same level. Since summer 2016, professional organisations have two options: applying for simplified referencing of qualifications or seek individualised referencing of qualifications<sup>901</sup>. For simplified assignment of levels, qualifications are assigned according to a standard level for a type of qualification, proposed by SERI<sup>902</sup>. This reduces workload for the professional organisation submitting the application. A professional organisation can request an individual levelling of a qualification if it feels that a specific qualification might be assigned higher levels within the NQF-VPET. In this case levelling is based on learning outcomes of each qualification description and takes into account the specifics of each profession. Close cooperation with all stakeholders is required to reach a consensus on a level for a specific qualification.

<sup>901</sup> [www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/bildung/mobilitaet/nqf-vpet/das-vorgehen-zur-einstufung.html](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/bildung/mobilitaet/nqf-vpet/das-vorgehen-zur-einstufung.html)

<sup>902</sup> SERI proposes a standard reference level for each type of qualification: Federal certificate of vocational education and training (two-year VET programmes): level 3; Federal diploma of vocational education and training (three- and four-year VET programmes): level 4; Federal diploma of higher education (federal professional examination): level 5; Advanced federal diploma of higher education (federal professional examination): level 6; Advanced federal diploma of higher education (formal study programme): level 6.

SERI maintains a list of qualifications that have been referenced to the NQF-VPET. It updates this list twice each year, in January and July. The assigned NQF-VPET reference level of a given qualification becomes official as soon as it has been added to this list. By January 2019<sup>903</sup> a total of 474 of roughly 700 formal vocational and professional qualifications had been attributed levels; 207 IVET qualifications mostly distributed to levels 3 and 4; 264 of professional qualifications, mostly at levels 5 to 7; and three at level 8. The process is expected to continue. Continuing VET (CVET) is not integrated into the NQF-VPET (European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International, 2019).

The NQF-VPET plays an important transparency role. The classification of qualifications did not imply any change in Swiss VET. In the same vein, validation of non-formal and informal learning and the links to the NQF-VPET did not change.

A database of all State-recognised occupations and professions and programmes is available in German, French and Italian, but does not include NQF and EQF levels<sup>904</sup>. NQF and EQF levels are indicated on Europass supplements for VET and tertiary professional qualifications<sup>905</sup>. With a detailed profile of skills and competence to be achieved by a qualification holder, together with an NQF-VPET level, the Europass supplements are intended to make it easier to understand and compare Swiss qualifications with others elsewhere. There are no plans to include levels on certificates and diplomas (European Commission; Cedefop, 2018).

The NQF-VPET has been promoted mostly through professional organisations and sectors<sup>906</sup>.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The NQF-VPET was referenced to the EQF in May 2015. [Figure 21](#) shows the approximate alignment of EQF and NQF-VPET levels and how different categories of qualifications fit into the framework.

<sup>903</sup> [www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20151046/index.html](http://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20151046/index.html)

<sup>904</sup> [www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz](http://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz)

<sup>905</sup> [www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/education/mobility/nqf-vpet.html](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/education/mobility/nqf-vpet.html)

<sup>906</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 21. Indication of qualification types included in the NQF-VPET and approximate levels**

NQF VPET levels	Qualification type		EQF levels
8		Advanced federal diploma of higher education	8
7			7
6		Federal diploma of higher education	6
		College of higher education diploma	
5	Federal VET diploma		5
4			4
3	Federal VET certificate		3
2			2
1			1

Notes:

- Federal certificate of vocational education and training – two-year VET programmes;
- Federal diploma of vocational education and training – three- and four-year VET programmes;
- Federal diploma of higher education – part-time tertiary level professional education and training (federal professional examination);
- Advanced federal diploma of higher education issued by a college of higher education (federal professional examination);
- Advanced federal diploma of higher education – formal study programme.

Source: SERI, 2018.

Abbreviations		
EQF	European qualifications framework	education and training ( <i>Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen für Abschlüsse der Berufsbildung (NQR-CH-BB)</i> )
NQF	national qualifications framework	
NQF-HE	national qualifications framework for higher education ( <i>Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen für den schweizerischen Hochschulbereich (NQR-CH-HS)</i> )	SERI State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (Staatssekretariat für Bildung, Forschung und Innovation)
NQF-VPET	national qualifications framework for vocational and professional	VET vocational education and training VPET vocational and professional education and training

## Main sources of information

State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) – acts as the EQF NCP: [www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home.html](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home.html)

NQF VPET website: [www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/education/mobility/nqf-vpet.html](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/education/mobility/nqf-vpet.html)

List of assigned vocational and professional qualifications: [www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/bildung/mobilitaet/nqf-vpet/das-verzeichnis-der-eingestufteten-abschluesse.html](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/bildung/mobilitaet/nqf-vpet/das-verzeichnis-der-eingestufteten-abschluesse.html)

A database of all State-recognised occupations and professions (available in German, French and Italian): [www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz](http://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz)

SERI (State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation) (2015). *Swiss EQF referencing report*. [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/e\\_referencing\\_report\\_final\\_ch.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/e_referencing_report_final_ch.pdf)

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- European Commission; Cedefop (2018). *Survey on implementation, communication and use of NQF/EQF (unpublished)*.
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### Prepared by:

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in collaboration with national experts.



# TAJIKISTAN

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The Tajik national qualifications framework (NQF) has not been adopted yet. It is still in an ad hoc stage, where no major decisions, such as on the number of levels or descriptors, have been taken.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

The population of Tajikistan has been growing steadily in the past years, reaching circa 8.7 million in 2016, from 6.25 million in 2000. The population is predominantly rural, with 73.7% living in the countryside. The country has a very young population with 60.5% under the age of 25; 32.4% between 25 and 54; and 7.2% over 55.

These data show that there is a challenge in accommodating this large share of young people within the education system as well as in the local labour market. Youth unemployment (age 15 to 29) has been increasing in recent years: in 2009, the latest year for which figures are available, 15.4% of young people were out of work.

Unemployment is the result of a lack of jobs in the domestic labour market and limited economic development and business growth, especially in rural and remote areas. Migration is officially recognised as a tool to maintain social equilibrium and to support skills development not provided by the vocational education and training (VET) system.

The primary sources of income in the country are aluminium production, cotton growing and remittances from migrant workers. Cotton accounts for 60% of agricultural output, supporting 75% of the rural population, and using 45% of irrigated arable land. The aluminium industry is represented by the State-owned Tajik Aluminium Company – the biggest aluminium plant in Central Asia and one of the biggest in the world.

Around 1.3 million Tajik citizens live abroad, notably men aged 20 to 39, of whom one third live and work abroad, especially in Russia. Their labour provides an important economic support to the home country

in the form of remittances. It is estimated by the Economist magazine that approximately 47% of the country's GDP comes from remittances. The reliance on access to the Russian labour market and remittances makes the country's economy particularly vulnerable to changes in Russia's economic fortunes.

In addition to migration, the increase in the working age population has particularly affected the informal sector, which is mainly made up of household-based enterprises or corporate enterprises owned by households producing goods and services. In 2009 informal employment accounted for 51% of the employed people, excluding the agricultural sector.

The Tajik labour market lacks qualified people in most branches of industry; it is not sufficiently structured and 70% of the employment is rural. The labour market is characterised by high unemployment and low salaries. Young people with traditional vocational qualifications, such as those provided by initial VET, experience considerable difficulties in finding employment in the country, and most become migrants. Estimates of the number of migrants vary from one eighth to one third of the workforce. At the same time, every year many vacancies remain unfilled due to lack of relevant competences. There is a strong need to revitalise skills development and to improve transparency and efficiency through streamlining numerous specialisations into a manageable number of broad occupations or career paths. The quality and relevance of programmes of study need to be improved to target gaps in the labour market, and to make vocational, professional and higher education institutions more accountable for quality results. Key elements of this process are the strengthening of quality assurance mechanisms and recognition of qualifications at national level.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

In 2012 Tajikistan adopted the National Education Development Strategy 2020; this assumes a

transition to competence-based training in VET, modularisation of programmes and adoption of an NQF. An NQF would contribute to transparency of qualifications, and their quality and relevance to the labour market.

### **International cooperation**

Tajikistan aspires to cooperation with the Bologna process area. Links with Kazakhstan and Russia are important and should form part of NQF planning considerations. The country currently participates in the Central Asia Education Platform (CAEP) initiative<sup>907</sup>.

## **Levels and use of learning outcomes**

### **NQF scope and structure**

No decision has been made yet on the scope of any NQF.

### **Alignment to other classification systems**

The national classification of occupations (NCO) adopted in 2013, links occupations to qualifications. Four levels of qualifications are allocated in the NCO: the initial level corresponds to primary and secondary general education; the second level to lower secondary VET; the third to upper secondary VET; and the fourth to higher education.

Various projects have produced occupational standards and higher education has developed qualification standards. Higher education providers propose a standard which is ultimately approved by the Ministry of Education. In VET, similar processes apply. In essence, the old Soviet standards are still in operation and there is little or no employer involvement.

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

There is no decision on the number of levels, but eight is likely, as it is the international norm and considering the country's aspiration to be linked to the Bologna process, most of whose members have eight-level qualifications frameworks.

None developed yet at national level.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

The National Education Development Strategy 2020 implies an outcomes-based NQF.

### **Definition of qualification**

No definition available yet.

## **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

### **NQF legal basis**

No law authorising an NQF has yet been adopted. Instead, an NQF concept was adopted under a Tempus project; other tools that might support an eventual NQF, were developed: an NQF manual and other supporting documents.

### **Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF**

The Ministry of Education is responsible for qualifications; it currently approves State education standards.

### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

While previous donor projects included employers and other stakeholders, awareness of NQFs as instruments of change is otherwise very limited, so stakeholder representation in qualifications issues is limited.

### **Resources and funding**

These are limited. An NQF will need much donor support.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

No system for quality-assuring qualifications is in place. References to quality assurance broadly appear across various laws and regulations governing education, but there is nowhere a clear definition of quality assurance or allocation of quality assurance functions. There is provision in law to accredit providers, plus the State education standards, but no quality assuring of assessment or criteria to validate qualifications. The State has, to date, been concerned with control, not with improvement.

## **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

There is no framework to authorise validation of non-formal learning yet. However, the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Population is developing adult learning and plans to establish a mechanism to recognise skills acquired outside formal education. Similarly, the National Adult Training Centre issues some qualifications to adults whose work experience illustrates skills equivalent to specified qualifications.

## **NQF implementation**

### **Inclusion of qualifications in a register**

There is no national register or database yet.

<sup>907</sup> An EU initiative in education for the region.

### **Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF**

Given the limited progress of NQF plans, there are no mechanisms to monitor development.

### **Impact for end-users**

None yet.

### **Referencing to regional frameworks**

Tajikistan is not involved in any regional framework.

### **Important lessons and future plans**

The NQF has not gone beyond an aim set in the National Education Development Strategy 2020. Capacities to develop an NQF are lacking. There is

a need to conceptualise and define qualifications in terms of outcomes achieved; stakeholder awareness is largely absent. Occupational standards need to be developed with employers to provide the basis of qualifications. An NQF concept needs to be developed fully by the ministries in cooperation with stakeholders as the basis of a law.

#### **Abbreviations**

NCO	national classification of occupations
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

#### **Prepared by:**

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

# THAILAND

## Introduction and context

The establishment of a Thai national qualifications framework (NQF) was proposed by the Office of the Education Council (OEC) of the Ministry of Education as part of the *National manpower production and development initiative* during the second decade of education reform 2009–18. The Thai NQF builds on the existing Thai qualifications framework for higher education (TQF) and the Thai qualifications framework for vocational education (TVQF) (OEC, 2013). The Thai NQF has eight levels; the revision of the number of levels was approved by the Cabinet on 18 April 2017.

Thailand's economy has attained high levels of growth in recent years. However, a study by the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) on the qualifications of workers in the manufacturing and services sectors revealed that between 7 and 10 million workers in these sectors had no qualifications, 21.66 million had only primary education, and 5.94 million only lower secondary education (TDRI, 2010). Many workers had acquired competences on the job yet remained without qualifications.

The Thai NQF is intended to address this situation. The government sees the NQF as a tool for increasing manpower capabilities and competitiveness in order to meet the demands of production and services in today's rapidly changing economic climate. The NQF is thus designed to benefit both individuals and industry. By setting out unified standards for qualifications and clear learning outcomes, it will enable individuals to clearly visualize their own learning trajectories. Workers already in the labour market will be able to access learning pathways previously barred to them, and to have their previous experiences and learning validated, whether formal, non-formal or informal. This will, in turn, benefit industries by providing them with a better qualified workforce.

A number of measures are envisaged to improve the quality of education and training in Thailand. These include improving the quality of content,

inputs and standards, introducing assessment based on learning outcomes, and ensuring internal and external assessment of educational institutions at every qualification level (Choomnoom, 2011). The capacities of educational institutions and of public and private sector training providers to implement the NQF will be strengthened, making them better able to meet the needs of production and services. Training will also be introduced to raise the calibre of educational personnel.

The Thai NQF is designed to facilitate regional worker and student mobility, which is expected to increase in the imminent future, particularly in the context of the recent ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) established in 2015. Making Thai and foreign qualifications mutually recognizable, although crucial, will not be an easy task, and will entail harmonization at all levels.

## Policy objectives

The Thai NQF is intended to:

- a. make educational qualifications more relevant to industry needs, thus raising the quality of manpower in the manufacturing and services sectors;
- b. raise the standard of Thai qualifications to international level;
- c. make qualifications transparent and comparable across national borders;
- d. enhance the competitiveness of both domestic and regional labour markets.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The Thai NQF currently has eight levels. Each level is described by a level descriptor based on learning outcomes. The level descriptors were arrived at by linking educational qualification levels (secondary, vocational and higher) with the competence levels required by various industry clusters, thus ensuring the closest possible fit between educational content and industry demands.

**Table 79. Thailand's national qualifications framework**

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS			NQF LEVELS	OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS/ QUALIFICATIONS	
BASIC EDUCATION	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	HIGHER EDUCATION		PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION (PQ) LEVELS	NATIONAL SKILL STANDARDS (NSS) / OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS (OS)
		Doctoral degree	Level 8	PQ 8	NSS 6
		Master degree	Level 7	PQ 7	NSS 5
	Bachelor degree	Bachelor degree	Level 6	PQ 6	NSS 4
	Technical education diploma	Associate degree	Level 5	PQ 5	NSS 3
			Level 4	PQ 4	NSS 2
<b>Upper secondary + occupational</b>	Vocational education certificate		Level 3	PQ 3	NSS 1
<b>Upper secondary</b>			Level 2	PQ 2	OS 2
<b>Lower secondary</b>			Level 1	PQ 1	OS 1

**Mechanisms linking, filling up, validating, and recognizing education qualifications and occupational standards**

- Testing, assessing, and evaluating
- Learning through formal, informal and non-formal education
- Validating working experiences, training, and operating in the workplace
- Accumulating learning credits (Credit Bank System)

**Continuing and lifelong education**

Source: Office of the Education Council, 2017.

**Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

The Office of the Education Council has been responsible for various NQF-related activities, including:

- a. working closely with the Thailand Professional Qualifications Institute (TPQI) to communicate information about the skills required by industries to educational institutions;
- b. appointing a working team comprising representatives from various education and training sectors and relevant agencies to develop the NQF based on the already existing design of the Thai qualifications framework for higher education and the Thai qualifications framework for vocational education. Bodies represented include the National Education Quality Assessment and Assurance Office and the National Testing Office;

- c. undertaking research studies. One study, undertaken in collaboration with King Mongkut University of Technology during 2010–11 (OEC and King Mongkut University of Technology, 2012), aimed to develop linkages between the skills standards required by key industry clusters and the learning outcomes of educational qualifications at secondary, vocational and higher levels. Employers, employees, educators and teachers were involved in the consultation process, providing in-depth analysis and synthesis. Key stakeholders from six industrial clusters<sup>908</sup> first identified core competences at each qualification level. A further nine industrial clusters were then identified to review the reliability of the comparisons made between occupational standards and educational qualifications;

<sup>908</sup> Food processing, petrochemicals, fisheries, tourism and hospitality, logistics, and jewellery making.

- d. appointing the NQF and ASEAN qualifications framework development working group to study criteria for referencing the Thai NQF to the ASEAN regional qualifications framework and propose NQF development guidelines accordingly;
- e. organizing four public hearings on NQF development, attended by representatives of the Federation of Thai Industries, the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade of Thailand, and Commissions of Higher and Vocational Education.

Overall responsibility for implementing the NQF is in the hands of the ministries of education, labour and industries, together with the Federation of Thai Industries and the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade of Thailand. A national committee composed of qualified experts from educational institutions, workplaces and professional associations will be in charge of implementing the NQF in accordance with the principles and guidelines approved by the Cabinet. The Office for National Educational Standards and Quality Assessment, the Ministry of Education, and the National Institute of Education Testing Service are also involved.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

One of the key aims of the Thai NQF is to give Thai citizens greater understanding of and control over their own education by enabling them to match formal educational provision with the learning outcomes and competences described in the NQF. Special attention will be paid to developing mechanisms of assessment which will allow workers to put their existing learning towards a full qualification in combination with other measures such as additional education and training or workplace-based learning.

### NQF implementation

Four implementation strategies are planned.

- a. Strategy one involves the development of systematic cooperation between workplaces, professional associations, professional and/or occupational groups and educational institutions in order to produce manpower equipped with the requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes according to NQF guidelines.
- b. Strategy two concerns curriculum development in line with NQF level descriptors. Advocacy campaigns will be held to encourage workplaces, professional associations and educational

institutions to work together to design curricula integrating formal, non-formal and informal education systems, and to determine learning outcomes and performance standards at each qualification level. A system will also be established for monitoring, evaluating and accrediting educational institutions in accordance with NQF levels.

- c. Strategy three involves developing systems for the assessment and evaluation of learning achievement, incorporating mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning and for credit accumulation and transfer.
- d. Strategy four involves strengthening educational institutions in their efforts to link education to the manpower demanded by the labour market.

### Referencing to regional frameworks

The Office of the Education Council plans to link the NQF with those of other ASEAN countries as well as the regional ASEAN framework. This is a priority particularly in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector (SHARE, 2015). The NQF has been revised, with the number of levels reduced to eight to facilitate these links.

### Important lessons and future plans

Since the latest revision of the NQF was completed, the following activities have been carried out:

- a. Curriculum development – the revised NQF has been sent to all educational authorities to inform how curriculum development should be organized.
- b. Adjustment of occupational standards or professional qualification levels and descriptors corresponding to the NQF – two organizations are working on this: the Ministry of Labour and the Thailand Professional Qualification Institute (public organization).
- c. Development of a model for enhancing NQF implementation – this concerns primarily seven key areas of human resources development for Thailand: infrastructure; logistics and supply chain management; robotics and automation; information and communication technology and digital content; food and agriculture; petrochemicals, energy and alternative energy; and mould and die making.

#### Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
NQF	national qualifications framework

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UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

# THE GAMBIA

## Introduction and context

The Gambia has finalized a national qualifications framework (NQF) for all education levels in the country. In doing so, it will build on the Gambian skills qualifications framework (GSQF) established in 2006 and designed to extend into a full qualifications framework (GSQF, 2006, p. 4). However, as yet, the NQF implementation has not taken off.

Although the GSQF of 2006 made significant contributions to the regulation of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, the absence of a national regulatory body to control, monitor and evaluate the progress and performance of tertiary and higher education institutions has limited their progression. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of international and private universities in the country. This complicates the management and governance of tertiary and higher education further. To address this issue and improve TVET standards, the government, through the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MoHERST) and its partners and stakeholders, developed the Quality Assurance Bill, and the subsequent enactment to the Quality Assurance Act (NAQAA Act 2015) which led to the establishment of the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (NAQAA). NAQAA oversees all qualifications offered by tertiary (TVET) and higher education institutions, as well as the accreditation of all qualifications delivered in the institutions.

In addition to the establishment of NAQAA, a number of national priorities were identified.

- In the short term, basic and secondary education sectors should be linked with other sectors to provide a continuum of high-quality lifelong learning opportunities. Relevant structures and systems to instigate essential legislative and regulatory frameworks should be established to help with this.
- In the medium term, efforts should be made to increase the number of graduates in science,

technology and engineering to provide students with the relevant knowledge, skills and understanding to facilitate full participation in socio-economic development.

- In the long-term, the government intends to raise the quality of education across all levels by ensuring sector skills plans and qualifications are fully integrated into the NQF, thereby significantly reducing the skills gaps and shortages in the labour market.

Challenges faced by The Gambia's education sector that are relevant to the development and successful operationalization of a unified NQF were listed in the Tertiary and Higher Education Policy 2013–2022 (MoHERST, 2013). They can be summarized as follows: there is an increasing demographic trend in the post-secondary population and the country has seen an increase in the educational aspirations of young Gambians. This has resulted in significant growth in the tertiary and higher education sector. While some young people have been afforded a relatively straightforward pathway into and through tertiary and higher education, many have not. It is important that students can pursue not only their occupational careers, but also advanced educational goals.

There are several challenges, however:

- a. Access to and equity in education between TVET institutions and higher education institutions is insufficient.
- b. Training at most TVET institutions does not adequately respond to labour market needs for the socio-economic development of the country in terms of relevance and quality. Vocational education is therefore not considered a viable option by many students. The low number of TVET graduates does not meet the demands for skilled manpower, and the absence of a standardized quality assurance framework has led to institutions self-regulating by means of internal quality assurance mechanisms. Lack of coordination among training programmes makes it difficult to transfer relevant academic or professional credits.



- c. In terms of sector management, there is minimal coordination among educational institutions in harmonizing courses and programmes and introducing administrative arrangements that would optimize resources and credit transfers.
- a. to support human resource development across all economic sectors by defining skills standards clearly to support vocational training; and
- b. to support learners whose literacy levels are functional but low.

## Policy objectives

Taking the abovementioned challenges and governmental priorities into account, the aims of the unified NQF for tertiary and higher education will be to:

- a. provide a framework for improved communication between education, training and employment stakeholders by enabling schools, parents, prospective students, employers and others to understand the achievements and attributes represented by the main qualification titles, and how qualifications relate to one another;
- b. create a nationally relevant, coherent and responsive qualification system, and assist higher education institutions, learners and others in doing so;
- c. clarify potential routes for progression and credit transfer, particularly in the context of wider participation in lifelong learning;
- d. support the alignment of qualifications in The Gambia with international standards, thus ensuring international competitiveness and facilitating student and graduate mobility;
- e. provide a point of reference for setting and assessing standards, thereby assisting higher education institutions and their external examiners;
- f. facilitate a smooth transition into employment by aligning education with current and future labour market needs through the use of an 'outcome-based' metric for knowledge, skills and competences.

The NQF also comprises the following GSQF objectives:

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The former NQF comprises four levels, which are differentiated in terms of the difficulty of the tasks demanded and the degree of responsibility required. A summary of the former NQF level descriptors is shown in [Table 80](#).

The proposed NQF for tertiary and higher education, as shown in [Table 81](#), has nine levels. The learning outcome domains include:

- knowledge and understanding;
- applied knowledge and understanding;
- generic cognitive skills communication, ICT and use of data.

In the new NQF, qualifications will consist of standalone units of work, with each unit and qualification being assigned a credit value; each credit point awarded to a unit or qualification will represent approximately 10 hours of notional learning. It is important to note that a credit point does not indicate the level of difficulty of a unit or qualification: this is determined by the assigned 'level' of the qualification, as detailed in the generic level descriptor. A credit point is determined by the size or amount of time or amount of learning that has to take place to complete the unit and/or qualification. The size, amount of time or amount of learning will be defined as any formal or non-formal learning along with the amount of time spent completing practical work and any form of assessment.

**Table 80. Level descriptors in the former GSQF**

QUALIFICATIONS		LEVEL DESCRIPTOR
<b>Level 4</b>		Competent to perform managerial, analytical and/or specialist tasks associated with jobs that are non-routine, e.g. middle manager/professional worker
<b>Level 3 Practical</b>	Level 3	Competent to perform tasks associated with skilled jobs of a routine yet complex nature, sometimes with supervisory functions, e.g. team leader
<b>Level 2 Practical</b>	Level 2	Competent to perform routine and sometimes non-routine tasks under minimum guidance and supervision, e.g. skilled worker
<b>Level 1 Practical</b>	Level 1	Competent to perform a limited range of work activities under supervision, e.g. trained worker
<b>Foundation level</b>		Basic skills in English communication, life skills, <sup>49</sup> numeracy and work skills, with literacy in mother tongue as an option

**Table 81. Proposed NQF for tertiary and higher education in The Gambia**

MAIN STAGES OF EDUCATION (EMPLOYMENT STATUS)	LEVEL	TERTIARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION
<b>Professional or postgraduate education or research</b> (senior manager)	9	Doctoral degree
<b>Higher education advanced skills training</b> (senior manager/middle manager or professional worker)	8	Master's degree/Master of Philosophy (M. Phil)
<b>Entry to professional graduate employment</b> (middle manager/professional worker/supervisor or team leader)	7	Postgraduate diploma/certificate
<b>Entry to professional graduate employment</b> (middle manager/professional worker/supervisor or team leader)	6	Bachelor's degree
<b>Entry to higher education/specialized education and training</b> (management training/skilled worker)	5	Higher national diploma
<b>Specialized education and training</b> (management training/skilled worker)	4	National diploma
<b>Continuation of secondary education</b> (progression to skilled employment, semi-skilled worker, trainee/apprentice; GABECE equivalent level)	3	Certificate 3 (advanced)
<b>Basic skills required to function in the workplace</b>	2	WASSCE (grade 12)/intermediate certificate
Advanced literacy, numeracy and vocational skills training required to enter the workplace	1	GABECE (grade 9)/elementary certificate
<b>Basic literacy and numeracy skills required to enter the workplace and undertake vocational training</b>	Foundation	

*Note:* WASSCE – West African senior school certificate examination; GABECE – Gambia basic education certificate examinations

*Source:* MoHERST/NAQAA, 2017

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

NAQAA, as enshrined in the NAQAA Act 2015, has the responsibility for the regulation of tertiary (including TVET) and higher education institutions in The Gambia. Prior to the establishment of NAQAA, the defunct National Training Authority was mandated to regulate only tertiary (TVET) institutions; however, this did not include quality assurance, delivery, accreditation or awarding of any of the qualifications at the higher education (university) levels. The MoHERST provides the policy framework within which NAQAA operates.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The Gambia has also made efforts to identify learning pathways at different levels of the NQF. These learning pathways are indicated in the

entry requirements for each level of tertiary and higher education. The entry level could be defined as a duration of study and its associated credits, but it could also be credits obtained through the recognition of prior learning through non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Having standards and quality assurance processes in place will make it easier for a credit transfer system to be implemented successfully across TVET, tertiary and higher education institutions. The 'notional hours of learning' include formal and non-formal learning, all forms of assessment and practical work.

When applying to transfer credits from one course to another, whether in the same institution or from one institution to another, the number of transfer credits awarded will be determined by the relevant individual institution within the framework of the NQF. Agreement between different education providers facilitates successful credit transfer across education systems. Credit accumulation and

transfer systems not only allow for recognition of a student's prior learning but also encourage lifelong learning and student mobility within and between institutions without interruption of their studies or the need to repeat examinations/courses.

In addition to the transfer of credits mentioned above, accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) also opens up access to tertiary and higher education to those who would not otherwise be able to access such education through normal institutional admission procedures. APEL is a procedure whereby previous relevant high quality professional or non-standardized learning qualifications that do not meet the normal admission requirements may be taken into account for admission to some courses of study in some education institutions. In some international educational institutions, candidates wishing to take advantage of APEL must sit an examination at the relevant institution prior to being considered for admission.

Having the opportunity to make use of both credit transfers and APEL helps to promote lifelong learning for Gambians wishing to progress in their careers and/or expand their knowledge of a particular specialist area.

## NQF implementation

There are three phases of implementation of the NQF for tertiary and higher education.

Phase one involves a consultation with the key stakeholders from the tertiary and higher education institutions and employer representatives. It is crucial for stakeholders to 'buy in'. They will therefore be asked to review the level descriptors and to discuss whether these are an accurate indication of the knowledge, skills and competences that employers are seeking from employees holding related qualifications.

Phase two will consist of standardizing qualification levels and finalizing credit values. In collaboration with the MoHERST, tertiary and higher education institutions will be required to:

- a. identify and map the level of difficulty for each qualification currently on offer at each of the tertiary and higher education institutions using NQF level descriptors;
- b. standardize the type and title of each qualification; that is,
  - certificate (for WASSCE or GABECE)
  - advanced certificate
  - advanced diploma
  - degree, etc.;

- c. determine the duration of the course of study necessary to achieve each of the qualifications;
- d. determine the standalone 'units of learning' (learning outcomes) that make up each qualification; in other words:
  - allocate credit points to the 'units of learning' (based on duration, i.e. one credit point is equivalent to approximately ten hours of learning);
  - allocate a credit value to each qualification.

It is important to note that the quality of the qualification content and its subsequent delivery in institutions is crucial to the successful implementation of NQF. This will be a key focus at NAQAA.

Phase three will consist of capacity-building and awareness sessions. The MoHERST and NAQAA will facilitate a series of awareness sessions prior to the implementation of the NQF. Attendees at the sessions will include, among others:

- a. staff from TVET, tertiary and higher education institutions;
- b. school representatives;
- c. employers;
- d. students and parents;
- e. relevant government agencies, including those responsible for employment and economic development;
- f. 'employee' representative bodies;
- g. professional bodies;
- h. career guidance professionals.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The Gambia is one of the member states in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). For qualifications listed in the GSQF, the descriptions provided and the quality assurance process during assessment allow for acknowledgement by another country in the ECOWAS sub-region. The Gambian approach permits the recognition of learning outcomes, which will facilitate individual mobility.

## Important lessons and future plans

The Gambian Government has risen to the challenge and acknowledged the importance of taking a unified approach to the development of an NQF encompassing TVET, tertiary and higher education institutions, and schools.

The process of developing the NQF has demonstrated the importance of tailoring a qualifications framework to the specific realities

in the country. The NQF is designed with a view to ensuring that the fourth level of the existing GSQF represents entry level to tertiary and higher education, in particular for entry into an advanced diploma/higher national diploma. The design is to ensure that there are sufficient levels in the GSQF to cater for all possible education levels of students/adults returning to or entering into vocational education in the country. If necessary, an additional level will be added, one that falls between levels three and four of the current GSQF. If the entry requirements into vocational education in the GSQF are too demanding to be accessible by school-age students and/or adults returning to or entering into vocational education, the existing foundation (basic skills) level could be split into two or three levels, thus making the requirements easier to fulfil and giving students a sense of achievement.

The GSQF review has been completed and its alignment to the new NQF for tertiary and higher education has been undertaken in a unified, coherent and consistent manner. The framework will promote lifelong learning access, mobility and progression into and between education and training sectors in The Gambia. This will

be achieved by integrating existing vocational education and training, general education, and higher education into a national framework with levels accommodating all learners from various educational backgrounds.

#### Abbreviations

APEL	accreditation of prior experiential learning
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GABECE	Gambia basic education certificate examinations
GSQF	Gambian skills qualifications framework
MoHERST	Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology
NAQAA	National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority
NQF	national qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
WASSCE	West African senior school certificate examination

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# TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

## Introduction and context

Trinidad and Tobago has a seven-level qualifications framework for its tertiary and vocational education sectors. This represents the country's first step towards formalizing its hitherto disparate education system. The aim is to create a unified structure in which learners can use credit transfers to move seamlessly from one programme or institution to another. The qualifications framework in the vocational sector is the Trinidad and Tobago national vocational qualification (TTNVQ) system; the tertiary framework is currently being revised to include all levels of education in the country, including general, higher and technical vocational education and training (TVET). The revised framework will have ten levels and will be closely aligned to the CARICOM qualifications framework. National education and training at all levels is in need of expansion, upgrading and integration if the country is to equip its citizens with the entrepreneurial, ethical and critical-thinking skills demanded by today's labour market.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago recognizes that a number of challenges must be overcome to expand its education system. These include: reforming the education and training landscape while maintaining a focus on curricula about the country's history and geography; increasing cultural diversification; improving STEM subjects education (science, technology, engineering and mathematics); and ensuring that post-secondary and tertiary education remains relevant (MoE, 2015).

The Ministry of Education aims to develop policies to address its ageing school infrastructure, as well as deficiencies in the education system and in research capacities. It understands that human capital development is a major contributor to economic growth and sustainable wealth creation. Its strategies are enshrined in the Ministerial Priorities published on 9 October 2015, which are available to view on the government's website (MoE, 2015).

The government hopes to strengthen connections between TVET and academic higher education to facilitate the transfer of learning and skills between the two. This will ultimately create a more

competent workforce, thus supporting industrial development.

## Policy objectives

The government is committed to:

- a. preserving, maintaining and expanding, where necessary, the system of free education and training at all levels;
- b. ensuring the 2004 Government assistance for tuition expenses (GATE) programme remains relevant, easily accessible and available to all citizens who need it;
- c. supporting its two public universities, the University of the West Indies and the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), to achieve maximum efficiency and high standards;
- d. developing a culture of discipline, productivity and tolerance in all schools and emphasizing these core values in the curriculum;
- e. implementing a comprehensive, efficient and sustainable school maintenance programme to cope with an ageing school infrastructure;
- f. replacing dilapidated schools with new modern facilities and building new schools in areas where they are most needed;
- g. emphasizing the richness of cultural diversity and eliminating any dissonance that may arise from ethnic, cultural, religious or class differences;
- h. supporting the teaching of the country's history and geography in schools;
- i. mobilizing the artistic community to take a leading role in cultural diversification and cultural education;
- j. ensuring primary, secondary and tertiary curricula comprise STEM education;
- k. fostering, developing and encouraging best practices in the administration of the educational system;
- l. providing clear prospects for advancement for all teachers in their careers and professions, and ensuring their education comprises modern-day training on world cultures, technology and social media;
- m. ensuring students have free and easy access to broadband internet in all schools;

- n. developing and encouraging a culture of research and development in all tertiary-level institutions, both public and private;
  - o. maintaining high standards in enrolment and participation in post-secondary and tertiary education;
  - p. providing opportunities for school leavers to re-enter the education system;
  - q. ensuring universal early childhood education;
  - r. promoting and encouraging continuing education and adult education;
  - s. developing sports- and humanities-based curricula;
  - t. harmonizing, rationalizing and modernizing the legislation governing the education sector.
- c. degree of specialization;
  - d. transferability of competences;
  - e. ability to innovate and to cope with non-routine activities;
  - f. ability to plan and organize work and to supervise others.

As a result, similar jobs are supported by similar qualifications.

Vocational qualification programmes are designed to impart the practical skills required in specific job roles or sectors. Courses tend to be classroom-based with assessment by written and practical examinations. There is tension between performance-based assessment and assessment by written and practical examinations.

### Levels and use of learning outcomes

The qualifications framework for the tertiary sector is divided into seven levels, from the certificate at level 1 to the doctorate at level 7. The levels are differentiated according to the following parameters:

- a. complexity of subject matter;
- b. breadth of competences required;

The TTNVQs are based on national occupational standards. Industry experts come together to define the standards for top performance in their industries. These standards are then translated to the curriculum and assessment procedures developed to encompass them. All TTNVQs are represented on the five-level TTNVQ framework, which ranges from level 1 (semi-skilled) to level 5 (chartered and advanced professional level).

**Table 82. Trinidad and Tobago national vocational qualifications (TTNVQ) framework**

LEVEL	TTNVQ FRAMEWORK
5	Chartered and advanced professional
4	Professional
3	Technician
2	Craft
1	Pre-craft (semi-skilled)

Source: ACTT, 2007

**Table 83. Qualifications framework for the tertiary and vocational sectors in Trinidad and Tobago**

LEVEL	TYPE OF CERTIFICATE	SKILLS ACHIEVED
1	Certificate	Candidate demonstrates knowledge of the tasks required to accomplish a routine job and the practical skills to perform those tasks effectively. Can apply learned responses to straightforward problems.
2	Certificate	Candidate demonstrates knowledge of the main problems in his/her field of study and the practical skills necessary for employment in that field Can solve some practical problems in the area by applying learned principles.
3	Diploma	Candidate demonstrates knowledge of the underlying principles in his/her field of study and the practical skills necessary to interpret and evaluate these principles in a related field of employment. Candidate is able to present, interpret and evaluate qualitative and quantitative data, to develop lines of argument, and to make sound judgements in accordance with the basic principles of the field.

**Table 83. Qualifications framework for the tertiary and vocational sectors in Trinidad and Tobago (Continued)**

LEVEL	TYPE OF CERTIFICATE	SKILLS ACHIEVED
4	Associate degree or higher diploma	<p>Candidate demonstrates knowledge and critical understanding of the established principles in his/her field of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed. Applies principles outside the context in which they were studied and in an employment context.</p> <p>Demonstrates knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the field and is able to critically evaluate different approaches to solving problems in related fields of employment.</p> <p>Understands the limits of his/her knowledge and how these impacts on analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.</p>
5	Baccalaureate, bachelor's degree, honours degree, graduate diploma	<p>Candidate demonstrates a systematic understanding of the key principles of his/her field of study. Shows coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the cutting edge of research in the field.</p> <p>Can devise and defend arguments and/or solve problems by accurately deploying ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of the field. Understands how these techniques can be used in employment.</p> <p>Can describe and comment on aspects of current research or equivalent advanced scholarship in the field.</p> <p>Shows an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge. Candidate can manage his/her own learning and make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources.</p>
6	Master's degree, postgraduate diploma, professional qualification	<p>Candidate demonstrates a systematic understanding and critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the cutting edge of his/her field of study or professional practice.</p> <p>Shows a comprehensive knowledge of techniques applicable to his/her own research or professional practice and applies this knowledge in original ways.</p> <p>Demonstrates a practical understanding of how established research techniques are used to create and interpret knowledge in the field.</p> <p>Can critically evaluate current research and advanced scholarship in the field.</p> <p>Can evaluate and critique methodologies and, where appropriate, propose new hypotheses.</p>
7	Doctoral degree	<p>Candidate demonstrates a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge and advanced research techniques at the cutting edge of an academic discipline or area of professional practice.</p> <p>Through original research or other advanced scholarship, candidate creates and interprets new knowledge of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication.</p> <p>Demonstrates an ability to conceptualize, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge and to adjust the design in the light of unforeseen problems.</p>

Source: ACTT, 2007

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT) is the regulatory body for quality assurance

in post-secondary and tertiary education. It provides the following services: institutional accreditation, registration, recognition, conferment of institutional titles, programme approval, and equivalence assessment.

Learning standards are also set by the ACTT, which encourages institutions to shift to curricula based on learning outcomes expressed in terms of competences gained. Quality assurance measures have been introduced to standardize learning outcomes and allow for accountability.

The National Training Agency of Trinidad and Tobago (NTATT) is the body responsible for overseeing TVET. Its mission is to establish a national system to coordinate, harmonize and evaluate all TVET provision in the country. The NTATT laid the foundations for the five-level TTNVQ framework. Cabinet Minute 736 of 27 March 2008 mandated the NTATT to develop a world-class labour force that is competent, innovative and entrepreneurial. In order to enable institutions to deliver the quality of training required to produce such a labour force, the NTATT has developed standardized curricula which provide all training institutions with regional and international recognition.

The TTNVQ system follows a national curriculum with an internationally approved design which incorporates the latest theories on teaching and learning associated with competency-based education and training. Assessment is performance-based and is conducted according to rigorous criteria designed to reveal a candidate's knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) is the official certifying body, which ensures the quality of awards level 1 and level 2 Caribbean vocational qualification (CVQ) units to students who have met the requirements stipulated in regional occupational standards. The Council is authorized by heads of State in the region to carry out regional certification at secondary level. The existence of an external awarding body at this level makes assessment more objective and thus encourages stakeholders' acceptance of outcomes-based learning.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

At present, there is no national policy on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in Trinidad and Tobago, although there has been some development in this area with the establishment of workforce assessment centres, designed to increase access to and participation in post-secondary education and training. In recent years, some tertiary education providers have begun to award credit for prior learning. These providers also evaluate the impact of informal and non-formal

learning on the progress of adult learners, whose enrolment in these institutions has substantially increased. So far, however, few institutions have formalized their policies for RPL.

This slow progress is largely attributable to the difficulty educational providers face in convincing employers of the value of non-formal and informal learning. The concept of RPL is new to the Caribbean and a traditionalist approach to education has been paramount for many years. Many therefore resist what they see as a radical departure from cherished ideals. Even within tertiary education institutions there is substantial resistance to the RPL initiative. This makes it difficult for the government to achieve its aim of integrating graduates into a permeable lifelong learning system.

In the institutions that do practise RPL to some degree, learners' competences are measured via portfolios and interviews. Candidates are accepted for RPL assessment following an initial interview during the admissions process. Various documents may be submitted as evidence of competences, including letters from employers, samples of work, and critical reflective statements. Mentors assist candidates in developing their portfolio and presenting the information contained therein to the assessor, who then examines the evidence in order to ascertain whether the candidate has achieved 70% or more of the competences required for completion of a course. If this is judged to be the case, exemption is granted, which means that the candidate is exempted from parts of the study programme or is required to do a shorter training period in preparation for an examination for a full qualification. The introduction of effective quality assurance and accreditation systems ensures that the quality of learning outcomes from RPL meets or exceeds internationally accepted standards.

In the TVET sector, the situation with regard to RPL is somewhat more promising. Trinidad and Tobago's TVET qualifications framework gives all candidates the opportunity to attain progressively higher qualifications in their selected occupation. Candidates are able to transfer credits between programmes from one level to another. Moreover, the prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) system allows TVET learners to have their skills and knowledge validated, no matter how, when or where they were acquired. In PLAR, assessment of an individual's skills and knowledge against approved occupational standards may lead to the award of a full or partial occupational or professional qualification (TTNVQ or CVQ). Where necessary, further training in specific areas is recommended. Trinidad and Tobago is currently experiencing heightened demand for trained,



competent and certified workers; increased use of the PLAR system will help to fulfil this need by providing industries with a pool of certified workers who meet required occupational standards.

## Recognising foreign qualifications

The ACTT provides advice on the recognition status of post-secondary and tertiary programmes and institutions operating internationally and locally. Persons who wish to pursue a course of study, or who have completed a programme at a post-secondary or tertiary institution, may apply to the ACTT for a statement on recognition. This statement will provide information on the accredited/recognition status of both the institution and the programme.

The ACTT is also responsible for quality assuring programmes that are delivered in Trinidad and Tobago, but which originate in other territories. These are referred to as transnational programmes and must undergo the process of transnational recognition prior to delivery in Trinidad and Tobago.

## Recognition of transnational programmes

Chapter 39:06 mandates that the ACTT recognizes programmes and awards of foreign institutions operating in Trinidad and Tobago. The aim of recognition is to certify that minimum requirements are met for the delivery of foreign post-secondary and tertiary education and training programmes through partnership arrangements with local institutions that have been registered by the ACTT. While local institutions may apply for recognition of individual transnational programmes, a foreign awarding body/institution may alternatively seek recognition by the ACTT.

## NQF implementation

The ACTT, the organization responsible for the design of the national qualifications framework, has been a key player in the development of a quality tertiary education sector in the country. Since its board appointment in 2004 and launch in November 2005, the ACTT has:

- a. established 49 institutions with 'registered' status, i.e. offering programmes that lead to post-secondary and tertiary-level qualifications;
- b. secured 14 institutions with institutional accreditation;
- c. offered 408 recognized transnational programmes;

- d. issued 16,286 statements on recognition
- e. issued 292 equivalence assessments
- f. recognized 18 foreign awarding bodies and institutions;
- g. approved more than 258 locally-developed higher education programmes.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

In 1972, Commonwealth Caribbean leaders at the seventh Heads of government conference decided to transform the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) into a common market and establish the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), of which the common market would be an integral part.

The CVQ levels are consistent with the levels in the regional qualifications framework (ACTT, 2007) and are recognized and portable within CARICOM and the wider world. The CVQ provides a broad preparation base for employment that aims to produce workers able to meet the varied demands of the modern workplace. The award of a CVQ represents the achievement of a set of competences that define the core work of an occupational area. CVQs have parallel standing with academic qualifications at the same level and can provide access to higher education.

Over the past two decades, the post-secondary and tertiary education sectors in Trinidad and Tobago have become a great deal more international. At first, only indigenous programmes were provided at local public institutions, but recent arrangements such as franchises have enabled foreign universities and professional bodies to provide courses in the country. This applies in particular to tertiary education. TVET, on the other hand, remains almost totally regional.

The level descriptors in the national qualifications frameworks are derived from those in other countries' NQFs and represent internationally recognized standards. Levels 1 to 3 of the ACTT framework for tertiary education equate broadly to the first three levels of the five-level general framework for occupational levels proposed by the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA). The ACTT framework has more levels than CANTA, however, because it covers academic as well as occupational qualifications.

The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs is responsible for the free movement of skills within the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). The ACTT is a member of the Free Movement Committee established to process applications for certificates of recognition of CARICOM skills

qualification through the recognition of foreign and local qualifications.

## Important lessons and future plans

The Ministry of Education envisages a number of innovative policies to reduce the burden on the economy while ensuring value for money in

expenditure on education. These include rationalizing the expenditure in the post-secondary and tertiary education sectors to improve efficiency and accountability and to avoid duplication. In the long run, the ministry aims to develop an overarching system to guide the management and operation of all levels of education in Trinidad and Tobago, while providing the infrastructure necessary to catapult the output of this sector into the next century.

Abbreviations			
ACTT	Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago	PLAR	prior learning assessment and recognition
CANTA	Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies	RPL	recognition of prior learning
CARICOM	Caribbean Community	STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
CVO	Caribbean vocational qualification	TTNVQ	Trinidad and Tobago national vocational qualifications
NTATT	National Training Agency of Trinidad and Tobago	TVET	technical vocational education and training

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### Prepared by:

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The national qualifications framework (NQF) was established by presidential decree No 2009–2139 of 8 July 2009, which put into force the national classification of qualifications. The NQF was jointly developed by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, following consultation with the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Employment and the Administrative Court. The Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Education share responsibility in their respective sub-sectors. The Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment has been active in dialogue and cooperation with international partners to advance the agenda of the NQF and develop further its instruments.

The NQF is structured in seven levels. Each level is defined by six categories of level descriptors: complexity, autonomy, responsibility, adaptability, knowledge, skills and behaviour.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

In the seven years following the 2011 Revolution, Tunisia has been undertaking a reform of its institutions and economy. The European Union has been Tunisia's key partner in this process. Cooperation in a wide range of domains has been reinforced through a privileged partnership established in 2012. The EU's commitment to help Tunisia achieve its ambitions was underlined again in the 2016 Joint Communication 'Strengthening EU support for Tunisia' and the launch, by High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini and President Essebsi, of the EU-Tunisia Youth Partnership.

Tunisia's population was 11,435,000 people in July 2017. The demographic transition has reached an advanced stage, as the population growth rate

declined from 3.5% annually in the period 1980–95 to 1% in the decade 2005–15. Young people aged 15–29 account for approximately 33% of the total population (2017).

Agriculture contributes 8.8% of GDP, and is relatively in decline; industry constitutes 29.3%, also in decline relatively, while services are increasing in relative value, now at 61.9%.

Job creation, and in particular in the private sector is relatively low. In 2014 two-thirds of total employment is concentrated in four sectors: agriculture (18.4%), manufacturing (16.1%), construction (16.8%) and commerce in all forms (11.3%). In manufacturing 10% of employees have higher education qualifications, but the rest are low qualified. However there is a shift to increased higher-skills employment in private companies in sectors such as IT, health, scientific and engineering services. The public sector is the larger employer of higher qualifications for public administration, education, health and public enterprises. Recent prospective studies, conducted by IACE in 2018, show that a number of occupations face severe shortages, e.g. IT engineers and technicians, medical doctors, heavy truck drivers, construction workers and some elementary occupations. Some shortages might be related to intense emigration of specialists; this concerns particularly medical doctors and IT engineers and technicians.

The activity rate has stayed stable since 2010, floating around 47%, but this figure encompasses a very large gender gap. Despite some gradual improvement since 2010, women still have a very low activity rate (26.5% in 2017). Men have an activity rate floating between 70.3% and 68.3% (2017). It is important to note that younger women have much better labour market participation than the total female population: 60.4% for the age group 25–29, 51.1% for the age group 30–34, but much lower for all other age groups.

This contextual clarification is important, to better understand the meaning of the unemployment rate, which has been over 15% in the last years (15.5%

in quarter 3 2018). A major challenge for Tunisia is the high unemployment rate of the population with higher education, which has been growing since the mid-1990s; it became a real concern in the early 2000s and it surpassed the average unemployment rate for the first time in 2006, with a figure of 17%. In 2011 it peaked to 33.1% and in 2017 it was 29.1% (twice the average rate). Not surprisingly the unemployment rate of women with higher education qualifications is much higher (39% in 2017), but had been in decline. Men with higher education qualifications have a much lower unemployment rate (18.2% in 2017).

The educational attainment of the active population has visibly increased over the last decades. In 2001, 60% of the active population had no education or only primary education, but this figure decreased to 40.4% in 2017. In parallel, the share of the active Tunisians with higher education doubled in this time span, to reach 22.1% in 2017, while a much smaller increase occurred with the proportion of secondary education (37.5% in 2017).

The Strategic Reform Plan of 2025 reflects a national strategy, which seeks to enhance the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors. The vision and measures for transformation of the VET sector are outlined in the reform strategy (2016–20). The Strategic Plan for the Reform of Higher Education and Scientific Research has five objectives:

- a. to improve the quality of university education and graduate employability;
- b. to stimulate research and innovation;
- c. to promote good governance and optimize resource management;
- d. to revise the university map for better anchoring and regional balance;
- e. to improve teachers' education.

The preparation of the Strategic Plan for the Reform of Higher Education and Scientific Research was launched in October 2011 with the establishment of the National Tripartite Committee, which includes representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, university representatives and union representatives. The task started with the development of a scoping note in December 2011 and the organisation of a national reflection seminar in July 2014. The Strategic Plan was developed and approved by the Universities Council in January 2015. After its validation by the Council of Ministers, a participatory process of societal dialogue was launched, involving all stakeholders in the system: teachers, students, civil society, professionals, private sector, regional officials and representatives of other ministries. The plan also includes

consultations in different regions of the country to emphasise concerns and specificities, thus to prepare a plan which reflects all Tunisians' needs and expectations. During the final stage, a draft law will be submitted for approval to the Chamber of Deputies.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

The Tunisian NQF has several objectives:

- a. to contribute to better readability of competences;
- b. to bridge the gap between the economy's skills needs and education and training provision;
- c. to provide common references to promote geographic, sectoral and professional mobility;
- d. to take into account all modes of learning in a lifelong learning perspective;
- e. to reduce dead ends in learning pathways, in particular between VET and higher education.

### International cooperation

In view of its privileged status of cooperation with the EU, Tunisia cooperates with the Erasmus+ programme and in 2016, the country became the first of Arab and African countries associated with the EU's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, which provides new opportunities to Tunisian researchers and academics under the same conditions as their peers in EU Member States. Thanks to EU support, hundreds of Tunisian students and staff of higher education institutions benefit from Erasmus scholarships in Europe (1,143 in 2017 alone).

The General Directorate of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research establishes and manages all bilateral agreements with partner countries and foreign organisations. Currently, there are 44 bilateral agreements as reported by the official statistics of the Directorate on 3 December 2015. According to these statistics, the bilateral agreements are categorised as follows: 17 with Arab countries, 15 with European countries, 8 with Asian countries and 4 with American countries. The main elements of these agreements refer to cooperation in the area of higher education, research, innovation and technology, foreign students' exchange and other activities of the Ministry. In addition to higher education, some of these agreements also relate to culture, languages, secondary and primary education.

Regionally, Tunisia has a solid cooperation with neighbouring Maghreb countries in higher education

and scientific research, such as the intensive programme for students exchange with Morocco that has been in place for many years. In addition, Tunisia is a partner of Algeria in Tempus/Erasmus+ programmes (joint degrees, mobility for academic, research and administrative staff, credit transfers). A new specific programme for student mobility between Tunisia and Algeria is being developed.

Tunisia is also building new cooperation opportunities with Southern African countries.

Furthermore, Tunisia is involved in a number of international programmes, such as Tunisian-American programmes offering degree and non-degree scholarships for master and doctorate students, researchers and academic staff – including 'Partnership for the enhanced engagement in research' (PEER), 'Fulbright', 'Fulbright Tech+', and 'Thomas Jefferson' programmes. Tunisia also participates in a number of bilateral programmes with Canada and Japan.

Apart from European cooperation programmes, the General Directorate of International Cooperation disseminates a number of scholarship offers granted by international and regional organisations, such as the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the World Bank (joint Japan-World Bank scholarships and Robert S. McNamara Fellowship Programme), UNESCO, the Agence universitaire de la francophonie (AUF), the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), and the African Bank. Generally, these calls concern scholarships for teachers and PhD or Master students and are limited to research.

Tunisia is a member of the Meric Network<sup>909</sup>, which cooperates with ENIC-NARIC.

The General Direction of Higher Education of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research coordinates recognition of foreign qualifications. The term used in the legal base is 'equivalence'. Equivalence is the assimilation of diplomas and titles issued by an educational system of a foreign country with diplomas and titles issued by the Tunisian education system on the basis of a set of conditions such as those relating to the registration, the number of years of study, the content of the programmes and the procedures for assessing knowledge. In Tunisia the system of equivalences is organised by regulatory texts whose purpose is, in particular, to determine the structures

authorised to issue equivalence and the criteria according to which the equivalence of diplomas and titles is awarded. It should be noted that the various texts which organise higher education either from the point of view of aims and structures, or from the point of view of the system of studies and examinations, provide for the necessity of the equivalence of foreign diplomas. This requirement is the legal basis for the application for equivalence.

The national legal base of recognition of foreign qualifications is composed of the following texts:

- Décret n°96-519 du 25 mars 1996, portant refonte de la réglementation relative à l'équivalence des diplômes et des titres;
- Arrêté de 15 août 1996, fixant les critères sur la base desquels l'équivalence est accordée aux diplômes et titres;
- Arrêté du ministre de l'enseignement supérieur du 28 mars 2002, modifiant et complétant l'arrêté du 15 août 1996, fixant les critères sur la base desquels l'équivalence est accordée aux diplômes et titres.

The legal framework for recognition in the Mediterranean Unesco region is the Mediterranean international convention on recognition: International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean, 1976.

The reference Tunisian institutions are the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Tunisian Agency for Vocational Training (Agence tunisienne de la formation professionnelle, ATFP) and the Portail éducatif tunisien<sup>910</sup>.

Together with Morocco, Algeria and Lebanon, Tunisia participates in the EU-funded technical assistance project supporting the Meric Network in strengthening institutional capacities, instruments and converging approaches.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### NQF scope and structure

The NQF covers qualifications from general, VET and higher education systems.

### NQF levels and level descriptors

The Tunisian NQF is designed as a classification of qualifications (hence the name CNQ, 'classification

<sup>909</sup> Mediterranean network of national information centres on the recognition of qualifications.

<sup>910</sup> [www.edunet.tn](http://www.edunet.tn)

nationale des qualifications'), based on previous classifications of occupations, public services labour regulation and sectoral collective agreements. The CNQ has seven levels and six categories of descriptors: four cover the levels of occupations targeted – complexity, autonomy, responsibility and adaptability; and two describe the resources needed to ensure qualifications are at that level – knowledge, know-how and behaviour.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

New qualifications are outcomes-based. Article 1 of the NQF decree specifies that: 'the qualifications corresponding to each of the seven levels of the NQF are defined by the six descriptors formulated in terms of learning outcomes.'

### **Definition of qualification**

There is no explicit definition in the NQF decree; the descriptors provide information on the purpose and meaning of qualifications.

Several sectors have elaborated occupational standards for all their key occupations (REM/REC – 'référentiel de métiers-compétences'). These standards are organised as sector collections and are used by employers, as well as by training providers. The actual use of REM/REC is not without difficulties, particularly if the sector strategic leadership and the cooperation with state bodies and education institution is not effective.

The new classification of occupations, which has been validated in 2018, was elaborated with reference to the classification ROME ('répertoire opérationnel des métiers et des emplois', France). The occupational descriptions in the Tunisian ROME provide information equivalent to occupational standards.

### **Development process of qualifications**

In VET the competence-based approach (APC – 'approche par compétences') has taken root as the main system for development of programmes and qualifications aligned with labour market requirements. Although the full implantation of APC programmes is still underway, the approach is well established. The APC is constructed as a chain, going from the sector study to the analysis of the work situation to the definition of competence standards. The training and pedagogic components and the assessment standards are created with reference to the competence standards. The qualification is awarded once the candidate's assessment of the intended competences is verified.

### **Access, progression and credit**

The public higher education in Tunisia remains accessible to anyone holding the certificate awarded

on successful completion of secondary education ('al-bakaluria'). Holders of the bakaluria are directed in the choice of university and course by a computerised system, which takes into account pupils' merits, their wishes and the number of places available in each course.

As a result of the reform which has introduced the three-cycle system ('licence, master, doctorat'), all the courses administered by Tunisian universities, with the exception of medical, architecture and engineering courses, are based on the structure of Bachelor degrees, awarded on accumulation of 180 credits, Master degrees, awarded after a further accumulation of 120 credits and Doctorates (180 credits).

Higher education is divided into three levels.

- a. The first level of studies includes Academic (fundamental) Bachelor – lasting for three years and carrying 180 ECTS (European credit transfer and accumulation system) credits; and Applied Bachelor – lasting for three years and carrying 180 ECTS.
- b. The second level of studies includes Academic Master – lasting for two years and carrying 120 ECTS for students having previously achieved 180 ECTS; and Professional Master – lasting for two years and carrying 120 ECTS for students having previously achieved 180 ECTS.
- c. The third level of studies includes doctoral academic studies (PhD), including a minimum of three years of research and courses and carrying 180 ECTS (150 ECTS for the thesis and 30 ECTS for doctoral courses).

The studies of engineering, architecture, medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and veterinary medicine are organised in accordance with the specific characteristics of these disciplines and in accordance with international standards. Engineering students attend two years of preparatory classes, culminating in a national competitive examination and are then assigned to engineering schools ('écoles d'ingénieurs') on the basis of their grades and wishes. Specialised training in the engineer school takes three years, bringing the total length of the engineering training to five years. In medical subjects the number of places is limited to about 200 first-year students in each institution and studies last for five years, followed by one year of clinical training. Courses in paramedical subjects, i.e. health science and technology and nursing, have switched to the bachelor, master and doctorate system.

There are no longer university courses in Tunisia shorter than the three-year bachelor course. The

process for teaching in universities ('ataahil-el-jamii') involves the preparation of a research dossier by a lecturer seeking promotion to the grade of senior lecturer. The procedure is similar to that of a doctoral thesis defence. The lecturer defends the research dossier in front of a panel; if it is accepted, the candidate is eligible to enter the national competitive examination for the recruitment of senior lecturers.

The Tunisian education and training system is hampered by a lack of pathways between vocational training, general education and higher education. In 2008 a law set out plans to link these qualifications but has not been applied since. A commission involving the three departments concerned was created in 2015 to coordinate strategies and reforms between the three sub-sectors of education, along with pathways and progression. The national strategy for vocational training in Tunisia for 2016–20 plans to transform this commission into a permanent national authority.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

### NQF legal basis

The NQF legal act<sup>911</sup> (presidential decree) was adopted in 2009.

### Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

There is no single institution in charge of NQF coordination and operational functions. The governance of the qualifications system involves numerous institutions with mandates of different nature related to key functions, such as quality assurance, development of standards and learning programmes, recognition of qualifications and management of different reforms with international assistance in key domains of the NQF.

The NQF decree stipulates the establishment of a commission entrusted with the steering and follow-up of the NQF. This commission, to be created under the High Council for Human Resources Development, has not been validated by the social partners and has not become operational. The High Council has been deactivated. A new proposal for a national instance for human resources development was validated in 2018 by the Government Presidency, under certain conditions.

<sup>911</sup> [www.emploi.gov.tn/uploads/tx\\_elyjort/Fr-Decret2009\\_2139.pdf](http://www.emploi.gov.tn/uploads/tx_elyjort/Fr-Decret2009_2139.pdf)

The key ministries – Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research, and Vocational Training and Employment – exercise functions of policy shaping and decision-making in their respective sectors. An NQF technical group is currently active in the VET sector, but focuses only on non-tertiary education and VET qualifications.

In VET, other important players are:

- the National Centre of Teacher Training and Curriculum Development<sup>912</sup> (Centre national de formation des formateurs et d'ingénierie de formation, CENAFFIF), which operates under the umbrella of the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment. CENAFFIF has a key role in developing competence standards and programmes for VET, and other qualifications norms;
- the Tunisian Agency for Vocational Training (ATFP), the main public provider of VET courses (initial and continuing) through its network of 130 VET centres. The ATFP coordinates public VET provision and delivers the qualifications in the name of the state. It also evaluates the training provision in the VET centres.

In higher education, other key institutions are:

- the National Evaluation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Authority (NEQAAA), in charge of quality assurance procedures and decisions, as described below. The aim of NEQAAA is to contribute to the maintenance and improvement of quality in higher education as well as to the compliance of the education system with internationally recognised standards;
- the Universities Council, in charge of ensuring that the strategic guidelines of the sector are applied;
- higher education institutions.

### Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

Besides the above indicated state bodies, the social partners (UTICA and UGTT), sector organisations and companies play a role in developing standards of qualification and in the APC (competence-based approach in VET).

### Resources and funding

The state budget is used for the functioning of public institutions involved in NQF activities and is complemented by resources of different donors channelled to various system development and reform actions.

<sup>912</sup> [www.cenaffif.nat.tn/39/](http://www.cenaffif.nat.tn/39/)

### Quality assurance of qualifications

Article 4 of the NQF states that all public and private education institutions (higher, general and VET) shall take the necessary measures to assure quality of the developed qualifications and their coherence with the descriptors defined in the NQF for the targeted level. This is a fundamental principle, establishing a link between quality assurance of qualifications and the NQF (level and descriptor).

The legal framework for quality assurance in higher education is based on two essential notions: the quality assurance in the higher education institutions (law No 2008-19 of 25 February 2008), and the national frame of qualification – CNQ (decree No 2139 of 8 July 2009).

In VET, the Permanent Commission for VET Coordination is in charge of quality assurance, and plans to step up collaboration with the social partners and the sector commissions, which are to be established with an upgraded role in qualifications development.

According to the law on higher education, NEQAAA – the National Evaluation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Authority – is the body responsible for quality assurance and improvement in higher education. It consists of 13 members (decree No 2012-1719 of 14 September 2012 on higher education). Eight higher education professors in the various scientific specialties are selected, after a call for candidacy, on the basis of their skills, their scientific and academic position as well as their knowledge of the field of quality in higher education. In addition, NEQAAA includes four representatives of the economic and social environment, among whom a representative of the private higher education sector, and a specialist in administrative and financial management. The aim of NEQAAA is to contribute to the maintenance and to the improvement of quality in higher education as well as to the compliance of the education system with internationally recognised standards.

NEQAAA's main missions are:

- a. to institute a quality system and a guide of procedures appropriate to NEQAAA;
- b. to approve the methodology and procedures of quality assurance;
- c. to elaborate and adopt a code of ethics;
- d. to accredit the expert assessors on proposal of the technical departments of NEQAAA on the basis of calls to candidacy;
- e. to implement a programme of evaluation and accreditation in compliance with the priorities fixed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and with the requests

of accreditation of the higher education and research institutions;

- f. to implement a follow-up system of the procedures adopted by the universities and higher education and research institutions in view of appraisal reports and accreditation;
- g. to define self-evaluation standards;
- h. to formulate external quality assurance standards and procedures;
- i. to define standards for accreditation of academic programmes and higher education institutions to guarantee the quality and the recognition of the national diplomas;
- j. to formulate an international policy of cooperation in coordination with the regulatory authority.

### NEQAAA submits an annual report on the evaluation activities to the head of the government.

The Universities Council ('Majlis al-Jamiat'), which comprises the presidents of the country's universities, contributes substantially to provide the background and analysis supporting accreditation decisions of the Ministry. The Universities Council is in charge of ensuring that the broad strategic guidelines of the sector are applied, and of validating the decisions of the sectoral committees and of the national committee on the reform of the course structure. This enables higher education institutions to award bachelor, master and doctorate degrees and to habilitate teaching staff.

NEQAAA cooperates bilaterally with quality assurance agencies of other countries, notably the EU Member States.

The ongoing reforms foresee the implantation of accreditation mechanisms addressing programmes and qualifications.

NEQAAA is in charge of the external evaluation and focuses on the external quality assurance procedures on teaching, internal quality assurance and management systems, research, support services to students, library and IT resources, space and equipment, non-teaching staff, management and transparency, lifelong learning provisions and employability of graduates. In order to fulfill these tasks, experts in curricula, education, and higher education assessment are trained. More than 120 experts (2011–15) benefited from training in quality review through the organisation of training courses, visits to quality assurance agencies within the framework of the EU educational programmes and workshops dedicated to the exchange of experiences and best practices in the fields of quality assessment with Arab, American and British partners. The panel of experts gathers



representatives of all the scientific disciplines and other stakeholders.

The accreditation at the institutional level includes a review of the programmes proposed, the educational and scientific methods applied and their compliance with the quality of the delivered diplomas, as well as the skills and capacities expected from the graduates. The accreditation is granted for a maximal period of four years, for either the institution, the programmes or the courses. In case of negligence in terms of quality standards during the aforementioned period, NEQAAA is legally able to withdraw the granted accreditation. Once obtained, the accreditation allows the concerned institution to benefit from additional credits, permitting to face the requirements implying its commitment to respect the quality standards.

The internal quality assurance of academic programmes, teaching and learning, research, student's services, general managements and work conditions is carried out by the higher education institutes under the supervision of the committee responsible for quality as defined by the law No 2008-19 of 25 February 2008 on higher education. In each higher education institution, this committee is responsible for elaborating internal assessment reports, monitoring the established programmes, in particular those related to quality, and formulating proposals regarding quality enhancement.

Self-evaluation takes place each year. Students' assessment of the academic programmes quality is part of the quality assurance procedure.

Universities and higher education institutes submit annual reports of internal evaluation to the Ministry for Higher Education and to NEQAAA.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

The EU-funded PEFESE programme aimed at supporting education, vocational training, higher education and employability of graduates (programme d'appui à l'éducation, à la formation professionnelle, à l'enseignement supérieur et à l'employabilité des diplômés) concluded in 2015; it aimed to reinforce links between education and industry and employment. One specific aim was to pilot a system of validation of informal and non-formal learning using a standards-based qualifications system in three sectors – agriculture, tourism and construction.

Previous pilot initiatives, such as the project supported by the French association for adult vocational training AFPA (Association pour la formation professionnelle des adultes), were carried out in the ready-made garment and automotive sectors. These pilots will be applied to support further reform of the national VET system, particularly the development of a system for validation of informal and non-formal learning.

## **NQF implementation**

### **Inclusion of qualifications in a register**

The VET system has a structured 'nomenclature of sectors and specialities of training' – a database of existing programmes, structured in 20 sectors, 59 sub-sectors and more than 533 specialities, of which 326 are operational. This database is managed by the General Direction of Services to Training Users. VET programmes are conceived and elaborated according to a defined procedure, which includes preliminary sector studies. The programmes validated by sector enterprises/professionals can be incorporated in the database.

This database is not open for end-users or the wider public. The Ministry plans to launch an online platform for the end-users/citizens, providing relevant information on VET programmes and qualifications and career information and guidance.

### **Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF**

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of the NQF's implementation have not yet been defined.

### **Impact for end-users**

The NQF is an important driver of the learning outcomes approach for all sub-sectors of education and training.

## **Referencing to regional frameworks**

The NQF's structure and descriptors differ from the European qualifications framework, but the upper levels (5, 6 and 7) are aligned with the qualifications framework of the European higher education area.

## **Important lessons and future plans**

In 2017–18, the Tunisian NQF regained some vigour as an important pillar for a more transparent and interlinked qualifications system for lifelong learning, better connected with the economic context and attuned with international developments.

Both in VET and in higher education ongoing reforms, aided by international technical assistance, support this new dynamism. The EU supports the VET qualifications system in developing transparent qualifications, based on renewed quality assurance mechanisms. In higher education a renewed attention is being directed to improving the quality assurance framework, accreditation mechanisms and institutions, towards better learning outputs and comparability of qualifications.

These developments will necessitate consistent leadership from the relevant ministries and respective technical agencies, but also better and systematic collaboration with the socio-economic partners – sector commissions and social partners. Mutual trust needs to be reinforced on matters of qualifications and their classification.

Plans of the VET system aimed at further deepening the impact of the NQF include:

- a. to conceive and launch the new open and interactive online qualifications register, which is expected to be an additional incentive to improve qualifications and their readability for end-users;
- b. to revamp the governance mechanisms of the NQF functions, with inclusion of new sector commissions in the chain of qualifications development and review.

Moreover, VET and higher education need to restore dialogue and cooperation, and to carve a necessary joint vision and roadmap for human capital, employability, citizenship and lifelong learning. Such a dialogue of partners has been largely insufficient. Permeability and recognition of learning outcomes between education sub-sectors are long-standing issues in discussion. The NQF as an instrument can inspire this debate towards renewed arguments and solutions based on outcomes, rather than on counterproductive separation within the lifelong learning continuum.

Tunisia has expressed interest to cooperate with the European qualifications framework once the ongoing reforms reach results in the form of improved qualifications transparency mechanisms. The country has an open economy and society, and its privileged status in the relations with the EU – demonstrated by strategic initiatives such as the ongoing negotiations for a visa facilitation agreement and the deep and comprehensive free

trade agreement (ALECA – accord de libre-échange complet et approfondi) – are an additional testimony of the importance of a performing qualifications framework and system. The NQF has a new window of opportunity to fully meet its promise of a policy instrument to facilitate mobility, recognition of qualifications and lifelong learning.

The NQF component of the EU-funded project IRADA (Initiative régionale d'appui au développement économique durable (regional initiative to support sustainable economic development)), signed in December 2015, started activities late 2018. Recognising the insufficient participation or adhesion of social partners and other stakeholders in the early design of the NQF, it seeks to revive the framework and aims to:

- engage social partners and other actors;
- support the curricula and training agencies in developing qualifications described in learning outcomes;
- define a levelling procedure to place qualifications in the NQF;
- establish necessary quality assurance systems and procedures;
- develop information tools, e.g. databases and manuals on functions of the NQF and to guide users.

#### Abbreviations

APC	approche par compétences (competence-based approach)
ATFP	Agence tunisienne de la formation professionnelle (Tunisian Agency for Vocational Training)
CNQ	classification nationale des qualifications (national classification of qualifications)
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
NEQAAA	National Evaluation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Authority
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

#### Prepared by:

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# TURKEY

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The Regulation on the procedures and principles concerning the implementation of the Turkish qualifications framework (TQF Regulation) was adopted by a Ministerial Decision of the Council of Ministers and published in the *Official Journal* in November 2015. The Description of the Turkish qualifications framework (TQF Document) was adopted by a Ministerial Decision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and published in the *Official Journal* in January 2016. The Regulation on the quality assurance of qualifications to be included into the TQF was adopted by a decision of the TQF Coordination Council and published in the *Official Journal* in March 2018.

The Turkish qualifications framework (TQF) has eight levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications and certification. Besides levels and level descriptors, the TQF defines qualification types and qualification categories.

The three-member TQF Coordination Council is the decision-making body of the TQF. Its members are high-level representatives of the three main bodies responsible for the TQF: the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) and the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA).

Turkey is an EU candidate country and participates in the European qualifications framework (EQF) advisory group. It referenced to the EQF at the March 2017 EQF advisory group meeting.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Turkey is an upper middle-income country of 80.3 million inhabitants, with a gross domestic product (GDP) of USD 850.7 billion, a GDP per capita of USD 10,592, and a life expectancy at birth of 75.4 years (2017).

Turkey is a European Union (EU) accession candidate country. The EU accession process has been a significant anchor for socio-economic

reforms in the country. The EU is Turkey's largest economic partner, accounting for around 40% of Turkish trade, and 70–80% of foreign direct investment into the country is coming from the EU. Turkey has benefited significantly from deepening integration with the EU through the growing sophistication of both exports and imports and access to financing. It is a member of the OECD and the G20, and an increasingly important donor to bilateral official development assistance.

Although growth prospects have been reasonably robust, in recent years Turkey's economy has been fighting double-digit inflation and a falling currency, which all pose challenges to moving into high-income status. The influx of over 3 million Syrian refugees (2015–16) has created new social, economic and political demands, placing a strain to education and training reform efforts.

Economic growth has stimulated job creation, but unemployment remains at 10.9%. Turkey has witnessed positive developments against the EU 2020 targets. Considerable progress has been made especially on the EU 2020 twofold target on education (i.e. reducing the early leavers and increasing tertiary attainment) and adult participation in lifelong learning (albeit from relatively low levels). However, the country continues to experience low rates of labour market participation and employment, high informality and precarious and vulnerable employment, which disproportionately affect young people. Despite the increasing activity and employment rates in the 20–64 age group, Turkey continues to lag behind EU averages. Graduates from secondary vocational education and training (VET) show better employment prospects as compared to those of general secondary education streams. VET is a viable education option for a large number of young people; VET enrolments, as a proportion of upper secondary education, is high by almost 55.8%.

According to the OECD Education Policy Turkey report<sup>913</sup>, Turkey has made substantial progress in

<sup>913</sup> OECD (2018). Education policy outlook 2018: putting student learning at the centre.

the area of education and human capital focusing on increasing equal access to primary, secondary, upper secondary (general and VET) and tertiary education. The education system includes key policies to support students from disadvantaged groups, immigrant backgrounds and population subgroups, as well as students with special educational needs and those living in different regions within the country. However, gaps vis-à-vis OECD benchmarks remain very large. This is partly due to the quality of education lagging behind quantitative changes in school years. Equity and quality in education continue to be seen as a challenge and Turkey has set several key priorities, such as improving access and completion of upper secondary education, addressing the needs of disadvantaged students and improving equity between regions (especially between urban and rural areas). Providing education facilities and services to Syrians with temporary protection in Turkey is another key target.

Improving access to both VET and tertiary education is a key policy target for the country. Key education policies have been implemented (starting in 2015), which address the establishment of better links between education levels and the labour market by allocating funding to support projects related to both professional teaching skills and students transitioning into the labour market. Other policies focus on updating qualifications to provide education orientation or transitions from lower to upper secondary education.

Turkey tracks the performance of its vocational graduates in the labour market through the E-graduate system. The country has invested efforts in developing new processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation, and has strived to improve inter-institutional cooperation to match supply and demand, assess effectiveness of education or employment policies etc. However, the mismatch between labour market demand and supply remains a constraint to growth and employability. There is need to address the high levels of skills mismatch, and many small entrepreneurs and workers need basic upskilling, as low skills inhibit the growth of productivity and incomes. Timely and relevant policy responses to the needs of young people are constrained by a lack of, or insufficiently exploited, data and information on transitions from school to work, on quality aspects of such transitions, and on vulnerable groups of young people. The mechanisms of skills needs identification and matching need to be consolidated and used for policy making.

Looking at the present delivery of the VET system in Turkey, it might be beneficial to look at some

forward-looking policy areas in the country's context. A more strategic approach – including sharing of information among educators and digitally streamlined consultation with employers – is required. Turkey skills panorama is being assessed through EU and OECD multi-country analysis. Turkey can learn from the way some countries are addressing these emerging challenges. Digital technology is evolving and will significantly change the way education and training are delivered. Perhaps it is time to re-imagine education and training in view of the emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the growing demand for 'soft' or 'enterprise' skills. One suggestion is to move away from narrowly defined qualifications built around specific roles or tasks towards broader qualifications, structured around the concept of vocational streams. Vocational streams are clusters of occupations that share similar requirements for knowledge, skills and attributes. By focusing on the broader capabilities underpinning vocational streams, it is expected that youth job mobility, adaptive capacity and career development will be promoted.

For the Turkish economy to be competitive and inclusive, there is an increasing demand for a remodelling of VET delivery in the formal system. The skills profile of the current workforce and the growing demand for more highly skilled workers has become imperative. STEM skill set, which includes science, technology design, engineering, mathematics, programming, systems analysis, critical thinking and computer use, should be part of the VET system. Courses and their associated qualifications will need to become more modular to allow them to be completed progressively and flexibly alongside work. Furthermore, modular course offerings should serve as the building blocks for more long-term and continuous engagement between students, employers and VET providers. Maintaining currency with industry requirements is central to VET but is becoming increasingly challenging with the pace of change. Entrepreneurship should be added to the core skills and lifelong learning should become accessible to all. In view of the combination of technological change and longer working lives – during which people may change careers a number of times and work for numerous employers – lifelong learning will be fundamental to future work environments. Education and training have never been more important.

Currently there is no published evidence of skills forecast and skills matching policies in Turkey. However, changes are planned that need to be confirmed. Harmonising demand for the workforce in the labour market and supply offered by the

education system fell within the scope of the 65<sup>th</sup> Government programme. This included higher education with the Transformation programme of high priority on development of basic and professional skills prepared within the framework of strengthening the education and employment relationship (MoNE 2018 Performance programme).

Harmonisation of the education system and the labour market also falls within the scope of the 11<sup>th</sup> Development plan 2019–23: making individuals acquire skills and qualifications that are required by the business sector by taking a lifelong learning perspective as the starting point, by adopting an entrepreneurship culture and strengthening school-business relations in vocational and technical education, taking medium- and long-term sector projections into account (MoNE 2018 Performance programme).

The Fourth Industrial Revolution brings far-reaching and accelerating disruptive change to business models and traditional education practices. For the government, it will entail innovations within education and labour-related policy making. For the education and training sector, it will mean vast new business opportunities as it provides new services to individuals, entrepreneurs, organisations and the public sector. Is the system ready to face what the future brings?

Workers in Turkey use information-processing skills at work and in their daily lives, however much less than do workers in other OECD countries<sup>914</sup>. National and international studies and surveys confirm that acquiring the right skills remains a challenge in the country. This is strongly corroborated by employers' organisations. In Turkey adults are considerably less likely to read, write, work with mathematics, solve problems and use computers in their jobs and in everyday life than is the case across other participating OECD countries. The employment rate remains well below the OECD average, despite a rise from its pre-crisis level, while the unemployment rate remains well above the OECD average.

According to the 'Automation Readiness Index: Who is ready for the coming wave of automation?' of the Economist Intelligence Unit report commissioned by the ABB (June 2018)<sup>915</sup>, unfortunately, there is not

yet much evidence in Turkey of either policy making or multi-stakeholder dialogue on this topic. There is not even evidence of any coordinated policy action, which analyses and/or plans for the challenges of automation, its impact on the future of work and skills needed not only to match needs but also to contribute to innovation, and inclusive economic and social growth in the country. In assessing the existence of policies and strategies in the areas of research, innovation, education and training, and labour market, the study highlights that little/no policy is in place in Turkey today which specifically addresses the challenges of AI- and robotics-based automation. No policies, apart from some initiatives (e.g. by Tubitak), are in place in areas such as curriculum reform, lifelong learning, occupational training and workplace flexibility.

Whatever the impact of intelligent automation on work and employment, it is clear that the Turkish government must be prepared. There is no thorough evidence and no robust policy on the skills for the future of jobs in the country. It confirms a lack of dialogue between government and industry, as well as between different industries, on the skills forecast and skills matching including the challenges of automation. There is an urgent need for structural engagement between government, industry, educational specialists and other stakeholders if policy making is to keep pace with skills for the future and innovation in automation.

Turkey submitted its fourth annual Economic Reform Programme covering the 2018–20 period<sup>916</sup>. Turkey's Economic Reform Programme and other related national, EU and international strategic documents all recognise the need for structural and governance reform in the human resources development sector. National and international studies and surveys confirm that acquiring the right skills remains a

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policy challenges that automation poses. Its attention is focused on three areas: innovation policies that directly or indirectly support research into and business adoption of artificial intelligence, robotics and other advanced technologies; education policies that aim to develop the human capital needed to take advantage of these technologies; and labour market policies needed to manage the workforce transition to a highly automated economy (for more detail, see the chart 'Index categories').

<sup>916</sup> These were assessed by the European Commission and the European Central Bank. Based on these assessments, joint conclusions with country-specific policy guidance were agreed on and adopted by all seven enlargement partners and the EU in the annual Economic and Financial Dialogue held on 25 May 2018. See the latest joint conclusions on the Economic Reform Programmes: [www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/05/25/western-balkans-and-turkey-joint-conclusions-of-the-economic-and-financial-dialogue/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/05/25/western-balkans-and-turkey-joint-conclusions-of-the-economic-and-financial-dialogue/)

<sup>914</sup> OECD (2016). Survey of adult skills technical report (second edition).

<sup>915</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited (2018). See the Automation Readiness Index, which compares countries on their preparedness for the age of intelligent automation. The purpose of the index is to determine which countries are better positioned to take up the

challenge in Turkey. This is strongly corroborated by employers' organisations. To realise its underlying growth potential, Turkey needs to accelerate structural reforms in education and training, and employment and improve trust in its institutions. In particular, the country's economic growth would benefit from upgrading and making better use of its human capital through the pursuit of the education agenda and the deepening and widening of labour market reforms. Specifically, the qualifications of low-skilled workers should be improved through training, and female labour force participation should be stimulated through flexible working conditions. To address these challenges Turkey is encouraged to implement strategies to align education and training policies with labour market needs.

One major theme in the 11<sup>th</sup> Strategic Development Plan is digitalisation (Industry 4.0). However, according to PISA<sup>917</sup> 2016 results, Turkey ranked 52<sup>nd</sup> in science, 49<sup>th</sup> in mathematics, and 50<sup>th</sup> in reading skills among 70 countries. Given the coming digital transformation of the workplace and occupations, some questions need to be addressed urgently: Which sectors will be growing? What will be their skill needs (Industry 2.0, 3.0, or 4.0)? How will Turkey education system respond for future employability of the youth? Youth employment is a remaining challenge. Aging is another concern. Can Turkey design employment incentives for young people, while also keeping older workers employed? Turkey skills institutions cannot avoid some of the key questions: Which sectors to invest for productivity growth – by enhancing technologies (Industry 4.0), one can produce with fewer workers (aging)? What happens to youth unemployment? Who gets or keeps the job? Who will be better able to adapt to digitalisation of the workplace, the young or the old? In which occupations?

The large-scale technology or market changes occurring through technological advances such as automation, advanced robotics and virtualisation are already influencing the demand for both technical and soft skills in many occupations, with some skills in decline and others in higher demand. Turkey's socio-economic development require policy discussions about the impact that technological developments or disruption will have on Turkey's present workforce and skilling for tomorrow. The various ways by which the growth in technological advance is reshaping the labour market, workforce and jobs need to be examined and shared with all. These discussions cannot occur in isolation among educational platforms. The private sector is a key

partner for the intelligence on the skills required. The focus of discussions should be on the anticipated necessary skills from the perspective of both the innovators (technology producers) and industry (technology users).

Skills foresight enhances such thinking by gathering anticipatory intelligence from a wide range of knowledge sources in a systematic way and linking it to today's decision-making on how to deal with demographic change, health, social welfare, transport, energy, environment and climate change, community development, culture, human resources, and skills anticipation and education.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

Improving access to both VET and tertiary education is a key policy target for Turkey. Many education policies have been implemented, based on strategies such as the Lifelong Learning Strategy (2014–18), the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Strategy (2014–18), the Higher Education Strategy (2007–25) and the Employment Strategy (2014–23).

Turkey's Lifelong Learning Strategy and action plan pays particular attention to improving access to lifelong learning beyond the formal education system and promotes validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). The Employment Strategy and action plan attributes a core role to the TQF aimed at strengthening the link between education and employment and the quality of the VET system. The VET Strategy focuses on broadening access to VET, with improved system capacity and better employment outcomes for graduates. The latter is also the goal of the Higher Education Strategy. The Employment Strategy and action plan focuses on the national framework for qualifications to cover the university and non-formal education qualifications and entrepreneurship. A whole chapter on the role of the TQF in strengthening the link between education and employment focuses on the quality of the VET system. Its objectives include delivering qualifications as part of the TQF, implementing curricula in compliance with occupational standards, developing information, guidance and counselling and accrediting VET institutions.

Turkey's new lifelong learning strategy pays particular attention to improving access to lifelong learning beyond the formal education system and promotes the VNFIL<sup>918</sup>.

<sup>917</sup> OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment.

<sup>918</sup> Lifelong learning Action Plan 2014–18: [http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/str/files/LLL\\_ACTION\\_PLAN.pdf](http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/str/files/LLL_ACTION_PLAN.pdf)

In higher education, the implementation of the learning outcome approach is an essential part of the implementation of the NQF for higher education. However, current arrangements inhibit the VNFIL in higher education.

According to the OECD Education Policy Turkey report, Turkey has made substantial progress in the education and human capital area focusing on increasing equal access to primary, secondary, upper secondary (general and VET) and tertiary education. The education system includes key policies to support students from disadvantaged groups, immigrant backgrounds and population subgroups, as well as students with special educational needs and those living in different regions within the country. However, gaps vis-à-vis OECD benchmarks remain very large. This is partly due to the quality of education lagging behind quantitative changes in school years. Equity and quality in education continue to be seen as a challenge and Turkey has set several key priorities, such as improving access and completion of upper secondary education, addressing the needs of disadvantaged students and improving equity between regions (especially between urban and rural areas). Providing education facilities and services to Syrians with temporary protection in Turkey is another key target.

### **International cooperation**

The Turkish National Action Plan for EU Accession was presented to the European Commission in March 2016<sup>919</sup> and lists the actions that Turkish authorities are planning to take up to 2019 in order to align with EU legislation and continue the reform agenda in education and training, and the skills agenda.

The EU Education and Training 2020 priorities, the Bruges and Riga medium-term deliverables and the new EU Skills Agenda are informing the Turkey skills agenda. Turkey has benefited from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II) funds beside national contribution to implement the policy options under each Riga medium-term deliverable. Applications for the Erasmus+ programme has increased in quantity focusing on implementing the Riga medium-term deliverables. There is a good level of exchange, implementation and learning from other countries, which is shared in the country. However, Turkey's central structures need to be more strategic in terms of building on these developments and learning from peers in EU Member States and beyond, and mainstreaming them in the national education and training system.

Turkey has a functioning system for the assessment and recognition of foreign academic qualifications in Associate's, Bachelor's and Master's degrees that is supported by legislation and in line with the Lisbon Convention. The Equivalence Office of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE/YÖK) deals with recognition and equivalence requests for these degrees. The CoHE is part of the ENIC-NARIC networks.

Many professions in Turkey are regulated. Requirements to execute a regulated profession are defined in different laws. The CoHE has adopted a Regulation on the harmonisation of the minimum training requirements for the seven regulated professions, stipulated by EU Directive 2005/363. This should bring the minimum requirements for these professions in compliance with the Directive.

The VQA is responsible for the validation of the vocational qualifications held by foreigners who are seeking to work in Turkey. The VQA Law speaks of validation, not of recognition<sup>920</sup>.

To execute a craft profession in Turkey one needs to have a mastership certificate. Foreigners can establish a business or work as employees if the equivalence of their certificate is recognised by the Ministry of Education (in addition they need a residence permit and a work permit). Legislation involved is Law No 3308 on vocational training (as amended by Law No 4702).

## **Levels and use of learning outcomes**

### **NQF scope and structure**

The TQF is designed as an inclusive, comprehensive framework for classification of all quality-assured qualifications. The TQF primarily includes:

- a. qualifications awarded under the mandate of MoNE;
- b. qualifications awarded under the mandate of the VQA;
- c. higher education qualifications awarded under the coordination and supervision of the CoHE.

In time, the TQF will include other qualifications awarded under the mandate of certain responsible institutions.

### **Alignment to other classification systems**

The TQF is the national instrument for classification of qualifications in Turkey. The higher education

<sup>919</sup> [www.ab.gov.tr/files/5%20Ekim/uepkitapcik2016-2019-EN.pdf](http://www.ab.gov.tr/files/5%20Ekim/uepkitapcik2016-2019-EN.pdf)

<sup>920</sup> Principles and procedures (in Turkish): [www.myk.gov.tr/images/articles/editor/140613/MYK\\_yab\\_sert\\_dogrulanmasi\\_usul\\_esaslari\\_revize\\_web2.pdf](http://www.myk.gov.tr/images/articles/editor/140613/MYK_yab_sert_dogrulanmasi_usul_esaslari_revize_web2.pdf)

qualifications framework, which is a sub-framework within the TQF, is already functioning<sup>921</sup>.

The qualifications database includes qualifications awarded in Turkey regardless of their quality. This means that the database currently functions as a qualifications inventory rather than a register of the qualifications included in the TQF. In the database it is emphasized that the official levelling/inclusion of qualifications into the TQF has not started yet. The database includes all qualifications provided by the VQA and a high proportion of the qualifications provided by the Ministry of Education. There is only one higher education institute whose qualifications are included. As of August 2018, 1 633 qualifications were included in the database. The database is accessible in Turkish and English<sup>922</sup>.

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

The TQF has eight levels. In addition to levels, the TQF uses qualification types and qualification categories.

- a. Qualification types distinguish among qualifications that are at the same level but differ significantly in terms of their functions, learning outcomes, volume and/or orientations. Examples of qualification types are associate degree and level 5 vocational qualification certificate, at level 5; vocational upper secondary education diploma and skilled worker certificate, at level 4.
- b. Qualification categories classify qualifications according to their purposes.
  - Principal qualifications reflect comprehensive sets of learning outcomes achieved as a result of assessment after completion of a learning process, training programme or vocational training, e.g. the vocational and technical high school diploma marking the end of vocational and technical secondary education.
  - Supplemental qualifications are awarded for learning achievements additional to a previous principal qualification. They relate to updating and refreshing of knowledge or skills, or to continuing professional development and they can only be achieved on condition that a principal qualification is previously achieved, e.g. level 6 vocational qualification certificate in job and occupational counselling, achieved in addition to any bachelor degree.
  - Unit qualifications provide recognition for the achievement of a coherent set of learning outcomes that form part of the

combination of the overall requirement for a principal qualification. Unit qualifications are usually associated with modular learning programmes.

- Special purpose qualifications are awarded for sets of learning outcomes that form a distinct, coherent achievement that may be used alone (such as license to work, and license to start up business). These qualifications involve fewer learning outcomes compared to a principal qualification but they can be used as a license to operate, e.g. level 3 vocational qualification certificate for roller operation in the construction sector or level 5 vocational qualification certificate for computer hardware in the IT sector.

The TQF level descriptors are described in terms of learning outcomes and use the following domains: knowledge, skills, and competence.

- a. Knowledge is defined as theoretical and/or factual knowledge requiring comprehension of facts, principles, theories and practices related to an area of work or learning.
- b. Skill is defined as utilisation of knowledge and problem solving, which requires the ability to use logical, intuitive and creative thinking and dexterity, method, material, tools and instruments acquired in an area of work or learning.
- c. Competence is defined as use of knowledge and skills in an area of work or learning by taking responsibility and/or displaying autonomy, determination and satisfaction of learning requirements.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

Learning outcomes are the backbone of the TQF. According to the Regulation, the TQF is to ensure that qualifications are based on learning outcomes. However, the shift to learning outcomes takes time.

The national qualifications developed by the VQA are based on learning outcomes. By mid-2018, the VQA had published 451 national qualifications in 21 sectors.

For all of the VQA qualifications, modules used in the VET training programmes of MoNE are defined by learning outcomes. However, MoNE VET programmes have no separate qualification specifications defined by learning outcomes. This situation created a challenge while populating the qualifications database. MoNE general education qualifications also are not readily identified as defined by learning outcomes. In higher education, some universities have identified the qualifications

<sup>921</sup> See the higher education qualifications framework website: <http://tyyc.yok.gov.tr/>

<sup>922</sup> <http://portal.tyc.gov.tr/>



**Table 84. Turkish qualifications framework level descriptors**

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE	SKILL	COMPETENCE
<b>1</b>	Have a general knowledge of self and environment	Have basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Carry out simple tasks under guidance and supervision
<b>2</b>	Have an elementary factual knowledge in a field of work or study	Have basic skills required to use necessary information in order to carry out tasks and to solve potential simple problems	Carry out simple tasks under supervision with limited autonomy Have awareness of own learning needs within the scope of a lifelong learning approach
<b>3</b>	Have an elementary theoretical knowledge and moderate factual knowledge in a field of work or study	Have skills required to select and apply data, methods, tools and materials in order to carry out tasks and solve problems	Take responsibility in carrying out tasks Complete tasks in consideration of changing situations Identify and meet own learning needs under guidance within the scope of a lifelong learning approach
<b>4</b>	Have a moderate theoretical and operational knowledge and good factual knowledge in a field of work or study	Have cognitive and practical skills required to perform procedures and generate solutions to problems specific for a field of work or study	Take full responsibility in completing tasks within predictable, but changeable contexts Supervise the ordinary tasks of others, and take limited responsibility in evaluating and improving such tasks Meet own learning needs, and define proactive learning goals under guidance within the scope of a lifelong learning approach Have awareness of the relationship of knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes in a field of work or study with moral issues and responsibilities
<b>5</b>	Have comprehensive, theoretical and factual knowledge in a field of work or study including awareness of the boundaries of that field	Have comprehensive, cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems whose limits are defined, and concrete problems	Carry out management and supervision tasks in contexts with unpredictable changes Evaluate and improve own and others' performance level Be in interaction for operations in contexts of work or study including the management of projects Have general awareness of the scope of a lifelong learning approach for a field of work or study as well as the relationship of this scope with formal, non-formal and informal ways of learning Have awareness of the relationship of knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes in a field of work or study with moral issues and responsibilities
<b>6</b>	Have an advanced theoretical, methodological and factual knowledge in a field of work or study, including inquiring thinking	Have advanced skills, including the quality of mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	Make decisions by taking responsibility in unpredictable work or study contexts, and manage complex technical or professional activities or projects Take responsibility in managing the professional development of individuals and groups Have experience in the concepts, policies, tools and practices of a lifelong learning approach for a field of work or study as well as their relationship with formal, non-formal and informal ways of learning Have awareness of social and moral issues in assessing work or study

(Continued)

**Table 84. Turkish qualifications framework level descriptors (Continued)**

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE	SKILL	COMPETENCE
<b>7</b>	<p>Have advanced specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront in a field of work or study, as the basis for original ideas and/or research</p> <p>Have an inquiring approach for knowledge issues in his/her field and at the interface between different fields related to his/her field</p>	<p>Have advanced problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation activities that are carried out to develop new knowledge and methods in a field of work or study and to integrate knowledge from different fields</p> <p>Have skills required to understand, design, apply and adapt advanced research operations as a team member or partially autonomously</p>	<p>Manage and transform unpredictable and complex work or study contexts that require new strategic approaches</p> <p>Have experience in managing changes within a complex context</p> <p>Take responsibility in contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or evaluating the strategic performance level of teams</p> <p>Show leadership in the concept, policy, tools and practices of a lifelong learning approach for knowledge in a field of work or study and the interface between different fields as well as their relationship with formal, non-formal and informal ways of learning</p> <p>Integrate knowledge and make judgements in a field of work or study in consideration of social and moral issues and responsibilities</p>
<b>8</b>	<p>Have the most advanced systematic knowledge and inquiry analysis capacity in the theory, practice, method and techniques of a field of work or study</p> <p>Have the most advanced interface knowledge in different fields of work or study related to a particular field of work or study</p>	<p>Have the most advanced and specialised skills, including synthesis and evaluation, that require the use of knowledge, methods and techniques, required to solve critical problems in the most advanced research and/or innovation within a field of work or study and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice</p> <p>Have skills required to understand, design, apply and adapt advanced research processes autonomously</p> <p>Have problem-solving skills, including the use of methods and approaches from different fields, required to solve new and complex problems in his/her field</p>	<p>Demonstrate competence in the development of new ideas and processes at the forefront of work or study contexts, including strong competence, innovation, autonomy, scientific and professional consistency and research</p> <p>Show leadership in developing new and original approaches to redefine or extend existing knowledge or professional practice in a field of work or study</p> <p>Develop original policies and practices for the promotion of a lifelong learning approach for knowledge in a field of work or study as well as the interface between different fields in unpredictable and complex contexts that require innovation, and for the promotion of this approach through formal, non-formal and informal ways of learning</p> <p>Create new knowledge in a field of work or study in consideration of social and moral issues and responsibilities</p>

Source: Vocational Qualifications Authority.

they offer by learning outcomes but it is not easy to give an exact number. The process of transformation continues and the plan was to have all qualifications of MoNE and higher education institutions defined by learning outcomes until the end of 2018, at least on the qualifications database.

### **Definition of qualification**

The VQA Law No 5544 defines a qualification as the formal certification of knowledge, skill and competence possessed by an individual and recognised by the competent authority (VQA Law, Article 2-(1) h).

The TQF Regulation defines a qualification as the official document obtained when a competent body, at the end of a process of assessment and validation, recognises that an individual has accomplished the learning outcomes according to certain criteria (TQF Regulation, Article 3-(1) r).

Turkey does not use the term qualification standard<sup>923</sup> but the TQF Regulation and the TQF Document use the term 'qualification type specification' to describe the features of a qualification type. A qualification type specification includes:

- a. qualification type title,
- b. awarding body,
- c. orientation,
- d. level,
- e. category,
- f. credit range and typical duration programme,
- g. programme profile,
- h. learning environment,
- i. learning outcomes,
- j. key competences,
- k. assessment and evaluation methods,
- l. quality assurance,
- m. entry requirements,
- n. requirements for obtaining the qualification,
- o. progression paths,
- p. legal basis of the qualification.

Qualification type specifications have been drafted for all types such as bachelor diploma and level 3 vocational qualification certificate and submitted for consultation by the responsible bodies. The plan

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<sup>923</sup> The document which corresponds to qualification standard is the national qualification in the VQA context. Unfortunately this is causing a misunderstanding since the term 'qualification' alone stands for the formal outcome of an assessment process. Eventually, there is an invisible 'standard' or 'specification' word in the term national qualification. National qualification (specification) provides the information about the learning outcomes, performance criteria, assessment procedure, assessor competences, etc.

is to use these specifications while developing qualifications in specific types, so that the qualification bachelor in BA should be consistent with the qualification type specification of bachelor diploma.

### **Development process of qualifications**

MoNE is responsible for developing qualifications under its mandate. It has launched secondary education curriculum reform for both general and vocational and technical schools. Vocational curricula are modularised and MoNE has a database of more than 4 000 modules that are also used for the licensing and certification of adult learning. There are also plans to establish a national credit system for VET. Although curricula are advanced, most initial vocational qualifications are not yet utilised and fully learning outcomes-based. Modules based on learning outcomes are used for learning, but they are not assessed separately and often lack an assessment component.

The VQA is responsible for developing qualifications under the national vocational qualifications system. Qualifications under the VQA's mandate are based on occupational standards and learning outcomes. Assessment, evaluation and certification for these qualifications are carried out by certification bodies (called Voc-Test centres), authorised by the VQA. These qualifications are classified under the qualification types vocational qualification certificate.

The CoHE coordinates and supervises the development of higher education qualifications awarded by higher education institutes. The higher education qualifications framework is a sub-framework within the TQF that is already functioning. National working groups for different fields of learning define common outcomes as a guideline for qualification and curriculum developers. A common register on the website of the higher education NQF<sup>924</sup> provides links to specific programmes (website in Turkish and English).

### **Access, progression and credit**

According to its Regulation, facilitating access to qualifications and progress between qualifications are the main principles of the TQF. The TQF Council has drafted a concept paper about credit transfer and accumulation. The preparation of the principles and procedures for horizontal and vertical progression between qualifications in the TQF, credit transfer and accumulation is about to start.

The TQF proposes an evaluation and credit system associated with the workload that will allow credit

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<sup>924</sup> <http://tyyc.yok.gov.tr/>

accumulation and transfer. The proposed metric for the qualifications to be included in the TQF is 60 credits as the value ascribed to a learning period of 1 500 to 1 800 hours. This approach is compliant with both of the transnational credit systems in use in Europe – ECTS and ECVET. The regulating bodies will determine the credit range of the qualification types and the credit values of the qualifications. The principles and procedures for the credit transfer systems are planned to be developed by mid-2019.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

### NQF legal basis

The Regulation on the procedures and principles concerning the implementation of the Turkish qualifications framework (TQF Regulation) entered into force via Decision 2015/8213 of the Council of Ministers and publication in the *Official Journal* of 19 November 2015 (numbered 29537). According to the Regulation, a three-year action plan for the implementation of the TQF has been developed by the TQF Secretariat and approved by the TQF Council.

The Regulation on the quality assurance of qualifications to be included into the TQF was adopted and published in the *Official Journal* in March 2018<sup>925</sup>.

### Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The three-member TQF Coordination Council is the decision-making body of the TQF. Its members are the Deputy Minister of National Education, the President of the CoHE and the President of the VQA. The TQF Coordination Council is assisted by the 22-member TQF Council, representing MoNE, the CoHE, the VQA and social partners' organisations. The TQF Council addresses technical issues.

The VQA is the body responsible for the implementation and execution of the TQF. The TQF Department of the VQA executes secretariat services for the TQF Council and Coordination Council.

The TQF Coordination Council, the TQF Council and the TQF Department of the VQA have been established and are operational. Their main duties and responsibilities are described below.

The TQF Coordination Council:

- evaluates and approves procedures, principles, decisions, suggestions and opinions submitted by the TQF Council;
- collaborates with responsible bodies and institutions, international organisations, and the bodies and institutions of other countries.

Members of the Coordination Council are responsible for ensuring collaboration and coordination in the implementation of Coordination Council decisions within their bodies.

The TQF Council:

- prepares a three-year action plan for the implementation of the TQF and a communication strategy to raise national and international awareness of it;
- prepares principles, procedures and criteria for a wide range of issues, such as quality assurance of the qualifications to be included in the TQF, qualifications database, progress routes, credit accumulation and transfer, recognition of prior learning (RPL), and updating, modification and cancellation of qualifications.

Secretariat services in relation to the TQF are carried out by the TQF Department of the VQA.

The TQF Secretariat:

- provides assistance to all the technical and administrative works of the Coordination Council and Turkish Qualifications Framework Council;
- drafts an action plan, annual work plan and activity report under the management of the TQF Council;
- ensures the implementation of the TQF communication strategy;
- establishes the qualifications database and ensures its update;
- prepares all kinds of research and analysis reports requested by the Chairman of the TQF Council, or conducts work and procedures for their preparation;
- performs other duties assigned by the Chairman of the TQF Council.

### Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The TQF Regulation foresees the establishment of a consultation committee, with broad stakeholder participation, to evaluate issues and submit opinions regarding the framework. The committee will meet at least once a year. The VQA and the TQF Council have identified which stakeholders should sit on the consultation committee and the consultation committee has been established. The list of the

<sup>925</sup> [https://myk.gov.tr/images/articles/TYC/TQF\\_QA\\_Regulation.pdf](https://myk.gov.tr/images/articles/TYC/TQF_QA_Regulation.pdf)

institutions to be represented in the committee was approved by the TQF Coordination Council at a meeting held on 25 January 2018.

Turkey has a system of sector committees, which is one of the cornerstones of the sustainability of the national vocational qualification system under the VQA. Sector committees are tripartite structures with State, employer and employee representatives; their establishment, duties and operations are regulated by law. Some 26 sector committees<sup>926</sup> are operational; sectors have been defined by the VQA. These committees perform tasks related to the development and maintenance of occupational standards and qualifications for their sector.

### Resources and funding

The TQF Regulation stipulates that all expenditures arising from drafting, updating and roll out of the framework shall be covered by the VQA. MoNE, the CoHE and the VQA shall designate personnel to work permanently at the TQF Department of the VQA (Secretariat), which consists of one administrative staff, three assistant experts, one expert and one manager.

Erasmus+ funds are also being used and IPA II funding for TQF implementation is expected in 2019.

Per diem allowances for TQF Coordination Council and Council members attending meetings shall be covered by the responsible bodies.

### Quality assurance of qualifications

The TQF Document states that: 'All quality-assured qualifications shall be included in the TQF. The Regulation on the quality assurance of qualifications to be included into the TQF – adopted and published in the *Official Journal* in March 2018 – regulates the quality assurance procedures and principles to which qualifications must comply to be included in the TQF. This Regulation is applicable to all the qualifications offered in Turkey, whether achieved through formal education, non-formal education or an RPL/VNFIL procedure.

The Regulation stipulates the duties, authorities and responsibilities regarding the quality assurance and the components of the quality assurance system, namely:

- a. quality assurance criteria,
- b. quality assurance paper and guidelines,
- c. qualification form,
- d. assessment and evaluation,
- e. certification,

- f. self-assessment and external evaluation,
- g. regular review,
- h. allocation of resources,
- i. stakeholder involvement,
- j. feedback mechanisms,
- k. accessibility to the outcomes of the activities (through electronic information technologies).

The criteria for quality assurance are identified in accordance with Annex 4 of the EQF Recommendation 2017, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, as well as national quality frameworks for education that are in compliance with them.

The TQF has three regulating bodies: MoNE, the CoHE and the VQA. Each body is responsible for the quality assurance of the qualifications under its authority. For higher education, the Higher Education Quality Board was established in 2015. Quality assurance for the qualifications outside the scope of MoNE, CoHE, higher education institutions and VQA responsibility will be ensured by the institutions and organisations specified in related legislation.

The TQF Coordination Council shall monitor continuous improvement of all quality assurance processes.

The qualifications under the responsibility of MoNE and CoHE mostly focus on academic and key competences, while the qualifications under the responsibility of the VQA focus on employment and skills. Thus, the quality assurance systems of the institutions responsible for qualifications in Turkey have different procedures by nature.

The CoHE is an affiliated member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The VQA and MoNE's lifelong learning department are actively working to widen the VNFIL in Turkey.

The 2014–18 Lifelong Learning Strategy promotes extensive use of the VNFIL. MoNE has conducted two EU IPA lifelong learning projects with VNFIL components. The Lifelong Learning 2 project, completed in 2017, lays the foundation for the VNFIL system under MoNE's remit and provides organising

<sup>926</sup> [www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/tr/sector-komiteleri](http://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/tr/sector-komiteleri)

principles and mechanisms for the identification, assessment and certification in relation to the qualifications under MoNE's authority.

Turkey has implemented a system to assess, evaluate and certify skills of adults against national vocational qualifications. Assessment, evaluation and certification are carried out by certification bodies (called Voc-Test centres) authorised by the VQA. In recent years, the number of authorised certification bodies increased substantially, from 45 in 2016 to 170 by August 2018.

The TQF Regulation and TQF Document include provisions for the recognition of prior learning, stipulating that all qualifications included in the TQF can be attained via RPL/VNFIL.

Learners will have the following possibilities through the recognition of prior learning:

- a. access to programmes,
- b. access to exams,
- c. exemptions,
- d. certification of units,
- e. credit accumulation and transfer,
- f. recognition of qualifications.

The TQF Coordination Council will prepare guidelines for RPL/VNFIL principles and procedures. This will be a general VNFIL framework like the EU Recommendation 2012. The responsible bodies shall manage the application of these principles and procedures for the qualifications under their authority. The principles and procedures were planned to be prepared at the end of 2018.

The VNFIL was legally introduced in the Turkish higher education system in 2011 but is still in a starting phase. The country has an operational system to assess, evaluate and certify adult skills against national vocational qualifications. Assessment, evaluation and certification are carried out by certification bodies authorised by the VQA (called Voc-Test centres). By August 2018 the country had 170 authorised centres and numbers are increasing. The VQA certification has become compulsory for 81 hazardous occupations, which puts a strain on the capacity of the system.

For the qualifications under MoNE's authority, comprehensive updates have been made in the VNFIL legal framework. Amendments of the VET Law (No 3308 of 2 December 2016, adopted by the Parliament) stipulate that: 'The vocational qualifications related to prior learning are defined based on the occupational standards and their levels and assessed by testing. The VNFIL and accreditation principles will be defined by a

regulation issued by MoNE.' On 2 October 2017, MoNE issued the Regulation on the principles and implementation of VNFIL, regarding accreditation, measurement and evaluation. On 26 March 2018, revisions were made to the Regulation on secondary education to include VNFIL in the system. The VNFIL was established in the higher education system in 2011 but is still in its early stages.

Turkey has a highly developed system of distance learning. Most stages in formal and non-formal education can be reached by distance learning and open education options.

## NQF implementation

### **Inclusion of qualifications in a register**

The TQF does not yet include qualifications since realisation of the quality assurance is a priority for qualifications to be included into the TQF. Therefore, the quality assurance Regulation has been adopted; it envisages the establishment and implementation of quality assurance systems by April 2020. The principles and procedures for the inclusion of the qualifications into the TQF are being drafted. Following the adoption of these principles and procedures, the quality assured qualifications can be included into the TQF, expected in 2019.

### **Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF**

Monitoring the effectiveness of the TQF implementation will be the joint task of the TQF Coordination Council and TQF Consultation Committee established in 2018.

### **Impact for end-users**

Legal arrangements for the TQF are in place and its implementation is in process. A qualifications database is operational. The TQF does not yet include qualifications since the realisation of quality assurance is a priority for qualifications to be included into the TQF. Therefore, the quality assurance Regulation has been adopted; it envisages the establishment and implementation of quality assurance systems by April 2020. The principles and procedures for the inclusion of the qualifications into the TQF are being drafted. Following the adoption of these principles and procedures, the quality assured qualifications can be included into the TQF, expected in 2019.

The authorised certification bodies/VOC-Test centres, which assess, evaluate and certify skills of adults have an impact on end-users. By August 2018 these centres had issued over 387 000 certificates to individuals that now hold a recognised national vocational qualification.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Turkey is an EU candidate country and participates in the EQF advisory group. The EQF referencing of the TQF was completed in the spring of 2017.

## Important lessons and future plans

The institutional arrangements for the TQF have been very much focused on and around the VQA. Coordination of the TQF will be shared between stakeholders, in a similar way that the VQA executive board has been functioning. The VQA experience has greatly contributed to the developments so far. MoNE and the CoHE will play a more prominent role in the implementation of the TQF. The VQA is supporting the implementation of the TQF, but is also one of the three regulating bodies and it will establish a system for quality assurance of provision. The accumulation of these different tasks within a single institution is not easy to manage, particularly if the system is starting to grow more rapidly. The numbers of authorised certification bodies, providers and qualifications is increasing, as VQA certification is becoming compulsory for certain qualifications.

Development of the TQF as an integrated structure is a huge step forward from the previous position where the national vocational qualifications system operated as a parallel structure, focusing on the certification of adults. The responsibilities of the VQA, MoNE and the CoHE are becoming clearer but the new quality assurance regulation defines the division of responsibilities based on a common set of quality assurance criteria. Implementation of the quality assurance regulation will be decisive in determining the ultimate division. Sectors have been actively involved in developing national occupational standards and qualifications and are volunteering to become authorised certification bodies, but there is a need to support the establishment of these bodies, to allow the system

to grow fast enough to meet the expectations. Training that can lead to qualifications is the next challenge. The role of the sectors in initial and post-secondary VET (MYOs<sup>927</sup>) and possibly higher education has to be clarified. There is interest from the private sector in using the TQF to make qualifications more relevant. Many training providers provide adult learning courses. The Istanbul municipality, as an example, is offering hundreds of courses, free of charge, for more than 1 million participants. These courses are based on MoNE's programmes, with a MoNE course completion certificate awarded. The municipality is doing this through a protocol with MoNE. Bringing such courses into the TQF by mapping them against the outcomes of units of VQA or MoNE qualifications is a process currently being considered to quality assure and certificate them within the TQF.

### Abbreviations

CoHE	Council of Higher Education
EQF	European qualifications framework
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (the EU's support programme for candidate and potential candidate countries)
MoNE	Ministry of National Education
RPL	recognition of prior learning
TQF	Turkish qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning
VQA	Vocational Qualifications Authority

### Prepared by:

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

<sup>927</sup> Post-secondary colleges, offering VET and general education; offer higher education short-cycle qualifications; administered by CoHE.

## Introduction and context

The Ugandan vocational qualifications framework (UVQF) was officially introduced through the Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTJET) Act of 2008 as a part of the BTJET's overarching 10-year strategic plan, Skilling Uganda (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011).

The most important sub-sectors of the Ugandan labour market are the informal economy and the agricultural sector. Some 70% of the Ugandan workforce continues to work in agriculture. Employment in the non-agricultural informal sector (comprising mainly microenterprises, own account workers and unpaid family workers) accounts for 18% of total employment and 58% of non-agricultural employment.

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Uganda is beset with problems. Chief among these is the perceived insignificance of TVET programmes, which mars the productivity and employment chances of an estimated 800,000 school leavers annually (Heitmann, 2012). Less than 40% of large and medium firms regard the course content and methodologies of BTJET institutions as relevant. At the level of advanced technical qualifications, the limited coverage of practical skills as well as soft skills (such as communication, computer literacy, customer care, problem solving, work attitudes and ethics) in training programmes makes for low performance in modern work environments (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011).

Furthermore, only a narrow range of occupations are covered in BTJET programmes and they do not address the skills requirements of modern and emerging sectors such as hospitality, ICT, business management and finance, mining and engineering, oil and gas, and environmental technologies. Employers are rarely represented in the rigidly supply-oriented BTJET system. The lack of a systematic labour market information system

further decreases the system's responsiveness to demand.

## Policy objectives

The UVQF's objectives are to:

- a. align BTJET programmes and qualifications with the needs of the labour market, so as to produce graduates with employable skills;
- b. allow employers and industry experts to play a significant role in defining occupational standards and training content;
- c. safeguard against the institutionalization of supply-driven, academically-focused formal training programmes, which in the past failed to equip graduates with skills relevant to the needs of the labour market;
- d. develop formal and (where possible and appropriate) non-formal programmes based on UVQF standards in order to facilitate progression within the BTJET system (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011).

Section 3 (5) of the 2008 BTJET Act highlights the following aims:

- a. improve the relevance, accessibility, quality and affordability of BTJET for the purposes of progression and employment;
- b. enhance workers' capabilities for employment and self-employment;
- c. monitor gaps between supply of and demand for skills;
- d. establish financial sustainability and funding mechanisms.

Section 3 (3) of the BTJET Act defines the following aims of the UVQF:

- a. determine the scope and levels of BTJET programmes and the roles of the different stakeholders in designing programme content;
- b. separate training and delivery from quality assurance functions;



- c. establish an institutional framework for the coordination of BTVET;
- d. establish an authority to regulate qualifications (standards, assessment and certification) and training delivery in formal and non-formal institutions.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The UVQF has five levels. The level descriptors form a continuum in which the preceding levels are subsumed within those that follow.

**Table 85. Ugandan vocational qualifications framework (UVQF) summary of generic level descriptors**

LEVEL	LEVEL DESCRIPTOR	COMPARABLE QUALIFICATIONS
5	Candidate can apply a broad range of specialised knowledge and skills to interpret technical information, modify concepts, practices and procedures, and perform complex technical operations in unpredictable contexts. Can undertake activities with a high degree of autonomy when results are checked on by superiors. Shows a high degree of control of resources and managerial performance.	Higher diploma (HD)
4	Candidate can apply a substantial range of specialised knowledge and skills to interpret technical information and perform and modify complex operations in a variety of contexts. Can undertake activities with a substantial degree of autonomy when results are checked on by superiors. Shows a substantial degree of control of resources and managerial performance.	Ordinary diploma (OD)
3	Candidate can apply a broad range of knowledge and skills to perform complex work in varied contexts. Can undertake activities as a 'working supervisor' with a substantial degree of autonomy when results are checked on by superiors. Can find technical solutions and make proposals to modify technical operations. Shows a moderate degree of control of resources and managerial performance.	Certificate III
2	Candidate can apply a moderate range of knowledge and skills to perform less complex work in non-routine and occasionally varied contexts. Can undertake directed activities with some degree of autonomy while working in a team, and can find simple technical solutions unaided. Shows a limited degree of control of resources.	Certificate II
1	Candidate can apply a basic range of knowledge and skills to perform simple work in routine contexts. Can work with others under direct supervision. If self-employed, shows a limited ability to find technical solutions.	Certificate I
<b>Elementary/entry level (partial qualification)</b>	Candidate can apply a limited range of knowledge and skills to perform specific and simple tasks in routine contexts. Can work with others under direct supervision. If self-employed, shows a limited ability to find technical solutions.  Note: elementary/entry level abilities will be awarded a partial qualification based on modular assessment and certification.	Worker's PAS transcript

Note: PAS – practically acquired skills

Source: Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

A task force set up by the BTVET department of the Ministry of Education and Sports began work on a comprehensive qualifications framework for

Uganda in 2000; however, the government-approved Promotion of employment-oriented vocational and technical education and training (PEVOT) programme later shifted focus to the development of a sub-sector framework for vocational qualifications only. The original idea to establish an autonomous

vocational qualifications authority was abandoned due to resistance from parliament and the ministry (Heitmann, 2012). Nevertheless, the development of occupational profiles, item banks and modular curricula started in 2003 in a number of pilot projects.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The BTVET Act of 2008 makes provision for the assessment of prior learning (APL). Regulations to facilitate APL are supported by both stakeholders and TVET graduates who have expressed an interest in higher education via APL. This is catered for by Section 20 (5) of the UVQF, under which graduates of community polytechnics, vocational schools and training centres are offered the opportunity to progress to the next level of learning. Individuals are encouraged to undergo evidence-based assessments to determine the appropriate level for them. In this way, learners who have acquired skills in the informal economy will have the chance to rejoin the formal system. In order to meet the needs of APL learners, occupational qualifications programmes on the UVQF are characterized by competence-based education and training and flexible learning modules delivered in the form of assessment and training packages.

In 2009, the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) assessed roughly 2,000 applicants on the basis of the old trade testing regulations using an item bank developed under the UVQF. However, these numbers must be seen in relation to the much larger numbers of students (around 18,000 annually) who appear for examinations in formal TVET schools (Heitmann, 2012, p. 22).

## NQF implementation

The BTVET Act revitalized the DIT, which was made obsolete in 1998 when all education and training functions were transferred from line ministries to the Ministry of Education and Sports. The DIT is now in charge of quality assurance and assessment. Learners with employable skills are encouraged to apply to the DIT for assessment irrespective of the duration and type of learning (i.e. formal, informal or non-formal) and of their gender and social background. The DIT started issuing UVQF qualification certificates in 2009, phasing out the award of trade test certificates. It assures employers that every UVQF-certified individual is able to perform the relevant occupational tasks to the level of competence indicated on the qualification certificate.

The DIT is supervised by the Industrial Training Council, which develops policies for technical and vocational skills development with representation from industry.

The qualifications standards department is responsible for developing occupational standards, training modules, and compiling and distributing assessment and training packages that are occupation-based.

The department currently has an estimated 70 occupational profiles, training modules for 80 occupations, assessment instrument banks for 83 occupations, and assessment and training packages for 80 occupations (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016).

## Referencing to regional frameworks

A technical paper on Harmonization of Education Systems and Training Curricula in the East African Community (EAC Secretariat, April 2012) made several recommendations on the proposed overarching qualifications framework for the East African region. The most important of these as regards the UVQF are:

- a. A regional qualifications framework for TVET should be developed. It should feature guidelines and regulations for instruction, curriculum management and examination and assessment in the regional TVET sub-sector.
- b. A regulatory body should be established to accredit institutions and programmes, set and control standards, standardize awards, and ensure the quality and relevance of TVET programmes and assessment centres in the region.
- c. An inter-governmental body should be created to deal with TVET-related issues in the region. The East African Community Secretariat should schedule regular meetings of TVET experts to develop guidelines for harmonization of the regional TVET sub-sector.

## Important lessons and future plans

The Ugandan Government's vision for the future is to give all learners the opportunity to further their education up to tertiary level via an overarching national qualifications framework covering general and higher education as well as TVET. The UVQF is seen as a forerunner to this framework, which will make education and training in Uganda truly democratic.

The first step towards this goal in the immediate future will be to expand the UVQF up to diploma level. This responds to the urgent request of employers to produce more diploma-level BTVET graduates with relevant practical skills. Curriculum development will be accelerated based on UVQF standards (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016), and the quality and profile of vocational training will be improved by strengthening links between TVET and the private sector.

#### Abbreviations

APL	assessment of prior learning
BTVET	business, technical and vocational education and training
DIT	Directorate of Industrial Training
NQF	national qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UVQF	Ugandan vocational qualifications framework

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## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

The national qualifications framework (NQF) is described in an annex of Resolution No 1341 of the Cabinet of Ministers from 23 November 2011 on the confirmation of the NQF. The Higher Education Law (Law 1556-VII of 1 July 2014), made a direct link between higher education qualifications and the NQF by allocating qualifications to NQF levels. The Law on Education (Law 2145-VIII adopted 5 September 2017) gave a central role to the NQF and lifelong learning and competence-based education.

The Law has a chapter on the qualification system and describes the tasks of the National Agency for Qualifications (NAK). NAK is a collegial body supported by government and social partners. It coordinates the development of occupational standards and qualifications, manages the registers of standards and qualifications, supports the widening of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), and accredits qualification centres. NAK's statute was adopted on 5 December 2018 with Resolution No 1029.

The draft Law on Vocational Education builds on the Law on Education and defines the approach to educational standards (based on learning outcomes derived from occupational standards), decentralised educational programmes (modular and competence-based), more active learning methods and different forms of learning. A national methodology for developing occupational standards (Ministerial Order No 74 of 22 January 2018 on Approval of the Professional Standards Development Methodology, Ministry of Social Policy) was adopted, giving occupational standards a clear legal status.

The NQF originally had 10 levels, from 0 to 9. Each level has a general outcome descriptor as well as four outcome statements for knowledge, skills, communication, and autonomy and responsibility.

The Ministry of Education is the main policy body. It collaborates closely with the Ministry

of Social Policy. The Interdepartmental Working Group including ministries, research centres, employer representatives, trade unions, and NGOs meets every four–five months to discuss NQF implementation.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Ukraine faces major socio-economic challenges. The population has dropped to 42 million and is predominantly (close to 70%) urban. The country is aging, and the population in decline. Labour force aging is worse in the rural areas. Big enterprises still play an important role in the economy and in employment, which has a very sizeable industrial and mining sector, next to a large number of small and medium enterprises. There are significant economic, social and cultural regional differences in the country.

The occupation of the regions in the East of Ukraine where a major part of the country's industrial potential was concentrated and annexation of the Crimea have aggravated the situation. An area where 6 million people lived was cut off from the rest of Ukraine and affected by destruction. Operations of thousands of enterprises were suspended. The GDP plummeted and recovery is slow. The number of internally displaced persons grew significantly. There are close to 2 million internally displaced persons while an estimated 2–5 million Ukrainians left the country, mainly for the EU and some to Russia. Since the start of military actions, there has been an increase in the number of people with disabilities; a sharp decline in industrial production; contraction of foreign direct investment inflows; termination of business ties with enterprises in the occupied territories; declining rates of economic activity; an increase in forced part-time work; a decline in disposable incomes due to growing wage arrears; and increased migration of employable population.

The number of employed people fell from 18.07 million in 2014 to 16.03 million in 2018. With a reducing labour force, unemployment has not seen a big increase: in 2018, the unemployment rate

was 9.7% while the youth unemployment rate was 19.7%.

Ukrainians are well educated. The gross enrolment rate in tertiary education is close to 80% and attainment levels of the working population is high. In 2017, 52.9 % of the adult population have completed or are engaged in tertiary education.

More education did not translate in better labour market outcomes. Over-education has become a widespread phenomenon. Most higher education graduates cannot find employment at the appropriate level, and many have to accept skilled worker jobs. Ukraine has the lowest labour productivity in the entire Europe and Central Asia region (IMF, 2015). Skill gaps significantly constrain firms' performance. In a 2014 survey<sup>928</sup>, four firms out of ten reported a significant gap between the type of skills their employees have and those they need to achieve business objectives. Skill gaps limit the companies' efficiency, service quality, and ability to retain and grow their client base. It also impedes firms from finding the right candidate for the job when hiring. Despite dissatisfaction with learning results, businesses mainly rely on formal education to train the workforce, as formal workplace training is scarce.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

The objectives of the NQF have been evolving over time. Initially the focus was on the need for more relevant qualifications and quality assurance through European standards, showing as well the desire for European integration and, especially, the link to the Bologna process. With the articulation of the education reforms, the NQF is becoming an instrument to support reform. The NQF facilitates reform of higher education and of general and vocational education, lifelong learning, and a better coordination between education and labour market policies. The NQF supports competence-based education, through reform of education standards and curricula, and can ensure safeguards for equity, access and progression, and quality assurance in a decentralised education system in which providers are more autonomous.

On the labour market side, the development of occupational standards and the introduction of validation of non-formal learning and independent assessment of candidates are seen as the most important tools in ensuring that the workforce

acquires and keeps up to date with identified skill needs. This is important as there is a huge mismatch between supply and demand. The desire to link qualifications with European frameworks, and to ensure more transparent qualifications that will be recognised abroad, is important but not the top priority at this stage. Self-certification against the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) and alignment with the European qualifications framework (EQF) will gain importance when we move closer to 2020.

Higher education reforms have been shaped by the Bologna process, breaking the linkage between higher education and the tariff qualification system, and abolishing qualification types inherited from the Soviet system.

Current education reforms are addressing the contents of education, preparing young people better for the 21<sup>st</sup> century by the introduction of decentralised competence-based general education, starting from pre-school education and giving more emphasis to developing key competences and transversal skills, while also aligning the duration of secondary education to European practices. These changes (which are part of the New Ukrainian School concept) are also affecting secondary vocational education and training (VET), that will span levels 3–5 of the NQF.

A concept for a modernised VET has been developed. Modernised VET will be provided in a decentralised system that is competence-based and much more closely linked with the needs of local companies and individual learners. Educational programmes will be modularised and developed from the learning outcomes defined in the educational standards by training providers. Educational standards are based on occupational standards, which have received a national status through changes in legislation issued by the Ministry of Social Policy. Instead of a centralised system based on state order, qualification characteristics and educational standards and subject-based training programmes. The new approach should be more demand-driven, based on regional priorities, occupational standards, educational standards, decentralised educational programmes and modular training programmes. Teacher competence and qualifications need to be reinforced. Assessment standards will define the requirements for (independent) summative assessment.

In the field of adult learning there are important reforms, linked with the legislation of professional qualifications, the VNFIL, independent assessment by qualification centres and the development of sector qualifications frameworks. Partial

<sup>928</sup> Ukraine STEP employer survey 2014; World Bank (2015). Skills for modern Ukraine: overview.

qualifications have been regulated in addition to full educational and professional qualifications.

New institutional settings have been created through the establishment of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (Nazyavo), the National Agency for Qualifications (NAK), qualification centres, independent assessment bodies and sector committees.

### **International cooperation**

The Bologna process is one of the main drivers for NQF development. It should ensure an NQF that is in line with the QF-EHEA. The Law on Higher Education has started implementation. The establishment of the Quality Assurance Agency has faced many challenges and four years after the Law on Higher Education, the agency is not yet fully functional. New processes for accreditation, new higher education standards and new curricula have been developed and introduced. All the programmes and their components are now expressed in learning outcomes. But the whole system is still very much focused on teaching and no steering is in place to ensure that assessment is also based on learning outcomes (see the European Higher Education Area 2018 Bologna Process implementation report). The role of students is also limited in comparison to other countries, as is the role of employers. Most students are encouraged to continue from a bachelor's to a master's degree.

The Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU includes a number of elements that are relevant for implementing the qualifications reform. The agreement promotes convergence in higher education deriving from the Bologna process; establishing a national framework to improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications and skills, drawing, where possible, on EU experience; and helping young people acquire knowledge, skills and competences outside education systems, including through volunteering, and recognising the value of such experiences. It also mentions joint work to bring Ukraine's vocational training system more closely in line with the modernisation of EU VET structures via instruments such as the EQF, the European credit system for VET (ECVET) and the European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training (EQARF). This has helped to give the NQF a central place in reforms.

A number of education projects have been implemented during the past seven years after the adoption of the NQF, but many of them have been very small in size and scope. The Tempus and Erasmus+ programme for higher education have been a continuous source for cooperation in higher education and the British Council has also given

some support in this area. In general education the Polish and Finnish governments have been providing bilateral support to implement the New Ukrainian School. In vocational education, there has been a twinning project and some smaller bilateral initiatives, including cooperation to develop dual education. Estonia has started to implement a project for the region of Volyn which provided school partnerships and curriculum development support. The EU ULEAD project has been providing some support for the decentralisation of VET.

Since major educational reforms have been launched without substantial donor support, the ETF has started to develop bridging support for the implementation of the NQF Action Plan 2016–20, to support legislative and institutional changes and the clarification of processes and approaches for the development of standards and curricula.

Currently preparations are advanced for a combined EU and Member States EUR 53 million initiative to support the modernisation of vocational education, which foresees policy and legislative support, support to raise the quality of vocational education and investment in infrastructure. This project will include support to the development of the National Agency for Qualifications, the elaboration and implementation of standards and VET curricula for 100 profiles and widening the offer of the VNFIL.

## **Levels and use of learning outcomes**

### **NQF scope and structure**

The NQF is a framework for lifelong learning with a focus on education, but also on employment and social labour relations and individuals. With the Law on Education the NQF has clearly become an instrument for lifelong learning. The features for adult learning, however, will need to be further developed before they can be implemented. Especially in the area of assessment there is a need to develop applications to move towards assessment based on learning outcomes.

The NQF is described in the annex of Resolution No 1341 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 23 November 2011. The NQF Decree is relatively short and asks for the implementation of the NQF by different stakeholders and institutions, the development of rules for its implementation, an action plan and the establishment of an interdepartmental committee. The annex explains what the NQF is, its purpose and key concepts, and it is followed by a table with the NQF descriptors. The NQF has 10 levels from 0 to 9 that have a general outcome descriptor for each level as well as four outcome statements for knowledge, skills, communication, and autonomy and responsibility.

The NQF levels are not aligned with the tariff qualification system, and in particular, the wage levels (розряди), but are a genuine break with the past. This poses a number of problems. Wage levels have been abolished for higher education qualifications but still play a role in vocational qualifications and in the definition of educational standards. They are not reflected in modern occupational standards. However, decoupling qualifications from wage levels has consequences on the way wages are defined.

With the introduction of learning outcomes in ISCED 2011 and the adoption of eight ISCED levels, including level 0 for pre-school education, there has been an attempt to align ISCED with the EQF. This has found resonance in Ukraine, but has also created a unique set of level descriptors.

There is progressive use of NQF levels, in particular in education. The Law on Education mentions which educational qualifications will be issued for which levels. Following Article 36 of the Law, an additional level was introduced.

### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

The 10-level framework is seen as a mechanism for recognising lifelong learning from pre-school education level up to Doctor of Sciences. It has attempted to unify the approaches introduced by ISCED 2011 in the year that the NQF was adopted, and the EQF to create a truly lifelong learning framework from the cradle to the grave. The idea was promoted by the Ukrainian National Academy of Pedagogy. Levels 0 and 9 were preserved in spite of critical comments by the Council of Europe and the ETF. Level 9 is seen as essential for enhancing the scientific and research leadership in the country, building on a strong academic tradition that goes back to the Soviet period; it is seen as important to innovation and scientific discovery. Level 0 is the first stage in the lifelong learning system and should ensure basic values on which the education system is built. The descriptors for knowledge, skills, communication, and autonomy and responsibility are complemented by integrating professional competences, bringing the essence of the different categories together. Among the other essential social dimensions of the NQF are the need to enhance democratisation and social partnership in education.

The Law on Education (Article 36) introduced an additional level to accommodate the Junior Bachelor and distinguish it from the Junior Specialist, described in the future as a pre-higher professional qualification. In 2019, the last generation of junior specialists is going to enter higher education; from then onwards this qualification will be falling outside the higher education field. The Ministry of Education

proposed an adapted set of level descriptors in 2018 that has not yet been adopted to accommodate these changes. Public consultation of the new levels has not produced any response, while the whole issue of integrating the Junior Specialist into VET is very much contested by colleges.

### **Use of learning outcomes**

Under the New Ukrainian School concept, a 12-year education system has been introduced. It comprises a basic nine-year secondary education, followed by a profiled three-year specialisation, bringing Ukrainian education closer to common practices in other industrialised countries. The reform focuses on renewing the contents of education. Students should be trained to become responsible citizens, patriots, innovators, and critical thinkers. The education system has been too much disconnected from society and the country's economy. Education needs to be more strongly embedded in society, and schools will need to work closer with parents and communities.

All secondary school graduates need to develop 10 key competences: communication in the state language and in foreign languages; mathematical literacy, sciences and technology, and digital competences; the ability to learn and adapt; social and civic competences for effective and constructive participation in society; entrepreneurship; general cultural literacy to understand works of art, express ideas artistically, and help to understand cultural diversity; and environmental and health competences. Moreover, the following skills are seen as indispensable to developing key competences: reading abilities, oral and written expression, critical thinking, the ability to give one's opinion logically, the ability to constructively manage one's emotions, initiative, creativity, problem-solving skills, evaluating risks and decision-making, and the ability to work in teams.

The first phase of general education will be focused on developing basic skills, which should normally last six years depending on the learning outcomes obtained. During the next phase, the focus should be much more on developing the key competences, hence the extensive work under way to redevelop the secondary education curriculum. The last three years of secondary education is proposed to take place in academic lyceums for specialisation in arts and humanities, maths and sciences or other academic fields, and professional lyceums, or in professional colleges or technicums that can provide a qualified worker or junior specialist diploma.

The new educational standards and curricula needed to reshape the contents of secondary education will be part of the NQF register and

**Table 86. Types of qualifications in the national qualifications framework of Ukraine**

NQF LEVEL	FORMAL EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS			OTHER QUALIFICATIONS
	GENERAL EDUCATION	PRIMARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	HIGHER EDUCATION	PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS
0				
1	Specialised secondary school certificate			Professional qualification level 1
2	Basic general secondary education certificate	Skilled labour certificate		Professional qualification level 2
3		Skilled labour certificate		Professional qualification level 3
4	High school diploma ENA certificate	Skilled labour diploma		Professional qualification level 4
5		Junior specialist diploma		Professional qualification level 5
6			Junior Bachelor	Professional qualification level 6
7			Bachelor	Professional qualification level 7
8			Master	Professional qualification level 8
9			PhD	Professional qualification level 9
10			Doctor of Science	Professional qualification level 10

developed in line with the learning outcomes descriptors. The key competences development will need to continue to play an important role across vocational education, higher education and adult learning. The new approach has been clarified progressively over the past two years. In higher education, learning outcomes are already used in all educational standards and related curricula, but assessment has not been systematically addressed. In VET, experience with learning outcomes-based curricula on an experimental basis goes back to 2006. Since then 330 new standards have been introduced with aspects of a learning outcomes-based approach, although only a small number of them has a direct link to occupational standards. During 2016–18 the ETF worked closely with the ministries of Education and Social Policy and the Institute for the Modernisation of the Contents of Education (IMZO) to review current approaches and build a common competence-based approach for occupational standards, educational standards, assessment standards and decentralised curricula.

The development of standards and curricula needs to be followed up by implementation.

Learning and assessment practices need to change. It is therefore proposed that separate assessment standards be developed to facilitate independent assessment. These will be used by qualification centres (Law on Education) for the assessment of professional qualifications and by independent assessment bodies (draft Law on Vocational Education) overseeing the assessment of educational qualifications for VET. The VNFIL based on occupational standards has already started for cooks. This practice implemented by the State Employment Service is expected to be widened in the coming years. The New Ukrainian School is entering its second year of implementation and the number of teachers involved in delivering competence-based education programmes is growing substantially through a cascading model. In vocational education the EU project supporting the modernisation of VET will support the implementation of many new standards and curricula.

**Definition of qualification**

According to the Law on Education, qualification is a standardised set of competences (learning



outcomes) achieved by a person, recognised by an authorised body and confirmed by a respective document.

The use of the term qualifications standard is changing as stakeholders have now started preparations to develop assessment standards. For educational qualifications issued in the education system the standards that regulate the award of the qualification (the so-called documents of education) are educational standards, but these are changing in nature. For professional qualifications, occupational standards or assessment standards should be the basis. Partial qualifications can be based on a module or unit of a standard.

Traditionally the state educational standards for vocational education and higher education started from a description of the qualification characteristics that were derived from one of the 92 sectoral handbooks on qualification characteristics. This system of qualification characteristics contains more than 6 000 entries for different occupations, but is only very partially maintained and many descriptions of the labour market needs are, therefore, out of date.

A new model is emerging with qualifications focused on demand rather than the state order. The ETF has been supporting this development. Occupational standards define competences for occupations that are in demand on the labour market and are developed with stakeholders (sectoral and professional councils). This work started voluntarily in 2010 with employers developing more than 80 occupational standards and it was legislated last year, making occupational standards formally part of the new system. The Ministry of Social Policy now approves occupational standards and will develop a repository of occupational standards until the National Qualifications Authority is established. Occupational standards should be used to develop assessment standards that will be the basis for independent assessment of VET graduates, the certification of unqualified workers and the VNFIL. Education standards have been simplified and provide the minimal information needed to support curriculum development by VET providers.

Since 2012 VET providers can develop their own curricula, which need to be approved by the Ministry of Education. This system of national standards and independent assessment will ensure the quality and comparability of the outcomes of vocational education, while giving providers and local employers more autonomy to develop and deliver curricula that meet local needs.

In the new model education standards for VET are describing modules and learning outcomes that have been derived from the labour functions in the occupational standards. Common education requirements and key competences are integrated in a basic block that provides the learning outcomes common to all VET qualifications. In accordance with the draft Law on Vocational Education, students should all be trained to complete secondary education and obtain the key competences and occupational competences they need for successful integration in the labour market. The latter need to be successfully completed by all students. Some students, however, will complete their education and training without completing secondary education, indicating that the priority for VET is to obtain relevant competences for the labour market. Moreover, after successful completion of each module, students will be able to get a partial qualification. These partial qualifications will also form a bridge with professional qualifications.

#### **Access, progression and credit**

Access to educational qualifications is guaranteed by the Law on Education. Special measures will need to be developed for learners with special needs. Gender discrimination is prohibited. The new flexible and modularised structure should make VET more accessible and facilitate as well the integration of different groups of learners in one group. Individual development plans and programmes are specifically mentioned in the Law. There are already a number of partial qualifications in operation for integrating different target groups into learning and the labour market. These include for example Ukrainian language proficiency tests. The modularised approach is opening opportunities for a credit-based approach but this is not yet on the agenda. The draft Law on Vocational Education uses workload more in a traditional context of a fixed number of contact hours. In higher education, the ECTS is in use but is not very much defined by outcomes.

### **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

#### **NQF legal basis**

The NQF is described in the annex of Resolution No 1341 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 23 November 2011 on the confirmation of the NQF. The Resolution was not sufficient to ensure implementation.

The Higher Education Law (Law 1556-VII of 1 July 2014) made a direct link between higher education qualifications and the NQF by allocating qualifications to NQF levels.

The Law on Education (Law No 2145-VIII adopted on 5 September 2017), gave a central role to the NQF and lifelong learning and competence-based education. The Law supports principles for lifelong learning, giving a central place to learning outcomes and key competences at the basis of standards and curricula, more autonomy to providers, and more attention to independent assessment. The Law establishes a competence-based approach for general education and secondary VET through the New Ukrainian School. VET standards will be based on occupational standards. The Law distinguishes between education qualifications delivered through formal education, and professional qualifications focused on use in the labour market. It introduces sector qualifications frameworks and partial qualifications.

The Law has a chapter on the qualification system and describes the tasks of the National Agency for Qualifications (NAK). NAK is a collegial body supported by the government and social partners. It coordinates the development of occupational standards and qualifications, manages the registers of standards and qualifications, supports VNFIL widening, and accredits qualification centres. NAK's statute is close to adoption.

The VNFIL was regulated by the Law on Professional Development of Employees (Law No 4312) stipulating that the State Employment Service established recognition centres for the VNFIL. The Law on Employment (Law No 5067-VI of 5 July 2012) confirmed the right of unemployed people to validate their skills obtained through informal learning. Order No 256 of 2016 of the Ministry of Social Policy initiated the implementation of the VNFIL of guards, cooks and welders. The draft Law on Vocational Education builds on the Law on Education and defines the approach to educational standards (based on learning outcomes derived from occupational standards), decentralised educational programmes (modular and competence-based), more active learning methods and different forms of learning.

A national methodology for developing occupational standards (Ministerial Order No 74 of 22 January 2018 on Approval of the Professional Standards Development Methodology) was adopted, giving occupational standards a clear legal status.

#### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

Many stakeholders have been involved in the development and implementation of the NQF and the qualification system. Current developments include the Cabinet of Ministers, the ministries of Education, Economic Development and Trade, Social Policy, Regional Development, Finance, Culture,

and Agriculture who all participate regularly in meetings on the NQF. Other stakeholders involved are: the Verkhovna Rada, the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, the Academy of Sciences, the Institute for the Modernisation of Education, the State Employment Service, the VET Research Institute, regional training and methodological centres, the Federation of Employers, the Confederation of Employers and the Institute for Professional Qualifications, the Chamber of Industry, professional bodies, economic clusters, the Federation of Metallurgists, sector committees, lead enterprises, the State Railways, trade unions, universities, NGOs and other training providers. In the coming five years, the number of institutions and people involved in NQF implementation will grow.

The Ministry of Education is the main policy body. It collaborates closely with the Ministry of Social Policy in charge of the VNFIL, occupational standards, guidance and counselling. The Interdepartmental Working Group that includes ministries, research centres, employer representatives, trade unions and NGOs meets every four–five months to discuss NQF implementation. The group was re-established in 2017 and widened its composition in 2018. The Minister of Education chairs the group. The Ministry of Education is responsible for reporting on the NQF Action Plan 2016–20. The Federation of Employers has been a continuous active promoter of the NQF. It prepared several law initiatives that failed. In June 2017, the Federation proposed to establish the National Agency of Qualifications in a joint decision of social partners and government. Article 38 of the Law on Education legislates the Agency (abbreviated as NAK in Ukrainian). NAK will be a collegial body, co-founded by the government and social partners to strengthen coordination. It will have 17 tasks, including coordination and information of stakeholders, supporting legislative developments, developing and maintaining the registry of qualifications, coordinating the development of occupational standards, supporting the development of educational standards, accrediting qualification centres, overseeing the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and establishing the criteria for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

#### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

Quality assurance has been a main objective of the NQF. All qualifications should define minimal requirements in terms of learning outcomes. The systematic use of occupational standards is a guarantee to make qualifications relevant for the labour market. Educational qualifications should promote competence-based education

and include key competences. New education standards and curricula for general education, vocational education and higher education are being prepared. Minimal requirements facilitate autonomy of providers for learning and set safeguards for assessment. Independent assessment should ensure that individuals meet the learning outcomes in the standards. Quality assurance principles are legislated in the Law on Higher Education (2014), VNFIL regulations (2016), the Law on Education (2017) and the Draft VET Law (approval expected in 2019). New approaches are being developed to elaborate occupational and educational standards, curricula (educational programmes) and assessment standards. The New Ukrainian School and the project supporting the modernisation of VET will put these in practice in 2019–24, with EU and Member States support.

According to the NQF Decree, the NQF is intended to introduce the European standards and principles of quality assurance of labour market requirements in respect of specialist competences. Quality assurance has, therefore, been one of the main objectives of the NQF in order to strengthen confidence in qualifications. The focus has been on bringing standards more in line with European practices, moving from a curriculum-focused subject-oriented approach to an outcome-based approach, strengthening the relevance of standards, assessment processes and programme accreditation of providers. There is consensus that qualifications or educational standards should become part of a single national register of qualifications. The establishment of such a register is foreseen in the NQF Action Plan 2016–20. Another register is also foreseen for occupational standards. Both registers would have a filtering function as repositories of validated relevant qualifications and standards. Under the responsibility of the National Agency for Qualifications it is proposed that both registers and other databases be linked. International experiences have already been studied and a national qualification system's website has been designed. These sources are also important to mobilise the implementers of the new standards and explain the benefits to final beneficiaries (learners, employers). Dissemination of practices beyond a small group of experts is needed.

Decisions have been made to move to independent assessment. The Law on Education regulates the establishment of qualification centres that will be accredited by NAK. An experiment in independent assessment in vocational education is scheduled for five profiles next year. The VNFIL is already being implemented for three occupations in three locations, organised by the State Employment

Service. Existing training providers are expected to play a role in these processes. Assessment has been the weak link in the existing system of educational standards, with limited indications of how competences should be demonstrated. There is a need to experiment with new assessment approaches, with the increased involvement of stakeholders from the world of work in assessment, and to train assessors and verifiers to ensure that candidates can demonstrate that they have reached the learning outcomes in the standards. This becomes increasingly important within a decentralised education system with more autonomy for providers to adapt provision to local and learner needs.

Programme accreditation is foreseen for higher education and vocational education, verifying that programmes are in line with the state educational standards. But this does not mean that summative assessment can be left completely to providers, without any external validation. It has been mainly the lack of trust in qualifications and the poor performance of the education system in terms of labour market outcomes that has promoted the introduction of the NQF.

The roles of the new agencies for quality assurance are critical in promoting new quality assurance practices. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has become operational. For vocational education different bodies at regional, national or sectoral level are foreseen in the draft Law on Vocational Education that deal with the quality assurance of qualifications. It is important that there is coordination among these different bodies.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

The Law on Professional Development of Employees (Law No 4312 of January 2012) introduced the establishment of recognition centres by the State Employment Service. In order to verify an employee's professional qualification, recognition centres should work with State Employment Service training centres, VET institutions, enterprises, and other providers licensed to carry out educational activities for certain occupations. The certificate to be awarded could be for specific professional skills or for improvement. The procedure for evaluation is determined by the Ministry of Social Policy in consultation with the Ministry of Education.

In 2012 a new Law on Employment was adopted that stated that the unemployed are entitled to have

their skills assessed. This legislation was followed by other regulations providing further guidance for implementation. In May 2013, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted Resolution No 340 on the procedure for validation of blue-collar occupations' non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This was followed in December 2013 by Ministry of Social Policy Order 875/1776, which sets criteria for (private) assessment centres and the Ministerial Order 886 which sets a list of occupations for assessment. In 2013/14 a first pilot in VNFIL for cooks was undertaken with support of the ETF.

In spite of the rapidly advancing legislation, the pilot showed that legislation alone is not enough to kick start a validation system and there are still many aspects related to the preparation of candidates, assessors, availability of standards and appropriate certification processes that need additional work. Through Order No 695 of 26 September 2014, the Ministry of Social Policy established the Interagency Working Group to determine how enterprises, institutions, organisations could become compliant with the needs to validate non-formal and informal learning in blue-collar occupations.

The system became operational through Order No 256 of 2016 of the Ministry of Social Policy, starting assessment of guards, cooks and welders. The Odessa and Rivne training centres of the State Employment Service and the Higher Commercial College of the National Trade and Economic University in Kiev acquired the status of assessment centres. The work with cooks is progressing slowly. Progress is limited: approximately 129 persons have been certified since July 2016. There is a need for more assessment centres, trained assessors, verifiers and standards that can support assessment to extend these first pilots to a truly national system.

The introduction of VNFIL in higher education has made no progress. Ukraine did not report on it for the 2015 implementation report on the European higher education area. The Law on Higher Education does not mention the possibility of VNFIL.

The NQF does not refer directly to the VNFIL, but it explicitly mentions the use of qualifications for employment, social-labour relations and for individuals. Also Resolution 340 of 15 May 2013 on the validation of blue-collar workers does not refer to the NQF. However, stakeholders do see the VNFIL and the NQF as part of a common system. The Law on Education has created more direct links between them. The establishment of qualification centres, the development of professional qualifications, the regulation of assessment standards, the training

of assessors and the role of NAK to coordinate the system is expected to provide a further boost.

## NQF implementation

### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

In 2017, the Ministry of Social Policy became responsible for the repository of occupational standards until the establishment of NAK<sup>929</sup>, which will also manage the NQF register, including assessment/qualification standards. Educational standards remain the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Preparatory work on scoping and developing the register will start in 2019.

In 2012 a first implementation plan for the NQF was adopted and an interdepartmental committee established to oversee implementation. There has been progress in various areas during these first years: testing new approaches and developing methodologies for standards, and developing a concept for the national qualification system (which was not approved); development of occupational standards by employers in cooperation with other stakeholders and developing legislation for the VNFIL; and preparation of a new Law on Higher Education.

In 2014/15, discussions in the parliamentary committee on the Law on Education and the Law on Vocational Education brought the NQF back as a tool to support lifelong learning, with a stronger focus on competences, and on more relevant qualifications. The Association Agreement also mentioned the need to develop a functioning NQF. But the NQF was not mentioned as a priority in the new government coalition agreement. Higher education had become the priority for the Ministry of Education in 2014/15 after the adoption of the new Law on Higher Education and the NQF vanished from the radar.

A self-evaluation of the first NQF implementation plan 2012–15, presented by the ETF in early 2016, showed that most planned activities had not, or only partially, been implemented. There was least progress in legislative developments (in spite of higher education and VNFIL), the communication on the NQF to stakeholders and the public at large, capacity building, and the allocation of resources and international support. These were all essential for operationalising the NQF, which was doomed to fail without stronger commitment and a new plan for implementation.

<sup>929</sup> [www.msp.gov.ua/timeline/Profesiyni-standarti.html](http://www.msp.gov.ua/timeline/Profesiyni-standarti.html)

In 2016, under the responsibility of a new government the situation changed. A new plan was developed with ETF support by a team of experts coming from different stakeholders and the Ministry of Education; it included consultations with almost 200 stakeholders and all ministries. A thorough stakeholder analysis took place and feedback was received from more than 160 different organisations, including many private sector and NGO stakeholders as well as the already active employers, professional associations (17 out of an estimated 115 associations contributed to the plan) and student representatives. On 14 December 2016 the Cabinet of Ministers (Governmental Order No 1077) adopted the NQF implementation plan for 2016–20. The plan is the result of constructive cooperation between stakeholders from the world of work, and from vocational and higher education, under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and with active participation by the Federation of Employers.

The plan foresees work in seven areas:

- a. coordinate activities and provide legislative and regulatory support for the formation and development of the national qualifications system;
- b. modernise the system for skills needs anticipation and occupational standards development;
- c. develop qualifications of different types (educational standards and curricula based on learning outcomes) in line with the NQF;
- d. develop a system for the validation of VET learning outcomes (awarding professional qualifications);
- e. improve processes for qualifications quality assurance;
- f. improve communication on NQF implementation;
- g. ensure international recognition of the NQF and national qualifications.

For each strand there are defined actions, tasks, responsible bodies, deadlines and measurable results. In 2017 a new interdepartmental working group was established to monitor NQF implementation. The Law on Education provided a much stronger legal framework for the NQF as a pillar for wider education and training reform, followed in 2018 by a methodology regulating occupational standards and by guidelines for occupational standards development. New educational standards formats and methodologies have been developed and are being implemented in higher, general, and vocational education. Decentralised curricula are also planned. In 2019 a large EU and Member

States project will start to support the further implementation and development of the National Agency for Qualifications. No evaluation has yet been conducted, given the NQF early stage of development.

### **Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF**

Ukraine is still at an early structured stage, so no evaluation of the NQF has been conducted.

### **Impact for end-users**

The end-users benefiting from the new systems are still limited, but the group is growing among candidates for VNFIL, pupils in primary education, participants in adult learning courses, and some employers who are using occupational standards. Over the coming five years the people involved in implementation are expected to grow substantially.

## **Referencing to regional frameworks**

Self-certification to the QF-EHEA has not yet started. The National Agency for Qualifications should support the alignment of the NQF with the QF-EHEA and the EQF (enabled by the new EQF Recommendation). The Association Agenda foresees a functioning NQF by 2020.

## **Important lessons and future plans**

The first five years after the adoption of the NQF Decree have shown that successful implementation needs commitment and concerted action. The new Action Plan for the implementation of the NQF 2016–20 provides a clearly staged path towards implementation that can support ongoing education reforms, bringing provision more in line with the needs of the labour market, focus on the development of learning outcomes and change learning and assessment practices. This has already paid off as we have recently seen with the nomination of the Interdepartmental Working Group, the new Law on Education, the draft Law on VET, and new approaches to standards and curricula.

The establishment of a National Agency for Qualifications as foreseen in the Law on Education will particularly strengthen coordination of all these processes. The Law on Vocational Education is also needed to regulate many aspects of the new competence-based education system and bring it in line with the NQF. The new qualification system needs to be populated with new standards and curricula. New approaches for these are being developed, starting with occupational standards replacing outdated qualification characteristics. That is now regulated. The use of occupational

standards for developing educational standards and assessment standards for vocational education is integrated in a new approach to educational standards. Assessment standards are also planned but their use in higher education needs to be clarified. Professional qualifications and the functioning of qualification centres to independently assess them are included in the new Law on Education. This will have an impact on adult learning.

There need to be more occupational standards developed than those produced so far, voluntarily, by employers, requiring shared responsibilities and co-funding for their development. The EU project EU4Skills: Better Skills for Modern Ukraine is offering unique opportunities to advance these developments, but more than donor support is needed. The development of standards for general, vocational and higher education, and adult learning needs to be aligned. Some integration and overlap between sector standards is imperative if the NQF is to create a smooth, seamless, logical progression, consistent with its level descriptors and stated purposes. One common issue that needs to be addressed is the use of key competences. It is important that the registers for occupational standards and qualifications are established as soon as possible.

The National Agency for Qualifications plays a key role in these developments and needs to start its functions as soon as possible. The development processes involve many different actors and there is a need for continuous review of new initiatives, and consolidation and coordination of approaches. In order to mobilise the implementers of the new standards and explain the benefits to final beneficiaries (learners, employers), more guidance materials and dissemination of practices going beyond selected groups of experts is needed. The draft national qualification system's website needs to be launched.

New standards should be used to change learning and assessment practices. A critical implementation issue is teacher training and retraining. Providers will have more autonomy to adapt provision to the needs of local companies and learners. The NQF has an important role in balancing the increased autonomy of providers and ensuring achievement

of minimal learning outcomes throughout the education and training system.

Summative assessment cannot be left completely to providers. There is a need to experiment with new assessment approaches, with the increased involvement of stakeholders from the world of work in assessment, and to train assessors and verifiers to ensure that candidates can demonstrate that they have reached the learning outcomes in the standards in independent external assessment settings. Current VNFIL pilots should be extended.

The development of standards and curricula and the establishment of effective quality assurance procedures have priority in higher education, taking into account institutional autonomy. Ukraine is not ready yet for self-certification against the QF-EHEA, but preparations will have to start sooner or later.

An open issue that has no solution yet is the use of NQF levels for vocational and adult qualifications in parallel with wage levels (розряди), as NQF levels are not aligned with the tariff qualification system.

The NQF implementation plan 2016–20 offers a good basis for developments over the coming two years and it is hoped that political changes during 2019 will not weaken the government commitment to implement the changes.

#### Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework
ISCED	international standard classification of education (statistical framework for organising information on education maintained by UNESCO)
NAK	National Agency for Qualifications
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

#### Prepared by:

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

# UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

## Introduction and context

On 23 August 2010, President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan issued Federal Decree No 1 'Establish and Maintain the National Qualifications Authority'. The Decree sets out 16 aims and objectives, among which 'Establish and maintain systems, processes, and procedures to ensure that the national qualifications framework is the national frame of reference for qualifications in the country'.

The national qualifications framework for the United Arab Emirates (UAE), called the *QFEmirates*, was developed by the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) and approved by the NQA Board on 20 February 2012. The framework is presented in the *Qualifications Framework for the Emirates Handbook*. In 2013, the UAE Cabinet approved the framework's level descriptors. The *QFEmirates* consists of 10 levels and covers school (general) education, vocational education and training, higher education, work-based training, and professional education and training.

The NQA supports the national agenda, UAE Vision 2021, to build a strong education and training system that helps to equip citizens with the qualifications, skills, knowledge, and attributes necessary to succeed in the world of work. In order to overcome the structural division in the labour market, the UAE government launched the Emiratisation campaign, which mandates the inclusion of Emiratis in the workforce, particularly in the private sector. In 2017, the share of UAE nationals in the workforce was 7.19%, while the Emiratisation rate in the private sector was 3.38%. The NQA aims at addressing skills gaps and skills shortages in order to increase labour market opportunities and assist Emiratis to secure jobs.

## Policy objectives

The *QFEmirates* is designed to be the single structure and reference point through which all qualifications in the UAE can be compared nationally and

internationally. The framework sets out to recognize all forms of learning: formal, non-formal, and informal.

The framework aims to:

- a. provide a frame of reference, enabling all qualifications to be described and compared;
- b. accommodate qualifications in all education sectors – general education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and higher education – to recognize the achievement in learning from the most elementary task to the most complex;
- c. assist in the recognition of non-formal and informal activities;
- d. develop and maintain a qualifications system to promote the concept of lifelong learning;
- e. facilitate international mobility of learners.

The *QFEmirates* ensures that academic programmes offered by higher education institutions in the UAE recognized by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) at the Ministry of Education are appropriate to the level of the qualification.

The 2011 Standards for Licensure and Accreditation developed by the Commission state that programme learning outcomes need to be appropriate to the level of qualifications awarded as defined in the *QFEmirates*. The framework gives 'more transparency to the possible pathways for students to progress from one award to the next across the spectrum of qualifications in post-secondary education and vocational training'. It is mandatory for each institution to follow descriptive criteria set by the *QFEmirates* associated with each level of the qualifications framework while designing, delivering, and reviewing their programmes of study.

The 10 levels of the *QFEmirates* readily relate to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF), the framework for qualifications of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA), as well as other national frameworks. [Table 87](#) shows how the *QFEmirates* aligns to the EQF and QF-EHEA.

**Table 87. Alignment of the QFEmirates with the EQF and QF-EHEA**

QFEMIRATES LEVEL	EQF LEVEL	QF-EHEA
10	8	Third cycle
9	7	Second cycle
7, 8	6	First cycle
6	5	Short cycle
5	4	
4	3	
3	2	
1, 2	1	

Since its foundation, the NQA has established ties of cooperation with different countries for the purpose of measuring and benchmarking the quality of education in the UAE. The 10-level QFEmirates allows for alignment with national qualifications frameworks in other countries.

The NQA signed bilateral referencing agreements aligning the QFEmirates with the Qualifications and Credit Framework (UK: England and Northern Ireland), the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (UK: England, Wales, and Northern Ireland), and the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. The NQA and Australian Qualifications Authority completed a joint technical report mapping the level descriptors of the two countries' national qualifications frameworks.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The key features of the QFEmirates are as follows:

- The QFEmirates is composed of 10 levels, from Certificate 1 to Doctorate (see Table 88) covering all education sectors. Each level represents a hierarchy of relative difficulty, complexity, and depth. The higher the qualifications framework level, the greater the challenge and the demands made on the learner in order to be awarded a qualification. The QFEmirates allows comparisons between all UAE and international qualifications.
- The QFEmirates is based on what a learner has learned (learning outcomes), not what they have been taught.
- Learning outcomes in the QFEmirates are expressed in terms of strands of learning outcomes that reflect the knowledge, skills, and

competence a learner is expected to achieve at the respective level, for each qualification.

- A set of learning outcomes for each level is referred to as a 'level descriptor'.
- The QFEmirates requires the common titling of qualifications and adding credit value to awards to ensure that employers, learners, and the public understand the nature of the qualification and that they can be readily aligned and compared.
- A notional value of 15 hours (with additional study time hours) per credit has been adopted in the QFEmirates.
- Key competences required for effective participation and performance in the workplace, learning, and everyday life are referred to as CoreLife Skills in the QFEmirates. There are eight CoreLife Skills in the QFEmirates.

The NQA participated in the *Global Study on Level Descriptors* initiated by UNESCO following the *Third International Congress on TVET* held in Shanghai in 2012. The UAE was among seven countries across the world to be included into the study to represent a cross-cutting sample of first, second, and third generation frameworks. A study entitled *Level-setting and recognition of learning outcomes. The use of level descriptors in the twenty-first century* provides a comprehensive overview of the different ways in which learning is recognized in contemporary education and training systems with a special focus on the use of qualifications frameworks to facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes within a broader lifelong learning perspective. The study will inform the development of international guidelines on quality assurance for the recognition of qualifications based on learning outcomes.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) was established in 2010. It has independent legal status and full legal capacity to act in accordance with the establishment decree of August 2010. It is represented by the Board of Directors. The NQA works across all emirates to implement the QFEmirates and quality assure the qualifications system in the country.

The NQA works closely with various ministries, authorities, awarding bodies, education providers, and other related entities to establish and implement an internationally recognized qualifications system for the UAE, which includes a national qualifications framework, to determine the



**Table 88. National qualifications framework for the UAE (QFEmirates)**

LEVEL	PRINCIPAL QUALIFICATION TITLES USED IN THE QFEMIRATES (EACH WITH ITS OWN PROFILE)			
	GENERAL NOMENCLATURE	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)	HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)	GENERAL EDUCATION (G12 – GE)
10	Doctoral Degree	–	Doctoral	–
9	Master Degree	Applied Master	Master	–
8	Graduate Diploma	Applied Graduate Diploma	Postgraduate Diploma	–
7	Bachelor Degree	Applied Bachelor	Bachelor	–
6	Diploma*	Advanced Diploma	Higher Diploma	–
5	Diploma* / Associate Degree	Diploma	Associate Degree	–
4	Certificate*	Certificate 4	–	Secondary School Certificate (G 12)
3	Certificate*	Certificate 3	–	TBA
2	Certificate*	Certificate 2	–	–
1	Certificate*	Certificate 1	–	–

quality standards, and identify current and future labour market needs.

The NQA collaborates with industry whose role is to take the lead in shaping the future direction of TVET in the country.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The NQA conducted a recognition of prior learning (RPL) pilot project to process up to 100 cases to gain insight and deep understanding of the specific needs of the workforce and UAE citizens. The NQA worked in close cooperation with the leading UAE universities and enterprises and welcomed all RPL applicants.

The RPL pilot project included the following stages:

- identifying what the candidate knows and can do;
- matching the candidate's skills, knowledge, and experience to specific standards;

- assessing the candidate against those standards;
- crediting the candidate for skills, knowledge, and experience gained in all learning situations.

As an outcome of the project, the NQA developed national policy for RPL within the national qualifications framework. The RPL national policy caters for both the future needs of an individual and the UAE labour market needs.

The NQA's RPL project was presented at a planning meeting of the *Expert Group on Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of basic education for youth and adults as a foundation for lifelong learning* that took place in Paris (UNESCO headquarters) on 18–19 February 2016. The NQA is a member of UNESCO Expert Group on RVA. The approach, findings, and research conducted by the NQA while working on the RPL pilot project and national policy along with corresponding evidence gathered by other members of UNESCO Expert Group on RVA, serve as a basis of the *Recognition, validation and accreditation of youth and adult basic education as a foundation for lifelong learning* study.

## Recognising foreign qualifications

Recognizing foreign qualifications is one of the services the NQA offers to individuals as well as education and training providers. It falls in line with the country's strategy to achieve the quality of education and training. The objectives of the recognizing foreign qualifications policy are as follows:

- a. provide learners with a broader range of formally recognized and quality assured qualifications in the UAE;
- b. meet qualifications demands in the market from UAE employers that are not currently available in the UAE;
- c. enable Emiratis and expatriates with highly respected international qualifications to have them immediately recognized in the UAE;
- d. avoid individuals having to repeat learning when they are already qualified.

Recognizing foreign qualifications service enables education and training providers operating in the UAE to have their existing foreign qualifications aligned to the *QFEmirates*.

## NQF implementation

The relevance and currency of the *QFEmirates* is continuously monitored and maintained so that it reflects the ongoing needs of the respective stakeholders. The NQA conducts reviews and benchmarking of the *QFEmirates* against other mature qualifications systems.

The implementation of *QFEmirates* is phased as follows:

Phase 1 ran to the end of 2012 and involved testing aspects of the implementation. It focused particularly on ensuring that qualifications accredited by the Vocational Education and Training Awards Council met the quality standards required to ensure that they complied with international recognition requirements and had parity of esteem with academic qualifications. This phase enabled minor modifications to be made to the design and operation of the *QFEmirates* before full roll-out.

As part of Phase 1, other aspects of national qualification policy were developed and tested. Among them are RPL, recognition and equivalency of international qualifications found commonly in the UAE, and the alignment of the *QFEmirates* to other mature international qualifications systems and frameworks.

Phase 2 has been running from January 2013 to date.

Both phases of the implementation of the *QFEmirates* were evaluated in the first instance internally. At the end of Phase 1 and at regular intervals thereafter, it is reviewed externally by peers.

The NQA has undertaken a two-year review of the *QFEmirates*. Over the past five years, there have been changes in UAE's regulatory framework for education and training as well as an increasing commitment by leaders to long-term foresight and ambitions for the country. A first-rate education system for the UAE is one of the pillars in UAE Vision 2021. The leaders of the country have also set UAE Centennial 2071 priorities, which include the UAE offering the best education system in the world in order to empower future generations.

The overarching goal of the *QFEmirates* remains the same. The framework is to drive a world-class, flexible, responsive, and demand-led education and training system through a single integrated framework covering general education, TVET, and higher education. In turn, the system generates nationally and internationally recognized qualifications that meet the needs of industry, government, community, and learners.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), aims at increasing mobility of workforce to ensure that the most qualified people can support the collaborative development of the GCC region. Therefore, the context for a metaframework of qualifications for the region was considered appropriate. The framework will achieve consistency among Gulf education and training systems, compare and align qualifications within member states, and allow mutual recognition of qualifications and workforce transfer within the GCC region.

On behalf of the GCC, the NQA leads the development of the metaframework for the Gulf region, known as the Gulf qualifications framework (GQF). The member countries are working to develop the vision, objectives, and terms of participation for the GQF.

On 22 May 2014, the Technical Committee chaired by the NQA approved the level descriptors for the GQF.

## Important lessons and future plans

Full implementation of the QF*Emirates* will take some time and will vary between respective education sectors. In higher education, it is mandatory for institutions recognized by the Commission for Academic Accreditation to use and refer to the QF*Emirates* in their courses/programme development and promotional arrangements and activities. Institutions are required to increasingly implement the use of learning outcomes consistent with those detailed in the QF*Emirates* for respective qualifications.

The Ministry of Education is committed to the transition to the international trend and use of learning outcomes in provision of school education. The ministry aims at achieving congruence between the respective learning outcomes of the QF*Emirates* and the level associated with the Secondary School Certificate.

Further awareness of the QF*Emirates* is required. The NQA aims at raising levels of interest among organizations, employers, providers, etc. with existing non-accredited qualifications to revise them in line with the requirements of the QF*Emirates* and to be nationally recognized. In the first instance, it is expected that the majority of these

qualifications will be vocational and based on previous training courses. The areas where revisions are likely to be required will be in the definition of learning outcomes, based on the QF*Emirates* level descriptors. Although not obliged to undertake revisions, this will enable them to receive greater currency internationally and align to, for example, the EQF, the QF-EHEA, and other international frameworks.

### Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework for lifelong learning
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GQF	Gulf qualifications framework
NQA	National Qualifications Authority
QF <i>Emirates</i>	national qualifications framework for the United Arab Emirates
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework of the European higher education area
RVA	recognition, validation and accreditation
RPL	recognition of prior learning
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UAE	United Arab Emirates

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### Prepared by:

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

# UNITED KINGDOM

The UK education and training system performs relatively well according to most EU 2020 benchmarks. Participation of children aged four and above in early childhood education and care has reached 100% and student basic skills are at a high and stable level. The percentage of 15-year-olds with underachievement in reading, mathematics and science is below the EU average (17.9%, 21.9% and, respectively, 17.4% in 2015). The percentage of students who leave school early has been decreasing and has reached the EU average (10.6% in 2017); unlike in most EU countries, it is higher among native students than among those born outside the UK. The employment rates of recent graduates are above EU averages for all levels of qualification. One of the main challenges in the school system is the availability and retention of teachers; the government has increased support for training, recruiting and retaining teachers in all parts of the UK. The tertiary educational attainment rate is among the highest in the EU (48.3% in 2017), despite concerns around the high levels of student debt. Two-year 'accelerated' undergraduate degrees have been proposed as a solution to reduce the time required to obtain a degree and thus reduce university costs. Participation in study mobility programmes abroad is relatively low at 3.2% of total graduates in 2016 (compared to 9% the EU average); 50% of it has been as part of EU programmes. Initiatives to develop vocational education and training (VET) are being implemented in all parts of the UK. Efforts are focused on developing apprenticeship programmes, improving the quality of provision, the attractiveness of VET and engagement with STEM subjects. Participation in upper secondary VET has increased over recent years across the UK. Mismatches in terms of qualification level and field of study, on the one hand, and job profile on the other hand are higher compared to the EU average. Adult participation in lifelong learning is above the EU average, at 14.3% in 2017, but it has been declining. Various policy measures and initiatives in all parts of the UK aim to support retraining and upskilling of individuals across the lifespan (European Commission, 2018).

Starting in the 1980s, several qualifications frameworks were developed in the UK, partly reflecting the fact that education and qualifications policy has been devolved to the four UK nations, and partly reflecting the different needs and interests of subsectors of education and training. Between 2008 and 2015, five qualifications frameworks were operational in parallel: the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; the national qualifications framework (NQF); the qualifications and credit framework (QCF); the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS), the Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF), of which the FQHEIS is a constituent part; and the credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW), of which the FHEQ is a constituent part. The Scottish qualifications framework and the credit and qualifications framework of Wales are comprehensive frameworks covering all levels and types of qualification.

In October 2015 a new regulated qualifications framework (RQF) was introduced for England and Northern Ireland, replacing the QCF and the NQF<sup>930</sup>. The RQF covers all general and vocational qualifications regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)<sup>931</sup> and by the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment Regulation (CCEA Regulation)<sup>932</sup>. The most significant change introduced by the RQF is the lifting of standardised requirements for the design of qualifications. RQF is a descriptive framework and uses the same eight levels (plus three entry levels) as the QCF but introduces some changes in the way qualification size is calculated.

<sup>930</sup> Relevant documents: [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework)

<sup>931</sup> Ofqual: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about)

<sup>932</sup> CCEA: [http://ccea.org.uk/about\\_us/what\\_we\\_do](http://ccea.org.uk/about_us/what_we_do)

While these developments show that frameworks develop and change continuously, they also show that the visibility and overall impact of frameworks depends on the political context they operate within. This is particularly visible in England and Northern Ireland, where the existence of parallel frameworks may have partly contradicted their ability to support transparency and learning progression. The introduction of the RQF addressed this problem.

The Scottish and Welsh frameworks contrast developments in England and Northern Ireland, operating as comprehensive frameworks and setting themselves ambitious targets for lifelong learning. Evaluation of the Welsh framework, published in

2014, pointed to the importance of better integrating it into mainstream education and training policies. While the CQFW is considered a useful tool, it tends to operate on the margins of the education and training system, not as a central entry and focal point. The abolition of the QCF has influenced the CQFW: starting from 2015, all regulated qualifications in Wales refer to the new RQF level descriptors, while non-regulated qualifications (the lifelong learning pillar) continue to refer to the original CQFW descriptors. The Scottish framework, in contrast, is considered a key tool for stakeholders and is increasingly emerging as the most visible and consistent of the UK frameworks.

# England and Northern Ireland

## Introduction and context

In October 2015 a new regulated qualifications framework (RQF) was introduced for England and Northern Ireland, replacing the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) and the national qualifications framework (NQF). The RQF covers all vocational and general education qualifications regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) in England and the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment Regulation (CCEA) in Northern Ireland. It also allows for the inclusion of qualifications developed for the third sector (community and voluntary sector). The framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) covers higher education qualifications awarded by organisations with degree awarding powers, at levels 4 to 8.

The RQF uses the same eight levels (plus three entry levels) as the former QCF. Levels 4 to 8 of the RQF are comparable to those in the FHEQ. The RQF builds on the descriptors used by the QCF, partly adjusted by using European qualifications framework (EQF) descriptors.

The main difference between the QCF and the RQF lies in their respective regulatory roles and functions. The QCF was intended to be a transformational framework, with a clear regulatory role in the design and accreditation of qualifications; however, it did not always contribute to the development of fit-for-purpose qualifications. The role of the RQF is to provide a transparent description of existing qualifications, not to regulate them.

The QCF was referenced to the EQF in February 2010, as a part of the overall UK referencing process. The RQF levels have now been mapped to the EQF levels and the outcomes were the same as those in the 2010 referencing exercise. The FHEQ was self-certified to the QF-EHEA in 2008, and it will be formally referenced to the EQF in 2019. An updated referencing report covering both the RQF and the FHEQ is planned for 2019.

## Policy objectives

The (now abolished) QCF had been formally introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2008 as part of the UK vocational qualifications

reform programme with four official aims (Ofqual, 2008):

- a. ensure a wider range of achievements can be recognised within a more inclusive framework;
- b. establish a framework that is more responsive to individual and employer needs;
- c. establish a simpler qualifications framework that is easier for all users to understand;
- d. reduce the burden of bureaucracy in the accreditation and assessment of qualifications.

An Ofqual review in 2013–14 of how the QCF rules were working found that they did not, in all cases, support the design of good qualifications. It concluded that (Ofqual, 2014):

- a. The QCF provided a structure within which the relative size and value of qualifications could be expressed using consistent terminology.
- b. The level structure worked well and the eight levels and three entry levels were suggested to be kept.
- c. The qualifications framework made it possible to explain to learners how qualifications related to each other.

While the transparency functions of the QCF were seen as positive, its regulatory role was criticised (Ofqual, 2014).

- a. Though the structure of the QCF was designed to support credit transfer, in practice there were very low levels of take-up for credit transfer and the projected benefits of a credit system were not realised.
- b. Unit sharing<sup>933</sup> did not contribute to reducing the number of qualifications; after the introduction of the QCF, the number of qualifications increased.
- c. There was a feeling that the requirements for awarding organisations to unit share damaged innovation and development.
- d. The regulatory arrangements imposed an approach to assessment which required students to satisfy all assessment criteria; this led to over-assessment.
- e. The overall validity of qualifications was not sufficiently addressed; the focus on unit assessment drew attention away from overall validity.

<sup>933</sup> To reduce the overall number of qualifications, the QCF introduced the principle of 'unit sharing', requiring awarding organisations to share units adding up to qualifications. Shared units were intended to be available in a 'unit bank' to be used as building blocks by awarding organisations. Ofqual reported that organisations were reluctant to engage in the development of these shared units and that this lack of commitment had a negative impact on development and innovation.

As a result, and as part of a policy to devolve responsibility to awarding organisations and learning providers, the new RQF was introduced (after public consultation) as a simple, descriptive framework aiming to help individuals understand better how qualifications relate to each other. It aims to achieve transparency of qualifications by setting consistent measures of size (how long, typically, a learner takes to study and be assessed for a qualification) and level of difficulty.

The new framework replaces the QCF and the NQF and includes all qualifications regulated by Ofqual in England and CCEA Regulation in Northern Ireland. The existing Ofqual handbook *General conditions of recognition* (Ofqual, 2017) sets a range of requirements and principles for qualifications and replaces the regulatory functions previously forming part of the QCF. As stated by Ofqual, 'lifting the rules means that high quality vocational qualifications can be designed around the needs of employers, rather than fitting to the prescriptive QCF rules'<sup>934</sup>.

The introduction of the RQF reflects experiences gained with the QCF: it retains key transparency functions but plays a limited role in regulation of qualifications. The framework is now an integrated part of the regulated qualification system in England and Northern Ireland, aiming to ensure access, transfer and progression, validation of prior learning and quality assurance. Its design aims to allow learners of all abilities to access qualifications, from entry level to level 8. The general conditions of recognition require awarding organisations to offer qualifications that have progression routes and include a condition on the recognition of prior learning, providing a mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The RQF is based on the following principles (Ofqual, 2015):

- a. The levelling approach introduced by the QCF is continued: all qualifications should have a level; this level should be under review; and this revision should take place through a managed process.

- b. The level descriptors of the QCF are simplified, not including a separate section on autonomy and accountability.
- c. All qualifications registered in the framework are assigned a measure of size, expressed in total qualification time (TQT) and guided learning hours (GLH).
- d. If recognition of prior learning (RPL) is allowed, awarding organisations are required to have and publish a policy on it.
- e. Allocation of credits to qualifications is no longer compulsory.

The RQF includes an entry level (subdivided into entry 1 to 3) and levels 1 to 8. A level can be assigned to a qualification and to a component of a qualification using level descriptors. It is also possible to assign more than one level to a qualification, provided that there is a clear rationale and 'the range of achievement recognised by the qualification is sufficient to span more than one level' (Ofqual, 2017)<sup>935</sup>. Levels 4 to 8 are consistent with the levels of the FHEQ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The level descriptors<sup>936</sup> are expressed in terms of learning outcomes and provide a general, shared understanding of learning and achievement at each of the eight levels and three entry levels. They are designed to be used across a wide range of learning contexts, and many have an 'and/or' construction indicating knowledge and skills associated with the study of a subject or in preparation for a job. The RQF level descriptors build on, but simplify, the descriptors used by the former QCF and the EQF. While the QCF operated with three categories – knowledge and understanding; application and action; autonomy and accountability – the RQF operates with only two: knowledge and understanding; and skills. The category for 'autonomy and accountability' was not included in the RQF due to the difficulty associated with aligning knowledge and/or skills with autonomy and accountability in some job roles. This is illustrated in [Table 89](#).

<sup>934</sup> UK Government web page of the consultation on After the QCF: a new qualifications framework (go to Consultation description): [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework)

<sup>935</sup> See Section E of Ofqual handbook: Design and development of qualifications: [www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook/section-e-design-and-development-of-qualifications](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook/section-e-design-and-development-of-qualifications)

<sup>936</sup> The level descriptors are available in the Ofqual handbook: [www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook/section-e-design-and-development-of-qualifications#level-descriptors](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook/section-e-design-and-development-of-qualifications#level-descriptors)

**Table 89. Descriptors for level 1 of the RQF**

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE DESCRIPTOR (THE HOLDER...)	SKILLS DESCRIPTOR (THE HOLDER CAN...)
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has basic factual knowledge of a subject and/or knowledge of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined routine tasks and address simple problems</li> <li>Is aware of aspects of information relevant to the area of work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use basic cognitive and practical skills to complete well-defined routine tasks and procedures</li> <li>Select and use relevant information</li> <li>Identify whether actions have been effective</li> </ul>

Source: OFQUAL, 2017.

'Size' in the RQF refers to the estimated total amount of time it could typically take to study and be assessed for a qualification. Awarding organisations must indicate the total qualification time (TQT) and guided learning hours (GLH) for all qualifications<sup>937</sup>. The concept of 'guided learning hours' (GLH)<sup>938</sup> refers to all activities completed by the learner under the direct instruction or supervision of a lecturer, supervisor or tutor, whether through physical presence or electronic means. Total qualification time (TQT) is made up of the guided learning hours plus all other time taken in preparation, study or any other form of participation in education or training but not under the direct supervision of a lecturer, supervisor or tutor.

The RQF downplays the role of credits. Awarding organisations can attribute credits to qualifications, but are not obliged to do so. The credit value of a qualification is calculated by dividing total qualification time (TQT) by 10. If credits are calculated these should be included in the qualification specification. Any qualification component to which credit is assigned should also be levelled.

England and Northern Ireland have had a long history of using the learning outcomes approach even before the introduction of the QCF and RQF. Under the QCF, awarding organisations for vocational qualifications were required to design qualifications based on units of learning outcomes, credits and assessment criteria, and to share qualification units by submitting them to a 'unit

bank'. A major staff development programme trained key stakeholders in the writing of learning outcomes and assessment criteria. While the regulatory design rules for qualifications were lifted with the introduction of the RQF, and the 'unit bank' was dissolved, awarding organisations continue to develop qualifications using units, learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and to build larger qualifications from smaller ones. This enables the accumulation of units of learning outcomes (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The QCF had been jointly developed, tested and implemented by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England; the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland; and the Welsh Assembly Government in Wales. These regulatory bodies were responsible for regulating qualifications within the QCF and NQF. When the QCA was disbanded following the change of government in 2011, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) took over the main responsibility for qualifications and framework developments in England; since 2015 it has been responsible for the implementation of the RQF. Set up in April 2010 under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009<sup>939</sup> as a non-ministerial government department reporting directly to the Parliament, Ofqual is the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and, until 2016, it was also the regulator of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. In May 2016, CCEA Regulation took over the regulation of all qualifications awarded in Northern Ireland. Ofqual

<sup>937</sup> Currently, this condition does not apply to GCSEs, GCE AS and A levels; Ofqual-regulated apprenticeship end-point assessments; and certain qualifications undergoing withdrawal (Ofqual, 2017).

<sup>938</sup> In the RQF, total qualification time (TQT) replaced the notional learning time that was used in the QCF, while the concept of guided learning hours (GLH) from the QCF was maintained.

<sup>939</sup> The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/22/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/22/contents)



and CCEA Regulation host the EQF respective national coordination points (EQF NCPs) in England and Northern Ireland.

The introduction of the RQF took into account opinions from key stakeholders responding to two public consultations on the QCF and its withdrawal in 2014<sup>940</sup> and in 2015<sup>941</sup>. A total of 119 responses were registered in the latter: 104 from awarding organisations and 15 from individuals, with each response carrying equal weight. The transition from the QCF to the RQF has also involved a high degree of consultation, collaboration and communication between a range of stakeholders (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- a. the qualifications regulators and the recognised awarding organisations;
- b. the recognised awarding organisations and approved centres/providers (schools, further education colleges, training organisations);
- c. the awarding organisations and employer and sector organisations involved in the development of national occupational standards and qualifications;
- d. awarding organisations and the third sector.

Awarding organisations who want to offer regulated qualifications in England and Northern Ireland must be recognised by Ofqual and CCEA Regulation (respectively) and meet the regulators' general criteria for recognition. Once recognised, awarding organisations can submit qualifications that comply with the general conditions for recognition to the Ofqual *Register of regulated qualifications*<sup>942</sup>.

Responsibility for the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) lies with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), a registered charity. QAA is included in the European quality assurance register for higher education (EQAR) and in a 2018 assessment by the Board of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), it was found to be in full compliance with all European Standards and Guidelines (2015) criteria.

Prior to 2017, sector skills councils (SSCs)<sup>943</sup> were involved in the development of qualifications in the

UK through their work on national occupational standards (NOS) underpinning national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish vocational qualifications (SVQs). From 2016–17, skills policy in England has shifted away from national occupational standards<sup>944</sup>. Consequently, the SSCs and sector bodies no longer have a role in English apprenticeship development and the capacity of these organisations has dramatically reduced. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills, which managed and maintained the UK NOS database and commissioned SSCs and sector bodies to develop and update UK NOS, closed in March 2017. The new Institute for Apprenticeships was established in England to ensure high-quality apprenticeship standards.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>945</sup>

While there is no specific national strategy devoted to the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in England and Northern Ireland, and no system to coordinate validation activities taking place in the different sectors, there are a number of routes through which learners can have their non-formal and informal learning recognised and validated.

The *General conditions for recognition* of both Ofqual and CCEA regulation refer to recognition of prior learning (RPL) in relation to formal, regulated qualifications included in the RQF. RPL is mainly used for initial assessment of a learner to tailor the learning offer; this is a generally accepted practice leading to an amendment to the requirements that a learner must satisfy before assessment or before award, and to a reduction of funding so that only the activities that are delivered are paid for. Awarding organisations offering RPL in this context are required to set out and publish their RPL policy following the guidance to the *General conditions for recognition* (Ofqual, 2017).

<sup>940</sup> Relevant documents at: [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/withdrawing-qcf-regulatory-arrangements](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/withdrawing-qcf-regulatory-arrangements)

<sup>941</sup> Relevant documents, including an analysis of the responses, are available at: [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework).

<sup>942</sup> Ofqual's *Register of regulated qualifications*: <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>

<sup>943</sup> SSCs are independent, employer-led organisations in specific economic sectors; currently there are 15 SSCs in the UK.

<sup>944</sup> Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, however, have retained NOS as the basis for work-based and vocational qualifications and apprenticeships. Skills Development Scotland has taken over the management of NOS and related activity on an interim basis, on behalf of the devolved administrations. The contents of the NOS database remain publicly available and employers throughout the UK can continue to use NOS if they so choose, although they are not a mandatory requirement in England for either qualifications or apprenticeships.

<sup>945</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

There is also a long tradition of recognising prior learning in higher education. RPL is referred to in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Quality Code for higher education<sup>946</sup>, and it can be used for access to university programmes, exemption and award. It is often linked to the award of credits and varies both across and within higher education institutions. The *Quality code* brought together RPL and assessment of formal learning in one chapter, aiming to demonstrate that both share common quality assurance principles. However, data is not collected to show the extent to which RPL takes place. In England, progress and achievement in non-regulated learning (mainly adult and community learning) can be recognised through a five-stage process, complementary to RPL, known as RARPA (recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning). Using RARPA standards is mandatory for non-regulated training provision funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), but the system is now also used by some providers offering accredited/regulated learning. Though this does not lead to any form of certification, it is a method of quality assurance of non-regulated learning provision and supports the transition from non-formal to formal learning. RPL and RARPA are referred to in the ESFA's funding rules which apply in England to providers from across the private and third sectors.

On the labour market, national vocational qualifications (NVQs) are work-related, outcomes-based, competence-oriented qualifications based on national occupational standards. They can offer people in work or in apprenticeship an opportunity to validate workplace learning. Assessment is through evidence of performance against work-related tasks, rather than formal examinations, and there are no time limits for completion of NVQs, no age limits and no special entry requirements. However, it has been noted that the NVQ system has promoted VNFIL only to a limited extent, partly because RPL is perceived as costly and NVQ learning outcomes are too narrowly defined. There are also separate validation initiatives in the third sector<sup>947</sup>.

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<sup>946</sup> The QAA Quality Code for higher education was introduced in the academic year 2012/13 and applies to England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. After extensive revision, a new Quality Code was published in March 2018: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code).

<sup>947</sup> An example is the Soft outcomes universal learning (SOUL) record® (<https://soulrecord.org>), a toolkit using questionnaires and worksheets to collate data on soft outcome progression. It is used by organisations in the third sector for quality reviews and to support funding applications (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

One strength of the current RPL arrangements in England and Northern Ireland is the link to the RQF, allowing non-formal and informal learning to be converted into a recognised qualification with real currency. In addition, the qualifications regulator has oversight of (and provides quality assurance of) qualifications acquired via RPL. Qualifications awarded through RPL (and the standards used) are the same as those earned through formal learning opportunities, although it may not be possible to achieve the same graded outcomes; instead, the outcomes of RPL are either 'pass' or 'fail'. Consequently, 'there is no question of whether the outcomes of validation are 'trusted' by stakeholders and in society, since they are the same outcomes' (European Commission et al, forthcoming).

However, there is no single centralised policy on RPL or VNFIL provision; responsibility for deciding on and implementing validation arrangements has been devolved to the awarding organisations<sup>948</sup> and learning providers. The process is designed to be self-governing and allow for RPL validation where it is relevant, but not to impose an overly rigid model on those who deliver qualifications. The advantage is that each validation process, and even each individual procedure of validation, can be tailored to the learner(s) in question. Some argue that this way of validation can better respond to changes in the labour market. The potential disadvantage is that, without a greater drive at national level, and without a centralised system for identifying where RPL is available or if a particular qualification can be obtained via RPL, it is likely that the number of people actually benefiting from RPL opportunities will remain low. There is no data to show the extent to which RPL takes place in England and Northern Ireland, but it is thought that, in practice, it is relatively small-scale.

For the use of RPL to increase, further support and awareness-raising amongst providers and other practitioners involved in working with learners would be needed. This includes resources in terms of staff numbers and staff development, as well as a funding methodology which supports the process and makes it a viable option for providers to offer.

## NQF implementation

The RQF was introduced in October 2015 after extensive consultation with key stakeholders. It replaced the NQF and the QCF and it covers all regulated qualifications from general and vocational

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<sup>948</sup> Ofqual and CCEA Regulation recognise 155 and, respectively, 99 awarding organisations which can award credits and qualifications in England and Northern Ireland.

education in England and Northern Ireland<sup>949</sup>. The RQF has now reached an operational stage and forms an integrated part of the regulated qualifications system.

RQF implementation is supported by the *General conditions of recognition and statutory guidance* (Ofqual, 2017), which ensure the quality assurance of all qualifications entering the RQF from a development, delivery and awarding/certification perspective. Awarding organisations that want to offer regulated qualifications in England and Northern Ireland must meet the general criteria for recognition and be recognised by the qualifications regulators (Ofqual and CCEA Regulation). Once recognised, awarding organisations can submit qualifications compliant with the *General conditions of recognition* to the *Ofqual Register of regulated qualifications*<sup>950</sup>. All qualifications entered into the register become part of the RQF. The *General conditions of recognition* require awarding organisations to take a consistent approach to determining the level and describing the size of regulated qualifications. All qualifications registered in the framework were required to have total qualification time assigned by the end of 2017.

Several operational activities were closely associated with RQF implementation: accreditation of certain types of qualifications; auditing of awarding organisations against regulatory requirements, including their use of framework level descriptors and the way they describe the size of their qualifications; recognition of awarding organisations to offer certain types of qualification; and policy development<sup>951</sup>.

The transition from the QCF to the RQF was found to be less challenging than the implementation of the QCF. It did not require radical overhaul of all qualifications, as with the introduction of the QCF, and the QCF regulatory requirements were not replaced with another set of prescriptive rules. The *General conditions of recognition* were updated, and criteria and guidance, and a transition timetable, were developed by Ofqual and published widely for awarding organisations to ensure compliance with the new RQF conditions. There have been key challenges in implementing the RQF: managing changes smoothly in a planned and phased transition process with realistic timescales;

coordinating and managing communications with awarding organisations; and managing the technical aspects of transition, particularly IT changes (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The *Ofqual Register of regulated qualifications*<sup>952</sup> has been set up and now includes qualifications from general education up to RQF level 3 (EQF level 4) and VET qualifications (vocational and occupational) ranging from entry level to level 8. The EQF level is displayed along with the RQF level for each qualification in the register. The RQF level is indicated on qualification documents<sup>953</sup> and Europass certificate supplements for all qualifications included in the framework; the indication of the EQF level is optional, at the decision of awarding organisations. A number of surveys were conducted among awarding organisations and employers to gauge interest in the inclusion of EQF levels on learner qualification documents but this was found not to be necessary (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Ofqual and CCEA Regulation work on qualifications and on the RQF is promoted through their websites, publications, web-based leaflets<sup>954</sup>, consultations and presentations. The regulators also communicate regularly with awarding organisations through email circulars, the Federation of Awarding Bodies, the regulators' annual conference, and attendance at the awarding organisations' forums and conferences. The prioritised target groups are recognised awarding organisations, fellow regulators in Wales and Scotland, and relevant government departments and funding agencies. When the QCF was withdrawn in 2015, a significant communications campaign took place to ensure the general public had access to clear information as required<sup>955</sup>. With

<sup>949</sup> There are 17 783 and 11 759 regulated qualifications available in England and Northern Ireland, respectively (January 2019).

<sup>950</sup> The *Ofqual Register of regulated qualifications*: <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>

<sup>951</sup> Cedefop (2015). *Survey on the sustainability and visibility of NQFs* (unpublished).

<sup>952</sup> *Ofqual Register of regulated qualifications*: <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>

<sup>953</sup> In the *General conditions of recognition* there is a condition on 'Requirements on qualification titling' which specifies that RQF levels must be included in the qualification title in the qualifications register, in all awarding organisation documentation and on learner qualification certificates.

<sup>954</sup> Such as:

Ofqual 'postcards' outlining Ofqual's work, with an emphasis on current reforms to qualifications in England: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/your-qualification-our-regulation-gcse-as-and-a-level-reforms](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/your-qualification-our-regulation-gcse-as-and-a-level-reforms)  
Ofqual's publication describing the new RQF: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulated-qualifications-framework-a-postcard](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulated-qualifications-framework-a-postcard)  
Ofqual handbook: *General conditions of recognition*: [www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook)

<sup>955</sup> This took place mainly via the recognised awarding organisations. For example, Ofqual held a public consultation about the rules and guidance that should be in place following the removal of the QCF; there were

the RQF in operation, Ofqual ensures information availability to stakeholders. It is the responsibility of awarding organisations to communicate with their approved centres/providers and with employers, and it is the centres'/providers' responsibility to communicate with learners, employers and parents.

Evaluation of the RQF has not yet been undertaken. It is estimated that there is a good level of awareness and use of the framework among education and training institutions and providers, and recognition authorities and bodies. Knowledge and use of the RQF is more limited among labour market stakeholders and guidance and counselling practitioners. While the framework itself is little known by the general public, there are pockets of good awareness and understanding of RQF levels and what they refer to. For example, GCSEs and A levels are widely understood in their own right and they are not widely referred to as L1/2/3 qualifications, but their vocational and technical alternatives are generally referred to by learners and employers using the RQF level. Levels are widely used in school and college prospectuses, often in job advertisements and job descriptions, and qualification level requirements are sometimes included in licences to practise and professional requirements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The influence of the RQF (and its predecessor QCF) has been noted in several areas. The QCF played a major role in the redesign of vocational qualifications using units of learning outcomes and assessment criteria and being assigned a QCF level and credit value. Despite the withdrawal of the QCF rules, awarding organisations continue to design qualifications using units, learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The RQF has also helped increase permeability of the education and training system, strengthening dialogue and cooperation between sectors and institutions. In Northern Ireland, regulated VET qualifications (referred to as professional and technical qualifications), which become part of the RQF, are required to have support from qualification users (providers, employers and sector bodies). These bodies and the awarding organisations must work cooperatively on the review and renewal of national occupational standards for work-based RQF qualifications and Northern Ireland apprenticeship programmes. Levels 4 to 8 of the RQF are comparable to levels 4 to 8 of the FHEQ, which reduces barriers between education and training sectors, allowing learners to move between pathways at these levels. The RQF

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119 responses – 104 from awarding organisations, and 15 from individuals – with each response carrying equal weight.

and the *General conditions of recognition* play an important role in parity of esteem between VET and academic qualifications, as both types appear at all levels of the framework and they can only enter the RQF if they are regulated and subject to rigorous quality assurance measures. The RQF level descriptors can also be used to provide a broad comparison of foreign qualifications; UK-Naric takes account of the RQF levels in their recognition work. The UK and Irish EQF NCP, regulators and quality assurance bodies produce a broad comparison leaflet<sup>956</sup>, which shows level-to-level comparisons in the UK and Ireland, and indicates how UK and Irish qualifications frameworks relate to qualifications frameworks in Europe.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The QCF had been referenced to the EQF in February 2010 as a part of the overall UK referencing process (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency et al., 2010). An update on developments in England and Northern Ireland was presented in the EQF advisory group in February 2019, and an updated referencing report to reference the RQF and FHEQ<sup>957</sup> to the EQF is planned to be presented in June 2019. It will cover the transition from the QCF to the RQF, changes in the design, content and assessment of apprenticeships, along with the introduction of degree apprenticeships in England and the introduction of higher apprenticeships in Northern Ireland.

## Important lessons and future plans

The changes introduced in England and Northern Ireland in recent years aimed to increase the validity, flexibility and value of regulated qualifications. The review of the QCF identified a number of problems with the *Regulatory arrangements for the qualifications and credit framework* (Ofqual, 2008) and the way in which they affected qualification design, specifically (Ofqual, 2014):

- a. The structure of the QCF had been designed to support credit transfer; in practice, there were very low levels of take-up of credit transfer and the projected benefits of a credit-based system were not realised.

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<sup>956</sup> Ofqual et al. (2017). This leaflet is updated regularly and can be accessed at: [http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/accreditation/guidance/Qualifications\\_can\\_cross\\_Boundaries.pdf](http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/accreditation/guidance/Qualifications_can_cross_Boundaries.pdf)

<sup>957</sup> The FHEQ was self-certified to the QF-EHEA in 2008, but it was not referenced to the EQF.

- b. Unit sharing did not have the desired effect of reducing the number of vocational qualifications; there were over 10,000 more qualifications than in 2008 when the QCF regulatory arrangements were launched.
- c. There was a strong feeling that the requirement to unit share had significantly damaged qualification innovation and development.
- d. The *Regulatory arrangements for the QCF* imposed a mastery approach to assessment, which required students to satisfy all of the assessment criteria as evidence that they met all of the learning outcomes; this worked against the use of compensation and could lead to over-assessment at the unit level.
- e. The unit-level focus on assessment was not easily compatible with synoptic and end-point assessment which could be effective forms of assessment of some vocational qualifications.
- f. There was confusion about vocational qualifications which were not developed to meet the *Regulatory arrangements for the QCF* and about what this meant for qualifications frameworks.

This, together with the related public consultations in 2014 and 2015, brought agreement that the rules governing the design of qualifications should be abandoned, devolving responsibility for qualification design to awarding organisations and learning providers. At the same time, the transparency function of the framework was maintained in

the newly introduced RQF. The updated *General conditions of recognition* (Ofqual, 2017) focus on what the awarding bodies and their qualifications should achieve, and not on how they should achieve it. They are considered as a best practice quality assurance manual for qualification development, delivery and review. The key requirements of the RQF are that the size and the level of all regulated qualifications are described in a consistent way.

The introduction of the RQF could be interpreted as a change in approach in line with the trends in NQF development in other European countries: a move towards comprehensive frameworks, less prescriptive in nature, and with a strong role of communication, as opposed to regulation.

Qualifications frameworks have existed for several years in England and Northern Ireland, and it is expected that the RQF will remain a permanent feature of the skills and education system. There is a diverse qualifications market with a range of qualifications for users to choose from, and the RQF provides a good basis for understanding the relationships between them<sup>958</sup>. While there is continued commitment to international portability of qualifications following the UK's exit from the EU<sup>959</sup>, the uncertainty around it is seen (October 2018) as the most evident challenge for future RQF implementation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

**Table 90. Regulated qualifications framework (RQF) for England and Northern Ireland**

RQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS*
8	Technical/vocational qualifications level 8	8
7	Technical/vocational qualifications level 7	7
6	Technical/vocational qualifications level 6	6
5	Technical/vocational qualifications level 5 Higher national diplomas (HND)	5
4	Technical/vocational qualifications level 4 Higher national certificates (HNC)	5
3	Technical/vocational qualifications level 3 GCE AS and A levels	4

(Continued)

<sup>958</sup> Cedefop (2015). *Survey on the sustainability and visibility of NQFs* (unpublished).

<sup>959</sup> Ofqual and CCEA regulation (2019). *Referencing the RQF and the FHEQ to the EQF*. Update to the EQF advisory group, January 2019.

**Table 90. Regulated qualifications framework (RQF) for England and Northern Ireland (Continued)**

RQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS*
<b>2</b>	Technical/vocational qualifications level 2 GCSEs at grade A*–C and from 2017 grade 4–9 (England) Functional skills level 2 (England) Essential skills qualifications (Northern Ireland)	3
<b>1</b>	Technical/vocational qualifications level 1 GCSEs at grade D–G and from 2017 grade 1–3 (England) Functional skills level 1 (England) Essential skills qualifications (Northern Ireland)	2
<b>Entry level 3</b>	Entry level certificates (sublevel 3) Functional skills entry level (England) (English, mathematics and ICT) Essential skills qualifications (Northern Ireland)	1
<b>Entry levels 1–2</b>	Entry level certificates (sublevels 1 and 2)	–

(\*) The EQF levels are indicative, as the 2010 referencing report referred to the QCF, not the RQF. An updated referencing report will be available in 2019.

Source: Adapted from Ofqual; QAA; SCQF; CCEA Regulation; Welsh government & QQI (2017). *Qualifications can cross boundaries: a guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland.*

Abbreviations		
		NVQ national vocational qualifications
		Ofqual Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
CCEA	Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment	QAA Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
CQFW	credit and qualifications framework of Wales	QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
EQF	European qualifications framework	QCF qualifications and credit framework
FHEQ	framework for higher education qualifications	RARPA recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning
FQHEIS	framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland	RPL recognition of prior learning
GCE A level	general certificate of education at advanced level	RQF regulated qualifications framework
GCE AS level	general certificate of education at advanced subsidiary level	SCQF Scottish credit and qualifications framework
GCSE	general certificate of secondary education	SSCs sector skills councils
NCP	national coordination point	STEM science, technology, engineering and mathematics
NOS	national occupational standards	VET vocational education and training
NQF	national qualifications framework	VNFIL validation of non-formal and informal learning

## Main sources of information

- Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) – acts as the EQF NCP for England: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about)
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment Northern Ireland – acts as EQF NCP for Northern Ireland: [http://ccea.org.uk/about\\_us/what\\_we\\_do](http://ccea.org.uk/about_us/what_we_do)
- Register of regulated qualifications*: <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>
- QCA et al. (2010). *Referencing the qualifications frameworks of the United Kingdom to the European qualifications framework*: <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/2011-05-16-uk-efq-referencing-report.pdf>

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- Ofqual (2015). *After the QCF: a new qualifications framework: decisions on conditions and guidance for the regulated qualifications framework (RQF)*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/461401/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework-decisions-on-conditions-and-guidance-for-the-rqf.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/461401/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework-decisions-on-conditions-and-guidance-for-the-rqf.pdf)
- Ofqual (2017). *General conditions of recognition*. Ofqual handbook. [www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook)
- Ofqual et al. (2017). *Qualifications can cross boundaries: a guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland*. [http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/accreditation/guidance/Qualifications\\_can\\_cross\\_Boundaries.pdf](http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/accreditation/guidance/Qualifications_can_cross_Boundaries.pdf)
- Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency et al. (2010). *Report: referencing the qualifications frameworks of the United Kingdom to the European qualifications framework*. <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/2011-05-16-uk-efq-referencing-report.pdf>

## Introduction and context

The Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF) was originally introduced in 2001 and has since been gradually revised and refined. It is maintained by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP), a company (and charity) set up in 2006, formally independent of national education and training authorities. The 12-level framework covers all types of qualification and seeks to provide people of all ages and circumstances with better understanding of Scottish qualifications and the role they play in lifelong learning and workforce development. Scotland rarely uses legislation for matters related to education and the SCQF is not a regulatory framework; it currently underpins all Government policies and is fully integrated in the Scottish education, training and qualification landscape. Apart from providing a set of levels and level descriptors, the SCQF is defined through its qualification database<sup>960</sup>, the SCQF credit system<sup>961</sup>, arrangements for recognition of prior learning<sup>962</sup> and extensive guidance and support material for different stakeholders (employers, educators, learners, and parents)<sup>963</sup>. The framework was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in 2010, as a part of the overall UK referencing process. An updated report for referencing the Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF) to the EQF was presented in December 2018. The SCQF is fully operational and a number of studies looking at its impact across different sectors have been conducted. SCQF levels are indicated in all qualification documents awarded. While playing an important role in promoting transparency of national (and international) qualifications, the SCQF is increasingly focusing on level descriptors as a product in their own right and

as a tool for development, for example supporting recruitment and workforce developments.

## Policy objectives

The SCQF is seen as ‘an absolutely dependable single reference point for everyone, no matter where they are from’<sup>964</sup>. It aims to support lifelong learning by:

- a. helping people of all ages and circumstances to understand how to progress through appropriate education and training over their lifetime, to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential;
- b. clarifying entry and exit points for qualifications and programmes of learning at all levels;
- c. making transparent the level and credit (size) of different types of qualification;
- d. enabling credit transfer between qualifications or learning programmes to assist learners to build on previous successes.

It also aims to enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand:

- a. the full range of Scottish qualifications;
- b. how qualifications relate to each other and to other forms of assessed learning;
- c. how different types of qualification can contribute to improving the development and utilisation of workforce skills;
- d. how Scottish qualifications relate to those in other countries;
- e. how using SCQF level descriptors can assist with qualifications development and benchmarking skills and experience in all sectors.

The SCQF addresses these objectives by making the overall system of qualifications and relevant programmes of learning easier to understand,

<sup>960</sup> SCQF qualification database: <http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/search-database/>

<sup>961</sup> SCQF credit system: <http://scqf.org.uk/media/1118/credit-point-explained-march-2017-web.pdf>

<sup>962</sup> Arrangements for the recognition of prior learning: <http://scqf.org.uk/more/rpl/>

<sup>963</sup> Guidance and support material for employers: <http://scqf.org.uk/employers/>

<sup>964</sup> Quote from the Deputy First Minister at the SCQF conference *Linking the learning journey*, Glasgow, 22 February 2018. <http://scqf.org.uk/news-blog/news/successful-scqf-conference-linking-the-learning-journey/>



and by providing a national vocabulary for describing learning opportunities. As one of the oldest comprehensive national qualifications frameworks (NQF) in Europe (and the world), the SCQF illustrates the potential of frameworks as instruments for development and, to some extent, reform. The SCQF has gradually moved beyond a simple 'communication' role (Raffe, 2009 and 2011) and established itself as a reference for revision and renewal of education and training (*curricula* and standards) and for human resource development.

The SCQF is an 'open framework' in that it explicitly addresses the private sector and employers, and encourages these to have their training provisions recognised under the framework, through third-party credit rating. The benefits for employers and employees include (SCQF, no date):

- a. national and EU-level recognition of in-house training and comparability with nationally recognised qualifications;
- b. recognition of staff learning, linked to increased morale and retention;
- c. increased credibility of the organisation, attraction of new recruits of high calibre, and competitive advantage.

In addition to its original objectives, more recent aims were set to promote fair work and social justice, reflecting policies in these areas<sup>965</sup>. The SCQF provides tools and resources to recognise prior learning, support progression and improve social inclusion.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The SCQF is a comprehensive framework covering all types of qualification including general education, higher education, and vocational education. It also covers a range of non-formal programmes from all sectors and providers, including community learning and development, social partners, employers, professional bodies and public services. Some international qualifications, such as those from Microsoft, are also included. The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS) is a constitutive part of the SCQF. As is also the case in the other UK countries, the Scottish approach is unit-based, supported by credit points, and allows for the inclusion and levelling of qualifications of differing character and size. This also explains the high number of qualifications included in the SCQF database (around 11 500).

<sup>965</sup> An example of such policies is the *Fair work convention* (website currently under reconstruction).

One SCQF credit point corresponds to a notional 10 hours of learning, based on the time judged to be required for an 'average' learner to achieve the learning outcomes.

The framework has 12 levels ranging from entry at SCQF level 1, up to doctorate at level 12. The first three levels are seen as important in addressing individuals with particular learning needs and as an important part of an overall lifelong learning strategy. For some, these levels can function as a way back to formal education and training. The different levels indicate the level of difficulty of a particular qualification; increases in levels relate to factors such as:

- a. the complexity and depth of knowledge and understanding;
- b. links to associated academic, vocational or professional practice;
- c. the degree of integration, independence and creativity required;
- d. the range and sophistication of application/practice;
- e. the role(s) taken in relation to other learners/workers in carrying out tasks.

Learning outcomes have been used in Scotland since the 1980s, even before the adoption of the SCQF. However, the introduction of the SCQF has promoted the use of learning outcomes in learning programmes in different sectors. To be included in the framework and in the SCQF database, all qualifications, programmes and units of qualifications have to be described in terms of learning outcomes and to be credit rated: they must have a level and credit value allocated. The Scottish level descriptors were revised in 2012 though not as a radical departure from the past; revision can be seen as part of continuous evolution of the framework based on experiences gained. The level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge and understanding; practice (applied knowledge and understanding); generic cognitive skills; communication, ICT and numeric skills; and autonomy, accountability and working with others.

The SCQF has also been instrumental in the creation of recognised pathways, allowing learners to move more flexibly from one sector to another. The Scottish Government has recognised that repeating levels and duplication of SCQF credit is not efficient for the learner, nor for the system. Maximising the multiple entry points of the four-year Honours Degree at SCQF level 10, both from school and from college, is seen as one way to ensure smoother transitions across sectors and a priority for improvement in the short to medium term (Scottish Government, 2018). The credit

rating of programmes, and the use of one set of level descriptors and one credit system across all sectors, has already helped to increase trust and reduce barriers between sectors. For example, someone completing a higher national certificate at SCQF level 7 in a vocational college would anticipate entering the second year of a related university degree; similarly, someone completing a higher national diploma at level 8 would enter the third year. Although important progress has been achieved over the last five years, there are still some sectors and institutions which are less proactive.

According to the SCQF Partnership<sup>966</sup>, the SCQF level descriptors are also used to provide a broad comparison of foreign qualifications, and UK-Naric take note of the SCQF levels in their recognition work. The UK and Ireland national contact points also produce a document<sup>967</sup> showing the level-to-level broad comparisons of UK and Irish qualifications, as well as how UK and Irish qualifications frameworks relate to qualifications frameworks in Europe. SCQFP has also used level comparison to complete formal referencing reports to both the Hong Kong and Bahrain frameworks<sup>968</sup>.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Scottish framework was first proposed in the 1998 Government green paper *Opportunity Scotland: a paper on lifelong learning*<sup>969</sup> and was introduced in 2001 via stakeholder agreement. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP), responsible for the development, quality assurance and promotion of the framework, was set up as a company (and charity) in 2006, aiming to do the following<sup>970</sup>:

- a. ensure that, where appropriate, all assessed learning and qualifications in Scotland are included on the SCQF;
- b. extend recognition of informal and non-formal learning;
- c. develop and promote the SCQF as a lifelong learning tool;

- d. develop relationships with other frameworks internationally.

Being formally independent of national education and training authorities, the SCQFP has ensured active engagement with the framework of a broad group of stakeholders, including qualification authorities, quality assurance bodies, universities and colleges, as well as employers. The partnership has a board of directors representing the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Universities Scotland, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, and the College Development Network. There is also a director representing employers.

A degree of ownership can be observed with the SCQF in all sectors of education and training as well as among labour market stakeholders. This reflects the broad coverage within the framework of different types and levels of qualification. Between 2001 and 2006 the priority was to level and include in the SCQF the main general, vocational and higher education qualifications. Since 2007 the SCQFP has been working with both the government and social partners to widen coverage and to include non-formal and international qualifications. Around 11 500 qualifications are currently included in the SCQF database and around 1 000 of these belong to social partners, trade unions, employers and professional bodies. The SCQFP runs regular workshops aiming to help social partners, professional bodies and employers to understand the requirements for developing qualifications and learning programmes that can be levelled and can have credit attached (credit rated).

The framework is thought to have supported some difficult discussions around access and progression between sectors, offering a common language, and helping to promote trust and reduce barriers. In addition, the Quality Committee, which oversees the integrity and quality of the SCQF, has representatives from all sectors of education in Scotland as does the SCQF Forum, which meets regularly to discuss developments in the use of the SCQF. However, keeping all sectors and institutions in the loop is seen as a key challenge, especially given limitations in staff and budget within the SCQFP. The SCQFP consists of a core team of 12 staff, of which almost half are employed part-time. Budget is provided by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council and amounted to GBP 650 000 in 2017. Additional income was generated through consultancy work and through EQF subsidies.

Engagement of employers and general education schools is considered to require more attention. To help, the SCQFP has introduced the School

<sup>966</sup> European Commission; Cedefop (2018). *Survey on implementation, communication and use of NQF/EQF* (unpublished).

<sup>967</sup> QAA Scotland et al. (2017).

<sup>968</sup> More information is available at: <http://scqf.org.uk/services-partnerships/bespoke-workshops-and-study-visits/examples-of-bespoke-services/>

<sup>969</sup> Scottish Government (1998). *Opportunity Scotland: a paper on lifelong learning*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100309211722/http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w1/llgp-00.htm>

<sup>970</sup> <http://scqf.org.uk/about-us/the-scqf-partnership/>

ambassador programme, which trains teachers and senior pupils to pass on information about the benefits of using the SCQF to other teachers, pupils, parents and carers. It has also developed and revised an employer engagement strategy, focusing efforts where they could add most value.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>971</sup>

Scotland's approach to validation (referred to as recognition of prior learning or RPL) covers prior formal, non-formal and informal learning in all sectors. The principle of RPL is well embedded in the policies and guidelines of a number of organisations, including the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland (QAA Scotland), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). While there is no single policy or strategy on RPL in Scotland, and no single governmental body responsible for it, there are guidelines, tools and resources on the benefits, opportunities and procedures for RPL, mainly delivered through the SCQFP. They include: the SCQF Partnership's Guide to RPL and RPL tool<sup>972</sup>, the *Facilitating the recognition of prior learning toolkit*<sup>973</sup>, the *SCQF handbook*<sup>974</sup> and the publication *Recognition of prior learning: national framework for Scottish higher education*<sup>975</sup>.

RPL is closely linked to the implementation of the Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF), which is intended to support both formative and summative recognition. The SCQF handbook recommends that the design and development of qualifications and learning programmes for the SCQF should support, promote and make as straightforward as possible the recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning and credit transfer,

to minimise any duplication of learning. One way to achieve this is by writing clear learning outcomes and assessment procedures for qualifications. The SCQF level descriptors are common reference points for recognising all learning that is outcome-based and quality-assured, irrespective of whether it is academic, vocational, non-formal or informal. The SCQF credit points support both flexibility and progression, and are the building blocks for credit transfer. Three types of RPL are described, and the four stages of validation – identification, documentation, assessment and certification – are likely to be used to varying extents, depending on the type of recognition taking place:

- a. RPL for personal/career development (formative recognition);
- b. RPL to gain entry to a learning programme (summative recognition);
- c. RPL for the award of SCQF credit points to gain entry with credit or advanced standing in a programme/qualification (summative recognition).

Among the strengths of the Scottish approach to RPL are its compliance with agreed standards equivalent to those for qualifications obtained through formal education, and the transparent quality assurance measures in line with existing quality assurance frameworks. The standard used involves comparison of the individual's learning against the aims and/or learning outcomes of the qualification or learning programme for which credit is being sought. The award of credit points can be carried out by SCQF credit rating bodies, within the context of clearly defined quality assurance mechanisms, and must involve a formal assessment or acceptance of evidence of learning which is quality assured. SCQF credit points can be awarded to recognise prior learning that has not already been assessed or credit rated, regardless of the context in which that learning was achieved, and they are of the same value as credit gained through other formal learning.

Most RPL activity so far has been related to higher education and vocational education. The national RPL framework for higher education attempts to locate RPL within broader developments in establishing more flexible and efficient learner journeys, a more flexible and accessible curriculum, and enabling greater participation and fair access to higher education by learners from a wide range of backgrounds. Graduate apprenticeships<sup>976</sup> are a new development set to begin from September 2018,

<sup>971</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>972</sup> SCQFP (2018). *RPL tool* is available at: <http://scqf.org.uk/guide-to-rpl/rpl-tool/>

<sup>973</sup> SCQFP (2010). *Facilitating the recognition of prior learning toolkit*. Glasgow: SCQFP. [www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/RPLToolkitUpdatedDecember2010.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/RPLToolkitUpdatedDecember2010.pdf)

<sup>974</sup> SCQFP (2015). *SCQF handbook* is available at: [www.scqf.org.uk/media/1125/scqf\\_handbook\\_web\\_final\\_2015.pdf](http://www.scqf.org.uk/media/1125/scqf_handbook_web_final_2015.pdf)

<sup>975</sup> QAA Scotland (2014). *Recognition of prior learning: national framework for Scottish higher education*. Glasgow: QAA Scotland. [www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/enhancement-and-development/recognition-of-prior-learning--framework-for-scottish-he.pdf?sfvrsn=ae7cf581\\_10](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/enhancement-and-development/recognition-of-prior-learning--framework-for-scottish-he.pdf?sfvrsn=ae7cf581_10)

<sup>976</sup> Graduate apprenticeships are work-based learning programmes at SCQF levels 9, 10 or 11 that lead to degree-level qualifications. These are nationally recognised, accredited and certificated by a national

expected to focus the attention of universities on RPL and to reinvigorate the agenda. In this context, RPL could be used for access to the programme or to award credit for competences developed in the workplace. In vocational education, RPL can be used to assess complete or partial units<sup>977</sup> of qualifications accredited by the SQA, including the Scottish vocational qualifications (SVQs). Over the past two years employers have become increasingly interested in using RPL; the SCQFP promotes it for recruitment, induction, supervision, performance interviewing and gaining qualifications for learning in the workplace. The SCQFP is also currently supporting two Government initiatives in relation to RPL: one aiming to provide better recognition of qualifications gained by those in the armed forces once they exit into civilian life; and the other looking at an RPL sustainable model for refugees and asylum seekers without credentials seeking to enter the labour market.

One of the challenges to implementation of RPL in Scotland is a perception among providers that RPL is expensive and time-consuming: it can seem easier and cheaper to include a person in a course rather than to carry out a one-to-one RPL process. Lack of explicit resourcing is another barrier, particularly in the college sector. For instance, if a learner uses RPL to reduce the learning he/she needs to undertake for a qualification, this can affect their status and the funding they are entitled to. Another issue is that there is no 'centre' for validation; instead validation is the responsibility of providers with support and guidance from SCQFP, QAA Scotland and SQA. This means that trust in RPL procedures and achievements will depend on the provider in question. The lack of a national policy or strategy on RPL means that providers have a wide variety of practices and procedures, which can be confusing to learners. A national strategy would be needed to improve the current arrangements, setting out the responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved. At the same time, SCQFP has limited capacity to promote RPL and to offer advice and guidance.

However, the speed and flexibility with which RPL procedures can be implemented is an advantage. Different sectors and employers are able to

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awarding body. [www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/apprenticeships/graduate-apprenticeships/](http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/apprenticeships/graduate-apprenticeships/)

<sup>977</sup> RPL may be used to assess complete or partial SQA units. Where evidence of prior learning only partially meets the evidence requirements of a unit, other methods of assessment should be used to complete the outstanding requirements. The minimum level of awarding and certification will be a complete SQA unit. More information is available at: [www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/67029.html](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/67029.html)

participate if they wish. Increased use of RPL can be further enabled by its links to other policy agendas:

- a. developing the young workforce (Scotland's youth employment strategy);
- b. outcome agreements (setting out what colleges and universities plan to deliver in return for their funding from the Scottish Funding Council);
- c. the *Blueprint for fairness* (Scottish Government, 2016), concerned with widening access to universities to those from the most deprived communities.

## NQF implementation

One of the oldest comprehensive NQFs in Europe, the SCQF has reached an advanced operational stage. In its initial stages, between 2001 and 2006, SCQF implementation focused on levelling the main general, vocational and higher education qualifications. From 2007 onwards efforts were made to include non-formal and international qualifications. The SCQF database<sup>978</sup> contains all qualifications and learning programmes that are levelled and credit rated; there are around 11 500 qualifications in total so far, of which around 1 000 belong to social partners, trade unions, employers and professional bodies. Both SCQF and EQF levels are included in the public view of the SCQF database, and SCQF levels can be included on certificates, diplomas, and Europass certificate and diploma supplements once the qualification/programme has been formally credit rated. Surveys of employers and awarding bodies have been carried out to gauge interest in the inclusion of the EQF level on certificates. However, this is not felt necessary, though awarding bodies can do so if they wish.

Further efforts to promote the visibility of the framework are made through the overall SCQF communication strategy, through presentations, social media, and leaflets, addressing various target groups. The SCQF is thought to be extensively known and used by education and training providers, partly due to the SCQF School ambassador programme developed by the SCQFP, which trains teachers and senior pupils to pass on information about the framework to other teachers, pupils and parents. It is also well known and regularly used by guidance and counselling practitioners and recognition authorities and bodies; labour market

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<sup>978</sup> The SCQF database is available at: <http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/search-database/>

stakeholders have limited but growing awareness of it (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The SCQFP has systematically used evaluations to inform framework developments. Six studies investigating the impact of the SCQF across different sectors have been conducted by various consultants using a range of different methods. All suggested that the SCQF Partnership was moving in the right direction in terms of raising awareness of the framework, while it lacks resources to achieve this on a large scale.

A 2013 evaluation looking at the level of awareness, perception and understanding of the SCQF (Ashbrook Research & Consultancy, 2013) showed that the framework is widely recognised by learners, parents and education professionals in Scotland. A 2015 evaluation of the use of the SCQF among higher education institutions and colleges (Kerson Associates Ltd, 2015), suggested that the framework is well embedded in curriculum decision-making processes, aiding the development of progression pathways and highlighting gaps in provision; it is also used in quality assurance processes.

An assessment was undertaken in 2016–17 (University of Glasgow, 2017) of the impact that the SCQF and the SCQF Partnership had made across key stakeholders and their policies and practices. It showed that the SCQF and SCQFP are both well-established features of Scotland’s education and qualifications landscape, having cross-cutting impacts such as:

- a. providing a common point of reference and vocabulary across different user groups;
- b. emphasising the value and equality of all qualifications due to the comprehensive nature of the SCQF;
- c. supporting the progress of all learners by providing a single, quality assured benchmark that all can refer to and which can help plan, articulate and transport their learning;
- d. providing a model of international best practice and promoting the Scottish education and skills system internationally.

The SCQFP was found to be instrumental in a number of key developments expected to have a long-term impact on Scotland’s education and skills landscape: embedding of SCQF levels in the school curriculum and in Scotland’s national training programmes; replacement of SVQ levels with SCQF levels; inclusion of more than 850 non-mainstream qualifications and programmes; establishment of six new credit rating bodies (CRBs); and development

of adult achievement awards (allowing for the recognition of non-formal skills).

The study also showed that reach and use of the SCQF increased across all target groups between 2010/11 and 2015/16, evidenced by:

- a. an increase from 400 to 11 270 in the number of qualifications credit rated onto the SCQF database;
- b. the increasing prominence of the SCQF in the college sector, including 4 008 college students who benefitted from articulation routes between Higher National Qualifications (HNQs) and degree level courses in 2015/16;
- c. increased use of the SCQF by employers in job adverts (153 in 2015/16);
- d. continued yearly growth in the SCQF’s social media and website reach.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

The SCQF was referenced to the EQF in February 2010 as a part of the overall UK referencing process<sup>979</sup>.

In the meantime, there have been major changes in the general education system in Scotland, including the renaming of qualifications to indicate their SCQF level (National 1 to National 5). The offer of apprenticeships from level 6 upwards has been expanded, with some plans to introduce apprenticeships at levels 4 and 5. As a result of these changes, an updated referencing report has been prepared by the SCQF Partnership and presented to the EQF advisory group in December 2018<sup>980</sup>.

## Important lessons and future plans

The SCQF is one of the oldest comprehensive NQFs in Europe. It has gradually evolved from an instrument for transparency and communication of qualifications to a reference tool for revision of education and training and for human resource development. Given the government’s focus on articulation of progression pathways, the interest in promoting, valuing and recognising all types of learning, and the full buy-in of stakeholders, the

<sup>979</sup> It was prepared by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, the Scottish credit and qualifications framework Partnership and the Welsh Assembly Government. See Qualifications and Curriculum Agency et al. (2010).

<sup>980</sup> See SCQF Partnership (forthcoming).

SCQF has a secure position as a permanent feature of the national qualifications system, underpinning all education and training policies. *The 15–24 learner journey review* undertaken by the Scottish Government in 2018 features both the SCQF and the SCQF Partnership as instrumental in achieving success in its recommendations aimed at achieving shorter and more coherent learner journeys. The SCQF is seen as central to policies on access, transfer and progression, validation of non-formal and informal learning, and quality assurance.

Success factors include regular evaluations helping to ensure its relevance, and its governance, based on a partnership model with collaboration and good links to the government and other networks. The SCQFP is seen as a completely neutral organisation, allowing engagement of a wide range of stakeholders. However, due to its small size and limited funding, keeping every sector and every institution in the loop and upscaling projects have been key challenges in implementing the framework. The evaluation of SCQF and SCQFP impact undertaken in 2016–17 (University of Glasgow, 2017) has revealed that, while mainstream institutions such as colleges and universities have

been impacted extensively by the SCQF, employers and general education schools require more attention. Current and future efforts are focused on implementing the School ambassador programme and an employer engagement strategy to extend the use of the framework by these groups. The recommendations of the 2016–17 impact assessment include:

- continued resourcing of the SCQF Partnership for the coordination, promotion and quality assurance of the framework in order to maintain its increasing scale, reach, use and impact;
- taking a more targeted approach to promoting the SCQF to those involved in planning young people’s learner journeys (teachers, parents and pupils) and employers (tying in with the *Developing the young workforce* agenda);
- striking a balance between simplicity and quality assurance: simplicity encourages increased use and understanding of the SCQF, while quality assurance ensures its credibility.

The two last points have been taken forward by the SCQF Partnerships in their latest communications strategy.

**Table 91. Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF)**

SCQF LEVEL	SQA QUALIFICATIONS		QUALIFICATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS	APPRENTICESHIPS AND SVQs	EQF LEVEL
12		Professional development award	Doctoral degree	Professional apprenticeship	8
11		Professional development award	Master degree Integrated master degree Postgraduate diploma Postgraduate certificate	Graduate apprenticeship Professional apprenticeship SVQ	7
10		Professional development award	Honours degree Graduate diploma Graduate certificate	Graduate apprenticeship Professional apprenticeship	6
9		Professional development award	Bachelor/ordinary degree Graduate diploma Graduate certificate	Graduate apprenticeship Technical apprenticeship SVQ	

**Table 91. Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF) (Continued)**

SCQF LEVEL	SQA QUALIFICATIONS			QUALIFICATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS	APPRENTICESHIPS AND SVQs	EQF LEVEL
8		Higher national diploma	Professional development award	Diploma of higher education	Higher apprenticeship Technical apprenticeship SVQ	5
7	Advanced higher awards Scottish baccalaureate	Higher national certificate	Professional development award	Certificate of higher education	Modern apprenticeship SVQ	
6	Higher awards Skills for work higher	National certificate	Professional development award		Modern apprenticeship Foundation apprenticeship SVQ	4
			National progression award			
5	National 5 awards Skills for work national 5	National certificate	National progression award		Modern apprenticeship SVQ	3
4	National 4 awards Skills for work national 4	National certificate	National progression award		SVQ	2
3	National 3 awards Skills for work national 3	National certificate	National progression award			1
2	National 2 awards	National certificate	National progression award			
1	National 1 awards					

Source: adapted from the SCQF website, 2018: <https://scqf.org.uk/interactive-framework/>

<b>Abbreviations</b>		SCQF	Scottish credit and qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework	SCQFP	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership
NQF	national qualifications framework	SQA	Scottish qualifications authority
QAA	Scotland Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland	SVQs	Scottish vocational qualifications
RPL	recognition of prior learning		

## Main sources of information

- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP) – acts as the EQF national coordination point for Scotland: [www.scqf.org.uk/](http://www.scqf.org.uk/)
- SCQF database: <http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/search-database/>
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## Introduction and context

The credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW) was adopted in 2002 and launched in 2003. Its purpose is to act as an overarching structure to provide clarity for the existing education sub-systems. The CQFW is an all-inclusive meta-framework that encompasses a wide range of learning under three 'pillars': the higher education pillar (levels 4 to 8), the regulated qualifications pillar (entry 1 to level 8) and the lifelong learning pillar (entry 1 to level 8) (Welsh Government, 2018a). The framework has no regulatory functions, but helps to bring together the main stakeholders involved in regulating Welsh qualifications.

The CQFW is operational and can be seen as a second generation framework, departing from sector frameworks established from the 1990s onwards. Following evaluation of the CQFW in 2014 (Welsh Government, 2014)<sup>981</sup> a number of changes have been introduced, partly reflecting the setting up of Qualifications Wales<sup>982</sup>, a new government body responsible for regulated qualifications (outside higher education). Changes were introduced to the quality-assured lifelong learning pillar of the framework, seeking to clarify the way non-formal and informal learning is recognised.

Abolition of the qualifications and credit framework in England and Northern Ireland has also influenced the CQFW. From 2015 onwards all regulated qualifications refer to the new Ofqual level descriptors introduced for the regulated qualifications framework (RQF) in England and Northern Ireland<sup>983</sup>. Non-regulated qualifications continue to refer to the 2009 CQFW level descriptors.

<sup>981</sup> See the relevant web page of the Welsh Government: <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/evaluation-impact-credit-qualifications-framework-wales/?lang=en> [accessed 19.3.2019].

<sup>982</sup> Qualifications Wales webpage: [www.qualificationswales.org/english/](http://www.qualificationswales.org/english/) [accessed 19.3.2019].

<sup>983</sup> See the chapter on UK England and Northern Ireland of the European NQF inventory 2018.

## Policy objectives

The CQFW has been designed to provide greater clarity on the qualifications system in Wales. It is seen as an 'enabling tool' in relation to the Welsh Government's economic and skills policies and goals. It should therefore:

- a. offer a national qualifications framework (NQF) for learners in Wales of all ages and abilities;
- b. provide a common currency for learning achievement;
- c. support the recognition of credit and qualifications across all levels, enabling learners to progress;
- d. support providers in articulating pathways of progression that are easily understood and are transferable and consistent within Europe and the wider international community.

The CQFW embraces three common principles:

- a. expression of achievement as learning outcomes;
- b. the demands made by that learning on the learner (level);
- d. credit can be applied.

Together, these principles underpin all types of learning in all sections of education and training. The CQFW is positioned as a key part of Wales' lifelong learning policy and strategy.

For formal education and training, the framework supports all recognised, credit-based learning within:

- a. higher education;
- b. regulated general and vocational qualifications.

The lifelong learning pillar forms a third and integrated pillar of the CQFW. It takes as its starting point that all learning, wherever and whenever it takes place, should be valued and recognised.

The CQFW can be considered an 'open framework' in the sense that its unit-based approach at the

outset is oriented towards a multitude of awarding bodies and education and training formats. This aids inclusion of units developed (for example) by the private sector and as part of continuing and enterprise-based education and training. The CQFW is also a communications framework that aims ‘to provide a language and route map to make it easier for learners, parents, education professionals and employers to understand progression routes’ (Welsh Government, 2014).

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The CQFW encompasses a wide range of qualifications and other credit-based accredited training (that can be awarded to learners undertaking a wide range of learning, covering general and vocational training) and non-accredited delivery (Welsh Government, 2018a). There are eight levels plus entry levels in the CQFW. The higher education pillar includes higher education certificates, diplomas and degrees at levels 4 and above. The regulated qualifications pillar includes school leaving qualifications (GCSEs, GCE A levels) and all-age vocational qualifications (national vocational qualifications, certificates, diplomas, awards). Qualifications Wales regulates the awarding bodies for this pillar. The lifelong learning pillar includes units of accredited learning<sup>984</sup> and professional learning<sup>985</sup>. The providers in this pillar are required to meet the CQFW high level

principles: the credit, learning time, recognised standards, levels/level descriptors, title, purpose, learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

The CQFW level descriptors were revised in 2009 and are structured in three categories: knowledge and understanding; application and action; and autonomy and accountability<sup>986</sup>. With the introduction of RQF in England and Northern Ireland in 2015, the revised RQF level descriptors – defined in terms of knowledge and skills – have been adopted for the regulated qualifications pillar of the CQFW and apply for vocational and general education qualifications, as can be seen in Table 92.

Higher education qualifications are assigned to levels in accordance with the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland<sup>987</sup>. The lifelong learning pillar continues to use the 2009 CQFW level descriptors.

All qualifications and learning programmes within the CQFW are based on learning outcomes and must have quality-assured assessment of these outcomes. The CQFW uses two measures to describe qualifications:

- the level of the outcomes of learning;
- the volume of outcomes, described by the number of CQFW credit points.

**Table 92. Changes to level descriptors**

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE DESCRIPTOR (THE HOLDER...)	SKILLS DESCRIPTOR (THE HOLDER CAN...)
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has basic factual knowledge of a subject and/or knowledge of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined routine tasks and address simple problems</li> <li>Is aware of aspects of information relevant to the area of study or work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use basic cognitive and practical skills to complete well-defined routine tasks and procedures</li> <li>Select and use relevant information</li> <li>Identify whether actions have been effective</li> </ul>

Source: [www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook/section-e-design-and-development-of-qualifications#level-descriptors](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook/section-e-design-and-development-of-qualifications#level-descriptors)

<sup>984</sup> This is called ‘unitised accredited learning’ (UAL) which is unit-based provision and has a credit value.

<sup>985</sup> This is called ‘vendor/industry/professional’ (VIP) learning that tends to be sector/industry specific training and/or workforce development programmes (Welsh Government, 2018a).

<sup>986</sup> Detailed graph on level descriptors: <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/level-descriptors.pdf> [accessed 19.3.2019].

<sup>987</sup> Quality Assurance Agency (2014). *UK Quality code for higher education. Part A: setting and maintaining academic standards. The frameworks for higher education qualifications of UK degree-awarding bodies*. [www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf)

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

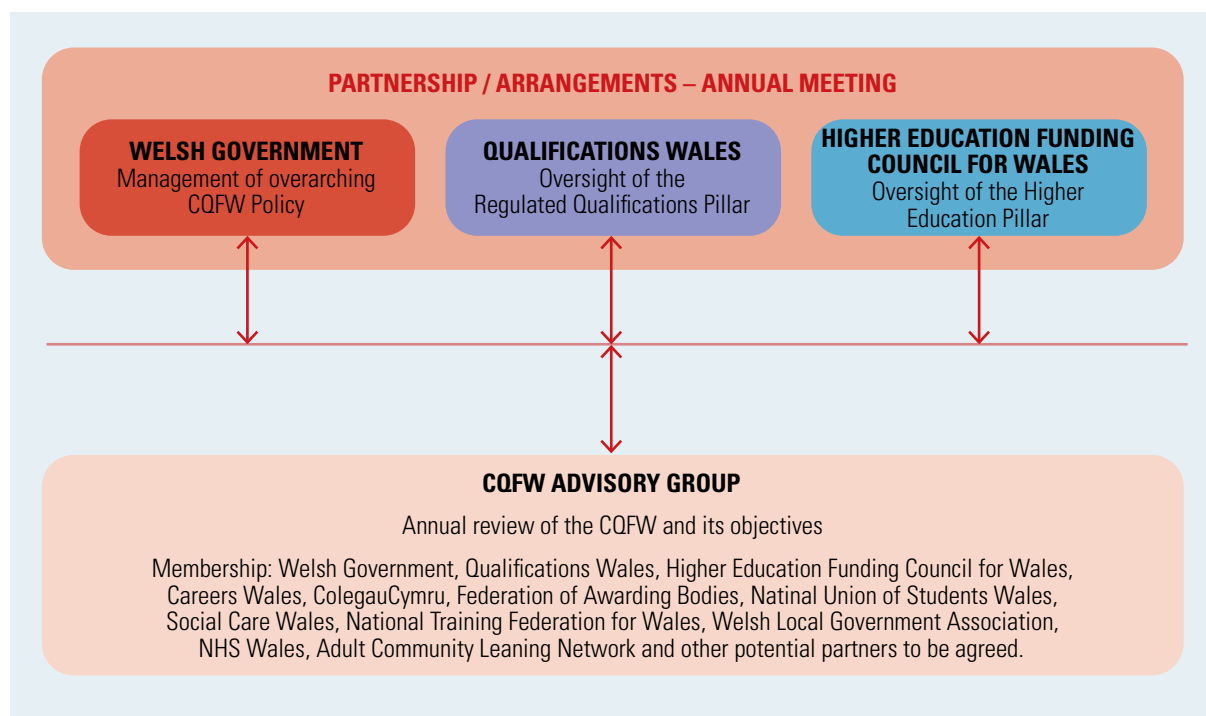
The credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW) is managed by a strategic operational partnership comprising the Welsh Government, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, and Qualifications Wales. Other external agencies, awarding bodies, higher education and training providers are invited to join the advisory group as appropriate. All partners support the CQFW in aiding transparency and assisting learners in planning their progression pathways (Welsh Government, 2018a). The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)<sup>988</sup> is a membership organisation representing the seven largest awarding bodies offering qualifications in the UK, including GCSEs, GSE A levels and vocational qualifications.

The 2014 evaluation noted that the CQFW was particularly well established in certain sectors: higher education and adult and community learning. For other sectors, however, engagement was lower. Stakeholders generally perceived engagement with the framework to be low among employers and most learners, and that there is a need to increase

awareness of – and buy-in to – the framework across education and training sectors. This mixed assessment was balanced by the fact that stakeholders are generally aware of the CQFW and its roles and it is considered a useful information tool, providing coherent understanding of the Welsh qualifications system. Since 2014, this has been addressed by a targeted programme of awareness-raising, including the production of brochures and web materials, as well as engagement with learning providers and employers through the CQFW advisory group. The CQFW has also been embedded in Welsh Government targets in, for example, apprenticeship provision and learner attainment.

A number of changes were introduced in 2015, including the CQFW governance structure, by setting up of Qualifications Wales<sup>989</sup>; this is a new government-sponsored but independent body responsible for non-higher education qualifications. Qualifications Wales has a range of regulatory powers to support the system and take action if there is non-compliance. Its main purpose is to promote the interests of learners and public confidence in the qualification system. In order to

**Figure 22. CQFW governance structure**



Source: Welsh Government (2018a). <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-01/cqfw-brochure.pdf>

<sup>988</sup> More information at JCQ website: [www.jcq.org.uk/](http://www.jcq.org.uk/)

<sup>989</sup> For further information see Qualifications Wales at: [www.qualificationswales.org](http://www.qualificationswales.org)

offer regulated qualifications in Wales an awarding body must be recognised by Qualifications Wales (Welsh Government, 2018).

Changes were also introduced to the lifelong learning pillar of the framework, seeking to clarify the way non-formal and informal learning is recognised. The units of accredited learning in this pillar are designed primarily by awarding bodies and, in some cases, employers, professional bodies, colleges or voluntary sector bodies.

The framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is a constituent part of the CQFW. Higher education is a devolved area, which means that most decisions about higher education policy in Wales are taken by the Welsh Government. Higher education institutions are private bodies/charities which are independent of government and are quality regulated by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. This body ensures the FHEQ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is in place for assessing the quality of higher education; it also scrutinises the performance of universities and other designated providers (Welsh Government, 2018). In *Taking Wales forward 2016–21*<sup>990</sup> a commitment was made to update governance arrangements for further and higher education. In June 2017, proposals to create a new commission to oversee the higher and further education sector in Wales were published by the Education Secretary as a Welsh Government white paper titled *Public good and a prosperous Wales: building a reformed PCET system*<sup>991</sup>. It set out how the new body (referred to as the Tertiary Education and Research Commission), would succeed the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, will regulate the post-compulsory education and training sector, as well as have responsibility for research and innovation (Cedefop, forthcoming).

Quality assurance of lifelong learning is not overseen centrally; it is assumed that sectors will utilise their own internal existing quality assurance practices and processes to comply with the CQFW's high-level principles. There is no regulatory process for unitised accredited learning (UAL)<sup>992</sup>, nor is there

a regulatory process for approval of vendor/industry/professional (VIP) learning. Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) guidance<sup>993</sup> has been developed for the implementation of the FHEQ, a constituent part of the CQFW. This guidance applies to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other awards granted by a higher education provider.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways<sup>994</sup>

Only formal and non-formal learning is recognised by the CQFW; the framework does not recognise informal learning because it does not comply with the CQFW high-level principles<sup>995</sup> and it has no set objectives in terms of learning outcomes. Non-formal learning can be recognised in a number of ways in Wales. The terms recognition of prior learning (RPL), accreditation of prior learning and accreditation of prior experiential learning are used interchangeably.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is possible for individuals using their previously acquired learning to obtain or access formal qualifications on the CQFW, including higher education and vocational qualifications<sup>996</sup>. Access to higher education courses includes opportunities for recognition of prior learning. While the CQFW recognises the importance and benefits of RPL, there is currently no formal RPL policy in Wales and, use of RPL remains at the discretion of individual providers. Data are not collected at national level, except in the higher education sector, where they are only collected in relation to RPL provision (accreditation of prior experiential learning modules) and not in relation to access aided via RPL. However, one recent development is that the Welsh Government published a brochure<sup>997</sup> on the CQFW (Welsh Government, 2018a) that includes an outline of

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[gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-01/cqfw-brochure.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-01/cqfw-brochure.pdf)

<sup>993</sup> More information on Quality Assurance Agency at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/)

<sup>994</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

<sup>995</sup> The high level pillars refer to the credit, learning time, recognised standards, levels/level descriptors, title, purpose, learning outcomes and assessment criteria (Welsh Government, 2018a).

<sup>996</sup> RPL is a learner-centred voluntary process. The learner should be offered advice on the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support credit through RPL (Welsh Government, 2018b).

<sup>997</sup> Welsh Government (2018a). This brochure is not a regulatory document.

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<sup>990</sup> Welsh Government (2016). *Taking Wales forward: 2016–21*. <https://gov.wales/docs/strategies/160920-taking-wales-forward-en.pdf>

<sup>991</sup> Welsh Government (2017). *Public good and prosperous Wales: building a reformed PCET system*. [https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2018-02/170620\\_consultation-en.pdf](https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2018-02/170620_consultation-en.pdf)

<sup>992</sup> Lifelong learning units are not regulated qualifications. For more details regarding the process for recognition of unitised accredited learning within the CQFW, see the Welsh brochure on CQFW (p. 27) at: <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-01/cqfw-brochure.pdf>

principles related to RPL. Its content is aimed at those working within the education/training and advice and guidance sectors. Opportunities for RPL are developed from a sectoral perspective, with different approaches for vocational education and training, higher education and adult learning. A bottom-up approach is taken, with awarding organisations and learning providers developing their own policies (and practices in the case of providers) for RPL. In 2017, the publicly funded National Health Service of Wales (NHS Wales)<sup>998</sup> developed a *Recognition of prior learning framework and toolkit*, which is designed to support progression and staff development through lifelong learning, non-accredited in-house learning or work-based learning qualifications which are no longer available (Welsh Government, 2018b).

The lifelong learning pillar of the CQFW is also intended to recognise non-formal learning provision on the CQFW. The focus of the lifelong learning pillar is to accredit learning provision from outside higher education and regulated qualifications pillars of the CQFW. Gaining CQFW credit value is dependent on the learner completing assessment based on learning outcomes<sup>999</sup>. National vocational qualifications offer a third opportunity to validate workplace learning. They are aimed mainly at people in employment, proving the ability to perform an occupation to a nationally recognised occupational standard.

While RPL arrangements are in place, there is no evidence to suggest that RPL is well utilised. There are also no systems to coordinate validation across the different sectors of learning in Wales and no sectors are given priority. The question of trust in the outcomes of RPL is not really an issue, since outcomes (access, award of credits/qualifications) are based on evidence gathered by assessors and are not usually different to those acquired by learners who have pursued a formal route. The lifelong learning pillar of the CQFW serves to increase trust in, and recognition of, non-formal learning provision, which is acknowledged and accredited through this pillar.

According to stakeholders interviewed in 2014 and 2016, potential obstacles to further development include the lack of strategic drive to promote RPL at national level, lack of awareness among learners

of RPL opportunities, lack of expertise among providers, or lack of confidence to carry out RPL or trust in RPL processes (in the higher education sector). It is also possible that the lack of dedicated funding for RPL (except in the higher education sector) is a disincentive to what can be perceived as a process that is difficult to administer and time-consuming (for both individual applicants and providers).

While RPL is possible 'on paper', it is not clear how much it is actually offered and taken up in practice; it appears that implementation is low. In the higher education sector, for instance, the RPL Wales project found that, although there is good practice in some (departments of) universities, this is limited. A more uniform approach, which can be applied across all qualifications and situations, is called for in the progress report for the RPL Wales project, to help to ensure that the Welsh workforce is able to face the changes taking place in the country's labour market. The CQFW is a potential enabler for validation in Wales. One of the main impacts identified by stakeholders is greater recognition of prior learning through the lifelong learning pillar, with particular benefits for disadvantaged learner groups, helping to raise aspirations and promote progression opportunities. Stakeholders identified the flexibility created by the CQFW as a benefit and, through RPL, the framework is said to have helped employers and employees to avoid duplication of training.

## NQF implementation

The CQFW was formally adopted in 2002 and was launched in 2003. The ten-year implementation plan ran from 2003 to 2014. This reflected the view that framework implementation takes time and requires a long-term development perspective. The framework is an overarching meta-framework, including all levels and types of qualification and is considered to be an integral part of the qualification system. It consists of three pillars: regulated qualifications, higher education qualifications and lifelong learning pillar. The CQFW has reached an advanced operational stage and can be seen as a second generation framework. From 2015 onwards all regulated qualifications refer to the new RQF level descriptors. Higher education qualifications refer to the qualifications framework for higher education and the lifelong learning pillar continues to use the 2009 CQFW level descriptors.

<sup>998</sup> [www.wales.nhs.uk/nhswalesaboutus](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/nhswalesaboutus)

<sup>999</sup> Credit can be awarded for the achievement of learning outcomes that have been verified through the appropriate rules, regulations and assessment for each of the pillars. This is done through the achievement of units certificated through a regulated recognised body (Welsh Government, 2018a).

Wales has a qualification database, *QiW database*<sup>1000</sup> which is owned and managed by Qualifications Wales, the regulator of regulated qualifications pillar qualifications and the qualifications system in Wales. This database contains details of all qualifications that are approved or designated for teaching in Wales for learners aged below 19, excluding higher education. Any qualifications that are approved or designated<sup>1001</sup> by Qualifications Wales are eligible for funding by a local authority or by Welsh Government. This is related to education providers and not the learners. The database contains information on qualification titles, numbers, the awarding body that awards each qualification as well as links to further qualification information. There are 102 383 current and archived<sup>1002</sup> qualifications in the database.

NQF levels are indicated on Europass certificates<sup>1003</sup> and diplomas as well as in the qualification database. However, European qualifications framework (EQF) levels have not been included on certificates/diplomas or supplements, but are included in the database. No plans have been made to insist on EQF levels appearing on certificates but the NQF managers in the UK maintain ongoing consultations on this with the organisations that award certificates.

Evaluation of the framework was undertaken in 2014. The CQFW was seen as playing a generally positive and constructive role in the Welsh qualification landscape and there is support among all stakeholders to continue the work started a decade ago. The main strengths of the CQFW were related to its role in allowing for greater validation of non-formal and informal learning (recognition of prior and informal learning). The framework was generally seen to have raised learner aspirations and contributed to promoting progression. The opportunity to add new units to the lifelong learning pillar of the framework was seen as beneficial to the flexibility of the framework and as a condition for addressing the needs of special-needs groups. Further, the CQFW was seen as supporting a 'common currency' of credit that has made it easier to articulate and communicate achievements across sectors, levels and geographic areas. A broad range

of stakeholders<sup>1004</sup> appreciated the flexibility offered by the unit-based approach.

The evaluation offered a good insight into the challenges involved in setting up NQFs. Most stakeholders consider that the potential of the CQFW has not been used in practice as much as originally hoped. Despite having been used in some sectors, the 'concept has not taken off on a great scale'. Some stakeholders pointed out that credit accumulation and transfer has not played the role originally expected; learners and employers seem to be more focused on full qualifications than credits in the current situation. Although the most important criticism of implementation of the framework was directed to the Welsh Government and the lack of 'strategic investment' in it, its governance is managed by a strategic operational partnership.

In terms of use of the NQF by different stakeholders, credit size and levels are used by universities in setting entry requirements and selecting students. The levels of qualifications are included in job advertisements, while accessible publicity materials (leaflets, videos<sup>1005</sup>) are continually evolving and widely distributed in the country. The Welsh Government has provided information sessions to Careers Wales staff regarding updates to the curriculum, which included the CQFW. An employer<sup>1006</sup> and a learner guide<sup>1007</sup> were developed in 2018 to aid comprehension of the framework by these target groups.

Wales is currently in the process of updating the referencing report due to the changes in the level descriptors, the creation of Qualification Wales and the changes to quality assurance in higher education. This report will be presented to the EQF advisory group in June 2019. The approach to referencing will be based on a thorough mapping of level descriptors of CQFW as well as on desk-based review of evidence including policy documents, regulatory requirements and quality assurance processes (Welsh Government, 2018a). A CQFW

<sup>1000</sup> More information on the qualification database: [www.qiw.wales/](http://www.qiw.wales/)

<sup>1001</sup> QiW is an independent system. All qualifications in QiW will be allocated a unique identification code known as a Qualifications Wales Approval/Designation Number.

<sup>1002</sup> Archived refers to qualifications that have passed their operational end date within the last two years.

<sup>1003</sup> More information on Europass certificate supplements: UK Naric homepage

<sup>1004</sup> These stakeholders, including awarding bodies, sector skills councils, training providers and third sector organisations, noted this approach as a major benefit, allowing for rapid renewal of provisions and for meeting the needs of diverse groups of learners. The framework, by providing an overview, also made it possible to avoid duplication of units and qualifications, delivering economic benefit (Welsh Government, 2014).

<sup>1005</sup> <https://beta.gov.wales/credit-and-qualifications-framework-cqfw-overview> [accessed 19.3.2019].

<sup>1006</sup> <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-11/credit-and-qualifications-framework-for-wales-employer-guide.pdf> [accessed 19.3.2019].

<sup>1007</sup> <https://beta.gov.wales/credit-and-qualifications-framework-cqfw-learner-guide> [accessed 19.3.2019]. Learners can be helped to plan their progression pathways with this guide.

advisory group, with membership drawn from wider key stakeholders, such as representatives from government, regulators, learning providers, employers and learners, will be created.

**Referencing to regional frameworks**

The CQFW was referenced to the EQF as a part of the overall UK referencing process in February 2010 (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency et al., 2010). An updated referencing report is currently being drafted and is planned to be submitted to the EQF advisory group in mid-2019. A framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) was linked to the Bologna process and was self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2009 (QQA, 2009), and will also be incorporated in the updated referencing to the EQF.

**Important lessons and future plans**

The framework has matured over time and has become an integral part of the qualifications system in Wales. Evaluation of the CQFW was carried out in 2014 (Welsh Government, 2014) focusing on strengths and weaknesses of the framework. Overall, stakeholders responding to the evaluation recognised the role played by the CQFW as an overarching framework; there was general support for its further development and implementation. They pointed out that the increasing divergences

between the Welsh and the English education and training systems offer an opportunity for the CQFW to present the Welsh qualification landscape and to inspire its further development and reform.

The changes introduced in Wales in recent years aimed to increase the awareness of the framework and simplify the levels of understanding and profile of the framework. The lifelong learning pillar was considered to have had an impact on disadvantaged learners and contributed to overall lifelong learning strategies. It helped to introduce learners with low educational attainment to more formal learning in ‘achievable, bite-size pieces’, providing an understanding of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and evidence (European Commission et al., (forthcoming). One of the ten recommendations, based on the findings of the 2014 evaluation<sup>1008</sup> was to ‘revise the aims and objectives so that it evolves to become a ‘functional’ NQF which acts as a vehicle for describing the qualifications system in Wales’. To this end, the CQFW advisory group will review the CQFW and its objectives annually.

Future plans involve review of the CQFW planned referencing report by the steering group and approval by CQFW advisory group members, as well as promoting and distributing that report. Maintaining relationships with other UK nations to ensure alignment of frameworks across the UK and Europe is still needed. Revising existing publicity materials and using them to further promote and raise the profile of the CQFW would support the commitment to the framework.

**Table 93. Credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW)**

CQFW LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctoral degree Industry qualifications (e.g. chartered accountant)	8
7	Master degree Vocational qualifications Postgraduate certificate in education Apprenticeships	7
6	Bachelor honours degrees Vocational qualifications Professional certificate in education Apprenticeships	6

(Continued)

<sup>1008</sup> See Welsh Government (2014).

**Table 93. Credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW) (Continued)**

CQFW LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
<b>5</b>	Foundation degree Vocational qualifications Higher national diploma Apprenticeships	5
	<b>4</b>	
<b>3</b>	Welsh baccalaureate advanced Vocational qualifications AS/A level Access to higher education Apprenticeships	4
<b>2</b>	Welsh baccalaureate national Vocational qualifications Essential skills General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) (grades A–C) Apprenticeships	3
<b>1</b>	Welsh baccalaureate foundation Vocational qualifications Essential skills General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) (grades D–G)	2
<b>Entry 1–3</b>	Entry level qualifications	1

Source: Welsh Government, 2017. See CQFW diagram

<b>Abbreviations</b>	
CQFW	credit and qualifications framework for Wales
EQF	European qualifications framework
FHEQ	framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
GCE A level	general certificate of education advanced level
GCSE	general certificate of secondary education
NHS	National Health Service of Wales
NQF	national qualifications framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
RQF	regulated qualifications framework

### Main sources of information

CollegesWales (ColegauCymru) – acts as the EQF NCP: [www.collegeswales.ac.uk/](http://www.collegeswales.ac.uk/)

Welsh Government CQFW website: <https://beta.gov.wales/qualifications>

Qualification database in Wales (QiW): [www.qiw.wales/](http://www.qiw.wales/)

QCA et al. (2010). *Referencing the qualifications frameworks of the United Kingdom to the European qualifications framework*. <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/2011-05-16-uk-efq-referencing-report.pdf>



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### Prepared by:

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in collaboration with national experts.

# UZBEKISTAN

## Introduction and context

### NQF snapshot

A national qualifications framework (NQF) has not been adopted yet. Instead, there are structures in higher education similar to the Bologna framework, and vocational education and training (VET) qualifications and occupations classifiers.

Qualifications initiatives lie with the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education.

### Educational, social, economic and political context

Uzbekistan has a very young and rapidly growing population, estimated at 32 million in 2018 by national authorities. The share of young people aged 15 to 29 years was 61.7% of the population in 2008.

As a result of demographic trends with a significantly increasing population overall, Uzbekistan is experiencing a rapid increase in the working age population. The labour market workforce grew by 23.9% in 2004–09, reaching 16 million people, while the number of people in employment increased by 26.1%, totalling 11.3 million in 2009. According to official data, 95% of the population of working age was employed in 2010.

The highest employment rates have been registered in construction, the housing and communal sector, domestic services, trade and public catering, transport and communication. Differences between rural and urban experiences are significant in understanding how the benefits of vocational education are distributed. Agriculture employs 27% of the country's labour force and contributes 17.4% of its GDP (2012 data), while over 60% of the population lives in rural areas.

The government acknowledges that the quality of the workforce is important in meeting the occupation and qualification requirements of employers (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2007). Vocational school curricula need to strengthen their relevance to labour market needs. The involvement

of private sector businesses in curriculum development is important in ensuring that graduates obtain practical skills and the capacity to work independently.

## Policy objectives

### Education and training reforms

While a formal NQF per se does not exist, there are NQF-type instruments such as the State education standards and national classifiers. These provide a structure of defined and validated qualifications, awarded at defined levels, and specify how qualifications relate to each other and thus how a learner can progress between them. In higher education, level structures are similar to the Bologna framework.

### International cooperation

Developments in the country's education system take into account the European qualifications framework and Bologna discussions, but currently there is no explicit intention to emulate neighbouring countries in pursuing a full NQF.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

### NQF scope and structure

No decision has been made yet on the scope of any NQF.

### Alignment to other classification systems

The State education standards define requirements for the quality of personnel training and education content; ensure a sufficient and necessary level of student training and qualification requirements of graduates of education establishments; and determine academic workload and the procedures and mechanisms for evaluating the activities of education establishments and the quality of personnel training. The State education standards are a basis for preparing other normative documents, regulating the education process and evaluating the activities of education establishments.

The classifier of directions and specialties of higher education is a part of the unified system of classification and coding of information. The renewed classifier is being developed in accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan #1553 issued on 20 May 2011 'On measures for strengthening the material and technical base of higher education institutions and the fundamental improvement of the quality of training of qualified specialists'. The classifier is based on the Law on Education and the national programme of personnel training, and constructed in accordance with the principles of the international standard classification of education (ISCED) adopted by UNESCO in March 1997.

The renewed classifier of the main working and serving professions is the instrument used for systematising the main titles of working and serving professions, determining the range of tariff ranks and position categories for working and serving professions, and requirements for the level and area of education.

The national classifier code assigns codes to all exit qualifications.

The State education standards and the classifier of directions and specialties of higher education provide a structure of defined and nationally accredited qualifications awarded at defined levels, indicate the interrelationships of the qualifications and how one can progress from one level to another. The State education standards and higher education classifier are, therefore, the route through which the country brings education and training together in a single unified system. Moreover, they provide a framework, which assures a nationally recognised quality standard and consistent training standards and provide a way of structuring existing and new qualifications.

#### **NQF levels and level descriptors**

The State education standards have implicit levels, including secondary, bachelor, master, and graduate levels. No numeric values are yet assigned to levels.

The Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers on the development and introduction of education standards in the system of continuous education is related to State education standards, which set the subject area-specific qualifications framework for all specialties listed in the renewed classifier of main working and serving professions and in the classifier of directions and specialties of higher education. This document sets clear descriptors of what graduates at bachelor and master levels should possess in terms of skills and knowledge. It can be compared to the level descriptors used in other

European countries, but the main difference is that it addresses only exit level descriptors rather than each level within the programmes.

#### **Use of learning outcomes**

Qualifications and curricula are adopting learning outcomes approaches. An example is the State education standard for foreign languages, already implemented in schools and colleges.

#### **Definition of qualification**

A general definition is included in the qualification requirements, which set out descriptions of the general knowledge and level of professional readiness of graduates at corresponding stages of continuous education.

#### **Access, progression and credit**

There is not yet sufficient development of the NQF to say that there is easier access to qualifications or clear progression routes. However, the State education standards provide links between higher education and VET, and thereby some progression. There is no credit system yet.

### **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

#### **NQF legal basis**

There is no NQF law at present.

#### **Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF**

The Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education are responsible for qualifications. Higher education and VET are closely linked, so there is movement and exchange of students between them.

#### **Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

Stakeholders are involved in the country's qualification system, contributing particularly to the development of qualifications. In addition to ministries, actors include providers, students, parents, employers and professional associations. Examples of stakeholder influence include updates to VET provider curricula, following advice of employers and others. VET colleges also are usually well linked to local employers.

#### **Resources and funding**

All Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education's activities are funded by the State or through other sources not prohibited by law. Funding of NQF development is currently limited, due to the plans for introducing the full NQF not being finalised. An NQF will need donor support.

### Quality assurance of qualifications

The process of developing and approving State education standards, qualification requirements and other normative documents, internal quality control and monitoring is coordinated by the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education. At the same time, the external quality control, attestation and accreditation of education establishments are implemented by the State testing centre under the Cabinet of Ministers. A review is carried out periodically by the State testing centre, with a recommendation for each education establishment being issued as a result. In general, the main task of the State testing centre is to determine the comparability of existing potential, experience, level of qualification and preparedness and other capabilities of the education establishment under review to qualifications awarded to its graduates. Education establishments that fail to pass attestation or to receive accreditation within the framework of existing legislation can be closed.

One element of quality assurance, referred to above, is strong employer input to curricula and qualifications, which provides some degree of labour market relevance to new qualifications. The ministries are careful to consult employers and also bring in foreign experts to advise on some aspects of qualification design.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

No validation system applies yet.

### NQF implementation

#### Inclusion of qualifications in a register

All State education standards, classifiers and qualification requirements are available in open

access through relevant ministry websites and can be obtained using the e-government portal. New services, registers and databases are constantly being developed and become available through the internet. However, these services or registers are not linked to an NQF.

#### Monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF

Given the limited progress of NQF plans, there are no mechanisms to monitor the NQF development.

#### Impact for end-users

The NQF is at an ad hoc stage, so it has had no impact yet on citizens or institutions.

### Referencing to regional frameworks

None. The country is not part of any wider grouping of countries.

### Important lessons and future plans

While links between employers and colleges are relatively strong, and the State education standards and various classifiers provide NQF-type functions, no NQF concept has been developed. Currently, ministries are considering whether to go down the full NQF route.

#### Abbreviations

NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

#### Prepared by:

The European Training Foundation (ETF).

## Introduction and context

The Vietnamese qualifications framework (VQF) is designed to categorise and standardise competences, the minimum required learning volume, and qualifications and certificates relevant to Vietnam's vocational education and higher education. This aims to contribute to improve human resources; set up an effective mechanism to link requirements in human resource quality of employers with the system of training qualifications through training activities, measurement, testing, evaluation and quality accreditation; and to build policies to improve the quality of human resources quality.

The VQF helps to establish the relation with the national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) of other countries through regional and international referential qualifications frameworks, and thereby to acknowledge qualifications, improve the quality and sharpen the competitive edge of local human resources.

Programmes developed within the VQF facilitate progression along learning pathways, and can therefore contribute to the development of a learning society and the promotion of lifelong learning.

## Policy objectives

The VQF was created and approved by the Prime Minister on 18 October 2016. The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) is developing a plan and policies for VQF implementation in higher education since 2019.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The scope of the VQF shall be applied to qualifications indicated in the Law on Technical Vocational Education and Training and the Law on Higher Education. The VQF is structured as follows:

- a. Qualification levels: there are eight levels – level 1, primary certificate 1; level 2, primary certificate 2; level 3, primary certificate 3; level 4, secondary diploma; level 5, college diploma; level 6, bachelor's degree; level 7, master's degree; and level 8, doctorate.
- b. Learning outcomes:
  - applied knowledge and theoretical knowledge;
  - cognitive skills, professional practical skills, and communication skills;
  - autonomy and personal responsibility in applying knowledge and skills to solve professional problems.
- c. The minimum required learning volume is calculated based on the number of credits the learner has to accumulate for each qualification.
- d. Qualifications and certificates are documents acknowledging learning results by a training provider for an individual after finishing a course and meeting the learning outcomes preset by the provider.

The level descriptors are as follows:

- a. Level 1 recognizes the training level of learners with general and basic knowledge, basic skills to perform one or some simple routine tasks of a certain occupation in an unchanged context under supervision of the trainer. The minimum required learning volume for level 1 is 5 credits. Learners finishing the training programme and meeting the outcomes of level 1 shall be granted a primary certificate 1.
- b. Level 2 recognizes the training level of learners with applied and theoretical knowledge about operation in a narrow scope of an occupation, general and basic knowledge about nature, culture, society and laws; occupationally practical skills based on technical standards to perform some routine tasks in a little changed context under supervision of the trainer; and being able to independently perform some activities. The minimum required learning volume for level 2 is 15 credits. Learners finishing the training programme and meeting the outcomes of level 2 shall be granted a primary certificate 2.

- c. Level 3 recognizes the training level of learners with applied and theoretical knowledge about some contents of an occupation; general knowledge about nature, culture, society and laws; basic knowledge about information and technology; cognitive skills, professional practical skills, communication skills essential to work independently in stable conditions and familiar contexts. The minimum required learning volume for level 3 is 25 credits. Learners finishing the training programme and meeting the outcomes of level 3 shall be granted a primary certificate 3.
- d. Level 4 recognizes the training level of learners with essential applied and theoretical knowledge about an occupation or a sector; basic knowledge about politics, culture, society, laws, and IT; cognitive skills, professional practical skills, communication skills essential to perform routine or complex tasks, to work independently or in a group in informed and changeable conditions, to take personal and teamwork responsibility, to be able to instruct, supervise other people to perform pre-assigned tasks. The minimum required learning volume for level 4 is 35 credits for those who have upper secondary certificate, and 50 credits for those who have lower secondary certificate. Learners finishing the training programme and meeting the outcomes of level 4 shall be granted a secondary diploma.
- e. Level 5 recognizes the training level of learners with broad applied and theoretical knowledge about an occupation or a sector; basic knowledge about politics, culture, society, laws, and IT; cognitive skills, professional practical skills, communication skills essential to perform routine or complex tasks, to work independently or in a group in informed and changeable conditions, to take personal responsibility; to instruct, supervise, and evaluate, at minimum level, a team to perform certain tasks. The minimum required learning volume for level 5 is 60 credits. Learners finishing the training programme and meeting the outcomes of level 5 shall be granted a college diploma.
- f. Level 6 recognizes the training level of learners with solid applied knowledge, comprehensive and in-depth theoretical knowledge, basic knowledge about social science, politics, and laws; cognitive skills including critical thinking, analytical and synthetic skills, professional practical skills, communication skills essential to perform complicated tasks, to work independently or in a group in changeable contexts, take personal and teamwork responsibility in instructing and educating major-related knowledge, supervising other people to perform tasks. The minimum required learning volume for level 6 is 120 credits. Learners finishing the training programme and meeting the outcomes of level 6 shall be granted a bachelor's degree.
- g. Level 7 recognizes the learning level of learners with applied and theoretical knowledge being broad and deep enough to master the major knowledge; critical thinking skills, scientific and advanced data analytical, synthetic, and assessment skills; research and development skills, renovation and application skills in academic and professional realms; educating knowledge in specialization areas; being able to self-directed and adapted to changeable contexts; being able to instruct other people to perform tasks; and being able to manage, evaluate, and renovate to improve efficiency. The minimum required learning volume for level 7 is 60 credits for university degree holders. Learners finishing the training programme and meet the outcomes of level 7 shall be granted master's degree. University degree holders who finish the training programme equivalent to 150 credits at minimum and meet the outcomes of level 7 shall be certified to be at level 7.
- h. Level 8 recognizes the learning level of learners with advanced and intensive applied and theoretical knowledge at the leading position of the major; synthetic and analytical skills; being able to identify and solve problems creatively; independent, creative and innovative thinking and research skills to create new knowledge; being able to educate knowledge, to set up national and international cooperation networks in managing and monitoring professional activities; being able to demonstrate creativity, self-direction and leadership in professional areas; being able to draw expertise conclusions and give scientific recommendations. The minimum required learning volume for level 8 is 90 credits for a master's degree, 120 credits for bachelor's degree. Learners finishing the training programme and meeting the outcomes of level 8 shall be granted a doctorate degree. Those who are at level 7 or equivalent and finish specializing training programmes with the minimum learning volume of 90 credits and meet the outcomes of level 8 shall be certified to be at level 8.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Various institutions and stakeholders are involved in VQF implementation.

The MoET is responsible for:

- a. administration and implementation of the VQF as for qualifications of higher education; planning

roadmaps and preparing essential conditions to implement the VQF to submit to the Prime Minister for approval;

- b. hosting and coordinating with other ministries and sectors related to map higher education qualifications of the VQF with those in the ASEAN qualifications referential framework (AQRf) and other countries' frameworks;
- c. hosting and coordinating with other ministries and sectors related, professional associations, training providers, and research institutes involved to build up and approve learning outcomes and aligned evidence for each level, each area and each major of higher education;
- d. directing higher education establishments to review their curricular, adjust and supplement in accordance with the requirements of learning outcomes; to accredit the quality of the training curricular based on outcome-based evidence and conditions ensuring quality;
- e. working with the Ministry of Finance to set phase-based cost norm and budget estimation for the implementation of the VQF for qualifications of higher education.

The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA) is responsible for:

- a. administration and implementation of the VQF as for qualifications of higher education; planning roadmaps and preparing essential conditions to implement the VQF to submit the Prime Minister for approval;
- b. hosting and coordinating with other Ministries and sectors related to map higher education qualifications of the VQF with those in the AQRf and other countries' frameworks;
- c. hosting and coordinating with MoET and other ministries and sectors related to develop links between occupational competency standards, national occupational skills standards with national training qualifications;
- d. directing vocational education establishments to review their curricula, adjust and supplement in accordance with the requirements of learning outcomes; to accredit the quality of the training curricula based on outcome-based evidence and conditions ensuring the quality;
- e. working with the Ministry of Finance to set phase-based cost norm and budget estimation for the implementation of the VQF for qualifications of vocational education.

The Ministry of Finance is responsible for:

- a. hosting and coordinating with MoET and MoLISA to allocate, instruct, examine and supervise the funding disbursement to implement the VQF in accordance with current legal regulations.

Related ministries and sectors are responsible for:

- a. coordinating with MoET and MoLISA to develop learning outcomes for majors in the areas managed by the two ministries;
- b. directing research institutes, training providers directly under the management to review and adjust training curricular in accordance with learning outcomes and aligned evidence;
- c. providing information about sectors, jobs, and requirements for relevant job roles; developing and issuing occupational competency standards as the basis to develop learning outcomes for each level.

People's committees of centrally-run cities and provinces are responsible for:

- a. directing local education and training sectors and competent agencies to organize and implement the VQF; examining, supervising, evaluating and synthesizing the results using the VQF at directly managed training providers.

Professional associations and representatives of manufacturing and service sectors are responsible for:

- a. researching and recommending competency profiles, requirements in knowledge and skills of job roles in the expertise.
- b. attending sector councils to suggest requirements for qualifications, learning outcomes and evidence for each area and major;
- c. taking part in outcome-based and evidence-based assessment of training quality of areas and sectors; giving recommendations to state authorities and training providers on adjustment and supplementation to make learning outcomes and evidence relevant with each job role.

Training providers are responsible for:

- a. reviewing and adjusting structure, content and methods to implement the curricular to meet the requirements of employers and being committed to run the curricular based on learning outcomes and evidence;
- b. outcome-based and evidence-based self-assessment.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

One of the key aims of the NQF is to give citizens greater understanding of and control over their own education by enabling them to match formal

educational provision with the learning outcomes and competences described in the NQF. Special attention will be paid to developing assessment mechanisms, which will allow workers to put their existing learning towards a full qualification in combination with other measures such as additional education and training or workplace-based learning.

- c. criteria 3: response focuses on the VQF structure but should be further developed to focus on the procedures for including qualifications in the VQF, either as a concept or with future plans.

This report will need to be revised based on the comments and to continue progress in referencing.

## NQF implementation<sup>1009</sup>

Challenges and issues to implement the VQF are:

- a. lack of leadership, vision and strategy;
- b. lack of awareness of the importance of VQF implementation;
- c. existing challenges related to human, infrastructure, administrative and financial resources fully engaging with VQF implementation.

## Referencing to regional frameworks

Vietnam submitted the draft of the Vietnam report on the referencing of the VQF to the AQRF by November 2018. This is the first draft partial referencing report covering the first three referencing criteria based on the guidelines of the AQRF Committee and legal documents of Vietnam. It received comments by Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Mike Coles and Andrea Bateman, consultants of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area's National Qualifications Framework Project Phases I to IV.

The Report of the Fifth National Qualifications Reference (NQF) Phase IV Workshop had a summary of the written feedback from countries for Vietnam as included below:

- a. criteria 1: general acceptance that the overview was clear but further refinement and additional information needed;
- b. criteria 2: general acceptance that the relevant bodies were clearly described, but more details required;

<sup>1009</sup> Key criteria and indicators for stages of NQF implementation to be further elaborated.

## Important lessons and future plans

Challenges in implementing the VQF included:

- a. the introduction of the learning outcomes approach;
- b. the lack of national quality-assurance systems.

A reference VQF and AQRF to ensure that qualification outcomes:

- a. remain contemporary, relevant and nationally consistent; and
- b. meet the skills needs of the economy and the standards expected by industry and employers.

Future plans:

- a. Referencing the VQF to the AQRF is planned by MoET in consultation with MoLISA. Technical support for the referencing process is needed, as well as financing.
- b. MoET will report to the Prime Minister to establish the AQRF Committee of Vietnam.
- c. A plan to implement the VQF is developed and submitted to the Prime Minister for approval.
- d. MoET hosts and coordinates with other ministries and sectors to develop higher education standards and guidelines for VQF learning outcomes.

### Abbreviations

AQRF	ASEAN qualifications reference framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
MoLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
NQF	national qualifications framework
VQF	Vietnamese qualifications framework



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# ZAMBIA

## Introduction and context

The Zambian general education system consists of three levels: early childhood, primary, junior and secondary; and a higher education system composed of universities and technical education, vocational and entrepreneurship training (TEVET) colleges. Access to the education and training sector has increased with the growth of private universities and colleges.

In 2011 the government of Zambia enacted the Zambia Qualifications Authority Act No 13 that provided for the establishment of the Zambia Qualifications Authority (ZAQA), which became operational in 2014; and for the development and implementation of the national qualifications framework with measures to ensure that standards and registered qualifications were internationally comparable. The scope of the Zambia qualifications framework (ZQF) comprehensively covers all learning achievements and pathways. It provides a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages, public and labour market recognition of qualifications within Zambia and internationally.

The ZQF is a single integrated system comprising three coordinated qualifications sub-frameworks:

- a. general and further education and training, contemplated in Education Act No 23 of 2011 – [www.moge.gov.zm](http://www.moge.gov.zm); [www.exams-council.org.zm](http://www.exams-council.org.zm)
- b. trades and occupations, contemplated in the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TEVET) Act No 13 of 1998 and the Apprenticeships Act, Cap 275 – [www.teveta.org.zm](http://www.teveta.org.zm)
- c. higher education, contemplated in University Act No 11 of 1999 and repealed by the Higher Education Act No 4 of 2013 – [www.heg.org.zm](http://www.heg.org.zm)

The ZQF rests on three main pillars:

- a. qualifications and awards,
- b. quality assurance (provision),
- c. quality assurance (assessments and learner achievement records).

The three pillars are all rooted in established standards. The determination, design and implementation of these standards through quality assurance regulations are provided by the respective quality assurance bodies in conformity with qualification standards and guidelines from ZAQA. In the context of the education and training system in Zambia, these quality assurance bodies are shown in [Table 94](#).

**Table 94. Quality assurance bodies in Zambia**

ZQF SUB-FRAMEWORK	QUALITY ASSURANCE BODY	LEGAL BASIS
General education	Department of Standards Examinations Council of Zambia	Education Act No 23 of 2011
Trades and occupations	Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA)	Technical, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Act No 13 of 1998
Higher education	Higher Education Authority	Higher Education Act No 4 of 2013

Further quality assurance is provided by relevant quality assurance bodies regulating professions such as medical, teaching, nursing, accountancy, engineering, tourism etc. All quality assurance bodies, regardless of the focus area, are subject to the standards and guidelines provided by ZAQA to ensure consistency of learning outcomes from the education and training sector.

## Policy objectives

The main policy objectives of the ZQF that guide the education and training sector are to:

- create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths;
- enhance the quality of education and training;
- promote education, training and employment opportunities;

- contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation;
- develop, foster and maintain an integrated and transparent national framework for the recognition of learning achievements; and ensure that educational qualifications meet appropriate criteria, and are internationally comparable.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The ZQF is organized into 10 qualification levels from the primary school certificate (grade 7 certificate) at level 1 through to doctorate degree at level 10. Each level is described by a statement of learning outcomes known as a level descriptor defining foundational competences based on knowledge; technical competences based on skills; and reflexive competences based on values and attitudes.

**Table 95. ZQF qualification levels and sub-frameworks**

ZQF LEVEL	GENERAL EDUCATION	TRADES AND OCCUPATIONS (TEVET)	HIGHER EDUCATION	
10			Doctorate	
9			Master's degree	
8			Postgraduate diploma	
7			Bachelor's degree	
6		Diploma		
5		Level 5 certificate		
4		Level 4 certificate		
3		Level 3 certificate		
2b		Senior secondary education certificate (grade 12)		
2a		Junior secondary education certificate (grade 9)		
1	Primary education certificate (grade 7)			
<b>Quality assurance</b>	Quality assurance bodies by Act of Parliament (appropriate authorities)			
<b>Qualifications</b>	Zambia Qualifications Authority			

The level descriptors of the ZQF were gazetted in July 2016 to provide the learning outcomes at each level. Statutory instrument No 4 of 2018 was issued in February 2018 to provide for guidelines on the registration and accreditation of qualifications on the ZQF. Consequently, all appropriate authorities are required to align their learning programmes leading to qualifications at all levels on the ZQF. To this end, by December 2018, ZAQA evaluated and approved 88 qualifications for registration and accreditation on the ZQF. A qualifications management system is currently under pilot by ZAQA to maintain all learner achievement records.

### **Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements**

The ZAQA Board, as well as governance structures at all institutions responsible for quality assurance of the education and training sector in Zambia, comprise stakeholders in education, training and industry involved at all levels of the ZQF. All other implementing authorities are involved and form part of the technical committees in relevant institutions. Industry and civil society are co-opted onto the governance structures. Further, the boards and committee of quality assurance and awarding bodies consist of representatives from stakeholder institutions.

In order to ensure the learning outcomes meet demands of various stakeholders, the ZAQA qualification requirements at all levels demand that stakeholder inclusion is evidenced throughout the qualification development process. To demonstrate this, ZAQA engages all stakeholders in the development of national occupational standards that inform the learning programmes at different qualification levels.

### **Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways**

The Zambian Government has developed a recognition of prior learning policy in order to cater for learners who have not been able to attend formal education but have some level of experience in a particular field. This process will provide an opportunity for learners to earn a qualification or to upgrade an existing qualification.

The following types of learning are to be considered for recognition of prior learning:

- a. formal: learning obtained through organized training in a school system from pre-school to a university leading to an award;
- b. non-formal: learning obtained through organized training not leading to an award (e.g. agricultural training, college, faith-based institution);
- c. informal: learning obtained through experience.

### **Referencing to regional frameworks**

As a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Zambia actively works with the regional bodies and references to frameworks within the region by engaging other countries on matters of mutual interest. Zambia has provided inputs to the development and implementation of the SADC regional qualifications framework. Zambia has a National Alignment Committee comprising key stakeholders in education and skills training working on aligning the ZQF to the SADC qualifications framework. Zambia is signatory to the 1981 Arusha Convention and is currently in the process of ratifying the 2014 Revised Addis Convention.

### **Important lessons and future plans**

Each sub-framework is coordinated by the relevant appropriate authorities who ensure adherence to set standards. Key developments include:

- a. general education – reviewed school curriculum for levels 1 and 2; enhanced teacher regulation by the Teaching Council of Zambia;
- b. trades and occupations – ongoing review of the curriculum by both the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA) and professional bodies in this sector. An education levy was introduced in 2016 to support the development of skills in Zambia;
- c. higher education – development of a Higher Education Policy and review of the Higher Education Act was on going in 2018 aimed at streamlining the provision and regulation of higher education;
- d. most professional bodies are actively regulating the training of related professions aimed at enhancing quality;
- e. development of national occupational standards for key economic sectors with industry involvement has been initiated by ZAQA;

- f. alignment of the ZQF to the SADC qualifications framework and other qualification frameworks internationally;
- g. ratification of the Revised Addis Convention on the recognition of qualifications in higher education;
- h. availability of various standards and guideline documents to support the provision of education and the implementation of the national qualifications framework;
- i. popularisation of the ZQF and continuous stakeholder engagement.

#### **Abbreviations**

SADC	Southern African Development Community
TEVET	technical education, vocational and entrepreneurship training
ZAQA	Zambia Qualification Authority
ZQF	Zambia qualifications framework

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#### **Prepared by:**

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

# ZIMBABWE

## Introduction and context

With the coming in of the new government in Zimbabwe, the economy has started to recover substantially expanding by an estimated 3.5%, driven mainly by agriculture. According to the African Development Bank, the fiscal deficit was an estimated 10.7% of GDP in 2018, compared to 12.5% of GDP in 2017, financed mainly through domestic borrowing. In 2018, the government started addressing the unsustainable budget deficit with strong fiscal consolidation measures. Total external debt was an estimated 45.3% of GDP in 2018, down from 53.8% in 2017. The current account deficit was an estimated 3.7% of GDP in 2018, with merchandise imports continuing to exceed exports, putting pressure on the supply of urgently needed foreign exchange and making it critical to diversify exports. The economy however is projected to grow by 4.2% in 2019 and 4.4% in 2020.

The country's protracted fiscal imbalances have constrained development expenditure and social service provision, undermining poverty reduction efforts. Unemployment pressures have been mounting as employment opportunities continue to dwindle. The country has one of the most youthful populations, with those aged 15–34 accounting for more than 36% of the total population. However, most young people remain unemployed and resort to informal trading.

On the educational front, technical vocational education and training (TVET) has remained popular, with polytechnics, industrial training centres, agricultural colleges and youth training centres failing to fully satisfy demand for TVET. There is also a marked increase in the number of students electing for TVET subjects at secondary school level. Demand for TVET graduates has increased compared to general and tertiary education. This is evidence that the TVET sector has a substantial contribution to make towards economic recovery.

The rate of tertiary education attainment is comparatively high within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. Quality

assurance of higher education and increased cooperation between polytechnics and industry is a priority for government. Zimbabwean TVET curricula have been consistently reviewed in three-year cycles. Reviews are carried out in consultation with practicing industry experts and institutional trainers to establish key competences in each occupation and develop content and assessment strategies that address the identified competences.

## Policy objectives

The Zimbabwe national qualifications framework (ZNQF) provides a mechanism for harmonising national qualifications to enable vertical and horizontal mobility of learners and graduates. The ZNQF allows for portability and comparability of qualifications in Zimbabwe and the SADC region to address, among others, non-recognition of prior learning, non-compatibility and non-comparability of skills and educational qualifications in the country and across borders.

Other than contributing to the ease of movement of local learners from basic education to TVET and/or university education, the ZNQF is aligned to the SADC and COMESA mutual recognition agreements for professional qualifications. These agreements are meant to facilitate mobility of qualified labour as part of enhancing human capital for the industrialization and modernization of the country, thus providing for cooperation with transferees in the regions.

This framework provides an instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competences along an agreed continuum of 10 levels. The framework details the comparability of different qualifications and how one can progress from one level to another within and across occupations or industrial sectors. This provides a way for structuring existing and new qualifications, defined by learning outcomes, that is, clear statements of what the learner must know or be able to do whether learned in a classroom, on the job, or less formally.

The specific goals of the ZNQF are to:

- a. establish pathways for vertical progression of education and training qualifications;
- b. establish pathways for horizontal comparability of education and training qualifications; and
- c. increase coherence between education output and needs of the labour market.

The aim is to develop a harmonized framework of qualifications, including those awarded outside formal education. The ZNQF was previously fragmented with three different authorities administering the qualifications frameworks for primary and secondary, tertiary and university qualifications respectively. The harmonized qualification framework has significantly increased cooperation between universities and polytechnics.

**Table 96. ZNQF levels of learning outcomes**

ZNQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPE	DESCRIPTORS	TYPE OF OCCUPATION
10	Ph.D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cutting edge research and creation of new knowledge in the development of the study</li> <li>• Advance new techniques, ideas or approaches</li> <li>• Autonomous in research conducted</li> </ul>	Doctor/ researcher
9	Master's Post-graduate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mastery of knowledge in the field of study</li> <li>• Analysis of complex issues and research proposing solutions based on critical thinking</li> <li>• Participate in resource management and supervision of others</li> <li>• In-depth expert knowledge in the field of study</li> <li>• Specialized skills and principles based on systematic scrutiny of information</li> <li>• Function within wide ranging independence</li> </ul>	Expert/specialist
8	Honours degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methodical comprehension of strategic facets in area of specialty</li> <li>• Implement precisely analysis and enquiry procedures within the area of specialty</li> <li>• Work out setbacks using thoughts and method in their area of specialty</li> <li>• Work within wide ranging self-sufficiency -</li> </ul>	Manager/ supervisor
7	General degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive knowledge in the area of specialty</li> <li>• Apply recognized tenets, calling for a wide range of information to work out challenges in diverse settings</li> </ul>	Manager/ supervisor
6	Higher national diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work within wide ranging self-sufficiency</li> <li>• Specialized knowledge in the area of specialty</li> <li>• Relate various and specific methods in the area of specialty entailing elementary investigation</li> <li>• Work within wide range of structure and a specific self-sufficiency</li> </ul>	Technician specialised
5	National diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive knowledge in the area of specialty</li> <li>• Relate wide-ranging procedures, to work out real problems, in non-routine situations</li> <li>• Work under broad supervision</li> </ul>	Technician

(Continued)

**Table 96. ZNQF levels of learning outcomes (Continued)**

ZNQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPE	DESCRIPTORS	TYPE OF OCCUPATION
4	National certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operational knowledge in the area of specialty</li> <li>Relate diverse techniques in the area of specialty, to get to the bottom of recognizable problems in moderately usual settings</li> <li>Work under general supervision</li> </ul>	Trades person/ apprentice/ skilled at basic level
3	General advanced level certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-depth knowledge in specific subject areas</li> <li>Relate series of techniques in the field of study, to resolve challenges in broad circumstances</li> <li>Function under general supervision</li> </ul>	Specialized general education
2	Ordinary level certificate/ national foundation certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad-based knowledge</li> <li>Relate basic procedures and techniques</li> <li>Work in a controlled atmosphere, under direct supervision</li> </ul>	General education and training
1	Primary level certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rudimentary knowledge</li> <li>Relate elementary techniques to mastery and mathematical ability including desirable values</li> <li>Work under intermittent guidance, consistent scrutiny and limited autonomy</li> </ul>	Basic educational foundation

### Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The ZNQF is coordinated through the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards in the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development. Previously the qualifications framework was fragmented with three different authorities administering the frameworks as follows:

- Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC): primary and secondary education;
- Higher Education Examinations Council (HEXCO): technical vocational education and training education from national certificate, national diploma, higher national diploma up to bachelor of technology levels;
- Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE): general university education.

These regulatory bodies were established under different Acts of Parliament. Efforts are now underway to enact legislation to harmonize the operations of the bodies under one piece of legislation. Industry contributes 1% of the wage bill towards the Zimbabwe Manpower Development Fund (ZIMDEF) to support training. Industry advises the Minister of Higher and Tertiary

Education, Science and Technology Development on skills development and apprenticeship training through the National Manpower Advisory Council (NAMACO), whose membership is drawn from all sectors of the Zimbabwean economy.

ZIMCHE is working on the standardization of degrees offered by all universities in the country including private higher and tertiary learning institutions to ensure uniformity as well as matching international standards. This will be achieved through the development of minimum bodies of knowledge for related degree programmes.

HEXCO is in the process of reviewing all TVET curricula in line with international best practices and technological trends. They are both guided by the Education 5.0 policy that embraces teaching, research, community service, innovation and industrialization. This policy was developed in line with the country's vision 2030 of attaining a middle-income economy through modernization and industrialization.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has developed a curriculum framework, which provides a comprehensive plan for the rapid and sustainable transformation of Zimbabwe's education system. Learners are now required to lay strong



foundations for vocational skills in order to empower them to develop enterprises and contribute to the socio-economic transformation. The curriculum framework exposes learners to the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and heritage studies. In addition, learners are exposed to life-and-work learning contexts through the life-skills orientation programme.

### Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Zimbabwe does not have a mechanism for validating non-formal and informal learning, but efforts are underway to establish one.

### Recognising foreign qualifications

Zimbabwe conducts assessments for foreign qualifications for purposes of recognition. The assessment considers content, duration and key competences as enunciated in the course regulations and syllabi. These are compared with similar qualifications offered in the Zimbabwean training system. Before assessment is done, authentication of the foreign qualification is carried out through the National Qualification Authority of the country of origin.

### NQF implementation

The ZNQF is still at an early stage of implementation and is being coordinated by the Department of Quality Assurance and Standards in the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development. Stakeholders responsible for accreditation of qualifications will continue to work according to the existing legislative framework while new legislation is being enacted.

### Referencing to regional frameworks

Zimbabwe is a member of the SADC regional qualifications framework. The main purpose of the framework is to promote mobility. As such, it plays a key role in setting the regional standards for comparing qualifications obtained in the SADC. The SADC regional qualifications framework is a reference framework for now but might later develop into a framework that has qualifications registered onto it. Currently Zimbabwe is conducting a self-assessment to align itself with the SADC regional qualifications framework.

### Important lessons and future plans

There is a plan in place to establish a national qualification database by mid-2019. The database will contain qualifications from general, TVET and higher education systems. There are also plans to develop mechanisms for the recognition of informal and non-formal training.

#### Abbreviations

HEXCO	Higher Education Examinations Council
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TVET	technical vocational education and training
ZIMCHE	Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education
ZNQF	Zimbabwe national qualifications framework

#### Prepared by:

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.

Section II

**Inventory of Regional  
Qualifications Frameworks**

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AQRF</b>	ASEAN qualifications reference framework
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>CANTA</b>	Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies
<b>Caricom</b>	Caribbean Community
<b>CQF</b>	Caricom qualifications framework
<b>CVQ</b>	Caribbean vocational qualification
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>EQAP</b>	educational quality and assessment programme
<b>EQF</b>	European qualifications framework
<b>MRA</b>	mutual recognition arrangement
<b>NQF</b>	national qualifications framework
<b>PQAF</b>	Pacific quality assurance framework
<b>PQF</b>	Pacific qualifications framework
<b>PRQS</b>	Pacific register of qualifications and standards
<b>QA</b>	quality assurance
<b>QF-EHEA</b>	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area
<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>SADCQF</b>	Southern African Development Community qualifications framework
<b>TCCA</b>	Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation
<b>TQF</b>	transnational qualifications framework
<b>TVET</b>	technical and vocational education and training
<b>VET</b>	vocational education and training
<b>VUSSC</b>	Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

# THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS QUALIFICATIONS REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

## Member States:

**Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.**

## Background

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a political and economic organization of 10 Southeast Asian countries, which was formed on 8 August 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Since then, its membership has expanded to include Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. Its aims include accelerating economic growth, social progress and sociocultural evolution among its members, protection of regional peace and stability, and providing opportunities for Member States to discuss differences peacefully.

The ASEAN Charter, signed by the 10 ASEAN leaders in Singapore on 20 November 2007, provides the basis for an ASEAN qualifications reference framework (AQRF). The Charter reinforces aspirations for a single ASEAN Community that aims, among other things, to develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and lifelong learning, and in science and technology, for the empowerment of the ASEAN peoples and for the strengthening of the ASEAN Community. In the same year, the ASEAN Member States also signed the ASEAN Economic Blueprint (ASEAN, 2007), which calls for multiple areas of economic integration, including the aspiration for the free flow of skilled labour, which is facilitated through harmonisation and standardisation of qualifications (ASEAN, 2007).

Another important ASEAN initiative related to the AQRF in terms of facilitating the free flow of skilled labour is the mutual recognition arrangement (MRA). In addition to MRAs in engineering and nursing, completed in 2005 and 2006, respectively, five additional MRAs were finalised between 2007

and 2009 – in architecture, surveying, medical practitioners, dental practitioners and accountancy – and then tourism in 2012, and most recently, in 2014, the MRA in accountancy services was updated.

In support of mutual confidence building, the 'ASEAN guiding principles for quality assurance and recognition of competency certification systems' were adopted by the ASEAN labour ministers in 2016. In 2019, the guiding principles will be piloted in three ASEAN countries, which are currently also participating in the AQRF referencing process.

## About the AQRF

The AQRF is a common reference framework that enables comparisons of educational qualifications across the ASEAN countries. It aims to:

- a. support recognition of qualifications;
- b. encourage the development of qualifications frameworks that can facilitate lifelong learning;
- c. encourage the development of national approaches to validating learning gained outside formal education;
- d. promote and encourage education and learner mobility;
- e. promote worker mobility;
- f. support better understanding of qualifications systems; and
- g. promote higher quality qualifications systems.

The AQRF is based on agreed understandings between Member States and invites their voluntary engagement (ASEAN, 2016). It aims to be a neutral influence on national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) within ASEAN countries. While the goal is to make national qualifications systems explicit vis-à-vis the AQRF, referencing to it does not require changes in national qualifications systems (Ibid.). The AQRF respects the Member States' specific structures and processes that are responsive to national priorities (Ibid.).

The framework is underpinned by a set of agreed quality assurance principles and broad standards related to: (i) the functions of the registering and accrediting agencies; (ii) systems for the assessment of learning and the issuing of qualifications; and (iii) regulation of the issuance of certificates. As such, these quality assurance processes build confidence and trust in national qualifications and in the value of the region's qualifications. Furthermore, the AQRF requires countries to refer to one or more established quality assurance frameworks as the basis for their agreed quality assurance principles and standards more broadly (Ibid.).

The AQRF includes a set of regional level descriptors and will, in the future, allow ASEAN countries to link the levels of their NQFs to the ASEAN framework. The level descriptors cover two domains: knowledge and skills; and application and responsibility (see Table 97).

## Development of the AQRF

In 2011 a process was initiated to develop a concept design for the AQRF. A task force on the AQRF, comprising representatives from ASEAN ministries of trade, education, and labour/manpower, as well as representatives of qualification, accreditation and other agencies, was created in 2012. The task force was set up under the auspices of the economic cooperation and work programme of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand free trade agreement, with the mandate of developing the AQRF in consultation with stakeholders in the different ASEAN countries. By 2015, the AQRF was completed and the document containing its principles and structure was endorsed by the ASEAN economic, education and labour ministers. Subsequently, the AQRF governance and structure document was endorsed by ASEAN labour and education ministers in May 2016, and by economic ministers in August 2016. This document provides for the establishment of the AQRF Committee, which is tasked with overseeing the referencing process and further development of the AQRF, among other roles.

## Further information

<https://asean.org/asean-economic-community/sectoral-bodies-under-the-purview-of-aem/services/asean-qualifications-reference-framework/>

## Implementation of the AQRF

The AQRF Committee convened its first meeting in February 2017. This meeting launched the implementation of Phase IV of the NQF project on referencing NQFs to the AQRF. Supported by the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand free trade agreement economic cooperation support programme, this project aims to support the referencing process of the ASEAN countries' NQFs or qualifications systems to the AQRF. The project aims to have at least two ASEAN countries undertake this referencing.

The AQRF Committee began the informal peer-review process of the draft referencing reports submitted by some Member States at its fourth meeting in May 2018, and formal consideration of draft referencing reports submitted by two Member States, at its fifth meeting in November 2018.

ASEAN countries are at different stages in the development of their NQF. Most of the Member States' NQFs have been endorsed, but are at different stages of implementation (Bateman and Coles, 2015).

## The future of the AQRF

At least four ASEAN countries have expressed their intention to undertake the referencing process in 2018–19. Other Member States also intend to undertake the referencing once ready. Referencing requires countries to describe their education and training, and quality assurance systems. The referencing process also requires each ASEAN country to set up a national referencing panel of key stakeholders that includes at least one observer from another Member State.

In the long term, the AQRF is expected to serve as a meta-framework to support recognition of its levels against other regional qualifications frameworks as well as support inter-regional recognition.

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### Prepared by:

UNESCO.

**Table 97. Level descriptors for the ASEAN qualifications reference framework (AQRF)**

LEVELS	KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	APPLICATION AND RESPONSIBILITY
	DEMONSTRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THAT:	THE CONTEXTS IN WHICH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ARE DEMONSTRATED:
<b>8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are at the most advanced and specialised level and at the frontier of a field</li> <li>involve independent and original thinking and research, resulting in the creation of new knowledge or practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are highly specialised and complex involving the development and testing of new theories and new solutions to resolve complex, abstract issues</li> <li>require authoritative and expert judgment in management of research or an organization, and significant responsibility for extending professional knowledge and practice and creation of new ideas and or processes</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are at the forefront of a field and show mastery of a body of knowledge</li> <li>involve critical and independent thinking as the basis for research to extend or redefine knowledge or practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are complex and unpredictable and involve the development and testing of innovative solutions to resolve issues</li> <li>require expert judgment and significant responsibility for professional knowledge, practice and management</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are specialised technical and theoretical within a specific field</li> <li>involve critical and analytical thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are complex and changing</li> <li>require initiative and adaptability as well as strategies to improve activities and to solve complex and abstract issues</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are detailed technical and theoretical within a general field</li> <li>involve analytical thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are often subject to change</li> <li>involve independent evaluation of activities to resolve complex and sometimes abstract issues</li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are technical and theoretical with general coverage of a field</li> <li>involve adapting processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are generally predictable but subject to change</li> <li>involve broad guidance requiring some self-direction, and coordination to resolve unfamiliar issues</li> </ul>

(Continued)

**Table 97. Level descriptors for the ASEAN qualifications reference framework (AQRF) (Continued)**

LEVELS	KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	APPLICATION AND RESPONSIBILITY
	DEMONSTRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THAT:	THE CONTEXTS IN WHICH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ARE DEMONSTRATED:
<b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>include general principles and some conceptual aspects</li> <li>involve selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are stable with some aspects subject to change</li> <li>involve general guidance and require judgment and planning to resolve some issues independently</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are general and factual</li> <li>involve use of standard actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involve structured processes</li> <li>involve supervision and some discretion for judgment on resolving familiar issues</li> </ul>
<b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are basic, general</li> <li>involve simple, straightforward and routine actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involve structured routine processes</li> <li>involve close levels of support and supervision</li> </ul>

Source: ASEAN, 2016.

# THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

## Member States:

**Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.**

## Associate members:

**Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, and Turks and Caicos Islands.**

## Background

Established in 1973, the Caribbean Community (Caricom) comprises 20 Caribbean nations, of which 15 are full members, and 5 (all overseas British territories) are associate members. Caricom's mission is to develop resilient societies that promote economic integration and cooperation among its members; to ensure that the benefits of integration are equitably shared; to facilitate social development and cohesion; and to coordinate foreign policy.

In 1990, Caricom developed a regional strategy for technical vocational education and training (TVET). In 2002, a corresponding 'competence model for TVET' was developed and adopted, which laid the basis for a Caricom TVET strategy. The Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA) was established in 2003 and endorsed by Caricom as the 'implementation arm' of the regional coordinating mechanism for TVET. CANTA's key purpose was to establish and govern a regional training and certification system, called the Caribbean vocational qualification (CVQ), to ensure standard and uniform delivery of competence-based TVET training within the Caricom single market and economy (Caricom, 2007; 2009) and thus facilitate the free movement of skills across the Community. CVQs are awarded on completion of assessment measured against regional occupational standards. These qualifications

recognise and describe the competences required to do a job at various levels and act as the basis of an articulation and accreditation system. National training agencies, TVET councils and apex bodies are responsible for facilitating the development of standards through various institutional arrangements and industry engagement. These standards are reviewed at a regional level by CANTA, the regional coordinating mechanism for TVET and, finally, the Council for Human and Social Development. The CVQ certificate is then awarded by the authorised national training agencies<sup>1010</sup>.

## Level of development

At the centre of the CVQ model is the regional occupational qualifications framework, adopted by Caricom for use by national training agencies, ministries with responsibility for TVET and/or workforce training, and the Caribbean Examination Council. The framework is characterised by a five-tiered system of qualifications at different levels of skill, autonomy and responsibility. These correspond to levels of employment in the labour market, beginning with level 1, which describes the entry-level worker, through to level 5, which describes the professional worker<sup>1011</sup>.

In 2012 Caricom developed a draft regional qualifications framework (CQF) (Caricom, 2012). The CQF was designed as a 'reference point' to facilitate mobility of learners and recognition and accreditation of qualifications within the region. The CQF also aims to provide sufficient independent data to improve the transparency of qualifications, both regionally and internationally.

<sup>1010</sup> Jamaica/Heart Trust National Training Agency; Barbados TVET Council; National Training Agency of Trinidad and Tobago; Saint Lucia TVET Council; Grenada TVET Council; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Sector Skills Development Agency; Guyana TVET Council.

<sup>1011</sup> The regional occupational qualifications framework is presently being expanded from five to eight levels. It is also being harmonised with the recently approved Caricom qualifications framework.



The CQF is informed by the principles of the ‘ideal Caribbean citizen’ as defined by Caricom, and is based on 10 generic level descriptors (Caricom, 2012). Five domains are used at each level:

- a. knowledge and understanding;
- b. application and practice;
- c. communication, numeracy and ICT;
- d. life skills; and
- e. autonomy, accountability and working with others.

The CQF was approved in Georgetown, Guyana by the 32nd Council for Human and Social Development meeting on education on 30–31 March 2017.

## The future of the CQF

At present, several Caricom countries have established national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). These include Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. Other countries in the region are still in the initial stages of NQF development. These include Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Suriname. Guidelines for NQF development have been produced by the Caricom Secretariat.

In conclusion, the CQF will only be successful once all Member States have established their own NQFs that are articulated and harmonised with the CQF. In October 2019, the TVET qualifications framework, showing its alignment with the CQF, will be presented to education ministers at a meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development.

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**Prepared by:**  
UNESCO.

**Table 98. Domain and descriptors for the Caricom qualifications framework (CQF)**

DOMAIN	DESCRIPTORS
<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>	Theoretical and/or factual knowledge; possesses ability to recall and present information; demonstrates knowledge and understanding of specific facts, concepts, principles, procedures and theories
<b>Application and practice</b>	Cognitive (logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments) competencies to achieve results
<b>Communication, numeracy, information and communication technology</b>	Literacy in verbal and non-verbal communication, in numerical and graphical tasks and in ICT applications demonstrated through ability to use a range of skills in context to access, process, produce and respond appropriately to information
<b>Life skills</b>	Problem-solving; decision-making; critical and creative thinking; interpersonal relationships; empathy; emotional and self-awareness; coping with stress and effective communication skills
<b>Autonomy, accountability and working with others</b>	From working alone on simple and routine tasks under direct supervision to becoming increasingly autonomous and accountable within a work role; greater independence and focus on management and leadership; becoming more self-critical and responsive to ethical and professional issues

# THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEMS

## Member States:

**Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, The Gambia and Togo.**

## Background

The Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) was established in 1975 with the signing of the treaty of Lagos. The group consists of 15 Member States and has the mandate to promote economic cooperation and regional integration in all fields of activity of the constituting countries. These are seen as tools for an accelerated development of the West African economy. Ecowas vision is to create a borderless region where the population has access to its abundant resources, can enjoy free movement, with access to efficient education and health systems, and engage in economic and commercial activities in peace and security. The ultimate aim is to achieve collective self-sufficiency for Member States by creating a single large trade bloc and building a full economic and trading union.

There are considerable differences in terms of population sizes, economies and levels of per capita income across Ecowas member countries. While there are labour flows between member countries they are not as great as those of some other regions. Nevertheless, Ecowas is a robust entity and has been active in building mutual economic and social cooperation between Member States. Ecowas countries had an estimated population of over 349 million in 2015. West Africa is also one of the strongest sub-regions in the continent, growing by as much as 6.3% in 2013 and this is largely due to the collective prosperity drive of Ecowas.

In 2011, Ecowas adopted its development blueprint for the next decade – Vision 2020. Vision 2020 is aimed at setting a clear direction and goal to significantly raise the standard of living of the Ecowas people through conscious and inclusive programmes that will guarantee peace and

prosperity in West Africa. It aims to replace the current 'Ecowas of States' with an 'Ecowas of People' (Ecowas, 2010). In this context, it is expected that all countries will have 'a highly skilled, flexible and mobile workforce'.

## Development work on harmonization of qualifications systems

The development and implementation of national and regional qualifications frameworks has been one of the priorities of Ecowas education ministers for some time. After a first conference that took place in Dakar in 2002, two reference documents were published in 2003: the Protocol on education and training and its annex on the equivalence of certificates (Ecowas, 2003). From the Protocol, it became clear that the main interest of ministers was to have a holistic approach concerning the whole range of provision from basic to higher education and to adult learning. In the annex on the equivalence of certificates, the focus was on the assessment of knowledge, skills and competences and their recognition; for (re-)entering the formal education and training system and/or the labour market. This approach aimed also at facilitating geographical, occupational and social mobility.

Among the 15 Ecowas countries, only The Gambia, Nigeria and Senegal seem to have concrete initiatives to develop a national qualifications framework (NQF). In most other countries of the region, there exists an intention to develop a NQF as part of their broad education and training policies. Within this context a regional common reference framework needs to accommodate different types of NQFs that are at different stages of development, ranging from the in principle and conceptual to the fully developed and functioning NQFs.

There is already a set of arrangements and initiatives between neighbouring countries that aim to facilitate labour mobility and the recognition and use of qualifications between countries in the region. Several bilateral, trilateral and multilateral agreements between national

qualifications agencies, professional bodies and education providers for qualifications standards and recognition exist across the region.

In this context, the Ecowas Commission, in cooperation with Unesco, launched in 2018 a new initiative to strengthen the capacities of its Member States in reforming qualifications systems while adopting a combined national and regional perspective. The initiative aims at deepening the integration and harmonization among qualifications systems; creating a common identity; improving the transparency of multiple complex systems; supporting the mobility of workers and learners as well as the social and economic imperatives as defined by Ecowas Vision 2020. The initiative may lead to the development of a regional qualifications framework as adopted in other regions in the world. The form and type that this future framework may take will be discussed and decided by Member States as part of this initiative.

In addition to the regional dimension, the initiative will provide the basis for the development of qualifications systems in countries that have not yet engaged in this process. The regional process will support and enhance each country's national qualifications framework or system while providing the necessary mechanism to facilitate comparison and transparency. The initiative will link the participating Ecowas national qualifications frameworks or systems and become the Community's mechanism for recognition of its qualifications against other sub-regional, continental, regional and international qualifications systems.

## References

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- Ecowas (2010). *Ecowas Vision 2020. Towards a democratic and prosperous community*. Abuja: Ecowas Commission.

**Prepared by:**  
UNESCO.

Two regional workshops took place in Senegal and Nigeria in June and December 2018 respectively. The workshops brought together stakeholders from nearly all Ecowas Member States and international experts and were the first steps in creating a regional community of practice in the field of qualifications. Workshop participants had the opportunity to discuss the aims of the initiative and engage in a comparative analysis of their programmes and qualifications systems, focusing in particular on the use of learning outcomes and quality assurance processes.

## Future steps

A clear workplan for the year ahead was adopted by the national focal points for the initiative at the workshop in December 2018. The workplan has three overall objectives:

- a. strengthen the capacities of national focal points and develop with them a common language and mutual understanding at regional level;
- b. enable focal points to work together on concrete activities related to NQFs and cross-border issues;
- c. mobilise and ensure political support at both national and regional levels to ensure the success of the initiative.

Specific activities will be undertaken under each of these objectives to achieve the workplan's expected results.

# THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

## Countries involved in EQF implementation (February 2018):

**EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.**

**Not members of the EU: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey.**

## Background

The European qualifications framework (EQF) came into force in April 2008 (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2008). Since then it has become a common reference point for comparing qualifications across national and institutional borders and making them easier to understand, both for study and working purposes. It consists of eight learning-outcomes-based levels, ranging from basic (level 1) to most advanced (level 8), to which each national qualifications framework (NQF) or system is linked or 'referenced'. Given the diversity of education and training systems across Europe, each level is defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy – previously competence<sup>1012</sup> – (learning outcomes) that need to be acquired to reach it. The EQF applies to all types and levels of education, training and qualifications, from general education, vocational education and training (VET), and higher education. Each level is attainable by a variety of education or career pathways; this includes qualifications awarded through validation of non-formal and informal learning. Individual qualifications are not directly

<sup>1012</sup> One important change in the revision of the EQF recommendation in 2017 is the change of the headline of the third descriptor pillar from 'competence' to 'responsibility and autonomy'.

referenced to the EQF but have to be initially included in an NQF. NQF levels are referenced to EQF levels based on a comparison of NQF level descriptors to the EQF level descriptors.

In May 2017, the EQF recommendation was revised (Council of the European Union, 2017) to respond better to current and future challenges. While the core objectives agreed a decade ago to create transparency and comparability in qualifications across Europe were kept, the revision was one of the 10 key actions of the New skills agenda for Europe (European Commission, 2018), which aims to improve the relevance and quality of training, make skills more visible, and improve skills intelligence<sup>1013</sup>. The EQF also contributes to the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>1014</sup>, whose first principle emphasises that everyone has 'the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.' The EQF has been used in Europass and will be integrated in the new Europass platform<sup>1015</sup> allowing individuals to be able to present the results of their learning through qualifications, with information on the content (learning outcomes) and level of their learning.

## Level of development

The EQF has acted as a catalyst for development of learning-outcomes-based NQFs and contributed to changes in the qualifications landscape in Europe. In the 39 countries currently cooperating

<sup>1013</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223>

<sup>1014</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

<sup>1015</sup> Decision 2018/646 of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 April 2018 on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) and repealing Decision No 2241/2004/EC. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L112, 2.5.2018, pp. 42–50. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018D0646&rid=9>

on EQF implementation, 43 NQFs using explicit levels of learning outcomes have been established or are being developed. Most countries are working towards a comprehensive NQF including all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training (general education, VET and higher education) and increasingly opening up to qualifications awarded outside the formal system; examples of this can be found in France, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK (Scotland) (Cedefop, 2018). Although these frameworks have reached different implementation stages, an increasing number are now becoming operational and making a contribution to education and training policies and practices in their respective countries (Cedefop, 2019).

The EQF has promoted two important principles supporting the transparency and modernisation of qualifications systems in Europe.

- a. The learning outcomes orientation – focuses on what the holder of a qualification is expected to know, be able to do and understand. This provides a new perspective on qualification systems and the content and profile of individual qualifications. The EQF has reinforced qualification design in terms of learning outcomes, providing a common language to compare them. Calibrating the qualifications description requirements and NQF level descriptors is work in progress in many countries.
- b. The comprehensive approach – covers all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training (VET, general education, higher education) as well those awarded outside formal education and training and through validation of non-formal and informal learning. This comprehensive approach draws attention to progression across education sectors and borders.

Countries have voluntarily adapted these principles to their national circumstances and needs. Ten EQF referencing criteria and procedures<sup>1016</sup> have been set up to help ensure that NQFs are linked to the EQF in a coherent and transparent way.

By February 2019, 35 countries had formally referenced their national qualifications levels to the EQF: Austria, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta,

<sup>1016</sup> Annex III, EQF recommendation, 2017.

Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK (England, Scotland and Wales)<sup>1017</sup>. The EQF advisory group<sup>1018</sup> is responsible for overall monitoring and coherence of the process.

The remaining four countries are expected to follow in 2019, which means that the first stage of EQF referencing is nearly finished. The EQF referencing report is a snapshot in time; as national qualification systems and frameworks evolve, it will eventually become outdated, requiring updates according to national developments. EQF implementation is a continuing process and Estonia, Malta, Poland and UK-Scotland presented updates in 2015–18.

Development of the EQF is closely coordinated with the Bologna process and the agreement to implement qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA). This means that EQF levels 5 to 8 are compatible with the ‘cycles’ of the Bologna process and the ‘Dublin descriptors’.

A total of 31 countries have formally self-certified their higher education qualifications to the QF-EHEA. Countries are increasingly combining referencing to the EQF and self-certification to the QF-EHEA<sup>1019</sup>. Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Turkey have all produced joint reports on both processes, reflecting the priority given to the development and adoption of comprehensive NQFs covering all levels and types of qualification. This development reflects the increasingly close cooperation between the two European framework initiatives, also illustrated by regular meetings between EQF national coordination points and Bologna framework coordinators.

NQF and EQF levels increasingly feature on new qualifications documents, Europass and qualifications databases. As a result, learners, employers, training providers and recognition bodies can better understand the level, content and value of a qualification. Qualifications documents (certificates and diplomas, and/or Europass

<sup>1017</sup> Referencing reports, see: <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/referencing-reports-and-contacts>

<sup>1018</sup> All 39 countries taking part in the EQF process are represented in the EQF advisory group, as are the European social partners (trade unions and employers) as well as representatives of the non-governmental sector.

<sup>1019</sup> Self-certification reports verify the compatibility of the national framework for higher education with the QF-EHEA.

certificate and diploma supplements) have started to include EQF/NQF levels in 27 countries<sup>1020</sup>: Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Switzerland and the UK. It is also important that national and European qualifications databases contain this information and ideally structure information on qualifications in line with their framework. Qualifications databases indicate NQF/EQF levels in 20 countries (though some only have NQF levels and are at initial stages): Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the UK. Several countries have indicated their intention to do so (or to include EQF levels also) in 2019, such as Cyprus and Greece.

transparency and recognition tools created over recent decades. It is generally considered a success and an important instrument for increasing transparency in national qualification systems and qualifications, and promoting mutual trust between European countries. Visible progress has been made in the last 10 years<sup>1021</sup>.

The revised EQF recommendation aims to address current challenges and increase the transparency and coherence of EQF referencing, reflecting the changing nature of qualification systems. It also aims to strengthen the link between qualifications referenced to the EQF and quality assurance, and clarify the role of the EQF in relation to international and third country qualifications.

There is agreement that a key priority in the coming period is to make the EQF more visible to end users and show its contribution to the wider objectives of lifelong learning, employability, and worker and learner mobility and social integration.

## The future of the EQF

The EQF is at the core of EU transparency tools in education and training and relates to all other

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<sup>1020</sup> This is work in progress. Most widely spread is indication on VET certificates and/or Europass certificates, at least in general education; in higher education this is the decision of higher education institutions.

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<sup>1021</sup> On 15–16 March 2018, a conference was organised in Brussels to celebrate the EQF's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. More information at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9068&furtherNew%20s=yes>

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### Prepared by:

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop).

**Table 99. Reference levels in the European qualifications framework (EQF)**

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTONOMY
<b>8</b>	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research practice
<b>7</b>	Highly specialised 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	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	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
<b>6</b>	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	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 and groups
<b>5</b>	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others
<b>4</b>	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Exercise self- management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities

**Table 99. Reference levels in the European qualifications framework (EQF) (Continued)**

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTONOMY
<b>3</b>	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
<b>2</b>	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy
<b>1</b>	Basic general knowledge	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context

Source: Council of the European Union, 2017.



# THE PACIFIC QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

## Member states:

**Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.**

## Background

The Pacific Community includes the 22 Pacific Island countries and territories as well as four of the original founders (the Netherlands and United Kingdom withdrew in 1962 and 2004 respectively, when they relinquished their Pacific interests). The Council of Regional Government and Administrations, which meets once a year, is the governing body of the Pacific Community. The Pacific Community works in a wide range of sectors to achieve three development goals<sup>1022</sup>:

- a. Goal 1: Pacific people benefit from sustainable economic development;
- b. Goal 2: Pacific communities are empowered and resilient;
- c. Goal 3: Pacific people reach their potential and live long and healthy lives.

The notion of a Pacific qualifications register was first mooted in 2001 at the Pacific Islands Ministers of Education Forum in Auckland, New Zealand. In the meetings that followed, officials reaffirmed their commitment to developing a regional qualifications register and, in February 2009, they proceeded to establish a dedicated unit within the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment<sup>1023</sup> (SPBEA) to champion the development of the Pacific qualifications register<sup>1024</sup> (SPBEA, 2009).

<sup>1022</sup> [www.spc.int/about-us/](http://www.spc.int/about-us/)

<sup>1023</sup> The South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment has now become the educational quality and assessment programme (EQAP) within the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

<sup>1024</sup> The Pacific qualifications register has been renamed the Pacific register of qualifications and standards.

The education ministers' initial expectation of a Pacific qualifications framework (PQF) was to achieve a regional commitment to continually improving the quality of all forms of Pacific education and training (basic and primary, secondary, TVET and tertiary) that would culminate in the award of internationally recognised qualifications.

## Level of development

The PQF is a common reference framework that is linked to the Pacific register of qualifications and standards (PRQS)<sup>1025</sup>. The PQF supports the current international move to outcomes-based learning. This is expected to shift the focus from teaching and delivery to learner achievement and learning outcomes. The PQF includes qualifications and components of qualifications from the primary and secondary school sector, TVET, tertiary or higher education levels as well as community-based training.

All qualifications to be entered into the register are to be referenced against the PQF: for example, both volume and level profiles are included in the information in the register. In particular, the PQF enables accredited qualifications (and components of qualifications) from diverse national education and training systems to be listed in the PRQS, which also notes their assigned PQF level and credit value.

The PQF includes a set of 10 level descriptors (see [Table 100](#)). The 10-level framework encompasses all forms of education and training, including general, adult education and community programmes; the primary and secondary school sector; TVET; and tertiary or higher education. The level descriptors include three domains: knowledge and skills; application (deconstructed to type and problem solving); and autonomy (deconstructed to level of support and degree of judgement). The PQF

<sup>1025</sup> See details in: [www.spbea.org.fj/getattachment/OurWork/Projects/Pacific-Register-for-Qualifications-Standards/2-PQF-booklet-FINAL.pdf.aspx](http://www.spbea.org.fj/getattachment/OurWork/Projects/Pacific-Register-for-Qualifications-Standards/2-PQF-booklet-FINAL.pdf.aspx)

level descriptors have been compared with the descriptors used in the Australian and New Zealand qualifications frameworks in 2012, as well as with NQFs in the Pacific Island countries – Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. Individual countries have also assessed their frameworks against the PQF and have found them to be comparable.

The governing body for the PQF and PRQS is the Pacific Board for Educational Quality, a specially mandated sub-committee of the Council of Regional Government and Administrations. An advisory board for the PRQS was established in 2014 to help guide the administration and operations of the register. Members of the advisory board are the heads of national and regional accrediting agencies from Pacific countries, including representatives from Australia and New Zealand.

Both the register and the framework are underpinned by a set of quality assurance standards for agencies (including the registration of providers and accreditation processes of qualifications), as well as minimum standards for providers and programmes. The quality assurance standards are supported by various policies and procedures, guidelines and criteria, which are set out in the Pacific quality assurance framework (PQAF). The PQAF is intended to serve two important purposes. First, it provides broad quality principles on the roles and functions of accrediting agencies in monitoring and sustaining quality within post-school education and training institutions; and second, as the educational quality and assessment programme's (EQAP) internal quality system.

The PQAF is not intended to standardise quality assurance practices in the Pacific; however, it provides a broad base for accrediting agencies and institutions to compare their own quality assurance policies and processes. Where the opportunity arises to relate to regional initiatives such as the PQF and the PRQS, the PQAF provides a common standard for mutual understanding and implementation.

In the Pacific region, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu have made progress in developing their national qualifications agencies and NQFs. Cook Islands and Niue are aligned with the New Zealand qualifications

framework. The Northern Pacific countries (Micronesia, Palau and Marshall Islands), however, seek accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges of the United States. Kiribati and Tuvalu have adopted the PQF and PQAF as their national qualifications and quality assurance frameworks and are working with EQAP to improve the quality assurance of their post-secondary education and training. Solomon Islands are in the early stages of establishing their qualifications and quality assurance system. Nauru now offers qualifications that are accredited by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

## The future of the PQF

The Qualifications Unit oversees the PRQS and will further:

- a. develop the region's capacity to set professional licensing and occupational standards. This means hosting information on national and regional professional associations, occupational standards, licensing criteria and other related aspects that support the various Pacific trade agreements that have labour mobility components;
- b. develop procedures for regional and international recognition of qualifications;
- c. explore the benefits of adding an external quality assurance function to ensure the integrity and credibility of the PRQS;
- d. support national and regional accrediting agencies;
- e. assist smaller island States (e.g. Kiribati and Tuvalu) in exploring best options for their frameworks and quality needs;
- f. assist countries in developing their qualifications and quality assurance frameworks;
- g. support the development, accreditation and delivery of regional qualifications;
- h. support the development and accreditation of micro-qualifications; and
- i. review the PRQS database over the next two-year period.

The unit will continue to work with countries and stakeholders to ensure the PQF and PQAF become fully operational, and their benefits are realised, across the region.

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**Prepared by:**  
UNESCO.

**Table 100. Level descriptors of the Pacific qualifications framework (PQF)**

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	APPLICATION	AUTONOMY
	DEMONSTRATED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THAT:	APPLIED IN CONTEXTS THAT:	IN CONDITIONS WHERE THERE IS:
<b>10</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involve critical understanding of a substantial and complex body of knowledge at the most forefront of a discipline or area</li> <li>involve high-level critical analyses, reflection and independent and original thinking</li> <li>involve the creation and interpretation of new knowledge or practice, through original advanced research that satisfies formal academic review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are subject to change with some complexity</li> <li>involve the formulation of or adaptation of processes to resolve complex and sometimes abstract issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>minimal guidance and high-level autonomy, initiative, adaptability and self-direction</li> <li>authoritative judgement and high-level planning, management and innovation required</li> </ul>
<b>9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involve mastery and integrated understanding of a complex body of knowledge, some of which is at the forefront in one or more disciplines or areas</li> <li>involve high level critical analyses</li> <li>involve research as the basis for extending or redefining knowledge or practice in one or more disciplines or areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are complex and specialised, generally involving some new or evolving aspects</li> <li>involve the formulation and testing of theories and processes to resolve highly complex, abstract and emergent issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>minimal guidance and substantial autonomy, initiative, adaptability and self-direction</li> <li>expert judgement and high-level planning, management and innovation required</li> </ul>
<b>8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are highly advanced, theoretical and/or technical, within one or more disciplines or areas</li> <li>involve critical, analytical and independent thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are complex with some specialisation</li> <li>involve the formulation of processes to resolve highly complex and abstract issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>minimal guidance and demonstrated self-direction or autonomy</li> <li>significant judgement, planning, coordination and organization required</li> </ul>

**Table 100. Level descriptors of the Pacific qualifications framework (PQF) (Continued)**

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	APPLICATION	AUTONOMY
	DEMONSTRATED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THAT:	APPLIED IN CONTEXTS THAT:	IN CONDITIONS WHERE THERE IS:
<b>7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are highly theoretical and/or technical with significant underpinning of knowledge, within one or more disciplines or areas</li> <li>involve critical and analytical thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are subject to complex change</li> <li>involve the formulation of or substantial adaptation of processes to resolve complex and abstract issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>broad guidance and demonstrated self-direction</li> <li>significant judgement and high-level planning, management and innovation required</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are highly theoretical and/or abstract or technical within a broad field or with depth in one area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are subject to change with some complexity</li> <li>involve the formulation or adaptation of processes to resolve complex and sometimes abstract issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>broad guidance or direction</li> <li>well-developed judgement planning required</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are mainly technical and theoretical, within a broad field or with depth in one area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are both known and changing</li> <li>involve unfamiliar issues that are addressed using a range of processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>general guidance or direction</li> <li>both judgement and planning required</li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are broadly factual, within a broad field in one area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are stable but sometimes unpredictable</li> <li>involve familiar and unfamiliar issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>routine guidance or direction</li> <li>judgement and some planning required</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are factual or procedural, technical, with some theoretical aspects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are stable and predictable</li> <li>involve familiar issues that are addressed by selecting from known solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>routine supervision, guidance and direction</li> <li>some judgement and discretion required</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are factual or manual or operational</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are structured and stable</li> <li>involve straightforward issues that are addressed by set, known solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>close support and guidance or direction</li> <li>minimal judgement or discretion required</li> </ul>
<b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are basic, foundational and explicit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are highly structured, defined and repetitive</li> <li>involve straightforward and everyday issues that are addressed by simple and rehearsed procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>immediate support and guidance or direction</li> <li>almost no judgement and planning required</li> </ul>

Source: SPBEA, 2011.

# THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK: BUILDING TRUST FOR BETTER MOBILITY

## Member States:

**Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.**

## Introduction and background

The main objectives of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are to enhance development, peace and security, and economic growth, to alleviate poverty, improve the standard and quality of life of the peoples of Southern Africa, and support the socially disadvantaged through regional integration, built on democratic principles and equitable and sustainable development.

In this context, SADC countries adopted in 1997 the *Protocol on education and training* which seeks to promote a regionally integrated and harmonised education system, especially with regard to issues of access, equity, relevance, and quality of educational interventions. In 2015, SADC countries adopted the SADC industrialisation strategy 2015–26 to promote greater regional integration, focusing on the industrialisation of economies in the region and enhancing factor accumulation (labour, capital and technology) to substantially raise total productivity.

The SADC qualifications framework (SADCQF) is considered an important mechanism to implement the Protocol on education and training and the SADC industrialisation strategy as it contributes to the harmonisation of the education and training systems, and facilitates the mobility of labour in the region. The SADCQF, a comprehensive regional qualifications framework for schooling, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education, was established in 2011 by the SADC education ministers. Its purpose is to ease mobility of learners and workers across the region and internationally. It is a 10-level framework underpinned by learning outcomes and quality assurance (QA) principles that will provide a regional

reference for qualifications and QA mechanisms in the region<sup>1026</sup>.

Member States have agreed to align their qualifications and QA mechanisms with those of the SADCQF. All new qualification certificates, diplomas and other credentials issued by competent authorities throughout the region will need to include the SADCQF relevant level. Alignment will enable this recognition of achievement at a regional level. The resulting transparency and information about the qualifications and QA of aligned Member States will further assist in generating mutual trust among SADC members. Regional alignment will also enable institutions and individuals to make comparisons of their learning and competence levels and reduce unnecessary duplication of learning and effort when moving through the SADC region for study or work.

The task of implementing the SADCQF was given by the education ministers to the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) – a group of experts from the 16 SADC Member States supported by the SADC Secretariat. At a TCCA meeting in September 2016, the implementation process of the SADCQF was revived and an implementation model developed. A clear two-year milestone plan was agreed and an implementation model was adopted<sup>1027</sup>. Initially comprising three programmes, namely (1) development and alignment; (2) quality assurance, and (3) verification, three more programmes relevant to regional development were added to the implementation model later, namely (4) communication and advocacy; (5) recognition of

<sup>1026</sup> The SADC level descriptors and quality assurance guidelines are presented in the SADCQF booklet (pp. 10–11 and 13–14 respectively), see: [www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20booklet.pdf](http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20booklet.pdf)  
See infographics on the SADCQF level descriptors and guidelines: [www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20Level%20descriptors.pdf](http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20Level%20descriptors.pdf) [www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20QA%20Guidelines%20Poster.pdf](http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20QA%20Guidelines%20Poster.pdf)

<sup>1027</sup> [www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20Implementation%20Model.pdf](http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20Implementation%20Model.pdf)

prior learning, credit accumulation and transfer, and articulation; and (6) governance.

Eight countries volunteered to pilot the alignment of their qualifications frameworks or education and training systems with the SADCQF. In order to provide support and centrally drive coordination of implementation, a TCCA executive committee (EXCO) was established based on the SADC troika principle, consisting of the current, outgoing and incoming chairs. To ensure the sustainability of the SADCQF implementation process, a funding proposal for a SADCQF implementation unit was submitted to the SADC Secretariat. In the meantime, Member States have volunteered to support the SADC Secretariat with the implementation effort and considerable progress has been made since the September 2016 meeting.

### Development and alignment of national qualifications frameworks and systems

The main purpose of the SADCQF is to promote mobility. As such, it plays a key role in being the regional reference framework for comparing qualifications obtained in SADC countries. The eight countries that are piloting the alignment of their national qualifications frameworks or national qualifications systems with the SADCQF are: Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia. An alignment plan and a roadmap, as well as alignment timelines were developed to assist these pilot countries. Support was provided via alignment capacity-building workshops hosted by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

Essential to the alignment process is the establishment of a national alignment committee to spearhead and approve the process. The committee typically comprises councils on higher education or tertiary councils; departments of education (including basic, TVET and higher); occupational and trades sector; and qualifications authorities. Each country establishes a national alignment committee that suits its particular needs and context.

The TCCA's future plans are to assist pilot countries to complete their alignment reports and, eventually, roll out alignment to the other eight SADC countries. Looking ahead, there is also a plan to develop an inventory of the national qualifications frameworks and systems in the SADC countries. South Africa is overseeing this programme to ensure that it is centrally driven and supported. South Africa is also providing secretarial assistance to the SADC Secretariat.

### Quality assurance

The SADCQF encourages SADC countries to have good QA mechanisms in place and links up with key regional QA bodies. In this regard, the Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN) has nominated two experts to assist the TCCA with the implementation of QA in the SADC. The Southern Africa Association for Educational Assessment has also nominated two representatives who will assist the TCCA with implementation of the SADCQF, with specific focus on the general education sector.

The aim is to strengthen SADC countries' QA mechanisms in terms of accreditation and certification and support their alignment with the SADC QA guidelines. Progress has been made in creating a list of credible SADC institutions and their qualifications, and making the information publicly available. Looking ahead, it is important to strengthen QA capacity within the SADC. To this end, opportunities for QA capacity building are consistently being sought, in particular opportunities to engage with the Addis Convention<sup>1028</sup>. Botswana is overseeing this programme to ensure that QA alignment and implementation are centrally driven and supported.

### Verification

While the preceding programmes promote trust by ensuring that qualifications and quality assurance meet the regional standards, it is also important that countries have mechanisms in place that can verify information about individual qualifications obtained in Member States. To ensure that credible, trustworthy information is shared across the SADC, a regional Qualifications Verification Network was established. It was initiated to strengthen verification in the SADC countries and it is a member of the African Qualifications Verification Network, which shares the common goal of ensuring that African qualifications can be trusted. A booklet was produced which provides information on the appropriate people to contact when verifying qualifications in the SADC<sup>1029</sup>. The annual collation of statistical information on learner and worker mobility in SADC countries, as well as on misrepresented qualifications, is a key feature of the SADC Qualifications Verification Network's work. Future plans also include creating a recognition

<sup>1028</sup> *Revised Convention on the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other academic qualifications in higher education in African States.*

<sup>1029</sup> See [www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQVN%20Brochure.pdf](http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQVN%20Brochure.pdf) (booklet consistently updated and shared across the region).

manual, developing regional policies on verification, and implementing verification agreements between SADC countries. To ensure that the network employs modern and innovative technologies, there are plans to pilot real-time verification at a regional level. There are also plans to assist Member States to develop their qualifications infrastructure so that information on their qualifications can be provided quickly and efficiently. Eswatini is overseeing this programme to ensure that it is centrally driven and supported.

## Communication and advocacy

The TCCA has identified platforms to advocate for – and communicate about – the SADCQF. Information has been distributed already at national, regional and international levels. A communication strategy, which includes promotional material on the SADCQF, was developed and approved. Social media sites have been set up and are being used to disseminate information<sup>1030</sup>.

Despite being approved in 2011, the SADCQF was not formally launched until six years later. To ensure that it is visible and that Member States commit to its implementation, a formal launch by the SADC education ministers, and a popularisation campaign by the TCCA, finally took place during the first half of 2017. Zambia is currently driving this initiative to ensure that it is supported.

## Recognition of prior learning, credit accumulation and transfer, and articulation

The SADC region has a set of guidelines for recognition of prior learning that were approved by SADC education ministers in June 2016<sup>1031</sup>. The International Labour Organisation has been closely involved in the production of these guidelines and has further indicated a readiness to assist with implementation across the region. The Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN) has been closely involved in the production of the draft regional guidelines for credit accumulation and transfer and is available to provide support to the SADC. This programme will also focus on articulation, namely on pathways and progression opportunities within and between schooling, TVET and higher education. This programme is centrally driven and supported by Namibia.

<sup>1030</sup> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sadcqf> and Facebook: [www.facebook.com/SadcQualificationsFramework/](http://www.facebook.com/SadcQualificationsFramework/)

<sup>1031</sup> See [www.saqan.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADC%20RPL%20Guidelines.pdf](http://www.saqan.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADC%20RPL%20Guidelines.pdf)

## Governance

The TCCA, with assistance from the SADC Secretariat, was tasked with implementing the SADCQF. However, implementation has been constrained by a lack of human capacity and financial resources at both national and regional levels to undertake the SADCQF-related activities. Implementation has nonetheless improved through effective chairing by Member States, which are supporting the strategic processes as well as assisting the SADC Secretariat to be the key driving force. As part of this effort, a TCCA executive committee (EXCO) was established to speed up implementation.

Since September 2016, the TCCA and its executive committee have accelerated implementation of the SADCQF. The following has been achieved:

- a. developing an action plan to start implementation of the SADCQF;
- b. setting up and ensuring regular meetings to coordinate the work of the TCCA and capacity building;
- c. developing an implementation roadmap and implementation model which include the six programmes of the SADCQF;
- d. mobilising Member States to take on the responsibility to drive the six programmes of SADCQF implementation;
- e. mobilising Member States to provide secretarial support to the SADC Secretariat;
- f. setting up the Electronic Certificate pilot project;
- g. developing and facilitating capacity-building workshops for alignment for eight pilot countries;
- h. developing and implementing an advocacy strategy.

A fully operational SADCQF will provide the region with the following benefits:

- a. improved mobility of skilled labour in the region;
- b. easier comparability and recognition, including verification, of qualifications in the region;
- c. improved articulation of qualifications within the education systems in the region;
- d. improved quality assurance systems in the region;
- e. improved awareness of how qualifications compare in the region;
- f. reduction of misrepresented and fraudulent qualifications being used in the region.

It is against this background that the TCCA has proposed that a SADCQF implementation unit be established to ensure the sustainable functioning of the SADCQF at regional level.

## The way forward

As mentioned above, implementation of the SADCQF entails implementing the following six programmes: governance; development and alignment; verification of qualifications; quality assurance; recognition of prior learning, credit accumulation and transfer, and articulation; and advocacy and communication.

The TCCA understands that in order to maintain the momentum created since September 2016 there is a need to consolidate, review and plan the work to move ahead. Therefore, it meets regularly to keep members updated on SADCQF matters, including discussing the following:

- a. harmonising energies to synergise quality assurance initiatives across Africa and strengthening countries' capacity to ratify the Addis Convention;
- b. meeting with the SADC Qualifications Verification Network to plan and monitor its various verification initiatives;
- c. reviewing overall progress to fast-track SADCQF implementation, with a focus on improving the

- overall structures that need to be put in place to foster optimal functioning of the SADCQF and make recommendations to education ministers;
- d. considering funding models for setting up a sustainable regional implementation unit that will assist with implementing the SADCQF and strengthening countries' capacities by employing more resources at the country level.

Progress has been made in SADCQF communication and advocacy, aligning national qualifications frameworks with the SADCQF, ensuring that qualifications meet regional quality assurance standards, establishing a mechanism for verifying SADC qualifications, and furthering recognition of prior learning, credit accumulation and transfer, and articulation. All of these measures have the common purpose of building trust in SADC qualifications and enhancing the mobility of learners and workers across the region. It is envisaged that a fully operational SADCQF will promote lifelong learning by facilitating movement of learners and workers regionally, continentally and internationally.

## References

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### Prepared by:

UNESCO in collaboration with national experts.



# THE TRANSNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH

## Member States<sup>1032</sup>:

**Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brunei, Cyprus, Dominica, Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), Fiji, Grenade, Guyana, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lesotho, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, The Gambia, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.**

## Background

The Commonwealth of Nations, commonly known as the Commonwealth, is an intergovernmental organization of 53 Member States that were mostly territories of the former British Empire. The Commonwealth operates by intergovernmental consensus of its Member States, organized through the Commonwealth Secretariat, and non-governmental organizations working through the Commonwealth Foundation.

On request of Commonwealth Heads of State, the Commonwealth of Learning initiated the development of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) in 2003, based on a virtual model of distance education. This was expected to improve access to educational opportunities, enhance the quality of teaching and reduce costs. All participating VUSSC countries are small States that share at least some common challenges in the face of globalisation and the increased mobility of highly skilled professionals.

<sup>1032</sup> The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth is an initiative of the education ministers of the 32 small States that account for two thirds of Commonwealth Member States. The Commonwealth defines small States as sovereign countries with a population of 1.5 million people or fewer. The Commonwealth also designates some of its larger member countries – Botswana, Jamaica, Lesotho, Namibia and Papua New Guinea – as small States because they share many of the characteristics of small States.

Participating VUSSC countries are located across the globe and represent a unique initiative that does not rely on geographical proximity.

After approval of the VUSSC concept in 2003 by the education ministers of the countries concerned, the Commonwealth of Learning was asked to help them to collaborate and strengthen the capacity of their national education institutions through VUSSC. There followed a period of four years of course development through the VUSSC 'boot camps'. This resulted in a proposal for small States to create a transnational qualifications framework (TQF) that would support the development, international recognition, comparability and understanding of the VUSSC courses.

The TQF is defined as 'a translation instrument for the classification of VUSSC qualifications according to set criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, to improve credit transfer and promote common accreditation mechanisms between participating VUSSC countries'.

The proposed architecture of the TQF includes a set of level descriptors (see [Table 101](#)) that include three domains: knowledge and understanding; skills; and wider personal and professional competences.

## Level of development

The first TQF management committee was appointed in October 2008, comprising two representatives from each of the three main regions in which the 32 countries participating in VUSSC are located. The committee developed an implementation plan for the TQF in 2010 (COL and SAQA, 2010). In 2016 the second TQF management committee was elected.

The TQF was officially launched in 2010 in Namibia. In 2011 work was initiated to register the first qualifications on the TQF. Standards for VUSSC courses have subsequently been developed in tourism, agriculture and ICT through consultative workshops held since 2010 in the Bahamas and

Samoa, and in 2012 in the Seychelles. In 2015, the TQF management committee approved the registration of six VUSSC programmes.

For quality assurance, the TQF relies entirely on the quality assurance mechanisms in countries where courses originate and/or are offered. The TQF design excludes the accreditation of providers, which is done at national and regional levels, but includes the registration of qualifications: a qualification that meets the transnational qualifications criteria will be registered on the TQF and is referred to as a 'TQF registered qualification'. Any education and training provider within a participating VUSSC country that meets the broad quality-assurance criteria, and is accredited on a sectoral, national and/or regional level, will be able to offer such a registered qualification. Guidelines have been approved for higher education institutions, regional bodies, external quality assurance bodies, and students. The TQF can provide guidance on national quality assurance processes, based on existing international guidelines.

To date 86 institutions have participated in VUSSC activities and more than 53 000 individuals have been trained. Ten institutions in eight countries have started to offer VUSSC courses and programmes through a variety of means, but mainly through conventional, online or blended modes. More open courses are now available. VUSSC has developed more than 13 courses and programmes, all of which were identified by the small States themselves. These courses are now being shared as open educational resources.

## References

COL; SAQA (2010). *Transnational qualifications framework for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth*. Procedures and Guidelines. Pretoria: Commonwealth of Learning; South African Qualifications Authority. [www.vussc.info](http://www.vussc.info)

**Prepared by:**  
UNESCO.

The TQF was revised by the management committee in 2016. This is significant because the Commonwealth of Learning initially sought the help of the South African Qualifications Authority to develop the TQF. The small States are now taking the lead in implementation of VUSSC.

When senior officials met in Malaysia in March 2016 they also approved the referencing of the TQF against national and regional qualifications frameworks, which included the European qualifications framework. A qualification emanating from any VUSSC participating country can now be recognised throughout the Commonwealth, provided it has met all the quality assurance criteria of the national, regional and transnational qualifications frameworks.

Development of a national qualifications framework (NQF) among the small States involved in the TQF varies greatly, but is mostly still at an early stage. Only Malta, Mauritius, Namibia and Samoa have moved ahead more rapidly.

## The future of VUSSC

The Open University of Malaysia hosted a meeting during the first week of March 2015 to finalise the review of the TQF, the referencing of NQFs against the TQF, and to approve the registration of six VUSSC programmes on the TQF. The announcement of the completed TQF is expected to provide small States with more up-to-date procedures and guidelines and a referencing tool for alignment of qualifications to the TQF.

**Table 101. Level descriptors for the VUSSC transnational qualifications framework**

LEVEL	DESCRIPTORS
10	Acquire and possess a systematic understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice; be able to create and interpret new knowledge at a most advanced frontier of a field of work or study through original and advanced research of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication; possess the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques to be able to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge or to solve critical problems or to refute or redefine existing knowledge; demonstrate authority, innovation, autonomy, integrity and personal responsibility in the production or development of innovative ideas or processes in the context of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice.
9	Have a logical understanding of a body of highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice, as a basis for original thought and/or the conduct of research and/or enquiry; have a comprehensive understanding of the research skills and/or relevant established techniques applicable to their own research or to advanced scholarship that can be used to create and interpret knowledge; demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge to solve problems, together with a practical understanding of how knowledge can be managed to transform work or study; possess a conceptual understanding of how to analyse and critically evaluate current research in their academic discipline, field of study or work and to apply, where appropriate, to solve problems.
8	Have systematic, extensive and comparative knowledge of the key aspects of their academic discipline, field of study or work; possess an ability to deploy accurately established analytical tools and/or techniques and enquiry within their academic discipline, field of study or work; be able to use their knowledge, understanding and skills of a wide range of concepts, ideas and information to devise and sustain arguments and/or to solve problems; display a critical understanding of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge and how it is developed; possess the ability to manage their own learning and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (e.g. refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).
7	Have advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of the well-established principles and including an understanding of some advanced aspect(s) of their area(s) of their field of work or study; where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context; have an understanding of the limits of that knowledge and how this influences analysis and interpretation based on that knowledge; possess advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in their specialised field of work or study; be able to manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts.
6	Possess an in-depth knowledge and critical understanding of the ideas, concepts and principles in their field of work or study; have knowledge of the methods of enquiry in the subject, and use a range of techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, proposing solutions to problems arising from that analysis; demonstrate an ability to evaluate critically and apply the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems; apply those concepts and principles more widely; have an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations; effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis, in a variety of forms, to specialist and non-specialist audiences, and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively; have the qualities necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making.

**Table 101. Level descriptors for the VUSSC transnational qualifications framework (Continued)**

LEVEL	DESCRIPTORS
5	Have broad knowledge and understanding of the main underlying ideas, concepts and principles in a field of work or study; be able to use their knowledge, understanding and skills to evaluate critically and determine appropriate methods and procedures to respond to a range of problems of a generally routine nature; display qualities and transferable knowledge and skills necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility; communicate the results of their field of study or work accurately and reliably using a range of different modalities; identify and articulate their own learning needs within defined contexts and undertake guided further learning in new areas.
4	Have a broad knowledge and understanding of the main underlying concepts and principles in a field of work or study; demonstrate a basic understanding of the major theories, principles, ideas and concepts of their particular area of study; be able to use different approaches to identify, evaluate and solve problems of a generally routine nature; be able to use their knowledge, understanding of a particular subject area to communicate accurately and reliably with structured and coherent arguments; use their knowledge, understanding and skills to undertake further learning within a structured and managed environment; possess the qualities and transferable skills needed for employment in situations requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility.
3	Demonstrate a knowledge of basic concepts and principles in a field of work or study; have command of analytical interpretation of information; express informed judgement; be able to display a range of known responses to familiar problems.
2	Demonstrate a narrow range of applied knowledge and basic comprehension in a field of work or study; display a narrow range of skills in a field of work or study; be able to use known solutions to familiar problems.
1	Demonstrate basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Source: COL and SAQA, 2010.

