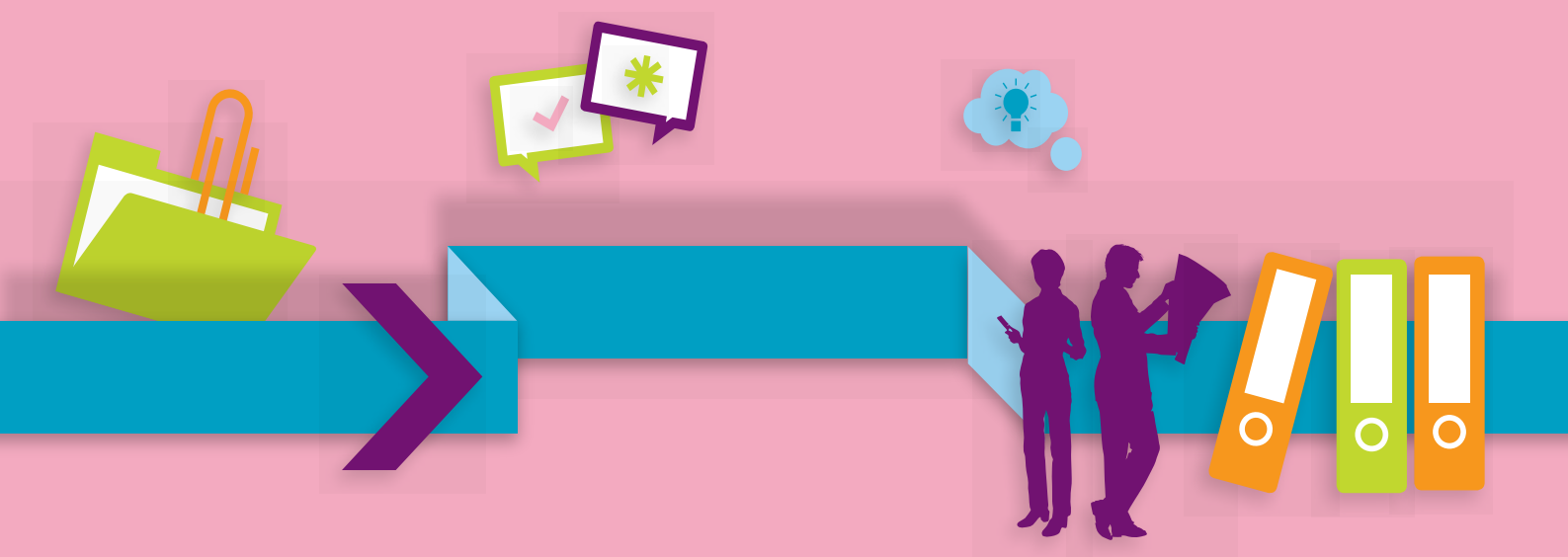# Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks 2022

Volume II
National and Regional case studies

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Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners. UNESCO also leads efforts to respond to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.

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Paving the way to better learning opportunities

Qualifications frameworks are tools for describing qualifications of an education or training system by classifying them into levels. Each level provides a clear description of what the holder of a qualification knows, understands and is able to do. They are important tools for making qualifications transparent and comprehensible, within and across borders, and for promoting lifelong learning.

This fifth edition of *the Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks* consists of two volumes with up-to-date information on recent developments in this field destined for policy-makers, educators, researchers, and experts.

- Volume I features a series of thematic chapters that identify emerging issues in qualifications systems, including the digitalization of qualifications systems, the validation of informal and non-formal learning and the increased use of microcredentials.

- Volume II compiles case studies from countries across four world regions to record progress in the development and implementation of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks globally. A cross-country analysis of national case studies is presented, examining the objectives, functions and characteristics of national qualifications frameworks and their contributions to wider educational and training systems.

The publication is the result of collaborative work between UNESCO, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) and the European Training Foundation (ETF).

Case studies from **79 countries present developments** in national qualifications frameworks

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"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"

Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks 2022

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ALBANIA

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

Albania's parliament adopted the country's first law on an NQF in 2010, so establishing the Albanian qualifications framework (AQF). Parliament adopted a revised law in 2018, which added clauses on raising the quality and relevance of the country's qualifications, including provision to engage social partners in the identification and development of new VET qualifications.

The AQF has eight levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications and certification. The 2017 law on vocational education and training (VET) specifies that curricula should be modularised or unitised by learning area so that learners can take these units separately, thus offering flexible options for different groups of learners.

While the framework is not fully operational, the responsible Ministries and national VET agency have sought to adapt and update it. Most notable recent improvements are the introduction of sectoral committees, criteria to include a wider range of qualifications in the framework and reinforcement of the AQF's level descriptors. Albania has reached the activation stage.

Policy context

Albania has been a candidate country for EU entry since 2014 and seeks integration and compatibility with EU policies, tools and systems in education and training. It is a member of the EQF advisory group but has not referenced yet to the EQF.

The AQF is integral to meeting the country's employment and skills needs, and so is a principal instrument in contributing to the objectives specified in the National employment and skills strategies (NESS) 2014-2020[1] and 2019-2022. A mid-term report on the first NESS in 2018 concluded

that Albania had made partial progress towards its original objectives of fostering decent work, providing quality VET, promoting social cohesion and strengthening labour market governance and modernising the qualifications system.

Before the start of 2020, labour market data had shown marked improvement in outcomes since 2013; Covid-19 will have increased unemployment levels. The employment rate for people aged 15-64 in Albania grew from 50% in 2013 to 59.5% in 2018, one of the highest in the Western Balkans. Employment rates have improved, notably for women, from 40% in 2013 to 52.4% in 2018. However, gender inequality remains problematic, with women's employment rates being 14% lower than for men.

Despite these generally upward trends, unemployment remains high at more than 11%, recorded mid-2019 and this figure is bound to surge following Covid-19.

NQF legal basis

Law No 10 247 on the Albanian qualifications framework (AQF) was adopted by parliament on 4 March 2010[2]. A revision of this law (23/2018) was adopted on 18 May 2018[3]. It describes the main characteristics of the AQF, such as its structure, scope, objectives and functions, as well as arrangements for governance, institutional

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1. Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (2014*). National employment and skills strategy 2014-20: higher skills and better jobs for all women and men.*

2. Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2010). Ligj No 10 247, datë 4.3.2010 përkornizën shqiptare të kualifikimeve [Law No 10 247 of 4 March 2010 on the Albanian qualifications framework]. http://80.78.70.231/pls/kuv/f?p=201:Ligj:10247:04.03.2010 [in Albanian].

3. Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2018). Ligj Nr. 23/2018 Për disa ndryshime dhe shtesa në ligjin nr. 10 247, datë 4.3.2010, "Për kornizën shqiptare të kualifikimeve" [Law No 23/2018 of 10.5.2018 on the revised Albanian qualifications framework].http://www.qbz.gov.al/Botime/Akteindividuale/Janar%202018/Fletore%2079/LIGJ%20nr.%2023-2018,%20date%2010.5.2018.pdf

management, implementation, quality assurance and financing.

Law No 15/2017 On vocational education and training[4] defines the AQF as a national classification system of qualifications.

Three by-laws, adopted by the Council of Ministers, implement specific features of the AQF:
a. Decision of Council of Ministers (DCM) No 426, June 2019 On organisation and functioning of the sector committees and the criteria for their selection;
b. DCM No 427, June 2019 On approval of criteria and procedures for including the qualifications received through lifelong learning into the AQF levels for VET;
c. DCM No 428, June 2019 On detailed level descriptors of the AQF level.

Policy objectives

Aims of NQF
The aims of the AQF are to classify and link qualifications, ensure they are relevant to learners and employers, and to raise their quality. Additionally, the AQF, as most international equivalents, acts as an identifiable entry point for foreign qualifications to the country's education system and employment market.

Like their counterparts in the region, Albania's education and employment actors and stakeholders view the AQF as one of a set of tools to reform and govern the labour market and qualifications system. The AQF will contribute to achieving NESS strategic objectives B, on VET provision, and D, which concerns governing the labour market and the qualifications system.

Strategic objective B, On the quality offer of vet for youth and adults, includes actions to:
a. diversify VET provision;
b. develop post-secondary VET qualifications and assess provision of post-secondary VET;
c. in recognition of prior learning (RPL), complete the legal framework to move it towards implementation, and pilot RPL in two occupations;
d. in quality assurance, implement accreditation of public and private VET providers;

e. develop a first model of a teacher training qualification.

Objective D includes measures to:
a. implement the AQF, including via updating and maintaining the national catalogue of vocational qualifications;
b. complete the AQF's legal framework;
c. introduce mechanisms to include non-formal qualifications in the AQF;
d. revise professional qualifications based on labour market needs;
e. introduce a VET credit system aligned with ECVET;
f. complete regulations for sectoral committees and pilot a committee in a chosen sector;
g. strengthen the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ), e.g. via staff training and formalisation in law of its functions.

NESS aims to raise the quality of VET, and, by extension, its attractiveness. There are signs that this strategy is bearing fruit: enrolments for VET programmes at secondary level increased from 17% of all secondary programmes in 2014 to 20.6% in 2018. Most other countries in the region still have higher VET enrolment levels than Albania, as VET has traditionally been an unattractive option compared to academic education.

Vocational schools offer formal initial vocational education. Both general education (gymnasium) and four-year vocational education programmes lead to the State *matura* exams. Successful completion of this stage allows access to higher education and/ or post-secondary education. Vocational education offers exit points after two, three or four years, depending on the programme. On completion, graduates receive a vocational State *matura* diploma (ISCED/Albanian qualification framework (AQF) level 4), as well as a final certificate for the vocational education programme they will have attended (usually ISCED 3/AQF level 4).

Vocational training centres offer short vocational training courses. NAVETQ has recently developed 35 curricula for such courses.

Authorities plan to merge the two separate VET provider systems, vocational schools and vocational training centres, into one system of VET multifunctional centres, to maximise efficiency and quality. The Integrated Policy Management Group, or IPMG, the forum of national and donor actors which coordinates human capital development policies, consulted on this merger proposal in 2020. A technical working group established by the minister responsible for VET is undertaking the necessary

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4. Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2017). Ligj Nr. 15/2017 Për arsimin dhe forminin profesional në republikën e shqipërisë datë 16.2.2017 [Law No 15/2017 of 16.2.2017 on VET in the Republic of Albania]. http://www.akafp.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Ligji-i-ri-per-AFP_Gazeta-Zyrtare-43-2017-1-1.pdf

institutional preparatory work, including identifying the required legislative changes and implications for providers.

During 2020, as in other countries, the education and training systems was hit by Covid-19. There was a rapid transfer to online teaching, albeit hampered by incomplete broadband coverage, as some areas could not access fast internet services. Television delivered extensive general education content, although the passive learner experience of watching TV means that it is only partially effective in supporting learning aims.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure
Inspired by the EQF, the AQF consists of eight levels, whose descriptors are written in learning outcomes organised in the three domains of knowledge, skills and competence. Originally the descriptors were simply a language translation of the (very basic and short) EQF level descriptors, but a ministerial decree of June 2019 replaced them with more detailed descriptors. These draw on the taxonomy in the EQF descriptors but expand to cover many more elements. For example, level 4 knowledge includes Exercise self-management within work context guidelines, while the level 3 skills include Work independently in variable conditions, etc.

The AQF's eight levels correspond one-to-one to the EQF's.

Types of qualification
The AQF is open to all types of qualifications. There are three main categories identified in the AQF handbook and 2018 Law: general and higher education qualifications; professional or VET qualifications; and lifelong learning qualifications catering to adults and people undertaking specialised courses for professional development (Cedefop, 2020).

The term 'qualifications for lifelong learning' in the AQF laws is used to distinguish between the formal qualifications that are automatically included in the AQF, based on existing legislation (such as the VET law, the law on higher education) and all other qualifications.

ETF's inventory and analysis of vocational qualifications in Albania in 2017 identified 85 qualifications that are not part of formal education subsectors. A total of 80 of these are vocational

training courses developed for vocational training centres or by private schools. Five are courses designed for managers or higher technicians developed by private universities, at AQF level 5. Currently, there are a few Level 5 qualifications in the NLVQ or AQF, which have often been pursued outside the scope of programmes or qualifications covered by legislation.

However, one level 5 qualification in post-secondary VET has been approved by Ministry Order No 149, June 2020 and is now levelled in the AQF. This qualification is in fashion design and was developed by NAVETQ and implemented in the Secondary Technical and Economics School in Tirana during 2020.

In June 2019, the Council of Ministers adopted a bylaw on the inclusion of lifelong learning qualifications in the AQF; this stipulates criteria and procedures to place such qualifications on the AQF levels. It should open the way for applications for qualifications obtained outside formal subsystems to be levelled in the AQF and so should lead to, among other gains, inclusion of AQF Level 5 qualifications.

Use of learning outcomes and standards
All VET qualifications are defined in learning outcomes and have a clear division between knowledge, skills and broader competences. Learning outcomes for individual qualifications are more detailed in terms of knowledge, skills and broader competences compared to the more generic AQF level descriptors.

VET qualifications derive from occupational descriptions contained in the national list of occupations (NLO)[5]. The NLO contains 10 major occupational groups, 43 major subgroups, 133 minor groups, 480 unit groups and 5 489 job titles[6]. NAVETQ draws on the NLO, then uses the AQF descriptors as occupational standards to develop VET qualifications. The template for occupational standards is being currently improved and will include performance criteria, tools and equipment. All future standards will be developed against this new template.

The vocational part of the national curricula framework is modularised. Vocational theory modules/subjects are organised in outcomes and themes with respective teaching hours. The modularised curricula are crucial in supporting

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5. http://listakombetareprofesioneve.al
6. (ETF, 2020) *VET credit system in Albania: context and potential usefulness.*

flexible delivery of qualifications; they develop a flexible pathway between different qualifications and between different learning contexts.

No measures have been taken to date towards delivering certification of partial qualifications or units of qualifications, although this option is an element in the NESS 2014-22 action plan.

Higher education qualifications are not yet based on learning outcomes; instead, student workload id referenced for allocation of credits. A working group is developing new legislation, which will introduce outcomes in the higher education system.

Quality assurance of qualifications
The AQF law stipulates that all qualifications in the AQF shall be quality assured. There is not yet a coherent, national system of external quality assurance of development, provision, assessment and certification of vocational qualifications. In VET, QA has hitherto mainly been internal.

All public VET schools in the country have now completed a self-assessment exercise. NAVETQ is working to develop the accreditation model to be implemented in VET schools. This measure addresses both providers and the qualifications themselves.

VET providers are responsible for internal assessment and certification of vocational qualifications at AQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. NAVETQ provides guidelines on both formative assessment and for summative assessment to achieve the certification. The framework curricula include recommendations on verifying whether learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes in the qualification. NAVETQ also produces guidelines for VET teachers and providers, with assessment methods and assessment tools such as tests, projects, and check lists.

The Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AQAHE) manages quality assurance for this sector. It requires higher education institutions and their programmes to be accredited before they can issue degrees or other qualifications.

Credit systems
The AQF law stipulates that the AQF should facilitate accumulation and transfer of credits. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credit system in higher education is operational.

VET does not yet have a credit system. Authorities have written a concept paper looking at how a credit

system in VET could be established. Aims would include improving quality assurance and supporting learner progression. Qualifications for lifelong learning are generally not expressed in credits.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF
Ministries, rather than a dedicated NQF authority, are responsible for the AQF. Broadly, the ministries concerned manage qualifications in the AQF which correspond to the education subsystem the respective ministry coordinates. Therefore, the Ministry of Education covers qualifications in elementary, lower and upper secondary general education, and higher education and lifelong learning, while the Ministry of Finance and Economy leads on VET qualifications.

The AQF laws define three implementing institutions:
a. the National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ);
b. higher education institutions in cooperation with institutions which carry out periodic labour market assessments and employment surveys of graduates;
c. the ministries responsible for education and their associated agencies in accordance with the relevant provisions of the applicable legal framework (ETF, 2018b).

Implementation is coordinated by a dedicated AQF taskforce jointly chaired by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Its tasks include development of an AQF handbook for users, revision of the AQF law, and referencing the AQF to the European qualifications framework (EQF). During 2020, its mandate was extended to end 2022.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders
Sector committees can now be established, following the June 2019 bylaw adopted by the Council of Ministers. This is an important step in delivering objectives within NESS to revise existing, and develop new, professional qualifications based on labour market needs. The Committees' functions will include identifying qualifications needed, based on studies; proposing new qualifications to NAVETQ; working with NAVETQ to draft the occupational standards and vocational qualifications standards included in the national catalogue of

vocational qualifications; and broader support to AQF implementation.

The Committees will be organised by technical groups for each sector, to a maximum of 10 national committees, each of fewer than 10 persons to facilitate decision-making. Members will be drawn from the different ministries responsible for the AQF; ministries responsible for the respective committee's economic sector; employers' associations; trades unions; VET institutions; a human resources specialist from the sector; and an independent expert with experience of developing and implementing the AQF.

At the time of writing, stakeholders are developing a roadmap to operationalise the committees. A regulation on the functions of the committees' supporting technical secretariat is being drafted.

Implementation has begun. Stakeholders are establishing criteria to define the sectors and to prioritise a number for first phase piloting. In early 2021, piloting in a chosen sector will start with the support of RISI Albania, a joint Swiss-Albanian project which supports employment opportunities for young Albanians. Pilots will expand to further sectors during 2021 and after.

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

VNFIL arrangements

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is one of the priority measures in NESS and provided for in both the VET and AQF laws. Implementation so far has been confined to pilots and has not yet been applied country wide.

NESS outlines a national system for validation. Actions to be taken include:
a. selecting bodies and putting in place procedures for the validation of qualifications, skills assessments, certification and the validation/recognition of prior learning;
b. appointment of special bodies and establishment of procedures for the validation of qualifications, assessments of knowledge, skills and competences; certification; and validation of prior learning;
c. establishment of a national system to recognise qualifications, work experience, skills obtained/received abroad;
d. consolidating the legal framework for recognition of prior learning (RPL);

e. defining roles of implementing institutions in managing RPL;
f. identifying priority sectors for RPL and piloting in two occupations.

Officials are currently preparing a draft decision of the Council of Ministers on the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings

NAVETQ has compiled the national list of vocational qualifications (NLVQ)[7], which is approved by the Ministry of Finance and Economy. The NLVQ contains more than 100 qualifications at AQF levels 2, 3 and 4, offered through the 2+1+1, 2+2 and four years formal educational structure. The list is now available online in the national catalogue of vocational qualifications (NCVQ) in the form of a public, interactive, searchable web portal/database on qualifications, curricula and training offers by VET providers.

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth is creating a national register of higher education programmes. Each programme will be coded according to the field of study. The required legal framework is under development.

AQF levels are included on new certificates and diplomas and Europass supplement documents and indicated in the national catalogue for VET qualifications.

Recognition of foreign qualifications

Information on the ENIC-NARIC website about recognition of foreign qualifications in Albania is limited. The national information centre is the Technical Secretariat for the Recognition of Foreign Diplomas under the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth. Albania has procedures in place for the recognition of foreign certificates and diplomas at levels 5 to 8 of the AQF, issued by foreign higher education institutions. Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications is under development. An instruction of the Minister of Finance and Economy to the procedures for recognition of qualifications at levels 2 to 5 was adopted in 2018.

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7. http://www.akafp.gov.al/lista-kombetare-profesionale/

Referencing to the EQF

Referencing to regional frameworks

Albania participates as a full member in both the EU's EQF process as a member of the EQF advisory group and the Council of Europe-chaired Bologna process in higher education. The AQF is not yet referenced to the EQF or self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA). However, authorities have been working on a draft report and plan to link the AQF to both frameworks in one process, resulting in one report.

International cooperation

As an EU candidate country, Albania receives financial assistance from the EU via IPA (Instrument for pre-accession). The government has prioritised skills mismatch as the country prepares for the next round of EU support through the Instrument for pre-accession assistance 2021-27.

EU assistance focuses on democratic development, good governance, regulatory reform, administrative capacity-building and infrastructure development. EU funding for projects in Albania is provided in the form of grants, contracts, and, increasingly, budget support.

The current education, social policy and employment portfolio is worth EUR 30 million and is mainly rolled-out through a budget support programme that is currently being adapted to the Covid-19 context.

The next programme, entitled *EU for social inclusion* has been under preparation during 2020, and provides EUR 50 million, much of it addressing VET and employment. It replicates in many ways for Albania the EU 2020 programmes, providing support for transitioning to the knowledge economy and adopting the European social model. It will support implementation of NESS, the Strategy for development of pre-university education 2014-20 (PUE) and the National strategy for decentralisation and local government 2015-20.

As an EU candidate country, Albania implements actions consistent with the RIGA 2015 conclusions on new medium-term deliverables in the field of 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.

Important lessons and future plans

The adoption of the revised, 2018, AQF law steers the AQF development process towards achieving more relevant qualifications, including through establishment of sector councils comprising social partners and other stakeholders. Pilot committees will provide feedback to inform orientations in reforming existing or designing new qualifications.

Application of learning outcomes in higher education would more closely align Albania's higher education sector to those in other countries in the European higher education area.

Recognition of prior learning, facilitated by early adoption of a Ministerial decision, would contribute to the development of lifelong learning opportunities and improve adult participation.

Two other priorities are developing a communication strategy and referencing of the AQF to the EQF.

Table 1. Albanian qualifications framework (AQF)

AQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATIONS FROM INITIAL EDUCATION		LIFELONG LEARNING QUALIFICATIONS
	GENERAL/TRADITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	**VOCATIONAL/PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS**	**LIFELONG LEARNING QUALIFICATIONS**
8	• Doctorate • Graduate school study in advanced studies	• Executive master/second level master/postmaster • Long term specialisation	Study programmes for continuous education
7	• 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 (pre-Bologna programmes)	Professional master/first level master	Study programmes for continuous education

| AQF LEVEL | QUALIFICATIONS FROM INITIAL EDUCATION | | LIFELONG LEARNING QUALIFICATIONS |
	GENERAL/TRADITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	VOCATIONAL/PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	
6	• Bachelor • Study programme first level		
5		• Post-secondary study programme of professional type • Professional non-university study programme after secondary education • Vocational certificate	• Bridging courses (certificate) • Specialisation courses based on professional requirements
4	State *matura* diploma (Upper secondary general education)	• State vocational *matura* diploma issued upon completion of the vocational high school programme • Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the four-year study programme for middle technicians/ middle managers • Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the two-year programme for technicians/ middle managers • Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the one-year programme for technicians/ middle managers • Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of an apprenticeship programme	• Bridging courses • Vocational training courses • Specialisation courses based on professional requirements
3		• Vocational certificate issued at the end of a three-year programme for skilled workers • Vocational certificate issued at the end of a one-year programme for skilled workers • Vocational Certificate issued at the end of an apprenticeship programme	
2		Vocational certificate issued at the completion of the two-year programme for semi-skilled workers	
1	Final school report after completion of compulsory nine-year education		Minimum entry requirements to work or social life

Source: Law No 23/2018 on some changes and additions to Law No 10 247 of 3.4.2010 on the Albanian qualifications framework: http://www.akafp.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/LIGJ-nr.-23-2018-date-10.5.2018.pdf

Abbreviations

AQAHE	Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	NESS	National employment and skills strategy
AQF	Albanian qualifications framework	NQF	national qualifications framework
DCM	Decision of Council of Ministers	NCVQ	national catalogue of vocational qualifications
EQF	European qualifications framework		
ETF	European Training Foundation	NLVQ	national list of vocational qualifications (NLVQ)
NAVETQ	National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications	NLO	national list of occupations

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ARMENIA

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

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

The Armenian NQF 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 NQF is oriented towards the formal education system and there is no mechanism to include qualifications awarded from outside the formal education sector.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport 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. Governments have usually prioritised higher education over VET.

Armenia participates in the Bologna process in higher education having joined in 2005, but has not yet presented a self-certification report. Armenia's NQF is formally adopted and contributes to wider VET reform; implementing bodies are operating; learning outcomes are used in standards and qualifications; and quality assurance arrangements are in place. It is therefore at the activation stage of NQF development.

Policy context

The country's principal policy framework is the Armenia Development Strategy (ADS) 2014-2025. It identifies four priorities: growth of employment, development of human capital, improvement of the social protection system, and institutional modernisation of the public administration and governance systems. Its main objective is to increase employment through the creation of quality and high productivity jobs. The education sector is considered fundamental to the country's sustainable development.

The government programme for the period 2019–2023[8] aims at building a high-tech, industrial, competitive, export-oriented, inclusive economy. It recognises the development of human capital, including through the modernisation of education and an improvement in its quality, as one of the key factors to achieving this goal.

The "Work, Armenia" strategy[9] sets out the priorities for employment reform for 2020-2023. The strategy is aimed at developing human capital, promoting employment, and institutional reforms of employment policy development.

Armenia's relations with the EU are based on the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed in November 2017. The cooperation in the field of education and training aims to promote lifelong learning and encourage cooperation and transparency at all levels of education and training, with a special focus on vocational and higher education. This cooperation focuses, inter alia, on modernising education and training systems, enhancing quality, relevance and access at all levels of education, developing the national qualifications framework to improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences aligned with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

In 2018 and 2019, the economy expanded impressively, at 5.2% and 7.6% respectively. Before Covid, the trend for 2020 had been positive. Since then, the pandemic has disrupted Armenia's growth trend - GDP is expected to contract in 2020 by about 3 or 4%.

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8.   Government Decision No. 65-A, 08.02.2019. https://www.gov.am/files/docs/3562.pdf
9.   Government Decision No. 1753-L, 5.12.2019 http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=152312 https://www.e-gov.am/gov-decrees/item/33051/

Due to the pandemic, schools were closed in March 2020, moving to online learning. This shift was difficult as many teachers lack familiarity with using digital tools, while up to a quarter of teachers and a similar proportion of learners lack computers at home. Public TV aired training courses. Schools and colleges developed and implemented online training programmes via Zoom, YouTube etc. End of year exams were replaced by coursework-based assessment.

In 2018, students in upper secondary VET (ISCED 3) accounted for 28% of the cohort. VET enrolment has been growing steadily in recent years, in an education system traditionally dominated by general and higher education.

NQF legal basis
The education system in Armenia is regulated by three main laws: the Law on Education (1999), the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education (2004), and the Law on Primary Vocational (Handicraft) and Secondary Vocational Education (2005).

The Armenian national qualifications framework (NQF) was first adopted by the Government Decree (No 332-N) in March 2011, and revised in 2016 (No. 714-N) with new definitions for each level.

Other important relevant legislation includes regulations on quality assurance, the development of state educational standards, lists (classifiers) of VET and higher education specialities and qualifications.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms
The Armenia Development Strategy identifies increasing the education sector's quality, effectiveness, relevance and access at all levels as a major priority. Within the ADS, the government programme for 2019-2023 specifies that VET sector reforms will be targeted at enhancing education programmes to enable them to better respond to the changing needs of the economy and labour market, and expanding the dual education system through the active involvement of employers. In higher education, the reforms will aim, inter alia, at reviewing the content and structure of curricula with a focus on learning outcomes and in line with the NQF.

The action plan for the VET sector for the period 2017–2023 approved by the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport sets nine priorities: transformation of the VET institutions network,

strengthening social partnership, modernisation of the content of educational programmes, new models for the organisation of educational process and improvement of assessment of students, implementation of internet-based educational technologies, internationalisation of the VET system, promotion of youth employability and entrepreneurship; and human resource development in the VET system.

Aims of NQF
The Armenian NQF, 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 informing government decisions on skills matching adjustments. The objectives of the Armenian framework are similar to the frameworks of other countries:

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

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure
The Armenian NQF has eight levels and follows the EQF level descriptors categories: knowledge, skills and competences. Level descriptors for NQF levels 6-8 are based on the Dublin Descriptors in line with the QF-EHEA.

Types of qualifications
The NQF defines the types of qualifications allocated by levels. General education qualifications correspond to NQF levels 1, 2 and 4. VET qualifications correspond to NQF levels 3 and 4, "Primary VET" in Armenia (initial VET), and NQF level 5, "Secondary VET" in Armenia (higher VET). Higher education qualifications are allocated to NQF levels 6-8.

Quality assurance of qualifications
VET qualifications are defined in the state VET standards which are approved by the MoES. VET standards are developed (revised) and approved according to the procedure adopted by the Government[10]. They must meet the requirements of the relevant NQF level descriptors and be validated

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10. Government Decision No. 333, 22.03.2012 http://www.mkuzak.am/wp-content/uploads/1-2.pdf

by the corresponding Sectoral Committee. VET standards are developed by the MoES working groups with the involvement of representatives of interested public bodies, organisations, educational institutions and social partners. There are no occupational or professional standards to inform qualifications development.

VET qualifications are included in the lists (classifiers) of primary and secondary VET professions (specialities)[11]. For a new VET qualification (profession)[12] to be introduced into the classifier, the relevant VET standard shall be developed and approved. VET qualifications are delivered and awarded by VET institutions or other training providers licensed and accredited by the MoEs.

Secondary VET qualifications can be acquired at secondary vocational educational institutions (colleges) and higher education institutions.

Higher education qualifications are awarded by the higher education institutions accredited by the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA). Programme accreditation is not obligatory except for the medical education programmes. It also can be done by foreign organisations listed in the EQAR register or which are full ENQA members. Programme accreditation requires that the education programme be in line with the relevant NQF level descriptors and state educational standards.

Use of learning outcomes and standards
The state VET standard defines general characteristics of the qualification (NQF level, modes and terms of training, minimum and maximum student workloads), occupational characteristics (related occupational titles and main tasks and duties), minimum content of the educational programme (competence profile of the graduate, including general/key competences, modules of learning outcomes and performance criteria), requirements for the organisation of training, and exemplary curriculum.

General/key skills (communication, entrepreneurship, professional soft skills, digital competencies) are defined in modules common for all VET standards. Along with the vocational qualification, VET curricula for persons with basic general education ensure the acquisition of general secondary education.

Credit systems
The current legislation allows for the use of a credit system for VET to ensure progression or transfer between VET and higher education systems[13].

In higher education, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) has been used since 2008. Most first cycle (NQF level 6) programmes have 240 ECTS credits, second cycle (NQF 7 level) programmes have 60-120 ECTS.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF
The Ministry of Education has the overall lead in the NQF. It is responsible, in particular, for the approval of state educational standards and descriptions of VET qualifications, licensing of educational institutions and VET programmes, and development of the lists of VET and higher education specialities and qualifications.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders
Responsibility for the implementation of education policy is distributed among a number of institutions. The National Centre for Vocational Education and Training Development (NCVETD)[14] supports the development and implementation of the NQF, its alignment with the EQF; organises the development[15] and updating of VET standards and curricula; supports the introduction of a credit accumulation and transfer system in VET; ensures communication between the VET system and the labour market.

The National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA),7 was established in 2008 as an independent quality assurance body accountable to the Government. Its main responsibility is external quality assurance of higher education institutions, through institutional and programme accreditation.

There are 14 Sectoral Committees responsible for the provision of expertise and validation of the draft state educational standards. They operate as consultative bodies of the MoES, representing social partners (chambers of commerce, employers organisations, trade unions).

11. Government Decision No. 1254, 30.10.2008 http://mkuzak.am/wp-content/uploads/woroshum-1.pdf
12. Government Decision No. 73, 12.01.2006 https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=22489

13. The Law on Primary Vocational (Handicraft) and Secondary Vocational Education, art. 3, 7 http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=30686&m=%27%27&sc=
14. http://www.mkuzak.am/?lang=en
15. http://www.anqa.am/en/

Social partners are also represented in the tripartite National Council for VET Development (NCVD) which is the main structure of social partnership in VET at the national level.

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

VNFIL arrangements
In 2015, the government approved the procedures for continuing vocational training and validation of non-formal and informal learning[16]. The decree defines requirements for the VNFIL process and assessors. The National Training Fund (NTF)[17] was authorised by MoES as the body responsible for the implementation of the VNFIL system. Currently the VNFIL mechanism is not operational.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
Armenia has made important and valuable progress in NQF development in recent years. The country has updated its VET system to include quality assurance measures, competence-based education standards and assessment, modular programmes based on learning outcomes, career guidance, sectoral committees representing social partners.

Quality assurance mechanisms have been aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA (ESG). Since 2017, ANQA has been a full member of ENQA and registered in EQAR. ANQA supports the introduction of QA principles in the VET system and has started institutional accreditation of VET institutions.

Although the current framework allows for the use of a credit accumulation and transfer system, it is not used to ensure progression or transfer across education subsectors.

There is no mechanism to include qualifications awarded outside the formal education sector into the NQF. Regulatory documents necessary for the recognition of non-formal learning have been approved, but they do not allow that NQF qualifications be awarded based on the VNFIL process.

Qualifications registers and databases
VET standards and exemplary modular programmes and curricula are published on the website of the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training Development (NCVETD)[18]. VET qualifications (standards) are structured according to the lists (classifiers) of primary and secondary VET professions (specialities) based on ISCED-F 2013.

The State register of institutional accreditation and the State register of programme accreditation[19] include the lists of higher education institutions which have applied for institutional or programme accreditation,[20] together with the relevant information.

Qualification documents
The titles of higher education qualifications include the name of the higher education level and the name of the field of study according to the list of specialities and qualifications of higher professional education[21]. The supplement to the higher education diploma[22] follows the European Diploma Supplement format.

Recognition of foreign qualifications
Armenia ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2004. The Armenian National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility (ARMENIC)[23] is a member of the ENIC-NARIC network.

Referencing to regional framework/other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks
Armenia has been a member of the Bologna process since 2005. It has not yet self-certified the NQF against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF EHEA). The revision of the NQF in 2016 mainly addressed higher education qualifications to ensure that they better comply with the QF EHEA.

International cooperation
In 2015 Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) (with Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan). Relations between the EU and Armenia are based on the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and

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16. Government Decision No. 1062, 10.09.2015 https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=100589
17. https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=72097

18. http://www.mkuzak.am/
19. http://www.anqa.am/en/institutional-accreditation-state-register/
20. http://www.anqa.am/en/programme-accreditation-state-register/
21. Government Decision No. 1191, 23.10.2014 https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=93665
22. https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=40823
23. http://armenic.am/?lang=en

Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed in 2017.

ANQA is a member the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEENQA); it is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

International donor support
EU is the principal donor supporting VET in the country. The implementation of the NQF higher education component was supported by the Tempus project ARMENQA (2014-2017)[24]. It aimed to make the Armenian NQF operational, including by the development of methodological guidelines, sectoral frameworks for higher education, the draft NQF implementation strategy and self-certification report.

The EU "Better Qualifications for Better Jobs" support programme launched in 2017 seeks to improve the efficiency of Armenia's labour market and the employability of its workforce, with an emphasis on agricultural employment. It also focuses on enhancing the capacity of labour market stakeholders to formulate skills needs and on supporting the operation of Sector Skills Councils.

Important lessons and future plans

Steps have been taken to establish a national qualification framework: legislation has been adopted, the NQF and level descriptors have been developed. The priority is to operationalise the NQF, so that there is increased allocation of qualifications to the framework, and that it directly supports end-users such as providers, employers and learners.

NQF governance is centralised under MoES. The NQF's development and implementation will require effective coordination and a stronger involvement of other stakeholders, especially the private sector. Strengthening social partnership, in particular at sectoral level, is one of the main targets of the revised Concept on Social Partnership in VET (2018). It will focus on increasing the role of the Sectoral Committees and expanding the scope of their responsibilities. At present Sectoral Committees have a limited role in qualifications development and identifying and anticipating skills needs.

A broader perspective on skills formation is needed, one that is not limited only to formal education and training. It is important that the VNFIL system be

part of the NQF arrangements and lead to the award of qualifications. The use of modular approaches and introduction of partial qualifications can contribute to the flexibility of initial VET and recognition of continuous education and training. The quality assurance framework should address not only education and training programmes, but also the assessment and validation of learning outcomes.

It is important to implement effective communication mechanisms and tools, including on available career and learning paths. The development of a qualifications register can make the NQF more visible and support career guidance services and recognition practices.

Other initiatives could include the development of methodologies for allocating qualifications to NQF levels, credit transfer and recognition arrangements to promote pathways across education subsectors and progression, improvement of a quality assurance system for VET and building stakeholders capacity.

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24. http://armenqa.am/

Infographic of the NQF/NQF overview table

Table 2. Qualifications according to levels

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION	EDUCATION DEGREE (LEVEL), THE PROGRAMME	DURATION
1	CERTIFICATE OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION	1st level of Secondary Education	4 years
2	CERTIFICATE OF BASIC EDUCATION	2nd level of Secondary Education	5 years
3	CRAFTSMAN (with basic education) (Certificate of Master training qualification)	Preliminary Vocational (Craftsmanship) Educational Programme	6 months to 1 year 3 years
4	1. CERTIFICATE ("Attestat") OF SECONDARY EDUCATION	3rd level of Secondary Education - senior school	3 years
	2. CRAFTSMAN (with secondary education) (Diploma of Craftsmanship Education)	Preliminary Vocational (Craftsmanship) Educational Programme	1-3 years
5	SPECIALIST (Diploma of Middle Vocational Education)	Middle Vocational Educational Programme	2-5 years
6	BACHELOR (Diploma of Bachelor)	Bachelor's Educational Programme	Minimum 3 years
7	MASTER (Diploma of Master) SPECIALIST WITH DIPLOMA (Diploma of Specialist with Diploma)	Master's Educational Programme Bachelor's Educational Programme of Specialist with Diploma	Minimum 1 year Minimum 5 years
8	PhD (Certificate of PhD)	Post-graduate Professional Educational Programme	Minimum 3 years
	General Education	Vocational Education	Higher Education

Source: Armenia - national Torino Process report 2018-2020

Abbreviations

ANQA	National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance	NCVD	National Council for VET Development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System	NCVETD	National Centre for Vocational Education and Training Development
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	NTF	National Training Fund
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education	NQF	National Qualifications Framework
		QF-EHEA	Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area
EQF	European qualifications framework	VET	Vocational education and training
ISCED	International standard classification of education	VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
MoES	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport		

Main sources of information

Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport: www.escs.am

National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance: www.anqa.am

National Centre for Vocational Education and Training Development: www.mkuzak.am

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https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2019-03/Armenia%202018_0.pdf

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https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/policies-human-capital-developmentarmenia-etf-torino

Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
Online platform	https://openspace.etf.europa.eu
Twitter	@etfeuropa
Facebook	facebook.com/etfeuropa
YouTube	www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
Live&Learn	https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/
Instagram	instagram.com/etfeuropa/
LinkedIn	linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation
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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 qualityassured qualifications from the higher education, vocational education and training (VET), and schools sectors into a single comprehensive national framework.

The AQF supports domestic and international students of the Australian education and training system, education and training providers, and industry and employers, to recognise that Australian qualifications are quality-assured, relevant, nationally consistent and internationally recognised. The rigour and transparency of the AQF helps to build trust internationally and supports the mobility of graduates with Australian qualifications around the globe to pursue further study and/or work opportunities.

As one of the longest established comprehensive national qualifications frameworks in the world, the AQF has an extensive history of development, built upon lessons learned from a number of successive qualifications systems since the 1960s. In recognising the need to deliver national consistency in program quality, qualifications and learning pathways, a national, cross-sectoral qualifications framework was a means of providing consistent recognition of education and training outcomes achieved.

Policy objectives

The objectives of the AQF are to provide an integrated and flexible framework that:
- accommodates the diversity of purposes of Australian education and training, now and into the future;
- contributes to national economic performance by supporting contemporary, relevant and nationally consistent qualification outcomes that build confidence in qualifications;

- 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;
- supports individuals' lifelong learning goals by providing the basis for individuals to progress through education and training, and gain recognition for their prior learning and experiences;
- underpins national regulatory and quality assurance arrangements for education and training; and
- supports and enhances the national and international mobility of graduates and workers through increased recognition of the value and comparability of Australian qualifications.

Levels and learning outcomes

Levels
The AQF is a 10-level framework encompassing 15 qualification types from across the senior secondary and tertiary education sectors. An AQF level refers to the complexity, breadth and depth of learning outcomes. The level criteria and qualification types are not specific to disciplines.

Learning outcomes
Learning outcomes are a critical element of the AQF and are used to 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. Both the level criteria and qualification type descriptors are based on learning outcomes that include:

- Knowledge - what a graduate knows and understands. This can be general or specialised, in a single area or a range of areas, and can be discrete or cumulative.

- Skills - what a graduate can do. This can be cognitive, creative, technical, communicative and/or interpersonal.
- Application of knowledge and skills - the context in which a graduate applies acquired knowledge and skills. This is described in terms of autonomy, responsibility and accountability. Contexts may be predictable, routine and known, or unpredictable, non-routine and unknown.

The learning outcomes for each level of the AQF underpin qualification and educational standards, curricula, and assessment across the secondary education, vocational education and training, and higher education sectors in Australia. The AQF learning outcomes directly inform the development of curricula and assessment to ensure that AQF qualifications are consistent, regardless of institution, discipline or delivery method.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Responsibility for the AQF rests with the Australian Government and state and territory governments, with specific arrangements depending on the education sector concerned and the assignment of legislative responsibilities. The Australian Government and the state and territory governments cooperate on education policy and planning through National Cabinet, which in 2020 replaced what was previously known as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). National Cabinet provides a forum for the Australian Government and leaders of each state and territory to negotiate, cooperate and make decisions on interstate matters.

A diverse range of stakeholders use the AQF, including students, education and training providers, education and training regulatory bodies, occupational bodies (such as professional bodies and registration and licensing authorities), employers, industry, and governments. The AQF is referred to in legislation across education, employment, defence, finance, occupational regulation, social security, tax and telecommunications. Therefore, stakeholder consultation is critical to ensuring that the AQF continues to meet the needs of students, employers, education providers and the wider community.

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

The AQF has explicit policies to support lifelong learning, and provides explanations of AQF terms such as recognition of prior learning, credit transfer and articulation. The *AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy* covers all education and training sectors that issue AQF qualifications and aims to:

- enhance student progression into and between AQF qualifications;
- recognise the multiple pathways that students take to gain AQF qualifications and that learning can be formal, non-formal or informal; and
- support the development of pathways in qualifications design.

The policy includes the responsibilities for making qualification pathways accessible to students. Education and training providers of AQF qualifications are responsible for ensuring that there are transparent pathways for students. Accrediting authorities and qualification developers are responsible for promoting and facilitating pathways for students.

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 outcomes of an individual's application for credit. 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 AQF also facilitates the progression of students through qualifications, by giving credit for learning outcomes they have already achieved through formal or informal learning. Credit outcomes may allow for entry into a qualification and/or provide credit towards the qualification. Credit given may also reduce the time required for a student to complete the qualification.

AQF implementation and impact

The AQF was introduced across Australia on 1 January 1995 and was fully implemented by the end of 1999. Governance arrangements were put in place to promote the AQF, monitor its implementation and regularly review its performance and impact.

In addition to the regulation of secondary education through state or territory governments, a national regulatory system in tertiary education and training was implemented in 2011 through the establishment of two independent national regulators: the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA); and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). TEQSA is responsible for the regulation and accreditation of higher education. AQSA is responsible for the regulation and accreditation of vocational education and training, with the exception of Victoria and Western Australia, where state VET regulators are responsible for only the intrastate delivery of VET within their jurisdictions. TEQSA, ASQA and the two state VET regulators maintain registers of education and training providers, both public and private, in addition to courses and qualifications that are publicly available and lead to an AQF qualification. Due to this regulation, all AQF qualifications are quality-assured and consistent, meeting rigorous national standards and learning outcomes within the AQF.

Qualifications
Qualification types are benchmarked against AQF levels. Vocational and technical education qualifications span AQF levels 1 to 6, and include the Certificate I, Certificate II, Certificate III, Certificate IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma. Higher education qualifications span AQF levels 6 to 10, and include the Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Associate Degree, Undergraduate Certificate, Bachelor Degree, Bachelor Honours Degree, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters Degree and Doctoral Degree. The Senior Secondary Certificate of Education is also an AQF qualification, however it is not located on an AQF level. These levels and qualification types are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Australian Qualifications Framework levels and qualification types
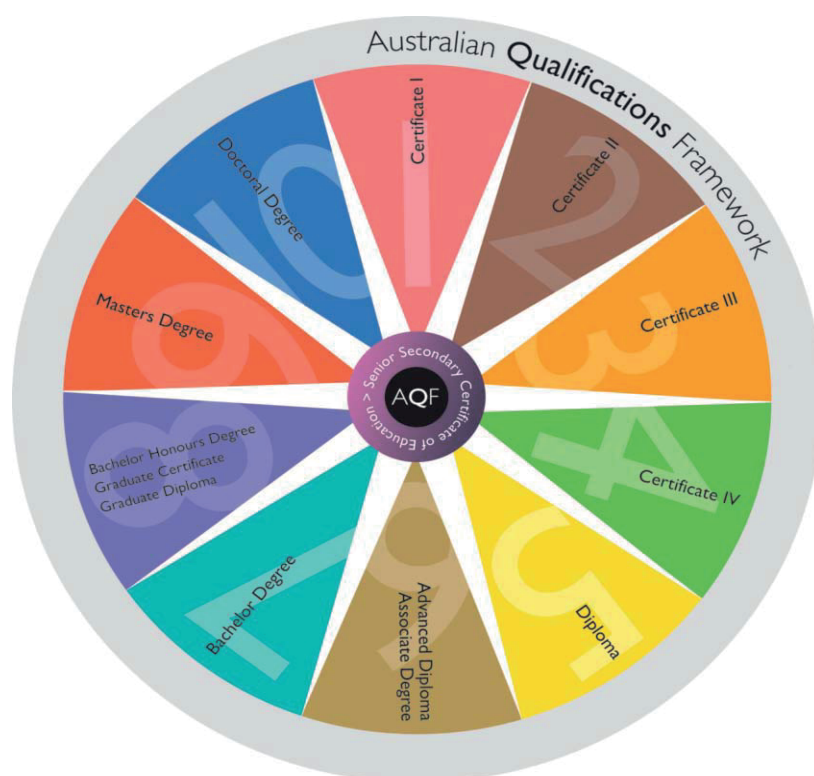
Source: Australian Qualificions Framework, Second Edition, January 2013, p. 19 © Commonwealth of Australia. Provided by UIL

An objective of the AQF is to provide a contemporary and flexible framework that accommodates the diversity of purposes of Australian education and training now and into the future. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Education and Skills Councils approved the inclusion of the Undergraduate Certificate (UC) specifications to the *AQF Second Edition 2013* in 2020, as a qualification to upskill workers displaced by COVID-19. The UC is a higher education qualification that is not allocated to a single AQF level, but covers AQF levels 5, 6 or 7. The UC is accredited by TEQSA and is currently formalised into the AQF. The Australian Government and state and territory governments will review the UC at a

later date to determine its suitability to become a permanent part of the AQF.

Recognition of qualifications in Australia and internationally

The AQF is used to support recognition of overseas qualifications in Australia. Foreign qualifications can undergo an assessment for a range of purposes which compares it to an Australian benchmark, such as an AQF qualification, which supports international graduate mobility to access further study or work opportunities.

To support the recognition of Australian qualifications internationally, the AQF level of a qualification can be found on both education provider websites and on documents that accompany completed qualifications, for example, the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement. Employers may look to the AQF and its levels to understand the learning outcomes and attributes of graduates with different qualifications.

Reviews

As part of the policy cycle for continuous improvements, the AQF is regularly reviewed. The AQF was most recently reviewed in 2019 to consider ways in which the AQF could be revised to facilitate necessary changes in the education and training sectors, and to keep the AQF at the forefront of best practice in qualifications frameworks. The Australian Government accepted all the recommendations of the review in relation to higher education, and accepted the aims of the recommendations of the review in relation to vocational education, contingent on further discussions with state and territory governments. At present, the *AQF Second Edition January 2013* continues to be implemented.

Important lessons and future plans

As a mature and well-developed national qualifications framework, the AQF has brought significant benefits to the Australian education and training system. It has made a meaningful contribution both domestically to Australia's vibrant education and training sector, and internationally, by instilling confidence in the quality of Australian qualifications. In Australia's experience, the AQF has brought together a wide array of stakeholders with diverse and dynamic interests to achieve education and training policy integration, at the domestic and international levels.

The high level of transparency that the AQF offers builds stakeholder trust in qualifications in all education and training sectors. From an international perspective, readily accessible and comprehensive information about the AQF helps other countries to understand the Australian education and training system and recognise AQF qualifications.

The Australian Government works bilaterally and multilaterally to explore solutions that support quality, transparency and robustness to fully realise the potential for qualifications frameworks to enhance international mobility. Australia shares its lessons learned internationally by promoting the importance of understanding the interrelationship between qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and qualifications recognition. The environment to facilitate successful student, academic, researcher, worker and education provider mobility can be optimised when these three policy areas are comprehensive, effective, transparent and well-integrated.

Abbreviations

AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
IRF	APEC Integrated Referencing Framework
RATE	Register of Australian Tertiary Education
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Main sources of information

AQF, visit www.aqf.edu.au

2019 review of the AQF, visit www.dese.gov.au/reviews-and-consultations/australian-qualifications-framework-review

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), www.teqsa.gov.au

Australian Skills Quality Authority (AQSA), visit www.aqsa.gov.au

Australian education system, including information about previous Australian qualifications systems, visit www.internationaleducation.gov.au.

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The UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning in consultation with national experts.

AUSTRIA

Introduction and context

Austria has a low youth unemployment rate, with early school leaving below the EU average (7.8% compared to 10.2% in 2019)[25]. The main factor explaining this success is high participation in vocational education and training (VET) (68.4% of upper secondary students in 2018)[26]. This is one of the main education pathways in the country, with VET courses of high quality and labour market relevance leading to high employability (88% of recent VET graduates were in employment in 2019)[27]. VET is also seen as crucial for the integration of refugees and migrants to the labour market and in society. Recent initiatives include adapting the VET sector for the digital transition and development of guidelines for competence-oriented apprenticeships. Adult participation in lifelong learning is also above the EU average, at 14.7% in 2019[28]; there is, however, a need for upskilling. Foreign-born students are much more likely to leave school early and educational performance continues to be strongly dependent on parents' socioeconomic status. Almost half of Austria's teaching personnel, especially at secondary level, are expected to have to be replaced over the next decade; there is also a need to support teachers better in tackling increasingly complex classroom environments, in terms of diversity, intercultural issues, multilingualism, inclusive education and ICT. Continuous professional development of teachers has become mandatory as of the 2019/20 school year. A comprehensive education and training reform is being implemented, focusing on increasing school autonomy, improving digital skills of students at all levels and more structured pedagogical approaches. Demand for a highly skilled workforce is reflected in an employment rate of recent tertiary graduates higher than the EU average (91.4% compared to 85% in 2019)[29] and significantly higher wages compared to holders of upper secondary qualifications (European Commission, 2019).

In response to the European qualifications framework (EQF) initiative, Austria designed a national qualifications framework (NQF) with an eight-level structure. It is a comprehensive framework, open to all types and levels of qualifications from the formal and non-formal sector, and also envisages integrating the results of informal learning in the long term. 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 and has no regulatory functions. While qualifications 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.

The Federal Act on the national qualifications framework[30] was approved by the Austrian Parliament in March 2016, establishing the governance structure for the framework and the procedures for allocating qualifications to levels. The NQF was referenced to the EQF in 2012 and is now operational. 44 vocational and professional qualifications were assigned to levels 4, 5, 6 and 8 by September 2020. Academic higher education qualifications are automatically referenced to the NQF according to the 2016 NQF Act. Levelling of non-government regulated qualifications acquired through non-formal learning started in 2020. The NQF has had an influence on the education and training system since its development phase (Cedefop and Refernet Austria, 2018). More

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25. Data from European Commission, 2020.
26. Idem.
27. Idem.
28. Idem.
29. Idem.

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30. The NQF Act was published in the *Federal Law Gazette* 14/2016, Part I, 21 March 2016. https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA_2016_I_14/BGBLA_2016_I_14.pdf

recently, it has been part of discussions on the establishment of a separate subsystem, under the 'higher VET' umbrella label, to increase transparency and trust in the diversity of higher-qualifying training offers available in the country (Cedefop and Refernet Austria, 2020b).

Policy objectives

The main roles of the Austrian NQF are transparency and comparability of qualifications, nationally and internationally, support for the development of a permeable education and training system and a highly effective VET system and promoting lifelong learning in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. 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 transparency of the different subsystems by highlighting existing pathways and developing new ones to open up new progression possibilities. It is also expected to aid validation of non-formal and informal learning and to be an important tool in promoting lifelong learning. While having no regulatory functions and no legal effect on vocational and other authorisations, the NQF supports reform and further development of VET qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Specific objectives of the NQF are to[31]:
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.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The Austrian NQF has eight levels. The decision on the number of levels followed broad consultation, a study providing information on the implicit hierarchy in the national qualification system and NQF pilot projects (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research, 2011). Opening levels 6 to 8 to both academic higher education qualifications and VET qualifications was one important topic of discussion. A 'Y-structure' was agreed, to capture differences between the two strands at these levels. Dublin descriptors are used at levels 6 to 8 for qualifications related to the Bologna cycles (bachelor degree, master degree and doctorate) as outlined in the Qualification Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). EQF level descriptors are used for all other qualifications, with additional explanations serving as a guide to make the EQF descriptors understood in the Austrian context[32]. The explanations were formulated to build on existing qualification descriptions, curricula, training regulations and legal documents. In addition to the EQF descriptors and the national explanations, reference qualifications were also used in the referencing process, aiming to illustrate the requirements of learning outcomes connected to each level and to guide the allocation process for additional qualifications.

As learning outcomes are central in the levelling of qualifications to 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 is continuing (Cedefop, 2016a; Cedefop, 2016b).

In school-based VET, learning outcomes are defined in VET educational standards[33]; 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

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31. Explanations to the NQF act (in German). https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/I/I_00999/fname_498915.pdf

32. The explanations for the use of EQF descriptors in the Austrian context are available on the NQF webpage (in German). https://www.qualifikationsregister.at/en/der-nqr/deskriptoren/
33. A description of VET educational standards can be found in the project handbook *Bildungsstandards in der Berufsbildung.* http://www.berufsbildendeschulen.at/fileadmin/content/bbs/Handbuch_BIST_15.10.2015.pdf

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 the transparency and comparability of upper secondary qualifications and fairness; they grant direct access to higher education[34]. Higher VET curricula are being revised and qualifications awarded by VET colleges are being updated based on NQF principles. An initiative (*fit4NQR*) was piloted to increase transparency and quality assurance in the master craftsperson qualification (*Meister*) and in examinations, with a more detailed definition of learning outcomes and implementation of a competence-oriented structure of the preparatory courses[35]. The master craftsperson qualification[36] was allocated to NQF level 6 in 2018, reflecting the high esteem of this qualification in Austria.

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 a job profile (*Berufsbild*), with the knowledge and skills to be acquired by apprentices.

Implementation of the learning outcomes approach in higher education is 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.

Guidelines for developing learning outcomes approaches in adult education became available in 2011, part of NQF development, and leaning outcomes were introduced in quality guidelines for the accreditation of institutions offering free basic skills courses (Cedefop, 2016a).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

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. The Austrian context has been characterised from the beginning by active stakeholder involvement and occasional conflicting views on the NQF's role[37]. 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, 2020). 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[38] established the governance structure for the framework and defined the responsibilities of institutions and bodies and implementation processes. The NQF/EQF national coordination point (NCP), the main administrative, coordinating and information office on NQF/EQF, was set up as an independent body within the Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (Österreichischer *Austauschdienst* (OeAD)). It is governed by a contract between OeAD and the Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) in agreement with the Ministry of Digital and Economic Affairs (BMDW) and is funded by both ministries and European Commission grants. The NCP is staffed with five employees. Its tasks include (European Commission; Cedefop, 2020):
a. mapping of qualifications to the NQF according to the NQF Act;
b. further development of the NQF Register;
c. support of all relevant bodies involved in the process (NQF Steering Committee, NQF Advisory Board, NQF Service Points, and experts);
d. public relations and consultation;
e. networking at national and European level.

An NQF steering committee of 32 members representing all key stakeholders (all relevant federal

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34. https://www.bmb.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/ba/reifepruefungneu.html
35. https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20181108_OTS0115/oesterreichs-gewerbe-und-handwerk-ist-gut-vorbereitet-fuer-die-zukunft
36. Master craftsperson examinations (*Meisterprüfungen*) have been mapped to NQF level 6. The five qualifications published in the NQF Register are examples showing the scope of this qualification type.

37. For example, on the topic of opening NQF levels 6 to 8 to non-traditional higher education qualifications, with VET stakeholders on one side and higher education on the other.
38. The NQF Act: https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA_2016_I_14/BGBLA_2016_I_14.pdf [in German].

ministries, social partners, stakeholders from the different fields of education and training, 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). This broad representation reflects stakeholder interests and acknowledges 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, professional practice, higher education), was established to advise the NQF NCP by providing a written opinion on allocation requests. In addition, the NQF NCP maintains a list of experts (currently over 200 (NQF NCP, 2020)) that may be consulted in the process of examining allocation requests.

The NQF Act regulates the process of mapping qualifications based on learning outcomes to the eight levels of the NQF and publication of the results of the mapping process in the register. Higher education qualifications of the Bologna system (BA/MA/PhD) are mapped to the NQF automatically through the NQF Act; all other qualifications are levelled following an allocation request. Procedures and structures for levelling non-government regulated qualifications acquired through adult learning, further learning and youth work have been recently put in place. The allocation process[39] is principally the same for all qualifications, the only difference being the body submitting the allocation request. Applications for government-regulated qualifications are submitted by the responsible ministry, while for non-government regulated qualifications six NQF service points were established in November 2019[40] for this purpose, as intermediaries between qualification providers and the NQF coordination point. The NQF service points

serve as gatekeepers of the NQF[41], performing a quality assurance function and supporting qualification providers in the preparation of allocation requests (Cedefop and Refernet Austria, 2020a). Their activity will be evaluated after two years of operation (European Commission; Cedefop, 2020).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[42]

Following the 2012 recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2012) and linked to the Lifelong learning strategy[43] and the development of the NQF, the Austrian national strategy for validating non-formal and informal learning[44] was adopted in November 2017[45]. It was based on analysis of existing validation arrangements in three areas (the low-qualified, VET and higher education) and was subject to a national consultation process. 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');

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39. A schematic view of the mapping process can be found in Cedefop and Refernet Austria, 2020a.
40. The service points were selected following a call for interest among institutions that declare responsibility towards the entire Austrian qualification system. A catalogue of criteria for selection of future service points has been developed, focusing on: systemic perspective; expertise; capacities; quality assurance and strategy concept (NQF NCP, 2020).

41. They are responsible for ensuring that: the qualification to be submitted meets the NQF requirements; the information contained in the application is sufficient for making a decision; the level applied for is appropriately and sufficiently documented; and the information in the application reflects the lived practice, i.e. that the qualification is also offered as described in the application (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).
42. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update of the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning: Austria* (Luomi Messerer, 2019).
43. The text of the Lifelong learning strategy 2020 is available in German at: https://www.qualifikationsregister.at/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Strategie1.pdf
44. The text of the *Strategy for validating non-formal and informal learning* is available in German at: https://www.qualifikationsregister.at/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Strategie_zur_Validierung_nicht-formalen_und_informellen_Lernens.pdf
45. A working group was established in 2013 to develop the strategy for validation, 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.

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 (pillar 2) to validation, based on the requirements and standards of the qualifications system, aimed at the acquisition of a qualification or part of one; and also formative validation approaches (pillar 1) aimed at identifying and documenting competences to empower individuals and increase motivation for learning. The latter do not lead to certification, but may lead to steps towards certification. For the first stage of implementation (2017-19), four thematic working groups were established, related to quality, communication, system synergies and professionalisation. Results so far include a catalogue of quality criteria for validation initiatives in VET and adult education, piloted throughout 2018, and the outline of an online portal with information about validation initiatives.

The strategy is intended to provide a platform and framework for development and coordination of the many existing, and future, initiatives that were devised 'bottom-up' 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 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'), using the same standards and methods as in the formal education system. Examples are the acquisition of the compulsory school leaving certificate (*Pflichtschulabschluss*) by young people and adults, and exceptional admission to the final apprenticeship exam for those without formal training[46]. Validation is also used to obtain exemptions and shorten programmes in general education or VET and to shorten degree programmes at universities of applied science

based on recognition of professional experience. There are also possibilities of gaining access to higher education programmes in an alternative way. The vocational matriculation exam (the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (BRP)) and the higher education entrance examination (*Studienberechtigungsprüfung* (SBP)) can both be taken by graduates of specific apprenticeships and VET schools and early leavers from VET colleges that traditionally are not granted university access through their initial education.

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 could be an obstacle to implementation. In the long term, it should be possible for all qualifications mapped to the NQF to be acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning. The necessary steps for this are learning outcome-based quality assurance and the further development of validation methods and procedures. The Austrian NQF and the validation strategy share common objectives and their implementation is closely linked.

NQF implementation and impact

The Austrian NQF has reached the operational stage. The NQF Act[47], establishing procedures for allocating qualifications to the eight levels of the NQF and the responsible bodies and the NQF manual[48] describing the process, principles and criteria for allocation, were adopted in 2016. The allocation request form was updated in 2019. Academic higher education qualifications (bachelor, master and PhD/doctoral degrees) are directly allocated to levels 6, 7 and 8 through the NQF law. Mapping of all other 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. The NQF distinguishes between formally and non-formally acquired qualifications, the former being those, which are government-regulated, and the latter, which are those not regulated by the government.

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46. The requirement is that they are over 18 years old and have evidence of having acquired the corresponding vocational skills and knowledge, for example through work experience or courses (Luomi Messerer, 2019).

47. The NQF Act was published in the *Federal Law Gazette* 14/2016, Part I, issued on 21 March 2016. https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA_2016_I_14/BGBLA_2016_I_14.pdf

48. 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. https://www.qualifikationsregister.at/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/HandbuchNQR2019_RZ_bf.pdf

Mapping of qualifications awarded in the formal education and training system started in 2017. The initial focus has been on qualifications from the VET sector at levels 4, 5 and 6, starting with VET school-based and apprenticeship qualifications[49]; these were followed by qualifications under the responsibility of other ministries, such as defence and healthcare, at levels 5 and 8 respectively. A decision on inclusion of general education qualifications in the NQF has not yet been made.

Inclusion of non-government regulated qualifications into the NQF started in 2019, with the first eight levelled in 2020. A quality assurance process has been put in place and six NQF service points were set up in 2019, serving as intermediaries between qualification providers and the NQF NCP. Three deadlines per year have been set for submission of allocation requests; the NCP plans to allocate around 20 non-government regulated qualifications a year (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Mapped qualifications are included in the national qualifications register[50], which currently contains 50 qualifications (November 2020), including qualifications exemplarily representing a whole qualification type. The qualifications register indicates NQF and EQF levels, as well as a description of learning outcomes, the qualification provider, rights/entitlement, sectors and fields of activity, access requirements and duration of training. Discussions are under way to include NQF levels in the database of the Austrian Employment Service. Both NQF and EQF levels are, in some cases, indicated on new qualifications from VET, higher education, and on some of the non-government regulated qualifications that have been mapped to the NQF, and on Europass supplements[51].

The NQF is being used as a basis for reform and development in VET qualifications, with significant influence in VET at higher levels. There is a strong link between the NQF and the curricula of technical and vocational colleges, which are being constantly updated based on the NQF and labour market requirements. 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[52] 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, 2020).

Initial communication efforts have been oriented towards qualification-awarding bodies, aiming to help them prepare their qualifications for the mapping process and inclusion in the NQF register and experts using the NQF in their work. Future efforts will be directed to bringing the NQF closer to workers, job-seekers and learners (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). Dissemination of information about the NQF is carried out via the NQF website[53], newsletters, seminars and one-to-one meetings.

Referencing to the EQF

Austria referenced its national qualifications framework 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.

Important lessons and future plans

The Austrian NQF aims at improved transparency of a national qualification system that has traditionally witnessed distinct separation between different segments of education and training, and at increased transparency of VET and non-government regulated qualifications. With the adoption of the NQF Act in 2016, the allocation of the first formally acquired qualifications in 2017, and the development of procedures and structures for the allocation of non-government regulated qualifications in 2019, the framework is gradually moving towards achieving its goal of being a comprehensive representation of all qualifications, regardless of learning context.

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. This broad group of stakeholders is engaged in implementation via the NQF steering group. Stakeholder cooperation has been further strengthened with the establishment of the six

49. 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.
50. The Austrian qualifications register is available at: www.qualifikationsregister.at
51. The webpage of the Austrian Europass Centre is available at: www.europass.at

52. The legal act regulating the Ingenieur qualification is available in German at: https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20009785
53. The NQF website and register are available at: www.qualifikationsregister.at

NQF service points, responsible for submitting allocation requests for non-government regulated qualifications; two of them are run by institutions from the social partners. Education and training providers, 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. NQF service point conferences with the NQF NCP take place regularly to improve communication among stakeholders and enhance common understanding. In 2020, non-government regulated qualifications for people active in youth work were mapped to the NQF for the first time. The first job adverts and work profiles with NQF levels have appeared. The indication of NQF and EQF levels on qualifications has increased the visibility of the framework and facilitated its use (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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 especially in higher VET, where NQF principles are used for revision of qualifications. The mapping of *Meister* and *Ingenieur* qualifications to NQF level 6 has generated increased interest in the NQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). The NQF has also been referred to in discussions on the creation of a separate 'higher VET' education segment to help structure and make more visible the diverse higher VET offer, of which a substantial part is outside the formal education and training system. The use of the existing NQF allocation process is being considered as part of the solution to this discussion (Cedefop and Refernet, 2020b). The framework is also central in implementing the Austrian strategy for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Future plans related to the implementation of the NQF include continuing the mapping of qualifications and further improving the allocation process.

Table 3. Austrian national qualifications framework

AQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	
8	Doctorate *(Doktorgrade)*	Level 8 professional qualifications in the health sector E.g. Clinical Psychology *(Klinische Psychologie)*
7	Master degree (Master- bzw. Diplomgrade)	
6	Bachelor degree (Bachelorgrade)	Master craftsperson (Meister)
		Engineer (Ingenieur)
5	VET college/school leaving certificate – 5-year programmes (BHS) *(Reife- und Diplomprüfung der berufsbildenden höheren Schulen)* Level 5 professional qualification awarded by the Federal Ministry of Defence – Staff Non-Commissioned Officer *(Stabsunteroffizier oder Stabsunteroffizierin (StbUO, Erstverwendung))* Level 5 professional qualification awarded by the Federal Ministry of Justice – Executive Judicial Officer *(Exekutivdienst in der Verwendungsgruppe E2a im Justizressort ("Dienstführenden Grundausbildung" – mittleres Management))*	
4	VET school qualification – 3 and 4 year programmes (BMS) *(Abschluss der berufsbildenden mittleren Schule)* Apprenticeship certificate *(Lehrabschluss)* Level 4 professional qualification awarded by the Federal Ministry of Defence - Career Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) *(Militärberufsunteroffizier oder Militärberufsunteroffizierin (MBUO, Erstverwendung))* Level 4 professional qualification awarded by regional governments – agricultural technical schools – 3 years *(Abschlussprüfung an der landwirtschaftlichen Fachschule)*	
3		
2		
1		

Sources: The Austrian NQF register: www.qualifikationsregister.at [accessed 30.3.2020]
The NQF Act (2016): https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA_2016_I_14/BGBLA_2016_I_14.pdfsig.

Main sources of information

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AZERBAIJAN

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

The Azerbaijan National Qualifications Framework (AzNQF) was officially adopted in July 2018 by Ministerial Decree. It is an eight-level, comprehensive framework spanning qualifications from general, vocational, higher and further education.

The framework aims to improve the quality and transparency of qualifications, to orient qualifications towards the needs of society and the labour market, and to facilitate lifelong learning by improving progression pathways and recognition of prior learning.

Azerbaijan joined the Bologna Process in 2005 but has not self-certified yet.

The governance of the AzNQF is still under development. The Education Institute currently coordinates overall AzNQF developments but there is not yet an established national platform such as a council or commission to ensure systematic involvement of stakeholders in the NQF's implementation.

Azerbaijan has formally adopted an NQF, is developing some tools such as a qualifications register, and is piloting validation. However, governance is not yet settled, procedures to allocate qualifications by level are still being developed and the framework does not yet shape curricula or teaching.

Therefore, the AzNQF is in the late adoption stage.

Policy context

Azerbaijan's main trading partner and the largest foreign investor is the EU. Azerbaijan to EU relations are conducted via the EU-Azerbaijan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, in force since 1999. Since 2017 there have been discussions about a revised agreement.

The pillars of cooperation are the same as for all Eastern partnership countries i.e. achieving:
- a stronger economy
- stronger governance; and better access to justice; human rights;
- a stronger society, including Erasmus+, youth exchange, support to civil society;
- better connectivity; specific measures in Azerbaijan include capacity-building support to the Port of Baku, and the EU4Energy project that supports improved energy efficiency.

Azerbaijan is an important energy partner for the EU and plays a pivotal role in bringing Caspian energy resources to the EU market.

Much of the country's recent growth has been driven by its hydrocarbon reserves. However, responding to falling global prices in oil, the government is seeking to diversify its economy to reduce its over-reliance on raw materials.

Following a period of steady growth, in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic accompanied by an oil price drop resulted in a 3% contraction of the economy. The economy is expected to grow by 2.5% in 2021[54].

The population of Azerbaijan is 10 million[55] with a large share of young people aged 15-24 (20.7%), over half of whom live in urban areas. Breakdown of employment in 2018 was as follows: 36% in agriculture, 15% in industry and 49% in services. A large proportion of the active population is selfemployed (68%) with a high incidence of vulnerable employment[56].

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54. EBRD, https://www.ebrd.com/where-we-are/azerbaijan/overview.html
55. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=AZ
56. 'Key indicators on education skills and employment 2019', ETF, https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2019-12/kiese_2019.pdf

Azerbaijan has moderate levels of educational attainment among its adult population, aged 25-64. In 2019, 16.6% had completed higher education; 76.4% had a medium-level education; while 7.1% had primary education or lower.

PISA test results of students from the capital Baku indicate a need to raise the quality of the education system – in 2018, over 60% of learners were underachieving in reading, while the figures were over 50% in mathematics and over 57% in science, that is failing to complete even simple tasks in the tested domains (i.e. failing Level 2 on the PISA scale).[57]

In 2018, the unemployment level in Azerbaijan was 4.9% overall, 13% among youth. The country struggles to generate an adequate number of jobs for graduates[58].

Tertiary education enrolment in Azerbaijan is relatively low at 32% in 2019, compared to neighbouring countries.[59] The VET sector is small – only 14,5% of upper secondary students follow VET programmes and the range of adult and further training provision is limited. That said, the newly established and well-resourced VET centres receive more applications than they have places available.

During 2020, as worldwide, the education and training system was obliged to adapt to COVID. Schools shut down in March 2020, teaching via the web and supported by state television education programmes. A state-Microsoft collaborative project, "Virtual School," provided homework to pupils nationwide via TV. Baku State Vocational Training Centre for Industry and Innovation used the system to provide tailored content for VET students, including teaching materials and video tutorials delivered via Microsoft Teams. In the VET system generally, assessment was carried out online where appropriate.

NQF legal basis
Decree 311 of the Cabinet of Ministers on the 'National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan'[60] approved on July 18, 2018, provides the main legal basis for the AzNQF. It includes general provisions, the objectives of the AzNQF, the level descriptors, responsibilities of institutions in the implementation of AzNQF and quality assurance provisions:

Since the adoption of AzNQF, the regulatory framework related to qualifications in Azerbaijan has been developing further with legislative documents adopted in 2019 and 2020. These include:
- The Charter of the Education Quality Assurance Agency approved by a Decree of the President in December 2019;
- Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers: no. 474 on 'Development, Improvement, Endorsement, Registration and Extension of Duration of Occupational and Qualification Standards'[61] and no. 475 on 'Sector Committees for Skills Development'[62], approved in December 2019;
- Resolution of the Ministry of Education no. KQ-06, "Conducting attestation of learners at stage of vocational education", adopted in March 2019[63];
- State standards for vocational education, Resolution of Cabinet of Ministers no. 85, adopted in March 2019[64];
- The Charter of the 'National Observatory on Labour Market and Social Protection Affairs', approved by an order of the Cabinet of Ministers in March 2020;[65]
- Regulation no. 266 on "Provision of Career Guidance Services" approved by a Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers in June 2019[66], laid the ground for provision of career guidance services, while a further resolution approved in May 2020 organised career guidance services in secondary schools[67];
- In August 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted Resolution no. 279 on regulations which provide a framework for a validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) scheme in Azerbaijan [68,69,70].

Both the 2009 Law on Education and the 2018 Law on Vocational Education 201816 contain elements that apply to the AzNQF such as: curricula based on learning outcomes, the concepts of non-formal and informal learning, and the principle of lifelong learning. The Law on Employment, adopted in 2018, 17 introduced provisions on occupational standards and the role of the trades unions in their

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57. Ibid.
58. Policies for Human Capital Development in Azerbaijan, An ETF Torino Process Assessment 2020, ETF
59. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER. ENRR?locations=AZ
60. http://e-qanun.az/framework/39622

61. http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/43855
62. http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/43856
63. http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/41904
64. http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/41741
65. http://e-qanun.az/framework/44811
66. http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/42636
67. http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/45034
68. http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/45613, 'Rules for carrying out examination and issuing the document confirming professional qualification of citizens for the purpose of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal forms of vocational learning',
69. http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/39275
70. http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/39846

development, further training, assessment of skills of employees, and vocational guidance.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms
Azerbaijan's government has prioritised development of human capital in numerous strategic documents including the National Strategy for the Development of Education (2013), which envisions the introduction of competence-based education, enabling access to lifelong learning, modernisation of the educational infrastructure, as well as reforms in education system management, governance, and financing. The NQF Decree issued in 2018 is intended to contribute to the Strategy's targets.

In 2016, the Strategic Roadmap for VET 2016-2025 was adopted. It included targets related to the development of outcomes-based funding, involvement of employers in VET, development of sectorbased and labour market-relevant training programmes, optimization of the school network, opening professional training programmes to adults and recognition of prior learning and implementation of the

NQF. It was followed by the establishment of the State Agency for Vocational Education (SAVE) in 2016 and the adoption of the new VET Law in 2018.

In 2005, Azerbaijan joined the Bologna Process which has triggered subsequent reforms in the higher education sector, e.g. the 2009 Law on Education introduced the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The new State Programme on Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019–2023, aims at modernising the content of higher education degree programmes and envisages the introduction of the latest scientific and innovative educational technology.

The Employment Strategy for 2017–30 sets 16 targets for 2030 aimed at reducing the share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), lowering unemployment rates, reducing informal employment and increasing employment in small and medium enterprises. To match the skills supply and demand, the implementation plan accompanying the Strategy included actions focused on increasing the scale and quality of training and the introduction of mechanisms for validation and recognition of prior learning. The Strategy envisaged revisions of several legislative documents relevant to the implementation of the AzNQF.

Aims of NQF
The primary objectives of the AzNQF are to improve the quality and transparency of qualifications through adoption of 'unified requirements for education and assessment standards, based on learning outcomes''. AzNQF serves to facilitate the comparability between national and international qualifications. Furthermore, the AzNQF is intended to be an instrument for aligning the education and training systems with the needs of the labour market and society, supporting lifelong learning and enabling recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

The alignment of AzNQF with the QF-EHEA and the EQF is intended to improve the international recognition of qualifications awarded in Azerbaijan and support the national and international mobility of learners and workers.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF Scope and Structure
The AzNQF structure draws on the EQF and the Bologna Framework. It comprises 8 levels. The level descriptors provide learning outcome statements for three domains: knowledge and understanding, skills, and autonomy and responsibility.

Some elements of key competencies for lifelong learning such as communicating in mother tongue and foreign language, and mathematical competence are integrated in the level descriptors. The levels are aligned with the major formal qualifications of the country's education system.

The NQF includes qualifications from general education, vocational education and training, secondary specialized education (the sub-bachelor's degree), higher education and further education (adult learning).

Vocational education and training qualifications are placed between levels 3 and 5. Qualifications can be awarded through formal learning and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Types of qualifications
By level, the framework accommodates the following qualifications types:
- Level 1, primary education qualifications and certificates from short courses;
- Level 2, secondary education qualifications and certificates for short courses;
- Level 3, initial vocational education and further vocational training qualifications, diplomas and certificates;

- Level 4, the certificate of full secondary education (school leaving certificate); vocational qualifications based on full secondary education (diploma), further vocational training qualifications (diplomas and certificates);
- Level 5, secondary specialized qualifications e.g. the sub-bachelor's degree; and further vocational training qualifications;
- Level 6, bachelor's degrees and further education and training qualifications;
- Level 7, master's degrees and further education and training qualifications;
- Level 8, PhDs, Doctor of science degree and further education and learning qualifications.

Qualifications for further education and training are placed between levels 3 and 8.

Quality assurance of qualifications
According to the AzNQF decree, the NQF is a framework of quality assured qualifications and the framework itself should be subject to regular review.

External quality arrangements are regulated by the rules for accreditation of educational institutions. The AzNQF envisages internal quality assurance processes but self-assessment and peer reviews are not widely used yet in the education sector. The Regulations on monitoring of vocational education institutions of 2 March 2018 provides for monitoring of VET institutions in the domains of curricula, personnel, educational infrastructure and teaching processes. The planned 2021 EU-funded Twinning Project will aim at quality improvement in vocational education through the introduction of self-assessment, peer reviews and performance monitoring mechanisms. It will support SAVE in development of policy and procedures for quality assurance in VET system.

The main body in charge of accreditation is the Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA). It was established in December 2019 by reorganising the former Accreditation and Nostrification[71] Department of the Ministry of Education into a new public legal entity. The main tasks of the Agency are managing the processes of accreditation of education institutions, recognition of foreign credentials, recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and advice and methodological support for development of internal quality assurance systems in education institutions. Supporting the implementation of AzNQF and improvement of educational standards are also included in the mandate of the Agency.

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71. Nostrification - the process of granting recognition to a degree from a foreign university.

External quality assurance guidelines on Higher Education have been drafted and corresponding guidelines for VET and general education are under preparation. In higher education guidelines on writing a self-evaluation report have been produced; plus, pilot accreditations of several study programmes.

The State Examination Centre organises and oversees central assessment in general education i.e. the final assessment at the end of secondary school; and centralized admission to undergraduate and graduate levels of higher education at universities.

The Higher Attestation Commission conducts external assessments of doctoral degrees.

In 2019, the MoE approved the regulation "Conducting attestation of vocational education students", which introduced assessment based on learning outcomes. The regulation emphasizes assessing students' knowledge, skills and competences based on learning outcomes and assessment criteria specified in curricula. The assessment processes include three stages: (1) 'current' (formative) assessment, (2) mid-term assessment and (3) final assessment. An EU-funded technical assistance project supporting the AzNQF developed assessment guidance standards for 41 modules in vocational education.

The regulatory and organization framework for quality assurance of assessment under the NQF requires further development. The missing element is the absence of a competent body which would provide overall coherent policy guidance and criteria against which the agencies responsible for the respective education and training sub-sectors could define their own procedures for quality assurance of assessment.

Quality assurance of the certification process will be addressed by the anticipated follow-up technical assistance project supporting further implementation of the AzNQF funded by the EU scheduled to commence in late 2021.

Use of learning outcomes and standards
The AzNQF is an outcomes-based framework, so learning outcomes form the basis for development, assessment and certification processes.

Quality assurance at the national level is regulated by educational standards which are important elements of the quality assurance of qualifications. Additionally, the current regulatory framework envisages parallel use of qualifications standards and the relationship between qualification standards

and education standards must be further clarified to ensure that the process of developing and describing qualifications is efficient and free from overlaps. Currently, the MoE issues educational standards and the MoLSPP oversees development of qualifications standards.

The relevance of qualifications is assured by use of occupational standards which are developed by sector committees. Regulations for development and registration of occupational and qualification standards provide sector committees with a conducive framework to collaborate with public agencies, education and training providers, trade unions and employers' associations. Qualification standards include key, core, and specific competences. So far, a few hundred occupational standards have been developed. They are available on the website of the MLSPP.[72] Regular budget for development of occupational and qualification standards is assured through the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

A National Labour Market Observatory under the MoLSPP was established in 2019 to analyse trends in the labour market and to produce data that can be used in the development of occupational and qualifications standards. An EU-funded technical assistance project has been supporting the operationalisation of the Observatory.

In March 2019, the 'State standard for vocational education' was adopted. The standard defines expected learning outcomes in terms of learners' knowledge, skills and competences. It specifies learning content and requirements for trainers, training infrastructure and teaching material. The standard ensures modular structure of the curriculum. It also includes eight key competences for lifelong learning[73] adapted to local circumstances.

In May 2020 a new framework for all state standards for bachelor's degrees was adopted. It includes 13 general competences for all studies at this level. Universities now have scope to define the programmes up to 60 ECTS. State standards define the competencies required from graduates while the universities define learning outcomes for individual courses. Guidelines on implementing competence-based approaches have been developed and 15 pilot study programmes at bachelor's level were redefined. University

teachers need training in more consistent use of the competencebased approach.

Credit systems

The 2009 Law on Education envisaged credit transfer and since 2013 qualifications of higher education and secondary specialised education (sub-bachelor's education) have been referenced to credits compatible with ECTS. However, there is no national credit system.

In general education, VET, and higher education, completion of related lower-level qualifications is a precondition to access higher level qualifications. In addition, to access secondary specialised education and degree programmes, learners must pass a centralised entrance exam administered by the State Examination Centre. Graduates of secondary specialised education can access higher education institutions without taking the central exam.

VET schools can provide short-term courses (up to six months) starting throughout the year, based on employer need or in line with agreements between the State Employment Service and SAVE. A system supporting vertical and horizontal mobility of learners and improved articulation between VET programmes, adult training, colleges and higher education, is needed.

In 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers approved rules which allow admission of college graduates (holders of the sub-bachelor's qualification) to bachelor's courses without participating in entrance exams. Based on these rules, the NQF technical assistance project proposed a methodology for testing credit transfer.

The planned EU Twinning Project aims at developing a technical framework for a credit system that enables accumulation, recognition and transfer of individuals' learning outcomes and supports development of flexible learning pathways in selected priority sectors.

72. https://www.sosial.gov.az/en/specialty-standards
73. The Council of the European Union adopted a recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning in May 2018: https://ec.europa.eu/education/ education-in-the-eu/council-recommendation-on-key-competences-forlifelong-learning_en

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The institutional and governance set-up of the AzNQF is under development. The NQF Decree stipulates that the Ministry of Education is responsible for the following functions:

- quality assurance;
- development of educational standards, curricula and assessment standards;
- development and management of the national register of qualifications;
- development, in collaboration with MoLSPP, of a system for validation and recognition of nonformal learning.

MoE carries out these functions through the following bodies:

1. The EQAA, which oversees the external quality assurance system and implements validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.
2. The NQLLL Department in the Institute of Education, which provides methodological support to the implementation of the AzNQF. It carries out the following services:
   o analysis and monitoring of AzNQF implementation, formulation of recommendations on regulatory amendments to the AzNQF; and drafting of proposals for development of lifelong learning policies;
   o making recommendations for development of new qualifications based on labour market analysis;
   o supporting development, approval and evaluation of outcomes-based educational programmes for all education sectors;
   o management of the national register of qualifications;
   o analysis and monitoring of the qualification system and its elements - qualifications and education standards, curricula, assessment, quality assurance, referencing, recognition of non-formal education, lifelong guidance;
   o information and awareness-raising activities.
3. Other relevant departments of the Ministry of Education involved in the implementation of AzNQF are the Department of General Education and the Department of Science, Higher and Secondary Specialised Education. They ensure approval and implementation of education standards in their respective subsectors. SAVE ensures development and implementation of policies and education standards for vocational education.

The Higher Attestation Commission under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan oversees the awarding of Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Science degrees.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population executes the functions of labour market analysis and coordinates the process of occupational and qualification standards development.

The National Labour Market Observatory established under MoLSPP in 2020 plays a main role in skills analysis and anticipation. It is expected that it will produce data that will feed occupational standards and qualifications standards development.

The Occupational Standards Development Unit in the MoLSPP oversees occupational standards development. Since the Unit has a limited number of staff, standards development has been subcontracted to a private company.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The Statute of "Sector Committees for Skills Development" provides for involvement of trades unions, employers, employers' associations and training providers in development and validation of occupational and qualifications standards. Employers can request development or revision of occupational standards and can express their opinions, but they do not enjoy voting rights in the Committees (unlike representatives of education institutions), which may reduce the labour market relevance of new qualifications.

A notable gap in the AzNQF's governance is the absence of a national platform such as a council. Such a grouping or committee could provide oversight of the AzNQF's implementation and ensure that reform of the qualifications system is linked to the major national economic strategies. A proposal for a 'National Commission for the AzNQF', listing key functions and stakeholders, was developed by the EU-funded NQF project. It recommends involvement of representatives from all relevant education sectors, departments of the Ministry of Labour, the State Employment Services, the Ministry of the Economy, the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs Organizations, the Trades Unions Confederation and the Sector Committees.

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

VNFIL arrangements

In August 2020, a regulation on assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning was approved by a Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers[74]. It gave the EQAA the mandate to implement the first validation scheme.

Citizens who have completed secondary education and have at least two years' work experience in a relevant specialty are eligible to undergo a validation process which involves the following stages:
- electronic registration of applicants and payment;
- initial review of documents and interview;
- assessment that includes theoretical and practical tests;
- certification.

An initial exchange of information is carried out through a personal account created on-line. Provision of guidance services is specified in the regulation.

Assessment methods are limited to theoretical and practical assessment. The regulation prescribes a multiple-choice test of 10 questions per module regardless of the occupation. Successful fulfilment of the theoretical part is a precondition for admission to the practical assessment. The practical assessment can be organized either in one of the vocational schools or in an enterprise. EQAA compiles the list of authorised assessment centres based on predefined criteria.

The assessment commission includes 3 members – representatives of EQAA, MoLSPP and employers. Independent assessors with a minimum of 5 years' experience in the assessed specialty can also be involved. The assessment is carried out based on the classification of specialties in vocational education and on the assessment criteria described in the educational programmes.

The certification awarded through validation is equivalent to an initial vocational qualification. It gives its holders the right to continue vocational education in the formal system.

An appeal procedure is foreseen. Either full or partial recognition is possible; partial recognition is granted in cases when the candidate demonstrates fulfilment against standards in some but not all units.

The EU-funded NQF project supported training of assessors and development of an assessment items bank for piloting a validation scheme in two occupations. In addition, various tools and instruments supporting operationalisation of the validation scheme were developed including guidelines for validation, guidelines for external quality assurance of assessment, standards for assessors and standards for verifiers.

EQAA is planning a gradual roll-out of the scheme to five occupations during 2021. Further support to scaling up of the validation system is envisaged by the upcoming EU-funded technical assistance project.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings

In the last two years, important milestones in implementation of the AzNQF have been reached. Agencies and units that will play important roles in the governance of the qualifications system have been formally established: EQAA, which provides oversight on quality assurance and the NQFLLL Department in the Education Institute, which has a mandate to support and monitor AzNQF implementation.

A labour market observatory and sector committees for skills development are operational to assure labour market relevance of national qualifications.

The first certificates have been awarded through the validation of non-formal learning scheme.

A regulatory framework is being consolidated and the adoption of the AzNQF Decree was followed by development and approval of several legal acts that together provide a conducive framework for development of qualifications described in clearly identified learning outcomes.

So, the framework is moving closer to the activation stage.

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74. Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 279 of August 5, 2020 on 'The Rules of Carrying out examinations and issuing of the document confirming professional qualification of citizens for the purpose of an assessment and recognition of the knowledge, skills, competence and experience acquired by citizens through non-formal and informal forms of vocational education', http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/45613

Qualifications registers and databases

The national register of qualifications was developed in 2019 and is available on the AzNQF website[75]. It contains 24 recently developed, outcomes-based qualifications. The register has a comprehensive structure and contains the following data fields: name of the qualification, AzNQF level, curriculum, qualifications standard, assessment standards, occupational standard, teaching and learning materials, awarding body, dates of preparation and revision.

Procedures to allocate qualifications, formal or non-formal, to the register have not yet been adopted. The NQF project supported development of a concept document which specified proposed inclusion criteria, which is still to be finalised and adopted.

It is not clear yet who will manage the register long term. Currently, the Education Institute fulfils this role.

The register will have to be linked with the database of occupational standards which is currently managed by the MoLSPP[76].

The AzNQF website provides useful information about the purposes and functions of the AzNQF and includes promotional materials as well as link to the validation scheme under EQAA.

A concept paper on career guidance and counselling, with recommendations and an implementation plan, has been developed with the support of the NQF project. The implementation of career guidance services in general education and vocational education school will be further supported by upcoming EU-funded projects.

Qualification documents

Procedures for inclusion of the AzQNF levels on certificates and diplomas have not yet been developed.

Recognition of foreign qualifications

Azerbaijan is a signatory to the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region.

EQQA oversees recognition and determination of equivalence for bachelor's and master's degrees awarded abroad (a process known as nostrification). Nostrification of doctorate degrees is within the mandate of the Higher Attestation Commission under the President of Azerbaijan.

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks

Azerbaijan joined the Bologna process in 2005. To further align the higher education system with the European Higher Education Area, an EU-Funded Twinning project running 2018-20 supported rewriting of higher education programmes in learning outcomes and development of procedures for evaluation and accreditation of higher education study programmes.

The AzNQF was designed and is being implemented in compliance with the QF-EHEA and the EQF. However, the AzNQF has not yet self-certified to the QF EHEA.

International cooperation

EQAA is a member of the ENIC-NARIC network and has observer status in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

Azerbaijan is a member of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The students of Azerbaijani universities and academic personnel participate in the EU Erasmus+ exchange programme. Between 2015 and 2019, over 1,600 Azerbaijani students and academic staff studied or taught in Europe and over 800 Europeans travelled to Azerbaijan via Erasmus + mobility schemes[77].

In 2020, Azerbaijan joined WorldSkills, an association which promotes professional skills worldwide, including organising international skills competitions for young people.

International donor support

The European Union, GIZ, UNDP, the British Council and the Korean Government have all been active in VET in Azerbaijan.

In the period 2017-2020, the EU supported the education sector in Azerbaijan with a package of projects worth €19 million. This included the technical assistance projects: 'Support to VET in Azerbaijan', 'Support to implementation of National Qualifications Framework in Azerbaijan', 'Support to workforce planning and skills anticipation' (Labour market observatory), and the Twinning project 'Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan'.

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75. https://www.kvalifikasiya.az/az/qualifications
76. https://www.sosial.gov.az/en/specialty-standards

77. https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/neighbourhood/azerbaijan_erasmusplus_2019.pdf

Further support by the EU is planned under the Annual Action Programme 2018 'Education for Employment in Azerbaijan' with a total budget of €14.4 million. The action focuses on creating an enabling environment for lifelong learning, consolidation of the qualification system reform, improvement of quality in VET and support to improving the teaching and learning environment in selected VET schools.

Important lessons and future plans

The AZNQF has benefited both from the state's willingness to place it high on the policy agenda and the continuous support of international partners, in particular the EU.

European policies and tools, especially the EQF and Bologna QF are strong influences.

But to fulfil the goals intended for AzNQF, a regular dialogue engaging the various education sectors plus labour market representatives, is needed. Introduction of a national inter-ministerial council overseeing qualification systems reforms could address this gap. The NQFLLL Department in the Education Institute is the current focal point for the AzNQF, but its functions are methodological rather than coordinating. It could in the future take on such a guiding role, given a revised mandate and greater resources.

There is also a demand versus resources available issue – the NQLLL Department handles a long list of tasks, but currently with just three staff, a departmental head plus two experts. This number is insufficient for the range and complexity of the undertakings required. In 2020, intensive capacity-building activities were delivered by the EU-funded NQF project and follow -p technical assistance will continue supporting the Department.

To reach the operational stage, the national stakeholders should finalise the institutional set-up for the AzNQF. Such a set-up should allocate clearly the who does what in : oversight, policy setting and day-to-day implementation roles for each of the main AzNQF functions, namely (1) development, approval and review of qualifications, (2) quality assurance, (3) assessment and certification (4) registration of qualifications (5) and information and guidance.

Plans include consolidation of the regulatory framework and development of procedures, especially for quality assurance requirements for inclusion of qualifications in the national register.

There is a need to streamline the regulations on qualification standards and state education standards, and to revise the guidelines on curriculum development to align with these. The relevant databases of MoLSPP and MoE must be linked.

Teaching and assessment practices need to improve if the objectives set for the framework are to be reached. Competence-based teaching is new for most teachers and a regular system for in-service teacher training is needed.

To facilitate lifelong learning and flexible learning pathways, the introduction of credit accumulation and transfer system is planned, as well as scaling up validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Finally, establishing mechanisms for system monitoring and review, and implementing the Strategic Plan for lifelong guidance is anticipated.

Figure 2. Infographic of the NQF

Source: Ministry of Education

Abbreviations

AzNQF	Azerbaijan National Qualifications Framework
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EQAA	Education Quality Assurance Agency
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLSPP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SAVE	State Agency on Vocational Education
QF-EHEA	Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area
VET	Vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Main sources of information

AzNQF website and register: www.kvalifikasiya.az

Education Quality Assurance Agency: www.tkta.edu.az

State Agency for Vocational Education: www.vet.edu.gov.az

Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population: www.sosial.gov.az

Ministry of Education: www.edu.gov.az

State Examination Centre: www.dim.gov.az

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World Bank Data https://data.worldbank.org/

Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
Online platform	https://openspace.etf.europa.eu
Twitter	@etfeuropa
Facebook	facebook.com/etfeuropa
YouTube	www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
Live&Learn	https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/
Instagram	instagram.com/etfeuropa/
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The European Training Foundation

BELGIUM

Due to its federal structure, Belgium developed three 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 EQF: the Flemish and French Communities have completed this process and the German-speaking Community is expected to do so soon.

The country performs above average on several key education and training indicators: the rate of early leaving has continued falling (8.4% in 2019, compared to 10.2% in the EU), tertiary educational attainment and the employment rate of recent graduates are high, and education spending in Belgium is among the highest in the EU. However, socioeconomic and migration background has a strong impact on educational outcomes and gaps in knowledge, skills and competences. With low participation in adult learning, Belgium is less well prepared to tackle its high exposure to digitalisation and socially disadvantaged groups are not well represented in adult learning (European Commission, 2020). Thus, validation of skills remains high on the agenda with the decree on the integrated quality assurance policy and the recognition of prior learning (Vlaams Ministerie Onderwijs, 2019). In the German-speaking Community, a skills validation system is under development. A steering group will be established to elaborate a concept for a validation system (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

The share of upper secondary students in vocational education and training (VET) is (slowly) decreasing; all communities have taken action to improve dual learning; in the Brussels region, a one stop shop called the *Cité des métiers* (City of trades) provides access to all types of lifelong learning, including VET. The Flemish Community formally adopted a new apprenticeship pathway called 'dual learning' and, since September 2019, implemented school reforms; a new common curriculum, based on the EU key competences framework, was developed, focusing on fewer but more ambitious final attainment levels for first grade. The French Community is also planning to implement school reforms from September 2020; central governance will be reinforced, combined with greater autonomy and accountability for schools and a common, multi-disciplinary curriculum will be developed first in pre-primary and then in higher grades (reaching 9th grade). The *Pact for excellence in education*, a systemic school reform, will stretch to 2030 with the aim to improve basic skills and to reduce grade repetition and high dropout rates (European Commission, 2019). The apprenticeship programme in the German-speaking Community is organised by the Institute for Vocational and Educational Training in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (IAWM)[78]; this is responsible for the general organization, the management and the teaching methods. The dual system in this community relies on the active participation of sectors, local entrepreneurial workforce and professional associations, all involved in the management committee of IAWM. As a result, the system is supported by the enterprises themselves and has close ties with the business world. Similar to the French Community, it provides the certificate of completion of secondary vocational education at the end of the apprenticeship period (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

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78. Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes: the Institute for Vocational and Educational Training in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

Belgium (The German-speaking Community)

Introduction and context

The German-speaking Community of Belgium adopted its qualifications framework (*Qualifikationsrahmen der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*, QDG) on 18 November 2013[79]. 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 (DQR). The 2013 decision envisages that a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning will be linked to the QDG. The QDG has not yet been referenced to the 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[80], and the strengthening of the learning outcomes principle is an important step in increasing transparency and strengthening permeability.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The QDG is an eight-level, learning-outcomes-based framework that includes qualifications from primary and secondary general education, VET and higher education. The framework builds on the concept of *Handlungskompetenz* (action competence) with qualifications levels defined in terms of two categories of descriptors: subject/occupation-specific competences, referring to knowledge and skills; and personal competences, referring to social competence and autonomy.

Table 4. Level descriptors of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, main categories

Handlungskompetenz (action competence)			
Subject/occupation-oriented competence (*Fachliche Kompetenz*)		Personal competence (*Personale Komptenz*)	
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.

Quality assurance arrangements in the German-speaking Community are organised as follows: the higher education institution Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien coordinates the internal and external evaluation of schools[81]; the School Inspectorate (*Schulinspektion*) is in charge of the quality assurance and development of the teaching system of primary, secondary as well as school-based continuing education[82]; and an external evaluation agency for VET schools and VET competence

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79. 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, 13.2.2014. http://reflex.raadvst-consetat.be/reflex/pdf/Mbbs/2014/02/13/126688.pdf

80. For example, the completion of the general upper secondary level and upper secondary technical and arts education are both level 4.

81. The main objectives of the evaluation are related to personal responsibility, participation, cooperation within and outside the school as well as sustainable school and teaching development. See chapter VII of the Decree of 31 August 1998. http://www.ostbelgienlive. be/addons/SharepointDokumentsuche/desktop/ SharepointDokDetails.aspx?Extern=1&DokID=7528bdbc-2bd1-4ad9-aa52-478a0cdd712f

82. See Decree of 25 June 2012. http://www.ostbelgienlive. be/addons/SharepointDokumentsuche/desktop/ SharepointDokDetails.aspx?Extern=1&DokID=cb133b9c-6a53-4aeb-9cd3-8163383ef3f6

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The QDG is legally embedded, following a 2013 decree[83]. The Department of VET and Organisation of Education in the Ministry of the Community was appointed as the EQF NCP and a leading institution; it has the task of referencing QDG to the EQF, using transparent methodologies and providing all stakeholders, institutions and companies with relevant information[84]. 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 Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen (IAWM) (Institute for Education and Training in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises)[85]. Scientific cooperation has been established with the Flemish Community and the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[86]

Current efforts are aimed at developing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning linked to the QDG. Once this happens, a central validation body will be set up (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

The strategy for introducing a validation system was outlined in 2015 and referred to European developments in this area, as validation was considered an integrated part of an overall, lifelong learning strategy for the region. Individuals with no (or low) qualifications were seen as a key target group. A steering group involving stakeholders from formal and non-formal education, as well as employment and the social partners, was set up following a 2016 public launch event on the recognition of competences 2016. During 2017, the steering group developed a validation concept with the aim of putting concrete arrangements in place by 2018. On that basis, application arrangements were jointly financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) (Cedefop, 2020b). In July 2018, the pilot project *Creating future directions* was initiated to support validation of non-formal and informal learning; it was aimed primarily at low-skilled jobseekers and workers, as well as migrants whose foreign diplomas could not be recognised. Access to education and employment was very difficult for these target groups. The project was 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).

A new ESF application was submitted and approved for 2021. In 2021, the focus lies on standardising the validation process and developing a corresponding circular letter. A concept of competence balancing for companies in the non-commercial sector will be worked on and the extent to which a competence balancing federation (*Kompetenzbilanzierungsbund*) can be created in the German-speaking Community will also be explored.

NQF implementation and impact

The QDG was adopted by decree on 18 November 2013 (Ministry of the German-speaking Community, 2013), paving the way for implementation. The 2013 decree outlines criteria[87] and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications into the framework; a technical commission in charge of levelling and inclusion has been put in place. Only qualifications with clear description of learning outcomes and those obtained in institutions accredited by

centres is in place (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

83. 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, 13.2.2014. http://reflex.raadvst-consetat.be/reflex/pdf/Mbbs/2014/02/13/126688.pdf
84. See Eurydice description of the German-speaking Community's qualifications framework: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/belgien-deutschsprachige-gemeinschaft/national-qualifications-framework_en
85. http://www.iawm.be/de/ueberuns/aufgaben.html
86. 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). https://www.ostbelgienlive.be/PortalData/2/Resources/downloads/rek/REK4-72dpi-KORR_23sept.pdf
87. These criteria are mentioned in Article 6 of the decree of 18 November 2013.

government are included. Among important criteria for inclusion is the relevance of a qualification on the labour market and for further learning. A total of 21 qualification types have been assigned to QDG levels so far according to the decree[88]. The framework is at activation stage.

Although the QDG is not referred to in the 2025 education and training vision for the region[89], the emphasis given to validation and competences over recent years indicates that the learning outcomes orientation underpinning the framework 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. 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[90]. No register of qualifications has been set up yet, and QDG levels are not yet indicated on certificates and diplomas[91]. 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[92].

Given the small size of the German-speaking Community, actors in the education sector and the labour market are aware of the different diplomas and certificates that are awarded within the Community. However, including levels on certificates and diplomas would facilitate transparency and comparability of qualifications in the broader Belgian landscape and international context.

Referencing to the EQF

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). The Ministry still needs to ensure the transparency of the methodology used to link the QDG with the EQF and ensure access to information and guidelines for the different institutions, educational actors, enterprises and citizens.

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88. See Articles 9 and 10 of the decree of 18 November 2013.
89. See Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2015).
90. See Eurydice's description of the German-speaking Community's qualifications framework.
91. Further legal provisions would be needed to indicate QDG levels on certificates and diplomas (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).
92. 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, 17.9.2009 http://reflex.raadvst-consetat.be/reflex/pdf/Mbbs/2009/09/17/114314.pdf

Table 5. Qualifications framework of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (QDG)

NQF LEVELS	GENERAL EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS	VET QUALIFICATIONS
8	Doctoral or postdoctoral degree/habilitation *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer Promotion oder Habilitation auf Doktoren- bzw. Professorebene)*	
7	Master degree *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines Hochschulstudiums langer Dauer auf Masterebene)*	Master degree on successful completion of dual track higher education (long duration) *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines dualen Hochschulstudiums langer Dauer auf Masterebene)*
6	Bachelor degree *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines Hochschulstudiums kurzer Dauer auf Bachelorebene)*	Master craftsperson certificate on successful completion of a three-year master craftsperson programme *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer dreijährigen Meisterausbildung mit dem Meisterbrief)*
		Professional bachelor degree on successful completion of dual track higher education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines dualen Hochschulstudiums kurzer Dauer auf Bachelorebene)*
5		Master craftsperson certificate on successful completion of a two-year master craftsperson programme *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer zweijährigen Meisterausbildung mit dem Meisterbrief)*
		Successful completion of supplementary secondary vocational education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer Ausbildung im ergänzenden beruflichen Sekundarunterricht)*
4	Successful completion of upper secondary general education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Oberstufe des allgemeinbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)*	Successful completion of upper secondary technical and arts programmes *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Oberstufe des technischen oder künstlerischen Sekundarunterrichts)*
		Attestation of competence upon successful completion of year 6 in vocational education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des sechsten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts mit Befähigungsnachweis)*
		Successful completion of year 7 (complementary year) in vocational education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des siebten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)*
		Journeyman certificate on successful completion of an apprenticeship *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer mittelständischen Lehre mit dem Gesellenzeugnis)*
3	Successful completion of lower secondary general education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Unterstufe des allgemeinbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)*	Successful completion of lower secondary technical, vocational or arts programmes *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Unterstufe des technischen, künstlerischen oder berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)*
		Certified partial qualification acquired in year 2 of an apprenticeship *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer zertifizierten Teilqualifikation im zweiten Jahr der mittelständischen Lehre)*
2	Successful completion of 'common' year 2 in secondary education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des zweiten gemeinsamen Jahres des Sekundarunterrichts)*	Successful completion of year 3 in vocationally oriented education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des dritten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterricht)*
		Attestation of competence certifying lower secondary special needs education *(Befähigungsnachweis der Unterstufe des Fördersekundarunterrichts)*
1	Successful completion of primary education, four years *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Grundschule)*	Certificate upon successful completion of year 2 in vocationally oriented education *(Das Studienzeugnis des zweiten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)*

Sources: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2014) and email correspondence with the EQF NCP.

Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework	QDG	*Qualifikationsrahmen*
ESF	European Social Fund		*Deutschsprachiger Gemeinschaft*
IAWM	Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung		[qualifications framework of the
	im Mittelstand und in kleinen und		German-speaking Community of
	mittleren Unternehmen [The Institute		Belgium]
	for Education and Training in Small and	VET	vocational education and training
	Medium-sized Enterprises]		
NQF	national qualifications framework		

Main sources of information

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

BELGIUM

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Belgium (the Flemish Community)

Introduction and context

The Flemish Community of Belgium introduced a comprehensive NQF, the Flemish qualifications framework (FQF), in 2009, with the adoption of the Act on the Qualification Structure[93]. It is a learning outcomes-based framework with eight levels, using two main categories of level descriptors: knowledge/skills and context/autonomy/responsibility.

The FQF is operational and well-integrated with education and training legislation. The Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Grants (AHOVOKS) coordinates FQF implementation actions and also oversees the quality assurance of professional qualifications, being part of the FQF. Clarification of the role of social partners in linking professional qualifications to the framework required substantial effort, but an agreement on how this would be undertaken was reached and proved a success with many professional qualifications included in the framework. 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. It forms an integrated part of the FQF.

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)' (Flemish Parliament, 2009, Chapter I, Article 3). The qualifications system and framework aim to make qualifications transparent, so that stakeholders in education, training and the labour market can communicate unambiguously about qualifications and associated competences and enable comparison of qualifications nationally and at European level. It acts as a reference for quality assurance, developing and renewing courses, and developing and aligning procedures for recognising acquired competences. It plays an important role

in strengthening the learning outcomes-based approach and aims to strengthen policies and practices on validation of non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2020).

With the reform of secondary education, starting in 2019[94], as well as the qualification reform at level 5, the FQF is seen as an instrument reshaping the structure and content of secondary and higher VET at level 5. Two important decrees supporting further implementation of the FQF were adopted in 2019: the decree on communal quality assurance framework for professional qualifications at all levels[95] and the decree on recognition of acquired competences[96]. With the approval of these regulations, the Flemish qualification structure has acquired a broader scope; they provide the quality framework, allowing for quality assurance of courses or recognition of competences (EVC), resulting in a professional qualification at any level of the FQF[97]. This ensures that all people following such courses or procedures for recognition of prior learning, leading to the same professional qualifications and titles, have obtained the same set of skills after completion of the course or procedure.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The FQF is a comprehensive framework with all types of qualifications from all parts of education (from primary to doctoral degrees), including professional qualifications. It provides a clear commitment to focus on the learning outcomes approach at policy level and programme and qualifications design. The FQF is based on an

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93. 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

94. The reform of secondary education started on 1 September 2019 and will be finalised in 2026 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

95. The decree and decision on quality assurance for professional qualifications based on a common quality framework can be accessed at: https://codex.vlaanderen.be/Zoeken/Document.aspx?DID=1031716&param=informatie&ref=search&AVIDS= and at: https://codex.vlaanderen.be/Zoeken/Document.aspx?DID=1032138&param=informatie

96. Decree and decision on an integrated policy for the recognition of acquired competences: https://codex.vlaanderen.be/Zoeken/Document.aspx?DID=1031737&param=informatie&ref=search&AVIDS= and https://codex.vlaanderen.be/Zoeken/Document.aspx?DID=1032137&param=inhoud

97. The scope of the decree on the communal quality assurance framework covers all the vocational training programmes offered outside formal education, relying on the professional qualifications standard (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019). In addition to education providers, private or public organisations can now also offer training or recognition of competences (EVC programmes) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

eight-level structure described by the categories of knowledge/skills and context/autonomy/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 term 'competence' also 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.

An explicit distinction is made between educational and professional qualifications; all eight levels are open to both[98]. 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[99]. 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 education programmes and in education institutions recognised by the Flemish authorities. Depending on the educational level and the form of education, such qualifications may consist of one or more professional qualifications, final objectives and/or specific final objectives[100].

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. The implementation has been accelerated by the new secondary education reform, starting in 2019. Special attention is given to the interplay between professional qualifications and final attainment levels so that learners from upper secondary vocational education (BSO), and upper secondary technical education (TSO) are well prepared for the labour market, with a good balance between basic skills and general knowledge and professional competences.

Learning outcomes are also present in general education, for example by the setting of learning objectives/the attainment targets in national core curricula. Following the adoption on 2 February 2018 of a decree[101] on altering the secondary education structure and the renewal of learning outcomes for compulsory education[102], new attainment targets began to be developed in stages[103]. The content and profile of all educational qualifications at levels 1-4 were approved at the end of August 2020 and will be gradually implemented in the context of modernisation of secondary education. In dual learning, most of the existing courses in the second and third grade have already been modernised.

At post-secondary level, one-year specialisation programmes are offered as follow-up technical programmes. Developments also occurred at EQF level 5 and, in particular, in graduate courses leading to short cycle graduate degrees, which have been updated so as to be based on at least one professional qualification. The professional qualification (s) are translated into domain-specific learning outcomes per educational qualification[104]. By 2024, all graduate degree programmes should be based on a professional qualification (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). In this way, labour market needs are taken up in VET programmes, including higher VET at EQF level 5[105].

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) lead to acquisition of

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98. Professional qualifications are placed at levels 2 to 7; there are currently no professional qualifications at levels 1 and 8.
99. Professional qualifications are 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.
100. https://vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be/wat-is-vks/meer-info-en-downloads/ files/Brochure-Developed_Approved_Implemented-(En)-12-2012.pdf

101. 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
102. Compulsory education lasts for a maximum of twelve school years, up to the age of 18 or as soon as a pupil obtains the diploma of secondary education.
103. Implementation of new attainment targets for the first grade started in 2019, the second stage will start in 2021, the third in 2023 and the fourth in 2025 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).
104. There are 29 level 5 educational qualifications based on 60 level 5 professional qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).
105. For further information, please see the Policy note 2019-24 Work and social economy – Beleidsnota 2019-2024, Werk en sociale economie – at: https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/beleidsnota-2019-2024-werk-en-sociale-economie

the corresponding credits in higher education[106]. At levels 6-8, the Parliament Act of 2009[107] states that higher education institutions 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).

There are various providers of further education for adults. The adult education centres are modularising their training offer and bringing it in line with the content of professional qualifications. Due to the decree on the communal quality framework, it is also possible, for example for VDAB (public employment services) but also for other public/private partners, to have training programmes recognised that lead to recognised partial or full professional qualifications. These organizations, when they meet the quality standards laid out in the communal quality framework, can also provide RPL – assessment trajectories that also lead to full or partial professional qualifications.

These regulations came into force in 2020 and only a limited number of courses and RPL trajectories have been accredited. There is also dialogue between the public employment service (PES) and adult education institutions. The PES aims to lead jobseekers to the labour market as quickly as possible (through short training courses, which are not necessarily based on a full professional qualification).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Flemish national qualifications framework is firmly legally embedded[108]. 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)[109]. The agency was appointed as EQF NCP and is responsible for coordinating the process of implementation, involving all stakeholders through expert committees. It also oversees the quality assurance of professional qualifications[110]. Professional qualifications are based on occupational standards. The development of professional qualifications is guided and supervised by AHOVOKS, involving sectoral representatives of employers and employees, VDAB and independent experts.

The process of FQF implementation has involved a broad range of stakeholders at all stages[111], 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 of 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 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

106. Credits are referred to in Flanders as 'study points', while students who successfully complete a course or modules are awarded a credit certificate (De Rick, K., 2019).
107. 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
108. The Flemish Community of Belgium introduced the FQF in 2009, with the adoption of the Act on the Qualification Structure: http://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=14111 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.

109. 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.
110. 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/.
111. 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 and student guidance centres), AHOVOKS (Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Allowances) and AGIOn, (Agency for Educational Infrastructure), which is responsible for designing, planning, building and renovating school buildings for grant-aided public and private schools. See OECD (2017): http://www.oecd.org/education/Education-Policy-Outlook-Country-Profile-Belgium.pdf

contributing to improving quality[112]. The Education Inspectorate inspects adult education and dual and non-dual training programmes in secondary education and adjusts their quality framework accordingly. For the training of private partners recognised by the Department of Work, a quality body (Team Supervisors Entities Work) was set up to check the quality requirements of the courses leading to professional qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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. Social partners have been involved at all levels with a high degree of commitment, although clarification of their role required substantial effort.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[113]

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 verworven competenties*: recognition of acquired competences) is used to refer to the validation of non-formal and informal learning[114]. Validation is used to obtain a certificate of professional qualification and to gain admission to an education and training programme and to request exemptions from (parts of) the study programme.

The main changes have been the increased congruence between different validation providers (inside as well as outside education), new developments in quality assurance and the adoption of a single integrated quality assurance framework linking validation processes to the FQF. Two decrees, one on a communal quality assurance framework

for professional qualifications at all levels[115] and another on recognition of acquired competences[116], approved by the Flemish Government, have strengthened the coherence of quality assurance systems. They serve as the legal basis for a system of external quality assurance for all courses and/or validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning resulting in a professional qualification at all levels[117]. This ensures that all people following professional courses or procedures for recognition of prior learning (RPL) resulting in the same professional qualifications titles, also obtain the same set of competences after completion of the course or procedure. EVC standards have already been developed for 10 professional qualifications.

Readily accessible information and guidance is provided in Belgium Flanders, but awareness-raising efforts will be increased with the new, integrated approach. All information on validation in Flanders is available to the public via a dedicated website[118]. The first professional qualifying training and trajectories for validation of non-formal and informal learning that follow the communal quality framework are being further implemented. In this way, the employed and job seekers can make use of the range of professional qualifying programmes (for training or recognition of acquired competences) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

NQF implementation and impact

The FQF is operational and well integrated with education and training legislation. The road from adoption to implementation and operational status has proved complex for the Flemish NQF but a series of implementation decrees have been adopted over the past decade, covering both professional and educational qualifications, which have led to detailed procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the framework. In the context of

112. 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

113. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Belgium – Flanders (De Rick, K., 2019).

114. Validation is a matter of policy in different education sectors and the arrangements in these sectors differ as each Ministry department regulates validation within its own sector.

115. The decree and decision on quality assurance for professional qualifications based on a common quality framework can be accessed at: https://codex.vlaanderen.be/Zoeken/Document.aspx?DID=1031716&param=informatie&ref=search&AVIDS= and at: https://codex.vlaanderen.be/Zoeken/Document.aspx?DID=1032138&param=informatie

116. Decree and decision on an integrated policy for the recognition of acquired competences: https://codex.vlaanderen.be/Zoeken/Document.aspx?DID=1031737&param=informatie&ref=search&AVIDS= and https://codex.vlaanderen.be/Zoeken/Document.aspx?DID=1032137&param=inhoud

117. This decree covers professional qualifications at levels 1-4 as well as professional qualifications at levels 5-8 obtained outside HE.

118. EVC – *erkennen van verworven competenties*: http://www.erkennenvanverworvencompetenties.be/ [accessed September 2020]

current reform, the FQF is seen as an instrument for reshaping the structure and content of secondary education and higher VET. The most important achievements are related to the links between educational and professional qualifications and the quality assurance of professional qualifications, which is getting stronger, as well as the broadening of the scope of the framework (as other accredited providers can train for professional qualifications).

The FQF covers educational qualifications and professional qualifications with links between them (see the section on levels, learning outcomes and qualifications). By November 2020 a total of 520 professional qualifications (*Beroepskwalificatie*), at levels 2-7, and 500 educational qualifications (*Onderwijskwalificatie*), at levels 5-8, had been included in the FQF and published in the Flemish qualifications database. An important change has happened at levels 1-4 of educational qualifications, which until now had not been included in the framework: the content and profile of educational qualifications at these levels were approved at the end of August 2020 and will be gradually implemented in the context of the modernisation of secondary education in the coming years[119].

A national database of qualifications[120] has been set up to support the FQF. All recognised qualifications are included in the database. Since 2017, NQF/EQF levels have been mentioned on diplomas awarded in the new apprenticeship pathway (*dual learning*) in initial VET, initially in the pilot phase and fully implemented since 2019, and in adult education and higher education qualifications, as well as qualifications awarded outside formal (regulated) education and training (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). The FQF/EQF levels are included on Europass supplements for the VET certificate supplement and the HE diploma supplement.

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 and education institutions). Dissemination of information about the NQF is carried out via the NQF website[121], brochures with technical information[122], seminars and meetings with sectoral organisations. However,

the website for citizens needs to be revised, for user friendliness, flexibility and interconnectedness.

The guidance 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)[123]. The Flemish public employment service is also involved in meetings about policy decisions on qualifications.

An evaluation of the framework has not yet been made.

Referencing to the EQF

The FQF was referenced to the EQF in June 2011 and an updated report was submitted in March 2014. The referencing report is planned to be updated in 2021-22. 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 FQF is considered operational and well integrated with education and training legislation. A qualifications database has been established and a large number of qualifications has already been included (mostly professional qualifications at levels 2-7 and educational qualifications from higher education (bachelor and master degrees). Educational qualifications at levels 1-4 were approved at the end of August 2020 and will be gradually implemented in the context of the modernisation of secondary education. Developments also occurred at EQF/FQF level 5. 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). The same qualification can be obtained through different types of providers (e.g. in adult education, secondary education, through dual learning, in special education and in RPL procedures) so transparency between educational and professional qualifications and progression (horizontal and vertical) in education and training have been enhanced. In this way, the framework acts with increased transparency supporting lifelong learning. FQF contributes to

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119. This process will be rolled out gradually, so that by 2025 all secondary education will have been adapted to the qualification structure.
120. Flemish qualifications database: www. vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be
121. Flemish qualifications framework website: http:// vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be/en/
122. http://vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be/wat-is-vks/meer-info-en-downloads/

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123. The *Competent* database/Professions and competences can be accessed at: http://production.competent.be/ competent-nl/main.html

better coordination between education, training and the labour market.

With the approval of the regulations on the communal quality framework and on the recognition of acquired competences, the FQF has found a broader scope, building trust in professional qualifications and acquired competences, independent of the way they were obtained. In addition, the use of a professional qualification in a training programme has brought stakeholders from education and sectors together in committees; these discussions led to commitments from both parties (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). The FQF also constitutes a building block for lifelong learning, delivering benefits for citizens, enabling them to obtain a professional qualification in different ways. Professional qualifications often build on each other in terms of content. For example, one can progress from assistant baker training to baker training, possibly with another provider (and thus obtain exemptions for the common competences). One may also have obtained a partial qualification and, after additional training or recognition of experience, obtain the full professional qualification.

Despite the improvements brought about by the development and introduction of the FQF, there are still issues to be addressed. One of the implementation challenges in the coming period is related to the link between educational qualifications and training programmes on the one hand and professional qualifications on the other. The new secondary reform and review of higher VET qualifications at EQF level 5 are strengthening this link. Adjusting IT systems in a way that transparency is also visible to the user is an important challenge for the future (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). The development of professional qualifications has currently stagnated due to the Covid-19 crisis as sectors have different priorities and different qualification providers have switched to online learning. Future FQF plans include updating and reviewing more qualifications and including them in the database and framework, indicating FQF levels on all certificates and diplomas and/or supplements, and supporting teachers, trainers and guidance/counselling staff in the use of the framework; the trajectory database (under construction)[124] will be able to link learning opportunities and qualifications to make learning pathways transparent for citizens, assisting guidance and career development.

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124. In the trajectory database, it will be clear for the end user how different pathways to a certain qualification are the same or differ and how their learning can be planned through different providers. For example, a person can qualify as an assistant baker in secondary school and after some years of work in a bakery, and by successfully doing a RPL, the person can qualify as a baker. Information on further study for a pâtissier in adult education and how many modules still need to be completed is available.

Table 6. Flemish qualifications framework (FQF)

NQF LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS
8	Doctoral degree (*Universiteit – Doctor*)	
7	Academic master degree (*Universiteit – Master*) Advanced master programmes (*master na master – manama*)	Examples: Librarian/information manager (*Bibliothecaris/ Informatiemanager*) Physiotherapist (*Kinesitherapeut*) Archivist/information manager (*Archivaris/ informatiebeheerder*)
6	Academic bachelor degree (*Universiteit – Bachelor*) Professional bachelor degree (*Hogeschool – Bachelor*) Advanced bachelor programme (*bachelor na bachelor – banaba*)	Examples: Dietitian (*Diëtist*) Dental technologist (*Dentaaltechnoloog*) Textile designer (*Textielontwerper*)
5	Graduate degree (short cycle) (*Graduaat*)	Examples: Archive expert (*Archiefdeskundige*) Coordinator-advisor of decorative painting (*Coördinator – adviseur decoratieve schilderwerken*) Police inspector (*Inspecteur Politie*)
4	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate (*Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs – ASO*) Upper secondary technical education school leaving certificate (*Technisch Secundair Onderwijs – TSO*) Upper secondary artistic education leaving certificate (*Kunstsecundair Onderwijs – KSO*) Certificate of a specialisation year as a preparation for higher education	Examples: Bartender (*Barman*) Electromechanic (*Elektromecanicien*) Commercial assistant (*Commercieel assistant*) Pastry chef (*Banketbakker*)
3	Upper secondary vocational education school leaving certificate (*Beroepssecundair Onderwijs – BSO*)	Examples: Construction welder (*Constructielasser*) Florist assistant (*Assistent florist*) Driver in the fuel service (*Chauffeur in de brandstoffenhandel*)
2	Adult basic education Lower secondary education – first stage of secondary education Pre-vocational education	Examples: Animal production assistant (*Assistent dierlijke productie*) Room service employee (*Medewerker kamerdienst*) Bakery and pastry shop employee (*Medewerker brood- en banketbakkerij*)
1	Certificate of elementary education (6 years)	

Sources: AHOVOKS, 2020 (email communication). Flemish qualification database: https://app.akov.be/pls/pakov/f?p=VLAAMSE_ KWALIFICATIESTRUCTUUR:KWALIFICATIEDATABANK [accessed 4.3.2020].

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BELGIUM

Due to its federal structure, Belgium developed three 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 EQF: the Flemish and French Communities have completed this process and the German-speaking Community is expected to do so soon.

The country performs above average on several key education and training indicators: the rate of early leaving has continued falling (8.4% in 2019, compared to 10.2% in the EU), tertiary educational attainment and the employment rate of recent graduates are high, and education spending in Belgium is among the highest in the EU. However, socioeconomic and migration background have a strong impact on educational outcomes and gaps in knowledge, skills and competences. With low participation in adult learning, Belgium is less well prepared to tackle its high exposure to digitalisation and socially disadvantaged groups are not well represented in adult learning (European Commission, 2020). Thus, validation of skills remains high on the agenda with the decree on the integrated quality assurance policy and the recognition of prior learning (Vlaams Ministerie Onderwijs, 2019).

The share of upper secondary students in vocational education and training (VET) is (slowly) decreasing; all communities have taken action to improve dual learning; in the Brussels region, a one stop shop called the *Cité des métiers* (City of trades) provides access to all types of lifelong learning, including VET. The Flemish Community formally adopted a new apprenticeship pathway called 'dual learning' and, since September 2019, implemented school reforms; a new common curriculum, based on the EU key competences framework, was developed, focusing on fewer but more ambitious final attainment levels for first grade. The French Community is implementing school reforms from September 2020; central governance will be reinforced, combined with greater autonomy and accountability for schools and a common, multi-disciplinary curriculum will be developed first in pre-primary and then in higher grades (reaching 9th grade). The Pact for excellence in education, a systemic school reform, will stretch to 2030 with the aim to improve basic skills and to reduce grade repetition and high dropout rates (European Commission, 2019).

Belgium (the French Community)

Introduction and context

The French Community of Belgium has developed a qualifications framework for lifelong learning (*Cadre francophone des certifications pour l'éducation et la formation tout au long de la vie*, CFC). Although initial work started in 2006, the current framework dates back to 2010, when the French Community (Federation Wallonia-Brussels), the Walloon Region (Wallonia) and the French Community Commission (COCOF)[125] agreed on the principles of the framework and on a structure similar to that applied by the Flemish Community of Belgium.

The CFC was formally adopted in 2015, through a decree operationalising the agreement between the three francophone governments[126]. It is an eight-level, learning-outcomes-based 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. The CFC was referenced to the EQF in December 2013. Self-certification to the QF-EHEA is in progress. An updated referencing report is expected in 2022-23.

Policy objectives

The CFC seeks to improve transparency and comparability of qualifications across regional and national borders, to ease mobility and support learner progression, and to help bridge the different parts of the education and training system (Cedefop, 2020b).

While the framework does not have a regulatory role and is not an instrument for reform, the CFC

aims to strengthen the quality of teaching and training, to support the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and to facilitate job seeking, recruitment and staff development processes. Through its focus on learning outcomes, it supports equal opportunities for citizens. The framework 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; Wallonia and COCOF, 2018).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The CFC is based on learning outcomes, giving 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[127]. The descriptors developed by the Flemish qualifications framework have been used as a basis but adjusted according to the conditions of the community. In the first stage of implementation, only qualifications delivered by public providers are included.

A competence-based approach is established in compulsory education and training. Learning outcomes are described in terms of *socles de compétences* and *compétences terminales*. For adult education 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'[128]. Among the items under revision is the evaluation of learning outcomes, the material resources, the monitoring of quality in the assessment of learning outcomes and of the staff who carry out this process[129] (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

Regional providers of continuous vocational education and training (CVET) have developed a common certification procedure (*reconnaissance des acquis de formation*, RECAF) based on common qualifications and assessment standards, with a competence-based approach, since 2010. The French service for trades and qualifications *(Service francophone des métiers et qualifications* (SFMQ)) plays an important role for learning outcomes, both

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125. See Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF (2013), p.12.
126. 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

127. More information here.
128. 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; Bruxelles, 2019)
129. The report from the 'cross-diagnostics' team can be consulted (in French) here.

for initial vocational education and training (IVET) and for CVET. The descriptions of qualifications are based on the occupational profiles (occupational standards) defined by the social partners. Common training profiles, described in units of learning outcomes, in line with the reality of trades to ensure the labour market relevance of training, are then defined by providers. This 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 and Bruxelles Formation, 2019). Progress has also been made in the implementation of certification by units (*certification par unites d'apprentissage*, CPU) in formal IVET programmes. In this system, the Qualification Board is responsible for validating units of learning outcomes (*unités d'acquis d'apprentissage*, UAA). Each validation test of a unit is assimilated to a qualification test and the board issues a certificate. As of September 2017, CPU was put in place for three optional subjects in post-secondary education[130]. The aim is to organise the three years of vocational education and training in the form of learning outcomes units. The experimentation and developments are carried out in the framework of the *Pact for excellence in education or Teaching excellence pact* which is a 2015 action plan to reform education that has paved the way for improving accessibility of all to VET and qualifications. The pact aims to improve education quality and reduce inequalities (between schools, students and genders) in the Wallonia-Brussels federation. In the context of a largely participatory approach and the collective ownership of the pact, this process is conducted in four phases. The implementation of the pact will be at phase 5 and will extend on a multi-year basis (2015-25)[131].

Although higher education institutions are autonomous in designing their curriculum, they are required to align their programmes in accordance with the *competences communes* developed by ARES (*Académie de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur*)[132]. 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 in higher education in practice, apart from in the university colleges.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The CFC was formally adopted in 2015, through a decree operationalising the agreement between the three francophone governments[133]. The three executive bodies of French-speaking Belgium (Federation Wallonia-Brussels, Wallonia and COCOF)[134] initiated the CFC development and consulted all CFC stakeholders (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonie and COCOF, 2018).

The CFC Forum (*Instance CFC*) was established with the 2015 decree[135] as a steering and allocation authority, responsible for managing the inclusion of qualifications in the framework and for disseminating the added value of the CFC and of the EQF to citizens, social partners, and education and training providers. It has four constitutive substructures[136], the Executive Committee[137], the Management Committee[138], the Committee

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130. 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, 2020a).
131. More information can be found at Eurydice Unit of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles.
132. ARES is a public interest organisation funded by the French Community and created by the decree of 7 November 2013, defining the landscape of higher education and the academic organisation of studies (Landscape Decree). The decree can be accessed here. The reform brought by this decree is centred on three key words: excellence (of research), consistency (of provision) and quality (of teaching), with a will to promote student success

133. 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
134. The French Community or Federation Wallonia-Brussels (FWB), having competence for education; The Walloon Region or *Wallonia*, having competence for continuing vocational training for workers and jobseekers and for training for small and medium sized enterprises for the French-speaking part of the Region; The French Community Commission (COCOF) which has the same powers with regard to training as Wallonia for the French-speaking inhabitants of Brussels (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF, 2013, p 12).
135. Ministère de la Communauté française (2015).
136. 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 here.
137. 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.
138. 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.

of Experts[139], and the Board of Appea[140]. The secretariat supporting the implementation bodies of the CFC is hosted in the Francophone Agency for Education and Lifelong Training)[141] but the budget is received from the three French-speaking Governments (the French Community, the Walloon Region and the French Community Commission).

The division of the framework into two main strands – educational and professional qualifications – had implications for stakeholder involvement. The Ministry of the French Community regulates formal education and is responsible for defining and positioning educational qualifications at levels 1 to 4 in the framework. The *Service francophone des metiers et qualifications* (SFMQ)[142] plays a key role in defining and positioning professional qualifications at levels 1 to 4. The SFMQ 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. The Academy of Research and Higher Education (ARES) is responsible for defining and positioning educational higher education qualifications at levels 6 to 8: this is still in process. ARES and SFMQ 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)[143].

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.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[144]

In French-speaking Belgium, the system for validating non-formal and informal learning has undergone important developments and is the result of initiatives supported nationally and framed by important pieces of legislation. Policy strategies[145] confirm that validating non-formal and informal learning is a key element of employment and education policies. There are two types of VNFIL in Belgium: the validation of competences (*validation des compétences*, VDC) in the CVET sector, leading to the award of a recognised skills certificate (*titre de competence*) following an assessment procedure; and the 'valorisation' of prior experience (*valorisation 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[146].

The most significant developments have been in adult education, where the decree[147] published in January 2018, promoted a unified approach to admission, exemption and certification of formal, non-formal and informal prior learning. It also

139. 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.
140. The Board of Appeal deals with appeals on the allocation of levels to qualifications.
141. Agence francophone pour l'éducation et la formation tout au long de la vie. (Francophone agency for education and life-long training).
142. The SFMQ gathers public employment services, social partners, all VET providers from the French-speaking Community and the Skills Validation Consortium. The agency is responsible for creating profession profiles reflecting the reality of the job, creating training profiles based on profession needs, and thus assuring the consistency between the training offered and job-market needs. It establishes the link between profiles and structures of public employment services and improves the legibility of qualifying education systems, trainings, skills validation and job offers; it sets common references and language for all partners (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).
143. The AEQES is an independent public service and a full member of the European ENQA network and is included on the European quality assurance register for higher education (EQAR).
144. This section draws mainly on input from Popovic, M. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Belgium – French speaking community.* https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Belgiu m_French.pdf
145. Plan Marshall 4.0 (2015); Strategy for the Walloon Region 2014-19 (Déclaration de politique régionale 2014-19); Strategy 2025 for Brussels.
146. 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.
147. 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.

sought coordination between EPS providers, 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 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 a certificate of achievement (*attestation de réussite*) when the student passes the integrated final test (épreuve *intégrée*). The Validation Skills Consortium grants skills credentials on behalf of the three governments. They can be used on the job market and are recognised by public services for employment and adult education schools. It allows navigation between all the vocational training providers as long as they are members of the consortium (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is also embedded in the NQF decree, which makes facilitation of VNFIL 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, ether at the end of an education or training pathway or following validation of his/her competences.

Challenges 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 and impact

The CFC reflects the federal structure of the country and coexists with the qualifications frameworks of the Flemish and German-speaking Communities. The CFC is seen as an integral part of an evolving education and training system and is at an activation stage. Introducing the distinction between educational and professional qualifications was instrumental in bringing the NQF process forward. This distinction made it possible to open-up the framework for professional qualifications at higher

levels. In principle, both types can be placed at any level in the framework. Allocation of qualifications to CFC levels started in 2017 and continues.

A qualification register[148] has been developed and 174 qualifications have been included in the register to date (January 2021), at levels 2 to 7. These are vocational and secondary general education qualifications, qualifications awarded through validation and higher education qualifications (see above). The register is linked to the Europass portal[149]. 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.

CFC/EQF levels are indicated in the register and on Europass certificate and diploma supplements[150]. One of the main objectives of the CFC Forum is to indicate the NQF/EQF level on all qualifications in the future.

The main challenges in implementing the CFC have been to include more qualifications in the framework to enhance comparability and disseminate the benefits of the framework to citizens and beneficiary institutions (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020. 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. To address this issue, the EQF NCP 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 NCP is planning to disseminate information about the framework using its website, video clips, brochures and guidance documents. The target group that will be prioritised will be the general public, as the framework is currently less known among labour market actors at regional and local level. Employers, guidance counsellors of education and training providers, employment counsellors of public employment services, teachers, trainers, trade union representatives and human resources

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148. *Registre des certifications*: http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/cfc/certifications/
149. The register is linked to the Europass portal.
150. See Europass certificate and diploma supplements and - Certificate_Supplement_Europass_EN (cfwb.be)

managers will also be informed, as they will be able to disseminate the benefits of the framework to the end-users. To date there has been no evaluation study on the different aspects of the framework and its impact (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Referencing to the EQF

The CFC levels were referenced to the EQF levels in 2013 (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonie and COCOF, 2013). Self-certification to the QF-EHEA is in progress. An updated referencing report is foreseen for 2021.

Important lessons and future plans

Important steps have been taken so far in developing the framework: the framework is firmly legally embedded, implementation bodies have been set up, criteria and procedures for inclusion of qualifications have been adopted and around 180 qualifications have been included in the qualifications register.

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.

However, for the framework to act as a credible reference point and improve transparency and comparability of qualifications, a higher percentage of qualifications from all types of providers needs to be included and levelled. In this way, the CFC can guarantee their comparability in the French-speaking part of Belgium. Strengthening the communication plan regarding the CFC is needed as the framework is currently less known or used by the general public.

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

CFC LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION TYPES	PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS
8		
7	Master degree [*Grade générique de Master de l'enseignement supérieur*]	
6	Bachelor degree [*Grade générique de bachelier de l'enseignement supérieur*]	
5		Professional diploma, level 5 *[Diplôme de formation, niveau 5]* e.g. diploma for business managers commercial agents [*Diplôme de chef d'entreprise agent(e) commercial(e)*] Professional foundation diploma for police officers, level 5 [*Diplôme de formation de base d'aspirant.e inspecteur.rice de police*] Skills certificate, level 5 [*Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 5]* e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for professional trainers for adults [*Certificat de compétences acquises en formation de formateur.rice* professionnel.le *d'adultes*]
4	Upper secondary education certificate [*Certificat de l'enseignement secondaire supérieur* (CESS)] Upper secondary vocational education certificate (level 4) *[Certificat de qualification en plein exercice ou en alternance]* Qualification certificate for technical qualifying post-secondary education – 7th year *[Certification de qualification de septième année technique]* Qualification certificate for vocational qualifying post-secondary education – 7th year [Certificat de qualification de septième année professionnelle] Qualification certificate (level 4) – education for social promotion e.g. qualification certificate for laboratory technicians [*Certificat de qualification de* technicien.ne *chimiste*]	Certificate of apprenticeship (level 4) offered by regional training services [*Certificat d'apprentissage, niveau 4]* e.g. certificate of apprenticeship for machining technicians [*Certificat d'apprentissage de* technicien.ne *en système d'usinage*] Professional diploma, level 4 *[Diplôme de formation, niveau 4]* e.g. diploma for coordination and supervision – haidresser manager [*Diplôme de coordination et d'encadrement de coiffeur.euse manager*] Skills certificate (level 4) offered by public employment/ training services *[Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 4]* e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for graphic designers [*Certificat de compétences acquises en formation de graphic designer*] Skills certifcate (level 4) awarded by a consortium for validation [*Titre de compétence, niveau 4]* e.g. skills certificate – Sales of second hand cars as part of the profession of automobile salesperson [*Titre de compétence assurer la vente de véhicules d'occasion faisant partie du métier de vendeur.euse automobile*]

CFC LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION TYPES	PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS
3	Upper secondary vocational qualification certificate (level 3) [*Certificat de qualification en plein exercice ou en alternance*] Upper secondary vocational qualification certificate for special and alternance education (level 3) [*Certificat de qualification spécifique (CQ S) à l'enseignement spécialisé et en alternance*] Qualification certificate (level 3) – education for social promotion e.g. qualification certificate for hairdressers [*Certificat de Qualification de Coiffeur.euse*]	Certificate of apprenticeship (level 3) offered by regional training services [*Certificat d'apprentissage, niveau 3*] e.g. certificate of apprenticeship for hairdressers [*Certificat d'apprentissage de Coiffeur.euse*] Professional diploma (level 3) [*Diplôme de formation, niveau 3*] e.g. diploma for coordination and supervision – supervisor bartender [*Diplôme de coordination et d'encadrement de chef barman/barmaid*] Skills certificate (level 3) offered by public employment/ training services [*Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 3*] e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for administrative employees [*Certificat de compétences acquises en formation d'employé.e administratif.ive*] Skills certifcate (level 3) awarded by a consortium for validation [*Titre de compétence, niveau 3*] e.g. skills certificate – managing incoming and outgoing contacts as part of the profession of call centre operator [*Titre de compétence gérer les contacts entrants et sortants constituant le métier d'opérateur.rice call center*]
2	Lower secondary vocational qualification certificate for special and alternance education [*Certificat de qualification spécifique (CQS) à l'enseignement spécialisé et en alternance*] Qualification certificate (level 2) – education for social promotion e.g. qualification certificate for electrician fitters [*Certificat de Qualification de Monteur électricien*]	Certificate of apprenticeship (level 2) offered by regional training services [*Certificat d'apprentissage, niveau 2*] e.g. certificate of apprenticeship for manufacturing agents in the food industry [*Certificat d'apprentissage d'Agent de fabrication du secteur alimentaire*] Skills certificate (level 2) offered by public employment/ training services [*Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 2*] e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for production operators in the food industry [*Certificat de compétences acquises en formation d'opérateur de production en industrie alimentaire]* Skills certifcate (level 2) awarded by a consortium for validation [*Titre de compétence, niveau 2*] e.g. skills certificate – transporting and placing theatre equipment as part of the profession of assistant theatre technician [*Titre de compétence transporter et placer le matériel de spectacle faisant partie du métier d'auxiliaire technique de spectacle*]
1		

Source: The register of qualifications [accessed 4.2.2021].

Abbreviations

AEQES	*Agence pour l'évaluation de la qualité dans l'enseignement supérieur* [Agency for quality assessment in higher education]	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	*Institut de Formation Permanente pour les Classes moyennes et les petites et moyennes entreprises* [training institute for SMEs, for the French Community] (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]		
COCOF	*Commission communautaire française de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale* [French Community commission in the Brussels-capital Region]	NCP	national coordination point
		NQF	national qualifications framework
		QDG	*Qualifikationsrahmen Deutschsprachiger Gemeinschaft* [qualifications framework German-speaking Community]
CPU	*certification par unités (certification per units)*		
CVET	continuous vocational education and training	RECAF	*Reconnaissance des acquis de formation* [recognition of prior learning]
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training	SFPME	Service Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises [Training service for SMEs]
EEA	European economic area		
EPS	*Enseignement de promotion sociale* [Education for Social Promotion]	SFMQ	*Service francophone des métiers et qualifications* [French service for trades and qualifications]
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education	UAA	*Unités d'Acquis d'Apprentissage [validating units of learning outcomes]*
EQF	European qualifications framework	VAE	*validation des acquis de l'expérience* [valorisation of prior experience]
FOREM	*Office Régional wallon pour l'emploi et la formation professionnelle* [Walloon Regional office for employment and vocational training]	VDC	*validation des compétences [valorisation of competences)*
		VET	vocational education and training
FWG	Walloon- Brussels Federation [Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles]		

Main sources of information

http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/

http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/

Register of qualifications: https://cfc.cfwb.be/index.php?id=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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BHUTAN[151]

Introduction and context

Bhutan has a total population of 735,553 and was ranked 134th in the global Human Development Index (HDI) of 2017. Its gross national income and purchasing power parity (GNI PPP) is US$10, 480[152] and the literacy rate is just over 70 per cent (PHCB, 2017).The country is still primarily an agrarian society based on subsistence farming. Hydropower and Tourism are the other major economic sectors, representing a vital source of hard currency and employment. A large proportion of the workers in construction and manufacturing sectors are migrants, both skilled and unskilled, particularly in the hydropower projects.

Increased enrolment in primary and secondary education has increased demand for post-secondary education and training (after Years 12 and 13). However, shortage of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) 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 (MoLHR), some diploma courses in TVET are administered by the HEIs such as Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan (KGUMSB) and Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law (JSW Law). Given the globalization trend in education and the fast changing higher education landscape, a system to recognize diverse type of qualifications and decide on equivalences between them is imperative.

The problem of unemployment among TVET graduates needs a careful analysis. As per the recent report on the employment & unemployment of the TVET graduates in the country, it revealed that initially almost 100% of the TVET graduates got employed in both the public & private sector or given the opportunities, but the over the time, the maximum turn-over after employment has been the trend for many years. This was mainly due to lack of the dignity of labour, job security, low wage & working environment among others. Limited job growth in public sector has made it more difficult for graduates to obtain a secured job. Meanwhile, the number of students leaving school without employable skills has been increasing over the years. Despite efforts to promote the growth of private sector, creating attractive jobs by private firms has always been a challenge. Further, for certain set of skill, there seem to be some mismatch between supply and demand.

TVET is negatively perceived in Bhutan and is therefore is not preferred choice among young people. Private training providers (particularly in the ICT and services sectors) often try to fill the gap left by inadequate TVET provision through support from government in terms of technical assistance, guidance and regulations to make their qualifications more marketable. Further, non-formal skills training initiatives for rural people remain supply-driven instead of adopting a demand-driven approach For example, in order to implement any skill training, it is important to understand how a that 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 equivalency and professional pathways. A qualifications framework plays an important role in classifying and recognizing qualifications, training

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151. Information in this chapter may no longer be accurate and up-to-date following recent policy developments in the country.
152. Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP. PCAP.PP.CD?locations=BT

and credit systems based on the validity and rigour of the courses and programmes offered by HEIs. 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 (BAC) developed the Bhutan Qualifications Framework (BQF) as per the Tertiary Education Policy of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2010.

BQF is the national document pertaining to qualifications and their classification based on a set of nationally agreed-upon criteria and benchmarked in line with international best practices. It integrates, harmonizes and links school, monastic, vocational and higher education qualifications awarded by education providers both within and outside the country. However, there were some difficulties in the implementation of BQF in areas like credit transfers and recognition of prior learning. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Division (QAAD) under the Department of the Adult and Higher Education (DAHE), Ministry of Education (MoE) currently serves as the Secretariat to the Council. The Council is responsible for ensuring quality higher education, recognition of qualifications and implementation of BQF.

Policy objectives

The BQF aims to provide an up-to-date and flexible framework that:
- guarantees the quality of education and training;
- enables comparison and ensures consistency between qualifications offered by academic, vocational and monastic institutions;
- allows Bhutanese qualifications to be recognized and valued internationally thereby enhancing mobility;
- facilitates lifelong learning;
- allows for lateral movement between different fields;
- provides for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning; and
- 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; and
- 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.

Table 8. Bhutan Qualifications Framework

BOF LEVEL	SCHOOL EDUCATION	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	MONASTIC EDUCATION
8			Doctorate	Khenpo
7			Master's degree	Geshey
6			Bachelor's degree	Tenchoe
5		ND1 and ND2	Diploma	Madhyamik
4	BHSEC	NC2 and NC3		
3	BCSE	NC1		
2	LSE			
	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 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.

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 BAC, which is responsible for establishing the relationship between tertiary academic education, TVET and the school system. The BAC developed the BQF that contain information on each qualification in 2012. It also provides basic guidelines for providers to develop clearly defined and suitably named qualifications programmes. However, the BQF may soon be reviewed.

The BVQF was initiated between October 2000 and June 2003 as one of the programmes of the National Technical Training Authority (NTTA) under the MoLHR and in collaboration with the Deutsche

GesellschaftfürTechnischeZusammenarbeit (GTZ), now called the Deutsche Gesellschaftfür Internationale Zusammenarbeit(GIZ).

In 2003, the Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Authority (BVQA) was established as a regulatory department under the MoLHR in collaboration with the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) 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. As a way forward, there is a plan to delink DOS, MoLHR and be merged with the QAAD, DAHE, MoE to form Bhutan Qualifications Authority (BQA).

Recognizing 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 Non-Formal and Continuing Education Division under DAHE, MoE developed the Non-Formal Education Equivalency Framework in 2019. The main objective is to establish flexible learning pathways and linkages among formal, non-formal and vocational

education as shown in Fig. 1 below. It is also aimed to provide education access by creating opportunities for lifelong learning through various learning modalities.

Figure 3. Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework
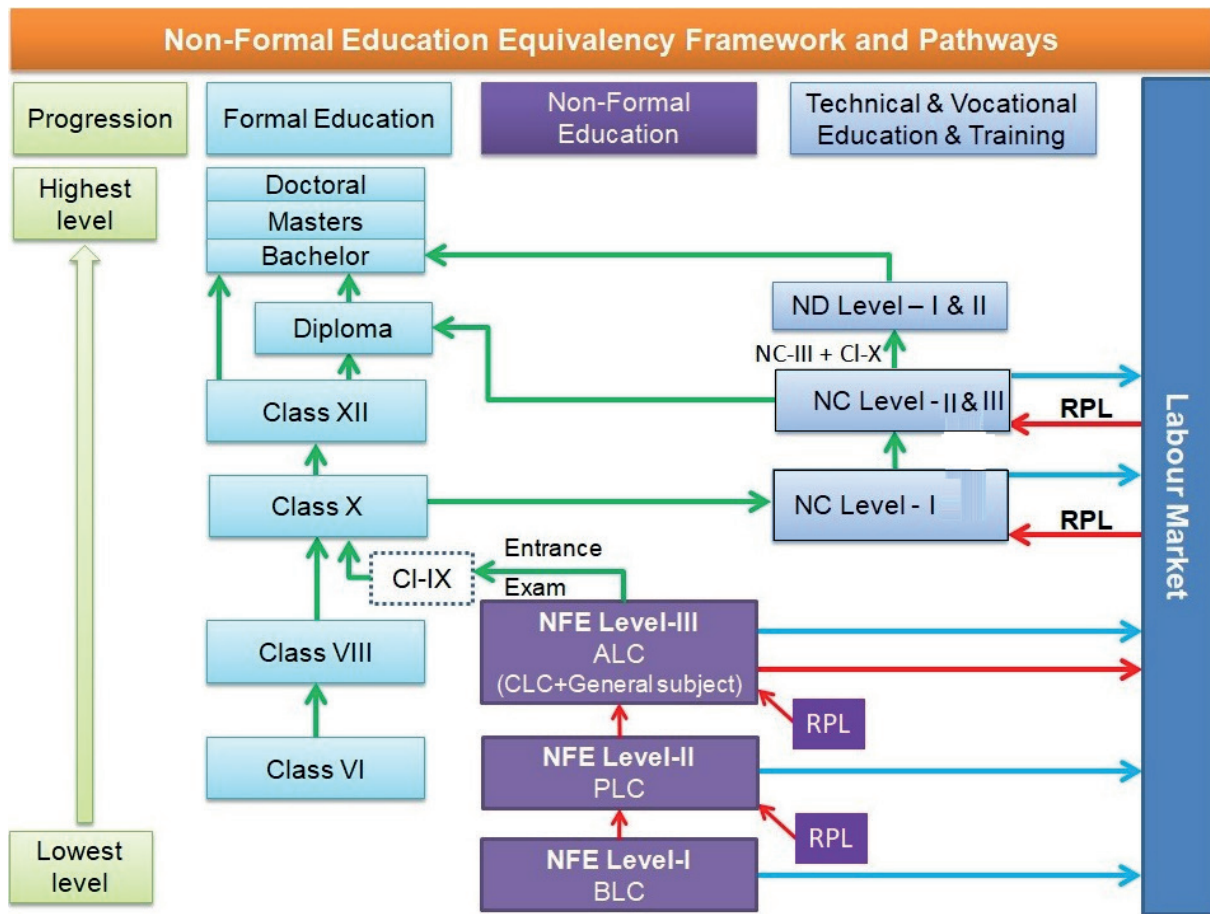
Source: BVQF, 2023

The BQF builds on the Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework (BVQF), which was developed in 2003 for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. The BVQF is a reform to the TVET system: input from employers and training providers help 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 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 (NC) levels. These are supported by level descriptors elaborating the range of responsibilities and learning demands at each level. The BVQF structure also makes provision for progression from NC 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. Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework
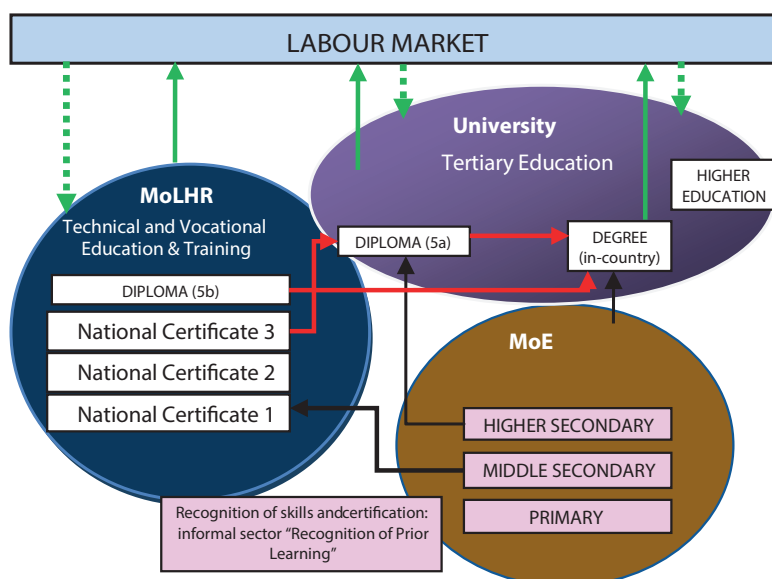
Source: BVQF, 2013

Figure 2 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 (APL), Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). APL concerns learning gained through formally assessed and certified programmes outside the university. APCL covers learning achieved and assessed through a formal programme of study in a higher education or professional institution. APEL refers to learning gained in informal and non-formal settings such as the workplace or the community.

BVQF implementation

DOS, which is one of four departments under the MoLHR, currently has the mandate to:
- develop Quality Assurance policies and procedures;
- develop and implement the National Accreditation System;
- improve and monitor the quality of TVET;
- develop National Competency Standards and TVET qualifications; and

- develop and implement the National Assessment and Certification System;

These objectives are implemented through a departmental structure comprising three divisions: the Standards and Qualifications Division, the Assessment and Certification Division, and the Quality Assurance Division.

DOS is responsible for the development of National Competency Standards (NCS). There is a National Competency Standards for each discipline or disciplines covered by a qualification. National Competency Standards incorporate information from industry experts about the skills they require from their workers in the light of current economic and technological conditions. An industry Committee advises the DOS on the identification of priority occupations, taking into account international and regional comparability of qualifications.

NCS 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 assessment and certification system that complies with international standards. The goal is to increase the proportion of the labour force holding National Competency Certificates.

NCS are developed at three occupational levels: NC1, NC2 and NC3 (see *Table 1*). They take into account the following criteria:

- Work process
- Learning demand
- Responsibilities

Referencing to regional frameworks

Formal education in Bhutan is already recognized by Indian bodies. The BCSE (Grade 10) and BHSEC (Grade 12) administered by the Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment (BCSEA) are recognized by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) in Delhi, the Council of the Boards of School Education in India (COBSE), the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), and the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE). 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 (BAC, 2012). 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 under the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources assumes responsibility for setting vocational qualification standards and developing NSCs.

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.

Currently, the Government is considering merging QAAD, DAHE, MoE and the Department of Occupational Standards (DOS) under MoLHR to establish theBhutan Qualifications Authority (BQA). It shall be the apex national body for quality assurance, recognition of qualifications and the guardian of BQF. There is a standing direction to review the BQF upon establishment of BQA to ensure successful implementation of BQF.

Abbreviations

AIU	Association of Indian Universities
APCL	Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning
APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
BAC	Bhutan Accreditation Council
BQA	Bhutan Qualifications Authority
BQF	Bhutan Qualifications Framework
BCSE	Bhutan Certificate for Secondary Education
BCSEA	Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment
BHSEC	Bhutan Higher Secondary Education Certificate
BVQ	Bhutan Vocational Qualifications
BVQA	Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Authority
BVQF	Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CISCE	Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination
COBSE	Council of the Boards of School Education
DAHE	Department of Adult and Higher Education
DEL	Department of Employment and Labour.
DOS	Department of Occupational Standards
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GNH	Gross National Happiness
GNI	Gross National Income
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HDI	Human Development Index
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICT	Information Communications Technology
JSW Law	Jigme SingyeWangchuck School of Law
KGUMSB	Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciencesof Bhutan
LSE	Lower Secondary Education
MoE	Ministryof Education
MoLHR	Ministry of Labour and Human Resources
NC	National Certificate
NCS	National Competency Standard
ND	National Diploma
NTTA	National Technical Training Authority
PE	Primary Education
PHCB	Population and Housing Census of Bhutan
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
RUB	Royal University of Bhutan
TTI	Technical Training Institute
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VTI	Vocational Training Institute

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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Council of Ministers adopted the Baseline Qualifications Framework, or BQF, in March 2011. The BQF has 8 levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications.

Governance of the framework remains unsettled. The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) currently coordinates QF development and implementation in cooperation with the country's various sub-state authorities. But, for wider political reasons, planned governing and implementing institutions are either suspended or not yet established. Consequently, MoCA has been compelled to convene ad-hoc bodies to carry out specific urgent tasks.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) participates in the EQF process as a member of the EQF Advisory Group and is a member of the Bologna Process in Higher Education.

BiH has a strategy to implement the QF and is developing tools and approaches. Institutional arrangements for coordination of the BQF's implementation have been designed but are not operational yet. Therefore, Bosnia and Herzegovina is at the activation stage.

Policy context

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a potential candidate for European Union (EU) membership since 2003. It participates in the Stabilisation and Association Process and submitted its formal application to join the EU in February 2016. However, the EU considers that further reforms across a range of political and economic areas are not yet sufficiently developed to warrant EU candidate country status.

The country comprises two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (divided into 10 cantons), the Republika Srpska and a smaller administrative region, Brcko District. At BiH level, there is the Council of Ministers (i.e. the state-level government)

and a presidency rotating every 8 months among the three main communities, Bosniak, Croat and Serb.

Pre-COVID, the economy had been showing slow but sustained growth, including improved employment levels. Nonetheless unemployment remained high, at 19% in 2018.[153].

The 2020 pandemic, however, has reversed any upward trend in the economy. International estimates suggest a -6.5 GDP contraction for 2020[154]. Employment is also adversely affected. Data available for the first quarter of 2020 point to a 0.5% fall in employment.

COVID caused a shift to remote learning in 2020. Digital poverty, particularly in rural areas, has exacerbated existing education exclusion. Teachers were largely unprepared for remote learning when school closures began, though schools which already had on-line learning experience e.g. in Sarajevo Canton, were better able to adapt to on-line provision, while others established hybrid learning models (emails, social media tools etc).

Demographic changes pose major challenges for the BiH economy, notably the country's ageing population. Birth rates are declining and young people are emigrating to such extents that between 2010 and 2019, young people's share of the general population fell by 10%. Approximately 75% of the upper secondary cohort is enrolled in VET.

The education and training system is highly fragmented, which results in a lack of common standards for education levels, teacher training and

153. OECD (2020). *The COVID-19 crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. 30 July 2020. https://www.oecd.org/south-easteurope/COVID-19-Crisis-in-Bosnia-and-Herzegovina.pdf
154. IMF (2020). *IMF World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2020 https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2020/October

performance evaluation[155]. The institutional structure is complex, involving 14 different education authorities, counting state-level, entities and cantons. Education reform so far has largely been focused on development of a legislative, institutional and policy frameworks, which is a lengthy process requiring adoption at state, entity and cantonal levels.

Moving forward, a comprehensive and inclusive qualifications environment will be important for mobility of workers and recognition of qualifications both within BiH as well as with the European Union given aspirations for accession to the Union.

NQF legal basis

There are two main legal acts concerning the QF.

First, Bosnia and Herzegovina's Council of Ministers' Decision on Adoption of the Baseline of Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 31/11, 39/12). The decision carries the force of law.

Second, the Council of Ministers' Decision on Adoption of the Action Plan for the Establishment and Implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Period 2014-2020 (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 28/15)[156].

A qualifications framework for higher education was developed in line with the Bologna process, with support from the Council of Europe. Legislation was adopted in 2007[157], making the HE framework an integral part of the QF.

Related legal acts at state level are[158]:
- 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).

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

As an instrument for reform, the QF supports the development of an education and training system based on lifelong learning principles, use of learning outcomes, and quality assurance at all levels of education. Given a highly fragmented legal and institutional environment, the framework is nonetheless intended to enable the development and application of common education, occupational and qualification standards, plus common standards for the certification of education service providers.

Given its potential to aid reform and create synergies, the QF is included in several strategic documents for the modernisation of education and training: "Priorities for development of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2016-2026"; "Strategic platform for development of adult education in the context of lifelong learning for the period 2014-2020"; and the old and new VET strategies[159].

In the area of qualification standards, the following actions have been formulated:

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155. European Commission (2018). Commission staff working document: Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018 report, accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - 2018 Communication on EU enlargement policy {COM(2018) 450 final}. SWD(2018) 155 final, Strasbourg 17.4.2018. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-bosnia-and-herzegovina-report.pdf
156. Documents are available in English or local languages at: http://www.mcp.gov.ba/Content/Read/obrazovanjedokumenti

157. The *Framework for higher education qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina* and the strategy for its implementation were adopted in December 2007 through Decision of the Council of Ministries on the adoption of documents needed for further implementation of the Bologna process in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 13/08). Other key documents adopted through this decision included: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Recommendations for Implementing Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina; National Action Plan for Qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Diploma Supplement model for Bosnia and Herzegovina; User Manuals for the Diploma Supplement for Bosnia and Herzegovina.
158. Documents are available in English or local languages at: http://www.mcp.gov.ba/Content/Read/obrazovanjedokumenti
159. Documents are available in English or local languages at: http://mcp.gov.ba/Content/Read/obrazovanjedokumenti

- the implementation of the Action Plan for the development and implementation of the
- Qualifications Framework in BiH for the period 2014-2020;
- the provision of a special budget line for innovations in public curricula;
- each curricula or study programme will be designed with two outputs: one for the labour market and for continuing education;
- improvement of legislation and practice in the field of recognition of qualifications for employment purposes or continuing education;
- improvement of quality assurance policies and practice for all levels of education and training;
- establishment of qualification standards in accordance with the BQF and Action Plan for the development and implementation of the Qualifications Framework in BiH for the period 20142020.

The main objectives of the strategic platform for development of adult education in the context of lifelong learning are the following:
- improving legislation for adult education in the context of lifelong learning and alignment with the EQF;
- establishing effective ways to involve relevant social partners in the process of adult education in the context of lifelong learning;
- developing programmes and increasing the accessibility of adult education;
- raising and ensuring the quality of adult education. Bosnia and Herzegovina recently adopted "Priorities in Integration of the Entrepreneurial Learning and Key Competencies in Education Systems in BiH, 2021-2030". This document is in line with NQF developments and aligned with the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework.[160]

The "Strategy for Development of Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2007-2013" (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 65/07), will be replaced by a new state-wide strategy. MoCA, with all relevant ministries, drafted the strategy "Improvement of Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021 – 2030", in line with the Riga conclusions. A final adoption by the Council of Ministers was expected in late 2020 to early 2021.

The seven priority areas in higher education are: (1) good governance and management (including quality assurance), (2) Resources, (3) strengthening the relationship between the labour market and higher education, in particular modernising study programmes to meet labour market needs, (4) qualification standards, (5) student experience, (6) internationalisation and (7) statistics.

Aims of NQF

The QF is intended as a tool for transparency and reform. While Bosnia and Herzegovina previously had a traditional qualifications classifier, the "nomenklatura", which comprehensively described the education and training system, the QF aims not only to structure and classify qualifications, but also to provide meaningful links between education and the labour market (ETF, 2018).

The QF aims to increase access to education and social inclusion, including through supporting mechanisms for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, and to enable comparability of qualifications to support mobility and progression, both within the country and abroad.

Specific goals for the QF include[161]:
- making understandable the different types of qualifications and their inter-relationships;
- achieving comprehensible presentations of education achievements to employers, learners and parents;
- guiding individuals in the selection of education and career paths;
- facilitating mobility and more transparent access to education throughout life;
- facilitating identification and recognition of national qualifications abroad and of foreign qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- creating the pre-conditions for introducing a quality assurance system for existing and new qualifications;
- creating the pre-conditions for the development of a system of evaluation and recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal education / learning; improvement of co-operation with all social partners.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

The BQF has eight levels, designed for 1-to-1 referencing to the EQF levels. It does not have the sublevels commonly found in other countries in the region. It is a comprehensive framework, including all types of qualifications from general education, VET and higher education.

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160. Adopted by the Council of Ministers on 22 October 2020

161. Documents are available in English or local languages at: http://mcp.gov.ba/Content/Read/obrazovanjedokumenti

Qualifications awarded outside formal education and training can be included, but criteria and procedures for inclusion and levelling these are yet to be defined. A methodology for such allocation was developed as part of the EU project "Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning".

Level descriptors are derived from the EQF's. Three domains of learning outcomes are used: knowledge, skills, and competences (responsibility and autonomy). The level descriptors may be further developed to better represent the country context, and to serve the EQF referencing process.

Types of qualifications

According to the "Action Plan for the Development and Implementation of the Qualifications Framework", a qualification is defined as "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, however, the distinction between curriculum and qualifications is not always clear.

Different types of qualifications distinguished are:
- General education qualifications;
- VET qualifications;
- Higher education qualifications.

Quality assurance of qualifications

In practice, except for higher education, quality assurance in qualifications is little developed in the country. Especially in VET, it is highly fragmented.

In higher education, the institutional lead lies with the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (HEA). In recent years, it has conducted accreditation of higher education institutions, private and public, of which a few offer short-cycle, level 5 qualifications, which are VET-oriented. To date, this has been general accreditation for both providers and programmes, but not yet for individual qualifications. The Agency has also been updating quality assurance procedures in higher education, to meet the Bologna Process' European Standards and Guidelines.

An EU-funded project developed a manual for quality assurance in VET which includes guidelines, including standards and criteria, for external evaluation and self-assessment based on best European practice and models, However, its take-up and use by authorities and providers has been partial.

Significant challenges in quality assurance of VET qualifications are lack of comparable education or occupational standards, lack of agreed criteria for development and validation of qualifications, minimal external assessment, and fragmented functions among the many actors. The Manual for Enhancement of Vocational Qualifications was developed by the EU-funded project "Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning" to overcome these challenges. The manual is intended for all institutions and bodies involved in developing the basic elements of the qualifications framework such as occupational standards, qualification standards, curricula and programmes and use of learning outcomes.

This manual is directly linked to the training programme for enhancement of VET qualifications, which includes additional materials for training qualifications developers.

Use of learning outcomes and standards

To be placed in the framework, qualifications should be composed of units of learning outcomes. But designing learning-outcomes-based qualifications has been a challenge, especially in VET. ETF conducted an inventory of vocational qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2017, covering qualifications from Levels 2 to 5. It revealed that of the 1,155 qualifications reviewed, most were not based on learning outcomes. Moreover, more than half were developed in 1995 and 1996, and required revision.

Based on this analysis, the decision was made to include only newly developed and learning outcomes-based VET and higher education qualifications in the BQF. So far, 21 VET and 5 higher education qualifications have been included in the BQF.

Credit systems

Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the Bologna process in 2003. In 2006, all public universities began the process of implementing first and second cycle study programmes and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). ECTS has since been introduced in all higher education programmes.

A credit system is not described in detail for the other levels in the BQF document. ECVET is used for new VET qualifications as mentioned in the Manual for enhancement of VET qualifications developed as part of the EU project "Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning", but implementation is still limited.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a complex and fragmented constitutional, legal and institutional landscape, which hinders implementation of the QF. The Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995 provided for a decentralised constitution, which poses challenges in creating a truly national qualifications framework with equal validity and application across the country (ETF, 2018).

The Ministry of Civil Affairs has a coordinating role in QF development and implementation, bringing together the relevant authorities from the Republika Srpska, the 10 cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brcko District.

The Council of Ministers established an Inter-sectoral Commission (ISC)[162] in 2013 as an interim executive policy-making and executive structure. This body was intended to steer the QF's early development, including designing a detailed Action Plan to implement the QF. The Council had planned that, in time, the ISC's decision-making functions would pass to a permanent governing body, working alongside MoCA, to manage the QF, and that the ISC would continue in an advisory capacity.

The Inter-sectoral Commission comprises nineteen members in total. There are six members for each of the three major population groups – Bosniak, Croat and Serb - plus one member for minorities such as Roma, representing education and training, the academic community, labour and employment, statistics institutions, and other social partners[163]. Its decisions are made by majority vote, requiring a minimum of two thirds of votes from the representatives of each constituent community. The Ministry of Civil Affairs chairs the ISC.

The ISC's first task was developing the QF's Action Plan. The Plan's provisions on institutional arrangements foresaw establishment of a permanent QF Council which would be a decision-making body, advised by the ISC and various technical expert groups, and cooperating with MoCA and the entities and cantons.

The technical expert groups would include sectoral councils, tasked to develop qualifications in specified sectors such as wood, metal processing etc. They currently operate on an ad-hoc basis, advising on request APOSO or bilateral donors when they are developing new VET qualifications.

However, for wider political reasons, the ISC itself has not sat since 2015, which has blocked progress in implementing much of the Action Plan, including the setting-up of the permanent QF Council. In the absence therefore of a permanent governance system, temporary arrangements are made. The Conference of Education Ministers in BiH and an ad-hoc "Referencing working group" set up for the EQF referencing process, have tried to bridge the gap until the bodies foreseen by the Action Plan are put in place.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

Since 2003, MoCA has been responsible for coordination of activities, harmonisation of plans of entity authorities and defining strategies at the international level and in the education field (Article 15 of the Law on Ministries and Other Bodies of Administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, "Official Gazette of BiH No. 5/03").

MoCA is responsible for educational policy at state level, in liaison with the international community and has a coordinating role in QF implementation. It also chairs the ISC and is designated to chair the planned QF Council.

The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (HEA) is the lead institution for quality in higher education. It is an affiliated member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA). It accredits public and private higher education institutions and updates quality assurance procedures to meet European standards and guidelines.

The Agency for Pre-primary, Primary, and Secondary Education (APOSO) has overall responsibility for quality in pre-university education. In cooperation with all responsible education authorities, it

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162. Decision on the Appointment of a Commission for the Development of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

163. Members of the Inter-sectoral Commission include: five representatives of education sector (Ministry of Civil Affairs; two canton representatives; Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska; Education Department of the Government of the Brcko District); three representatives of the Rectors Conference; three representatives of education agencies (Agency for pre-school, primary and secondary education; Agency for the development of higher education and quality assurance and the Centre for information and recognition of documents in higher education); three representatives of the statistics sector (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Federal Institute for Statistics, Institute for Statistics of Republika Srpska); three representatives of labour and employment (Ministry of Civil Affairs, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Labour and Protection of Veterans and Disabled Persons of Republika Srpska); one representative from the Association of Employers and one representative of the Confederation of Labour Unions.

develops education and occupational standards and guides curriculum development. Development of the occupational standards is carried out mainly with the support of pedagogic institutes, companies and schools, and often with significant donor support.

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

VNFIL arrangements
There is no state-wide system in place for validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), but given the high rate of labour migration, authorities see recognition and validation as useful tools. Creating the pre-conditions for their development is one of the policy objectives for QF implementation and among the activities outlined in the Action Plan[164].

Two strategic documents were adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2014 as a basis for development of lifelong learning and for regulating adult learning: "Principles and standards in the field of adult education in BiH and Strategic adult education development platform in the context of lifelong learning for the period 2014-2020". A first concept for establishing country-wide VNFIL arrangements was developed in 2018, by a working group within the EU-funded project "Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning".

Two new EU-funded projects will both include a component on RPL to further support the development of RPL in the country.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
Qualifications from vocational education and training and higher education are being prioritised for inclusion in the QF, due to their potential to support employability. To date, 21 VET and 5 higher education qualifications have been included in the BQF.

However, levelling of greater numbers of qualifications is slowed by various factors. One reason is lack of capacity across the education and training system, as the country is generally dependent on donors for development of new

qualifications. Another reason, related, is the wider political, and so education-administrative, fragmentation, which hinders cooperation by the necessary actors.

Initiatives and developments in the different education and training sub-systems have been undertaken over the past years, mostly as part of EU-funded projects[165]. The EU-funded project "Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning", which ran March 2016 to June 2018, focused on several aspects of the QF, such as quality assurance, accreditation procedures, EQF referencing and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

A "Manual for Enhancement of Vocational Qualifications" was developed with involvement of representatives from all relevant education authorities and key partners; it is intended for all bodies involved in developing occupational and qualification standards, curricula and programmes, and in using learning outcomes. The criteria defined in the manual are considered when developing new qualifications.

Communication about the QF has so far been directed at stakeholders relevant for, and directly involved with, the development and implementation of related elements and processes. These included policy-makers in education and employment, teachers, students, education and employment agencies and employers. The main channels used were the websites of different ministries, social media, leaflets, conferences and workshops. A new website has been developed for further communication of the QF in relation to the EQF (https://eqf.ba/).

As the QF is only at an early stage of implementation, no evaluation studies have been carried out to assess its impact. Given its major reforming role, QF implementation initiatives are starting to influence the introduction and use of learning outcomes, and the review, renewal and quality assurance of qualifications. The QF has helped formalise cooperation between stakeholders across education subsectors and institutions at

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164. Action plan for the development and implementation of the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014-20 (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 28/15) http://www.mcp.gov.ba/Content/Read/obrazovanjedokumenti; www.eqf.ba

165. The proposal for the Bosnia and Herzegovina qualifications framework was developed as part of the EU VET III project, and the VET IV project developed vocational qualifications based on occupational standards, which were a new development in the country. A joint EU and Council of Europe project developed a good practice guide for development of qualifications and occupational standards in higher education. An IPA-funded project managed by the British Council (2014-2016) sought to raise the quality of primary and general secondary education and to reform the school-leaving *Matura* exam; the project prioritized training for teachers, pre- and in-service, in the primary and secondary education.

different levels (political, technical, expert) and is seen as a solution for enhanced dialogue between stakeholders from education and training and those representing the labour market. It provides a basis for developing arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and is expected to increase permeability in the education and training system and to support recognition of foreign qualifications.

Qualifications registers and databases

In addition to providing information on the QF and key documents, the web portal for the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina includes databases of occupational standards and qualification standards in vocational education and training, and higher education, as basic elements of the qualifications framework. By the end of 2020, 23 occupational standards for VET and two for higher education had been included in the database. The database also includes the 21 VET and 5 higher education qualifications mentioned earlier.

Qualification documents

The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance issued in 2009 the

Instruction on the Form and Content of Diploma and Diploma Supplement Issued by Accredited Higher Education Institutions (Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, No. 86/09). This Instruction is obligatory for all competent education authorities and accredited higher education institutions.

Career information and guidance

Career guidance and counselling are under-developed across Bosnia and Herzegovina. Career counselling in education is mainly organized in secondary vocational schools and provided by psychologists and pedagogists. The public employment services offer career counselling as well, but the counsellors face big caseloads. Only a limited number of careers counsellors have received training in the use of the QF.

Recognition of foreign qualifications

The Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education is fully operational in BiH. The procedures of recognition of higher education qualifications in BiH are regulated primarily by the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education and are prescribed by laws on recognition, laws on higher education, by laws and statutes of higher education institutions.

In practice, there are still some differences between the ten cantons, Republika Srpska and Brčko District. The previously adopted legislative acts have been neither coherent nor clear in terms of terminology, criteria, or prescribed procedures for recognition. A harmonisation process has started, led by Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education [166].

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a full member of the EQF Advisory Group since 2015 and referencing the BQF to the EQF is considered a state-wide priority.

A final draft of the EQF referencing report has been produced and is awaiting adoption by the relevant authorities. It covers both referencing to the EQF and self-certification against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education area (Bologna Process). The State of Play report was presented to the EQF Advisory Group in June 2019.

International cooperation

The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance is an affiliated member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA). Full membership has not been granted yet.

International donor support

BiH receives financial assistance from the EU via the Instrument for pre-Accession (IPA).

Initiatives and developments in the different education and training sub-systems have been undertaken over the past years, mostly as part of EU-funded projects[167]. The EU-funded project "Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning", which ran from 2016 to 2018, addressed several elements of the BQF, including quality assurance, accreditation procedures, EQF referencing, and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

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166. http://www.cip.gov.ba/en/the-legislation
167. The proposal for the Bosnia and Herzegovina qualifications framework was developed as part of the EU VET III project, and the VET IV project developed vocational qualifications based on occupational standards, which were a new development in the country. A joint EU and Council of Europe project developed a good practice guide for development of qualifications and occupational standards in higher education. An IPA-funded project managed by the British Council (2014-2016) sought to raise the quality of primary and general secondary education and to reform the school-leaving *Matura* exam; the project prioritized training for teachers, pre- and in-service, in the primary and secondary education.

Both IPA16 and IPA19 will further support the development of occupational standards and RPL.

Different donors are involved in the development of occupational and qualification standards.

Important lessons and future plans

The (BQF) is an important development towards better education quality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, increased access to lifelong learning and more relevant qualifications for citizens and the labour market. Part of the country's efforts to gain EU membership, the QF is seen as contributing to the increased mobility, flexibility and competitiveness of the labour force[168].

Implementation actions are however at an early stage and behind schedule. Technical work necessary to implement the QF Action Plan has started, primarily through EU-funded projects. Useful tools, such as methodologies for qualification development, provide the groundwork for improving quality assurance systems and setting up mechanisms for validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, donor-supported projects always have a limited timeframe and scope for intervention; sustained follow-up is necessary, with allocation of financial resources from national funds at all relevant levels of government.

Reform of vocational education and training and higher education is continuing, but quality of provision remains a challenge. Efforts should be made to increase the number of learning outcomes-based qualifications and to revise curricula for existing qualifications. Procedures and criteria for placement of qualifications into the QF should be adopted and applied country wide.

The complex institutional arrangements, which allow State institutions only very limited mandates, make the overall pace of reform slower than might otherwise be the case and represent the main challenge in QF implementation so far. Support is needed to re-establish the operational capacities of the Inter-sectoral Committee at technical level, and to create the QF Council as a permanent NQF structure at decision-making and policy level.

COVID-19 has forced suspension of many NQF implementation activities, including delivery, assessment and certification of qualifications in the NQF.

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168. Action plan for the development and implementation of the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014-20 (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 28/15) https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1465728/8504223/7.+Action+Plan+BIH+QF.pdf/150757bf-2e65-4399-bd1d-d24c62815f41

Table 9. Infographic of the NQF/NQF overview table

LEVEL	TYPE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING	QUALIFICATION TITLES (POSITION IN THE LABOUR MARKET)	AWARD TYPE (DIPLOMA / CERTIFICATE / EDUCATION LEVEL)
8	Third 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..	PhD Doctorate diploma and Diploma supplement
7	Second cycle of higher education		Master diploma (MA) Master level diploma and Diploma supplement
6	First cycle of higher education		Bachelor diploma (BA) Diploma issued by the institution of higher education
			Diploma supplement
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
4	Secondary general education	Generally skilled worker	Secondary School graduation diploma with a supplement
	Secondary technical education	Specialised skilled worker for technical and related occupation	Diploma/Certificate of secondary graduation with a supplement
3	Vocational education and training	Skilled worker for a certain occupation	Diploma/certificate of final examination (matriculation) with practical work, including a supplement
2	Occupational training programmes	Low-skilled worker	Certificate on completed programme or education for lower level occupational qualifications
1	Elementary education	Unskilled worker	Certificate on completed elementary education (nine years)

Source: Adapted from European Training Foundation, 2016.

Abbreviations

APOSO	Agency for Pre-primary, Primary, and Secondary Education	NQF	National Qualifications Framework
BQF	Baseline Qualification Framework	QF	Qualifications Framework QF-EHEA Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System		
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
		VET	Vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework	VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
HEA	Agency for development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance		
ISC	Intersectoral Committee		

Main sources of information

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Dželalija, M., Morris, I. D., Ranfelt, L. (2018). *Development of Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.* EU.

Overview of laws and strategic plans: http://www.mcp.gov.ba/Content/Read/obrazovanje-dokumenti

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Overview of laws and strategic plans: http://www.mcp.gov.ba/Content/Read/obrazovanje-dokumenti

Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
Online platform	https://openspace.etf.europa.eu
Twitter	@etfeuropa
Facebook	facebook.com/etfeuropa
YouTube	www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
Live&Learn	https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/ Instagram instagram.com/etfeuropa/
LinkedIn	linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation
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BULGARIA

Introduction and context

Public spending on education in Bulgaria is increasing, though the system remains underfunded and measures do not fully match the magnitude of the challenges. Despite ongoing efforts, early school leaving remains problematic, particularly among the Roma and in rural areas. The rate of early leavers has increased from 12.7% in 2018 to 13,9% in 2019 (EU average 10.2%). Measures to return out-of-school children to education are in place, and support is being offered to overcome learning gaps and to increase motivation. However, overall enrolment rates in school education are not improving and dropout rates remain high. The percentage of underachievers in science, maths and reading in the 2018 Programme for international student assessment (PISA) is 47.1%, 44.4% and 46.5% respectively, which is around double the EU average. The impact of the ongoing education reform on learning outcomes will only be measurable in future testing rounds. The teaching workforce in Bulgaria is aging rapidly but salaries have been raised significantly in recent years to improve the attractiveness of the profession. The employment rate of recent upper secondary and tertiary graduates (age group 20-34) who are no longer in education or training has increased from 78.6% in 2018 to 80.7% in 2019 and is close to the EU average of 80.9%. Measures to increase labour market relevance have been introduced both in higher education and in vocational education and training (VET). A project, *Support for the dual training system*, co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), has been launched under the coordination of the Ministry of Education and Science. Improving the labour market relevance of higher education remains a key issue. Since 2015, Bulgaria has been using the funding system to shift the profile of graduates towards qualifications in high demand in the labour market, which are to a large extent STEM[169] professions. To this end, higher scholarships and support measures have been offered to students in these study fields, alongside increasing the number of state-subsidised places. As of the academic year 2020/21, tuition fees were eliminated for new entrants in 18 professional study fields in the areas of pedagogical and nature sciences and eight protected specialities in the areas of philology, physics, forestry and technical sciences. Adult participation in learning in 2019 was low (2.0% in 2019 compared to the EU average of 10.8%). The National developmental programme 2030, approved in January 2020, has set a participation target of 7% by 2030. Raising the skills of the working-age population through lifelong learning is considered central to government policy. (European Commission, 2020).

The Bulgarian qualifications framework for lifelong learning (BQF) was adopted in 2012 to raise understanding and trust in the Bulgarian education system and to support mobility and recognition of qualifications. The framework is 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[170], primary and secondary general education, VET and higher education, described in terms of learning outcomes. It 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 2013.

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169. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

170. Two years of pre-school education before first grade are mandatory.

Policy objectives

The overall objective of developing and introducing a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF), compatible with the European qualifications framework and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (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 the development of the BQF include:

- develop a device with translation and bridging functions;
- promote mobility within education and in the labour market;
- promote the learning-outcomes orientation of qualifications;
- support validation of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning;
- strengthen orientation towards a lifelong learning approach;
- increase cooperation between stakeholders (Bulgarian Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, 2013).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The BQF comprises eight levels and an additional preparatory level (BQF level 'zero', covering pre-school education). Level descriptors take EQF and QF-EHEA descriptors into account. 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).

Specified learning outcomes of the qualification levels reflect the legal acts governing different subsystems of education and training, as well as State education requirements for content

and expected learning outcomes in the national education system.

In January 2014, the Council of Ministers adopted a new national strategy for lifelong learning for 2014-20[171]. The new national strategy for lifelong learning, in addition to an explanation of the phrase 'learning outcomes', contains a definition of the term 'learning outcome units' (in Bulgarian: единици учебни резултати)[172]; 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. In the last five years, all State educational standards for acquiring a qualification in a profession from the list of professions for VET have been developed in units of learning outcomes.

The phrase learning outcomes is now widespread in policy documents. It is used or referred to in national curriculum, assessment and examination documents, particularly in State educational standards[173] and the evaluation and accreditation procedures in higher education. However, an action plan for implementing the approach has not been adopted nor discussed in the country. The current position in the various subsystems shows that implementation of the approach has continued in the new State educational standards adopted after the law on pre-school and school education entered into force in August 2016. It is also in the State educational requirements on acquisition of higher education in regulated professions, adopted after the BQF entered into force.

Two bills amending the law on VET introduced, and provided a legal definition of, the term 'learning outcomes'. State educational 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

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171. 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: http://www.strategy.bg/FileHandler.ashx?fileId=4297
172. 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'.
173. The term 'standard' has been adopted instead of the term 'requirement' since 1 August 2016 with the law for school and pre-school education.

a prerequisite for implementing the validation procedure and awarding of credits. The principles of the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) have been used for designing standards for VET since 2015. It aims at linking units of learning outcomes with credits in VET. Higher education institutions are autonomous and responsible for developing curriculum, assessment and examination rules; some have learning outcomes within study programmes but implementation differs from one institution to another. The New Bulgarian University is an example of an institution using learning outcomes in its study programmes[174]. The Burgas Free University also uses learning outcomes in some of its master programme courses[175]. However, there is no systematic approach for implementing a learning outcome approach in higher education.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Bulgarian qualifications framework is now firmly embedded in national legislation. The referencing report was adopted by the Minister of Education and Science in March 2014 and amendments to national legislation support implementation. A new pre-school and school education bill was adopted in late 2015[176] and is expected to lead to amendment of the BQF at secondary education levels. The Bulgarian vocational education and training law was amended in 2014 and 2018. Two amendment bills in 2014[177] support the BQF, with legal arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning, for learning outcomes units and for introduction of the VET credits accumulation and transfer system. Significant changes in legislation governing VET have taken effect from the last amendment in 2018[178]. They concern, for example, the structure and functions of the National Agency for Vocational

Education and Training (NAVET)[179], licencing procedures and the work of vocational training centres, supporting changes aiming to improve the performance of VET institutions and the VET system.

The Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science coordinated and led drafting of the BQF and is now coordinating its implementation. National coordination point (NCP) responsibilities shall lie with the International Cooperation Directorate in the ministry. NAVET develops the State educational standards for the acquisition of VET qualifications, which is integrated in the BQF. The agency maintains the list of professions according to the needs of the labour market[180]. It also controls the activities of VET institutions for people older than 16 (Cedefop 2018).

The Pre-school and School Education Act 2015 (in force since August 2016) establishes quality management processes, including for VET. Quality management is a continuous process of organisational development based on its analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation. The evaluation is performed through biennial self-assessment and inspection. The National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency, established in 1996, is a governmental institution dealing with the independent evaluation of the quality of higher education and accreditation of higher education institutions. The responsible body for quality assurance in adult education and training is the National Employment Agency. It assesses three main factors for providing training: teaching curriculum, teaching staff and facilities.

In 2018, a decree of the Council of Ministers established the National inspectorate of education, which has the main function of organising expert analysis and assessment of the quality of education provided in kindergartens and schools.

The State requirements in the field of higher education are adopted by the Council of Ministers as proposed by the relevant minister, usually the Minister of Education and Science or the Minister of Health. The legislative documents or their updates are elaborated by working groups in which different stakeholders are included, such as higher education institutions, the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency, employers, students etc.

174. New Bulgarian University, e-catalogue: http://ecatalog. nbu.bg/Default.asp?V_Year=2013
175. Burgas Free University, Master programmes: http://www. bfu.bg/index.php?q=node/1793
176. Pre-school and school education act. *State Gazette*, No 79, 13.10.2015. In force since 1.8.2016.
177. (a) 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
(b) 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
178. Bulgarian Vocational Education and Training Act (2018): https://www.navet.government.bg/bg/media/ZPOO-2018-1.pdf (in Bulgarian)

179. NAVET is a specialised body within the Council of ministers, supporting development of high-quality vocational education and training. https://www.navet.government.bg/en/about-navet/
180. Qualifications are linked to professions, not to education levels. Qualifications can be acquired in addition to a certificate attesting an education level. There are about 500 qualifications included in the list.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[181]

The validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning is an integral part of Bulgarian lifelong learning policy. The national lifelong learning strategy 2014-20 aimed at introducing validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal training and informal learning by 2018; and the VET development strategy 2015-20 defined validation as a priority in the context of lifelong learning.

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[182], 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. Amendments to the Pre-school and School Education Act (in force since 2016), brought it in line with VETA. 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 of *State gazette* No 96/2014). The standards used for validation are the same as the VET standards used in formal education and training.

While there are no explicit quality assurance indicators for validation, current legislation stipulates that institutions must put in place internal quality assurance systems. A project[183], implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with NAVET, 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 for assessing equivalence between competences declared by a candidate and those defined for a specific vocational qualification in the corresponding VET standard.

One of the aims of the BQF is 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, in title and description, from those issued in VET: the former describe validated competences[184] and the latter subjects of education.

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.

In the VET system, the validation of professional knowledge, skills and competences for adults is

181. This section draws mainly on input from: Dhzengozova, M. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Bulgaria.*

182. Ministry of Education and Science (2014). Ordinance No 2 on the conditions and procedures for the validation of professional knowledge, skills and competences: https://www.navet.government.bg/bg/media/N2_Validirane_21_11_14.pdf [in Bulgarian]

183. *System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences: new opportunity for my future (2013-15).*

184. A demo version of a certificate for validation is available in Bulgarian at: http://www.navet.government.bg/bg/media/Svidetelstvo_validirane.pdf

still poorly represented. According to NAVET data, procedures for recognition of qualifications through validation have been completed as follows: 570 procedures in 2015; 257 in 2016; 162 in 2017; 117 in 2018; 413 in 2019 and 176 in 2020.

NQF implementation and impact

The Bulgarian qualifications framework for lifelong learning is a comprehensive eight-level framework with an additional preparatory level 0. It has reached the activation stage. It includes qualifications from all levels of formal education and training: pre-primary, primary and secondary general education, VET and higher education. In accordance with Article 141 of the law for pre-school and school education[185], all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents will be referenced to the relevant BQF level and linked to the corresponding EQF level. An update of the State requirements in the most significant documents issued by the higher education institutions is being developed. All legislative documents in the field of higher education, adopted after the introduction of the BQF, call for explicit mentioning of the BQF level.

A national consultation with stakeholders – including education providers, students, employers, experts, and government officials – was carried out in 2018 to assess the impact of the framework and to inform further developments (NAVET, 2019). It was found that over 75% of survey participants were somewhat familiar with the NQF. Other findings included the need for more targeted information to employers and citizens, the need to improve awareness of the links between the NQF, the EQF and the State education standards, to more closely link the NQF to the quality of training, and to facilitate the validation and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. There is relatively little information so far on the conditions and role of the BQF in promoting lifelong learning and supporting access, progression and adult participation in education and training. Implementing the BQF at institutional level is seen as a challenge, particularly in higher education. For the BQF to achieve its aims, sustained implementation efforts are required.

Referencing to the EQF

The Bulgarian qualifications framework for lifelong learning was referenced to the European qualifications framework and self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in May 2013. 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. Stakeholders (including State institutions) in some economic sectors (IT, machinery, transport) have started discussions regarding sectoral qualifications at levels 2 to 7 of the BQF, including labour market needs, current possibilities and horizontal and vertical permeability. This might be perceived as a step towards development of a sectoral qualifications framework.

Improving the quality and labour market relevance of vocational education and training and of higher education remain important for the Bulgarian economy in the post-Covid-19 context. Authorities made efforts to ensure the continuity of teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the abrupt shift to remote learning has posed major challenges, risking exacerbating already high inequalities in access to quality education. Upskilling and reskilling the population remain a significant challenge in the context of the economic recovery from Covid-19. Increasing participation in adult learning is particularly important considering the low-skilled account for 17.5% of the working-age population. To this end, incentives and mechanisms will be introduced with the aim of improving skills and supporting the reintegration of the unemployed and inactive low-skilled persons into the labour market (European Commission, 2020).

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185. Law on pre-school and school education, *State Gazette,* No 79/2015. http://www.mon. bg/?h=downloadFile&fileId=8245

Table 10. Bulgarian qualifications framework (BQF)

BQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES
8	Doctor degree (Доктор)
7	Master degree (Магистър)
6	Bachelor degree (Бакалавър) Professional bachelor degree (Професионален Бакалавър)
5	Vocational qualification – national VET level 4 (IV Степен На Професионална Квалификация)
4	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate (Средно Образование Общо Образование) Vocational qualification – national VET level 3 (III Степен На Професионална Квалификация)
3	Vocational qualification – national VET level 2 (II Степен На Професионална Квалификация)
2	Lower secondary (basic education) certificate (grades 5-7) (Основно Образование) Vocational qualification – national VET level 1 (I Степен На Професионална Квалификация)
1	Primary education certificate (grades 1-4) (Начален Етап На Основното Образование)
0	Pre-primary education (Подготвително Ниво – Предучилищно Образование)

Source: National qualifications framework of the Republic of Bulgaria, adopted by Decision of the Council of Ministers No 96/ 2.2.2012 – Annex 1: http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=719

Abbreviations

BQF	Bulgarian qualifications framework	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
EQF	European qualifications framework		
NAVET	National Agency for Vocational Education and Training	VET	vocational education and training
		VETA	vocational education and training act
NCP	national coordination point		
NQF	national qualifications framework		

Main sources of information

The International and European Cooperation Directorate in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science is designated as the EQF national coordination point: https://www.mon.bg/en/303

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European Commission (2020). *Education and training Monitor 2020.* https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2020/en/index.html

NAVET (2019). Анализ за оценяване на въздействието на НКР в България [Analysis for assessing the impact of NQF in Bulgaria]. https://www.navet.government.bg/bg/analiz-za-otsenyavane-na-azdejstvieto-na-nkr-v-balgariya/

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CABO VERDE

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

The country report on the NQF of Cabo Verde[186], elaborated in the context of the Mapping Study of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) project is the main source of information used in this country fiche. Several chapters benefited of information updates, gathered from official Websites and sources, especially: Government of Cabo Verde, Coordination Unit of the National Qualifications System (UC-SNQ), National Institute of Statistics, and UNDP (Human Development Index).

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of Cabo Verde has 10 years of experience and has been conceived and operationalised as an instrument of the National Qualifications System (SNQ). This is a fundamental characteristic that marks the nature and functions of the NQF and its interconnection with the other instruments of the SNQ. The SNQ comprises the instruments necessary for the promotion, development and integration of training offer and qualifications, and the evaluation and certification of competences enabling professional, human, and social development of the individuals and responding to the needs of the economic system. The SNQ is operationalised by the combined action of the following instruments:

- The NQF (in Portuguese language: QNQ)
- The National Catalogue of Qualifications (CNQ): website.
- The credit system
- The individual register of qualifications and competences
- The system of monitoring, evaluation and quality improvement of the SNQ

- The system of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) The main milestones of the history of the SNQ-NQF in Cabo Verde are as follows:
- 2009: Enacted legislation regulating the NQF governance body – the Coordination Unit of the National Qualifications System (UC-SNQ) (decree-law n° 62/2009). Website.
- 2010: Approved the legal Acts establishing: the SNQ, the NQF and the CNQ
- 2013: Approved legislation on the legal regime on accreditation of training institutions
- 2014: Regulated the system of recognition, validation and certification of competences
- 2018: Adopted new legal Act on SNQ; new regulation on the organisation of the UC-SNQ
- 2020: Adopted new legal Acts on CNQ and on NQF (Joint Portaria n° 9 and n° 10/2020)
- The NQF of Cabo Verde is at operational stage.

Policy context

The Republic of Cabo Verde (Cabo Verde) is an island country in the central Atlantic Ocean. The 10 volcanic islands have a combined land area of 4 033 km², and the capital – Praia – is located approximately 650 km west from Dakar (Senegal). According to the World Population Review[187], the total population was 562 659 in 2021, and the growth rate was 1,1 per cent. According to National Institute of Statistics (INE), the share of population below 15 years of age is approximately 28 per cent, and that of age group 15-34 years is approximately 36 per cent. Politics in Cabo Verde have been largely consensus-oriented, and since its independence from Portugal in 1975, Cabo Verde has not experienced a single coup d'état. Elections are considered free and fair, and parties in power alternate regularly. Cabo Verde is a member of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)[188].

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186. *ACQF mapping study: Cabo Verde*. 2020. Country report. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Author: E. Castel-Branco. https://www.nepad.org/skillsportalforyouth/publication/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-mappingstudy

187. World Population Review. https://worldpopulationreview.com. Accessed: 16/08/2021
188. https://www.ecowas.int

Cabo Verde's Human Development Index (HDI) for 2019[189] is 0,665, putting the country in the medium human development category and positioning it at 126 out of 189 countries and territories. Cabo Verde's 2019 HDI of 0,665 is above the average of 0,631 for countries in the medium human development group and above the average of 0,547 for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The country's HDI has registered visible progress in the last two decades. Between 1990 and 2019, Cabo Verde's life expectancy at birth increased by 8,3 years (72,8 years in 2018), mean years of schooling increased by 2,8 years (to reach 6,3 years) and expected years of schooling increased by 1,2 years (127 years). Cabo Verde's GNI per capita increased by about 146.5 percent between 1990 and 2019, reaching 7,019 PPP$).

Labour market indicators have degraded in the period 2019-2020. The Covid-19 crisis adversely affected the economy, in which tourism and related economic activities (hotel, restaurants, recreation travel) play a central role. INE labour market data (2020)[190] shows a visible decline of the activity rate (from 57.4 to 53 percent), and of the employment rate (from 50.9 to 45.3 percent), with a corollary increase of the unemployment rate (11.3 to 14.5 per cent).

A new Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development (PEDS) 2030 is in consultation, through a wide mobilisation of debates, strategic discussions and thematic studies under the umbrella of the Platform "Cabo Verde Ambitions 2030" (CVA2030). The agenda of CVA20306 is comprehensive of all major domains of socio-economic sustainable development, including human capital development, postCovid-19, economic and business recovery, resilience and climate action, blue and digital economy. The previous Plan (2017-2021) was based on 35 programmes articulated around three pillars and four objectives, which jointly should contribute to Cabo Verde's sustainable development with full employment.

NQF legal basis
The legal basis of the SNQ and NQF is extensive and comprises specific legal Acts, listed in Chapter 9 of this report. The first NQF legal Act was

the Decree-Law nº 65/2010 of 27 December[191], regulating the nature, structure and effects of the NQF. The history of the SNQ and the NQF in Cabo Verde took its initial steps with the first Decree-Law nº 20/2010[192] of 14 June 2010, establishing the legal regime of the SNQ and its components, including the NQF.

In 2018, as a result of evaluation, the country adopted new legislation on the SNQ (Decree-Law nº 4/2018)[193], expanding its structural components, reinforcing its role in information and orientation for employment and in a more effective integration of the subsystems of education and training. In the same line of reform, in February 2020, two legal Acts regulating the CNQ (Joint Portaria nº 9/2020 of 20/02) and the NQF (Joint Portaria nº 10/2020, of 20/02)[194] were jointly developed and adopted by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms
The Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 (Plano Estratégico da Educação de Cabo Verde – PES)11 reflects the education objectives set in the PEDS 2017-2021 and is aligned with the Government Programme 2016-2021. The plan specifies a framework of priorities and the investment programmes and actions, which jointly contribute to the country's vision for development of human resources aligned with the national macro-economic perspectives. The plan provides a detailed diagnostic of the situation, challenges and performance of all subsystems of education.

The priorities are articulated around access to education and efficiency of education management. They are a) universalised access to preschool

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191. Decree-Law Nr 65/2010 of 27 December, Regulates the nature, structure and effects of the National Qualifications Framework (in Portuguese: Regula a natureza, a estrutura e os efeitos do Quadro Nacional de Qualificações – QNQ. Boletim Oficial Nr 50 – I serie, 27/12/2010. At: https://kiosk.incv.cv/1.1.50.85/
192. Decree-Law Nr 20/2010 of 14 June, Regulates the legal regime of the National Qualifications System (SNQ) (in Portuguese: Regula o Regime Jurídico Geral do Sistema Nacional de Qualificações (SNQ). At: https://kiosk.incv.cv/V/2010/6/14/1.1.22.171/
193. Decree-Law Nr 4/2018 of 10 January, Establishes the new legal regime of the National Qualifications System (SNQ) (in Portuguese: Estabelece novo regime jurídico do Sistema Nacional de Qualificações (SNQ). At: https://kiosk.incv.cv/V/2018/1/10/1.1.4.2461/
194. Portaria conjunta Nr 9/2020 of 17 February, and Joint Portaria Nr 10/2020 of the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education, At: http://iefp.cv/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/bo_20-02-2020_20-CNQ-e-QNQ.pdf https://minedu.gov.cv/documentos1

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189. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/CPV.pdf
190. https://ine.cv/quadros/estatistica-do-mercado-trabalho-inquerito-multi-objetivo-continuo-2020/ 6 https://peds.gov.cv/cva2030/cva2030/

education, basic and secondary education; b) improved and relevant education services; and c) reinforced efficiency and management of education.

These priorities of education policy are unpacked in five investment programmes, representing the shared vision between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance:

- Preschool education: Universalisation of access
- Obligatory basic education: Bases for life
- Reinforcement and consolidation of secondary education
- Higher education, science and innovation

- Education management: The pillar of change.

Structure of the education system

Cabo Verde has an ample legal basis regulating the education system as a whole and the particular domains of each of the subsystems. The fundamental legal act is the Legislative Decree Nr 13/2018 of 7 December, amending the Legislative Decree nº 2/2010 of 7 May, which defined the bases of the education system. The Legislative Decree Nr 13/2018 defines in detail the structure of the education system (Table 1).

Table 11. Structure of the education system

SECTION OF THE LAW Nº 13/2018	SUBSYSTEM	CYCLES	QUALIFICATIONS	OBSERVATIONS: AGE, PROGRESSION
Section II	Preschool education			From four years of age
Section III	Basic education eight years	First cycle: four years (1st -4th) second cycle: four years (5th-8th)		From six years of age
Section IV	Secondary education four years	9th- to 12th years Two optional pathways: general and technical. Permeability between general and technical is guaranteed Artistic education: Via technical pathway or via complementary year of secondary education	Diploma and certificate For the technical pathway: Double certification (academic and professional) For artistic education: Diploma	Progression upon conclusion of secondary education: • To higher education • Professional training (initial and continuous)
Section V	Higher education University education Polytechnic education	Three cycles of study: Licenciatura: Credits correspondent to six to eight semesters. Some areas of study require higher number of credits Master: Credits corresponding to three to four semesters. In some cases: Integrated cycle after secondary education of ten to twelve semesters Doctorate Postsecondary education: courses of professional nature, not leading to academic degree (CESP – Courses Higher Professional Studies)	Academic degrees: Licenciatura (certificate) Mestrado (Master): certified by a magister letter Doctorate: doctoral letter Non-academic postsecondary courses (CESP) lead to Diploma of Higher Professional Study (DESP)	Licenciatura degree: Can be awarded in university and polytechnic education Master and doctorate degrees: Only in university education DESP: Credits transferable to continue education to obtain licenciatura degree in the same area of study
Section VI	Extra-school education	Adult Education Alphabetisation Continuing education: cultural, scientific and technological upskilling Basic education of youth and adults articulates general and professional training (age: 15+, with or without schooling) Component of technicalprofessional training Skill development for the exercise of a profession and integration in the world of work Lifelong learning	Basic education and youth and adults First cycle (two years): certificate Second cycle (two years): diploma (equivalent to diploma of basic education) Technicalprofessional training is closely articulated with the national system of professional training and apprenticeship	In both modalities: Learning is organised in units (accumulation and transfer), flexible and adaptable to different individual needs and competences

Source: Authors

Aims of NQF

The **objectives of the NQF** defined in 2010 have been reinforced in the Joint Portaria Nr 10/2020, by adding emphasis on readability, transparency, and comparability of qualifications – in the education and training system and in the labour market. Article 4 defines the objectives of the NQF:

- Integrate and articulate the qualifications obtained in different sub-systems of education, vocational education and higher education and those obtained from non-formal and informal pathways and professional experience;
- Improve transparency of qualifications, supporting their value in the labour market, education and training and other contexts of personal and social life;
- Promote access, evaluation and quality of qualifications;
- Apply a competence-based approach to define and describe qualifications and promote validation of non-formal and informal learning; tap on the advantages of this approach to increase the participation in lifelong learning of the population at risk of unemployment and precarious employment.
- Promote close links with the European Qualifications Framework and with NQFs of other countries, notably ECOWAS member countries, with the aim to improve people's mobility and facilitate recognition of skills and competences.
- Improve readability, transparency, and comparability of qualifications in the education and training system and employment training.
- Adopt adequate measures assuring that all new certificates and diplomas issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference to the adequate NQF level.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

The NQF is structured in eight levels, from basic education (Level 1) to doctorate degree (Level 8).

The NQF is inclusive and comprehensive, its scope covers qualifications from basic, secondary and higher education as well processes of validation, recognition and certification of competences obtained via non-formal and informal learning.

Article 5 of the NQF legal Act of 2020 (Joint Portaria Nr 10/2020) and its Annex II define the structure of the NQF and the level descriptors. Qualification levels represent learning outcomes and are defined by descriptors in three domains of learning.

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Responsibility and autonomy

The domains of level descriptors are defined as follows:

- Knowledge – The body of facts, principles, theories and practices related with a field of study, work or professional training, and is the outcome of assimilation of information through learning.
- Skills - The ability to apply knowledge and use acquired resources to complete tasks and solve problems and are described as cognitive, including the application of logical intuitive and creative thinking, and practical, implying manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments.
- Responsibility and autonomy - The proven ability to apply knowledge, skills and personal, social and methodological skills in professional situations, in study and training contexts for purposes of professional and personal development.

Types of qualifications

The NQF legislation defines qualification as "the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process, which is obtained when a competent authority determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards." UC-SNQ clarifies further: "A qualification is obtained through a formal process of evaluation and validation of professional competences – knowledge and skills that allow the exercise of professional activity according to the requirements of the labour market."

The NQF includes qualifications of different types, as illustrated in Table 1 and Table 2. Two main types of qualifications are awarded in Cabo Verde:

- Diplomas
- Certificates

Annex 1 of the new NQF legal Act of 2020 (Portaria Nr 10/2020) presents the alignment of accredited qualifications with NQF levels (Table 2, in Chapter 10 of this report).

Higher education diplomas (DESP, Carta de Curso, Carta Magistral e Carta Doutoral) are accompanied by the Diploma Supplement, regulated by Portaria Nr 18/2014. The Diploma Supplement does not replace the diploma but complements the information on the programme and its level, for purposes of transparency and comparison. The adopted structure is aligned with international practice.

Quality assurance of qualifications

Legal base of quality assurance
In **vocational training**
Accreditation of institutions
- Decree-Law Nr 6/2013 of 11 February[195]. Establishes the legal regime for accreditation of training institutions in relation with provision of courses and programmes of professional training.

Other legal Acts defining elements of quality assurance of programmes and qualifications in professional education:
- Joint Portaria Nr 9/2020 (CNQ) and 10/2020 (NQF) of 20 February on the principles and related regulations: Components of professional qualifications, format and structure of units of competence and of training modules.

In **higher education**, the fundamental legal Act is the Law Nr 121/VIII/2016 of 24 March[196], which creates the Regulatory Agency of Higher Education (ARES) and approves its statute.

Other legal Acts on quality assurance of higher education:
- Decree-Law Nr 20/2012 of 19 June. Establishes the legal regime of HEIs[197].
- Decree-Law Nr 22/2012 of 7 August. Establishes the legal regime of academic degrees and diplomas in higher education[198].
- Despacho 05/2014 of 28 May 2014. Defines the general parameters of the process of selection of professionals for the Bank of Evaluators of HEIs[199].
- General Directorate of Higher Education – National System of Evaluation of Higher Education Directives of the National Quality Assurance System-SNAQES, of 7 October 2014[200].
- General Directorate of Higher Education – National System of Evaluation of Higher

Education, 07 October 2014, Guide for external institutional evaluation of HEIs[201].

Quality assurance processes
In **vocational training**, quality assurance processes comprise:
- Harmonised development and validation of qualifications (professional profiles and training plan and modules) and their inclusion in the CNQ. - Accreditation of institutions providing training.

Only those institutions holding a valid accreditation licence ("*Alvará*") can operate as training providers in the field of professional training. The accreditation system for professional training entities applies to all public or private entities, national or foreign, regularly constituted or registered in Cabo Verde, with legal personality, which meet all the requirements established in the accreditation regime of entities for the development of initial and/or continuing vocational training courses.

Schools

The Ministry of Education is responsible for quality assurance of secondary schools, notably for their licencing. Moreover, those secondary schools (technical) providing training programmes included in the Catalogue of Professional Qualifications shall be accredited by UC-SNQ. This outreach of the UC-SNQ's system of accreditation is fundamental to ascertain coherence and supervision over the performance of providers and the final trustworthiness of the achieved professional qualifications of the CNQ.

Higher education

By legislation, the national quality assurance system comprises the processes:
- Evaluation – twofold: a) internal (self-evaluation) of HEIs and b) external evaluation
- Accreditation and registration: a) creation of HEI; b) creation of study cycles (programmes) leading to degrees and diplomas.

All HEIs are obliged to establish internal systems of evaluation and a guarantee of quality and carry out regular self-evaluation of performance (Article 73 of Decree-Law Nr 20/2012).

External evaluation covers the following institutional dimensions of the HEIs, namely, institutional development, institutional management,

195. http://snq.cv/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Regime_Acreditacao_Entidades-Formadoras_DL-n%C2%BA62013.pdf
196. https://kiosk.incv.cv/V/2016/3/24/1.1.21.2165/
197. https://www.dgesc.gov.cv/index.php/ensino-superior-de-cv/legislacao/send/9-legislacao/182-regime-juridicodas-instituicoes-do-ensino
198. https://www.dgesc.gov.cv/index.php/ensino-superior-de-cv/legislacao/send/9-legislacao/175-regime-juridicodas-instituicoes-do-ensino-superior-cabo-verde
199. https://www.dgesc.gov.cv/index.php/ensino-superior-de-cv/legislacao/send/9-legislacao/838-diretrizes-dosistema-nacional-de-garantias-da-qualidade-do-ensino-superior
200. https://www.dgesc.gov.cv/index.php/ensino-superior-de-cv/legislacao/send/9-legislacao/677-directivas-dosistema-nacional-de-garantia-da-qualidade-do-ensino-superior-snaqes

201. https://www.dgesc.gov.cv/index.php/ensino-superior-de-cv/legislacao/send/9-legislacao/680-guiao-paraavaliacao-institucional-externa-das-ies-de-cabo-verde

infrastructure, academic policy, human resources policy.

The supervision of HEIs and their study programmes is a competence of ARES. Currently there are 10 accredited HEIs listed in ARES. Information on the respective legal acts of accreditation are published in the same webpage.

Quality assurance bodies
UC-SNQ's role

UC-SNQ is responsible for the processes of accreditation of institutions providing training courses in the subsystem of Professional Training (with links to secondary education of the technical strand).

ARES's mission and functions

In higher education, the only quality assurance body is the ARES, created by Law Nr 121/VIII/2016 of 24 March. Article 5 states that ARES is independent in the exercise of its functions and is not submitted to superintendence nor guardianship by the government in respect to regulatory functions, without prejudice to the supervisory powers conferred on the National Assembly. All governmental organs and institutions working in the sector of higher education have the duty to collaborate with ARES and provide information related with the quality assurance system.

ARES is tasked with four main competences: regulatory, supervisory, sanction and consultative The purpose of ARES is to guarantee the quality of higher education through:
- Evaluation, accreditation and registration of HEIs and their study cycles (programmes).
- Accreditation of the internal systems of quality assurance of HEIs.
- Recognition of degrees and diplomas awarded by foreign HEIs.
- Organisation and maintenance of an information system on higher education.
- Performance of the functions of supervision and control of the functioning of public and private HEIs.

ARES's specific functions of quality assurance include, amongst others: defining quality standards; promoting the accreditation of study cycles and institutions to ensure compliance with the legal requirements; supervising and controlling of the performance of the HEI; giving advice and support on quality assurance of higher education; studying and surveying the quality assurance system of higher education in Cabo Verde; providing information, statistical data and studies to support

the definition of measures and strategies for higher education and research policies ARES is governed by:
- Administration council: The main collegial executive organ
- The Fiscal organ: In charge of legal and economic-financial control
- Consultative council: Contributes to the efficient, effective and balanced exercise of the regulatory activity and provides advice to the administration council.

Cabo Verde participates in the project HAQAA of the Africa-EU Partnership. HAQAA focuses on harmonisation of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education.

Use of learning outcomes and standards
The application of the learning outcomes approach in the design and description of qualifications is one of the key objectives of the NQF, as defined in Article 4 of the NQF legal Act (Joint Portaria Nr 10/2020). Further, Article 4 specifies that the application of the learning outcomes approach is essential to promote validation of non-formal and informal learning, thereby offering citizens in situation of vulnerability possibilities to access lifelong learning and to enter the labour market.

Learning outcomes appear to play a manifold role, namely, in conceptual and technical design of units of competence of professional profiles and in training modules, which together structure qualifications; and in ensuring a socially minded access to qualifications, inclusive for citizens with a limited schooling history but tangible life and work experience.

The application of the learning outcomes approach is well-rooted and established in qualifications design and management in the subsystem of vocational training. UC-SNQ organises regular capacity building programmes on the competence-based approach in vocational qualifications and training for stakeholders and practitioners[202].

Conceptual basis

The conceptual and methodological underpinnings for the design and management of professional qualifications have been developed and adopted through legal Acts and explained and disseminated through handbooks. UC-SNQ assures the coordination, oversight and dissemination of this knowledge and methodological base.

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202. https://snq.cv/destaques/

The "Qualifications Regime" of UC-SNQ defines the wider principles of professional qualifications:
- Wide scope and based on competencies, with value and meaning for the labour market;
- Adaptable to the evolution of production modes and occupations;
- Based on concepts of professional skills that ensure workers' ability to work in different contexts and production situations;
- Compliance with the requirements and formats of professional profiles structured in competence units, and training Programmes organised in modules associated with competence units;

- Supported by learning programmes that are the basis of the training offer in technical education and the vocational training system, and enable the implementation of the modular training system;
- Designed and formulated to support validation of individuals' learning outcomes acquired in all types of learning contexts.

The established structure of a professional qualification included in the CNQ is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 5. Structure of professional qualifications
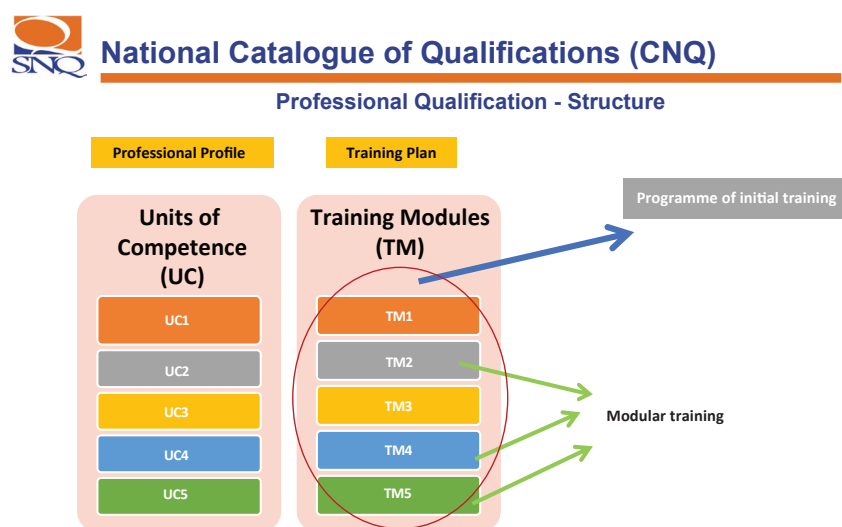
Source: UC-SNQ – Presentation at ACQF webinar on 8 May 2020

Credit systems

In professional training
- Legal basis: SNQ, Decree-Law Nr 4/2018 of 10 January: Article 11

The System of Credits of Professional-Technical Education is based on the attribution of credit points to qualifications of double certification in the NQF, which are integrated in the CNQ. The specific regulatory text is in development. Credit accumulation and transfer is permitted to enable mobility, notably in the space of ECOWAS and the EQF. Moreover, the credit system will apply to other certified training not integrated in the CNQ but based on valid quality assurance criteria.

In higher education
- Legal basis: Legislative Decree nº 13/2018 (Article 36) on the Bases of the Education System

- Decree-Law nº 22/2012 of 7 August. Establishes the legal regime of academic degrees and diplomas in higher education. At: https://www.dgesc.gov.cv/index.php/ensino-superior-decv/legislacao/send/9-legislacao/175-regime-juridico-das-instituicoes-do-ensino-superior-cabo-verde

The Legislative Decree nº 13/2018 determines that organisation of education provided by HEIs is based on the credit system, and defines:
- Credits are the measure of the number of hours of student workload.
- The number of hours of student workload to that is be considered in the definition of the number of credits includes all forms of academic work, namely contact hours, hours for practical learning (internships), field work, individual and group study and evaluation.

The credit system in higher education contributes to students' mobility and to recognition of prior learning.

- Students' mobility between national education institutions of the same or different subsystems, national and foreign institutions is ensured through the credit system, on the basis of the principle of mutual recognition of the value of learning and the acquired competences
- Recognition of prior learning: Education institutions recognise, through the credit system, the professional competences, and the postsecondary training of candidates and enrolled students, through the special access modalities, which are to be defined in a specific legal Act.

Besides, the Decree-Law n° 22/2012 in Article 52 stipulates that the number of credits allocated by curricular unit is defined in accordance with a set of principles, amongst the others the following: "The number of credits corresponding to the workload of one curricular year in full time is 60". This definition is aligned with ECTS.

The credit system is applied in HEIs as follows[203]:
- One credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of workload (all forms of learning – contact hours, autonomous study, project work, laboratory work, evaluation).
- One curricular year (full time) corresponds to 60 credits. One semester (full time) corresponds to 30 credits.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF
Policy institutions
The Ministry of Education leads education system policy, from preschool to higher education. The Secretary of State of Education is responsible for higher education policy.

The recently established ARES implements and supervises the system of quality assurance in higher education.

Professional education policy is conducted by the Deputy Secretary of State for Professional Training and Innovation, at the Ministry of Finance.

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203. University of Cabo Verde, Deliberation Nr 005/CONSU/2013 of 19/03/2012. Establishes the norms of curricular organisation and credit system in the courses of licenciatura of the University of Cabo Verde. https://unicv.edu.cv/universidade/organizacao/orgaos/conselho-da-universidade/deliberacoes/39delibera%C3%A7%C3%A3o-n%C2%B0-005-consu-2013-estabelece-as-normas-deorganiza%C3%A7%C3%A3o-curricular-e-do-sistema-de-cr%C3%A9ditos-nos-cursos-degradua%C3%A7%C3%A3o-da-uni-cvdownload

Governance of the NQF, in the frame of the SNQ, is assured by the UC-SNQ, established by DecreeLaw N° 62/2009 (14/12/2009). A decade later the UC-SNQ remains the core governing structure and its leading and coordinating role was reinforced (Decree-Law N° 7/2018). The UC-SNQ is led by the Unit Coordinator and is composed by a) the Inter-ministerial Technical Committee for Qualification (CTIQ), b) the Executive Secretariat, and c) the National Commission of Professional Equivalences (CNEP), a specialised body of the SNQ.

UC-SNQ is the central service tasked with the coordination, design, and technical support in the domain of professional qualification policies. UC-SNQ ensures the construction and integrity of the National Qualifications System, with the aim to promote and develop the integration of technical-professional training offers, through the National Qualifications Catalogue (CNQ), as well as the assessment and certification of competences.

The social partners contribute to the coordination of the SNQ through statutory participation in the CTIQ and in CNEP. Other entities that integrate the governance and implementation of the SNQ include the Institute of Employment and Professional Training (IEFP), Sectoral Technical Committees (CTS), and higher education institutions (HEIs).

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders
As part of the tasks of creating and managing the National Catalogue of Qualifications, temporary support and consultation bodies are created from UC-SNQ, namely:
- Sector Technical Committees (SC), responsible for technical support in the design of professional profiles and associated training modules related with professional qualifications corresponding to each of the professional families of the CNQ.
- Sector Councils (COS) responsible for the validation of profiles and training modules of each of the professional qualifications elaborated by the CTS and approved by UC-SNQ.

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

VNFIL / RPL (RVCC) arrangements
Recognition Validation and Certification of Competencies (RVCC) is one of the statutory components of the SNQ and is organically linked with:
- **NQF**: Through the application of the learning outcomes approach. The primacy of learning outcomes in designing and assessing qualifications enable the access to qualifications

by validation and certification of acquired competences.

- **CNQ:** Through the right to acquire any of the registered qualifications via processes of recognition, validation and certification of acquired competences, in accordance with the legislative-regulatory framework.
- **Individual register of qualifications and competences**: Registers individual acquired competences and qualifications and identifies the competences missing to the completion of a certain qualification, thereby contributes to build individual trajectories of adequate training. Currently in the process of legislative regulation.

The Decree-Law Nr 54/2014 of 22 September, on RVCC, defines the policy and conceptual underpinnings of the promotion of validation of competences acquired in all contexts of learning. Social and labour market inclusion, economic productivity, valorisation of all types of learning and reinforcement of flexible lifelong learning paths of citizens are the benefits expected from effective implementation of this policy.

- "People acquire, with their life experience, namely in professional activities, knowledge and competences relevant for the exercise of many activities. Those competences can and shall be formally certified, and, if necessary, complemented with training adjusted to individual needs, thereby promoting access to higher levels of qualification." *Source: Decree-Law Nr 54/2014*

Stage of development of RPL (RVCC)

In Cabo Verde, RVCC is in the activation stage. In 2020, the UC-SNQ is developing additional instruments to be pilot-tested in the context of RVCC.

RVCC is defined in Article 3 of the Decree-Law n° 54/2014, as the formal process enabling individuals to obtain the recognition, validation and certification of his/her skills and competences, independently of the ways and contexts in which these competences were developed.

Main features of RVCC as a system:
- **Target group**: Individuals over 25 years of age with at least 5 years of professional/ employment experience.
- **Governance of the system**: UC-SNQ coordinates the organisation, functioning and elaboration of referential for professional certification and assessment standards. UC-SNQ accredits the certifying entities, monitors and supervises them and provides technical and methodological support.
- **Accreditation**: Only accredited certifying entities can provide services of the RVCC system, in accordance with the legal requirements. Substantive experience in professional training and in the targeted professional families are among the key criteria of accreditation of certifying entities. The accreditation can be revoked under circumstances of breach of the legal requirements and obligations, low performance or at request of the entity.

Figure 6. Different paths to a common goal – certification of competences within the SNQ
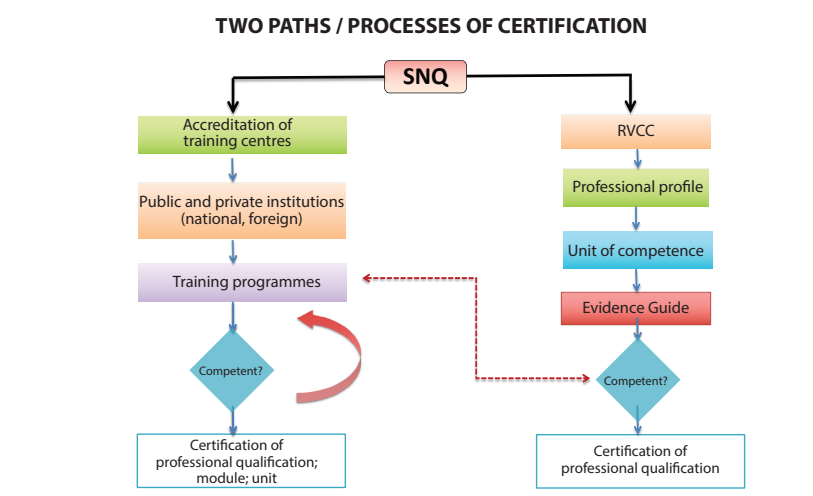
Source: UC-SNQ: Presentation at ACQF webinar of 8 May 2020

The RVCC process integrates the following phases:
- **Phase 1**: Information and guidance – first orientation for candidates on the process and viability in each case.
- **Phase 2**: Recognition of competences – candidates identify the knowledge and competences acquired throughout life, applying a methodology of *Bilan de competences* (Skills Audit). Main outputs: Individual professional portfolio, assessor's report identifying the candidates' competences by units of competence and the professional activities to be validated from the provided evidence.
- **Phase 3**: Validation of competences – evaluation of the competences in correspondence with the professional profiles of the CNQ. Based on evaluation instruments adapted to the nature of the competence, for example, technical interview, practical examination. The jury comprises an assessor, an evaluator, and a representative of the enterprise sector (independent evaluator). Output: Deliberation of the jury on the validation process.
- **Phase 4**: Certification of competences – the jury certifies that the assessed and validated competences have a formal value in relation to a predefined referential. In case of partial certification, the assessor and the evaluator propose a personal qualification plan, encompassing the units of competence, which were not certified. With this personal plan, the candidate has access to an adequate modality of training or to self-training in the context of the SNQ. At conclusion of the training programme, the candidate resumes the RVCC process.

UC-SNQ started practical implementation of RVCC, via two main actions: a) several rounds of training of RVCC professionals (assessors, coaches); b) piloting of RVCC process for priority sectors. One of the first pilot of RVCC processes took place in the sector Hotels-Restaurants-Tourism (Professional Qualification: Services of Food and Drinks, level 3). In 05/2021 a total of 32 candidates from different public and private organisations started their RVCC process to acquire the professional qualification Administrative Services and Client and User Support (level 4). More information is available in the UCSNQ website.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
A major strength of the NQF in Cabo Verde results from its operationalisation as inherent part of the qualifications system – the NQF is not a separated policy instrument but is integrated. The NQF has been legally defined and organised as component of the SNQ, working in complementarity with the national qualifications catalogue (CNQ), the system of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC / RPL) and the credit system. This systemic approach has contributed to the policy robustness of NQF, supported by a stable governance setting (led by UC-SNQ) and the involvement of social partners, sector councils and other consultative bodies such as Inter-ministerial Technical Committee for Qualification (CTIQ).

In the decade of evolution, the CNQ has been populated with new professional qualifications in 15 professional families (sectors) developed according to a common competence-based approach. RVCC is becoming a reality for workers in different economic sectors and human and technical capacities have been built to operationalise RVCC processes within common parameters of quality and credibility.

The way forward needs to move towards closer cooperation of the NQF with higher education qualifications, in line with the objectives of the NQF and the SNQ.

Qualifications registers and databases
The online **National Catalogue of Qualifications** is available at the home page of UC-SNQ. Currently, it includes 63 professional qualifications of four NQF levels (2, 3, 4, and 5), distributed in 15 professional families. The webpage of each professional family contains extensive information on the respective qualifications, in particular the professional profile by units of competence and the training plan by modules: example.

Moreover, the CNQ webpage includes comprehensive information on the legal and methodological aspects guiding development of qualifications, on the professional families and the related sector studies (example of study of IT sector).

The updated **register of accredited programmes in higher education leading to qualifications** is managed by the Higher Education Regulatory Agency (ARES) and the summary list is published at Agência Reguladora do Ensino Superior. By mid 2020 this register includes 205 accredited programmes of NQF levels 6, 7, and 8 (licenciatura, master and doctorate).

Qualification documents
The format and award of certificates and diplomas included in the NQF are regulated by legislation. UC-SNQ and ARES supervise the award of qualifications in vocational training and higher education respectively.

UC-SNQ carries out the homologation of certificates delivered by all training entities duly accredited by the competent authority, pursuant to 11 of Decree-Law No. 53/2014, of September 22, which regulates the new Legal Regime of Vocational / Professional Training. Homologation is obligatory for certificates of initial vocational training, certificates of professional qualification included in the CNQ, and certificates of modular training courses.

Recognition of foreign qualifications
In **professional training**
Decree-Law Nr 7/2018 of 7 February is the main legal basis regulating professional equivalence. The CNEP is a specialised organ with technical and scientific autonomy to evaluate and issue opinions and recommendations on professional equivalence of courses and other training activities carried our abroad or in foreign schools established in Cabo Verde. CNEP operates in close cooperation with UCSNQ, which homologates the opinions on equivalence issued by CNEP.

In **higher education**
ARES is the institution in charge of the recognition of academic degrees and diplomas.

In Cabo Verde, the recognition of academic degrees and higher education diplomas awarded by foreign HEIs is regulated by Portaria nº 49/2013, of 15 October[204], and by the Decree-Law n°. 22/2012, of 7 August, which approves the Legal Regime of Degrees and Diplomas of Higher Education (RJGDES).

Portaria nº 49/2013 standardises the procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications, making them more transparent, equitable and simple, and introduces changes to previous regimes. This broadens the recognition of foreign qualifications to diplomas of higher education courses not leading to academic degrees, of a level and nature identical to higher technical-professional courses. It introduces simplified procedures, establishing in the recognition of a system of precedence, which ensures a more automatic process on the decision, avoiding repetition, reducing costs and response times on the decision of recognitions.

The recognition of foreign degrees and diplomas is the act that allows to generically recognise a degree or diploma of foreign higher education, whose level, objectives and nature are considered equal in Cabo Verde to bachelor, master and doctor or diploma. The recognition process lasts approximately 30 days

upon submission of the full file, conditional on the timely response of the concerned foreign HEI.

Referencing to regional framework/other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks
Cabo Verde is an open society and economy, which values cooperation with Europe and Africa. The objectives defined in the NQF legal act (Joint Portaria nº 10/2020) reflect these values. Article 4, e) stipulates: "Promote close links with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) and with other NQFs, notably with NQFs of ECOWAS states to support credit transfer and accumulation in education, vocational training and higher education, with the purpose to improve people's mobility and facilitate recognition of acquired skills and competences".

Cabo Verde has expressed interest to compare with the EQF and participate in related activities.

International cooperation
Cabo Verde participates in international cooperation and networks in the domain of education and training, notably:
- African Union: HAQAA project, ACQF project
- ECOWAS
- Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP)

The Government promotes bilateral cooperation and exchanges with other African countries, seeking to share experience and expertise in the domain of qualifications systems and education.

International donor support
Cabo Verde and the European Union (EU) have strong cooperation ties in the context of the Special Partnership. The 11th Ministerial meeting (June 2021) of Foreign Affairs EU-Cabo Verde reiterated the strong commitment to an enhanced political dialogue within the Special Partnership, of particular relevance in this period marked by the pandemic and the need for a swift recovery. The partners reaffirmed their attachment to the shared values and principles underpinning the relationship: respect for human rights, democracy, good governance and rule of law, and commitment to multilateralism, international peace and security. The focus of the next bilateral multi-annual programme 2021-202 will be supporting socio-economic recovery based on a green and inclusive growth model taking into account Cabo Verde's Small Island Developing State (SIDS) specificities. The Amendment to the Visa Facilitation Agreement EU-Cabo Verde will reduce the cost and simplify the requirements.

204. https://portondinosilhas.gov.cv/images/igrpportal/img/documentos/1AD97C9EB7221E20E053E600040A6AAF.pdf

Cabo Verde maintains bilateral cooperation with Germany, Japan and other countries. GIZ and JICA support development of renewable energy, and electrical mobility. Portugal is an important bilateral partner, cooperating in several sectors, with special emphasis on education and health.

Important lessons and future plans

Can the NQF contribute more effectively to its objective of integration of the subsystems of education and training and promotion of lifelong learning?

The NQF aims to promote better integration of education and training subsystems and convergence between academic and professional education and training. While evidence of such convergence is visible in NQF Level 5 – attractive and provided by both professional training institutions and schools, but also by HEI – the analysed sources and websites show that the CNQ has been limited to qualifications of professional training (Levels 2 to 5). This path has been justified by factors of policy and institutional nature, but there are enablers of a refreshed dialogue across the subsystems.

The dialogue between the leading agencies – ARES for higher education and UC-SNQ for professional training – can reinvigorate the development of a common path and joint milestones in implementing the NQF. At least four opportunities can be identified to stimulate this dialogue:

- A common understanding and benchmarks for Level 5 qualifications.
- The place of secondary technical education with double certification – a starting point to professional training and/or to higher education.
- Shared concepts on outcomes of modular training for purposes of lifelong learning.
- The shared use of the CNQ for qualifications of all subsystems.

The **perspective developments of the SNQ** are planned in that the UC-SNQ was entrusted with the development of a wide range of policies and instruments the coming years. This portfolio of developments comprises the framework of key competences, the credit system for professional education and training, modular training, model of dual professional training, distance learning model and the model of "training checks".

Infographic of the NQF/NQF overview table

Table 12. Structure of the NQF – accredited qualifications

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION
1	Diploma of basic obligatory education
2	Diploma of basic adult education with double certification pathway corresponding to professional qualification of Level 2
	Certificate of professional qualification of Level 2
3	Certificate of Secondary Education (10th class)
	Certificate of professional qualification of Level 3
4	Diploma of secondary education (12th class general strand)
	Diploma of secondary education (12th class of technical strand corresponding to professional qualification of Level 4) with double certification
	Certificate of professional qualification of Level 4 with double certification
	Certificate of professional qualification of Level 4
5	Diploma of higher professional studies (DESP) with training of professional qualifications of Level 5 (CESP – Courses Higher Professional Studies).
	Certificate of the complementary professionalising class (ACP) with training of professional qualification of Level 5
	Certificate of professional qualification of Level 5 with double certification
	Certificate of professional qualification of Level 5
6	Academic degree licenciatura
7	Academic degree master
8	Academic degree doctorate

Source: Portaria conjunta 10/2020. Annex 1.

Abbreviations

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework	HAQAA	Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation
ARES	Regulatory Agency of Higher Education	HEI	Higher Education Institution
AU	African Union	IEFP	Institute of Employment and Professional Training
AUC	African Union Commission	ME	Ministry of Education
CESP	Courses Higher Professional Studies	REC	Regional Economic Community
CNEP	National Commission of Professional Equivalences	NQF	National Qualifications Framework
CNQ	National Catalogue of Qualifications	PEDS	Strategic Plan of Sustainable Development
CTIQ	Interministerial Technical Qualification Committee	RVCC	Recognition Validation and Certification of Competences
CTS	Sectoral Technical Committees	SADC	Southern African Development Community
DESP	Diploma of Higher Professional Study	SNQ	National Qualifications System
ECTS	European Credit and Transfer System	STC-EST	Specialised Technical Committee-on Education, Science and Technology
EAC	East African Community	UC-SNQ	Coordination Unit of the National Qualifications System
ECOWAS	Economic Community of Western African States		
EU	European Union		
ETF	European Training Foundation		
EQF	European Qualifications Framework		

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e-ME: http://portal.minedu.gov.cv/

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Prepared by
The European Training Foundation

CHILE

Introduction and context

The Qualifications Framework (QF), included in the Law on Higher Education 21091, is led by the Ministry of Education, with support from various stakeholders from the education, training, and labour market sectors stakeholders. This technical instrument will make it possible to recognize prior learning and relevant work experience gained by individuals in a non-formal or informal way, thus facilitating further training and employment processes.

The QF is a guiding and reference instrument that organises and recognizes prior learning and relevant work experience in a gradient of several levels and comprised of knowledge, skills and competencies. This instrument is designed to contribute to the promotion of lifelong learning and to the integration of formal education and job training, while simultaneously promoting the demands of real world needs within training and formal education.

Chile now has a qualifications framework in the Technical Professional sector (TVET QF). This work has been the culmination of a series of past achievements and events; among the most relevant and important are the following:

Figure 7. Timeline of milestones to Qualifications Framework

2013
Mining Skills Council publishes the Qualifications Framework for Mining.

2017
Qualifications Development in the Logistics, IT and Mining Sector.

2017
First experience of implementation of the sectoral Qualifications Development in mining in 54 Technical Vocational Training Institutions.

2018
Law 21.091 on Higher Education is published, which mentions the MCTP.

2020
Qualifications Development in the Tourism Sector and its implementation in 19 Technical Vocational and Training Institutions in the sector.

2021
The Undersecretary of Higher Education submits to the Minister of Education the proposal for the implementation of the Qualifications Framework.

2009
Chile Califica presents a proposal for a National Qualifications Framework.

2014
Chile Valora publishes the Qualifications Framework for Labor Training and Certification.

2017
Qualifications Development in the Logistics, IT and Mining Sector.

2018
Publication of the Framework of Professional Technical Qualifications in the Multisector of Maintenance 4.0.

2019
Implementation of the TVET QF in the Maintenance 4.0 sector in 18 Technical Vocational and Training Institutions.

2021
Qualifications Development in the Energy Sector.

Source: Authors

Policy Objectives

The main purposes of the QF are to strengthen the bridge between the labour market and the education and training sector, and to broaden the knowledge of all stakeholders regarding the importance of TVET. It is expected to influence and contribute to the creation of future curricula aimed at satisfying the realities of the labour market.

In the construction of the TVET QF, two fundamental premises were used as a guide: first, that the product be the result of the joint work between the State, the different stakeholders associated with TVET and the labour market; second, that the instrument should accurately reflect the knowledge and skills required for the labour market. To assist these aims both phases of product construction were carried out via iterative processes of dialogue with relevant stakeholders (MINEDUC, 2017).

Chile is part of the Pacific Alliance Network of Qualifications Framework Specialists (REMCAP) established in 2018. REMCAP seeks to develop equivalencies and training mechanisms through the exchanges between National Qualifications Frameworks, the creation of quality recognition systems, and the application of best practices for quality assurance in TVET. These mechanisms seek to promote an increased mobility of skilled workers within the member countries of the Pacific Alliance.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The elaboration of the TVET QF demonstrates the complexity and scope of such a project. The need to have a system that provides signals on equivalencies and clear trajectories between levels of competence development becomes central in the establishment of an integrated education system. Thus, this instrument responds to the need to generate articulations within the educational system and job training in order to integrate the multiple forms of lifelong learning and education.

The purpose of TVET QF is to facilitate the development of people's educational and labour trajectories, as well as to strengthen the quality and relevance between the education offer and the needs of the labour market, contributing to the understanding and legibility of the entire system.

The qualifications framework:

- Establishes a common language between the education and training sector and the labour market through the development of qualifications.
- Organizes and classifies sectorial qualifications and labour profiles in the levels established by the qualification's framework.
- Proposes training and labour routes between qualifications in any level of education and training.
- Contributes to the relevance of the education and training offer by improving the links between education and the needs of the labour market.
- Provides information for the users of the system, contributing to decision-making.
- Facilitates the recognition of individuals' lifelong experience and learning.
- Contributes to the articulation between different educational levels, and between formal education and job training.
- Highlights the links and interaction between different institutions and training levels, facilitating the recognition of competencies according to transparent criteria.

The TVET QF is made up of learning outcomes that are structured in a matrix of TVET QF descriptors, that is, statements that explain what the person can do, knows, and understands. It is arranged in five levels of increasing complexity and across three dimensions. The five levels cover material learnt and mastered, ranging from very low to high levels of complexity and frequently associated with training obtained in Higher Education.

The descriptors at each level specify the learning outcomes or competencies that can be demonstrated by an individual at a particular level. The levels of the TVET QF are equivalent to the levels of the 2011 International Standard Classification of Education. Formalizing these equivalencies makes training paths more flexible, recognizes the careers of individuals and strengthens transfer bridges between different levels and types of lifelong learning.

Institutional arrangements and engagement of stakeholders

Institutional responsibilities are currently distributed among different Ministries that together cover the areas related to the development of a qualifications framework. This shows the complexity of the task and the need to strengthen and formalize the relationships and flow of information that a

qualifications framework requires. It is essential to establish links with the various stakeholders: the labour market, including workers and employers, and the education and training sectors.

In order to advance in the implementation of the qualifications framework, a series of actions have been defined and prioritized in a roadmap containing three scales: short term, medium term and long term:

- **Short-term actions**
    o Define the objectives of the TVET QF: The general definitions that underpin the creation of the TVET QF instrument refer to the importance of operating as a bridge between the education sector and the labour market. The importance of generating a common objective and language among the actors involved in the process of designing and implementing the QF is vital for its effective implementation in order to facilitate dialogue and promote activity.
    o Diagnosis of the pilot programme and articulation at different levels: Among the outcomes of Law 21.091 is the implementation of a pilot of the TVET QF, the results of which include the diagnosis of the programme and the level and type of articulation between the different levels of training involved. The result of this experience provides relevant input, such as the articulation nodes, which allow generating recommendations to advance in the systemic and institutional actions for the implementation of the TVET QF.
    o Establish a National Coordinating Authority for Qualifications that assumes the technical role of coordination among the different actors: The objective of the creation of a National Coordinating Authority for Qualifications is to assume the role of coordination in the establishment of basic guidelines for the System. What is important at this point is the creation and positioning of an institution dedicated to the QF task, linked to institutions representing the educational and employment sectors, with sufficient independence so that the links established do not depend on political changes.
    o Develop and implement a communications strategy and awareness campaign on the uses and benefits of the QF.
    o Strengthen the capacities of the stakeholders of the TVET System to enable them to undertake activities relevant to the implementation of the QF Among the stakeholders that will need to develop their capacities are all the professionals of the educational sector whose functions include the design, updating, implementation and facilitation of vocational training.
    o Update the curricula of school-based TVET, integrating the TVET QF as a reference. This process is carried out by the Curriculum and Evaluation Unit of the Ministry of Education and approved by the National Education Council. In the process of updating the curricular instruments, it has been proposed to incorporate both the outcome descriptors of the TVET QF dimensions for the relevant qualification levels, the qualifications identified in the sectoral populations and/ or the ChileValora labour profiles of labour competencies.

- **Medium-term actions**
    o Availability of a single channel of information on the QF. This action requires the definition of the information needs of the system and the IT architecture for sharing information among institutions that could be articulated for the implementation of the QF. The integration of this information would facilitate the management of courses and careers available for people in the training and employment routes associated with the QF design. It would also allow public institutions to make decisions regarding the labour markets that require strengthening and development in order to direct training promotion campaigns in those areas. All of this while actively providing this information towards companies, workers, students, and training institutions.
    o Establish spaces for the participation of the labour market to encourage the use of the TVET QF: In this sense, the Technical Vocational Training Advisory Council facilitates this dialogue by incorporating stakeholders from different sectors in the conversation, who will be asked to participate in the development of TVET guidelines, thus ensuring the relevance and quality of the TVET QF. Among the bodies representing the labour market are the Mining Skills Council and the Skills Council of the maintenance 4.0 sector, the Human Capital Committees of the Ministry of Energy and the Under-secretariat of Tourism, the Sectoral Employment Skills Bodies, and bodies created under the auspices of ChileValora. In this regard, one important objective is to motivate, structure and assist the participation of all these bodies in the design and implementation of the TVET QF.
    o Design a qualifications system with all its components and for all training levels: Understanding that a qualifications system

refers to all the systemic and institutional actions that a country could carry out to achieve the recognition of people's learning outcomes between the different training levels and the labour market. Among the first actions necessary to begin designing the system are those related to the definition of quality criteria, for qualifications, recognition and training provision systems.

- **Long-term actions**
  - o Strengthen the functions of the National Qualifications Authority to enable the QF to be implemented: Strengthening the functions refers to the progressive review of the needs presented by the implementation of the Qualifications Framework. This implies a constant evaluation of progress, systemic and institutional facilitators and obstacles resulting in the modification and adjustment of functions. As part of the strengthening of functions, a continuous evaluation of the capacities related to the implementation of the TVET QF will be required, including a review of international experiences.
  - o Advancing in the use of the QF at all levels of education and job training: This refers to the possibility of making sustained progress both in formal education (secondary and higher levels) and job training (training and certification), given that only a systemic advance will allow generating the links that allow and facilitate the articulation and transit of people in the system, through the recognition of their learning. In this sense, a review of the incentives to adhere to the qualifications framework and the constant and sustained evaluation of processes, results and impact will be required in order to identify levels of progress and the closing of gaps.
  - o Identify the potential legal modifications necessary for the QF operation

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning

The MINEDUC Articulation Agreement has allowed the validation of subjects between secondary and tertiary TVET. This has generated greater fluidity in the articulation process between secondary and tertiary level TVET. This agreement allows students from Technical-Professional Secondary Schools to validate subjects in Tertiary Technical Education Institutions and gives them greater possibilities of articulation since they do not require a special bilateral agreement between the secondary and tertiary level institutes.

NQF Implementation and impact

Sectoral qualifications have been developed through a methodological exercise called "Sectoral qualifications development". This consists of the allocation of standardized profiles and their competencies in the levels of the TVET QF, having as a result the sectoral qualifications and training and employment routes.

The sectoral qualifications development is a process that leads to the construction of sectoral qualifications, according to the competencies required by one or more sector of the labour market. The sectors that have developed their sector's qualifications are as follows:

Mining Sector Qualifications Development: The Mining Skills Council (CCM) was the first skills council in the country to lead a sectoral Qualifications Development in 2013. This instrument integrates the most relevant occupational profiles for the sector, in qualifications and competency development routes linked to the main value chain processes of the industry: Extraction, Processing and Maintenance, as well as key processes such as Integrated Operation Centers (IOC), Mobile Equipment and Tailings. In 2019, an update of these sectoral qualifications, the Technical Professional Qualifications Framework, was developed based on the TVET QF (Mining Skills Council, 2019).

Logistics Sector Alignment: The Transport and Logistics sector developed its process in 2017. It generated a map of the production process, and a functional analysis of the process and the training and employment route.

ICT Sectoral Qualifications Development: In the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Sector, the subsector "Information Technologies" was developed in 2017. This subsector considered the functional analysis, mapping of productive processes and qualifications for two productive processes — software development and IT processes. The sector specialists decided, in spite of this, to unify the qualifications in a single Training and Labour Route with 17 qualifications that populate the TVET QF from Levels 2 to 5.

Maintenance 4.0 Sectoral Qualifications Development: The Confederation of Production and Commerce (CPC) developed the Maintenance 4.0 Sector Mapping in 2018. As a result of this exercise, 20 qualifications, 90 units of competence, two training plans and the Training and Employment Route for Installation and Maintenance 4.0 specialties were defined.

Tourism Sectoral Qualifications Development: Between 2019 and 2020, 34 job profiles and their competencies were positioned at the levels of the TVET QF, 24 qualifications and three training and employment routes were defined, based on the results of a study identifying relevant initiatives and challenges facing the sector. As a starting point, three subsectors were considered: tourism, hotel and catering and food and drink

Energy Sectoral Qualifications Development: The qualifications development of the energy sector, completed in 2021, is the last alignment developed to date and is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Energy. This process has been designed to generate an articulated training and work system, relevant to the needs of the labour market and that, at the same time, favors educational and labour trajectories in the Chilean energy sector. The work developed considered the analysis of the productive processes of wind energy generation, photovoltaic solar energy generation, electricity transmission processes, electricity distribution processes, commercialization and technical support processes, photovoltaic home distributed generation and energy efficiency (EE), where 41 qualifications, 68 occupational profiles and 157 units of labour competences were defined.

Forestry Sector: The study in the forestry sector, led by the Chilean Timber Corporation (CORMA), is in the process of being developed, and, so far, has generated a basis for articulating the training offer with the demand for qualified workers in the sector. This study will make it possible to identify the training and employment routes associated with the main processes of the forestry sector value chain. These will be decided in a representative and mutually agreed manner and will provide a clear guiding message to the education and vocational training world to continue in projects related to the development of human capital.

Construction Sectoral Qualifications Development: The Chilean Chamber of Construction (CChC) is currently working on the Construction Sector Alignment; participating in this endeavor is the technical team of the OTIC of the Chilean Chamber of Construction, representatives of Higher Education Institutions, ChileValora and MINEDUC. Once the resulting instrument receives formal approval, it will be available to the public sector, training institutions, unions, companies, trade unions, workers, and the general public.

Referencing to the regional framework/ other frameworks

N/A

Important lessons learnt and future plans

The proposal for the implementation of the QF is the result of a collaborative work between different stakeholders from the public and private sectors, representatives of the labour market, representatives of educational and training institutions, representatives of workers, and experts who have provided evidence on the relevance of this instrument and its value in generating more fluidity and flexibility between training and the labour market. The process of designing a qualifications framework can be relatively quick; however, its implementation and the development of trust among the actors and its credibility may take longer. For this reason, it is expected that the QF will be part of a broader policy, given that changes in education and training for work usually take several years, even decades, to be implemented and yield outcomes. The QF is no longer a simple government initiative, becoming instead a national policy irrespective of which political party is at the helm. It is a policy that will transform Technical and Vocational Training in Chile.

Abbreviations

CChC	Chilean Chamber of Construction	OTIC	Intermediate Technical Training Organizations
CCM	Mining Skill Council		
CINE	International Standard Classification of Education	QF	Qualifications Framework
		REMCAP	Pacific Alliance Network of Qualifications Framework Specialists
CORFO	Chilean Economic Development Agency		
CPC	Confederation of Production and Commerce	SENCE	National Training and Employment Service
IT	Information Technology	TVET QF	Technical Vocational Education and Training Qualifications Framework
OTEC	Technical Training Agencies		

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CHINA

Introduction and context

China is the most populous country in the world, with more than 1.4 billion inhabitants (NBS, 2021) and the largest developing country in the world: its per capita GDP is below the global average and ranks around 63 in the world (IMF, 2021). In 2020, the eradication of extreme poverty for 30 million people in rural areas was an important milestone in China. Since then, living standards and educational equality and quality have improved greatly and higher education has entered the universalization stage with a gross enrolment rate of 51.6% (MOE, 2020a).

China has a state-run public education system which took its current shape between 1977 and 1980 and is managed by the State Council and local government at all levels. All citizens must attend school for at least nine years, which are funded by the Chinese Government and include 6 years of primary education, starting at age 6 or 7, and 3 years of junior secondary education for ages 12 to 15. After junior secondary school, there is an option to attend three years of senior high school or secondary vocational school, which completes the upper secondary education. Since 1982, the number of private primary and secondary schools has increased year by year and the number of enrolled students has grown to 17.7 million, accounting for 6.1 per cent of the student population in 2019 (MOE, 2020a).

China has different types of formal higher education: for-degree higher education, non-degree higher education, full-time and part-time higher education and open and distance education. According to data for 2019, there are 2,956 higher education institutions (HEIs) in China, of which 1,265 are universities offering Bachelor degrees and 1,423 identify as higher vocational education institutes. In addition, there are 268 adult HEIs including 45 open universities. The gross enrolment rate for higher education is 51.6 per cent and there are 2,858 college students for every 100,000 people. There are a further 757 non-government HEIs in China catering to a total of 7.08 million students, including 257 independent colleges and 1 college for adults (MOE, 2020a).

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 (MHRSS). National vocational qualification examination is an essential part of the Chinese labour employment system, which was introduced in 1993 by assessment agencies approved by the government. Accreditation of learning outcomes is granted following the assessment of skill levels or vocational qualifications provided by an institute; these assessments are based on vocational skill standards or qualification requirements established by the government. In January 2020, the *National Vocational Qualification Catalog* released by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security showed that there were 58 vocational qualifications including 23 for level evaluation, and 81 technical qualifications including 76 for level evaluation. On December 30, 2020, Premier Li Keqiang presided over an executive meeting of the State Council and decided to cancel the level evaluation qualifications step by step and implement socialized vocational and technical level recognition (MHRSS, 2020).

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 entitled Research and Practice of the National Continuing Education Learning Outcomes Accreditation, Accumulation and Transfer System. To this end, OUC established a learning outcome qualifications framework (LOQ), which, in the form of credit banks, aims to recognize, validate and transfer learning outcomes among vocational colleges, continuing and adult learning institutes and various non-academic training institutions.

In 2016, Guangdong Province established the *Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework* to develop pluralistic 'growth pathways' by connecting various types of education and learning outcomes (Department of Education of Guangdong Province,2016). It is the first standardized qualifications framework jointly

established by various government departments, educational institutions and industries in China. In March 2017, Guangdong Provincial Quality and Technical Supervision Bureau approved a *Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework Level Standard*, which is China's first qualifications framework standard at provincial level.

In 2019, the Department of Vocational Education and Adult Education of the Ministry of Education commissioned the Central Institute for Vocational and Technical Education of the Ministry of Education to carry out the research work entitled *Research and Practice of National Qualifications Framework on Vocational Education*. After two years of effort, based on international comparison and experience acquired by OUC, Guangdong province, Chongqing municipality and Jiangsu province in implementing qualifications frameworks, learning outcome frameworks and vocational education and training qualifications frameworks, the research team proposed the *National Qualification Framework Level Standard* and the *National Qualification Framework Level Standard Manual*, comprising the qualifications framework levels and standards, Specification of Competency Standards (SCS), internal quality assurance mechanism, external quality review, outcome-based evaluation, credit accumulation, mutual recognition and transfer mechanism and credit bank system construction, etc. A three-in-one China lifelong learning qualifications framework system entitled *Qualifications Framework Standard + Learning Outcome Accreditation and Quality Assurance + Credit Bank System* was proposed as a basic system for lifelong learning, supported by big data, artificial intelligence and blockchain technology (Zhang, Xie and Zhang, 2021).

*China's Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (*hereinafter referred to as the *13th Five-Year Outline*) and *Education Modernization 2035* clearly proposed the establishment of a national qualifications framework, learning outcome accreditation and credit bank construction. The National Social Science Fund's National Qualifications Framework Research project was granted to conduct comprehensive and systematic research on the qualifications framework construction. This was completed on 26 July 2021. In 2021, the Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange of the Ministry of Education completed a comparative research project on the degree systems and qualifications frameworks of China and foreign countries. Although China has made great efforts to develop and practise its NVQCS and QF, educational and economical inequalities persist 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 can be 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 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Education Report 2020*, over 660,000 Chinese students studied abroad in 2019 (OECD, 2020). In addition, the export of labour has increased over the years: in 2000, an estimated 425,667 Chinese citizens emigrated for work; in 2019, this number rose to 992,000 (MOC, 2020:11). China therefore needs to build a unified qualification framework to strengthen the comparability of qualifications and promote international mobility, especially for the training of skilled talent serving the countries along the Belt and Road.

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 regarding workplace training, which is compulsory for students enrolled in higher vocational education institutes. There is also insufficient planning to meet the needs of the labour market. The coordination between labour supply and demand is also poor (OECD, 2020).

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 education and 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 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 society and the economy;

- strengthen the international competitiveness of the labour force in response to the challenges of the knowledge economy;
- promote nationwide lifelong learning.
- From a personal perspective, the aim was to:
- provide more choices to meet 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 *13th Five-Year Outline*, promulgated in 2016, proposed a personal learning account and credit accumulative system to smooth the continuing education and lifelong learning channel, along with a national qualifications framework, and promoted 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.

In 2019, China's *Education Modernization 2035* plan issued by the General Offices of CPC Central Committee and the State Council encouraged actors to 'establish an institutional environment for lifelong learning for all, establish a national qualifications framework, establish a sound national credit bank system and a learning outcome accreditation system' (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2019). The notice on the issuance of an Action Plan for the Improvement of Vocational Education Quality (2020-2023), the work of nine national departments including the Ministry of Education, proposed that actors 'promote the construction of a national qualifications framework and establish a mechanism for recognition, accumulation and transfer of learning achievements of all levels and types of education and training' (MOE, 2020c).

On 29 October 2020, the proposal of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on formulating the *Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development* and *Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035,* approved by the Fifth Plenum of the 19th Central Committee, proposed to 'make use of the advantages of online education, improve the lifelong learning system, and build a learning society' (The State Council of the People's Republic of China,2020). In 2021, the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the outline of the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035 proposed to 'deepen integration of general and vocational education and realize mutual recognition and vertical circulation of vocational and technical education and general education' and 'unblock channels for mutual recognition and conversion of different types of learning outcomes' (The State Council of the People's Republic of China,2021). The establishment of a qualifications framework for linking and communicating various learning outcomes has become a major strategy for building a lifelong learning system that serves the entire population of China.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

Levels and use of learning outcomes in NVQCS

The NVQCS has five levels (see **Table 1**); 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 them to set up a business in China.

Table 13. Levels and competence demands of NVQC

LEVEL	NAME OF CERTIFICATE	COMPETENCE DEMAND
5	Primary worker certificate	Can complete regular work independently with basic skills.
4	Intermediate worker certificate	In addition to the requirements of Level 5, Level 4 certificate holders can also cooperate with other workers and carry out more complicated work with specialized skills in certain situations.
3	Advanced worker certificate	Can complete complex and irregular work with specialized skills and special competences skilfully; masters the key skills of his/her own occupation; can deal with and solve technical challenges independently; can make innovations in technology; can organize and supervise other workers; can train general staff.
2	Technician certificate	Can carry out complex work including irregular work with basic skills and specialized competence; can deal with workplace issues independently; can supervise other workers and assist training of general staff.
1	Senior technician certificate	Can complete complex and irregular work with specialized skills and special competence in every area of own occupation; masters the key operational skills of their own occupation skilfully; can deal with and solve difficult challenges independently; can make innovations in technology; can organize technical reform and innovation; can lead systematic training for specialized skills.

Source: MHRSS (2018).

Table 2 illustrates the corresponding relationship between the NVQC and two other sub-frameworks.

- The NVQC is designed for specialized industries such as medicine and law, without which workers cannot be employed.

- The Qualification Certificate for Professional and Technical Personnel (QCPTP) has its own levels: junior, intermediate and senior.
- The Qualification Certificate for Skilled Workers (QCSW) is designed for manual labourer. In China, in contrast to other countries, 1 is the highest level and 5 is the lowest level.

Table 14. Corresponding relationship of 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: MHRSS (2018).

Learning Outcome Framework of the Open University of China (LOFOUC)

LOFOUC consists of 10 qualification levels with 3 domain descriptors for learning outcomes: knowledge (factual, technical and theoretical), skills (cognitive, technical, communicative and expressive) and competency (autonomy, judgment and responsibility for the application of knowledge and skills) (see **Figure 8**). OUC has established 75 learning outcome accreditation centres across the country, spanning 31 provinces and 24 industries.

Figure 8. Learning Outcome Framework of the Open University of China
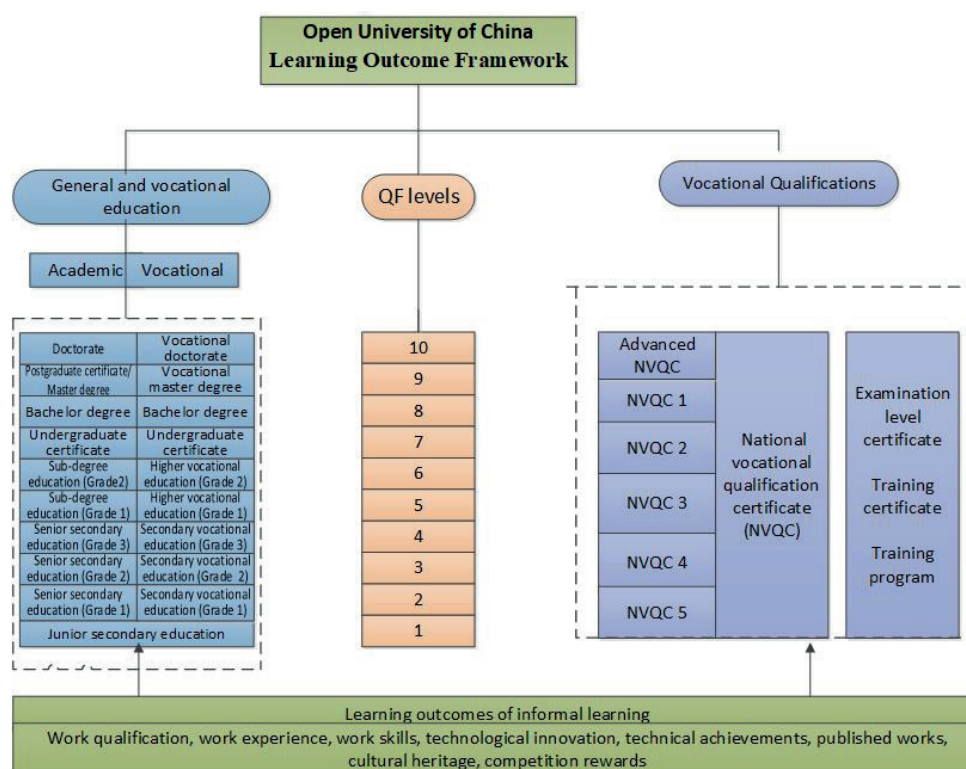
Source: Open University of China Credit Bank, 2013

Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework (GDLEQF)

GDLEQF:

- divides learning outcomes into seven levels;
- clarifies the relationship between general education, vocational education, vocational training and awards;

- establishes the standards of each level from the three dimensions of knowledge, skills and competency (see **Figure 9**).

It is the first local standardized qualifications framework in China.

Figure 9. Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework
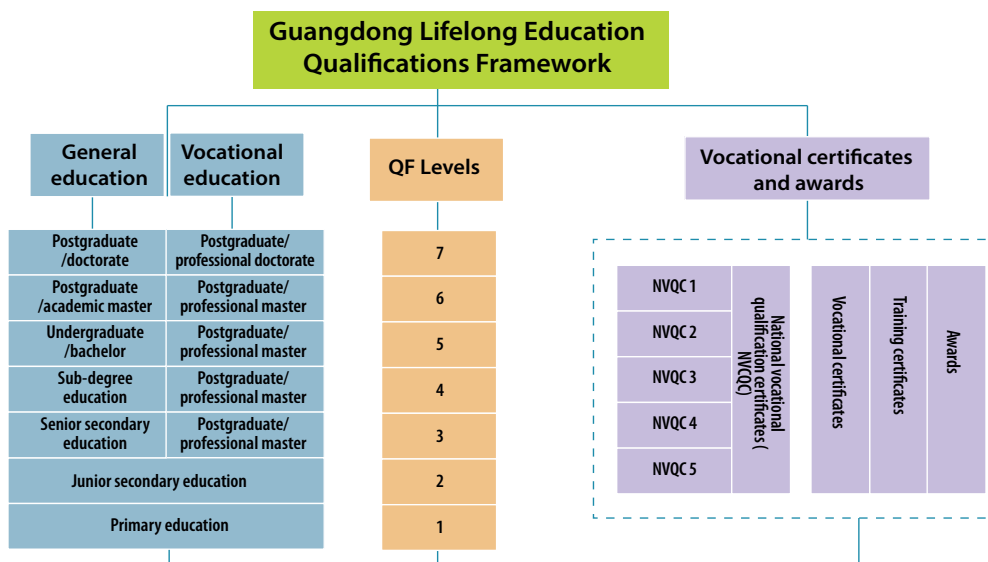
Source: Li, Zhao and Guan (2019, p. 63)

Proposed China Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework and its system

In December 2020, after a two-year research project on the object of research on and application of the National Qualifications Framework, the Central Institute for Vocational and Technical Education of the Ministry of Education introduced the China Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework and its system (See **Figure 10** and **Figure 11**).

Figure 10. Proposed China Lifelong Learning Qualifications Framework
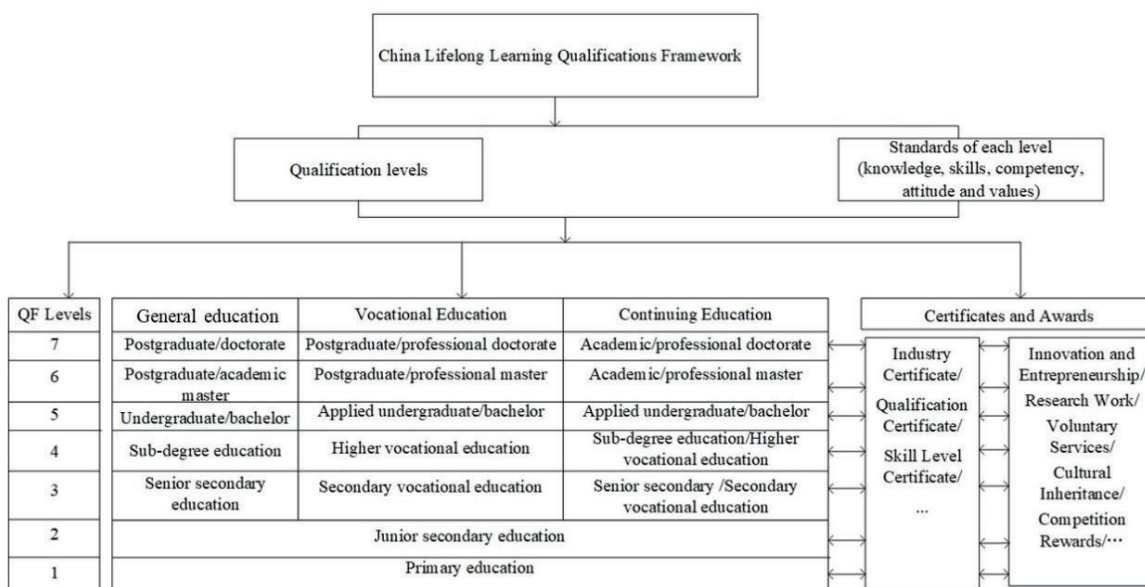
Source: Zhang et al. (2021, p. 59)

The classification of national qualifications is based on general education and is divided into seven levels from low to high: primary school, junior high school, senior high school, college, undergraduate, master and doctorate. Continuing education is divided into five levels: high school/secondary vocational/high school technical, junior college/higher vocational, applied undergraduate/bachelor, academic/professional master and academic/professional doctor. Vocational education is divided into five levels: secondary vocational/technical, higher vocational, applied undergraduate, professional master and professional doctorate. Vocational training includes various qualification certificates, skill level certificates and training certificates. Various achievements include but are not limited to innovation and entrepreneurship, scientific research, social services, cultural heritage and competition awards. The national qualifications framework unifies general education, continuing education, vocational education, vocational training and various learning outcomes into a framework system, providing corresponding level standards for all levels of education and training.

China Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework System

Figure 11. Proposed China Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework System
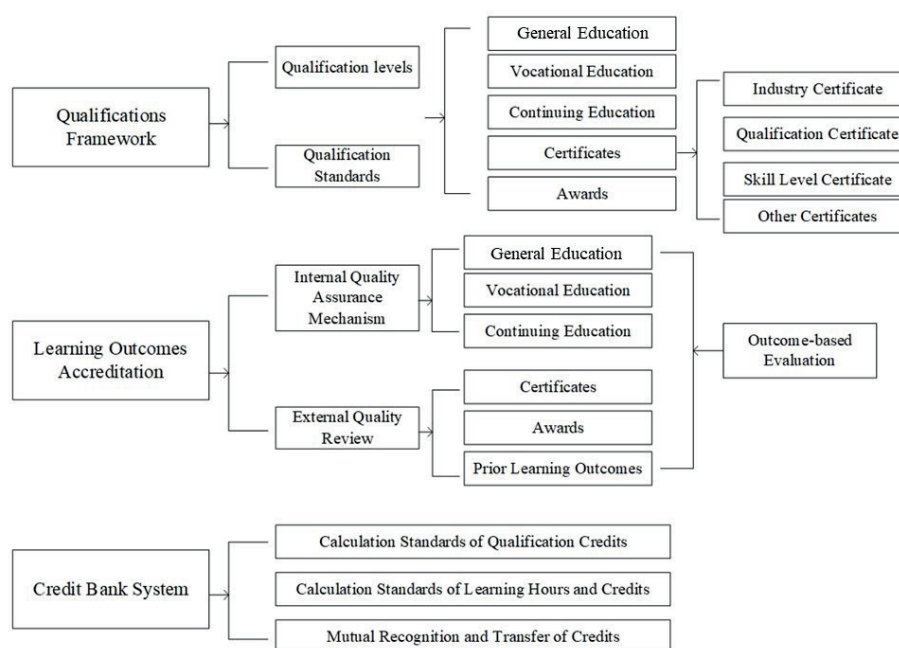
Source: Zhang et al. (2021, pp. 59,-60).

Based on the educational development principle of 'practice-theory continuous circulation and continuous rise' (Zhang et al, 2021) and the technology supported by big data, artificial intelligence and blockchain, the trinity innovation model of *Framework + Certification + Credit Bank* has been formed, which combines qualifications framework standards, learning outcome accreditation and the credit bank system. The National Qualifications Framework is the upper standard, the top-level designation of various learning outcome levels and standards and the parent standard of competency. Learning outcome accreditation based on the quality assurance mechanism ensures equivalence and fairness of mutual recognition of various learning achievements, as well as the quality of credits and social credibility. The credit bank is a platform through which members of society accumulate and transfer qualifications and credits from learning outcomes, providing a smooth, open and flexible lifelong learning channel.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Since China's national qualifications framework has not yet been officially released, the qualifications framework construction is still at the OUC and local level, focusing on the implementation of vocational education and training, which adopts a government-led, credit bank operation and multi-party participation model. The management office is generally affiliated with OUC and involves various stakeholders including government departments,

educational institutions, training centres, industries and enterprises.

OUC is a university directly under the leadership of the Ministry of Education (MOE), including headquarter, 45 provincial branches and 14 industry colleges. It covers both urban and rural areas and serves the whole nation as a community for lifelong learning (OUC, 2021). Through the Credit Bank, OUC has cooperated with 18 higher vocational colleges and research institutions, 23 industries and 2 companies to develop learning outcome accreditation units and has established a corresponding relationship with 20 professional and academic OUC programmes, to promote mutual recognition and connection of corporate training certificates and courses with OUC degree courses[205].

Guangdong's Provincial Department of Education, Provincial Department of Human Resources and Social Security, Provincial Development and Reform Commission, Provincial Economic and Information Technology Commission, Provincial Civil Affairs Department, Provincial Department of Finance, Provincial Quality and Technical Supervision Bureau, Provincial Education Examination Institute and Provincial Department of Education have coordinated with educational research institutes, relevant universities, industry enterprises, education and training institutions, research centres and other organizations to promote the operation of Guangdong Credit Bank by establishing credit bank management committees, expert committees, credit bank management centres and creating special funds. In 2018, Article 15 of the Regulations on Vocational Education of Guangdong Province proposed to 'build a lifelong education qualifications framework system for mutual recognition of general education, vocational education and performance achievements'. The legal status of the qualifications framework has therefore been established in Guangdong in the form of regulations (Li, 2020; Zhao, 2020).

Shanghai Lifelong Education Credit Bank is managed by the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission, although Shanghai Open University controls operations. The expert committee is the credit bank's advisory body. Shanghai Lifelong Education Credit Bank has 68 branches located in all of the city's colleges and universities and provides various credit bank services to students. Of these, 19 branches spanning all of the city's districts have been developed to conduct credit back business

for social learners and to form a credit bank service system for the whole city (Guo and Chen, 2020).

Chongqing Lifelong Learning Credit Bank is responsible for the Chongqing Education Commission, which established the Credit Bank Management Committee and its premises to coordinate and lead the work of the credit banks. The Credit Bank Management Center was set up in Chongqing Open University to be responsible for credit bank operations (CLLCB, 2015). There are 72 cooperative alliance institutions and stakeholders including open universities, industry colleges, higher vocational education colleges, universities, secondary vocational colleges and industry representatives[206].

The Management Committee of Jiangsu Lifelong Education Credit Bank is the leading institution for the construction and management of credit banks. It is composed of leaders and experts from Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education, as well as government departments and higher education institution representatives. The Credit Bank office under the management committee is responsible for operations, which are managed directly by the Social Education Division of Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education. The management committee has entrusted Jiangsu Open University to be responsible for the daily operations and maintenance of the Jiangsu Lifelong Education Credit Bank network platform (Zhang X., 2020). At present, there are 211 cooperative alliance institutions and stakeholders, including open universities, universities, higher vocational colleges, technical schools, social training institutions, industry societies and corporate schools[207].

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

As of December 2019 there were 41 credit banks across China; these included lifelong learning credit banks, alliance credit banks, adult college credit banks, vocational college credit banks and corporate credit banks (Jiangsu Lifelong Education Credit Bank Management Center, 2020). To bridge formal education, non-formal education and informal learning, some credit banks associated with open universities, such as the Open University of China, Guangdong Open University, Shanghai Open

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205. Based on the author's telephone interview with Ran Wang, director of OUC Credit Bank, on June 26, 2021.

206. Based on the author's telephone interview with Nanzhong Wu, director of Chongqing Lifelong Learning Credit Bank, on June 26, 2021.

207. Based on the author's telephone interview with Xuan Zhang, director of Jiangsu Lifelong Education Credit Bank, on June 26, 2021.

University, Jiangsu Open University and Chongqing Open University, have implemented pathways for the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of learning outcomes.

The Credit Bank of Open University of China, based on the OUCQF, developed an online learning achievement accreditation platform and a mutual recognition alliance for learning outcomes. The credit bank model led by OUC mainly includes two basic elements: a standard system based on the qualifications framework and the recognition, accumulation and transfer of various achievements at all levels based on these standard and rules. The main goals are to connect various qualifications smoothly, formulate corresponding standards in various fields according to the qualifications framework, design standardized certificate systems, build curriculum systems, guide resource construction, standardize education and training and promote the conversion of various types of learning outcomes at all levels[208].

The Shanghai Municipal Education Commission established the Shanghai Lifelong Education Credit Bank (SLECB) and its branches in 2012 in accordance with the administrative divisions of Shanghai. The district government is responsible for personnel, equipment, configuration and operating expenses of each district credit bank branch. Its 68 outlets serve students in all colleges and universities in the city. There are 19 branches in all districts of the city dedicated to credit bank services for learners. SLECB has established a series of systems and mechanisms for the transfer of various learning outcomes. As of 30 April 2020, Shanghai Lifelong Education Credit Bank has opened personal learning accounts for 3.85 million learners, accumulated more than 77.34 million learning achievements and managed deposits associated with the city's universities, self-study exams, national vocational qualifications, senior citizen education, enterprise training and other types of learning achievements (Guo and Chen, 2020).

Guangdong Lifelong Education Credit Bank is based on GDLEQF, having established the qualifications framework levels and standards, an organizational system, a standard system, an institutional system and a credit transfer service system. As of 31 December 2020, Guangdong Lifelong Education Credit Bank has established lifelong learning files for more than 850,000 learners and saved more than 14 million learning outcomes. Occupational standards based on industry capabilities formed the basis

for pilot work on the development of qualification level standards within the automotive industry (post-market) and the machinery manufacturing industry. The development and testing of these two standards have distinct regional characteristics and standardization features. In December 2020, the standards were released in the form of group standards on National Information Platform for Group Standards, providing uniform competence standards for learners, practitioners, education and training institutions and employers in these two industries (Li, 2020).

Since the promulgation of Administrative Measures for Lifelong Education Credit Banks in Jiangsu Province 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. Based on the meta-standards designed by the learning achievement framework, the credit bank has determined specific learning outcome levels, vocational competence certificates and certified vocational and social training courses (Zhang X., 2020).

Chongqing Open University has established a vocational and training qualifications framework and developed corresponding Specifications of Competence Standards (SCS) for rail transit and software engineering, bridging the gap between vocational education and talent training. Based on the vocational and education qualifications framework and driven by new-generation information technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence, Chongqing Lifelong Learning Credit Bank has established a big data analysis model that matches the requirements of vocational positions to the curriculum system, along with vertical connection and mutual recognition mechanisms for learning outcomes in the credit bank (Zhang, Wu and Zhou, 2020).

Chengdu Open University and the University of Electronic Science and Technology jointly developed an educational resource sharing platform based on blockchain technology and trialled its operation in the credit bank. A learning outcome bank based on blockchain technology could solve the trust problem in mutual recognition and credit exchange in the form of alliance agreement. It could also provide technical support to prevent tampering with credits and ensure that tracing is possible (Zhou, Chen and Ye, 2019).

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208. Based on the author's telephone interview with Wang Ran, Director of China Development Bank Credit Bank, on June 26, 2021.

NQF implementation and impact

Vocational qualifications implementation and reform

In the last decade, China's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security has published a series of policies that regulate vocational qualifications assessments. Local labour and personnel bureaus have also set out corresponding methods of vocational qualifications implementation.

The 1+X Vocational Certificate System (1 refers to an academic certificate, X represents a number of vocational skill level certificates), first implemented in 2019, issues vocational certificates to students with high-quality technical skills (MOE, 2020b). The certificate recognizes academic achievements as well as vocational and technical skills, increasing learners' chances of finding employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Lifelong education QF implementation

Learning outcome accreditation based on the LOFOUC has been applied in various industries. At the end of 2020, the Alliance for the Mutual Recognition of Learning Outcomes of the National Open University Credit Bank had grown to 41 members and established 75 learning outcome certification sub-centres (authentication points) across the country, spanning 30 provinces, municipalities and regions and 25 industries. It had also provided accreditation services for more than 450,000 people and issued 29 different certificates in education, postal services, housekeeping, construction, property management, logistics and supply chain, business services, information technology industry, culture, environmental protection, the petroleum and chemical industry and electronics, among other industries. To support the 1+X certificate system, the Ministry of Education recently entrusted Open University of China to establish a national vocational education credit bank platform. All students participating in the X certificate pilot can establish personal learning accounts in the credit bank. As of 30 June 2021, the national vocational education credit bank platform has established 1.01 million personal learning accounts for students applying for X-certificate training and has stored 710,000 X-certificate results for all students who passed the exam. There are 4,915 pilot colleges and 300 training programmes involved. All evaluation organizations have established institutional accounts[209].

Based on international standards, the Guangdong Lifelong Education Credit Bank has established a framework for lifelong education qualifications in Guangdong Province, providing certification services for 93,000 people with learning outcomes. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of Guangdong has launched the "one test and three certificates" trial for the mutual recognition of vocational qualifications in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. Candidates can obtain national vocational qualification certificates, Hong Kong professional competence assessment certificates and international professional standards alliances in hair and beauty. Approximately 1,600 citizens of Guangdong have obtained the certificate (Li, Zhao and Guan, 2019).

Shanghai Lifelong Education Credit Bank is led by the Shanghai Education Commission and managed and operated by Shanghai Open University. Its services are mainly dedicated to learners of secondary vocational, college/higher vocational and undergraduate level education. The credit bank has certified learning achievements for 91,000 people and converted qualifications from colleges, universities and self-study examinations. Within the Integration of Academic Certificate and Vocational Qualification Certificate project co-managed by the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission and the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Human Resources and Social Security, more than 16,000 students with academic education have passed the credit transfer and obtained the corresponding national vocational qualification certificates (Zhang W.Y., 2020).

Jiangsu Lifelong Education Credit Bank (JLECB) has compiled a learning achievement framework that is consistent with the levels and standards of GDLEQF. JLECB provides a basis for mutual recognition of the achievements of general education, vocational education and training. At present, 97,000 students have been certified for learning achievements and 2,702 students have passed the credit transfer between different learning outcomes (Zhang X., 2020).

Chongqing Lifelong Learning Credit Bank (CLLCB) has established about 400,000 lifelong learning accounts and has registered and certified more than 1.7 million learning outcomes (Zhang and Xie, 2020). The credit bank established a big data platform which matches the requirements of vocational education qualifications and vocational education training programmes with corporate job requirements to solve the disconnect between vocational education programmes and corporate job talent requirements. On 9 February 2021, Chongqing Specifications on Competence Standards was launched on the Internet of Things.

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209. Based on the author's telephone interview with Wang Ran, Director of China Development Bank Credit Bank, on June 26, 2021.

Important lessons and future plans

Efforts by the Chinese Government to establish a unified qualifications framework have shown that:
- although some local QFs have been established, a national QF is urgently needed to meet international QF standards and key indicators;
- national QFs should include formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes;
- various government units, educational institutions, industries and companies must be involved in the establishment and implementation of national QFs.

It has been 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. After several years' trials, the rich experiences from vocational education, vocational training, continuing education and general education are now taking shape with big data, artificial intelligence and blockchain as forms of technical support. The Chinese model of a qualifications framework with learning outcome accreditation and credit banks is committed to providing all members of society with an open, flexible and high-quality lifelong learning system and environment.

Abbreviations			
HEI	Higher education institution	TVET	Technical vocational education and training
IMF	International Monetary Fund	NVQC	National Vocational Qualification Certificate
MHRSS	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security		
MOE	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China	OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
NVQCS	National Vocational Qualification Certificate System	LOFOUC	Learning Outcome Framework of Open University of China
QCPTP	Qualification Certificate for Professional and Technical Personnel	OUC	Open University of China
QCSW	Qualification Certificate for Skilled Workers	GDLEQF	Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework
RVA	Recognition, validation and accreditation	SCLGOPAD	State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development
		CLLCB	Chongqing Lifelong Learning Credit Bank

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Prepared by

COSTA RICA

Introduction and context

The process of implementing the National Qualifications Framework of Costa Rica (MNC-EFTP-CR) began in 2015, when the Ministry of Public Education (MEP), the Higher Council of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MTSS), the National Learning Institute (INA) and the National Rectors Council (CONARE) joined efforts and took advantage of their experiences and learning on the subject.

In 2015, the formulation of a National Qualifications Framework for Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) was declared of interest and the MTSS, MEP, INA and CONARE were convened to work together to formulate the proposal. The team presented the roadmap for the development of the work, and it was approved by the Presidential Council on Innovation and Human Talent in the session of 10 November 2015. On 10 December 2015, the Presidential Council for Innovation and Human Talent convened the Costa Rican Union of Chambers and Associations of the Business Sector (UCCAEP) and the Unit of Rectors of Private Universities of Costa Rica (UNIRE) to present them with the preliminary proposal of the MNC-EFTP-CR and invite them to join the work of the Inter-Institutional Commission. Finally, on 14 December 2015, the commission delivered the preliminary proposal to the Secretariat of the Presidential Council for Innovation and Human Talent and shared it with the relevant authorities for consultation.

The creation of the MNC-EFTP-CR responds to the recommendations made by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). These entities agree on the need to articulate the education system, in order to achieve recognition of competencies, certification and articulation at the different educational levels, to achieve comprehensive training and lifelong learning.

Costa Rica's National Development Plans recognize the importance of TVET and the need to establish strategic actions that contribute to the improvement of the quality of education.

- National Development Plan (Francisco J. Orlich, 1994-98): Inserted the policy called "Integration and Strengthening of Technical Education and Vocational Training."
- National Development Plan (2002-06): Emphasized consolidating the process of vertical and horizontal articulation and integration of technical education and vocational training provided by the human resources training institutions that make up the National Integrated System of Technical Education for Competitiveness (SINETEC), to respond to the demands of the economic and social sectors, in order to enhance the country's competitiveness.
- National Development Plan (Jorge Manuel Dengo Obregón, 2006-2010): Continued with the strategic actions aimed at improving the productive and entrepreneurial capacity of the population, as well as forging an integral vision of the education sector, the operationalization of the National Council for Standardization and Technical Certification (CONOCETE) and the design and implementation of the National System for Training and Vocational Training (SINETEC).
- National Development Plan (María Teresa Obregón Zamora 2010-14): Recognized that TVET is one of the main weaknesses faced by the educational system and that there are gaps between the training offer and the increasingly complex requirements of the labour market. Hence, the strengthening of technical education was included as one of the lines of action, in order to stimulate the development of productive and entrepreneurial capacity.
- National Development Plan (Alberto Cañas Escalante 2015-18): Proposed to increase the employability of the working age population,

favoring the generation of employment as a mechanism for social inclusion, for which it is proposed to standardize labour skills associated with current and emerging occupations demanded by the productive sectors served by the INA.

Costa Rica's MNC-EFTP is a consolidated entity recognized by Costa Rican society. It is a national benchmark and a seal of quality for any academic entity dedicated to technical and vocational education and training. The effort made to show the importance of vocational technical education and training justifies its creation.

The National Qualifications Framework for Technical Vocational Education and Training of Costa Rica

The MNC-EFTP-CR is the nationally recognized structure that regulates qualifications and associated competencies based on a set of technical criteria contained in descriptors, in order to guide training, classify occupations and positions for employment, and facilitate the mobility of people at different levels; all of the above in accordance with the dynamics of the labour market.

The implementation of the MNC-EFTP in Costa Rica provides the following benefits:
- Facilitates and clarifies the articulation in the educational system. This is achieved by assigning qualifications to levels and establishing the relationships between them.
- Enables the creation of spaces for cooperation among the social actors related to TVET: employers, training centers, public and private entities, and civil society.
- Establishes parameters for the training and assessment of competencies according to qualification levels.
- Provides employers with clarity on the competencies associated with the qualification levels granted by the training centers, facilitating the recruitment and personnel selection.
- Helps current and future TVET graduates with understanding the competencies they will acquire and the various training and employment opportunities available to them.
- Provides data for the elaboration of statistics that can help with decision making in TVET,
- Guides people in their training path, promoting lifelong learning.
- Contributes to social inclusion and mobility.

General Purpose

The MNC-EFTP-CR regulates TVET, through the standardization of training levels, descriptors, duration, and entry and exit profiles. It establishes vertical and horizontal articulation in the Costa Rican educational system and orients attention to labour demand. In addition, it associates qualifications with fields of education established in the International Standard Classification of Education (CINE-F 2013) and salary regulations.

Policy Objectives

- Promote lifelong learning and improve employability.
- Establish qualifications and associated competencies in accordance with the current and projected demands of the labour market.
- Contribute to social inclusion and greater equity in education, training, employment opportunities and salary retribution.
- Provide people with the training route according to their interests and the TVET offer.
- Favour the competitiveness of the country's productive sector.
- Provide companies with the descriptors of the levels of technicians, thus supporting them in their management of human talent.

The National Qualifications Framework for TVET in Costa Rica has the following characteristics:

- It is comprehensive and inclusive because it covers the subsystems that make up the National Education System (TVET, Higher Education), with the purpose of establishing levels and equivalences that allow recognition and articulation.
- It is regulatory because it guides the regulation and control of TVET supply and its relevance.
- It does not include study plans and programmes; however, it establishes general criteria for their design and implementation.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The MNC-EFTP-CR establishes a nomenclature system of five technician levels. Each qualification level has its respective descriptor, minimum schooling requirement for entry, range of duration of the study program and minimum schooling requirement for the degree.

The following five tables show the different level descriptors for each level of technician.

Technician 1

Technician 1 is a person who is competent to apply procedures of a specific work activity in various contexts. He/she uses tools and instruments to solve everyday problems and is only responsible for his/her own work and requires supervision.

Table 15. Level Descriptors of Technician 1

DESCRIPTORS	LEARNING OUTCOMES
Disciplinary knowledge	• Knows procedures of a specific work activity. • Understands operational processes of a specific area. • Knows the technical language of a specific work activity.
Application	• Applies procedures in a specific work activity in various work contexts. • Uses instruments and technological tools and applies good practices to solve problems in a specific area. • Applies regulations for the protection of the environment.
Autonomy and responsibility	• Complies with the procedures established for the work area. • Complies with the specific regulations for the development of job functions. • Attends and complies with the instructions given by his immediate superior, for the fulfillment of the assigned work.
Professional, cultural and social interaction	• Communicates in a respectful manner. • Interacts with team members to solve problems. • Uses the means and channels of communication established by the organization. • Collaborates with an environment of healthy coexistence, respecting individual differences. • Acts ethically at a personal, professional and work level • Attends and complies with the instructions given by his immediate superior, for the fulfillment of the assigned work.

Source: National Qualifications Framework of Costa Rica, 2019

Technician 2

A person who is competent to know principles and apply procedures in a range of work activities, in different contexts. He/she uses tools and instruments to solve daily problems, is responsible for his/her work, has autonomy over the tasks he/ she performs and requires supervision. She/he relates and communicates assertively with the work team and uses the means and channels of communication established by the organization.

Table 16. Level Descriptors of Technician 2

DESCRIPTORS	LEARNING OUTCOMES
Disciplinary knowledge	• Recognizes concepts and processes of an occupational field. • Analyzes operative processes of an occupational field. • Knows the technical language of an occupational field.
Application	• Applies procedures in diverse practical situations in the occupational field. • Uses instruments and technological tools and selects good practices for the solution of problems in the occupational field. • Verifies the application of regulations. • Applies regulations for the protection of the environment.
Autonomy and responsibility	• Complies with established procedures and could propose improvements to specific processes in the occupational field. • Recognizes the importance of compliance with the regulations of the labour field. • Follows instructions from higher level personnel. • Responsible for assigned work. • Maintains a positive attitude towards learning.
Professional, cultural and social interaction	• Communicates respectfully and assertively. • Coordinates with team members to solve problems. • Uses the means and channels established by the organization to facilitate communication in the work team. • Collaborates for an environment of healthy coexistence recognizing individual differences. • Acts ethically at a personal, professional and work level.

Source: National Qualifications Framework of Costa Rica, 2019

Technician 3

A person with competencies to understand principles and fundamentals and apply procedures in a wide range of work activities, uses tools and instruments for problem solving. He/she has autonomy over the technical processes he/she performs. He/she can assume supervision over the work of others and in the allocation of resources. This technician 3 proposes viable solutions to problems within or outside the organization. He/she possesses the ability to relate to the different hierarchical levels of the organization.

Table 17. Level Descriptors of Technician 3

DESCRIPTORS	LEARNING OUTCOMES
Disciplinary knowledge	• Understands concepts and theories, and interprets information related to the technical tasks he/she performs. • Analyzes and innovates processes in the occupational field. • Knows technical language of the occupational field in a second language, when required.
Application	• Applies procedures in a wide range of practical situations in the occupational field. • Uses technological tools and specialized equipment to perform work in diverse contexts. • Researches, develops and implements good work practices. • Organizes work according to technical standards and criteria. • Develops projects in their field of work and evaluates the results. • Promotes and verifies compliance with environmental protection regulations.
Autonomy and responsibility	• Promotes improvements to specific processes in the occupational field. • Applies, values and promotes compliance with occupational field regulations and assumes the consequences of error. • Coordinates with qualified personnel and may supervise work processes and teams. • Allocates resources and could keep track of process activities. • Demonstrates commitment to self-learning. • Acts ethically on a personal, professional and work level.
Professional, cultural and social interaction	• Communicates in a respectful, assertive and proactive way with the hierarchical levels of the cultural and social organization • Coordinates with the hierarchical levels of the organization to solve problems.

Source: National Qualifications Framework of Costa Rica, 2019

Technician 4

A person with competencies to understand principles and fundamentals and apply procedures in a wide range of work activities, uses tools and instruments for problem solving. He/she has autonomy over technical processes and can take responsibility for the work performance of others. He/she proposes undertakings and viable solutions to problems within or outside the organization and has the ability to express him/herself with clarity and precision.

Table 18. Level Descriptors of Technician 4

DESCRIPTORS	LEARNING OUTCOMES
Disciplinary knowledge	• Understands concepts and theories, and interprets information related to the technical tasks he/she performs. • Analyzes and innovates processes in the occupational field. • Knows technical language of the occupational field in a second language, when it is required.
Application	• Applies procedures in a wide range of practical work situations. • Plans activities in a wide range of work situations. • Researches, develops and implements good practices in a wide range of situations in the occupational field. • Uses machinery, instruments, technological tools and specialized equipment to perform work in a variety of contexts. • Organizes work according to technical standards and criteria. • Develops projects in their field of work and evaluates the results. • Promotes and verifies compliance with regulations. • Promotes and verifies compliance with regulations and good environmental practices.

DESCRIPTORS	LEARNING OUTCOMES
Autonomy and responsibility	• Promotes improvements to specific processes in the occupational field. • Applies, values and promotes compliance with occupational field regulations and assumes the consequences of error. • Coordinates with qualified personnel and may supervise work processes and teams. • Allocates resources and could keep track of process activities • Demonstrates commitment to self-learning.
Professional, cultural and social interaction	• Communicates in a respectful, assertive and proactive manner with the hierarchical levels of the cultural and social organization. • Coordinates with the hierarchical levels of the organization to solve problems. • Distinguishes the appropriate means and channels to facilitate communication in the organization • Promotes an environment of healthy coexistence recognizing individual differences and promotes the search for general welfare. • Acts ethically at a personal, professional and work level.

Source: National Qualifications Framework of Costa Rica, 2019

Technician 5

A person with competencies to understand principles and fundamentals and to apply procedures in technical processes, in diverse contexts and work methods. He/she uses tools and instruments for the evaluation of results and can participate in the multidisciplinary approach to problem solving. He/she has autonomy and can take responsibility for the work performance of others. The technician proposes undertakings and viable solutions to problems within or outside the organization and has the ability to communicate clearly and accurately.

Table 19. Level Descriptors of Technician 5

DESCRIPTORS	LEARNING OUTCOMES
Disciplinary knowledge	• Understands the conceptual, methodological, normative and technical principles of their professionaltechnical field, integrates different perspectives and analyzes priorities to generate alternatives. • Masters the technologies and methodological tools of their professional technical field for the improvement and innovation of the processes and results of their professional technical field. • Analyzes, interprets and evaluates ideas and information relevant to their performance. • Masters appropriately the technical language of the occupational field in a second language.
Application	• Applies procedures and regulations to identify and solve complex problems in their work environment based on the protocols of their professional technical field and makes the pertinent adjustments. • Demonstrates dexterity and ability in the use of technological tools and specialized equipment, to efficiently execute the tasks of their professional technical field, in diverse contexts. • Plans the work according to technical standards and criteria. • Develops projects in their field of work for different contexts and evaluates the results. • Promotes and verifies compliance with environmentalprotection regulations. • Innovates and makes decisions based on valid and reliable pertinent data and information. • Systematizes good practices to obtain inputs that serve as a basis for the generation and improvement of protocols and professional technical performance.
Autonomy and responsibility	• Solve problems with autonomy taking into consideration the consequences of their decisions inthe aspects related to the problem. • Demonstrates capacity to solve problems in a responsible and creative way, taking as a reference the legal and ethical regulation of their professional technical field. Develops entrepreneurship in theirprofessional technical area with criteria of pertinence,quality and innovation. • Coordinates with professional peers for common goals and supervises processes and work teams.

DESCRIPTORS	LEARNING OUTCOMES
Professional, cultural and social interaction	• Communicates adequately in their official language, both orally and in writing. • Promotes an environment of healthy coexistence, recognizing individual differences, and favors thesearch for general welfare and the common good. • Communicates in a pertinent and purposeful mannerwith hierarchical levels, work teams and beneficiariesof the service and professional actions. • Identifies the level of responsibility of his/her participation or professional action and its scope in relation to other actors or interdisciplinary work teamswith respect for human rights and global awareness. • Promotes an environment of healthy coexistence, recognizing individual differences, and favors the search for the general welfare and the common good.

Source: National Qualifications Framework of Costa Rica, 2019

Institutional arrangements and engagement of stakeholders

The Executive Decree No. 39851-MEP-MTSS of 8 August, 2016 created the Inter- Institutional Commission for the Implementation and Monitoring of the National Qualifications Framework for Technical Vocational Education and Training of Costa Rica (CIISMNC-EFTP-CR). The taskforce is made up of representatives from the Ministry of Public Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the National Learning Institute, the National Council of Rectors, the Costa Rican Union of Chambers and Associations of the Private Business Sector, and the Unit of Rectors of Private Universities of Costa Rica.

Table 20. Summary Table

QUALIFICATION LEVEL	MINIMUM SCHOOLING REQUIREMENT FOR ADMISSION	RANGES OF CURRICULA DURATION	MINIMUM EDUCATION REQUIREMENT FOR QUALIFICATION
Technician 1	II Cycle of General Basic Education	400-700 hours	II Cycle of General Basic Education
Technician 2	II Cycle of General Basic Education	1,200-1600 hours	II Cycle of General Basic Education
Technician 3	III Cycle of General Basic Education	2,300-2,800 hours	III Cycle of General Basic Education
Technician 4	III Cycle of General Basic Education	2,840 hours	Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education
Technician 5	Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education	60-100 credits	University Diploma or Higher Technical Degree

Source: MNQ-TVET-CR Team

Main sources of information

http://www.cualificaciones.cr/

Prepared by
The UNESCO in consultation with national experts

CROATIA

Introduction and context

Croatia has the lowest rate of early school leaving in the EU (3.0% in 2019, compared with the EU average of 10.2%)[210]. The quality and relevance of education and training, however, is a challenge (European Commission, 2019). A major reform is being implemented in general and vocational education and training (VET). Curricular reform, including related teacher training, was piloted in 2018/19 at primary and secondary levels of general education and also in general subjects in VET. It is being mainstreamed as of 2019/20. New legislation has set the ground for reforms in VET and a modernisation project was initiated in 2019, focusing on redesigning VET curricula in line with sectoral needs, use of learning outcomes, work-based learning and updated teaching materials (Cedefop and Refernet, 2019). Participation in VET at upper secondary level is among the highest in the EU, while the share of learners in three-year VET programmes and in apprenticeships has decreased significantly due to demographic changes (Cedefop, 2020). The employment rate of recent VET graduates increased sharply from 45.7% in 2015 to 73.9% in 2019[211]; many VET students go on to higher education. Regional centres of competence aim to promote excellence in VET and a pilot programme for dual VET, launched in 2018 to reduce skills mismatch, is being expanded. The country faces challenges in terms of basic skill levels, especially in maths and science, participation in early childhood education and care (81.0% in 2018) and in adult lifelong learning (3.5% in 2019)[212]. The revision of the Adult Education Act has been discussed, but not yet adopted. Tertiary education attainment in higher education is relatively low (33.1% in 2019 compared to the EU average of 40.3%)[213] and so is student mobility (European Commission, 2019). Development of teachers and trainers, and mobility and 'brain circulation' were

among the priorities of the Croatian presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2020 (Cedefop, 2020).

The Croatian qualifications framework (CROQF) is seen as an important tool for tackling current challenges and aligning education and training with the needs of the labour market, society and further education. Its development started in 2006, aiming to modernise secondary VET, higher education and adult education, and to address existing and foreseen skill shortages. The CROQF Act, adopted by the Croatian Parliament in 2013 and subsequently amended in 2016, 2018 and 2020, set out the legislative and institutional framework for its development and implementation. It is a comprehensive framework with eight levels and sublevels at levels 4, 7 and 8[214], 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[215]. It is also referred to in the Crafts Act[216], the Labour Market Law[217] and in ordinances on Teachers' Assistants and on the Advancement of Teachers. It is also linked to planned developments in higher and adult education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). A CROQF register has been put

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210. Data from European Commission, 2020.
211. Idem.
212. Idem.
213. Idem.

214. Initially, the CROQF had sublevels at levels 4 (4. 1 and 4.2) and 8 (8.1 and 8.2). Sublevels at level 7 (7.1 and 7.2) were introduced in 2018 with the amended CROQF Act.
215. The text of the amended Act on VET is available at: https://www.zakon.hr/z/383/Zakon-o-strukovnom-obrazovanju (in Croatian).
216. https://www.zakon.hr/z/297/Zakon-o-obrtu
217. https://www.zakon.hr/z/1751/Zakon-o-tr%C5%BEi%C5%A1tu-rada

in place, consisting of three sub-registers: one for occupational standards; one for qualification standards; and one for units of learning outcomes.

The CROQF was referenced 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 an instrument for developing new education and training solutions reflecting national needs and priorities.

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 (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 (Act on Amendments of the CROQF Act (OG 64/2018)):
a. ensuring the conditions for quality education and learning in line with personal, social and economic needs and social inclusion; for access to lifelong learning; for horizontal and vertical mobility; and for acquisition and recognition of qualifications;
b. developing personal and social responsibility;
c. strengthening the role of key competences for lifelong learning;
d. use of learning outcomes in the development and classification of qualifications into different types;
e. understanding inter-relationships between qualifications;
f. supporting partnerships among stakeholders in the qualifications system;
g. supporting employability, individual and economic competitiveness and social development;

h. establishing a coordinated quality assurance system for existing and new qualifications.

In the framework of the *Strategy for education, science and technology* (Croatian Parliament, 2014), the CROQF was mentioned 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 comprehensive curriculum reform for primary and secondary education aims to modernise education to respond better to learners' age and interests, preparing them for work, further education and contemporary life challenges. It takes the CROQF into account, seeking to define learning outcomes and develop competences for lifelong learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The role of the CROQF in improving education quality is also emphasised in the *Strategy for lifelong career guidance and career development*[218], which establishes links between career guidance development, recognition of prior learning and the CROQF and in the 2016-20 VET Development Programme[219] (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The CROQF is a qualifications and 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)[220]. The CROQF covers full and partial qualifications[221] from all levels and subsystems of formal education and training (general education, VET and higher education), and is a basis for developing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. It has eight reference levels, in line with the EQF, but with additional sublevels at levels 4, 7 and 8. Partial qualifications can be awarded at levels 2 to 7. Level

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218. http://www.hzz.hr/UserDocsImages/Strategija_CPU_i_razvoja_karijere_u_RH_2016-2020_EN.pdf
219. https://www.asoo.hr/UserDocsImages/Program%20SOO_HR.pdf
220. 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).
221. A partial qualification does not independently meet the conditions for access to the labour market or further education. It can enable access only in conjunction with one full qualification or one or more other appropriate partial qualifications, which together meet a full qualification standard.

descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge (theoretical and factual), skills (cognitive, practical and social skills) and responsibility and autonomy.

Sublevels for levels 4 and 8 were introduced from the beginning, to cater for existing qualifications of different workload and complexity. For example, a qualification with a minimum of 180 ECVET and/or HROO points is referenced to level 4.1. For a qualification at level 4.2, a minimum of 240 ECVET and/or HROO points are required. Sublevels of level 7 were introduced with the amendment of the CROQF Act in 2018. Level 7 is now divided into sublevel 7.1, which covers graduate university studies (professional and academic master diplomas) and integrated undergraduate and graduate university studies, and sublevel 7.2, which includes post-master specialist university studies (*poslijediplomski specijalistički studiji*). While keeping academic and professional qualification types at the same level (7.1), this amendment limits access to doctoral programmes for graduates of professional studies. The conditions for admission and for acquiring a qualification, and workload requirements at each level and sublevel, are outlined in the CROQF Act. The types of qualifications in the CROQF are additionally regulated by specific regulations.

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. Learning outcomes are the main element of any qualification and they are organised in units of learning outcomes. Occupational standards are developed through research-based analysis of labour market needs, particularly the Occupational standard survey, a questionnaire initially completed by expert groups and then confirmed by employers and employees. They are then the basis for developing qualifications standards for qualifications aimed at the labour market. Qualifications standards entered in the CROQF register (10 included so far) 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. Competence-based occupational standards and learning-outcomes-based qualifications standards are being developed, mostly through ESF projects.

The learning outcomes approach has been gradually introduced in VET since 2006. The amended Act on

Vocational Education and Training[222], in force since March 2018, defines occupational and qualifications standards in compliance with the CROQF Act. VET curricula are being developed according to occupational and qualifications standards[223]. Full transition to a new, learning-outcomes-oriented VET system linked to the labour market is foreseen by 2022/23 (Cedefop, 2020).

Higher education has undergone extensive change in the last decade, including strengthening the learning outcomes dimension. Croatia adjusted its higher education system to the Bologna three-cycle system. 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). Calls for ESF funding have been launched to fund programme reform in higher education, VET and adult education in line with NQF standards.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

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 discussions with the broader public were held in the initial phase of drafting of the CROQF Act (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2013). The Act[224] was subsequently amended in 2016, 2018 and 2020; it sets up the institutional framework for CROQF implementation, defining the involvement, roles and responsibilities of key 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 25 representatives of national ministries, regional structures, social partners, education providers and national agencies involved in developing and

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222. The amended Act on VET is available at: https://www.zakon.hr/z/383/Zakon-o-strukovnom-obrazovanju (in Croatian).

223. A schematic view of the process of qualification and curricula development in VET is available in Cedefop (2020), p. 52.

224. The initial CROQF document (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2013) is available in English at: http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-09/The%20CROQF%20Act.pdf
The consolidated text of the amended CROQF Act is available in Croatian at: https://www.zakon.hr/z/566/Zakon-o-Hrvatskom-kvalifikacijskom-okviru

awarding qualifications in different subsystems of education and training[225]. Its first five-year term of office has expired and representatives for the second term are in the process of being appointed. The council oversees policies in education, training, employment and human resource development and monitors and evaluates the CROQF's impact and the work of 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 decision-making may take a long time.

On a technical and policy level, the Ministry of Science and Education coordinates CROQF development and implementation, 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 sectoral councils, providing support to the National Council for Development of Human Potential, developing procedures related to qualification standards, 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 Department for the Croatian Qualifications Framework within the Ministry of Science and Education is the EQF national coordination point (NCP). Permanent human and financial resources are available for the running of the NQF. Additional human and financial resources are available from Erasmus+ and ESF projects (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Twenty-five sectoral councils have been established as advisory and professional bodies working on the development of human potential in line with labour market needs in their respective sectors. Each 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.

External quality assurance of education and training programmes is the remit of three different agencies: the teacher training and education agency (for general education), the agency for VET and adult education (for VET and adult learning) and the agency for science and higher education (for higher education).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[226]

While there is not yet a formal national consensus in Croatia on how validation is to be implemented, it has been incorporated in several strategic documents[227]. 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* (Croatian Parliament, 2014) recognised validation as an essential part of lifelong learning, helping to remove barriers between the formal education system and other forms of learning, with adults as the main target group; it pointed out the need for consensus among key stakeholders.

One explicit aim of the CROQF is to set up a recognition and validation system at national level, based on units of learning outcomes[228]. 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 system. The register 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. Two key

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225. 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.

226. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (Pavkov, M., 2019).

227. The *Strategy for education, science and technology*, 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*.

228. The 2018 amendments to the CROQF Act 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).

methodologies were developed: one for developing occupational standards and one for qualifications standards.

The CROQF Act foresees the creation of an Ordinance on recognition and validation of prior learning at CROQF levels 1 to 5; this will specify the procedure in detail and establish a closer link to the CROQF. Recognition of prior learning for CROQF at levels 6 and above shall be in the competence of higher education institutions. The National Council for Development of Human Potential has developed Recommendations for strategic development of validation of prior learning[229] as a basis for developing the ordinance. This set of 15 recommendations concerns the revision of legal acts in adult[230] and higher education, the fundamental principles, operationalisation and financing of the validation system development and suggestions for a model for validation of competences. Draft national guidelines for validation and recognition of prior learning in higher education have been developed within the Erasmus+ project *Social and International Dimension of Education and Recognition of Acquired Learning*.

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 craftsperson 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 and impact

The CROQF has reached activation stage; steps are being taken towards the operational stage. In principle, all types of qualifications can be included in the framework, regardless of the way in which they were acquired, provided they comply with quality assurance requirements. The revised CROQF Act (2018) 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 prior learning. Governance and implementation structures have been put in place. The ordinance on the CROQF register adopted in 2014[231] stipulates the content and management of the register, procedures for requests, assessment and entry of qualifications into the register, the areas of activity of sectoral councils, criteria for selection of new council members and their operational activities, as well as the internal and external quality assurance systems. All 25 sectoral councils foreseen have been established and trained in preparation and evaluation of occupational and qualification standards for inclusion into the register.

The information system of the CROQF register has been created. It consists of three sub-registers: one for occupational standards; one for qualifications standards; and one for units of learning outcomes[232]. Ten qualifications standards and 44 occupational standards have been entered in the register so far (November 2020) and an increase to over 200 is expected within the next year. Over 400 more occupational and qualifications standards are being

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229. National Council for Human Resources Development (2018). *Recommendations for strategic development of recognition and validation of prior learning*. Available in Croatian at: http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2018-05/Preporuke%20NVRLJP-a%20za%20strateški%20razvoj%20priznavanja%20i%20vrednovanja%20prethodnog%20učenja.pdf

230. An update to the Adult Education Act is foreseen and should take into account developments related to the CROQF.

231. The text of the ordinance on the CROOQF register (*Pravilnik o Registru Hrvatskog kvalifikacijskog okvira*) is available in English at: http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-09/Ordinance%20on%20the%20CROQF%20Register.pdf

232. The CROQF register is available at: https://hko.srce.hr/registar/

developed through ESF projects[233]. The competent agency for quality assurance in higher education is finalising the procedure for evaluation of programmes according to CROQF criteria, and the Ministry of Science and Education will put in place a procedure for evaluation of programmes according to CROQF criteria for other levels of education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The NQF is starting to have an influence on the design of qualifications and curricula. The learning outcomes approach has been applied in the curricular reform in general education and VET. To be included in the CROQF register, qualifications and programmes need to be in line with CROQF standards and procedures. However, within the current legal framework, alignment to the CROQF is voluntary; creating education programmes in line with the CROQF represents a mark of quality. Defining qualifications in units of learning outcomes is seen as increasing transparency and comparability of qualifications and having a positive impact on quality. Several guiding documents have been developed to support the implementation of the

framework[234]. New methodology for development of occupational standards was adopted and the guidelines for developing qualification standards were revised in 2019 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

In addition to being used by education and training providers, some employers also use NQF levels in job descriptions and vacancies, and guidance and counselling practitioners use levels in their work. ENIC NARIC uses NQF levels to compare and interpret foreign qualifications. The Ministry of Science and Education has promoted the use of levels in legislation pertaining to regulated professions in various fields. Quality assurance agencies, especially the agency for higher education, have been integrating level descriptors and levels into processes for reviewing study programmes, and it is currently developing a specific procedure for programme evaluation, as mentioned above. Job seekers sometimes use NQF and EQF levels to describe their qualifications, especially when using the Europass documents; students and learners often contact the NQF Department to receive information on NQF levels of programmes they have completed, or plan to complete (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

NQF and EQF levels are not yet included on qualification documents from general education and VET. NQF levels are indicated in the CROQF register and there are plans to also include EQF levels. An evaluation of the information system of the CROQF register is planned for 2021; an evaluation of the NQF will be carried out when the referencing report is updated, in 2021 or 2022.

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233. Since 2017, the Agency for Vocational Education and Training has been implementing the five-year project *Modernisation of the system of vocational education and training*, aiming to develop innovative and flexible sectoral and vocational curricula based on labour market needs and to strengthen educators' competences for the introduction and implementation of curricula; 108 occupational standards and 195 qualification standards are being developed. In 2019, 26 projects began within the call *Implementation of the CROQF at the level of higher education* aimed at improving the quality, relevance and efficiency of higher education; the occupational and qualification standards developed will be the basis for educational programmes, quality assurance tools and improvement of the relevance of teaching in higher education. In 2019, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy signed a grant agreement for the project *Implementation of the CROQF and development of tools in connecting education and the labour market*; it aims to connect the labour market and the education system through occupational standards and envisages the development of 200 occupational standards for vocational and adult education. Standards will also be developed through projects of regional competence centres.

234. Methodology for developing occupational standards: http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2019-06/Metodologija%20za%20izradu%20standarda%20zanimanja.pdf
Methodology for developing qualification standards: http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2019-08/Smjernice%20za%20razvoj%20standarda%20kvalifikacija.pdf
Guidelines for developing and updating study programmes in line with CROQF standards: http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2019-08/Smjernice%20za%20uskla%C4%91ivanje%20studijskih%20programa%20sa%20standardima%20kvalifikacija%20i%20izradu%20novih%20studijskih%20programa%20uskla%C4%91enih%20s%20hrvatskim%20kvalifikacijskim%20okvirom.pdf
Guidelines for evaluating proposals of occupational standards by Sector Councils: http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2020-06/Smjernice%20za%20vrednovanje%20prijedloga%20standarda%20zanimanja.pdf

Referencing to the EQF

Croatia referenced its national qualifications framework to the EQF and self-certified to QF-EHEA in March 2012; a joint report was published in 2014 (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2014). An updated referencing report may be presented to the EQF advisory group in 2021 or 2022, covering the first qualification standards included in the CROQF register, the development of the system for validation of prior learning and the integration of the NQF in the education and training system (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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. 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.

The main benefits derived from NQF implementation so far are thought to be a better response of the education and training sector to labour market needs and more adequate quality assurance mechanisms in the education system. The NQF has created a platform for dialogue and cooperation among key stakeholders. There has been increased cooperation between education and training providers who need to reach agreement on learning outcomes and qualification standards, enabling them to align the outcomes and the quality of their programmes. There are also excellent examples of cooperation between education and training institutions (including higher education institutions) and labour market stakeholders in developing standards and curricula; sectoral councils include representatives of labour market stakeholders (employers and unions) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Ambitious procedures are being implemented for the development and evaluation of occupational and qualification standards and this work will remain a priority. Occupational and qualifications standards aligned to the CROQF are being developed and included in the register. Guidelines on development and use of occupational and qualifications standards for specific education sectors are to be developed, and promotional and educational activities for project teams will be carried out by the Education and Labour ministries. Calls for ESF funding have been launched to fund programme reform in higher education, VET and adult education. The information system of the CROQF register has been developed and will undergo evaluation. Current challenges are related to the introduction of changes in legislation to simplify NQF tools and procedures, in particular procedures concerning the development and evaluation of occupational and qualifications standards and of programmes in line with the standards, which are currently lengthy. Planned legislative changes in higher and adult education need to be taken forward. The Ordinance on recognition and validation of prior learning is to be finalised and adopted. Visibility of the NQF is to be enhanced in the future through the inclusion of NQF/EQF levels on all public qualification documents, once programmes are developed in line with CROQF standards and included in the register.

Table 21. Croatian national qualifications framework (CROQF)

CROQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8.2	• Doctoral diploma *(poslijediplomski (sveučilišni) doktorski studiji; obrana doktorske disertacije izvan studija)*	8
8.1	• Postgraduate research master of science diploma *(poslijediplomski znanstveni magistarski studiji)*	
7.2	• Post-master specialist university studies *(poslijediplomski specijalistički studiji)*	7
7.1	• Master diploma – graduate university studies *(sveučilišni diplomski studiji)* • Integrated undergraduate and graduate university studies • Professional master diploma – specialist graduate professional studies *(specijalistički diplomski stručni studiji)*	
6	• Bachelor diploma – undergraduate university studies *(sveučilišni preddiplomski studiji)* • Professional bachelor diploma – undergraduate professional studies *(stručni preddiplomski studiji)*	6

CROQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
5	• Professional higher education diploma – short cycle *(kratki stručni studiji)* • VET post-secondary development and training certificate *(strukovno specijalističko usavršavanje i osposobljavanje)* • Master craftsman diploma (p*rogrami za majstore uz najmanje dvije godine vrednovanog radnog iskustva*)	5
4.2	• Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate *(Gimnazijsko srednjoškolsko obrazovanje)* • Upper secondary VET certificate – four years / Upper secondary VET certificate – five years (*Četverogodišnje i petogodišnje strukovno srednjoškolsko obrazovanje*)	4
4.1	• Upper secondary VET – three years *(Trogodišnje strukovno obrazovanje)*	
3	• Upper secondary VET certificate – two years / Upper secondary VET certificate – one year *(Jednogodišnje i dvogodišnje srednjoškolsko strukovno obrazovanje)*	3
2	• Vocational training certificate *(Strukovno osposobljavanje*	2
1	• Primary education certificate – eight years *(Osnovno obrazovanje)* (*)	1

(*)   The first eight years of schooling are called primary education. This refers to both ISCED 1 and 2 (primary and lower secondary education).

Source: Adapted from the amended Croatian Qualifications Framework Act, article 7.

Abbreviations

CROQF	Croatian national qualifications framework	IPA	instrument for pre-accession assistance
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system for higher education	NCP	national coordination point
		NQF	national qualifications framework
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework in the European higher education area
EQF	European qualifications framework	VET	vocational education and training
ESF	European social fund		
HROO	Croatian credit system for general education		

Main sources of information

The EQF NCP for Croatia is the section for the Croatian qualifications framework at the Ministry of Science and Education: https://mzo.gov.hr/en

CROQF website: http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/en

The CROQF register is available at: https://hko.srce.hr/registar/

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Prepared by

the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in consultation with national experts

CYPRUS

Introduction and context

Investment in education and training in Cyprus is among the highest in the EU except at pre-primary level. However, the rate of early school leaving is on the rise (9.2% in 2019, up from 7.8% in 2018) and is below the EU average of 10.2%. In some areas the high level of spending per student does not translate into comparable education outcomes. The basic skills levels of Cyprus' students lag behind those of other EU countries, thus addressing underachievement and students' well-being remains a priority for the country. Measures are being taken by the government to improve outcomes in response to the results of the Programme for international student assessment (PISA), as well as to integrate the growing number of migrants into the education system. Immigration to Cyprus, especially since 2016, has increased the number of asylum seekers. A main policy focus in Cyprus is on digital education but gaps in students' digital participation due to distance learning (caused by Covid-19) are evident. Despite the initiatives to improve adults' digital literacy, digital skills remain below the EU average and educational support in adult education is underdeveloped.

Initiatives in vocational education and training (VET) aim to improve labour market links, yet participation in upper secondary VET remains low. In 2018, a small number of upper secondary students (16.7%) were enrolled in VET, the lowest in the EU and well below the EU average (48.4%). A platform is being piloted for initial VET graduates, aiming to ease communication between initial graduates of secondary VET and of post-secondary, higher VET institutes and potential employers (Cedefop, 2020b). Tertiary educational attainment remains high as in 2019, 58.8% of 30-34-year-olds had obtained a tertiary degree, the highest share in the EU (41.6%). Employability among young graduates is likely to be impacted by the Covid-19 crisis, although it has risen in 2019. Another challenge for education and training, which features prominently in the current education reform, is to encourage adult participation in lifelong learning activities; it is relatively low and

has been decreasing (5.9% in 2019), especially among the low-skilled, compared to the EU average (10.8% in 2019) (European Commission, 2020)

Cyprus decided to develop a comprehensive NQF, the Cyprus qualifications framework (CyQF), in 2008 (Decision No 67445 of 9 July 2008)[235] to improve permeability, both horizontal and vertical, within its education and training systems. The Council of Ministers approved the establishment of the framework based on the eight levels of the EQF in 2012 and work on framework design was finalised in 2017. 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.

The CyQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certified against the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) 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. The main role of the CyQF is to classify qualifications according to defined levels of learning outcomes. Its implementation is expected to impact specifically on the promotion of lifelong learning, the recognition and validation of qualifications, enhanced mobility of learners and workers and improved quality assurance of education and training programmes (Cedefop, 2020a).

The reform potential of the framework is being acknowledged by linking it to wider reforms and procedures for quality assurance, assessment

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235. Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 67445 on establishing the CyQF (2008).

and award of qualifications. The aim is to develop an inclusive framework of qualifications, including those awarded outside formal education, to promote lifelong learning. This is primarily achieved by including the vocational qualifications system – established by HRDA – within the framework (at levels 3 to 6) to bring about comparability and better correlation of qualifications acquired in formal or non-formal learning. These qualifications refer to occupational standards and certified learning outcomes acquired at work.

A further policy objective is to reinforce VET at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels through the framework initiative the Cyprus Productivity Centre (CPC)[236]. 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[237]. 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 setting-up and upgrading of post-secondary VET institutes (MIEEK) has been a major step towards attracting more students to this pathway. They deliver qualifications fully integrated into the framework at CyQF/EQF level 5.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The CyQF includes all levels and types of qualification in all subsystems of education and training. It consists of two distinct strands: one for formal education (primary, lower and upper secondary, tertiary education and apprenticeship schemes) and one for non-formal and informal learning (the system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) – developed by the Human Resource Development Authority, and other training programmes). Levels 5 and 7 have been divided into three sublevels each (a, b, and c) to better represent the diversity of qualifications existing in the country. Level descriptors were defined in three categories (knowledge, skills and competence), inspired by those of the EQF but further elaborated, with an emphasis on problem solving, communication,

cooperation, learning skills, and understanding and application of knowledge. Competence-based vocational qualifications in the SVQ are based on occupational standards (currently available for 82 occupations)[238], making it possible to award a qualification to a candidate irrespective of how and where they acquired the relevant knowledge, skills and competences. The SVQ system adopted the same level descriptors. Including the system of vocational qualifications within the framework (at levels 3 to 6) aims to bring about comparability of qualifications acquired through formal and non-formal learning.

The qualifications system has traditionally been input-based (quality of teachers, infrastructure and length of education and training programmes) but there has been a change towards an outcome-based approach with the SVQ system, the emphasis on learning outcomes and validation of non-formal learning. 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 have been 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 (EQF/CYQF levels 1 to 4).

Implementation of the learning outcomes approach has coincided with the ambitious Cyprus national reform programme 2020[239]. Education reform programme 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. An integrated student evaluation system (ISES), which was implemented during the 2019/20 school year, aims to give emphasis to formative assessment and to diagnose student needs in relation to specific expected outcomes,

236. The Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (MLSI) is responsible for the CPC, 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.
237. The NMA is part financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and has been fully operational since 2015.

238. http://www.hrdauth.org.cy/easyconsole.cfm/page/project/p_id/82/pc_id/17154
239. Directorate General for European Programmes, Coordination and Development (2020). *Europe 2020 – Cyprus national reform programme 2020.* https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-national-reform-programme-cyprus_en_0.pdf

and to offer early the necessary educational interventions required for improvement.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The EQF national coordination point was established at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth as an in-service department[240] overseeing the development and gradual implementation of the framework and coordinating the inclusion of qualifications in the CyQF registry. A National Qualifications Authority has been established[241] as the main body of CyQF implementation at operational level. The Authority has the power 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.

A permanent advisory body – the CyQF council– has been established, as a forum for collaboration between stakeholders[242]; 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 the CyQF;
d. advising the Ministry of Education and Culture on policy and resource implications.

To ensure the quality of higher education in Cyprus, there are two bodies responsible. The first is the Cyprus council for the recognition of higher education qualifications (KY.S.A.T.S), an independent body responsible for the recognition of diplomas awarded by higher education institutions. The second is the new Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAAA), which is an independent body responsible for accreditation of higher education institutions in Cyprus (Cedefop; Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus, 2019). For continuing VET (CVET) and the SVQ, the body responsible is the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[243]

Cyprus does not have a national framework for validating non-formal and informal learning, but an appropriate mechanism is currently under development through a project partly funded by the ESF. This project has supported a mapping study of the current situation in Cyprus[244] and a national action plan setting up a mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (*epikirosi mathisis*) was developed at the beginning of 2018. This plan was put to public consultation during the first half of 2018[245] and was completed in May 2018. It entered 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 at the end of 2019 are not available yet. Within the context of the ongoing reformation of the National Qualifications Authority, the governing body of the CyQF will evaluate the results from the pilot implementation and will integrate them into the plan for establishing a national framework for validating non-formal and informal learning.

Implementation will build on work already done by 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[246]. It is planned to develop 80 additional vocational qualifications

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240. The NQF secretariat is located in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth under the VET Management.
241. Decision No 82592. http://www.cm.gov.cy/cm/cm.nsf/All/E4CE86FB6C8269F6C22583E5002A810E/$file/82.592.pdf?OpenElement
242. 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 (HRDA) or their representatives.

243. This section draws mainly on input from Manoudi, A. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Cyprus*. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Cyprus.pdf
244. EEO Group (2017). *Mapping study on the validation of non-formal and informal learning* [unpublished].
245. See the text for consultation Prepared by the EEO Group for the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture here.
246. Validating the results of the evaluation of previous learning and certification of the candidates' qualifications facilitates the employment of the unemployed and inactive and the promotion of employees. In addition, companies that promote the certification of their employees' professional qualifications thus increase their productivity and competitiveness. More information here.

during the 2014-20 ESF programming period. The 82 vocational qualifications already developed will be revised in response to labour market needs[247]. Standards used in the vocational qualifications system relate not only to occupational skills, but also to soft skills developed through work experience (such as teamwork and collaboration)[248]; 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 the CyQF is developed. Once the process is completed, there will be a potential link between the two VET systems.

The autonomous nature of higher education institutions enables them to accept credits from prior learning. The Cyprus Council for Recognition 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.

Cyprus is inking the recommendation process for upskilling pathways closely with the development of arrangements for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This will provide learners with possibilities to bridge different learning routes, or to accumulate credits and partial qualifications to gain access to further learning opportunities[249]. The Ministry of Education and HRDA prepared a report during July 2018 on how Cyprus is responding to this Council recommendation. HRDA has established a variety of programmes targeting the upskilling of the active and inactive (young and long-term unemployed) populations. It offers, or finances, training programmes such as the training of secondary and tertiary education graduates and the schemes for improving the employability of the unemployed and economically inactive women[250]. The youth guarantee, a major part of the national action plan for youth employment (NAPFY), aims at preventing

unemployed individuals from falling into long-term unemployment and inactivity traps[251].

NQF implementation and impact

The CyQF is a comprehensive framework including all levels and types of qualifications from formal education and training and from the system of vocational qualifications (SVQ). The decision for the establishment of the CyQF in Cyprus has been adopted by the Council of Ministers[252]. The framework is at an activation stage. A national qualification register is under development[253] and will cover qualifications from general education, VET and higher education, as well as the SVQ at a later stage. So far, occupational standards have been developed for 82 SVQ qualifications and will continue to be developed for 80 additional ones. To support CyQF implementation, guidelines, criteria and procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national register were developed in consultation with stakeholders. The comprehensive and inclusive nature of the new framework requires systematic collaboration between stakeholders.

The CyQF includes the development and implementation of the procedures for quality assurance and qualifications award. The new legislation[254] 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 QAAA agency is, among others, responsible for the institutional, departmental and programmatic evaluation and accreditation of higher education, as well as the assessment of the conditions for the provision of cross-border education from foreign institutions in Cyprus[255]. HRDA has a robust quality assurance process in place for monitoring the SVQ. All aspects of the system, and those participating

247. More information here.
248. Qualifications standards have been developed in the following areas: tourism industry, manufacturing, construction industry, wholesale and retail trade, vehicle repair professional training, communication systems and networks/computers and hair makeup.
249. Commission staff working document: Council recommendation on upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults taking stock of implementation measures. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/implementation-report-upskilling-pathways_en.pdf
250. Independent national experts network in the area of adult education/adult skills. Full country report – Cyprus. file:///C:/Users/apouliou/Downloads/25.01.2019_ALN_CY-TOC.pdf

251. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-related-transversal-skills-and-employability-12_en
252. Decision of the Council of Ministers No 67445 on establishing the CyQF (2008).
253. The national qualifications register (NQF register-Ethniko Mitroo Prosonton) is at the early stages of development, as a decision is pending in relation to regulating the inclusion of qualifications within the NQF.
254. Assurance and accreditation of quality of higher education and the establishment and operation of an agency for related matters of 2015. Law 136(I)/2015. *Official Gazette* Annex I(I), No 4526, 21.7.2015. The law provides for the establishment and operation of an Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education. http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/arith/2015_1_136.pdf
255. Private universities will be evaluated by QQA every five years after their establishment, according to European standards.

in it, are quality assured by HRDA, which holds the relevant registers of assessment centres and assessors for each vocational field and region. The HRDA has also introduced a system for evaluating and certifying training. Some institutions have begun to indicate CyQF and EQF levels in national qualifications databases, on VET certificates and Europass Certificate and Diploma Supplements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020)[256]. The CyQF Council is responsible for the approval of the CyQF logo on diplomas and supplements issued by the different institutions.

An NQF/EQF communication strategy has 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[257], school-based seminars (for counselling practitioners) and conferences organised in the Cyprus chambers of commerce and by the 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. The development of the CyQF website, providing citizens with an update on news and developments on this matter, has been very helpful. An evaluation of the framework is not yet planned.

Referencing to the EQF

The CyQF was referenced to the EQF in February 2017. An updated referencing report will be submitted once the system for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning and its links to the CyQF are in place.

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. The creation of the Human Resource Development Authority and the setting up of a National Qualifications Authority, as well as a Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency in Higher Education (QAAA), have been very important developments for the implementation of the qualifications framework. In the same vein, setting up a CyQF council was important in establishing a permanent forum for collaboration between stakeholders[258]: 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. The main success factor to date is the use of the CyQF as a comparison tool for qualifications within and outside the country and as a guideline for new developments in the education field in Cyprus (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Future plans for Cyprus include strengthening the legal basis of the CyQF. Once the reformation process relating to the National Qualifications Authority is completed, and following an approval by the Council of Ministers, the CyQF will be regulated by law by the House of Representatives. Developing a national register as well as the criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in this register is needed for the future. The development of guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning, 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).

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256. This process is under revision within the context of the ongoing reformation of the National Qualifications Authority, the governing body of the CyQF. There is a preliminary approval by the Council of Ministers in relation to the process. Following a final decision, the process will be regulated by law by the House of Representatives (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).
257. The CyQF booklet, which provides full information on the CyQF and its social benefits, was prepared and circulated to all stakeholders.

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258. The CyQF Council has not held regular meetings because of the ongoing reformation process.

Table 22. Cypriot national qualifications framework (CyQF)

CYQF LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	SVQ LEVELS	EQF LEVELS
8	• Doctoral degree (Διδακτορικός Τίτλος)		8
7c	• Master degree (Μεταπτυχιακός Τίτλος)		7
7b	• Postgraduate diplomas (Μεταπτυχιακό Δίπλωμα)		
7a	• Postgraduate certificates (Μεταπτυχιακό Πιστοποιητικό)		
6	• Bachelor degree (Πτυχίο)	SVQ 6	6
5c	• Higher certificates and diplomas – three years (Ανώτερα Διπλώματα και Πιστοποιητικά)	SVQ 5	5
5b	• Post-secondary certificates and diplomas – two years (Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Διετούς Διάρκειας)		
5a	• Post-secondary certificates and diplomas – one year (Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Μονοετούς Διάρκειας)		
4	• Upper secondary general education and evening schools certificates – 12th grade or 12th and 13th for some private schools (Απολυτήριο Μέσης Γενικής Εκπαίδευσης) • Upper secondary technical and vocational education and evening technical schools certificates – 12th grade (Απολυτήριο Μέσης Τεχνικής Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης)	SVQ 4	4
3	• Lower secondary education certificate – 10th grade – preparatory year for upper secondary education (Απολυτήριο Πρώτου Κύκλου Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης – 10η τάξη) • New modern apprenticeship certificate – 10th grade (Νέα Σύγχρονη Μαθητεία – 10η τάξη)	SVQ 3	3
2	• Compulsory lower secondary education certificate – 9th 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 7th and/or 8th grade (Υποχρεωτική Εκπαίδευση)		1

Source: Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021: http://www.cyqf.gov.cy/index.php/en/diagram

Abbreviations

CPC	Cyprus Productivity Centre
CyQF	Cyprus qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European Social Fund
HRDA	Human Resource and Development Agency
KUSATS	Cyprus Council for Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications
MLSI	Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
MIEEK	*Metalykeiaka Instituta Epaggelmatikis Ekpaideysis kai Katartisis* (post-secondary VET institutes)
NAPFY	National action plan for youth employment
NMA	new modern apprenticeship scheme
NQF	national qualifications framework
PISA	programme for international student assessment
QAAA	Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
SVQ	system of vocational qualifications
VET	vocational education and training

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CZECHIA

Introduction and context

Czechia has a relatively low rate of early school leaving (6.7% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 10.2%) and a high employment rate of recent graduates (87.3% in 2019)[259]. A very high percentage of upper secondary students, although less than in the previous year, are enrolled in vocational education and training (VET) (71.3% in 2018, compared to 48.4% across the EU) and, in 2019, 86.8% of recent VET graduates were employed[260]. The labour market relevance of the VET system is being strengthened; there is also a focus on flexibility and improving transferability between initial and continuous VET pathways[261]. According to the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)[262], educational achievements of 15-year-olds in reading, maths and science are slightly higher than EU averages; however, socioeconomic background is a strong factor in differences in student performance (European Commission, 2019).

While the Czech education system remains highly decentralised, substantial changes in regional funding of schools have been introduced as of January 2020, from per-student funding to funding based on the number of hours taught, with the aim of improving teaching quality and more adequate remuneration of teaching staff (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2020). Discussions on the objectives, content and outcomes of Czech education until 2030 and on the revision of framework educational

programmes (key curricular documents) have been held in preparation of the *Strategy for education policy of the Czech Republic 2030+*[263] (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2019). Tertiary educational attainment increased to 35.1% in 2019, while participation of adults in lifelong learning slightly decreased from 8.5% to 8.1% in 2019[264]); both indicators remain below EU averages. In higher education, stronger internal quality assurance has been observed and the programme offer is being broadened to include professionally oriented programmes (European Commission, 2019).

Work on qualifications has been carried out at subsystem level to varying degrees, and the country has not yet decided to develop a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF). However, the importance of increased interconnectedness between various parts of the education system and the need to establish links between different education pathways have been acknowledged (Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2014). Thus, the question remains whether a comprehensive NQF could help coordinate and bridge developments in different subsystems.

A national register of qualifications (*Národní soustava kvalifikací* – NSK) has been developed, addressing adults as a main target group and learning outcomes acquired outside formal education and training. The NSK is operational and functions as a framework for qualifications obtained through further education and as a tool for validation of non-formal and informal learning. It has eight levels and comprises qualification standards and assessment standards developed by sector councils based on the descriptions of occupations in the national system of occupations. It currently (September 2020) includes 1 364 qualifications in 27 sectors, between EQF levels 2 and 7.

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259. Data from European Commission, 2020.
260. Idem.
261. The ESF-funded project *Modernisation of vocational education and training*, launched in 2017, introduced over 350 modules aimed at enhanced transferability between initial and continuing VET pathways and qualifications in the national register of qualifications (European Commission, 2019). An examination model for master craftsperson qualifications is being piloted and master craftsperson qualifications are being developed, opening access to EQF level 5 for holders of VET qualifications at EQF level 3 who have relevant work experience (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2018).
262. https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/pisa-2018_en

263. https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/skolstvi-v-cr/strategie-2030
264. Data from European Commission, 2020.

A framework for higher education covering qualifications provided by universities at EQF levels 6 to 8 was adopted in November 2018, providing a basis for implementation and self-certification to QF-EHEA.

Czechia referenced its national qualifications system to the EQF in 2011 (NÚOV, 2011). All qualifications awarded in secondary education and higher education, and the qualifications included in the NSK, are linked to EQF levels. The three subsystems are regulated by three different acts[265].

Policy objectives

In the absence of a comprehensive NQF, policy objectives were defined for the qualifications frameworks created at subsystem level. The establishment of the NSK was to some extent motivated by a gap between the requirements of the labour market and the education and training offer, and intended to strengthen the links between initial and continuing VET (Kadlec, Horská and Brůha, 2018). It was developed as an instrument in the national *Strategy for lifelong learning*[266], which expired in 2015. The strategy's main elements aimed at improving access to lifelong learning and at developing a more permeable education and training system. Currently, the NSK functions as a framework for qualifications obtained in further education and as a tool for validation of non-formal and informal learning. It supports policies in adult education, in the upskilling and retraining of adults.

The *Long-term objectives in higher education* (2016-20)[267] referred to the introduction of a qualifications framework for higher education, which was adopted in 2018, and its self-certification to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA). The aim of the higher

education framework is to increase transparency and permeability of higher education by defining learning outcomes for qualifications at different higher education levels.

The *Strategy for education policy until 2020* included 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). A 2017 external evaluation of its implementation indicated that these priorities remained relevant, as well as a need to better link strategic documents for a more flexible response to societal shifts in the post-2020 period (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2019).

Developments in VET and higher education have not been coordinated or connected. Despite the efforts of the EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP), most stakeholders and decision makers are not convinced about the need for a comprehensive or overarching national framework or its benefits (Stalker, 2019). This leaves several challenges for developing shared concepts, improving communication and cooperation between subsystems and opening up access pathways to education programmes.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The national register of qualifications (NSK)[268] addresses learning outcomes acquired outside formal education and training, responding directly to the needs of the labour market. It 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). They are based on the descriptions of occupations in the national system of occupations[269]. The Act 179/2006 distinguishes between 'vocational qualifications', which testify to the professional competence of an individual to perform occupational or work activities in a specific occupation, or in

265. 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
   Act No 111/1998 Coll., on higher education institutions. 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
266. The Strategy of lifelong learning in the Czech Republic, 2007*:* http://www.msmt.cz/uploads/Zalezitosti_EU/strategie_2007_EN_web_jednostrany.pdf
267. 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:http://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/tertiary-education/strategic-plan-for-higher-education-institutions-2016-2020?lang=2

268. For more information on the NSK: http://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/
269. The national system of occupations: www.nsp.cz

two or more occupations to the extent specified in the qualification standard, and 'comprehensive vocational qualifications', reflecting the vocational competence of an individual to duly perform all activities in a certain occupation[270].

The learning-outcomes-based NQF for higher education[271] 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. 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.

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. They are, however, not in use.

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, but the idea for a comprehensive NQF has not been taken forward.

The learning outcomes approach is widely used, although applied and interpreted slightly differently across education levels and subsystems. The Education Act, in force since 2005, introduced learning outcomes in national core curricula for all levels below tertiary. The use of learning outcomes as a starting point at all levels of the education system was one of the aims of the *Strategy for education policy until 2020* (Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2014). An official Czech translation[272] of Cedefop's *Handbook on defining, writing and applying learning outcomes*[273] was published in 2018.

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). Framework educational programmes in pre-primary, primary and secondary education are being revised, aiming to define learning outcomes for more educational stages and to better focus on skills for future jobs (European Commission, 2019).

Curriculum reform in vocational education and the development of relevant methodologies, and the Act on the verification and recognition of results of further education, have set the ground for a competence-based and learning-outcomes-oriented approach in VET. Initial VET (IVET) core curricula are increasingly being aligned with competences defined in the NSK, which in turn are based on occupational standards in the NSP. 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).

In higher education, each study programme has a 'graduate profile' (general programme description) and programme goals, described in terms of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are defined as professional knowledge, professional skills and general competences that graduates should be able to demonstrate on completion of a specific learning phase. Knowledge and skills are subject-specific, while competences are more general: 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 a competence (NÚV, 2015). The National Accreditation Bureau for Higher Education recommends that higher education institutions structure learning outcomes in this way, and it is intended that the qualifications framework for higher education be used in the accreditation process (Cedefop, 2016).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP) has been operational since 2009, first within the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NÚOV), and between 2011 and 2019

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270. Certain vocational qualifications can be combined to obtain a comprehensive vocational qualification and, after a final exam, can lead to an IVET qualification at EQF level 3 or 4. More information on the NQF for higher education can be found at

271. More information on the NQF for higher education can be found at: https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/vysoke-skolstvi/ramec-kvalifikaci-vysokoskolskeho-vzdelavani-ceske-republiky

272. http://www.nuv.cz/file/3403/

273. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4156

within the National Institute for Education (NÚV)[274]. Since January 2020, following the merging of the latter with the National Institute for Further Education (NIDV), the EQF NCP is hosted by the newly formed body – the National Pedagogical Institute (NPI CR)[275]. The EQF 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. It has also led discussions on establishing a comprehensive NQF and provides and disseminates information on European tools. As a comprehensive NQF has not been put in place, there are no specific human or financial resources available for an NQF secretariat (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The 2006 Act on the verification and recognition of further education results, which came into force in 2007[276], 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 authorising bodies and approves, modifies and issues a list of vocational and comprehensive vocational qualifications. The National Council for Qualifications acts as an advisory body to the MEYS on qualifications. The national register of qualifications (NSK) was maintained and published by NÚV, and, as of 2020, by NPI CR. Sector councils are in charge of developing qualification and assessment standards for qualifications up to level 7 included in the NSK[277]. There are currently 29 sector councils consisting of representatives of employers, employees, qualification authorities and academic sectors. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has been developing the national system of occupations, which is closely linked with the NSK.

Over the past 15 years there 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[278]. Schools are responsible for setting and achieving their own goals, based on the national curriculum. Key quality assurance mechanisms remain under the control of the Ministry of Education. The Czech School Inspectorate acts as external evaluator for primary and secondary education and tertiary vocational schools. Approval of programmes in tertiary education is the responsibility of the National Accreditation Bureau for Higher Education (university sector) and the Accreditation Commission for Tertiary Vocational Education (tertiary vocational sector). Higher education institutions are able to apply for institutional accreditation alongside programme accreditation. 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[279]

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[280], amended in 2012[281]. The VNFIL system addresses primarily the CVET sector, with the national register of qualifications (NSK) as its main tool. Validation and recognition procedures are in place for all qualifications included in the NSK, aimed at increasing employability of adults and mitigating skill shortages on the labour market. The NSK currently contains 1 364 vocational qualifications in 27 different sectors, ranging between EQF/NQF levels 2 to 7, with most on levels 3 (702 qualifications) and 4 (420 qualifications) (data from September 2020). They are developed and revised in a multistep process, with broad stakeholder involvement.

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274. The National Institute for Education was founded in 2011 by the 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).
275. https://www.npicr.cz/o-nas
276. Act No 179 of 30 March 2006 on verification and recognition of further education results and on amendments of some other acts: http://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/further-education/the-act-on-the-recognition-of-further-education-results
277. At higher levels, sector councils define only specialised supplementary qualifications, not those awarded by higher education institutions (bachelor, master and PhD degrees).

278. Cooperation of schools with employers in curriculum design, practical training, final examinations and placements for teaching staff was made mandatory through a 2018 amendment of the Education Act. For more information on involvement of employers in VET, please see Cedefop and ReferNet (2020a).
279. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory of validation of non-formal and informal learning* (Stalker, 2019).
280. The Act on the verification and recognition of further education results (2006): http://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/further-education/the-act-on-the-recognition-of-further-education-results
281. Among the amendments: the term 'partial qualification' was replaced with 'vocational qualification'; the minimum age limit for taking part in competence assessment was removed; parts of a vocational qualification can be recognised when passing a competence assessment for another vocational qualification.

The VNFIL system operates more or less parallel to formal education, with some connections between the two. Vocational certificates obtained through VNFIL differ from those awarded in formal VET, as certification in the two subsystems is governed by different legal acts. All four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment and certification), are available, but the first two are not mandatory to apply for assessment and certification. Europass documents are used to support the documentation stage. Assessment and certification relate to the authorisation system. Assessment of knowledge, skills and competences gained by prior learning and work experience is carried out according to the qualifications and assessment standards included in the NSK. The assessment is competence-based, usually consisting of an oral examination, a written part and a practical demonstration of skills and competences. Over the past 10 years, more than 180 000 adult learners have passed exams and were awarded a certificate of vocational qualification (data from September 2018). Certain vocational qualifications can be combined to obtain a comprehensive vocational qualification and, after a final exam, can lead to an IVET qualification. Approximately 80 IVET qualifications at EQF level 3 can be obtained in this way, which can be seen as a bridge between VNFIL and formal VET. About 30 vocational qualifications included in the NSK at EQF level 4 and obtained through validation of non-formal and informal learning can be recognised as the vocational part of the *maturita* exam, leading to the Certificate of upper secondary vocational education with *maturita* exam; the standardised part of the *maturita* exam (Czech language, English or Maths) must be passed as well.

The main strengths of VNFIL in Czechia are the existing legal basis, information accessibility, quality assurance arrangements, close collaboration with employers in developing vocational qualifications and the correspondence with the EQF. 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, VET and higher education can decide to shorten a learner's pathway in line with legal provisions. 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; to access higher education, students have to have achieved an upper-secondary leaving certificate (*maturita*). In the absence of a comprehensive NQF, coordination, communication and transfer among the different subsystems remain limited.

No credit system is used in VET. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) is used in higher education, though it is not linked to validation arrangements.

NQF implementation and impact

Czechia does not have a comprehensive NQF in place and it is not known whether one will be developed in the near future. Work on qualifications has been carried out at subsystem level. In 2011, the country referenced its qualifications from secondary education, higher education and the vocational qualifications included in the national register of vocational qualifications (NSK) directly to EQF levels.

The NSK includes qualifications outside the formal system, awarded under the Act 179/2006 on the verification and recognition of further education results. It functions as a framework for the VNFIL system and adult education. Qualifications in the NSK are developed based on occupation standards in the national system of occupations (NSP). The NSP and NSK are interconnected through a single central database of competences[282]. The NSK is operational. The NSK database[283] records the following information for each vocational qualification: qualification and assessment standard (including description of learning outcomes), reference to corresponding occupations, information on authorising body and validation procedure and NSK/EQF level. So far (September 2020), 1 364 vocational qualifications in 27 sectors have been included in the database, all achievable through validation. Over 180 000 vocational qualifications were awarded by September 2018 (Stalker, 2019).

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 2017[284]. Including EQF levels on higher education qualifications is voluntary and has been a challenge, due to the autonomy of

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282. The central database of competences is available at: http://kompetence.nsp.cz/
283. The NSK database is available at: https://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/
284. According to Decree No. 3/2015 Coll., on certain documents in education.

higher education institutions. EQF levels have been indicated on Europass certificate supplements[285] and diploma supplements for tertiary vocational qualifications since 2012 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The EQF NCP has been disseminating information about the EQF through the EQF national website[286], 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.

The qualifications framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna framework, was designed and developed between 2009-12 (in the Q-RAM project), initially covering EQF levels 5 to 8. In 2012, the framework went through pilot implementation at 12 universities and four tertiary VET institutions (VOŠ). In 2015, the framework was revised and its scope was reduced to EQF levels 6 to 8; it includes only qualifications provided by universities (not VOŠ, tertiary VET institutions). The framework was adopted in 2018 setting the ground for implementation and self-certification to QF-EHEA. It has been included in the amendment to the higher education Act, which is to be discussed by Parliament.

Referencing to the EQF

Czechia referenced its national qualifications subsystems directly to the EQF levels in December 2011. Formal qualifications from secondary education were referenced based on the classification of educational qualifications types (KKOV) and nationally approved curricula. CVET qualifications awarded through VNFIL are included in the NSK, whose eight levels were also referenced to the eight EQF levels. Qualifications from tertiary vocational education and higher education 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 approved through Cabinet decision 557/2011 and updated in 2013 and 2015 following minor changes in legislation. The latest referencing report (NÚV, 2015) is published on the Europass platform. There

are no plans to present another updated referencing report for the time being; however, the Education strategy 2030+, which is currently being finalised, may introduce significant changes in the education system, which may call for an updated EQF referencing report in the future, once the strategy is implemented (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The framework for higher education has not yet been self-certified against the QF-EHEA.

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), used as a tool for the VNFIL system and adult education, and a qualifications framework for higher education.

The NSK and its online database are operational and are being used for upskilling and reskilling of adults and for validating learning acquired in non-formal and informal contexts. A strong policy rationale underpinning the VNFIL strategy could be considered one success factor in the implementation of the NSK. Partnership between the education sector, qualification management and employers, within the sector skills councils, has been leveraged to define skills shortages in the labour market and utilise the VNFIL system to mitigate them (Stalker, 2019).

There has been commitment for the introduction of a learning-outcomes- orientation in all subsystems of education and training. Qualification and assessment standards for vocational qualifications included in the NSK are expressed in terms of competences. Competences in the NSK have been gradually used as a source of information for educational programmes in initial VET. The revision of framework educational programmes in primary and secondary education is currently being debated, with the aim to strengthen their learning-outcomes- orientation and to promote the development of skills for employability. It has been suggested that, in the future, the NSK could constitute a comprehensive system of reflection aimed at translating the needs of the labour market into educational outcomes (Kadlec, Horská and Brůha, 2018).

Successful implementation of learning outcomes requires coordination of subsystems, initiatives, measures and bodies, which is sometimes difficult. Better understanding of the approach and communication are prerequisites for future implementation of learning outcomes across

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285. The Europass certificate supplement database, including certificate supplements for formal VET qualifications (EQF levels 2-4): https://edo.europass.cz/edo/search_en/
286. http://www.nuv.cz/eqf

education and training. Informal networks of experts, teachers, researchers, policy-makers and officials willing to discuss and share their experiences have been created.

The main challenge and open topic of discussion in the country is the development of a comprehensive NQF, with a coherent set of level descriptors. This could bring together qualifications obtained in formal education and training and those included in the NSK. 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 been held, along with work by experts, but reaching political agreement among stakeholders remains a challenge. The Education strategy 2030+ does not address the development of a comprehensive NQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Table 23. 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	Doctoral programme (*doktor*) – PhD degrees three to four years beyond master	8
7	Master programme (*magistr, inženýr, doktor*) – 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	7 E.g. Head detective(*vedoucí detektiv*) Chemical specialist product manager (*specialista chemie produktmanažer*)
6	Bachelor programme (*bakalář*) – Bc and BcA degrees – three to four years of tertiary education Graduation diploma – Tertiary professional education (*diplom absolventa vyšší odborné školy ve vzdělávacím*) – DiS degree three to three-and-a-half years of tertiary education Graduation diploma – Conservatoire (*diplom absolventa konzervatoře*) – DiS degree – 8 years study after 5 years of primary education or 6 years study after completion of a lower secondary general education programme	6 E.g. Career counsellor for educational and professional paths (*kariérový poradce pro vzdělávací a profesní dráhu*) Independent research and development electrician (*samostatný elektrotechnik výzkumný a vývojový pracovník*)
5		5 E.g. Travel guide (*průvodce cestovního ruchu*) Agricultural advisor for crop production (*zemědělský poradce pro rostlinnou výrobu*)
4	Certificate of upper secondary general education with maturita exam (*vysvědčení o maturitní zkoušce z oboru vzdělání*) – four years of general upper secondary study Certificate of upper secondary vocational education with maturita exam (*vysvědčení o maturitní zkoušce z oboru vzdělání*) – four years of vocational upper secondary study Certificate of supplementary study leading to a maturita exam (*vysvědčení o maturitní zkoušce z oboru vzdělání*) – two years of study after level 3 VET certificate	4 E.g. Quality management specialist in engineering (*technik řízení jakosti ve strojírenství*) Detective trainee(detektiv koncipient)
3	Cetificate of upper secondary VET – (*výuční list z oboru vzdělání*) – three years of upper secondary VET study	3 E.g. Glassmaker for pressed glass (*sklář pro lisované sklo*) Locksmith (*zámkař*)

EQF LEVELS	CZECH QUALIFICATIONS AWARDED IN FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING	NSK LEVELS AND QUALIFICATIONS (AWARDED THROUGH VNFIL)
2	Certificate of lower secondary education *(vysvědčení o získání základního vzdělání)* – completion of a lower secondary general education programme – nine years Certificate of upper secondary education with VET certificate *(výuční list z oboru vzdělání)* – two years of upper secondary study Certificate of upper secondary education without VET certificate *(vysvědčení o závěrečné zkoušce)* – 1 or 2 years education programmes	2 E.g. Production of side dishes *(výroba příloh)* Guard *(strážný)*
1	Special education – completion of an educational programme in a special school – 10 years	1

*   In the absence of a comprehensive NQF, Czechia referenced its qualifications subsystems directly to the EQF.

Sources: Adapted from NUV (2015); the national register of qualifications (NSK): http://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us [accessed 2.4.2020]; the EQF NCP, 2020 (email communication).

Abbreviations

CVET	continuing vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
IVET	initial vocational education and training
KKOV	classification of educational qualification types
NCP	national coordination point
NSK	national register of qualifications *(Národní soustava kvalifikací)*
NQF	national qualifications framework
NPI CR	National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic
NÚOV	National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education [*Národního ústavu odborného vzdělávání*]
NÚV	National Institute for Education [*Národního ústavu pro vzdělávání*]
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework of the European higher education area
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

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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 early leavers from education and training, adult participation in lifelong learning, participation in early childhood education and care, tertiary educational attainment and employment rate of recent graduates. Pupils show good average basic skills and the share of underachievers, as measured in the 2018 Programme for international student assessment (PISA) results, is well below the EU average and better than, or close to, the 15% EU benchmark (mathematics 14.6%, reading 16% and science 18.7%). Since 2012, the share of underachievers has remained broadly unchanged.

The lack of qualified teachers and support staff risks somewhat affecting teaching quality. The OECD TALIS 2018 study[287] shows that Danish teachers have high self-efficiency from the start of their careers. However, about 20% of teachers below 50 intend to leave teaching within the next five years (double the EU average). Teaching starting salaries are relatively high, but pay structure is rather flat and salaries increase little during the career. Government is reforming the access to teacher training to increase quality and reduce dropout. This introduces a qualitative element into access to teacher training, balancing the financial incentive for institutions to maximise the number of students. While initial teacher education is strong in areas like pedagogy, it is less so in preparing trainees for teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting. Opportunities for professional development are close to the EU average, but are lacking, more importantly, in relation to multicultural and multilingual teaching and special needs (European Commission, 2020).

Denmark has developed a learning-outcome-based, comprehensive national qualifications framework (DK NQF) with eight levels covering all types and levels of qualification awarded and quality assured by public authorities. As of 2019, qualifications awarded outside the formal education system in Denmark can be level assessed and included in the NQF. Implementation of the framework has been a gradual process, starting in June 2009 when it was adopted via an administrative decision by the Ministry for Education (now the Ministry of Children and Education), the Ministry for Science, Technology and Innovation (now the Ministry of Higher Education and Science), the Ministry for Culture and the Ministry for Economic and Business Affairs (now the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs). The NQF itself has no regulatory functions; inclusion of Danish qualifications in the NQF and the quality assurance of qualifications are linked to the existing legal frameworks for publicly recognised qualifications.

Policy objectives

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 framework supports development of a transparent education for the purpose of mobility and recognition and a training and learning system without dead ends; it supports learner progression irrespective of prior learning, age or employment

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287. OECD (2019). *TALIS 2018 results (volume I): Teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners*. Paris: TALIS, OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en OECD (2020). *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and school leaders as valued professionals*. Paris: TALIS, OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en

situation and consolidates the learning-outcome-based foundation of Danish qualifications.

Creating more transparency in line with the emphasis on lifelong learning and strengthening the relevance of the framework for the labour market and the social partners is of utmost importance. Based on the Parliament's legislation on accreditation in 2017[288], private and public qualifications not under the remits of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Ministry of Children and Education and the Ministry of Culture[289] could be level assessed by the Danish Accreditation Institution[290] in relation to the Danish NQF. The institution has, in cooperation with relevant ministries, developed principles and procedures for level assessment and inclusion of education programmes awarded outside formal education and training in the Danish NQF[291]. The primary purpose of level assessments of private and public education programmes not under the remits of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Ministry of Children and Education and the Ministry of Culture is to make visible the severity of the learning outcomes of these programmes and provide a better overview of the private education market. Level assessments of such programmes will strengthen the opportunities for interaction between non-formal and public education, such as through credit assessments and validation of prior learning, and thus provide better opportunities for a link between education and the labour market in a lifelong learning perspective. The increased transparency can help counter double education. The level assessments will also strengthen consumer information and can, at the same time, help to ensure that the providers work systematically with learning outcomes and quality assurance.

A level assessment of private and public education programmes is not a public recognition, and gives no rights in the form of grade requirements for credit transfer or access to admission to publicly recognised programmes. However, it increases transparency in the private education market and supports efforts to ensure and develop the quality of education programmes outside the formal education system[292].

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The Danish qualifications framework is a comprehensive, eight level framework covering all types and levels of qualification awarded and quality assured by public authorities (general education, vocational education and training (VET), higher education (HE) and supplementary qualifications). Private and public education programmes not under the remits of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Ministry of Children and Education and Ministry of Culture have been included.

Level descriptors are defined by knowledge (*viden*), skills (*færdigheder*) and competences (*kompetencer*):

Knowledge descriptors emphasise the following:
- the type of knowledge involved; knowledge about theory or knowledge about practice; knowledge of a subject or a field within a profession;
- the complexity of knowledge; the degree of complexity and how predictable or unpredictable the situation in which the knowledge is mastered;
- 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:
- the type of skill involved; practical, cognitive, creative or communicative;
- the complexity of the problem-solving; the problem-solving these skills can be applied to, and the complexity of the task;
- 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:
- space for action; the type of work/study related context in which knowledge and

288. https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/r0710.aspx?id=198244
289. The Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Ministry of Children and Education and the Ministry of Culture regulate and award certificates and degrees in formal education and supplementary qualifications. Anyone who offers private or public education that is not subject to ministerial regulation under the three above mentioned ministries can apply to be level assessed. These can be, for example, in the areas of continuing education, leisure or culture. The education provider may, for example, be an individual, an association, a ministry (e.g. Ministry of Justice), a directorate or a trade union.
290. Danish Accreditation Institution: https://akkr.dk/en/ Danmarks Akkrediteringsinstitusjon: https://akkr.dk/
291. Guideline to level assessment: https://akkr.dk/wp-content/filer/akkr/Vejledning-til-niveauindplacering-2.-udgave.pdf (in Swedish).
292. Danish Accreditation Institution:https://akkr.dk/en/about-us/other-assessments/

skills are brought to play, and the degree of unpredictability and changeability in these contexts;

- 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;
- learning;
- the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning and that of others[293].

These descriptors are used to address both full and supplementary qualifications[294] and for level assessment of non-formal qualifications.

As some other NQFs, the Danish framework draws a clear distinction between levels 1 to 5 and levels 6 to 8. The latter are identical to the level descriptors in the Danish qualifications framework for higher education and contain explicit references to research-related outcomes. A broader descriptor has been drawn up for level 5 in the DK NQF than for the corresponding level descriptor in the national NQF-HE for short cycle degrees; this makes it possible to include qualifications at level 5 acquired through some vocational education and training and maritime vocational education and training programmes.

Qualifications at levels 1 to 5 are assigned according to a 'best fit' principle, while qualifications at levels 6 to 8 are assigned according to a 'full fit' principle; this means that qualifications at this level have to be accredited[295] as meeting the legal requirements set by national authorities and according to the qualifications framework for higher education.

All current publicly recognised qualifications in the Danish education system at levels 6 to 8 are included in the qualifications framework for higher education.

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 vocational education and training, 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 a VET certificate. In higher education all qualifications are clearly described using learning-outcome-based terminology. This shift from input- to output-based steering is supported by the Danish quality assurance approach of accreditation and learning outcome is an important reference point for accreditation of new and existing programmes (Danish Evaluation Institute et al., 2011).

For the vocational training system, it has been decided not to split up vocational education programmes into modules to which the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET), or other credit points, might be assigned. For foreign pupils in mobility programmes, the course of study is awarded ECVET points in relation to workload. A full-time equivalent programme corresponds to 60 points (ReferNet Denmark, Cedefop 2019)[296].

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The DK NQF for lifelong learning was established by administrative decision in 2009. No specific legal act on the DK NQF has been adopted. The framework is integrated into sectoral legislation. In higher education, it is implemented via the accreditation Act. On all other levels, it is integrated in educational orders.

Implementation of the DK NQF is coordinated by the inter-departmental National Coordination Committee for the Danish Qualifications Framework, established in 2006 with representatives from the ministries with responsibility for lifelong learning in Denmark: the Ministry of Children and Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science and the Ministry of Culture. After 2018, the Danish Accreditation Institution became an advisory member of the committee related to the referencing of private and public education programmes to the DK NQF. Stakeholders are consulted through the committee for all developments regarding the

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293. The Danish Evaluation Institute (2011), pp 17-18.
294. The role of supplementary qualifications is particularly important for adult education and for continuing vocational education and training. A supplementary qualification can be a supplement (addition) to a qualification, a part (module) or an independent entity not related to any other qualification.
295. Hansen, J.B. et al. (2013). *Learning outcomes in external quality assurance approaches. Investigating and discussing Nordic practices and developments*: https://www.nokut.no/contentassets/a4895de04f3744f0ab9f31330ad12cd8/learning_outcomes_in_external_quality_assurance_approaches_noqa_report_-220413_250613.pdf

296. Cedefop; University College Copenhagen (2019). Vocational education and training in Europe: Denmark [From Cedefop; ReferNet. Vocational education and training in Europe database].https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/el/printpdf/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/denmark

framework implementation and for regular updates. All stakeholders have, for example, been consulted on the principles and procedures for the inclusion of private and public education programmes in the Danish NQF.

At operational level, the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education is the official EQF national coordination point (NCP)[297]. The agency is part of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, established in 2017. The NCP functions as the information office for questions relating to the EQF and the correlation between the EQF and the DK NQF. The NCP informs all stakeholders about the correlation between the NQF and the EQF, including how the national qualifications levels reference to the qualifications levels in the EQF, provides information about the background and purpose of establishing the EQF and administers and develops the website on the Danish NCP and its referencing to the EQF. A main task for the NCP, in addition to coordinating stakeholders involved in framework implementation, is disseminating information to a wider public. Responsibility for other areas, such as quality assurance of qualifications in the national qualification framework and their levelling, lies with the ministries responsible for education and training. (Ministry of Higher Education and Science).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[298]

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. A legal framework for validation of prior learning (VPL), based on common principles in adult education and training, has been in place since 2007[299]. This ensures individuals' legal rights to have their prior learning validated in relation to the standards of a given education and training programme, no matter where and how the competences have been acquired, and includes the possibilities of obtaining a full or part qualification. The recommended VPL arrangement basically

includes four phases: identification, documentation, assessment and recognition. The implementation of VPL is decentralised at the provider level and carried out by the educational institutions in relation to the specific education and training in VET, HE and adult education and training. The results of the validation are guaranteed by the linkage to the national qualifications framework. Most qualifications in the Danish NQF can be acquired on the basis of validation.

In practice, validation of prior learning in Denmark, broadly speaking, provides individuals with the following opportunities:
a. to be granted access to formal education and training programmes if they do not meet the formal entry requirements;
b. to get exemptions for parts of a formal education and training programme and/or to have an individually 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.

The certificates issued as a result of the VPL are the same as obtained for the formal programme.

An evaluation of validation of prior learning in the adult education area in Denmark was carried out in 2018 by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA)[300]. The survey was sent out to 136 adult education providers and was based on perspectives from the educational institutions regarding their work on VPL. It resembled a survey conducted by the EVA of adult education in 2010 to enable comparison of results and describe the developments. The survey showed that assessment of prior learning was implemented at a larger percentage of institutions in 2018 than in 2010 and that there was strong support and more widespread use for the concept of recognising adults' prior learning, particularly within higher adult education (academy profession degrees, EQF level 5), where in 2010 just 29% of providers of academy programmes had completed at least one VPL and in 2018 this had risen to 88%. However, the survey also showed that there were weaknesses. The validation methodology could have been better (e.g. interviews were not always held and practical exercises not much used). Another

297. Denmark's information office for questions relating to the EQF: https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks/european-qualifications-framework/eqf-coordination-point
298. This section draws mainly on input from Husted, B. (2019). *Vocational education and training in Europe*: *Denmark.* https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Denmark.pdf
299. Law on changes of different laws under the merit of the Ministry of Education (in Danish): https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2007/556

300. The Danish Evaluation Institute (2019): *Evaluation of prior learning assessment in the adult education area in Denmark* (in Danish; English summary in appendix): https://www.eva.dk/voksen-efteruddannelse/realkompetencevurdering-paa-veu-omraadet-danmark

challenge exposed by the survey related to the lack of competence development for staff involved in the assessment. There are indications that it is still hard to see how VPL can be a financially viable activity for adult education providers and more than half of the respondents fully or mainly agreed that there was a general lack of knowledge about VPL among the population.

On the basis of the survey results, the Danish Evaluation Institute gave concrete recommendations about better use of VPL, including intensified external communication, improved information on webpages, better support and training for assessors, restructured financial incentives, improved quality of methods and strengthened reliability of the outcomes of the validation (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2019).

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science are responsible for the legislative framework for the assessment of prior learning and for taking national initiatives for implementing the legislation. The ministries have also developed policy guidelines and funded projects with the aim of developing tools, methods and procedures which can help the educational institutions conducting VPL.

A project aiming at developing both common guidelines and digital tools for HE institutions' use of VPL was launched in December 2018, scheduled to finish in 2021. A working group with labour market and HE 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. The working group sent the recommendations to the Danish Minister for Higher Education and Science in April 2020. It has not yet been decided how exactly the ministry will follow up on the recommendations

NQF implementation and impact

The Danish NQF is operational and 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 NQF levels and included in the database https://www.ug.dk/. Currently nine private and public education programmes not under the remits of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Ministry of Children and Education and the Ministry of Culture are level assessed by the Danish Accreditation Institution. Five of these had

been included in the NQF by mid-August 2020[301] and four have been rejected for not fulfilling the defined principles for being included in the Danish framework. Currently 10 applications are under evaluation.

Inclusion of qualifications into the DK NQF is quality assured through procedures for accreditation and/or approval of new qualifications and procedures for quality assurance of quality and level[302]. The NQF and EQF levels are indicated on new certificates and diplomas in general education, initial VET, continuous VET and higher education, and on VET certificate and higher education diploma supplements.

The NQF is visible to the general public through two (interconnected) websites. The ufm.dk[303] provides information for an international target group, presenting the NQF and the qualifications it covers. The ug.dk website[304] addresses a national target group and provides comprehensive information on qualifications, programmes and access. This website also provides comprehensive information on the NQF and qualification levels and explains the concept of learning-outcomes-based levels and how these can be used by learners.

Referencing to the EQF

The national qualifications framework for higher education was self-certified to the EHEA framework in 2010. The NQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in May 2011 (Danish Evaluation Institute et al., 2011).

The new process for referencing non-formal qualifications to the NQF, as well as the introduction of a new type of master level qualification, might call for an updated report by end of 2021 or beginning of 2022. This will be discussed in the autumn by the co-ordination committee of the NQF.

301. CISPA (Copenhagen International School of Performing Arts), three-year professional acting course (level 6), Finanssektorens Uddannelsescenter, eksamineret finansrådgiver formuesrådgivning (level 6), AkupunkturAkademiet (level 5), Nordisk Akupunkturuddannelse (level 5) and Forsikringsakademiet, certificeret privatkunderådgiver (level 5).

302. Quality assurance of the inclusion of the qualifications in the DK NQF: https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks/inclusion/quality-assurance

303. https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks?set_language=en&cl=en[assessed 23/4/2020]

304. UddannelsesGuiden: https://www.ug.dk/ About UddannelseGuiden: https://www.ug.dk/programmes/aboutugdk

Important lessons and future plans

In general, the concept of learning outcomes, which were in place in Denmark before the implantation of NQF and EQF, is increasing transparency of qualifications and lifelong learning. The concept is used to support levelling of private and public education programmes, enhance quality assurance and strengthen consumer protection. It is further used to support recognition of foreign qualifications (e.g. in relation to the subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention). In 2020, it is expected that the Danish ENIC-NARIC office will refer to NQF levels in its recognition decisions.

An evaluation was carried out prior to 2018 by the Danish Evaluation Institute[305] 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 showed there was good awareness and understanding of, and overall satisfaction with, the Danish NQF for lifelong learning. There is currently no real demand from stakeholders or any national partners to develop the NQF further (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

305. Danish Evaluation Institute (2013). *Evaluation of the DK NQF* (in Danish). https://www.eva.dk/ungdomsuddannelse/evaluering-danske-kvalifikationsramme-livslang-laering

Table 24. Danish qualifications framework (DK NQF)

NQF LEVELS	CERTIFICATES AND DEGREES	CERTIFICATES FOR SUPPLEMENTARY QUALIFICATIONS*	LEVEL ASSESSED PRIVATE AND PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMMES**	EQF LEVELS
8	• PhD degree (*Ph.d. grad*)			8
7	• Master degree – Candidatus (*Kandidat og masteruddannelser*) • Master degree in arts/fine arts • Master degree			7
6	• Bachelor degree (*Bachelor og diplomuddannelser*) • Bachelor degree in arts • Professional bachelor degree (*Professionsbacheloruddannelser*) • Diploma degree		• CISPA 3 years professional acting course • Financial advisor wealth advisory (E*ksamineret finansrådgiver formuesrådgivning*)	6
5	• VET certificate • Academy profession degrees (*Erhvervsakademi uddannelser*)	• Certificate for supplementary single subject courses at academy profession level • Adult VET certificate	• Acupuncture (*AkupunkturAkademie*t) • Nordic acupuncture education (*Nordisk akupunturuddannelse*) • Certified private client advisor (*certificeret privatkunderådgiver*)	5
4	• General upper secondary school certificate (*Gymnasiale uddannelser*) • 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

NQF LEVELS	CERTIFICATES AND DEGREES	CERTIFICATES FOR SUPPLEMENTARY QUALIFICATIONS*	LEVEL ASSESSED PRIVATE AND PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMMES**	EQF LEVELS
3	• VET certificate • Certificate for preparatory basic education and training (FGU)	• 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 – 10th grade (*10. klasse afgangsprøve*) • Certificate for preparatory basic education and training (FGU)	• Basic VET certificates • General adult education (levels E and F, approximates to 10th grade) • Adult VET certificate		2
1	• Leaving certificate for primary and lower secondary school (ninth grade) (*Folkeskolens afgangsprøve*) • Certificate for preparatory basic education and training (FGU)	• Certificate for preparatory adult education • Certificate for general adult education (level G, approximates to ninth grade)		2

*   Acquired in adult education and training.

**   These are level assessed private and public education programmes outside the remits of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Ministry of Children and Education and Ministry of Culture.

Source: Adapted from the website of the Danish Ministry of Higher education and Science, 2020. https://ufm.dk/en/education-and-institutions/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks/types-of-certificates-and-degrees/hardtableview

Abbreviations

DK NQF	Danish national qualifications framework	NQF	national qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework	VET	vocational education and training
NCP	national coordination point	VPL	validation of prior learning

Main sources of information

The Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education hosts the EQF NCP: https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks/european-qualifications-framework/eqf-coordination-point

Danish NQF website: http://ufm.dk/en/education-and-institutions/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks

The Danish Accreditation Institution: https://akkr.dk/en/

Register of qualifications and programmes included in the NQF: https://www.ug.dk/

The Danish Evaluation Institute et al. (2011): *Referencing the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework.* https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-05/DK_Qualifications_Framework_Referencing_Report_and_Self-certification_Report.pdf

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Danish Evaluation Institute (2019). *Evaluation of prior learning assessment in the adult education area in Denmark* (in Danish, English summary in appendix).https://www.eva.dk/sites/eva/files/2019-01/Rapport%20om%20evaluering%20af%20RKV%202018_med%20summary_al.pdf

European Commission (2020). *Education and training Monitor 2020.* https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2020/en/index.html

European Commission; Cedefop (2020). *Survey on implementation, use and impact of NQF/EQF* [unpublished].

Prepared by

the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in consultation with national experts

EGYPT

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

The Egyptian NQF is completing the adoption stage and has the prospect to enter the activation stage. Development of National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in Egypt has almost two decades of history, started in 2005 with a three-year cooperation programme with European Training Foundation (ETF), led by the Ministry of Manpower and Migration. As part of the education reform strategy, the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) was established in 2007 as the accreditation body for the whole Egyptian education system, and in 2009 was entrusted with coordination and management of the NQF. In the initial period before the 2011 Egyptian revolution NAQAAE conducted a participative process with involvement of stakeholders from all sectors, to develop the first two drafts of the NQF. The years of political instability until 2014 led to a halt of the NQF process, which was only resumed in 2015 with an international conference to unify efforts, include all stakeholders and revisit the structure and design of the proposed NQF. An advisory committee (task force) was then established to implement the recommendations of the conference and elaborated the third draft of the NQF. Between 2016 and 2017 the NQF text was further reviewed and submitted to Prime Minister for the legislative process, accompanied by a series of workshops with stakeholders and experts in cooperation with NARIC, ANQAHE and the TVET II project. From 09/2017 were initiated the discussions on the NQF-related legislative amendments to be introduced to the NAQAAE's law of establishment (law 82/2006[306]). The law amendment is discussed in the Egyptian house of representatives (parliament) and is expected to be issued in 2021.

The Egyptian NQF is conceived with an eight-level structure, comprehensive and inclusive of all levels of qualifications, from basic education to higher education (Doctorate).

NAQAAE is tasked with coordination and management of the NQF. Until 2021 NAQAAE has been the main quality assurance (QA) institution for all levels and sub-sectors of education and training. In 2021 was approved legislation on the establishment of new quality assurance institution focused on technical vocational education and training (TVET). This new institution is the Egyptian TVET Quality Assurance and Accreditation National Authority (ETQAAN). The set of bylaws are in development to support effective operationalisation of its mandate and functions.

Policy context

Egypt is a big country, geographically, and geopolitically, it occupies a strategic position, as a bridge between Africa and the Middle East.

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306. Executive Law 82 for the Year 2006 regarding the establishment of NAQAAE. http://en.naqaae.eg/?page_id=2545

Table 25. Egypt – Key figures (2020, unless otherwise indicated)

POPULATION, MILLION	102.3
Gross domestic product (GDP), current US$ billion	363.1
GDP per capita, current US$	3 549.4
National poverty rate (2017), %	32.5
School enrolment, primary (% gross), 2019	106.4
School enrolment, secondary (%, net), 2019 (UIS[307])	84.6
Higher education enrolment (% gross), 2018 (UIS)	38.9
Employment rate (aged 15+), 2018 Male Female	39.1 63.1 14.4
Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%), 2018	9.8
Youth unemployment rate (aged 15-25) (%), 2018	24.7
Life expectancy at birth, years	72.0

Data Sources: World Bank. 2021[308]. UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS)[309]. ETF 2020a[310].

With 102.3 million in 2020 (up from 83.7 million 2013), Egypt is the most populous Arab country. The proportion of young people aged 15–24 has been decreasing slightly, though it remains high (27.8% in 2019). This sizeable youth population presents significant challenges in terms of delivering education, creating job opportunities, curbing unemployment and improving living standards. However, it also presents a significant opportunity for the development of the economy, adoption of innovation and technology and the well-being of the population.

Egypt is a major migration player in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, experiencing substantial and diverse patterns of emigration and immigration. Egypt is the largest regional provider of migrant labour to the Middle East. More than six million Egyptian emigrants lived in the MENA region as of 2016, primarily in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. Another three million Egyptian citizens and their descendants reside in Europe, North America and Australia, where they

have formed vibrant diaspora communities. Their remittances back home make up 8.9% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP)3. At the same time, Egypt has become a destination for thousands of Arab and African immigrants, and a major host of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian, Sudanese and, since 2011, Syrian refugees. Over the past few years, Egypt has also served as a transit country on migrant routes used by sub-Saharan Africans crossing the Mediterranean towards Europe (ETF. 2020a).

Egypt is classified as a lower middle-income country. Despite the unstable regional and internal political and economic situations, the Egyptian economy has shown solid growth since the structural reforms of 2014, with GDP increasing from 2.2% in 2013 to 5.6% in 2019, before declining under the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the World, this growth is largely driven by expansion in the gas extractives, tourism, manufacturing, construction and information and communications technology (ICT) sectors, while

private investment is also picking up and net exports are improving. Growth is linked with a deliberate spending policy being implemented by the government, particularly in the form of mega-projects, which include the construction of a new administrative capital city, expansion of the Suez Canal and road extensions.

While this stimulus approach has the potential to boost economic growth and create jobs, the continued population increase in Egypt has, so far, outpaced the rate of job creation. Egypt will therefore require urgent measures to generate sufficient numbers of jobs to absorb the vast majority of the working-age population into the labour market and avoid possible social tensions.

Growth declined from 3.6% in financial year 2019/2020 to 3.3% in financial year 2020/2021 (July 1, 2020—June 30, 2021), affected by the ongoing impact of COVID-19. However, exposed sectors that were contracting since the beginning of the pandemic (tourism, manufacturing, extractives, and Suez Canal) started rebounding during April—June 2021 (Quarter 4 of financial year 2020/2021); in part reflecting base effects, easing restrictions and the gradual resumption of economic activity, international travel and trade. Unemployment declined to 7.3% by quarter 4 of financial year 2020/2021, from the 9.6% peak a year earlier at the height of the COVID-shock. Yet, labor force participation and employment rates remain low at 41.9% and 39% of the working-age population, further hindering poverty reduction.

307. UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Egypt. http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/eg
308. World Bank. https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/eff1ddf3a93d2f160b3799af8294649c-0280012021/original/4-mpo-am21egypt-egy-0930-kcm.pdf
309. UIS, Egypt. http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/eg
310. ETF. 2020a. Egypt Education, Training and Employment Developments 2020. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-01/egypt.pdf

The Constitution of 2014 commits to the expansion and quality of general education and VET in line with international standards. The national development plan, the *Sustainable Development Strategy – Egypt Vision 2030* (2015)[311], highlights investment in human resources as a key to achieving its overall goal of promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth. It is considered an overall political framework to which all strategic documents have to refer, and it contains three strategic dimensions – economic, social and environmental – with education and training included in the social dimension as one of four priority pillars.

NQF legal basis
The regulatory and legal framework mandating the NQF and its implementation is embedded in the amendment to Law 82 of 2006[312] that established NAQAAE. It does not have a separate or individual law, but it has the same level of legal force. The NQF levels and level descriptors are not included in this legislation.

The discussions on the new NQF-related legislative amendments to be introduced to the NAQAAE's law of establishment (law 82/2006) were initiated in 09/2017. The law amendment is in the legislative process in Egyptian house of representatives (parliament) and is expected to be issued in 2021.

In the initial period before the 2011 Egyptian revolution NAQAAE conducted a participative process with involvement of stakeholders from all sectors, to develop the first two drafts of the NQF. The years of political instability until 2014 led to a halt of the NQF process, which was only resumed in 2015 with an international conference to unify efforts, include all stakeholders and revisit the structure and design of the proposed NQF. An advisory committee (task force) was then established to implement the recommendations of the conference and elaborated the third draft of the NQF. Between 2016 and 2017 the NQF text was further reviewed and submitted to Prime Minister for the legislative process, accompanied by a series of workshops with stakeholders and experts in cooperation with NARIC, ANQAHE and the TVET II project.

Other important relevant elements of the legal basis include regulations and methodology on quality assurance, on competency-bases education programmes, benchmarks for higher education programmes.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms
Since the launch of Egypt's Sustainable Development Strategy - Vision 2030, the education sector, and TVET, has been in the spotlight. There is a broad consensus on the need for education reform and the programme of the MoETE is supported by the president and the government.

There is a renewed interest for TVET of the highest levels of the policy arena. New developments on TVET reform are based on the Technical Education 2.0 (TE2.0) transformation strategy. The MoETE, as the main VET provider in the country, is also working on the implementation of TE2.0, which was launched in 2019 around five main reform pillars. The strategy aims to increase the attractiveness and relevance of VET, ensure its quality, train teachers, review the governance model and establish new models of public–private partnerships. The Cabinet adopted a decision in September 2020 to establish a TVET QA authority (ETQAAN) and a teachers' training academy. TVET Egypt[313] is a major programme for reform and boosting of the sector, co-funded by the Government of Egypt and the European Union (EU).

In addition to the reforms within compulsory education, the government is seeking to modernise the higher education sector. In 2018, a Law for the Establishment of New Technological Universities was approved, with, initially, eight universities planned. These will be publicly owned and will offer two- and four-year programmes across a range of specialities, including agriculture, industry, technology and commerce. The courses will be open to students with general secondary school certificates, as well as those who have attended a technical school. It is envisaged that the model will build further on that of the Integrated Technical Educational Clusters (ITECs), which deliver all levels of technical and vocational qualifications in a given sector.

There are common positive trends across the different reform initiatives in the last years, such as: a shift in the policy agenda to a more employment-oriented focus (transition from school to work, role of sector skills, etc.); a trend towards quality assurance for VET (within the MoETE and beyond); a more demand-oriented VET vision (increased

311. Egypt. Sustainable Development Strategy: Egypt's Vision 2030. https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2016/sustainabledevelopment-strategy-egypt%E2%80%99s-vision-2030-6301

312. Executive Law 82 for the Year 2006 regarding the establishment of NAQAAE. http://en.naqaae.eg/?page_id=2545

313. TVET Egypt website: https://tvetegypt.org/

provision of work-based learning (WBL)) and models of public–private partnerships through, for example, applied technology schools, etc.; and increased collaboration between stakeholders and international partners at regional and local levels. In this regard, the incentives created through the establishment, in May 2019, of the National Investment Charity Fund for Education under the new Capital Market Authority Law might be pivotal for diversifying VET funding through new public–private partnership models.

Aims of NQF

The objectives of the NQF are identified as follows (NAQAAE. 2020):
- Setting reference standards for qualification levels based on learning outcomes.
- Acting as a reference to build qualification frameworks for different sectors /sub sectors.
- Serving as a comparability tool for recognition of Egyptian qualifications, allowing overseas mobility in education systems and labour markets.
- Linking qualification levels allowing progression from one level to another.
- Linking TVET & the general education systems, promoting level progression (no dead ends) and permitting (with appropriate tools) horizontal mobility between the two systems.
- Guiding QA standards (and Academic Reference Standards) setting both by providers of education and NAQAAE.
- Permitting inter sectorial mobility (with appropriate tools).
- Providing reference standards to review and enhance standing Egyptian. qualifications and acting as a benchmark when introducing new qualifications.
- Assuring public confidence in the outcomes of the Egyptian Qualifications system by meeting societal and employers' expectations for different Qualification levels.
- Fostering lifelong learning (LLL) and recognition of prior learning (RPL) Future efforts in Egypt will focus on setting up a national qualifications register, creating articulation pathways and implementing the recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer system.

Egypt is interested in cooperating and comparing with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and is involved in the process developing the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

The NQF is a comprehensive framework that covers primary and secondary education, TVET and higher education, in a unified type of framework.
- The architecture of the NQF in Egypt is defined by an eight-level structure.
- Levels are ascending, starting at level 1 (equivalent to the general primary certificate) up to level
- 8 (equivalent to a doctoral degree)
- The eight levels are described in terms of Learning Outcomes, covering all qualifications in Egypt.
- Qualifications are measured against these outcomes to be placed at a given level.
- One or more National Qualifications may fit into a level.
- The targeted qualifications in a general outlined form, leaving more flexibility to the different sectors to develop their academic / learning plan.

Level descriptors are structured in three domains, specified by sub-domains, as follows. The full set of level descriptors is provided in Annex 2 to this report.
- Domain: Knowledge (sub-domains: extent and type)
- Domain: Skills (sub-domains: cognitive and professional)
- Domain: Competencies (autonomy, responsibility and interaction).

The design strategy was based on defining a set of "evolving" skills and competencies that start with early Qualifications Level and progress throughout the different levels, until it reaches an ultimate value, after which it remains constant.

Types of qualifications

The Egyptian model of the NQF draws a distinction between qualifications, programmes and curriculum, with a qualification as the outcome of a learning process based on a programme and assessment. The conceptualisation of a programme leading to a qualification has been assumed.

Quality assurance of qualifications

Higher education

The legal basis for the quality assurance of qualifications in higher education is outlined in the

Executive Regulation No. 25 of 2017 of Law 82 for the Year 2006 regarding the Establishment of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE), which is the

body responsible for leading and coordinating the activities related with the NQF.

Key legal acts, such as Law 82 for the year 2006 and it's Executive Regulation No 25 of 2017 are published on NAQAAE website.

Quality assurance of the qualifications that will be registered on the Egyptian NQF is linked to the programme accreditation process, where only programmes that have been accredited will be eligible to register in the related qualification on the NQF. Education programmes in Egypt are only assessed for accreditation after the first cohort of learners has passed through and this is in itself a quality assurance mechanism.

The framework of quality assurance in higher education includes self-assessment, evaluation and accreditation of institutions, and assessment and accreditation of programmes in higher education institutes. NAQAAE website systematises the full range of publications and templates for institutional users at: http://en.naqaae.eg/?page_id=1237.

NAQAAE accredits universities as a whole, as well as individual faculties and programmes. In order for universities to be granted full institutional accreditation, at least 60 percent of their faculties must be accredited.

The accreditation process involves two phases: an optional "pre-accreditation" period during which NAQAAE performs a "gap analysis" and produces an improvement plan, followed by a formal ninemonth evaluation that includes an institutional self-assessment and further inspections by NAQAAE auditors. NAQAAE's quality criteria are laid out in several guidebooks; they include adequate financial resources, management structures, teaching staff, facilities, research output, and quality assurance mechanisms.

Accreditation is granted for periods of five years during which institutions must continue to submit annual self-assessments. Institutions that fall short on just a few criteria may be placed on "postponed accreditation" status pending improvements, while underperforming institutions may have their accreditation revoked.

Although accreditation is technically mandatory for all HEIs, the implementation of Egypt's new quality control regime is still in transition and progressing gradually.

The full set of guidebooks on accreditation of higher education institutions is gathered under the first section - "Accreditation Manuals" – of Publications and Templates in NAQAAE website:
- Guidebook for University accreditation (1st edition 2009)
- Guidebook for University accreditation (2nd edition 2017)
- Guidebook for accreditation of Faculties and Higher Education Institutes (3rd Edition, 2015
- Institutional Guide to the Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions.(1st ed 2008 and 2nd ed 2009)
- Guidebook for evaluation and accreditation for Technical Institutes (2 years)
- Guidebook for Assessment and Accreditation of Educational Programs in Higher Education Institutes
- Guidebook for Standards for areas and Human resources.

Most importantly, the National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) by fields of education are published by NAQAAE at:
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Medicine - Download 2017
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Pharmacy - Download 2017
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Nursing. - Download 2017
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Dentistry.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Basic Science.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Arts.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Language Studies.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Agriculture. - Download English
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Law.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Commerce.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Mass Communication.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Home Economics.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Urban Planning.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Applied Arts.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Education for Early Childhood.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Tourism and Hotels.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Physical Education.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Environmental sciences.

- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Veterinary Medicine.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Physical Therapy.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Engineering.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Arabic Language Studies.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Economy, Political Science and Statistics.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Musical Education.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Fine Arts.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Computer Sciences and Information Technology.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Social Work.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Specific Education.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Education.
- National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) for Nursing.

Another key document for quality assurance focuses on benchmarks for postgraduate programmes: Guidebook for Benchmarks for Postgraduate Programs.

The templates for evaluation and review process address self-assessment and evaluation:
- Template for self assessment and self study report.
- Templates for evaluation and review.

The reviewers' kit includes a large set of guidelines, check lists, templates:
- Evaluation Form_1
- Evaluation Form_2
- External Review Process Check list
- Faculty Coordinator
- Planning_Norms_Guideline
- Report technicalities Presentation
- Review Report Template
- Review Visit and Report Tips
- Suggested Site Visit Schedule
- Template and Guidelines for External Review Report
- Guidelines for the Site Visit

TVET

The transformation strategy for a Technical Education 2.0, as launched by the Ministry of Education and Technical Education in early 2019, foresees substantial changes. Though defined within the realm of Technical Education only, the transformations in terms of quality assurance,

centres of excellence, teacher training, expansion of work-based learning including Applied Technology Schools (ATS), dual education and training will impact the wider TVET environment.

MoETE is aware of the importance of a well-functioning quality assurance system for TVET, relying on the new lead institution – ETQAAN. The new Law regulating ETQAAN has been approved by tthe Parliament. Key conditions necessary to effectively start activities comprise the approval of a set of bylaws and implementing texts, organisational structure and funding for the functioning of ETQAAN.

ETQAAN will, amongst others, certify schools and training centres as well as accredited programmes.

The importance of coordination and complementarity between MoETE (Competency-based training - CBT) and ETQAAN (certification) should not be underestimated. A coordinated plan of actions between a) the expected completion of the CBT-transformation of all TVET curriculum (2024) from one side, and b) the piloting and roll-out of certification of providers by ETQAAN from the other, should take account of the strategic goals of TVET reform; but also let ETQAAN organise and deliver Quality assurance according to the terms of the legislation and international practice, that is, with the necessary independence, credibility and transparency.

Management of ETQAAN will work through accredited experts or houses of expertise (not in-house experts) and cooperate with international bodies. ETQAAN is expected to deliver in efficient mode, for fast results. This presupposes technical readiness as early as possible (groups of accredited experts), from one side, and governance bodies working with shared goals. ETQAAN´s senior body (Board of Trustees) will be composed of government representatives (6 persons) and private sector representatives (from key economic sectors, i.e tourism, construction and commerce). The other body is the Executive Council: it will be formed by 7 experts selected by the Board of Trustees.

The expected "non bureaucratic" style of work of ETQAAN to deliver efficient services will be put at test early on and the sustainability of the TVET reform may largely depend on the good start of ETQAAN. The importance of clear procedures and transparent processes to ascertain public acknowledgement and buy-in of the community of schools and training centres cannot be underestimated. ETQAAN will also need to collaborate with employer representative bodies such as SSCs to set the

skills standards on which it will set its quality standards; it might also use them as conformity assessment bodies as specified in the current draft law.

ETQAAN should align the TVET quality assurance principles/framework with the quality assurance requirements and principles foreseen in NQF legislation and coordinate future developments of TVET QA with the NQF implementation body. This will provide a solid foundation for future smooth processes of registration of TVET qualifications in the NQF/Register.

Use of learning outcomes and standards

The conceptualisation and structure of the NQF in Egypt is based on an outcomes-based approach. More than three-quarters of *all* curriculum in Egypt uses learning outcomes, according to information gathered from key informants and meetings with NAQAAE in 2020.

Competency-based training

New programmes based on CBT methodology and concept were jointly developed with the stakeholders and implemented in a number of TVET institutions, the majority of which happened before the academic year 2019/20 (TVET II. 2020).

- A total of 37 CBT programmes developed for 4 sectors: industry, agriculture, tourism, and commerce. The large majority were developed for MoETE.
- CBT programme for MoETE: 32 programmes and the resulting qualifications at level 3 of the NQF. Implemented within 105 Technical Secondary Schools.
- 3 programmes (covering 5 curricula) in the tourism sector have been developed for the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) but not yet implemented in the colleges. The related qualifications are at levels 4 and 5 of the NQF.
- 2 programmes for skills development with the PVTD (Ministry of Trade and Industry) – however, one of the programmes is not fully implemented due to lack of equipment and training material while the other is not yet implemented because the units are not yet completed.
- To assure sustainability, capacity building and orientation workshops have been conducted and a methodology package prepared. These activities targeted training of CBT curriculum developers / writers, teachers, and staff of MoETE.
- Links with the NQF: although the NQF legal texts are still in the political / approval process, the information on the NQF level is indicated in the "Structure of the Programme – Courses"

(Course and Unit of Competences) (Document: Curriculum Design Template – TVET II. 2019b).

CBT programmes are associated with curricula and the respective qualifications standards, which are defined in Units.

- The smallest part of a TVET CBT programme are Units, which represent a collection of related knowledge and skills (competencies), expressed in terms of learning outcomes and performance criteria. Units are made up of learning outcomes, performance criteria and evidence requirements.
- Units are the "Building blocks" of TVET programme. They include:
  o Level and credit value
  o Related Skills and Knowledge
  o Often based on Duties, or a combination of related Duties
  o Can be based on Key or Technical Competencies
  o Describe standards of performance
  o Include information on learning and teaching approaches
  o Required resources
  o Assessment and evidence requirements

Vocational Qualification "Unit Bank" – a web-based database / instrument has been developed gathering all units; a manual of operations developed, and workshop conducted on the operationalisation of the system. Relevant Units can be used in different qualifications standards, and the Unit Bank is a resource for CBT programme developers, assuring coherence across sectors and developers' teams.

Figure 12. "Unit Bank" – TVET Egypt
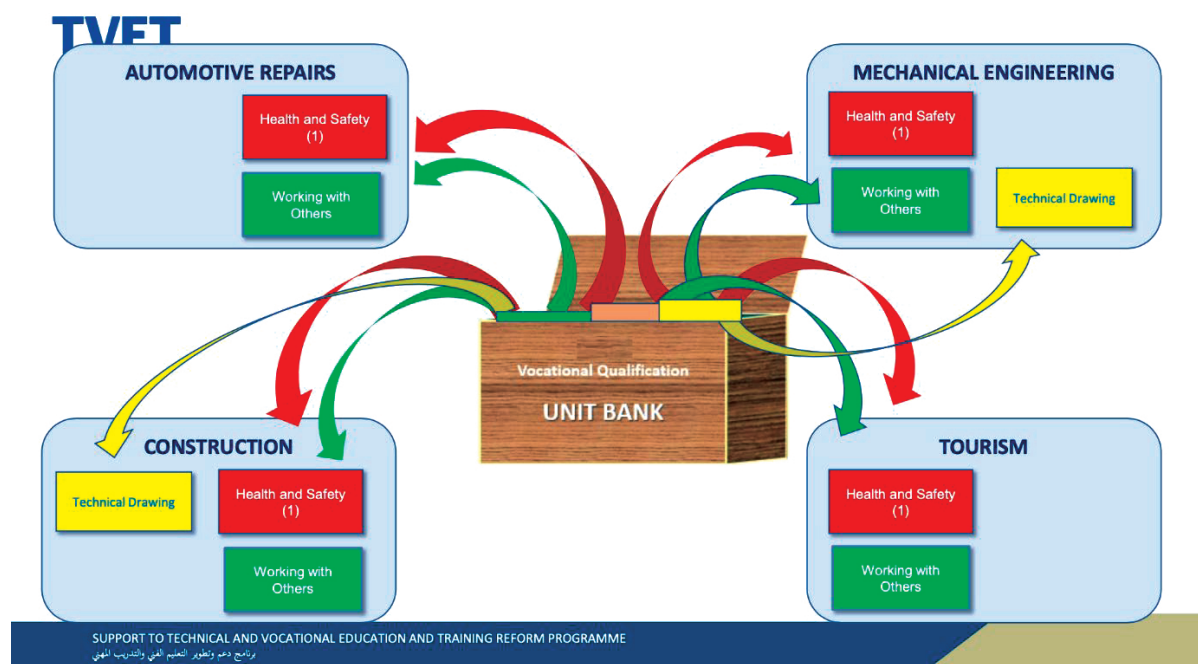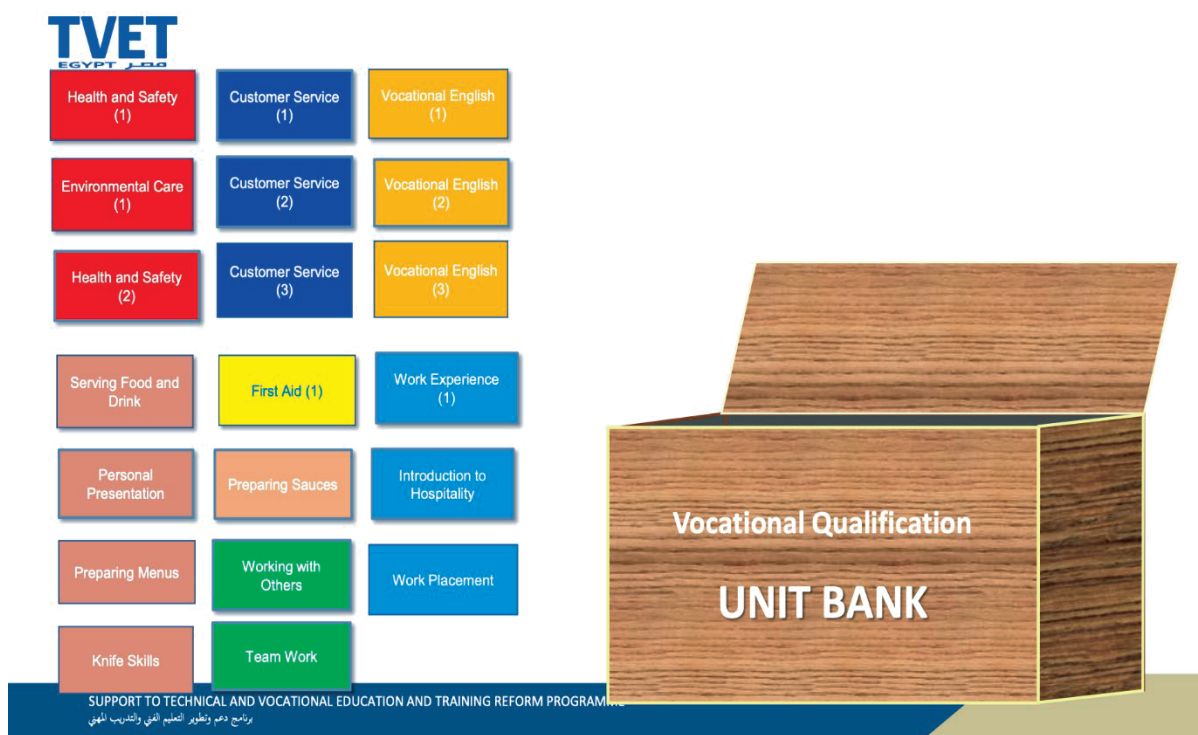
Source: Based on TVET II. 2019a.

In higher education, NAQAAE uses National Academic Reference Standards (NARS), which are reference points designed by NAQAAE to outline / describe the expected minimum knowledge and skills necessary to fulfil the requirements of a programme of study.

As an example, the NARS for Nursing[314] elucidates how the outcomes statements are grouped:

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314. NARS for Nursing: http://en.naqaae.eg/wp-content/uploads/2014/PDF/3.pdf

attributes of the graduate, knowledge and understanding, practical and clinical skills, intellectual skills, general and transferable skills, and attitude.

Credit systems

The current legislation allows for the use of a credit hour system for higher education cycles and for VET to ensure progression or transfer between VET and higher education system. Some universities use a credit hour system that defines a year of study as 30 to 36 hours of study (WENR. 2019).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

NAQAAE is the leading body responsible for coordination of the NQF related activities. The below administration model was the original model developed for coordination and management of the NQF. However, with the establishment of a separate entity in charge of TVET QA /ETQAAN), some of the functions/units presented in this administrative model may be transferred to this new authority.

Figure 13. Management of NQF operations
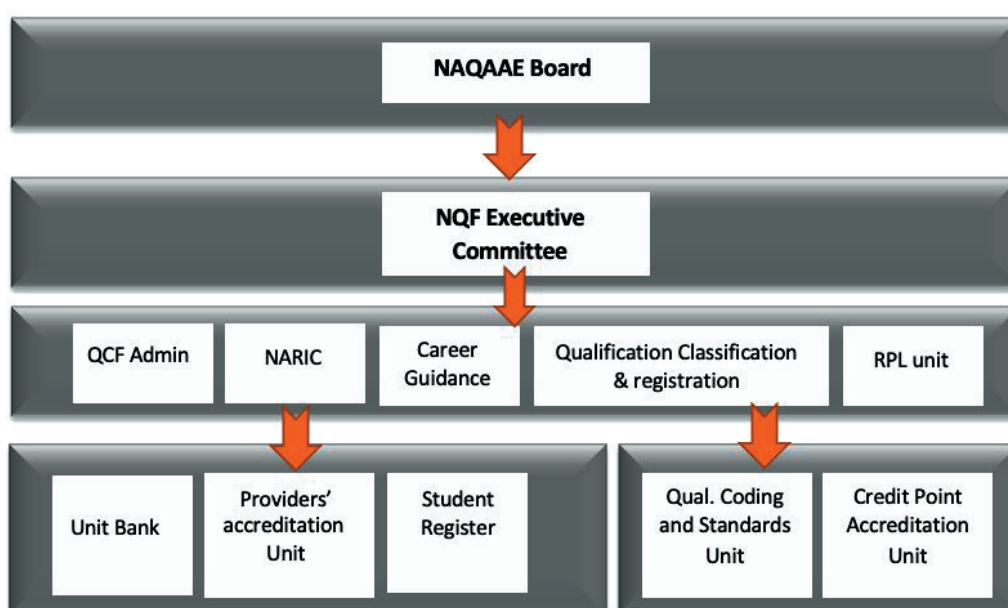
Source: NQAAE, 2020.

TVET

Over the past few years, a number of decrees and laws have been proposed or issued to organise the policy-making and governance of TVET although still not in a fully integrated manner. In 2014, the Executive Council for VET was established under the leadership of the Ministry of Education ad Technical Education (MoETE).

The current legislative framework includes a set of councils set up in 2014 by the Prime Minister, structuring TVET governance around three councils by the following decrees:
- Decree no. 705 for the establishment of the National Council for Human Resources Development under his presidency. This council would be replaced by the council in the new labour law, still to be approved.
- Decree no. 706 for the establishment of the Executive Council for Technical and Vocational
- Education and Training presided by the Minister of Education; and

- Decree no. 707 for the establishment of the Executive Council for Manpower Skills Development headed by Minister of Manpower.

Over 2020, new policy directives have let to the conception of new entities within the TVET governance arena:
- A draft law has been approved at the Cabinet level for the set-up of a Quality Assurance entity for TVET. This entity, which goes under the working title of 'ETQAAN', would ensure quality for the wider TVET sector and would ultimately alter the TVET landscape and reshuffle the roles and responsibilities with amongst others NAQAAE, which would still be responsible for developing the NQF.
- Similar development is ongoing for the development of a teacher-training academy for technical education under the MoETE, named TVETA. With a preliminary approval form the Prime Minister, this entity would equally alter the structure of the technical education

landscape, especially in areas related to the initial and continuous education and training and certification of technical teachers, including in-company trainers within WBL models as well as assessors and auditors.

Article 15 of Chapter 3 of the current *Investment Law* (Law # 72 for 2017) has for the first time explicitly provided income tax incentives for investors that invest in technical education. This provides an opportunity for the TVET sector to engage private sector investors especially in the new scheme of Applied Technology Schools and other forms of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in TVET.

- Although not yet a decree or law, under the Ministry of Trade and Industry a restructuring is in the pipeline for the Productivity and Vocational Training Department (PVTD) introducing new sectorspecific VTCs (e.g. in the food processing sector for example) and changing the legal status of the PVTD from a department within MoTI to an independent authority. If this materialises, it will also affect the TVET landscape.

The new *labour law* foresees the setup of a Supreme Council for Human Resources and Skills Development (SCHRSD) chaired by the Prime Minister. It also proposes that the new SCHRSD assumes responsibility for setting national policies and executive strategies for developing human resources through education and training systems of all types and levels. The SCHRSD will be responsible for setting a comprehensive national programme for enhancing workers' skills and competencies and the ideal utilization of Egypt's work force to fulfil the requirements of State's social and economic development plans. The new law did not refer to the executive elements, which will implement the set objectives. The law also proposes the restructuring of the existing Training Fund (levy) which, if organised and implemented well, could potentially be a mechanism for the financial contribution of employers in TVET and a source of financial sustainability for the sector skills council; however, this will require extensive dialogue with the social partners.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders
Currently there are no sector councils that are directly involved in the development of the NQF, however upon their future establishment they are anticipated to be involved in its implementation. However, industry and organised labour have made input to the development of the NQF with whom NAQAAE has conducted extensive consultations during the developmental stages.

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

VNFIL arrangements
While direct alignment between the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and the NQF has yet to be fully operational in Egypt, there is a policy on RPL that was developed. The development of alignment of the RPL policy to the NQF has not yet started.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
The long history of development of the Egyptian NQF, started in 2005, has translated in a conceptual and technical design that has been largely debated with stakeholders and also reviewed across different phases of the evolution of the education and training system – before and after the Egyptian revolution. NAQAAE has been the most constant player and engine of this process. NQF-related legislative amendment of the Law 82 of 2006 is expected to trigger the start of the activation stage of the NQF.

The priority allocated to education and training reforms by the government policy creates a favourable context for advancement of the reforms in TVET and Higher education, especially the wider implantation of CBT programmes, quality assurance of programmes and institutions, and improved involvement of sector councils in governance. The register of national qualifications has the potential to become a platform for integration and transparency of all qualifications.

A constructive dialogue and cooperation between NAQAAE and the new TVET QA institution (ETQAAN) on matters of common interest in NQF management will be essential for an operational phase based on mutual trust.

NAQAAE's active involvement in African projects, such as HAQAA and ACQF is beneficial for the NQF process, and NAQAAE could involve other national institutions in certain activities, such as peer learning and capacity development.

Start of the operational phase of the Egyptian NQF opens opportunity to cooperate with the EQF.

Qualifications registers and databases
While planning for the NQF, NAQAAE defined major policies and tools needed for its successful implementation (Figure 3). The

Qualifications Register is one of the essential NQF tools. NAQAAE will build the tools and coordinate the drafting of the policies, but will not necessarily oversee the implementation of each, some tools may become separate entities (e.g., NARIC) and some policies may be the responsibility of other authorities in Egypt. NAQAAE will be responsible for the qualifications register, which is developed as one of the outcomes of TVET Egypt project (EU cofounded project). The register is expected to be operational by 2022.

Figure 14. High-level concept NQF as a system – and place of the NQF register (NAQAAE. 2020)
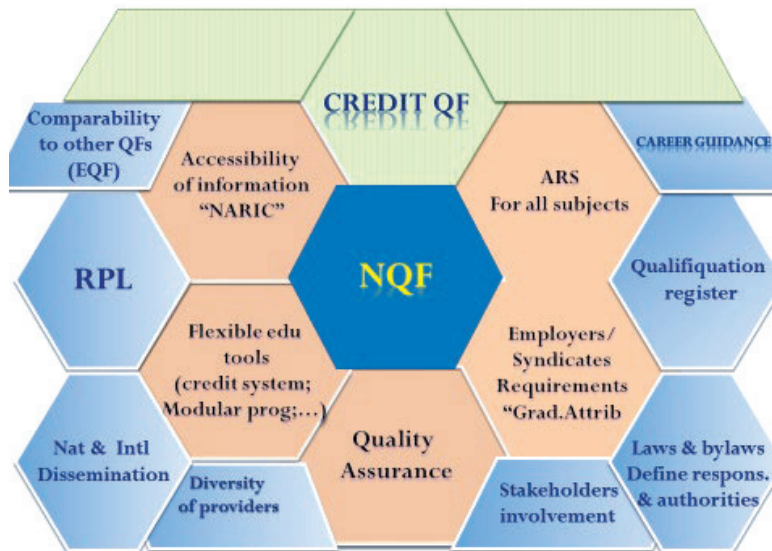
Source: NQAAE, 2020.

Qualification documents
Titles and format of qualifications documents are defined by legislation.

World Education News and Reviews (WENR) publishes the sample qualification documents10 for:
- General Secondary Certificate
- Higher Diploma of Technology
- Bachelor's degree
- Bachelor's degree (engineering)
- Bachelor of Dental Medicine and Surgery
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree

Recognition of foreign qualifications
Recognition of Foreign Qualifications is the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Egypt has not yet ratified the 'Revised Convention on Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualificators in Higher Education in African States' (Addis Convention)[315], signed in 2014.

Referencing to regional framework/other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks
The NQF in Egypt is newly established and has not yet been referenced to any other bodies or qualification frameworks, country or regional, but the plan of implementation includes referencing (comparison) against the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the Arab Qualifications Framework (AQF) and the ACQF once established.

International cooperation
NAQAAE is a Board Member of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance (ANQAHE).

NAQAAE is a member of the Advisory Group of the project Africa Union-EU Union project *African Continental Qualifications Framework.*

NAQAAE actively participates in the Africa-EU Partnership *Project Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation* (HAQAA). It is high-capacity QA agency that has been highly active in HAQAA1: It helped to develop and translate the ASG-QA into Arabic and received one of the pilot agency reviews. It has been a champion of the continental harmonisation agenda and is strategic partner for Northern Africa.

315. WENR. https://wenr.wes.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Education-in-Egypt-Sample-Documents.pdf 11 https://en.unesco.org/news/unescos-addis-convention-higher-education-enter-force

Egypt has been a partner organisation in the European Training Foundation's (ETF) Qualifications for the Mediterranean (Q4M) 2010-2015 project, which aimed to boost the comparability and transparency qualifications and qualifications systems and make them more responsive to labour market needs.

International donor support

The EU remains a strong supporter of the Egyptian education sector as a whole, with particular emphasis on increasing access to, and the quality of, education, especially for the most vulnerable children. The current EU cooperation portfolio in education includes two complementary primary community schooling programmes (total EUR 90 million).

In the area of VET, the EU provides support through the TVET Egypt programme (2013–2023) (EUR 50 million), which is co-funded by the Egyptian government (EUR 67 million) and aims to improve the structure and performance of the TVET system to better respond to Egypt's rapidly changing socioeconomic needs, with a focus on youth employability and national competitiveness. The TVET Egypt programme includes a component focused on the NQF and development of the NQF register of qualifications.

GIZ and USAID contribute substantially to advance the TVET and employment policies.

Important lessons and future plans

The Egyptian NQF is now established and promises to yield the desired results if the education sector policy orientations and reforms keep their priority and if funding is forthcoming once the current TVET Egypt project is concluded. It has taken a long time for the NQF to be conceived and agreed, and become established but it holds potential and promise.

Future directions in implementing the NQF will include the development of a national database of qualifications and undertaking referencing activities with other countries and systems. Progress in implementation of the NQF should be internally and externally monitored on an ongoing basis.

Governance of the NQF will count on a new player: ETQAAN, the TVET QA entity. Clarity and efficiency in the articulation of roles and areas of competence between NAQAAE (leading role in managing the NQF), and ETQAAN will be an important pre-condition and enabler for successful implementation of the NQF going forward.

Infographic of the NQF/NQF overview

Qualifications according to levels

Figure 15. Proposed structured of qualifications by NQF levels
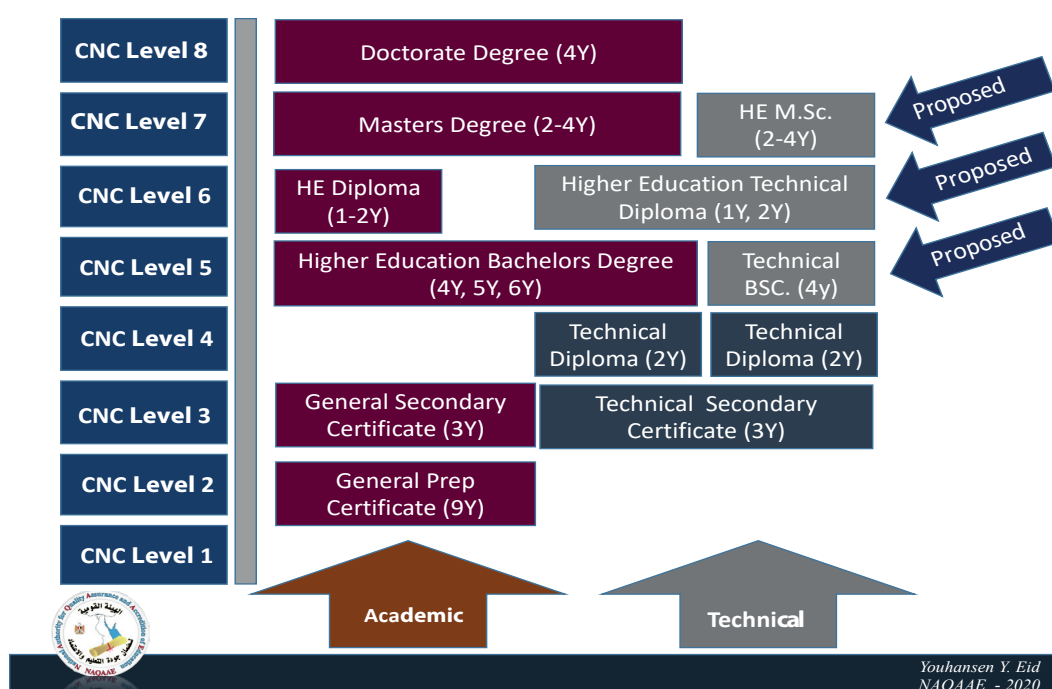
Source: NAQAAE. 2020

Table 26. Level descriptors of the NQF

Level	Knowledge & Understanding		Skills		Autonomy	Competencies	Interaction
	Type	Extent	Cognitive	Professional		Responsibility	
Level 8	Systematically acquires complex contemporary specialized most advanced knowledge in a field of study. Demonstrate the Acquisition of in-depth analytical knowledge at the interfaces with adjoining areas.	Contribute to knowledge in the field of specialty through scientific research or the introduction of new methods & tools.	Critically analyze and evaluate knowledge and synthesis of new and complex ideas; Innovate methodologies to solve complex specialized problems. Demonstrate the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a Substantial process of research	Mastering the most advanced professional skills in the area of specialty. Evaluate and develop of current methods & techniques in response to scientific advancement. Exploit ICT advances for research & development and for his own professional development	Practice complete autonomy in work or study. Works in an entrepreneurial manner as an independent entrepreneur.	Assumes responsibility for own develop. Take decisions in crisis Evaluate performance Allocates and develops workplace resources Commit to research & ethics Promote work ethics and professional conduct. Manage systems. Initiate, design and undertake research, strategic activities ...	Offer mentorship and support in the field of specialty to others Slide 33
Level 7	Demonstrate the Acquisition of Comprehensive contemporary specialized /professional knowledge within the field of specialty. And Extended integrated knowledge covering a broad spectrum of inter-related domains occupational activity. Aware of recent research trends	Analyze & critically appraise the recent knowledge within the field of specialty. Integrate relevant knowledge domains in the field of study or work.	Solve complex specialized problems within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study Choose and apply the appropriate process of enquiry for the area of study or practice. Deduce sound conclusions from raw &/or statistical data and relevant information.	Master comprehensive highly specialized and state-of-the-art skills in a field of study or work. Manage systems in familiar and unfamiliar contexts. Design, select and apply appropriate and creative methods, techniques, processes or technologies to complex practical and theoretical problems. Exploit ICT advances for research & continuous prof. development	Practice complete autonomy Works in an entrepreneurial manner in someone else's service. Design and undertake research, development or strategic activities to inform the area of work / produce organizational or professional change. Quality enhancement	Make justifiable decisions in partial absence of information Evaluate the performance of subordinates& plans for their development efficiently allocates and develops workplace resources. Promote work ethics and conduct	Lead a heterogeneous team of a higher level of expertise. Engages in change management Contribute to divisionally specific and cross-divisional debates.
LEVEL 6	Demonstrate the Acquisition of in depth specialized/ professional knowledge in a field of study or work Demonstrate the Acquisition of integrated knowledge covering a broad spectrum of inter-related domains	Critically analyze the various parameters affecting outcomes in a field of study, work.	Solve complex specialized problems in predictable and non predictable contexts	Select, apply and transfer appropriate standard procedures, processes or techniques to problem Manage processes in familiar and unfamiliar contexts. Carry out customized cost/effectiveness analysis.	Work or study autonomously under general systems and rules in familiar and unfamiliar contexts... Full awareness of the limits of his own knowledge..	Make informed decisions in familiar and less familiar contexts Uses & develops workplace resources. Embrace work ethics. Evaluate the performance of subordinates& development enhance methodologies & processes	Work in and Lead a heterogeneous team.
LEVEL 5	Demonstrate the Acquisition of Integrated general/ professional knowledge covering a broad spectrum of facts, principles and theories within inter-related domains with specialization in a field of study or work.	Apply the acquired knowledge using theories and abstract thinking of intermediate depth in field of study or work. Identify and diagnose the parameters affecting performance in field of study or work.	use analytic critical thinking to solve specialized problems in predictable and non predictable contexts, while dealing with variation and interfering factors. Critically evaluate the results of achieved tasks to establish multi-dimensional correlations and build technical expertise...	Master a wide spectrum of specialized skills using familiar & less familiar tools within a field of study, or work. Design mitigation measures for occupational hazards. Apply cost/effectiveness measures. Manage processes in familiar & less familiar contexts. Use digital tools and media to deal with academic/professional challenges in a critical and creative manner	Work or study autonomously under general systems and rules in less familiar contexts.. Use different references and learning resources. Possesses the capabilities to work in an entrepreneurial manner in someone else's service or as an independent entrepreneur	Assumes full responsibility for own learning and self development. Assumes responsibility for own and team performance. Take informed decisions in familiar contexts Evaluate the performance of subordinates& support their development enhance methodologies & processes efficiently uses and develops workplace resources. Embrace work ethics.	Work in and lead a heterogeneous team Communicates Effectively in the area of specialty with specialized and non-specialized individuals .using the appropriate communication means/modes & tools.
LEVEL 4	Demonstrate the Acquisition of general professional knowledge within a specific field of study or work Slide 32	Apply the acquired knowledge in field of study or work using standardized methods, procedures, and/or techniques.	Solve specialized problems in predictable contexts governed by general rules, with the ability to deal with some variation and interfering factors.	Apply a wide spectrum of specific skills guided by known rules and in a specialized context. of occupational activity using familiar tools Carry out cost estimation and analysis techniques for assigned tasks	Work or study autonomously under general systems and rules in familiar contexts Exercise self and team management facing limited variables.	Assumes responsibility for own learning and production within a generally supervised system. Assumes responsibility for work of others ... Offer suggestion and support for enhancement development Assures the application standard occupational safety measures	Work in heterogeneous teams. Seek and offer support and coordinate activities within the group. Respond to less detailed verbal and written communication. Issue detailed verbal and written instructions.
LEVEL 3	Demonstrate the Acquisition of Extended general/occupational knowledge covering basic facts, principles, general concepts and fundamental theories within a field of study or work.	Apply the acquired knowledge in field of study, work or activity in defined context. Demonstrate initial insight on cost estimation/analysis. Demonstrate full understanding of hazards.	Choose the appropriate response to solve problems in less defined context governed by routine or general rules.	Apply specific scientific or practical skills for processing technical assigned tasks guided by known rules and using familiar tools within a field of study/work or occupational activity. Competent use of digital tools in the school work context	Work or study autonomously with minimum guidance within familiar context Take the initiative to address any shortcomings faced in a work situation. Has an entrepreneurial mindset and the basic skills for working as an entrepreneur.	Assumes responsibility for quantity and quality of own production and learning in familiar context. Adheres to work ethics and regulations	Work in a team. Accepts guidance and seeks it when needed. Respond to complicated verbal and written communication
LEVEL 2	Demonstrate the Acquisition of Fundamental general knowledge	Comprehend and apply the acquired knowledge within clearly defined context. Shows an entrepreneurial awareness	Choose from limited responses to solve simple problems in clearly defined context. Establish simple multi-variable correlations.	Apply basic scientific or practical skills essential to perform moderately complicated tasks within a field of study ..using familiar tools. Basic use of digital tools in the school	Work or study under guidance Sequence and schedule learning /work tasks.	Assumes moderate level of responsibility for quantity & quality of own production in familiar contexts.	Work within a group. accept and Seek guidance in learning and work situations. Respond to detailed verbal and written communication
LEVEL 1	Demonstrate the Acquisition of elementary general knowledge	Memorize & recall the acquired knowledge Apply literacy and numeracy skills to contexts	Choose from limited routine responses. Establish simple correlations.	Apply basic scientific or practical skills essential to perform simple well-defined tasks. Elementary use of digital tools	work or study under direct supervision Access and use a limited range of learning resources.	assumes partial responsibility for quantity & quality of own production in familiar contexts.	Learn or work with others. accept supervision & guidance. Respond to simple verbal and written communication

Source: NAQAAE. 2020

Abbreviations

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
CAPMAS	Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics
EQF	European qualifications framework
ETQAAN	Egyptian TVET Quality Assurance and Accreditation National Authority
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
ETF	European Training Foundation
GDP	Gross domestic product
ISCED	International standard classification of education
MoETE	Ministry of Education and Technical Education
NAQAAE	National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
TE2.0	Technical Education 2.0
TVET	Technical Vocational education and training
TVETA	Technical and Vocational Teacher's Academy
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
WENR	World Education News and Reviews

Main sources of information

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Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. http://portal.mohesr.gov.eg/enus/Pages/default.aspx

Ministry of Manpower and Migration. https://www.manpower.gov.eg/index-e.html

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ESTONIA

Introduction and context

According to the 2018 Programme for international student assessment (PISA) results[316], the Estonian school system is among the best performing in the EU, with the lowest percentage of underachievers in science, reading and mathematics. Government investment in education is above the EU average (6.2% of GDP in 2018)[317]. The rate of early school leaving was at 9.8% in 2019[318], slightly lower than the previous year and the EU average; education outcomes of students in rural and Russian-language schools are lower than those of their peers. An education strategy for 2021-35 is being prepared, which aims to introduce gradual changes to the system, including curriculum revision, a new approach to learning, and more flexible transitions within education and between education and the labour market (European Commission, 2019). Estonia has been making efforts to improve participation in VET and its relevance to the labour market; a vocational orientation year at EQF level 2 was introduced in 2018 to facilitate transitions between compulsory education and VET (Cedefop, 2020). In 2018, 40.1%[319] of upper secondary students were enrolled in VET pathways; the proportion of students choosing programmes with work-based learning has doubled, though it remains low. Of the 9% of VET graduates who went on to higher education in 2017, three quarters chose professional higher education. Development of entrepreneurial skills in VET is promoted through in-service training for teachers and trainers, cooperation projects and a network for career and entrepreneurship teachers. Tertiary education attainment is relatively high (46.2% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 40.3%)[320]. However, the country faces skills and labour shortages in several sectors. Forecasts predict that future labour market demand for both higher

education and VET graduates will not be met; employers view the practical and transversal skills of higher education graduates and the general knowledge of VET graduates as insufficient. The employment rate of recent graduates was relatively high, at 83.3% in 2019. Participation in adult learning is also high (20.2% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 10.8%)[321], but the need for upskilling and reskilling remains and there is a large gap between the highly educated and those with low education and skills. A quality evaluation system for adult education is being developed by the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education since autumn 2018 as per contract concluded with the Ministry of Education and Research[322] (European Commission, 2019).

Estonia established a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) for lifelong learning, the Estonian qualifications framework (EstQF), in 2008 through the Occupational Qualifications Act. It has eight levels and includes all State-recognised qualifications. The overarching framework brings together four sub-frameworks: for higher education qualifications[323], for vocational education and training (VET) qualifications[324], for general education qualifications[325] and for occupational qualifications[326]. The sub-frameworks include specific descriptors as defined in the corresponding national educational standards, underpinning quality assurance activities. The EstQF is operational and it is implemented in legislation and regulatory documents of the education and training, VNFIL and qualifications system.

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316. https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/pisa-2018_en
317. Data from European Commission, 2020.
318. Idem.
319. Idem.
320. Idem.

321. Idem.
322. https://ekka.edu.ee/en/project-quality-enhancement-continuing-education/
323. Referred to as standard of higher education.
324. Referred to as vocational education standard.
325. Referred to as national curriculum for basic schools and national curriculum for upper secondary schools.
326. Occupational qualifications are those associated with a trade, occupation or profession, usually resulting from work-based learning, in-service training and adult education.

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 new developments in the education system (Estonian Qualifications Authority et al., 2016).

Policy objectives

The Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020[327] 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; and equal opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning. An increase in the participation rate in lifelong learning activities among adults (25-64) to 20% in 2020 was set as a national target in the Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020; this objective has been reached (20.2% in 2019). National programmes in response to the strategy goals in the different education and training subsystems, a programme for closer links between education and the labour market, and a programme for digital transformation have been implemented based on the strategy. Similar programmes for the period 2020-23 have been approved. Educational institutions will develop their curricula taking into account developments in the labour market and the occupational qualifications system (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). To make better use of Estonia's high-quality education and R&D systems for the benefit of people, society and the economy of the country, the Ministry of Education and Research is preparing strategies for the future (2021–35) in the fields of education, research, youth, and language policy[328].

The NQF's function 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.

It is expected that implementation of an overarching NQF would 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' (Estonian Qualifications Authority et al., 2016), while the barriers between the two systems have been lowered. The purpose of the EstQF has not changed over time.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

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 – use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking; and practical – manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments) and degree of responsibility and autonomy. More detailed descriptors have been developed in the four sub-frameworks for general education, initial vocational education, higher education and occupational qualifications.

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[329], where individuals are issued a professional certificate, giving the evidence of knowledge, skills and competences required for working in a specific occupation or profession.

Qualifications in sub-frameworks are described in the corresponding national educational standards, which are learning-outcomes-based:

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327. The *Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020* is available in English at: https://www.hm.ee/en/estonian-lifelong-learning-strategy-2020. A new strategy for 2021-2035 is being prepared.
328. https://www.hm.ee/en/activities/strategic-planning-2021-2035

329. Based on the Occupational Qualifications Act in 2001, occupational qualifications were referenced to a five-level occupational qualifications framework with level 1 the lowest and level 5 the highest. Occupational qualifications are now assigned to levels 2 to 8 in the EstQF (Estonian Qualifications Authority; Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2016).

a. national curriculum for basic schools[330];
b. simplified national curriculum for basic schools[331];
c. national curriculum for upper secondary schools[332];
d. standard of VET[333];
e. standard of higher education[334];
f. occupational qualifications standards[335].

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 and by the strategic goal 'change in the approach to learning' in the *Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020*. There is also an increased focus on recognition of prior learning (RPL). Higher and vocational education are more advanced in implementing the learning outcomes approach. 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 the approach (Cedefop, 2016). The new education development plan 2035 follows the principle of learning outcomes even more as its general objective is to enable plentiful learning opportunities which allow for a smooth transition between levels and types of education.

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. Both national and school curricula in VET have been reformed, starting in 2013[336]. Additional amendments were implemented in 2016 – amended school leaving conditions, in 2017 – adapting the International Standard Classification of Education Fields of Education and Training (ISCED-F 2013), and in 2019 – amended school leaving conditions with emphasis on achieving learning outcomes[337]. In adult education, the learning outcomes approach was introduced with the Adult Education Act of 2015[338]; a new continuing education standard was introduced, specifying quality criteria for adult education curricula based on learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2020).

The current national curricula in general education were introduced in 2011 and amended in 2013, 2014, 2018 and 2020. They set out goals and objectives, expected learning outcomes, assessment criteria and requirements for the learning and teaching environment, graduation and school curriculum. The General Education Programme prepared within the framework of the Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020, i.e. the education strategy, aims to align the content and volume of general education with the objectives and learning outcomes of national curricula and to change assessment principles.[339] External quality assurance in general education is coordinated by the external evaluation department of the Ministry of Education and Research.[340]

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[341] and the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act[342], since 2009, allow for accreditation of prior and experiential learning in higher education curricula.

Occupational qualification standards describe expected competences in terms of learning outcomes (performance indicators and knowledge). They are the basis for national VET curricula, higher education curricula and other training programmes, and for assessment of individuals' competence.

330. https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/114072020024?leiaKehtiv
331. https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/128122010014?leiaKehtiv
332. https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/128072020013?leiaKehtiv
333. https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/515012020003/consolide
334. https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/112072019017. In the sub-framework for higher education, general descriptors follow the logic of the Dublin descriptors, but are adjusted to national needs.
335. https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/525112013007/consolide/current
336. VET curricula database: https://enda.ehis.ee/avalik/avalik/oppekava/OppekavaOtsi.faces
337. https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/515012020003/consolide
338. The Adult Education Act is available at: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/529062015007/consolide
339. https://www.hm.ee/en/estonian-lifelong-learning-strategy-2020
340. https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/uldhariduse_valishindamise_ulesanded.pdf
341. The Universities Act is available in English at: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/521032014002/consolide
342. The Institutions of professional higher education Act is available in English at: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/504112013013/consolide

The Estonian Qualifications Authority (*Kutsekoda*) is responsible for implementing the quality assurance system in the occupational qualifications system.

A credit point system that conforms to the ECTS is used in higher education, and a credit point system that conforms to the ECVET is used in VET.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The EstQF was adopted in 2008 through the Occupational Qualifications Act (with subsequent amendments)[343]. The Act provides the basis for the eight-level comprehensive framework and for the organisation of the occupational qualifications system; it regulates activities of awarding authorities and sectoral councils, the adoption of occupational qualifications standards and the award of occupational qualifications.

The Ministry of Education and Research and the Estonian Qualifications Authority (*Kutsekoda*) 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, operating 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). The NCP is staffed by two part-time employees and one full-time employee of the Qualifications Authority and financed from the State budget and the EQF NCP grant. The NCP is tasked with[344]:

a. organising the referencing of Estonian qualifications to EQF levels, ensuring involvement of stakeholders and transparency of the process;
b. implementing the quality referencing principles agreed at EU level;
c. informing stakeholders and the public about the referencing of Estonian qualifications to the EQF levels and about NQF-related developments;
d. participating in the activities of the NCP's network.

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 limited, at first, to the referencing process. It was renewed in 2017 and 2018 and expanded to include the monitoring of EstQF implementation and, if necessary, making proposals for amendments. The NQF steering committee's activity was terminated by order of the Minister of Education and Research on 21 January 2020.[345] The steering committee will be reassembled if changes occur to the EQF and NQF implementation process. Currently, the implementation process is stable and coherent with declared aims in the referencing report. The Qualifications Authority coordinates the 14 sectoral councils and provides technical support to the board of chairmen of these councils. Typically, the sectoral councils consist of: representatives of employers, employees and professional associations in the sector; education and training institutions; and responsible ministries. They are responsible for preparing, amending, renewing and approving professional standards, and for deciding on the levelling of occupational qualifications to the EstQF. The board of chairmen of the sectoral professional councils coordinates cross-sectoral cooperation.

The Qualifications Authority also cooperates with other institutions, disseminates information and provides guidance and advice on the application of the framework to various stakeholders, mostly those participating in the occupational qualifications system: the sectoral councils, professional examination committees, and experts. Dissemination and information events 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[346]

Validation practices in Estonia are sector-specific and present in all sectors, but are more developed

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343. Available in English at: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/525112013007/consolide/current
344. https://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutsekoda-as-national-coordination-point-for-the-eqf-implementation/

345. https://dok.hm.ee/et/document.html?id=bd4d108e-7694-4096-b5be-7ff5ce334dbb
346. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (Johnson, 2019).

in formal education. If an applicant meets the requirements, non-formal and informal learning can be validated to enable meeting of enrolment criteria, completion of the curriculum, or award of an occupational qualification. Higher education has been leading developments, with vocational education and training and general education following.

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[347] enable education providers to recognise non-formal and informal learning.

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 entire curriculum may be recognised on the basis of prior learning, except for the thesis or final examination. Subjects and modules completed through validation must be marked as 'recognised on the basis of prior learning' in the Diploma Supplement. For admission to higher education, a specified level of education needs to be achieved. The Higher education programme 2016-19[348] features validation as a means for flexible study by supporting access to higher education for various groups of learners.

In VET, prior learning may be taken into account to fulfil admission requirements, to complete the curriculum, except the final examination, and to recognise a previously passed vocational examination. The Vocational education programme 2016-19[349] 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.

In general education, validation is possible, but processes and practices have not been clearly defined. Secondary education curricula for initial education and adult education are the same; evaluating prior knowledge can cut study duration for adults.

Although validation of non-formal and informal learning against occupational standards is not regulated by law, in principle full occupational qualifications can be awarded through RPL, regardless of how the competences were acquired.

In the past, the leading responsible institution for the development of validation arrangements has been the adult education department at the ministry. The Adult education programme 2016-19 (*Täiskasvanuhariduse* programme)[350] supported the development of validation practices for the needs of adult learners, with a focus on early school leavers. While mostly prior formal learning was recognised previously, more attention is given now to validation of non-formal and informal learning. Training has been provided to validation practitioners in adult gymnasiums (counsellors, assessors, teachers) and in higher education and vocational education institutions, the networks of validation practitioners are established, and e-instructional materials are worked out. Overall validation data collection is implemented through the educational information system.

NQF implementation and impact

The Estonian NQF has reached operational stage. Its legal basis is provided by the amended Professions Act of 2008 and responsibilities and roles of key 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 occupational 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 common awareness about learning outcomes and qualification levels is rather weak in this subsystem.

Two main qualifications registers are in use. The Estonian education infosystem (EHIS) includes all formal education qualifications. The Occupational qualifications register covers all occupational qualifications, with 558 valid occupational qualification standards for 93 subfields included to date (October 2020). It indicates the mandatory

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347. Standard of VET and Standard of higher education.
348. *Kõrgharidusprogramm* 2016-19: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/lisa_8_korghariduse_programm_2016-2019.pdf
349. *Kutseharidusprogramm* 2016-19: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/lisa_7_kutseharidusprogramm_2016-2019.pdf

350. *Täiskasvanuhariduse* programm 2016-19: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/lisa_9_taiskasvanuhariduse_programm_2016-2019.pdf

fields of Annex VI of the EQF recommendation[351], including a description of learning outcomes. Adult training courses have not been assigned to NQF levels and are not included in a register.

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 the EHIS database and the Occupational qualifications register. It has been decided to include EstQF and EQF levels in the envisaged new version of the Estonian education database (EHIS2). For a better comparison of curricula, EQF levels or for a variety of background information, there is a webpage www.haridussilm.ee, and the latest improvement for informing the public is the Education Portal https://haridusportaal.edu.ee/, a one-stop-shop for all Estonian education services presented from an end-user viewpoint.

The EstQF is being used by various stakeholder groups. Education and training providers indicate NQF/EQF levels when advertising study programmes. In the labour market, to participate in public procurement it is mandatory to have a required qualification at a specific NQF/EQF level. Guidance and counselling practitioners are being trained in the use of the NQF and EQF in their work; training materials for this purpose have been developed by the EQF NCP and the Euroguidance and Europass Centres. The EstQF is used in the external quality assessment of study programmes in VET and higher education. Validation practitioners use the NQF to assess the equivalence between applicants' portfolios and qualification standards or intended learning outcomes. Learners, students, workers and jobseekers use qualification standards and intended learning outcomes to self-assess compliance of their competence to the requirements of study programmes and jobs. The use of the framework has been promoted and supported through a variety of materials and tools,

such as articles, handbooks, leaflets and video clips[352] (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

As all qualifications included in the NQF are expressed in learning outcomes and indicate the NQF level, transparency and comparability of qualifications have increased. The NQF has also had an influence on the design of qualifications, as all occupational qualifications standards, VET and higher education standards, and formal educational curricula are described taking into account the NQF level descriptors. Links to the NQF level descriptors are assessed as part of quality assurance processes in all subsystems of education and training. Numerous adult (continuous) education programmes commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Unemployment Insurance Fund are designed as preparation for occupational qualification exams. The NQF is also thought to have an influence on progression through education and training: entry to higher education programmes in some occupations has been simplified for students who obtained a level 4 VET qualification in a specific area, and the framework supports the implementation of validation policies in VET, general and higher education by describing qualifications in learning outcomes. As occupational qualifications levels are negotiated through the work of sectoral councils, dialogue and stakeholder cooperation across sectors and institutions have increased. As the NQF includes qualifications from the formal education system as well as occupational qualifications, and as VET and higher education programmes are based on occupational qualifications standards where these exist, the NQF is thought to have contributed considerably to the parity of esteem between different types of qualifications.

Academic and professional recognition of foreign qualifications is conducted based on the Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications Act[353] and carried out by the ENIC-NARIC Centre, which curates the work of the competent authorities. The Estonian Qualifications Authority is the contact point for any question regarding qualifications,

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351. *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.* https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ceead970-518f-11e7-a5ca-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

352. Examples can be found at:
https://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/estonian-qualifications-framework-estqf/;
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnMgQZ_xI-4WrwwoFFMnNBw;
https://europass.ee/karjaarikoolitus-targa-toootsija-tooriistakast;
https://europass.ee/index.php?lang=et
https://epale.ec.europa.eu/et/blog/kuidas-taienduskoolituses-koostada-kutsestandardile-vastavaid-toomaailma-oppekavasid.

353. https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/502042014002/consolide/current

recognition, permissions to work and licencing (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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, the main discussion centred on the fact that there were no qualifications from initial education and training identified at EstQF level 5, only occupational qualifications. The need for these types of qualification in the labour market, supported by different stakeholders, has impacted on policy decisions. The framework has also been used to revisit provision of professional higher qualifications referenced to EstQF level 6.

Referencing to the EQF

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 (Estonian Qualifications Authority, 2011). Following the 2013 VET reform, the referencing report was updated in 2016 (Estonian Qualifications Authority et al., 2016). The next updated referencing report may be submitted in 2022 following changes in upper secondary education legislation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Important lessons and future plans

Estonia has developed an eight-level comprehensive qualifications framework, covering all State-recognised qualifications from formal education and from the occupational qualifications system. The framework is believed to have improved transparency, comparability and coherence in the qualifications system. Through the description of qualifications in learning outcomes, the EstQF is supporting the implementation of validation practices. Occupational qualifications meeting strict quality criteria can be assigned to levels 2 to 8 of the EstQF, increasing the parity of esteem between different types of qualifications. VET and higher education institutions, which have curricula based on occupational standards and are accredited against quality standards, can apply to become occupational qualifications awarding bodies. As stated in the EQF referencing report, 'a remarkable convergence' between the education system and the occupational qualification system has taken place (Estonian Qualifications Authority et al., 2016).

The EstQF has reached an operational stage. One of the success factors in its development

and implementation has been the systematic involvement and training of stakeholders at different stages of the process. Several stakeholder cooperation structures have been set in place over recent years for EstQF implementation and adjacent developments, including: the EstQF steering committee (currently inactive), whose mandate was expanded from the EQF referencing process to monitoring implementation and making amendment proposals; sectoral councils; the body of chairmen of sectoral councils as the coordination committee for the occupational qualifications system, representing institutions involved in workforce skills development, promotion of competitiveness, and organisation of lifelong learning; and, since 2015, the OSKA coordination committee, governing the development of a labour and skills anticipation system (OSKA)[354]. Sectoral surveys of labour and skills needs are being conducted by sectoral expert committees, including representatives of business and public sector organisations, and the respective education and training providers, leading to recommendations for quantitative and qualitative changes in sectoral education and training provision (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). Based on the Occupational Qualifications Act, the OSKA coordination committee and the body of chairmen of sectoral councils carry out the steering committee tasks for implementing the EstQF.

The main current challenge for the EstQF is its further 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. Major challenges of the Estonian education system and ways of overcoming these are described in the Education Strategy 2035[355].

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354. https://oska.kutsekoda.ee/en/
355. https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/preliminary_analyses_educational_system_en.pdf

Table 27. Estonian qualifications framework (EstQF)

ESTQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATIONS AWARDED IN FORMAL EDUCATION	OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS AND OCCUPATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctoral degree (*Doktorikraad*)	Level 8 occupational qualification – senior specialists, top managers E.g.: chartered engineer, principal architect	8
7	Master degree (*Magistrikraad*)	Level 7 occupational qualification – specialists, managers E.g.: diploma engineer, diploma architect	7
6	Bachelor degree (*Bakalaureusekraad*) Diploma of professional higher education (*Rakenduskõrgharidusõppe diplom*)	Level 6 occupational qualification – specialists, supervisors E.g.: energy auditor, career counsellor	6
5	VET certificate, level 5 (*5. taseme kutseõppe lõputunnistus*)	Level 5 occupational qualification – technicians and craft masters, frontline managers, clerical workers E.g.: master carpenter, construction site manager, master chef	5
4	Upper secondary general education certificate (*Gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus*) Upper secondary VET certificate (*Kutsekeskhariduse lõputunnistus*) VET certificate, level 4 (*4.taseme kutseõppe lõputunnistus*)	Level 4 occupational qualification – skilled workers, machine operators, service and sales workers, clerical support workers E.g.: CNC milling machine operator, carpenter, florist	4
3	VET qualification certificate, level 3 (*3. taseme kutseõppe lõputunnistus*)	Level 3 occupational qualification – skilled workers, machine operators, service and sales workers, clerical support workers E.g.: cleaner, electronic equipment assembler, facility maintenance technician	3
2	Basic education certificate (*Põhikooli lõputunnistus*) Basic education certificate based on simplified national curriculum for basic schools(*Põhikooli lihtsustatud rii kliku õppekava lõputunnistus*) VET certificate, level 2 (without basic education requirement) (*2.taseme kutseõppe lõputunnistus*)	Level 2 occupational qualification – elementary workers E.g.: cook assistant, cleaner assistant	2
1	Basic education certificate based on simplified national curriculum for basic schools (for students with special educational needs) (*Põhikooli lihtsustatud riikliku õppekava toimetulekuõppe tunnistus*)		1

Source: Adapted from Estonian Qualifications Authority et al., 2016; Estonian Qualifications Authority (Kutsekoda), 2020: https://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/estonian-qualifications-framework-estqf/

Abbreviations

ECTS	European credit transfer system	EstQF	Estonian qualifications framework
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training	NARIC	national academic recognition information centres
ENIC	European network of information centres	NQF	national qualifications framework
		RPL	recognition of prior learning
EQF	European qualifications framework	VET	vocational education and training

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ETHIOPIA

Introduction and context

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 and enable to provide adequate employment opportunities for the growing labour force. To this end, the government has carried out consecutive reforms of the education sector in order to foster a knowledge-based economy. As part of the education reform initiative, the development of the Ethiopian National Qualifications Framework (ENQF) was initiated by a task force set up in 2007 by the Ministry of Education (MoE). The task force produced a consultative document and submitted it to the Ministry in March 2008. In 2010, the Higher Education Strategy Centre, was mandated to coordinate the process of ENQF development and implementation in close collaboration with the MoE and other relevant agencies (HESC, 2011). As such, the HESC established a dedicated ENQF unit and led the development of the ENQF, with funding from Nuffic and support from long and short-term consultants from the South African Qualifications Framework Authority (SAQA). In 2012, the Council of Ministers passed Regulation 276/2012, which gave the Higher Education Strategy Centre responsibility for developing the ENQF, evaluating its implementation and reporting to the MoE.

The ENQF was introduced in response to challenges in the education system concerning issues such as access, quality, relevance, equity and the lack of linkages between different education sub-sectors. The framework was set up after the conceptualisation of the Ethiopian Technical and Vocational Education and Training Qualifications Framework (ETQF) in 2006, with the assumption that the ETQF would be integrated into an overarching framework, the ENQF. Since the launch of the ETQF in 2010, the TVET sector has seen great success, 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, 2010a).

The Ethiopia's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system is also in dire need of government attention in order to overcome the many challenges it currently faces. More specifically, the need 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. The ESDP IV also presents a comprehensive vision for the development of the education sector, covering formal, non-formal, initial and continuing education, providing open access to certification and building bridges between the general education, TVET and higher education sectors (MoE, 2010a).

Despite a number of reform initiatives proposed over the past 20 years to address the challenges facing Ethiopia's education and training system, it is still not able to produce competent graduates capable of supporting Ethiopia's development vision. The problem remains a concern and requires intervention. To this end, the government introduced another reform initiative: the Ethiopia Education Development Roadmap in 2018, which has resulted in multiple changes in the country's education and training system. Due to changes in the education system, the ETQF needs some revisions on levels and types of qualifications. As a result, the ETQF is moving from levels 1-5 to level 8.

Policy objectives

The ENQF is conceived as a reforming framework, which takes the existing system as a starting point, and seeks to address the problems: access, equity, quality, relevance and harmonization of the different sectors of education. It will serve as communication, coordination and collaboration tool for the different groups who have a stake in the education and training system.

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 EQF qualifications;
- promote the quality of development, delivery and assessment of Ethiopian qualification 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 formal, non-formal and informal settings.

The ENQF builds on the objectives of the existing ETQF (MoE, 2010), which are to:
- improve the transparency of the qualifications system, ensuring that graduates know what they need to learn and employers know what they can expect of graduates;
- ensure flexibility, transferability and progression between different qualifications
- eliminate the barriers that block horizontal and vertical educational pathways;
- establish and maintain a levels-based system detailing the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA) acquired by learners;
- 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 ENQF is a linked framework and covers the three sub sectors of education: general education, TVET and higher education. It has eight levels described by level descriptors 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 28. ENQF levels

ENQF LEVELS	SUB-FRAMEWORK FOR GENERAL EDUCATION	SUB-FRAMEWORK FOR TVET	SUB-FRAMEWORK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
8		Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree
7		Postgraduate Diploma Master's	Postgraduate Diploma Master's
6		Bachelor	Bachelor Professional Graduate Diploma
5		TVET Certificate 5	
4	Diploma in Teaching	TVET Certificate 4	
3		TVET Certificate 3	
2		TVET Certificate 2	
1		TVET Certificate 1	

Source: Revised ETQF (2021)

The ENQF is translated into practice through its implementation directives. Thus, there are around seven directives for implementation including qualification standard setting, quality assurance, qualification registration, assessment, credit accumulation and transfer, pathways, and awarding of qualifications.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Ethiopian government has committed itself for the implementation of ENQF by endorsing proclamations, regulations and sector-based strategies such as proclamations 351/2003; 650/2009. 690/2010 and 1152/2019, Regulation 276/2012, ESDPs VI and V, and the country Growth and Transformation plans since 2010 with the objective of improving employability knowledge, skill and competence of graduates.

The Higher Education Strategy Centre is mandated by Council of Ministers Regulation 276/2012 to develop the ENQF and evaluate its success in collaboration with other sectors such as the Agency for Quality and Relevance in Higher Education, the Federal Agency for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, while the Ministry of Education is to oversee its implementation.

The ENQF is an overarching framework covering all three educational sectors. There are three sub-framework bodies responsible for the quality assurance of qualifications for their respective sub-sectors: General education, TVET and Higher education. These sub-framework agencies are the National Examination and Assessment Agency (NEAA), responsible for the general education sub-sector, the Federal Technical and Vocational Education and Training Agency (FTVETA) for the TVET sub-sector and the Higher Education Quality and Relevance Agency (HERQA) for the higher education sub-sector. Here, effective coordination between stakeholders is crucial, as the different sectors may fall under different jurisdictions.

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Strengthening progression pathways between non-formal, post-secondary education and the TVET is one of the key objectives of the ENQF.

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,2010)

ENQF implementation

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 the quality and relevance of education and training for economic growth in Ethiopia. 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).

Although several attempts have been made to maintain the momentum towards the implementation of the ENQF, it has proved difficult to bring it into force, so full implementation has not yet started. Only the ETQF is being implemented. The draft regulation prepared for the implementation of the ENQF is not yet approved. Thus, the following issues need to be further highlighted.

- 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

EAC	East African Community	MoSHE	Ministry of Science and Higher Education
ENQF	Ethiopian National Qualifications Framework	NTQF	National TVET Qualifications Framework
ETQF	Ethiopian TVET Qualifications Framework	NUFFIC	Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation
HERQA	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency	SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
HESC	Higher Education Strategy Centre	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
KSA	Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes		
MoE	Ministry of Education		

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FIJI

Introduction and context

The Fiji Qualifications Framework (FQF) is a system for describing and categorising Fiji's quality assured qualifications.

The FQF was developed in the early 2000s under the then National Standards and Accreditation Council as the Fijian Government recognised the strategic importance of having a national qualifications framework to national planning and development, and to the supply of people with skills, knowledge and attitudes that match the current shortages in the economy and future needs of Fiji.

The FQF was launched on 24 February 2012 and was implemented by 2014. The Fiji Qualifications Council (FQC) was established to oversee the FQF, and the Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC) was established to monitor the national implementation of the framework.

A key issue is the acceptance of the FQF and its full national implementation. The full national implementation of the FQF is work in progress. An increase in the number of education providers offering quality-assured programmes gives assurance that the framework is on its way to being fully implemented.

The FQF was reviewed in 2017 to ensure that it was fit for purpose. The outcomes of the review highlighted recommendations that the FHEC is working towards achieving with its partners. The second review of the FQF is earmarked to be conducted in 2022.

The FQF has contributed to the Fiji's education system since its implementation in 2014, where learners, education providers and employers and other organisations are able to make informed decisions on the quality assured qualifications and the skills and knowledge of its graduates.

Policy objectives

The objectives of the FQF are to:
- Accommodate education reforms by ensuring that reforms at all levels can be strategically linked.
- Contribute to national strategic plans and performance through setting the direction of education and training in Fiji for the foreseeable future.
- Clarify how competence and qualifications relate to each other at different levels.
- Support the mobility of learners and workers.
- Support the stimulation of learner's progression and career through establishing learning pathways.
- Support access to consistent, high quality and relevant learning through the recognition of the achievement of learning outcomes.
- Support individuals' lifelong learning goals by recognising prior learning.
- Enable the formal recognition of traditional knowledge and skills based on Fijian indigenous culture and history.
- Enable the alignment of the FQF with international qualifications frameworks

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The FQF is a ten-level framework. It specifies the competency and achievement (outcomes) expected at each of the ten levels of the framework. The descriptions of levels express the increasing complexity, with level one being the simplest and level ten the most complex.

The characteristic outcomes of learning under the FQF are classified under five domains of learning. These are:
- Knowledge and understanding
- Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding
- Generic cognitive skills
- Communications, ICT and numeracy skills

- Autonomy, accountability and working with others

Qualifications are classified under three broad categories: Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates. Each FQF qualification type is defined by a level descriptor that is expressed in terms of learning outcomes. There are ten FQF qualification types that encompass all education and training provided within Fiji at senior levels of secondary school, vocational schools, technical and vocational education, and training (TVET), universities and specialist higher education providers.

Fiji has a diverse education system, and the quality assurance of higher and tertiary education institutions (universities, vocational schools and other providers of post-secondary education and training) is supported through internationally accepted guidelines of quality assurance.

Institutional arrangements and engagement of stakeholders

The FHEC is the national regulator overseeing post-secondary and education providers to ensure that these institutions and their programmes meet the Quality Standards for Fiji Higher Education that were implemented in 2019. FHEC engages with individuals and groups from regulatory authorities, communities, professional bodies, employers, government ministries and education providers to ensure the acceptance of the FQF.

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Supporting of learners through qualifications is also conducted through the recognition of prior learning (RPL).

RPL involves the assessment of an individual to make a judgement in relation to the required learning outcomes and may involve the evaluation of formal learning previously undertaken (which may or may not be competency-based) and include the evaluation of skills and knowledge gained through non-formal and informal learning.

Through the FQF credit points gained by a learner through RPL would allow the individual entry into a qualification or towards the qualification. Credit points transfer enables a learner to reduce the length of time it would normally take to complete a programme of study.

NQF implementation and impact

The FQF covers qualifications from certificates to doctorates delivered by universities, vocational schools, TVET providers and other post-secondary education providers.

There are categories of whole qualifications that were previously offered by education providers that are not covered by the framework as their characteristics have not been defined yet.

The framework does not yet address qualifications awarded outside the regulated national qualifications system including the micro-qualifications offered by the private sector and other organizations. This is expected to be extended in the future. The framework is however open to international qualifications

The National Register for Fiji Higher Education was launched in 2020 and is a directory of quality assured higher education and post-secondary education providers and quality assured qualifications. The register outlines a list of FQF registered qualifications offered by each quality assured education provider, and also includes a link to summary information on the quality assured qualification. The register is maintained by the FHEC.

Qualification documents including digital documents are authenticated and maintained by the FHEC. The FHEC also maintains records of learners that are enrolled into and have completed National Qualifications.

Documents on quality assured qualifications are also sent to the Educational Quality Assessment Programme (EQAP) under the Pacific Community, for registration on the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS). The EQAP oversees the implementation of the Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF).

The increase in visibility of the FHEC and its role has encouraged individuals and organizations to seek information on the recognition of foreign and local qualification in comparison to the FQF. The FQF is used to support the recognition of foreign qualifications for work or further study in Fiji. The recognition of foreign qualifications is also used for the recruitment of staff and advancing career development opportunities in government ministries.

Guides and templates on the quality assurance standards for education providers and qualifications are publicly available to enable organisations

and education providers to align their quality management systems to those used in Fiji higher education.

Since the implementation of the FQF in 2014 a total of 474 provider developed qualifications have been quality assured.

Referencing to the regional framework/ other frameworks

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Infographic of the NQF/NQF overview table

Table 29. Fiji Qualifications Framework

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES
10	Doctoral degree
9	Master's degree
8	Postgraduate Diploma, Postgraduate Certificate, Bachelor's degree with Honours
7	Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate, Bachelor's degree
6	Diplomas
5	
4	
3	Certificates
2	
1	

Source: Fiji Higher Education Commission

FIJI QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (FQF)		PACIFIC QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK (PQF)	
FQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	PQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPE
10	Doctoral degree	10	Doctorate
9	Master's degree	9	Master's
8	Postgraduate Diploma, Postgraduate Certificate, Bachelor's degree with Honours	8	Bachelor (Honours), Post-graduate Certificate, Post-graduate Diploma
7	Bachelor's degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	7	Bachelor, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma
6	Diploma	6	Diploma, Associate Degree
5	Diploma	5	Diploma
4	Certificate	4	Certificate
3	Certificate	3	Certificate
2	Certificate	2	Certificate
1	Certificate	1	Certificate

Abbreviations

EQAP	Educational Quality and Assessment Programme	TVET	technical and vocational education and training
FHEC	Fiji Higher Education Commission	PQF	Pacific Qualifications Framework
FQC	Fiji Qualifications Council	PRQS	Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards
FQF	Fiji Qualifications Framework		
RPL	recognition of prior learning		

Main sources of information

Fiji Higher Education Commission: www.fhec.org.fj

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Prepared by

UNESCO in consultation with national experts

FINLAND

Introduction and context

Finland has a well-functioning education and training system. According to the 2018 Programme for international student assessment (PISA), student performance in reading, mathematics and science is among the best in the EU; and has reached the target of less than 15% underachievement in reading and science. Socioeconomic and migrant backgrounds, however, have a strong influence on educational outcomes. After accounting for socioeconomic status, the difference in reading performance between students with migrant and non-migrant backgrounds is the largest in the EU. Finland keeps increasing participation of children above age four in early education and care (89.3% in 2018 compared to 87.8% in 2017), but is still below the EU benchmark of 95%. Tertiary education attainment reached 47.3% in 2019, exceeding the EU 2020 target. The employment rate of recent graduates aged 20-34 was 84.4% in 2019 which is above the EU benchmark of 82%. The percentage of early leavers from education and training is relatively low (7.3 in 2019) but shows a gender imbalance (8.5% for males and 6.0% for females). Finland will extend the compulsory schooling age to 18 by 2021. The aim is to ensure that every student completes at least secondary education, reducing the dropout rate as well as increasing their chances of getting a job.

Vocational education and training (VET) is a popular study path in Finland, with 71.6% of all learners at upper secondary level enrolled in 2018. VET offers good job opportunities for young students entering labour market and for adult students seeking new career opportunities. The 2019-23 government programme aims to increase the number of students completing upper secondary education, including VET. In November 2019, VET and general education matters were brought under one department at the Ministry of Education and Culture. This arrangement aims to strengthen the cooperation between the two strands. In June 2020, the Ministry launched a three-year programme for quality and equity in VET. In higher education, the

government has set three main objectives to be reached by 2030: providing 50% of the total youth adult population (aged 25-34) with a tertiary degree; playing a major role in adult learning; and increasing access to and equality in university studies.

New proposals have been adopted regarding the validation of non-formal adult education. In December 2019, a working group coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Culture prepared a report with recommendations to include non-formal adult education provision in the national digital database of qualifications and certificates (Koski) by September 2021. This will also involve creating a more structured description of learning outcomes in different areas of non-formal education. The process will be coordinated by the National Board of Education, including funding for pilot projects, training of teachers and other staff, and developing guidelines.

A parliamentary working group on the development of the continuous learning concept is on track to deliver its proposals by the end of 2020. The government has asked the Ministry of Education and Culture to produce an education policy report by the end of 2020. This snapshot of the current education system will serve as another tool for reshaping Finnish educational policy, including adult learning (European Commission, 2020).

A report from the Finnish National Forum for Skills Anticipation[356] highlights changes in competence and skills that will be needed in 2035. Important future skills include customer-oriented development

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356. The National Forum for Skills Anticipation serves as a joint expert body in educational anticipation for the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. The system consists of a steering group, anticipation groups and a network of experts. Their task is to promote the interaction of education and training with working life in cooperation with the ministry and the agency. https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/osaaminen_2035.pdf

of services and knowledge of sustainable development. The labour market will require digital, information evaluation and problem-solving skills.

Finland has developed and is implementing the Finnish national qualifications framework (FiNQF). This is a comprehensive framework covering the full range of national qualifications, including those awarded under other jurisdictions than that of the Ministry of Education and Culture (such as defence, police and border-guards). It also covers extensive competence modules, the extent of which may be less than that of a qualification, to be levelled and included in the framework[357]. A qualifications framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna process, was developed in 2005 and forms an integrated part of the NQF.

Policy objectives

The FiNQF aims to improve the clarity, transparency and effectiveness of the Finnish qualifications system, and to increase comparability of qualifications. It reflects the current system of qualifications; for this reason, specific policy strategic targets have not been set. However, it is used as a tool for promoting the learning outcomes approach, recognition of knowledge, skills and competences, and national and international mobility. It is used in combination with other policies on transfer and progression, validation of non-formal and informal learning, and quality assurance, introduced prior to the adoption of the NQF.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The FiNQF includes the full range of national qualifications from general education, VET and higher education, within the remit of the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as qualifications awarded by other ministries. Certain competence modules that are defined in learning outcomes and are comparable with qualifications, or constitute a qualification requirement, or are otherwise related to development of competence and professional skill, may also be levelled and included in the framework. These play an important part in Finnish lifelong learning and many relate to access to regulated or specialised professions.

The eight-level framework is learning-outcomes based, and describes qualification levels in an integrated approach, in terms of knowledge, skills, competences and their interrelationships, without an explicit distinction between them.

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 in the following way (FiNQF Government Decree, 120/2017, 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.

Source: FiNQF Government Decree 120/2017, Annex.

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

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357. This applies to competence modules comparable with qualifications or other extensive competence modules; the learning outcomes of which are laid down in or by virtue of an act, and which have been specified as professional eligibility or qualifications requirements for working in a profession, or which are otherwise related to development of competence and professional skills.

'interact in his/her 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 EQF; vocational-competence-based qualifications[358] were introduced in the mid-1990s and learning-outcomes-based vocational qualifications in the late 1990s. The country's 2018 VET reform reflects a holistic approach to lifelong learning with initial and continuing VET reorganised under the same legislation. Being flexible and customer-oriented are the main features, translating into more provider autonomy and responsibility. This flexibility allows taking up VET at any time, depending on provider arrangements, and following personal development plans which build on learners' knowledge, skills and competences. The more learners know and can do already, the shorter their studies. All programmes enable progression to higher education.

The scope of the competence in qualifications and units is expressed as competence points: 60 competence points corresponds to approximately one year of studies. Each VET qualification has a number of competence points (ECVET equivalent) mentioned in all diplomas/certificates (Cedefop, 2019).

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.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Act on the national framework for qualifications and other competence modules[359] and the Government Decree on the national framework for qualifications and other competence modules both came into force in March 2017[360].

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)[361] 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. Quality assurance of education in Finland is based on a principle of decentralisation where the self-evaluation of education providers and the external evaluations by national expert bodies build the basis. External evaluations are mainly carried out by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC)[362] which operates as a separate unit within EDUFI.

EDUFI is national reference point for quality assurance in VET and assists in this respect; however, the vocational training providers are responsible for the quality of the qualifications, the training and other services they provide. EDUFI is the national Europass centre in Finland, and manages and develops Europass and communicates information about it. The agency guides and supports cooperation between stakeholders, sectoral working life committees[363] and providers of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

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 (EQF-NCP):
a. participation in the development and implementation of the EQF;
b. disseminating information to stakeholders about the EQF, the NQF and the placement of qualifications in the framework;
c. giving guidance and advice to stakeholders in using the qualifications framework;
d. taking part in national and international collaboration on qualifications frameworks and promoting cooperation;
e. other tasks assigned by the ministry.

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358. In competence-based qualifications, proficiency is shown at work regardless of how the skills have been obtained: through work experience, education or other activity. All vocational upper secondary qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications can be achieved as competence-based qualifications.

359. Act 93/2017 of 10 February 2017, Helsinki (unofficial translation in English): https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182270_act_93-2017.pdf

360. Act 120/2017 of 23 February 2017 (in Swedish): https://www.finlex.fi/sv/laki/ajantasa/2017/20170120

361. The Finnish National Agency for Education: https://www.oph.fi/english

362. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre is an independent government agency that evaluates education in Finland and the work of Finnish education providers from early childhood education to higher education. It also produces information for education policy decision-making and the development of education: https://karvi.fi/en/fineec/

363. 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 and are involved in the development of qualifications in their respective sectors.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education and Culture also asked EDUFI to represent Finland in the network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks (EHEA QF). In 2019, the following tasks were also assigned to EDUFI:

a. to communicate on its website information both on the opportunity to propose the inclusion of new competence modules in the framework and on the process of dealing with the proposals

b. to compile the proposals received from other administrative sectors and stakeholders into new competence modules to be placed into the framework, issue an opinion on the received proposals and submit them and the opinions concerning them to the Ministry of Education and Culture annually by a separately agreed date.

A broad range of stakeholders was involved in the early, preparatory stages of the FiNQF developments. Delays encountered with the legal proposal between 2012 and 2016 systematically weakened the dialogue on the role of the framework but the relaunch in 2016 was supported by broad consultation. It is regarded as significant that higher education institutions have supported the development of the FiNQF from the start and have contributed to the composition of the framework. This reflects 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.

The Finnish NQF will be updated and supplemented by amending the annex to the Government Decree (120/2017). The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for making the amendments. Administrative branches and interest groups can propose new competence modules to be included in the FiNQF. The ministry processes the proposals at least every two years[364]. The ministry evaluates the proposals and, if necessary, consults other administrative branches and stakeholders. A draft for amending the annex is circulated for comments before the Decree is issued.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[365]

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 single law on validation of non-formal and informal learning; 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.

Validation has not been widely used in general upper secondary education. A new Act on general upper secondary education[366] 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. The law was implemented in August 2019

In other sectors (VET and HE) validation arrangements are in place and typically cover the four validation stages: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. VET qualifications are modular, and qualification units 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.

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 study 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

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364. Next deadline for submitting proposals is 31 March 2021.
365. This section draws mainly on input from Kartunen, A. (2019) *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Finland*

366. Law 714/2018 on general upper secondary education (in Finnish and Swedish): https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2018/20180714

arrangements are carried out in different areas of higher education; for example, SIMHE services[367] that aim to support immigrants in higher education. The members of SIMHE services include several Finnish HEIs, with coordination by EDUFI. The services aim to enhance the identification and recognition of prior learning of highly educated immigrants of different statuses and make it easier to direct immigrants to higher education at national and regional levels. Also, in 2019 a report on recognising prior learning in higher education[368] was published by the Ministry of Education and Culture; it is based on data from different sources and workshops organised together with diverse stakeholders.

The Ministry of Education and Culture set up a working group in February 2019 to examine and consider the use of competence-based descriptions in liberal adult education, to propose a model for such descriptions and to propose a common unit describing the extent of such education[369]. As a further step, the working group proposes that the legislation on the Koski database[370] be amended so that the skills and knowledge gained in liberal adult education could be transferred to this repository, starting in August 2021. The group also proposes a reference framework for describing skills and knowledge in liberal adult education.

Labour market stakeholders have a central role in the Finnish validation system, especially in VET; and the VET qualifications system is built to serve the labour market and ensure hands-on participation in validation processes. However, there are few examples where labour market organisations would independently carry out validation activities in the full meaning of the process.

The national student feedback system and questionnaires are an important tool for monitoring the quality of vocational education and training (VET) from the customers' point of view. National feedback is gathered anonymously from students whose target is to complete a vocational qualification or modules of VET qualifications. The education and competence demonstration tests are organised in cooperation with the VET provider and working life.

In 2019/20, students and graduates reported that they were satisfied with being able to start their studies flexibly with a suitable schedule (grade 4.3 on a scale of 1-5), and that earlier studies, work experience and other knowledge and skills were scrutinised diversely (grade 4.1). Students reported that they received sufficient instruction and guidance to progress as planned (grade 4.2) and the work tasks in which they completed their demonstration corresponded to work tasks in real working life (grade 4.4). Based on the feedback, the teaching and guidance were of high quality (grade 4.3) and students received sufficient feedback on the development of their knowledge and skills (4.0). In general, students were satisfied with the education and training they had received (grade 4.38; 80% of respondents, both young and adult students).

NQF implementation and impact

The comprehensive FiNQF has reached operational stage and is well embedded in the national education, training and qualification structure. The initial implementation phase covered all formal qualifications under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture, and vocational qualifications and higher education qualifications in the other administrative sectors. For the second phase a number of new competence modules are included in the framework as of February 2020, at levels 2 to 7 based on a proposal[371] made by a working group set up by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2018. The qualifications, syllabi and other extensive competence modules are classified into the levels based on the required competences. The competences acquired at each level are defined in the Government Decree 120/2017. Information is provided on the websites of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education[372].

The Finnish National Agency for Education maintains the portal Opintopolku[373] 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

367. SIMHE services: https://www.oph.fi/en/simhe-services-higher-education-institutions
368. Link to the report (in Finnish): https://bit.ly/3jZ1Izo
369. Link to the report (in Finnish): http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-263-695-9
370. The KOSKI national database introduced in 2018, collects real-time comprehensive data on education to serve both the needs of citizens and different administrative branches. The data are collected from various sources: https://www.oph.fi/fi/palvelut/koski-tietovaranto (in Finnish and Swedish)

371. Competence and skills matter. Final report of the working group for framework expansion in Finnish, with summaries in Swedish and English: http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161306
372. https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/qualifications-frameworks
373. https://studyinfo.fi/wp2/en/

prepared at EDUFI[374]. Opintopolku is currently being updated. In the future, the new version of the service will include information about Finnish NQF/EQF levels of all qualifications.

NQF/EQF levels are indicated on qualifications documents in general education, IVET, CVET, HE and Europass certificate and diploma supplements. The NQF/EQF levels are also indicated in some qualification documents awarded outside formal education, according to the decision of the education provider. EDUFI recommends that all education providers indicate NQF/EQF levels in their certificates.

No evidence has been gathered specifically about the use of the FiNQF. EDUFI, however, uses the qualifications framework as an information source in the comparison and recognition of foreign qualifications, and VET and higher education institutions know the descriptors of qualifications in the FiNQF well as they were prepared and developed in cooperation with education providers. Education and training institutions and providers are supposed to utilise the level descriptors of the FiNQF when planning programmes as well as defining learning outcomes for their qualifications.

In a survey[375], completed by the FINEEC as a part of an international project, many national-level respondents stated that FiNQF has improved the clarity and made the skills and competences of qualifications more visible and given directions for the learning outcomes approach in course and curriculum design. It has also improved the comparability of the degrees, furthering especially international student mobility. The survey report suggests, as the next steps in Finland, the role of the FiNQF in promoting greater awareness and understanding of qualifications and level descriptors and increasing dialogue between the world of qualifications and the world of work; this should be further discussed and possibly evaluated at a later stage. Other important areas for national discussions include the role of the FiNQF in advancing flexible learning pathways and increasing the synergy between the two national actors: the FiNQF contact point operating at EDUFI and the national quality assurance conducted by FINEEC.

All information required according to the Annex VI of the 2017 EQF recommendation will be given for all qualifications in the upcoming version of the Opintopolku website, including NQF and EQF levels. The width and depth of the description of qualifications differ[376].

The main source of information about the Finnish NQF is the EDUFI website, where all information can be found in Finnish, Swedish and English.

Specific evaluation of the FiNQF has not been carried out, but the tasks of the working group set up by the ministry in 2018 to coordinate the expansion of the FiNQF included to determine in more detail the criteria for the competence modules to be included and its rationale; to identify the wider competence modules in various administrative sectors and to determine which sectors are considered to meet the criteria specified; to formulate a proposal for placing competence modules on various levels of the framework; to provide arguments for such placements; and to formulate a proposal for the required legislative amendments. The working group was extensive and covered various sectors of ministries, employer and employee organisations, different types of education providers and student organisations. The working group considered how the current FiNQF had served the needs of the stakeholders and, as a result, the group proposed the FiNQF be expanded with additional qualifications to cover different types of competence modules. The working group proposed the FINQF be expanded. To reach this goal the criteria for expansion were defined and later published on the EDUFi website[377]. Generally, it was concluded that widening the FiNQF benefits individuals, and adds to the quality as well as recognition of prior learning. As the implementation of competence modules further expands, an evaluation of the FiNQF might also be considered.

Referencing to the EQF

FiNQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in December 2017. Finland has carried out referencing to the EQF and

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374. https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/en
375. UNESCO IIEP sustainable development project 2012-18 Planning for flexible learning pathways in higher education, Finnish national case study, Finnish Education Evaluation Centre: https://karvi.fi/en/

376. Countries have agreed on key data that need to be available. Annex VI of the 2017 EQF recommendation lists elements for data fields for the electronic publication of information on qualifications with an EQF level: title of the qualification, ISCED field, country, EQF level, description of the qualification in learning outcomes, and awarding/competent body are required. Optional elements include information on credits/workload, quality assurance, and entry requirements.
377. https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/qualifications-frameworksand https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/criteria-for-placing-new-competence-modules-in-the-finnish-national-framework.pdf

self-certification to the European higher education area as one process and combined report.

Important lessons and future plans

Through the wider coverage of the FiNQF, the transparency of the education system has increased, as other competence modules have been brought in, besides the degrees and qualifications. It also supports validation of prior learning and promotes clarity and transparency in the recognition of foreign qualifications. There is a general challenge that the FiNQF could be better known among citizens.

The future plan is to implement the process of the widening of the FiNQF and the proposal for the inclusion of new competence modules in the framework for all administrative branches and stakeholders (European Commission and Cedefop 2020).

As Finland switched to distance education in March 2020, EDUFI launched a study to find out how schools and institutions in primary and secondary education cope with being forced into distance education by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study is collating and summarising several Finnish studies and reports with the aim of facilitating further reforms and development of education in the future. The study period is planned to continue until the end of 2020 (Finnish National Agency for Education).

Table 30. Finnish national qualifications framework (FiNQF)

FINQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Universities and National Defence University scientific and artistic postgraduate degrees (licentiate and doctor degrees) (*Yliopistojen ja Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulun tieteelliset ja taiteelliset jatkotutkinnot (lisensiaatin tutkinnot ja tohtorin tutkinnot)*) General staff officer degree (*Yleisesikuntaupseerin tutkinto*) Specialist degree in veterinary medicine (*Erikoiseläinlääkärin tutkinto*) Specialist training in medicine (*Erikoislääkärikoulutus*) Specialist training in dentistry (*Erikoishammaslääkärikoulutus*)	8
7	Master degrees – universities (*Ylemmät korkeakoulututkinnot*) Master degrees – universities of applied sciences (*Ylemmät ammattikorkeakoulututkinnot*) Professional specialisation programmes provided by universities and universities of applied sciences intended for holders of a master degree or a UAS master degree (*Yliopistojen ja ammattikorkeakoulujen erikoistumiskoulutukset, joiden kohderyhmänä ovat ylemmän korkeakoulututkinnon tai ylemmän ammattikorkeakoulututkinnon suorittaneet henkilöt*) Advanced pastoral qualification (*Ylempi pastoraalitutkinto*) Senior staff officer course (*Esiupseerikurssi*) Further studies in war economy and technology (*Sotatalouden ja tekniikan lisäopinnot*) Specific qualification on prescribing medicines (*Rajatun lääkkeenmääräämisen erikoispätevyys*)	7
6	Bachelor degrees – universities (*Alemmat korkeakoulututkinnot*) Bachelor degrees – universities of applied sciences (*Ammattikorkeakoulututkinnot*) Professional specialisation programmes provided by universities and universities of applied sciences intended for holders of a bachelor degrees or a UAS bachelor degree (*Yliopistojen ja ammattikorkeakoulujen erikoistumiskoulutukset, joiden kohderyhmänä ovat alemman korkeakoulututkinnon tai ammattikorkeakoulututkinnon suorittaneet henkilöt*) Specialised training provided by the church (*Kirkon erityiskoulutukset*) Pastoral qualification (*Pastoraalitutkinto*)	6
5	Specialist vocational qualifications (*Erikoisammattitutkinnot*) Sub-officer qualification – Fire and rescue services (*Alipäällystötutkinto,pelastusala*) Vocational qualification in air traffic control (*Lennonjohdon perustutkinto*) General level (1 and 2) study module for non-commissioned officers (*Aliupseerin yleistason (1 ja 2) opintokokonaisuus*) Master level study module for non-commissioned officers (*Aliupseerin mestaritason opintokokonaisuus*)	5

FINQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
4	General upper secondary school leaving certificate (*Lukion oppimäärä*) Matriculation examination (*Ylioppilastutkinto*) Upper secondary vocational qualifications (*Ammatilliset perustutkinnot*) Further vocational qualifications (*Ammattitutkinnot*) Basic examination in prison services (Rikosseuraamusalan tutkinto) Fire fighter qualification (*Pelastajatutkinto*) Emergency response centre operator qualification (*Hätäkeskuspäivystäjätutkinto*) Basic course for border guards (*Rajavartijan peruskurssi*) Basic study module for non-commissioned officers (*Aliupseerin perustason opintokokonaisuus*)	4
3	Preparatory studies for general upper secondary school (*Lukiokoulutukseen valmistava koulutus (LUVA)*) Preparatory education for vocational training (*Ammatilliseen koulutukseen valmentava koulutus (VALMA)*) Advanced syllabus for basic education in the arts (*Taiteen perusopetuksen laaja oppimäärä*)	3
2	Basic education certificate (9 years) (*Perusopetuksen oppimäärä*) Preparatory education for working life and independent living (*Työhön ja itsenäiseen elämään valmentava koulutus (TELMA)*)	2
1		1

Sources:
Finnish National Agency for Education, Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018.
Government Decree 120/2017 on the Reference Framework for Degrees and Other Competences (in Finnish and Swedish):https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2017/20170120
Finnish National Agency for Education, 2020: https://www.oph.fi/en/news/2020/framework-qualifications-and-other-competence-modules-expands

Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework	FiNQF	Finnish national qualifications framework
FINEEC	Finnish Education Evaluation Centre		
IVET	initial vocational education and training	NCP	national coordination point
		EHEA QF	European higher education area qualification framework
NQF	national qualifications framework		
VET	vocational education and training	EDUFI	Finnish National Agency for Education

Main sources of information

The Finnish National Agency for Education acts as EQF NCP: http://www.oph.fi/qualificationsframework

Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture: https://minedu.fi/en/frontpage

Database of programmes from VET, general education and HE: https://studyinfo.fi/wp2/en/

Finnish National Agency for Education; Ministry of Education and Culture (2017). *Referencing the Finnish national qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework and the framework for qualifications of the European higher education area:* https://europa.eu/europass/en/compare-qualifications

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Prepared by

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FRANCE

Introduction and context

Participation in education and training increased in France over the last 10 years and is above the EU average. The share of early leavers has dropped by 4.2% since 2009 to 8.2%, compared to the EU-27 average of 10.2% in 2019; it is below the EU and national targets (EU less than 10%; France less than 9.5%), but shares are higher for men and foreign-born population. The 2018 PISA results show that France has relatively good educational outcomes. Underachievement in basic skills (reading, maths and science) among 15-year-olds is (at 20.9%, 21.3% and 20.5% respectively) slightly below the EU-27 average (at 22.5%, 22.9% and 22.3% respectively) and is higher in VET. Performance gaps in educational outcomes exist and correlate with disadvantaged socioeconomic background and territories disparities. National strategies in place to reduce inequalities in schools include the lowering (2019) of the compulsory age of pre-school education from six to three years and extending compulsory education from age 16 to 18 (as of 2020/21), reducing class sizes in primary education in disadvantaged schools and supporting teacher capacity to deliver differentiated teaching, as well as digital education initiatives in public schools for both pupils and teachers, and an increased budget and targeted support for distance learning during the health crisis (European Commission, 2020*a* and 2020*b*).

Participation in adult learning increased by 0.9% between 2018 and 2019 and is well above the EU average (19.5% and 10.8% respectively). The digitalisation of the personal training account (CPF), now accessible online by both individuals and companies, created more training opportunities for upskilling (distance learning, apprenticeships); focus has been given to upskilling the least qualified, distance learning programmes and regional guidance (European Commission, 2020*a* and 2020*b*).

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)[378] 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. During the health pandemic the *baccalauréat* examination for the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 has been replaced by continuous assessment. A new higher education law[379] was adopted in 2018, aiming to increase the completion rate at bachelor level (*licence*) through educational support, more flexible programmes and new teaching methods.

The share of VET learners in 2019 was 39.3% against the EU-27 average of 48.4%. Employment rates of vocational education and training (VET) graduates dropped by 3.4 points to 68.8% in 2019 (against 79.1% in the EU-27). A major reform of the vocational upper secondary path, gradually implemented as of 2019, has introduced more guidance in lower secondary education towards VET. The 2018 CVET and apprenticeship reform established a new funding model for apprenticeship training centres, now also open to private providers, and additional funds for innovation through the Trades and qualifications campuses[380] (European Commission, 2020 and Cedefop ReferNet 2020).

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

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378. Besides the general and technological *baccalauréat,* which are being revised, there is also a third type of upper secondary school-leaving examination: the professional/vocational *baccalauréat*.

379. 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. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2018/3/8/ESRX1730554L/jo/texte

380. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/el/news-and-press/news/ france-excellence-vet-new-generation-trades- and-qualifications-campuses

2002, of the National register of vocational and professional qualifications (*Repertoire national des certifications professionnelles* (RNCP)) 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[381]. It covered vocationally and professionally oriented qualifications, including those from higher education referenced to the EQF levels 3-8, while excluding secondary general education qualifications.

As the French qualification system has developed considerably[382] over recent decades, and more closely aligned to the European qualifications framework (EQF), the French NQF has been revised. The 2018 Law for the freedom to choose one's professional future[383] and subsequent legislation[384] 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, level of expertise and degree of responsibility and autonomy.

The CNCP functions were absorbed and replaced, in 2019, by a new commission (*Commission de la certification professionnnelle*) established within France Compétences. France Compétences acts as the national coordination point for the EQF. It is the body responsible for quality assurance, funding and governance of continuing VET and apprenticeships.

The five-level structure in use until 2019 was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF in 2010). The new eight-level national qualifications framework in use as of 2019

was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in 2021.

Policy objectives

The French qualifications framework has evolved through different stages, aiming to address new challenges and a wide range of policy objectives.

The initial aim of implementing a classification of vocational and professional qualifications[385] 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 combatting unemployment. The goal of accreditation was no longer to recognise the duration of training programmes, but their learning outcomes, with a focus on assessment of competences (Paddeu et al., 2018).

Since its establishment in 2002, the national register of vocational and professional qualifications (RNCP)[386] has been considered the NQF. The RNCP has been an important tool in quality assurance of qualifications and promotion of lifelong learning, and closely linked to the system for validating non-formal and informal learning (*validation des acquis de l'expérience*, VAE); all qualifications included in the RNCP can be acquired through validation (except regulated qualifications) and the relevant VAE procedure is specified for each of them. The RNCP aims to ensure quality and transparency of vocational and professional[387] 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, qualifications 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.

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381. 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. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte. do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000408905&dateTexte= &categorieLien=id

382. 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.

383. 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*]. *JORF*, No 0205, 6.9.2018. https:// www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte= JORFTEXT000037367660&dateTexte=20190227

384. 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. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do; jsessionid= 6A9D2FCF7FB127AC6021_BD782B475904.tplgfr34s _2?cidTexte= JORFTEXT000037964754&dateTexte= &oldAction=rechJO&categorieLien= id&idJO=JORFCONT000037964593

385. 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).

386. The RNCP (*Repertoire national des certifications professionnelles*) includes all qualifications, recognised by the State and/or social partners, that attest the ability to exercise a professional activity, independently from the learning route used to acquire them.

387. Higher education diplomas and degrees (levels 5, 6, 7 and 8) are considered professional qualifications due to their strong labour-market orientation.

With the 2018 Law for the freedom to choose one's professional future, which created a new article in the Labour Code, the French NQF became formally embedded in legislation, as distinct from the RNCP. The French qualifications framework has been revised to reflect considerable changes in all parts of education and training and the qualifications system. The 2018 Law[388] transformed continuing VET and apprenticeship system governance and financing and established an eight-level structure. It reinforced the quality assurance function of the framework and the supporting registers[389] by clarifying the role and responsibilities of all certifying bodies of qualifications registered by law and defined seven criteria and 32 indicators for registering of qualifications on demand (France Compétences, 2021, pp. 31, 42, 53 and 88)[390]. One of the major objectives of the revised framework is to set up a system that is more easily understandable by users (France Compétences, 2021, p. 36). It made mandatory that all (RNCP) qualifications have to be structured into units/blocks of assessable competences, encouraging the acquisition of competences and qualifications throughout a person's working life, if necessary by alternating the acquisition of blocks of competences in education and training with periods in employment. Thus, the revised French framework aims to increase transparency and flexibility of qualifications and horizontal and vertical progression possibilities. In parallel, the 2018 reform of the upper secondary vocational pathway, with gradual implementation by 2021, aimed to improve links between apprenticeship-based and academic pathways, facilitating progressive learning and re-engagement in training to acquire or complement a qualification from a lifelong learning perspective (France Compétences, 2021).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The revised French national framework of vocational and professional qualifications[391] has eight levels. Levels are defined using learning outcomes in three categories: (a) complexity of knowledge associated with carrying out the corresponding professional activity[392]; (b) level of expertise, assessed according to the complexity and technical nature of an activity in a work process[393]; and (c) level of responsibility and autonomy in organising work[394].

The framework has strong labour market focus[395]. Only qualifications and diplomas with professional integration objectives are included in the RNCP.

388. Law No 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 for the freedom to choose one's professional future.
389. The NQF is a part of the national qualification system that includes two registers: the RNCP, including qualifications with assigned levels, and the Specific Register (RS), including qualifications without levels, but with possible connections with the NQF through qualifications blocks (France Compétences, 2021, p. 6)
390. A guide on how to use the criteria for qualifications registered on demand is available here.
391. In the referencing report 2021 the term *national professional qualifications framework* is used (France Compétences, 2021).

392. The descriptor concerns progression in knowledge to be able to carry out professional activities at the level (processes, materials, terminology relating to one or more fields, and theoretical knowledge) (France Compétence, 2021, p. 8).
393. The descriptor concerns progression:
in the complexity and technical nature of a task, or activity, in a process;
in the level of mastery of the professional activity;
in the mobilisation of a range of cognitive and practical skills;
in expertise in the field of communication and interpersonal relations in the professional context;
in the ability to communicate expertise (France Compétences, 2021, p. 8).
394. The descriptor concerns progression in the following areas: (i) organisation of work; (ii) reaction to unforeseen situations; (iii) awareness of the complexity of the environment; (iv) understanding of interactions in activities in other professional fields in order to organise one's work, to correct it or give explanations to supervised staff; (v) participation in collective work; and (vi) level of supervision (France Compétences, 2021, p. 8).
395. The NQF '*defines the level of qualification associated with each professional certification according to criteria for grading the competences necessary for the practice of professional activities*' (D. 6113-18 French Labour Code)[392] (France Compétences, 2011, p. 35).

Table 31. Level descriptors in the French national qualifications framework*

LEVELS	LEVEL DESCRIPTORS
8	Level 8 certifies the ability to identify and solve complex and new problems involving numerous fields, by using the most advanced form of knowledge and expertise, to design and direct research and innovation projects and processes. The national diploma of Doctorate is classified at this level of the national framework.
7	Level 7 certifies the ability to design and implement alternative strategies for developing professional activity in complex professional contexts, and to assess the risks and consequences of one's activity. Diplomas conferring Master degrees are classified at this level of the national framework.
6	Level 6 certifies the ability to analyse and solve complex unforeseen problems in a specific field, to formalise know-how and methods to exploit them. Bachelor degrees (*licence*) are classified at this level of the national framework.
5	Level 5 certifies the ability to master expertise in a field of activity, to develop solutions to new problems, to analyse and interpret information by applying concepts, to communicate know-how and methods.
4	Level 4 certifies the ability to perform activities requiring the mobilisation of a wide range of skills, to adapt existing solutions to solve specific problems, to organise one's work autonomously in contexts that are generally predictable but liable to change, as well as participating in assessing activities. The national *baccalauréat* diploma is classified at this level of the national framework.
3	Level 3 certifies the ability to perform activities and solve problems by selecting and applying methods, tools, materials and basic information, in a known context, and the ability to adapt the means of implementation and one's behaviour to the circumstances.
2	Level 2 certifies the ability to perform simple activities and solve routine problems using simple rules and tools and applying professional expertise in a structured context. The associated professional activity is carried out with a limited level of autonomy.
1	Level 1 of the national professional qualifications framework corresponds to the mastery of basic knowledge.

(*)   For more detailed level descriptors of levels 2 to 8 consult France Compétences, 2021, pp. 8-9 and the Labour Code.
Source: France Compétences, 2021, p. 35.

Level 1 has no descriptors as it covers mastery of basic knowledge, which is not sufficient to certify the ability to exercise a professional activity. This level 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 two new levels 7 and 8, assigning master qualifications at level 7 and doctoral qualifications at level 8[396] (France Compétences, 2021, p. 36).

While the EQF descriptors are taken into account, the French level descriptors mirror some national specificities: expertise is used instead of skills, emphasising 'the attachment to the notion of evaluation of competences and the desire to give an operational dimension to the qualifications classified in the framework.' Also, contextualisation of qualifications is a very important element, systematically emphasised in relation to knowledge and expertise dimension (France Compétences, 2021, p. 48).

The notion of competence[397] 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 subsystems 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 increasingly defined in line with the NQF level descriptors (knowledge, expertise and responsibility and

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396. In the five-level structure in use until 2019 both master and doctorate programmes were assigned at level I.

397. In the Referencing report the term *competency* is used. It is understood as the ability to combine a set of knowledge, expertise and interpersonal skills in order to perform a task or activity. In the case of registration in the RNCP, it has a professional purpose and is contextualised. Competency relates to the notion of combining (rather than accumulating) knowledge, expertise and interpersonal skills (France Compétences, 2021, p. 4).

autonomy) and different forms of VET provision differ in how learning outcomes are assessed.

In higher education, a number of policy developments and changes were introduced over the last two decades, aligning the architecture of the higher education landscape to the EHEA. These included aligning academic higher education programmes into the three-level structure of studies[398] and ensuring progression in line with the competence-based approach based on learning outcomes and ECTS credits[399] also creating bridging solutions between bachelor decrees to prevent students from dropping out without a diploma. The establishment of the ECTS system and gradual adaptation to the Bologna process resulted in decompartmentalisation and reclassification of studies into specialisms corresponding to competences and learning outcomes defined per education level[400], increased focus on recognition of non-formal and informal learning and flexibility (individualisation) of training pathways (France Compétences, pp. 22, 59, 68-69). Further changes introduced in 2018[401] clarified the learning outcomes certified at bachelor, master and doctorate national degree levels (the licence-master-doctorate model, LDM) and programme description based on ECTS credits, and increased the focus on career guidance[402]. The master degree (dissociated from the old level I) established at EQF level 7 is a high-level qualification benchmark corresponding to a common core of knowledge, skills and competences that can be acquired through different pathways (France Compétences, pp. 66-67). The introduction of a new university level bachelor's in technology degree at level 6[403] in 2019 and the harmonisation of bachelor programmes delivered by different types of higher education institutions in

2020[404] are also direct results of the restructuring of the higher education sector in line with the QF-EHEA and EQF recommendation (France Compétences, 2021, p. 24).

The notion of 'units/blocks of competences' (*blocs de compétences*) was introduced in 2014[405], 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, Article L6113-1). The 2018 Law for the freedom to choose one's professional future[406] promotes and facilitates lifelong learning within the demand-driven national qualifications system by making the use of units/blocks of competences compulsory for all RNCP qualifications. The 2018 Law also opened up the possibility for the transfer of non-levelled qualifications included in the specific register (SR) as recognised units of competences of qualifications already registered in the RNCP (by decision of the agreement of the owner of the qualification), and of establishing/sharing common blocks of competences between two or several RNCP qualifications, with the possibility that the *Commission de la certification professionnelle)* would oblige owners of qualifications to share blocks of competences between two or more qualifications (France Compétences, 2021, pp. 34, 82, 84).

In the new national framework setting, a long-term objective is to define units/blocks of competences common to different qualifications to allow flexibility in career change in IVET and in less linear career paths in continuing training (France Compétences, 2021, p. 84). From 2019, qualification awarding bodies that 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. A 2020 decree defined the conditions for recognising successfully assessed units of competences in case the full

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398. Bachelor, master and doctorate national degrees (the licence-master-doctorate model, LDM).

399. At all levels but doctorates, bachelor level corresponds to 180 credits and master level to 300 credits (France Compétences, p. 75).

400. Specialisms are complemented by cross-disciplinary competences common to all degrees at a specific level, both forming the higher education national records per degree registered in the RNCP.

401. Decree of 30 July 2018 relating to the national bachelor degree (licence). https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000037291166
Decree of 30 July 2018 modifying the decree of 24 January 2014 fixing the national qualifications framework for the delivery of the national bachelor, professional bachelor and master degrees. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000037291136

402. Law No 2018-166 of 8 March 2018 relating to career guidance and success of students.

403. Delivered by institutes of technology, IUTs, integrating the existing undergraduate DUT level 5 diploma.

404. Decree of 6 December 2019 reforming the profesional bachelor [*Arrêté du 6 décembre 2019 portant réforme de la licence professionnelle*], Article 20. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000039481561

405. Law 2014-288 of 5 March 2014 on *vocational training, employment and social democracy* [*Loi No 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. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2014/3/5/ETSX1400015L/jo/texte

406. Law No 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 for the freedom to choose one's professional future.

IVET qualification was not achieved[407], thus easing re-engagement from a lifelong learning perceptive (adult/continuing training course or VAE) to achieve the full qualification (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2021).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The National commission for vocational and professional qualifications (*Commission nationale de la certification professionnelle*, CNCP) was introduced in 2002 through the Law on social modernisation[408], along with the National register of vocational and professional qualifications (RNCP). It was responsible for supervising the system of vocational and professional qualifications and for managing the register 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;
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[409] was necessary to ensure quality, credibility and ownership.

With the 2018 Law for the freedom to choose one's professional future[410], which created a new article in the Labour Code[411], 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 and professional qualifications[412].

The 2018 Law also created France Compétences, a new national public institution with a quadripartite structure representing the State, the regions and employer and employee organisations at national and international level. It operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Professional Integration; its mission is to ensure implementation of national CVET policies, finance vocational training and apprenticeships, regulate the VET market in terms of skill needs and demand and support synergies between all VET stakeholders. In 2019, a new committee within France Compétences (*Commission de la certification professionnelle)* was established[413] to ensure the qualifications included in the register meet the needs of society and the economy and offer a flexible qualifications system responding rapidly to changes. Its mission, defined in the labour code, is to:

a. issue notices of assent related to applications for registration in the national registers (RNCP and SR);
b. draw up a list of professions considered to be 'emerging' or changing particularly rapidly;
c. send requests to awarding bodies to establish equivalences between qualifications and/ or units/blocks of competences within same level qualifications registered either by law (by ministries) or on demand (by other certifying bodies);
d. issue methodological recommendations for awarding bodies;
e. contribute to the harmonisation of the terminology used for the titles of vocational and professional qualifications;
f. contribute to international work on the quality of qualifications (France Compétences, p. 4).

The committee continues to represent the platform for cooperation between ministries involved in the design and award of qualifications; it is composed

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407. Decree 2002-726 of 12 June modifying the conditions of the education code relevant to the recognition and acquisition of units of competences of five vocational qualifications [professional aptitude certificate (CAP), professional certificate (*BP*), vocational baccalaureate, applied arts certificate and specialisation certificate (MC)]. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000041996366?r=KmxywFXUxm
408. Law No 2002-73 of 17 January 2002 on social modernisation.
409. The CNCP consisted of a chairperson, 16 ministerial representatives, 10 social partners, three elected representatives of the consular chambers, three elected representatives of the regions, and 12 qualified persons, a general rapporteur and two deputy rapporteurs. The members were appointed by the French prime minister, for a renewable five-year term (CNCP, 2010).

410. Law No 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 for the freedom to choose one's professional future.
411. The Labour Code, Article L6113-1.
412. Decree No 2019-14 of 8 January 2019 on the national framework of vocational and professional qualifications.
413. Decree of 26 February,2019 appointing the commission in charge of vocational and professional certification within France Compétences. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000038191674&categorieLien=id

of 18 members (French State, regions and social partners)[414].

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[415]

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[416] 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 registered in the national register of vocational and professional qualifications (RNCP). VAE includes, by definition, the stages of identification, documentation, assessment and certification.

The French VAE system is integrated in the labour and education code and procedures are defined by legislation[417], ensuring consistency 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' (Mathou, 2019, 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. However, to apply for VAE it is required to have carried out at least one year of activity directly related to the activities outlined in the qualification standards and demonstrate required learning outcomes.

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 knowledge, skills and know-how and their assessment in relation to occupation standards (*référentiels d'activités*). A VAE procedure must be in place for all qualifications registered in the RNCP (except for those linked to regulated professions). Thus, VAE is considered a fourth route to qualifications[418]. In higher education, VAE is used in conjunction with the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS). Experiments to link workplace training schemes with VAE are also in place (France Compétences, 2021, p 23).

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[419] 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*, CPF) 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

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414. Decree of 26 February 2019 appointing the committee in charge of professional certification within France Compétences.

415. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning; France* (Mathou, C., 2019).

416. 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 is 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.

417. All legislative acts and labour code articles regulating aspects of the VAE process for vocational qualifications, higher education degrees and other higher education diplomas issued by certifying ministries, as well as VAE in the public sector, are listed here.

418. The 2018 Law for the freedom to choose one's professional future defines (Article 4) four types of lifelong vocational training: training schemes; competence assessments; schemes providing VAE; and apprenticeship schemes (*Referencing report 2021*, p. 22).

419. Law No 2014-288 of 5 March 2014 on *vocational training, employment and social democracy*. Decree No 2014-1354 of 12 November 2014 on measures regarding the validation of acquired experience [*Décret No 2014-1354 du 12 novembre 2014 portant diverses mesures relatives à la validation des acquis de l'expérience*]. *JORF,* No 0263, p. 19184, 14.11.2014). https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/decret/ 2014/11/12/ ETSD1417561D/jo

securing career paths[420] 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.

Since 2002, more than 330 000 full qualifications awarded by ministries have been obtained through VAE, mostly in the health and social sectors. Although VAE constitutes a third route to qualifications on equal footing with initial education and training and continuing training schemes, the number of applications has been gradually decreasing across all ministries. Within the State certifying bodies (ministries), the number of VAE applicants that acquired a qualification through VAE in 2019 was the lowest since 2004. There is no unique information system for monitoring VAE applications by State awarding bodies, data are yearly collected and aggregated by Dares[421]. Data are not available for other types of awarding bodies.

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[422]. The new governing body, France Compétences, ensures registration of qualifications in the RNCP is also available through VAE. Overall governance of the VAE system and statistical monitoring of the use of VAE remains under the responsibility of the State[423].

NQF implementation and impact

The revised French framework established in 2019 is a comprehensive one and demand-driven, open to all vocational and professional qualifications awarded in vocational education and training and higher education with clear professional scope. They are awarded by a range of institutions:

a. diplomas and degrees[424] issued on behalf of the State, legislated by French ministries and created on recommendation and in cooperation with 11 tripartite inter-ministerial vocational advisory committees (*Commissions professionnelles consultativse*, CPCs[425]);
b. qualifications issued on behalf of the State but where no consultative committee is in place[426];
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*, CQP).

State-issued qualifications are registered by law and other qualifications (on demand) are registered after assent of the committee of vocational and professional qualifications established within France Compétences. The French NQF is open to qualifications awarded outside the regulated national qualification system, including private sector and international qualifications, as long as they satisfy the respective quality criteria in place[427].

The upper secondary general and technological baccalaureates (*baccalauréat général and technologique*) are now included in the framework and assigned to level 4 as they 'constitute a social indicator of level for the labour market, even without a professional contextualisation'; they legitimate entry into higher education; they are not listed in the RNCP where only the vocational/professional baccalaureate is listed. There is a national consensus that learning acquired in initial education up to grade 9 (nursery school, primary school and first cycle/lower secondary level) has no professional dimension and remains outside the scope of the framework (France Compétences, 2021, p. 14).

There are two qualifications registers in place in France. The RNCP continues to act as technical support to the NQF where all levelled qualifications

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420. 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*]. *JORF*, No 0184, 9.8.2016. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=_LEGITEXT000033000929&dateTexte=20160908
421. Annex of the draft finance law on vocational training 2021, pp. 132-135.
422. Law No 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 for the freedom to choose one's professional future.
423. All legal acts regulating VAE are available here.

424. These are secondary and higher education qualifications and continuing training qualifications issued by the Ministry of Labour.
425. CPCs are inter-ministerial advisory bodies involving representatives of employers, employees, local authorities and professionals.
426. For example, qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Defence or Ministry of Culture are not developed through, and following recommendation from, advisory bodies.
427. Qualifications, independent of their origin, are included in the national registers (France Compétences, 2021, p. 6) in line with the respective criteria in place for the RNCP – https://www.cti-commission.fr/communication-concernant-la-procedure-denregistrement-des-fiches-rncp – and the Specific register – https://www.francecompetences.fr/app/_uploads/2020/12/FC_Guide_RS_final_interactif.pdf.

are listed (registered by law or on demand). The second register (or inventory, *Inventaire*) originally set up by the CNCP in 2014[428] to include awards that could not be levelled as they were not directly associated with an occupation recognised through an industry-level agreement[429] (Paddeu et al., 2018) has been kept and renamed the Specific register (SR). The awards in the SR are complementary to a qualification in the RNCP or attest transversal or basic skills. The two registers together give an overview of all diplomas and certificates relevant to the labour market, with or without a level, awarded within and outside the education system; the RNCP keeps the record of former qualifications which are not awarded any longer[430]. The number of qualifications has decreased in recent years, especially in higher education, where the number of diplomas registered has been reduced by half (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). There is a fiche for types of diploma, with a list of higher education institutions which provide them[431]. Providers of qualifications are strongly encouraged to create common qualifications and to operate within networks.

Requirements for inclusion of qualifications in the RNCP are specified in legislation[432], 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);* a competence standard (*référentiel de compétences*) 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[433] that can be assessed and validated;
c. classification by field of activity and allocation of an NQF level.

Inclusion in the NQF signals that all stakeholders, as represented in the commission within France Compétences, underwrite the validity and quality of a particular qualification or certificate and ensures parity of esteem between qualifications at the same level independent of the awarding body (the State and other awarding bodies), national/international validity of the qualification or training and other funding schemes in place to acquire them.

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428. Law 2014-288 of 5 March 2014 on *vocational training, employment and social democracy.*
429. 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. C*ertificat Voltaire* (spelling skills)).
430. Both registers are constantly updated; in late 2020 there were 4 841 active records (2 744 qualifications registered by law and 2 097 on demand) and 15 726 inactive records (France Compétences, 2021, p. 5).
431. In the former system, it was a more detailed fiche – for each university which provided, for instance, a master degree in economy, there were 20 fiches with small optional variations; now there is only one fiche.
432. Decree No 2018-1172 of 18 December 2018 on the conditions for registering vocational 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. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/decret/2018/12/18/2018-1172/jo/texte

433. 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).

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.

The introduction of the RNCP in 2002[434] opened the possibility for inclusion of industry or sectoral qualifications recognised by the professional branches (*Certificats de qualification professionnelle* – CQPs), diversifying the range of qualifications that could be nationally recognised. However, CQPs did not have a level. As of 2019, CQPs can be registered on demand after the assent of the committee within France Compétences[435] in either a) the SR without a level, or b) in the RNCP with a level, thus making them valid nationally and eligible for funding through the CPF. They can be obtained through training or VAE processes, but not in apprenticeship (Cedefop and Centre Inffo, 2019; France Compétences 2021, p. 79)[436].

The French qualifications framework is closely associated with the system for validating non-formal and informal learning (VAE), the two being mutually supportive: qualifications included in the RNCP[437] can be acquired through validation and need to have a VAE procedure specified. The gradual introduction of units/blocks of competences from 2014 became mandatory in 2019 for all RNCP qualifications to facilitate equivalences and bridges between qualifications. Those units can be assessed through VAE[438], allowing adults to acquire a given qualification gradually or by combing a training course with one or more VAE processes (Cedefop and Centre Inffo, 2019).

NQF levels are indicated on 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, NQF levels are included in higher education diploma supplements and, following the adoption of the new referencing report, EQF levels will be included in RNCP records. All necessary elements (except for ISCED fields)[439], according to Annex VI of the 2017 EQF Recommendation, are covered by the RNCP.

The French NQF is known and used by education and training institutions and providers in France. They are currently rewriting qualification standards to be expressed in units/blocks of competences. A common working group is in place to better align the learning outcomes of the NQF with the learning outcomes of the new version of the ROME database[440] established by the national employment service, *Pôle Emploi*. The regions, through their involvement with local guidance and counselling schemes and contacts with ONISEP, are mostly concerned with the use of units of competences established in the new NQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). Employers are aware of the levels, though they may not be aware of the NQF itself. Guidance and counselling practitioners and recognition authorities use the national registers in their daily work. Cooperation has been established between the EQF NCP and the National office for guidance (*Office national d'information sur les enseignements et les professions*, ONISEP), French Labour agency (*Pôle emploi*) and ENIC NARIC France. There is 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 NQF registered qualifications are important from the point of view of workers and jobseekers. Financing of training by the CPF is deeply connected with the qualifications registered in the two national registers. There may be also other types of training actions, especially for jobseekers or unqualified people (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020)

The main channels for disseminating information on the NQF and the EQF have been the EQF NCP website and, as of 2019, France Compétences is also hosting the RNCP and SR and interviews for the media.

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434. Law No 2002-73 of 17 January 2002 on social modernisation.
435. CQPs are designed by joint employment and vocational training committees (CPNEFP, *Commission paritaire nationale de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle*) and can be submitted for inclusion in the RNCP by the CPNEFPs.
436. More information here.
437. 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, Higher Education and Agriculture); they are included by entitlement and eligible for automatic inclusion; 'private' qualifications are included by request (i.e. on demand) and awarded by education and training providers, chambers and social partners in their own name (Paddeu et al., 2018).
438. the validity of the VAE assessment is without time limit from an individual perspective as long as the qualification they relate to is active/offered.

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439. The law retained the RNCP, which classifies vocational/ professional qualifications by level and by sector of activity (France Compétences, 2021, p. 36).
440. Register of occupations in the French labour market (*R*épertoire opérationnel des métiers et des emplois, ROME)

Referencing to the EQF

The French five-level structure was referenced to the EQF in October 2010 (CNCP, 2010). The evolution of the national qualifications system, many recent policy developments and reforms and the new national qualifications framework eight-level structure established in 2019 called for an updated referencing report. A single/combined report for the referencing of the French qualifications framework to the EQF and for self-certifying the compatibility of the framework with the QFEHEA was adopted in February 2021.

Important lessons and future plans

The French NQF has evolved through different stages over decades to address new challenges, policy objectives and trends in the national and European context. Being 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, in the 2002 framework the exclusion of secondary general education qualifications.

The national register of vocational and professional qualifications (RNCP) – set up in 2002 – ratified the separation between qualifications and the training courses that may lead to them and opened up to a wider range of awarding bodies. Given that the French qualifications system and, in particular, that 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 lengthy process. The new eight-level structure and learning-outcomes-based level descriptors, adopted in 2019, have brought the French framework closer to the EQF, increasing comparability between French qualifications and those in other European countries. The revised framework from 2019 is broader in scope. It not only includes vocational and professional qualifications from VET and higher education with the objective of professional integration, but also upper secondary general and technological baccalaureates (*baccalauréat général and technologique*) are now included in the framework and assigned level 4 as they 'constitute a social indicator of level for the labour market, even without a professional contextualisation'; they legitimate entry into higher education. From a European perspective this is an important development as now most European NQFs include this type of reference qualification in their frameworks. As in some other countries, level 1

does not have a descriptor and is not linked to the EQF and level 2 is currently empty and does not include any qualification.

Developments related to the French NQF since 2002 illustrate the need for NQFs to evolve continuously to stay relevant. Three main trends have been noted in the evolution of the qualifications system in France: the remarkable diversification of the range of qualifications recognised by the State; the shift in the object of recognition from duration of training to learning outcomes; and more recently, in light of concerns about the proliferation of qualifications, the decrease in the number of qualifications and the strong encouragement of providers to create common qualifications, share blocks of competences between different qualifications and to operate within networks.

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 have 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 – now mandatory for all new qualifications registered in the RNCP; the personal training account (*compte personnel de formation*, CPF) which follows the same logic of breaking down qualifications into blocks of learning outcomes that can be acquired gradually (with the help of the CPF); and the introduction of a new SR – in addition to the existing RNCP – for inclusion of smaller awards not levelled. One of the aims of the revised framework and qualifications registers is to support recognition of competences acquired through another awarding body (France Compétences, 2021, p. 34) and, in higher education, recognition of cross-disciplinary competences in degrees of an equivalent level (France Compétences, 2021, p. 84). In the years to come, developing the system of blocs of competences for all NQF qualifications would facilitate clarity and transparency between different types of qualifications, especially within the same occupation or profession as well as equivalences and pathways between RNCP and non-levelled qualifications in the SR, and access pathways to a qualification. However, this would greatly depend on the willingness of, and agreements between, providers on setting up such equivalences. The new legal framework gives France Compétences the ability to remove those qualifications with similar content for which bridging pathways cannot be established (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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.

The revised French qualifications framework was referenced to the EQF and self-certified its compatibility with the QF-EHEA in February 2021. A single/combined report was prepared combining both processes. This is now a common practice.

Table 32. French national framework for vocational and professional qualifications

NQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctorate degrees (*Doctorat*) Professional certificates/titles (*Titres professionnels*) – level 8* Professional qualification certificates (*Certificat de qualifications professionnelles – CQP*) – level 8** Professional qualifications on demand – level 8***	8
7	Master degrees (*Grade de Master*) Professional diploma in engineering with Master degree (*diplôme / titre d'ingénieur*) National diplomas at level 7**** Professional certificates/titles (*Titres professionnels*) – level 7 Professional qualification certificates (*CQP*) – level 7 Professional qualifications on demand – level 7	7
6	Bachelor degrees (*Grade Licence*) Bachelor (*Licence*) University Bachelor of technology (*Bachelor universitaire de technology – BUT*) National diploma in arts (*Diplôme National d'Art* – DNA) National diplomas at level 6**** Professional certificates/titles (*Titres professionnels*) – level 6 Professional qualification certificates (*CQP*) – level 6 Professional qualifications on demand – level 6	6
5	Undergraduate technician certificates (*Brevet de technicien supérieur – BTS*) Undergraduate technician certificates in agriculture (*Brevet de technicien supérieur agricole – BTSA*) Undergraduate diploma in technology (*Diplôme universitaire de technologie – DUT*) National diploma 'One of the best workers in France' (*Diplôme d'Etat 'Un des meilleurs ouvriers de France'*) National diplomas at level 5**** Professional certificates/titles (*Titres professionnels*) – level 5 Professional qualification certificates (*CQP*) – level 5 Master craftsman qualifications issued by the Chambers of Trades (*Brevets de maîtrise – Chambre des métiers*) Professional qualifications on demand – level 5	5
4	National baccalaureate diploma – general, technological or vocational education (*Diplôme national du baccalauréat général, technologique ou professionnel*) Applied arts certificates (*Brevet des métiers d'art – BMA*) Professional certificate for youth, adult education and sports (*Brevet professionnel de la jeunesse, de l'éducation nationale et du sport* – BPJEPS) Higher technical diploma in craftmanship (*Brevet technique des métiers*) Secondary vocational certificates at level 4**** Professional certificates/titles (*Titres professionnels*) – level 4 Professional qualification certificates (*CQP*) – level 4 Professional qualifications on demand – level 4	4

NQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
3	Secondary vocational certificates (*Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* – CAP; *Brevet d'études professionnelles* – BEP*****)	3
	Secondary vocational certificates in agriculture (*Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle agricole* – CAPA; *Brevet d'études professionnelles agricoles* – BEPA*****)	
	Secondary vocational certificate for youth, adult education and sports (*Certificat professionnel de la jeunesse, de l'éducation nationale et du sport* – CPJEPS)	
	Certificate issued by the Chambers of Trades and crafts (*Certificat technique des métiers* – CTM)	
	Secondary vocational certificates at level 4****	
	Professional certificates/titles (*Titres professionnels*) – level 3	
	Professional qualification certificates (*CQP*) – level 3	
	Professional qualifications on demand – level 3	
2	Currently no qualifications	2
1	-	1

NB:

* Professional certificates/titles are awarded by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social integration; they are registered by law and may be classified at any level.

** CQPs are under the responsibility of social partners; they are registered on demand and may be classified at all levels.

*** Qualifications registered on demand are awarded by public or private bodies and may be classified at all levels.

**** An overview of national diplomas and vocational certificates registered by law is available in Annex 9 of the 2021 referencing report (France Compétences, 2021, p. 103).

***** BEP and BEPA are intermediary qualifications granted to young people who have passed the BEP exam and are preparing for the vocational baccalaureate.

Sources: France Compétences (2021), pp. 7 and 102-103 https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2021-05/France-%20 updated%20referencing%20report.pdf; the national register of vocational and professsional qualifications (RNCP) hosted within France Compétences. https://www.francecompetences.fr/recherche_certificationprofessionnelle/

Abbreviations

CNCP	*Commission nationale de la certification professionnelle* [National committee on vocational qualifications]
CPC	*Commission professionnelle consultative* [Vocational advisory committee]
EQF	European qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area
RNCP	*Registre national de la certification professionnelle* [national register of vocational and professional qualifications]
ROME	*Répertoire opérationnel des métiers et des emplois* [register of occupations in the French labour market]
RS (RSCH)	*Répertoire spécifique des certifications et habilitations* [specific register of awards]
VAE	*validation des acquis de l'expérience* [validation of non-formal and informal learning]

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GEORGIA

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

The first Georgian national qualifications framework (NQF) was adopted by ministerial decree in 2010.

Following revisions, in 2019 an 8-level, comprehensive, lifelong learning framework, was approved.

National authorities intend that the ongoing reform of the NQF contribute to reform of the education and training system, enhance transparency and evidence-based decision-making on the NQF's 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) steers NQF implementation, reviewing and updating its legal basis and monitoring its impact. The NQF and the quality assurance framework for the national education and training system are closely linked.

Georgia has been participating in the Bologna process since 2005, but has not yet presented a selfcertification report.

Implementation structures such as governance arrangements are established, instruments including databases are used and a quality assurance system is functioning. Georgia has therefore reached the activation stage of NQF development.

Policy context

Georgia aspires to closer integration with the EU. Pursuing implementation of the Association Agreement signed in 2014, Georgia conducts and develops policy consistent with the framework of relevant EU policies and practices. Cooperation in the field of education and training aims to promote lifelong learning and encourage coordination and transparency at all levels of education and training. This cooperation focuses, inter alia, on enhancing quality, relevance and access at all levels of education, promoting progress towards recognition of qualifications and competences and ensuring transparency of qualifications.

The Socioeconomic Development Strategy of Georgia (2014) – "Georgia 2020" – sets inclusive economic development as the main objective of the government. The strategy identifies human resources development, including development of a workforce that meets labour market requirements, as one of the main factors contributing to economic growth.

The Government Programme 2018–2020 – "Freedom, rapid development and welfare" – reiterates the Strategy's priorities and recognizes the need to improve the match between skills supplied and market demand and the importance of involvement of the private sector actors in implementing VET policies and lifelong learning principles.

The Unified Strategy for Education and Science for 2017-2021, which succeeded the VET Development Strategy 2013-2020, sets the strategic objectives for all levels of education. The strategic objectives for VET include: (1) compliance of the vocational education with the requirements of the labour market and internationalisation of the system, (2) ensuring access to vocational education based on the principle of lifelong learning, (3) popularisation of professional education and increased attractiveness.

One of the specific goals of the Unified Strategy is to increase the number of VET students to support the socio-economic development of the country. Currently, the VET sector is small and unpopular with young people - ETF found that, in 2017, only 4.5% of the cohort aged 15 to 24 were registered in formal VET programmes. The Government plans to raise this proportion to 8%.

Unfortunately, as the VET offer is limited in range, young people are not attracted to apply, and thus

VET enrolment remains low. This dilemma is recognised by the Government, whose education strategy seeks to counter VET's negative image. By contrast, Higher Education is popular in Georgia, enjoying high enrolment rates.

The National Strategy 2019-2023 for Labour and Employment Policy of Georgia[441] identifies two priority areas: promotion of employment and promotion of effective functioning of the labour market. The strategy foresees addressing the mismatch between demand and supply in the labour market by promoting job creation, including in high productivity sectors, promoting qualified human resource development oriented towards labour market demands, and promoting innovation and entrepreneurship.

Between 2010 and 2017, Georgia's annual GDP growth rate was over 5%, while the average annual employment growth rate was 1.4%. Although unemployment has been decreasing over time e.g. from 16.3% in 2010 to 12.7% in 2018, it is still high by international standards. We can anticipate that COVID will have reversed the progress made in reducing unemployment levels.

During 2020, as in other countries, the education and training system was hit by COVID. Schools were closed and learning switched to online teaching methods, supported by "TV School", aired on national TV. For a period, training was suspended in all public vocational schools to allow the Ministry to conduct a mapping of staff needs in distance and online teaching.

NQF legal basis
Two legal acts provide the basis for the regulation and implementation of the revised NQF:

The Law of Georgia "On development of Quality of Education". A new section dedicated to the NQF (an amendment to the law of 20 September 2018) defines:
- the NQF structure and its goals;
- roles in the development and approval of NQF legislation, including on management, development, approval and monitoring of the framework, the creation of the electronic registry of qualifications, the procedures and rules for recognition of non-formal education;
- role of the classifier of fields of study.

The Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia 69/n of 10 April 2019 "On the approval of the National Qualifications Framework and the Classifier of Fields of Study", repealing the first Georgian NQF adopted in 2010. It determines:
- the NQF level descriptors and the list of types of qualifications;
- the purpose and structure of the classifier of fields of study, principles of classification, list of fields of study, formulation of higher education qualifications titles, and the development of higher education programmes in accordance with the classifier.

The new Law of Georgia on Vocational Education, adopted by Parliament in 2018, was a milestone in VET reform in the country. It provides the legal basis for many innovations within the system which the NQF will contribute to achieving. Further, the Laws "On Higher Education" and "On General Education" have been amended to ensure harmonisation with the new NQF level structure and concepts.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms
The main policy documents for VET – the Unified Strategy for Education and Science 2017–2021 and the new VET law of 2018 – include three strategic objectives in VET reform:
1. "Relevant VET" - relevant to labour market demands;
2. "Accessible VET" - accessible to everyone via lifelong learning;
3. "Attractive VET" - attractive or promoted to all groups in society.

The overall objective of the Unified Strategy is to develop an accessible system of quality education based on the principle of lifelong learning that provides opportunities to all citizens to achieve high quality outcomes. The Strategy and the respective action plan for 2019 have three strategic priorities for VET:
1. A VET system that meets labour market needs; internationalization of the system, which includes promoting involvement of the private sector; NQF implementation in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as one of the main tools for internationalisation; development of qualifications relevant to labour market needs; improvement of quality assurance mechanisms in vocational education; supporting entrepreneurial education and VET teachers' continuous professional development; development of eVET (information management system for VET);

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441. National Strategy 2019-2023 for Labour and Employment Policy of Georgia, Government of Georgia, Ordinance 662 as of 30.12.2019 https://www.moh.gov.ge/uploads/files/2020/Failebi/strategy-13.12.19_final-translation.pdf

2. Ensuring access to vocational education based on the principle of lifelong learning, which focuses on integrating VET and upper secondary education; recognition of VET credits within higher education; introduction of short-term, state-recognised training programmes for adults; recognition of non-formal learning; increasing and diversifying VET provision;
3. Promoting vocational education and increasing its attractiveness by improving the vocational/ career guidance service and the image of VET.

The new VET law of 2018 should improve access and raise participation in VET and broaden the scope of VET policy. It aims to improve the quality assurance mechanisms and flexibility of the VET system; create flexible pathways between VET and general and higher education; integrate general education into the VET system; better link VET to the needs of the economy to ensure that graduates are employable, and to facilitate their transition into work; ensure systematic application of workbased learning; develop mechanisms for credit accumulation and transfer; facilitate social partnership in VET; create mechanisms for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning; and support the development of adult education.

Aims of NQF
The Law of Georgia "On development of Quality of Education" sets the following goals for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF):
• classification of qualifications in accordance with the basic principles of the National Qualifications Framework (compliance with learning outcomes, quality assurance, access to information related to qualifications);
• interconnection, management and development of general, vocational and higher education;
• promoting lifelong learning;
• supporting a quality assurance system for qualifications;
• ensuring compatibility, comparability and transparency of qualifications at the international level;
• facilitating mobility;
• promoting the recognition of formal education received during study;
• promoting the recognition of non-formal education;
• informing the public about existing qualifications;
• catering to the ever-changing demands of society in the education system and stimulating the description of relevant qualifications.

Compared with the NQF adopted in 2010, this set of goals reflects a renewed vision of the NQF, seeking to better link general education, VET and higher education; promote non-formal/informal education; increase transparency in understanding the professional profiles for all types of users; and achieve responsiveness to changing requirements and renewal of qualifications. The new NQF is increasingly seen as a bridge between the sub-sectors of formal education, as well as between formal and non-formal learning.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure
Georgia first adopted three distinct frameworks in 2010, respectively catering for general, vocational and higher education. In 2017-2018, national authorities conducted a major revision of the NQF to achieve better linkages among the sub-systems of general education, VET and higher education, and greater international comparability of the framework. As a result, in 2018 the NQF-related amendments to the Law of Georgia on Development of Quality of Education were adopted, setting the main objectives and principles of the new NQF. In 2019, the new revised lifelong learning NQF was adopted.

The new framework comprises a unified eight-level structure whose level descriptor categories are "Knowledge and Understanding", "Skills", "Responsibility and autonomy", compatible with those of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

Types of qualifications
The NQF defines the types of qualifications allocated by levels: qualifications available in education subsystems: general education, initial VET, and higher education qualifications; and qualifications awarded as the result of completion of short-term vocational training/retraining programmes - CVET qualifications.

General education qualifications are placed at NQF levels 2 and 4, VET qualifications at NQF levels 3-5, while higher education qualifications are allocated to levels 6-8. CVET qualifications are placed at NQF levels 2-5. They are regarded as part of formal education, so can be levelled in the NQF, and can be awarded by any legal entity, including those outside the formal education system such as private companies, a training centres, associations, etc., authorised to provide short-term training/retraining programme independently or in collaboration with education institution.

Quality assurance of qualifications

The quality assurance framework includes mechanisms for the development and approval of qualifications - occupational and educational standards and procedures; and measures to ensure quality of provision - authorisation of providers and accreditation of education programmes. Authorisation refers to the initial licensing and aims at acquiring the status of an education institution that can deliver and award qualifications.

General education qualifications are based on the National Curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia (MESCS). It is obligatory for a general education institution and for a VET institution implementing the integrated VET and general secondary programme to follow the National Curriculum.

VET and short-cycle (Level 5) qualifications and programmes are developed using vocational education standards. The VET standards themselves are formulated based on occupational standards following NCEQE rules, procedures and methodologies[442]. A VET standard may be used to define one or more qualifications and must be developed with the involvement of representatives of employers and educational institutions, then validated by the relevant Sector Council and approved by the NCEQE.

VET qualifications may be awarded by education institutions authorised by the NCEQE. General education institutions can obtain the right to deliver programmes and award VET qualifications at NQF Levels 3 and 4 VET and higher education institutions can obtain the right to deliver and award VET qualifications at any level.

CVET qualifications can be developed based either on occupational or VET standards, or modules of the authorised VET programme, legal requirements, or documents containing information on occupations (e.g. ISCO-08), or any other relevant documents. To obtain the right to deliver the staterecognised vocational training/retraining programmes and award CVET qualifications, a legal entity must meet the requirements of the relevant authorisation standard[443]. Education institutions authorised to

deliver VET programmes may deliver vocational training/retraining programmes within the VET programme without additional authorisation.

Use of learning outcomes and standards

The application of the learning outcomes approach is stipulated as mandatory in the legislation on quality assurance of education. Authorisation and accreditation standards require clearly defined learning outcomes aligned with the NQF level descriptors.

In general education, the National Curriculum comprises subject standards of primary, basic and upper general secondary education which define the list of subject-specific learning outcomes in skills and knowledge, to be achieved by the student at each grade.

To eliminate the dead ends that have traditionally prevented VET students from accessing higher VET and higher education, general secondary education learning outcomes defined in the National Curriculum have been integrated into VET programmes, so that VET students can now access higher VET colleges and higher education institutions.

Georgia has gradually replaced vocational courses based on subjects with modular, competencybased vocational programmes, so that, since 2019, any new student entering vocational education follows a modular programme. Modular programmes focus not only on the development of vocational/professional skills but also on basic skills e.g. literacy, mathematical skills, etc. and key skills, such as entrepreneurship, communication in foreign languages, digital competencies, etc. The VET programmes integrated with general secondary education reflect the requirements of the National Curriculum in the integrated general modules.

Short cycle programmes leading to an associate degree at NQF level 5 are developed by the VET or higher education institutions based on the VET standard. Some of these programmes are standalone courses, while others are designed to lead to first or second-cycle higher education programmes. For those learners graduating from Level 5 short cycle programmes and advancing to first or second cycle programmes, the receiving higher education institution can recognise their credits acquired.

In higher education, the programme accreditation has among its main functions the assessment of feasibility of the programme's learning outcomes, their relevance and correspondence to the NQF.

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442. Rules for developing, amending and revoking the occupational standard, the framework document for educational program and module (NCEQE order no. 652ი as of 26.07.2019) https://eqe.ge/res/docs/652%E1%83%98.pdf
443. Rules and conditions on obtaining the right to implement the vocational training and retraining program recognized by the state (Resolution of the Government of Georgia N131 of 15.03.2019) https://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=9133&lang=eng

In the new modular VET programmes, a competence-based assessment is used. Each module is based on learning outcomes and includes performance/assessment criteria and evidence requirements[444]. Assessment should meet the requirements of the assessment standard, based on the respective occupational standard.

Credit systems

In higher education, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is used[445]. One ECTS credit equals 25-30 hours of student workload. One academic year is 60 ECTS credits, with a maximum of 75 ECTS for individual programmes. Higher education programmes of the first cycle shall have at least 240 ECTS; those of the second cycle, should have not less than 120 ECTS. However, it is possible for higher education institutions to develop the first cycle programme of 180 ECTS or the second cycle programme of 60 ECTS to promote students' international mobility and develop joint programmes at international level. The taught component of the third cycle cannot be less than 60 ECTS.

Credits awarded within one higher education programme (qualification) can be recognised for another higher education qualification at the same level, based on the comparison of learning outcomes[446].

The use of credits for VET is also foreseen. As in higher education, one credit equals 25-30 hours of student workload. Credits are allocated to modules and VET programmes in accordance with the VET educational standards.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The National Centre for Education Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) manages the NQF. It was established by the MESCS order as a legal entity of

public law[447] to support the improvement of quality assurance of education. NCEQE has independent management of its functional organisation, staffing and human resource development, and budget.

NQCEQE[448]:

- authorizes educational institutions and accredits educational programmes, and controls provider compliance with authorization and accreditation standards through monitoring;
- develops authorization and accreditation standards and ensures their continuous improvement;
- ensures the management and development of the National Qualifications Framework and the
- Classifier of Fields of Study;
- develops higher education and vocational educational standards. To this end, it can establish sectoral councils or working groups;
- proposes, to promote a quality culture in educational institutions, recommendations, conducts developmental assessments, and conducts training sessions, seminars, and conferences;
- provides consulting services to educational institutions and other interested parties regarding quality assurance mechanisms, plans and implements measures aimed at developing the internal quality of educational institutions;
- recognizes and confirms the authenticity of educational documents issued in Georgia;
- verifies the linguistic correctness of state documents certifying education;
- carries out ancillary economic activities;
- accredits professional development programmes for professional public servants;
- oversees requests to develop and offer vocational training programmes in accordance with the rules established by legislation;
- issues and publishes information;
- ensures the protection of personal data;
- ensures the information security of the Centre in accordance with legislation;
- implements related regulations.

NCEQE approves the occupational and VET educational standards, and sector benchmarks for higher education programmes. Its activities are

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444. https://eqe.ge/geo/static/669/vocational-education/
445. Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia "On approval of the rules of calculation of credits for higher education programmes" No. 3 as of 5.01.2007 https://eqe.ge/res/docs/201811301658573.pdf
446. Law on Higher Education, art. 50-1. https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/32830?publication=80

447. Order of the Minister of Science and Education of Georgia "On establishment of Legal Entity of Public Law - National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement and Approval of its Provision through Reorganization of Legal Entity of Public Law - National Center for Education Accreditation" No. 89 as of 14.09.2010 https://eqe.ge/res/docs/89ENG.pdf
448. Order of the Minister of Education and Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia No. 215/n as of 28.10.2019 https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4688172?publication=0

supervised by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MESCS), which is the main policy-making body for education. The national policies and strategies are developed following consultation with other ministries and governmental agencies, and social partners.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

NCEQE is managed by a Director, appointed by the Minister of Education, and overseen and guided by the Coordinating Council[449]. This body acts as a governing board and is a collegial body established to ensure involvement of stakeholders in the management and development of the NCEQE's activities.

The Coordinating Council may comprise no more than 13 members and may include representatives of MESCS, heads of public and private educational institutions, representatives of employers and civil sectors, representatives of international education organizations, plus foreign specialists and other experts who can contribute to the NCEQE's activities.

The Coordination Council considers / reviews:

- the NCEQE Strategy and Action Plans; main activities;
- authorization and accreditation standards and procedures, and makes proposals for their improvement;
- NCEQE reports, results of external evaluation of its activities;
- NCEQE draft budgets;
- international cooperation in the field of education quality assurance; and develops relevant recommendations.

NCEQE establishes and coordinates the Sector Councils representing social partners and education providers, which are responsible for the validation of occupational and educational standards developed by the NCEQE working groups or other interested parties.

Social partners are also represented in the Council that authorizes the implementation of vocational training and retraining programmes. The members of this council are appointed by MESCS, its activities are supported by NCEQE.

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

VNFIL arrangements

The VET law and framework documents for the recognition of informal education[450] have created a legal basis for the implementation of VNIFL in Georgia. Procedures and rules for VNIFL were renewed in 2019 to align with the EU Recommendation on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (2012) and to allow the recognition of non-formal and informal learning for VET qualifications at all NQF levels.

The VNIFL process includes four stages, corresponding to those of the 2012 European recommendation, namely identification, documentation, assessment and certification.

For the purposes of VNIFL, the VET educational standards are used. The assessment process should meet the requirements for the assessment of learning outcomes of the relevant VET standard or module. Following the VNIFL process, the candidate may be awarded the VET qualification or part of it.

VNIFL may be conducted by the VET institution or legal entity authorised to deliver the staterecognised vocational training/retraining programmes and only within its authorised programmes. To obtain the right to offer validation, which is granted by NCEQE, applicants must meet the rules and conditions established by the government[451].

In order to conduct the VNIFL process, the institution must establish a commission of at least 3 members: the representative of the relevant professional field (an employers' representative), a VET teacher in the relevant field and a representative of the institution. This commission decides on the admission to and organisation of the assessment, the establishment of the examination commission and its personal composition, validation of the results of the assessment (learning outcomes), and recognition (award of a qualification or part of one).

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449. Order of the Minister of Science and Education of Georgia "On establishment of Legal Entity of Public Law - National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement and Approval of its Provision through Reorganization of Legal Entity of Public Law - National Center for Education Accreditation" No. 89 as of 14.09.2010 https://eqe.ge/res/docs/89ENG.pdf

450. The Rule of recognition of learning outcomes achieved within non-formal education (order of MESCE as of 6.09.2019) and the Rules and conditions for obtaining the right to non-formal education recognition (Resolution of the Government of Georgia No. 459 as of 20.09.2019) https://eqe.ge/geo/static/873/

451. Resolution of the Government of Georgia No. 459 as of 20.09.2019 on approval the rules and conditions for obtaining the right to non-formal education recognition https://eqe.ge/geo/static/873/

In general education, extra-mural study is allowed, and it is possible to obtain the document certifying completion of general education, based only on the assessment of achieved learning outcomes[452].

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
In 2019 - 2020 significant progress was made in the NQF's development. New, modularized programmes integrated with general secondary education have been developed in VET, thus allowing VET students to access higher VET and higher education. The delivery of the "integrated" VET programmes began in 2019. Short cycle programmes, allowing for integration with higher education programmes, are being developed.

New quality assurance mechanisms have been developed to align the Georgian quality assurance framework with the European quality assurance principles for qualifications. Georgia has aligned the relevant reforms with the Bologna process and European Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA (ESG). Since 2019, the NCEQE has been a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

A system-wide implementation of the revised quality assurance standards and procedures at Georgian higher education institutions has begun. In VET, the authorization standards and procedures have been revised together with the development of relevant methodologies, tools, and capacity development activities to achieve compliance with EQAVET principles. This revised system will take account of modular, competence-based teaching and assessment approaches.

In order to provide a role for industry representatives in qualifications development at the sectoral level, NCEQE establishes Sector Councils, of which there are 12 VET and 8 higher education councils. However, they suffer from an under-representation of enterprises and professional associations, and a predominance of educational institutions and experts among their members[453].

Companies can now, under approved legislation, develop short-term vocational training programmes,

leading to CVET qualifications, and seek authorisation to issue state-recognised certificates and receive funding.

Recognition of prior learning is progressing – Georgia has revised its regulations, procedures and tools to align with the EU's 2012 Recommendation on VNFIL and developed and disseminated implementation materials and training for actors. NCEQE has started to authorise VNFIL providers.

Qualifications registers and databases
All VET qualifications together with occupational standards and VET educational standards are placed on www.vet.ge and www.eqe.ge. The www.vet. emis.ge portal includes the list of VET programmes, training and retraining programmes together with the authorised providers. The register of higher education programmes is not open for public use.

All occupational standards are linked with the national classification of occupations, based on ISCO08. VET qualifications are linked with the classifier of fields of study structured in accordance with ISCED-F 2013. Only the standards approved by NCEQE are entered into the register.

The concept for the new digital qualifications register has been developed. It defines a common structure for qualifications to be included in the register, which is in line with the Annex 6 of the 2017 EQF Recommendation.

Qualification documents
The title of the higher education qualification includes the name of the level of higher education and the name of the field of study according to the national classifier of fields of study. The supplement to the higher education diploma follows the European Diploma Supplement format. For the supplement to the diploma certifying VET qualifications, the Europass format is used.

Career information and guidance
The Labour Market Information System (LMIS) portal (www.lmis.gov.ge) is a one-stop-shop public web portal with up-to-date information on labour market trends, career guidance and occupational profiles. It is linked to the www.vet.ge portal focused on VET.

The portal www.vet.ge is designed to guide and inform different groups of users. It contains information on occupations linking them with VET programmes.

Recognition of foreign qualifications
The recognition of foreign higher education and vocational education qualifications, or periods

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452. Article 9 of the Law on General Education. https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/29248?publication=84

453. ETF (2019) Georgia: Education, Training and Employment Developments [ETF report 2019], p. 7. www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2019-03/Georgia%202018.pdf

of study (credits), is based on a comparison of qualifications taking into account the learning outcomes. The foreign higher education qualifications can be recognised regardless of the difference in the period of study[454].

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks

Georgia has been a member of the Bologna Process since 2005 but has not yet presented a selfcertification report.

The structure and level descriptors of the new NQF are compatible with the EQF and Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). Georgia seeks comparison of its NQF with the EQF in accordance with the new EQF Council Recommendation (2017)[455].

International cooperation

Georgia conducts and develops policy consistent with the framework of relevant EU policies and practices in line with the Association Agreement signed in 2014.

NCEQE is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEENQA). It is also registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education. NCEQE also hosts the Georgian ENIC Centre, which is a member of the ENIC-NARIC Network. NCEQE cooperates as a full or affiliate partner in EU-funded projects aiming at enhancing the quality of higher education in the EHEA.

Georgia ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 1999.

International donor support

To support the implementation of the framework, the EU Twinning project "Strengthening Capacities for Quality Assurance of Education and Governance of Qualifications" was launched in 2019. Its objective is to support NCEQE in further developing the key elements of the quality assurance framework for education and training and the new NQF. The project will review legal and regulatory bases of quality assurance and the NQF, develop methodology packages, reinforce institutional capacity and develop technical specifications for the new NQF online register and portal.

Important lessons and future plans

The revised NQF allows for inclusion of qualifications of different types beyond those from formal education, stronger links between education and the labour market, and more open access to and use by all stakeholders groups. To exploit this greater scope, NCEQE and the concerned ministries will need to extend participative governance and decision-making, and target dissemination and information at stakeholders.

Successful implementation of the NQF cannot be the sole responsibility of a single ministry and/or the NCEQE. Currently, however, the NQF governance structure is very much oriented towards the formal education system and dominated by actors from the educational institutions.

There is a need for active involvement of other stakeholders - private sector organisations, professional bodies, non-governmental organisations - in the NQF reform, which requires the development of effective coordination mechanisms and effective planning. It is therefore crucial for implementing the new or strengthened NQF functions - renewal of qualifications, competence-based assessment, VNFIL, recognition of qualifications awarded outside the formal education sector – that private sector stakeholders participate more intensively in decision-making and NQF management.

A more strategic approach to skills anticipation and qualifications development at the sectoral level is needed. MESCS and NCEQE have now agreed in principle that the Sector Councils should have a broader remit and that independent Sector Skills Councils should be established, possibly by transferring ownership to sectoral associations[456].

454. Article 50 of the Law on Higher Education. https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/32830?publication=80
455. In accordance with the criteria and procedures to be defined by the Advisory Group EQF and in accordance with the EQF Council Recommendation of 22/05/2017: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017H0615%2801%29
456. Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (MESCS, 2019), National Torino Process report 2018–2020: Georgia, MESCS, Tbilisi, 2019, p. 7

Sector Skills Councils should be empowered and resourced to play a key role in skills development, especially for strategically important economic sectors.

Further, a new consultative body, the NQF Advisory Board, is proposed to be established, which will review the strategic directions and action plans of the NQF development and implementation, and the results of NQF monitoring[457].

NQF implementation will require coordination with the quality assurance reforms. The same body (NCEQE) is responsible both for the development and approval of qualifications, and for the authorisation of qualification providers and accreditation of educational programmes. Different scenarios for the optimization of the existing NCEQE functions may need to be considered to avoid gaps and conflicts of interest in the qualifications system[458].

VNFIL is intended to lead towards the award of mainstream VET qualifications. This may require review of the authorisation standards to ensure that all VET providers meet specific requirements related to VNFIL[459].

At this stage of the NQF reform process, following the recent legislation, the focus should be on implementation issues. It is important to improve and implement effective communication mechanisms and tools to make NQF operational and more visible for end-users. Priorities include producing clear and user-friendly guidelines in the form of handbooks, and manuals and other methodological support, for all stakeholders and beneficiaries; implementation of the qualifications register and its use for career information, guidance and recognition purposes.

These needs require improved institutional capacity of the NCEQE, in human resources, instruments, and information. Some of these needs will be addressed in the frame of the current EU Twinning project.

457. Castel-Branco E. (2019). The Georgian National Qualifications Framework. Technical Note. Working document for the Workshop of 28-29th March 2019 "Rethinking the Georgian NQF: achievements, priorities and way forward. Strengthening exchanges with international partners". www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2019-03/Note%20for%20workshop_0.pdf

458. Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (MESCS, 2019), National Torino Process report 2018–2020: Georgia, MESCS, Tbilisi, 2019., p. 53

459. MCA 2019. Industry-led Skills and Workforce Development Project. Technical Assistance to Strengthening National TVET Policy: Development Brief. January 2019, p. 30. http://iswd.ge/uploads//Development%20Brief%20final.pdf

Table 33. Infographic of the NQF / NQF overview table

NQF LEVELS	EDUCATION SYSTEM	TRAINING AND RE-RETRAINING
1	Georgian – language course certificate	
2	State document, verifying elementary education	2th level VET training certificate
	Georgian – Language course certificate	2th level VEI re-training certificate
3	Basic VET diploma	3th level VET training certificate
	Georgian – Language course certificate	3th level VEI re-training certificate
4	State document, verifying complete general education	4th level VET training certificate
	Secondary VET education diploma	4th level VEI re-training certificate
	Georgian – Language course certificate	
5	Associate Degree	5th level VET training certificate
	Higher VET education diploma	5th level VEI re-training certificate
6	Bachelor	
	Teaching training certificate	
7	Master	
	Doctor of Medicine (MD)	
	Doctor of Dental Medicine (DDM)	
	Master of Education (MEd)	
	Master of Veterinary Science (MVSC)	
	Veterinary training course certificate	
8	PHD	

Descriptors: https://eqe.ge/res/20191007105945NQFofGeorgia.pdf

Source: National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement

Abbreviations

EMIS	Education Management Information System	ISCO	International standard classification of occupations
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System	LMIS	Labour Market Information System
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education EQAR European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education	MESCS	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia
		NCEQE	National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement
		NQF	National Qualifications Framework
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training	QF-EHEA	Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area
EQF	European qualifications framework	SSCs	Sector Skills Councils
ISCED	International standard classification of education	VET	Vocational education and training
		VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Main sources of information

Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia: www.mes.gov.ge

National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement: www.eqe.ge

VET Portal: www.vet.ge

EMIS: www.vet.emis.ge

LMIS: www.lmis.gov.ge

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GERMANY

Introduction and context

A number of reforms and policy developments are under way in Germany to address current and future challenges in education and training and skills development (Eurydice, 2021)[460]. German federal and regional levels jointly set digital strategies, with substantial investments in digital education, digital infrastructure of schools and digital skills of teachers. In March 2019, a Digital pact was concluded between the Federal Government and *Länder* that offers a federal contribution of EUR 5 billion over the next five years to equip schools with hardware. Although students have above-average ICT skills, gaps remain in the digital infrastructure of schools and digital skills of teachers. An aging teaching force is a further challenge (European Commission, 2020).

Germany has one of the highest employment rates for recent graduates (ISCED 3-8) in the EU, at 92.7% in 2019; among highly qualified individuals (ISCED levels 5-8) this is even higher at 94.7%. Although participation in early childhood education and care for older children is high, it has barely progressed for younger children (under three years old). Tertiary education attainment and participation of adults in lifelong learning have increased in recent years, but the two indicators remain below EU average levels. Germany continues to have the highest proportion of STEM graduates in the EU. Performance on basic skills is above the EU average but has somewhat declined over years. The proportions of 15-year-olds underachieving in reading (20.7%), science (19.6%) and maths (21.1%) have increased since 2017 but remain slightly below the EU average (22.5%, 22.3% and 22.9% respectively in 2019). Socioeconomic and migrant background have a strong impact on education outcomes and disadvantaged students tend to be more concentrated in certain schools. Early leaving from school has been stable since 2015, just above the EU target, with an increasing

gender gap; it is 10.3% in 2019, close to Germany's national target of 10%. Despite the rising number of VET learners at 0.9%, the number of new apprenticeship contracts dropped by 1.2% in 2019. Germany is thus modernising VET to align it with future requirements. Several new pieces of legislation came into force in 2020. In January 2020 the new Vocational training Act[461] came into force, introducing a minimum training wage for apprenticeships, emphasising equivalence between regulated further vocational qualifications and academic qualifications, expanding part-time vocational training to new target groups and facilitating recognition of prior learning. In April 2020, the act on the promotion of continuing vocational training during times of structural change and further development of funding of vocational training assistance was adopted[462]; investing in upskilling and reskilling helps to prepare for future challenges (European Commission, 2020).

Germany has been implementing 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)), including all levels and types of qualifications from formal education and training. 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

460. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments-25_en

461. https://www.bmbf.de/upload_filestore/pub/Das_neue_Berufsbildungsgesetz_BBiG.pdf

462. *Gesetz zur Förderung der beruflichen Weiterbildung im Strukturwandel und zur Weiterentwicklung der Ausbildungsförderung* [Act to promote continuing vocational training in structural change and to further develop support for training]. https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/text.xav?SID=&tf=xaver.component.Text_0&tocf=&qmf=&hlf=xaver.component.Hitlist_0&bk=bgbl&start=%2F%2F*%5B%40node_id%3D%27818037%27%5D&skin=pdf&tlevel=-2&nohist=1

Länder and the Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy[463].

The DQR was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in 2012. The qualifications framework for higher education – now an integral part of the DQR for lifelong learning – was self-certified against QF-EHEA in 2008.

Policy objectives

The DQR aims to increase transparency and comparability of German qualifications and overall coherence and permeability (*Durchlässigkeit)* in the education, training and qualification system. 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.

More specifically, the DQR aims to[464]:
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.

Functions and policy objectives have not changed over the years (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

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). 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 1). 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[465].

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 qualifications; higher levels are not restricted to qualifications awarded within the Bologna process. The table of level descriptors (DQR matrix) and a glossary are included in the DQR outline.

463. Joint resolution on the German qualifications framework for lifelong learning /Gemeinsamer Beschluss der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung, der Wirtschaftsministerkonferenz und des Bundesministeriums für Wirtschaft und Technologie zum Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen (DQR) https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/shareddocs/downloads/files/gemeinsamer_beschluss_final_ohne_unterschriften.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1
464. *German EQF referencing report* (BMBF and KMK, 2013). https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-06/German%20Referencing%20Report%20.pdf

465. 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.

Table 34. 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).

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 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). The DQR level descriptors have informed the design of qualifications standards, especially in VET, and are increasingly used for designing qualifications in the non-formal sector (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020)

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. Competence-based training regulations and framework curricula structured in 'learning fields' have been used for more than two decades. Increasing emphasis is being placed in curricula on cross-cutting/transversal competences within the context of coping with change in the world of work. They are becoming an increasing focus of company-based learning alongside specific professional competences[466]. Due to digitalisation and fast changing requirements, there is a need to incorporate and develop learning skills, digital skills (digital technologies/IT skills, software skills), analytical and problem-solving skills, process/

system understanding and competences relating to fostering cooperation among skilled workers from different fields (Zinke, 2020; KMK and BMBF, 2020; BMBF, 2020).

Competence orientation is also characteristic of reform in general education and development of national educational standards (*Bildungsstandards*) at all levels of general education. Most recently, in 2020, the KMK adopted binding educational standards for natural science subjects (biology, chemistry and physics) for the *Allgemeine Hochschulreife* (*Abitur*) next to already adopted educational standards for German, mathematics, English and French. Using these standards, a pool of possible examination tasks has been established to provide examples of how requirements could be tested in *Abitur* examinations. The pool is used by the federal states to create exam items.

The *Länder* have commenced using the educational standards in their curricula. The standards for the *Allgemeine Hochschulreife* in the natural sciences are to be introduced in the *Gymnasiale Oberstufe* from the 2022/2023 school year onwards. In the 2024/25 school year, the *Abitur* examinations in biology, chemistry and physics will be conducted nationwide on the basis of the new educational standards[467].

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.

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466. Kittel, Piel and Radi-Pentz (2021). *Identifying and promoting core competencies for the digital shift*. https://www.bwp-zeitschrift.de/en/bwp.php/en/bwp/show/17055

467. https://www.kmk.org/themen/qualitaetssicherung-in-schulen/bildungsstandards/bildungsstandards-und-allgemeine-hochschulreife.html

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Reflecting the federal structure of Germany, the formal basis of the DQR is the Joint resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Cultural Affairs, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Conference of Ministers of Economics of the *Länder* and the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology. The Joint Resolution entered into force on 1 May 2013[468]. It paved the way to full implementation, defining responsibilities of different stakeholders and setting up supporting tools and methodologies (including the DQR manual and qualifications register). This resolution was the basis for administrative regulations such as indicating DQR/EQF levels on certificates and diplomas and their supplements.

The body in charge of DQR implementation is the coordination point for the German qualifications framework (*Bund-Länder Koordinierungsstelle* (B-L-KS)), set up by a joint initiative of the federal government and the *Länder*. The B-L-KS, which emerged from the former *Bund-Länder-Koordinierungsgruppe*, also assumes the function of the national coordination point (NCP) 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-L-KS (NCP) is supported by the appropriate units of the BMBF and the Secretariat of the KMK. The units collaborate in performing their tasks.

Stakeholders such as education providers from higher education, general education, VET, social partners, ministries, public institutions from education and from the labour market, as well as researchers and practitioners, are involved via the DQR working group (*Arbeitskreis DQR*). Decisions are based on consensus and each of the members works closely with their respective constituent institutions and organisations.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning pathways[469]

Implementation of the DQR, with its focus on learning outcomes, has also strengthened work on making non-formal and informal learning more visible und comparable, underlying the importance of what a learner knows, understands and can do. In addition, the DQR can be helpful in validation procedures.

Various arrangements permit full or partial recognition of informally or non-formally acquired competences. Validation of non-formal and informal learning occurs in all education sectors but with different, tailor-made approaches using various instruments; it covers all elements of validation (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) and systematically builds on previous achievements of individuals. Such validation also supports the transition from one education sector to another, particularly between VET and higher education.

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 new Vocational Training Act[470] 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 demonstrate convincingly that they have acquired vocational competences.

Like the external students' examination within IVET, admission to examinations in the context of regulated further vocational training qualifications, such as *Handwerksmeister* (master craftsperson), 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, Nichtschülerprüfung*) in all *Länder*, fulfilling the residence and minimum age

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468. Joint resolution on the German qualifications framework for lifelong learning/Gemeinsamer Beschluss der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung, der Wirtschaftsministerkonferenz und des Bundesministeriums für Wirtschaft und Technologie zum Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen (DQR) https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/shareddocs/downloads/files/gemeinsamer_beschluss_final_ohne_unterschriften.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1

469. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (Ball (2019) and one-off report on validation of non-formal learning (BMB, 2018)

470. The new Berufsbildungsgesetz (BBiG) in force since January 2020. https://www.bmbf.de/upload_filestore/pub/Das_neue_Berufsbildungsgesetz_BBiG.pdf

requirements as well as evidence of appropriate examination preparation.

The Professional qualifications assessment Act/ Recognition Act (BQFG)[471] – introduced in April 2012 – provides individuals with the right to have their foreign-acquired qualifications matched to a German qualification by a competent 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 *Qualifikationsanalyse* (qualification analysis) is an instrument that was developed to support practical implementation, giving methodological standards and tools for validating professional knowledge, skills and competences. The act applies to initial vocational education and training (IVET) as well as regulated further vocational training. The implementation and impact of the BQFG are evaluated regularly[472].

The instrument has been further developed in the *ValiKom* project[473] that has developed a joint procedure to assess and validate vocational skills and competences. *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. It applies self-assessment and external assessment and is based on standards for assessing the equivalence of non-formally/informally acquired skills and competences, with reference to formal qualifications and 'reference occupations' (recognised training or regulated further training qualifications).

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 competences 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))[474].

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[475]. This aims to support jobseekers, including refugees and migrants who have several years of work experience and skills but no documentary evidence of these skills. The skills tests are being developed for 30 occupations in 12 languages. So far tests for eight occupations have been completed and are available throughout Germany.

NQF implementation and impact

The DQR is a comprehensive framework, including all levels and types of qualifications. Most qualifications from initial VET, higher education, general education and from regulated further training have been assigned to DQR levels and linked to the EQF.

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 craftsperson qualification to level 6, which shows that higher DQR levels are open to qualifications from different education sectors and regarded as comparable. Qualifications from outside regulated formal education and training have not yet been included in the DQR, as criteria and procedures for their inclusion need to be agreed by all stakeholders.

The DQR has reached its fully operational status, with key documents and responsibilities for its implementation agreed and used by main stakeholders and published, such as the DQR handbook[476] describing responsibilities, procedures, standards and methods of qualification allocation[477].

All qualifications allocated to the DQR/EQF (most regulated qualifications from VET, higher education

471. Gesetz über die Feststellung der Gleichwertigkeit von Berufsqualifikationen. (*Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz* – BQFG): http:// www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bqfg/BQFG.pdf Unofficial translation is available here: https://www.bmbf.de/ files/bqfg_englisch.pdf

472. BMBF (2019). *Report on the Recognition Act 2019*. www.bmbf.de/upload_filestore/pub/Bericht_zum_ Anerkennungsgesetz_2019_eng.pdf

473. *ValiKom/Valikom – Transfer* project: www. validierungsverfahren.de

474. The *ANKOM* initiative: http://ankom.dzhw.eu/beschluesse

475. https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/ identifying-occupational-skills/description

476. BMBF (2013). *Handbuch zum Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen* [Manual for the German qualifications framework]. https://www.dqr.de/media/ content/DQR_Handbuch_01_08_2013.pdf

477. See http://www.dqr.de/content/2445.php

and general education) have been included in the comprehensive DQR qualifications database[478]. The number of qualifications included is continuously increasing: as of end 2020, a total of 1 225 qualifications were listed in the database, with the largest numbers at level 4 (627) qualifications and level 6 (453 qualifications). All necessary elements according to Annex VI of the 2017 EQF recommendation are covered by the database: DQR/EQF levels, description of the qualification and learning outcomes, awarding body or competent authority. From the optional elements, entry requirements and pathways to the qualification are also included.

DQR/EQF levels have been indicated 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 the 16 *Länder*) (Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The DQR is a non-regulatory framework and its integration into policies of different education sectors is an evolutionary process. References to the DQR and its categories have already been made in regulatory instruments of formal education and training, 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 regulated further vocational training and improve its quality. Recently, to help promote regulated further vocational training (at DQR/EQF levels 5-7) a three-level structure was developed and included in the new Vocational training Act, in force since January 2020[479]. New terms/titles for regulated further vocational training programmes and related qualifications[480] at levels 5-7 underline the equivalence to academic education.

There is increasing interest from providers of non-formal qualifications to use the DQR level descriptors when designing qualificationsEuropean Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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 of the awareness and use of the DQR is growing: it is known and used by the organisations that are responsible for awarding qualifications with an DQR/EQF level. There is also continuing interest among providers of non-formal and private qualifications, which use the DQR descriptors as a competence model when designing qualifications. There are no representative data on the use of the DQR by labour market stakeholders; however, as employers and trade unions are involved in the design and renewal of qualifications, for example in VET, they use the DQR and its level descriptors. Experience also shows that some employers use the DQR when developing job profiles and qualifications requirements. Trade unions sometimes use the DQR in the context of collective agreements. There are no data available, but experience shows that recognition authorities use the DQR as a complementary source of information about qualifications within existing recognition procedures (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The DQR handbook[481] was designed to facilitate the understanding (and, by implication, the use) of the framework, but does not address specific target groups. However, examples of how different target groups can use the DQR can be found on the website[482] (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

No comprehensive DQR evaluation has been carried out. However, according to the European Commission and Cedefop (2020) the DQR has considerably enhanced transparency and comparability of qualifications across different sub-systems of the formal education system in Germany. It has had an impact on quality assurance of regulated further vocational training. It is also reported that the DQR has facilitated transparency of qualifications and considerably enhanced the parity of esteem, especially between VET and higher education. With the allocation of VET qualifications at DQR levels 6 and 7, the parity became visible. This is also reflected in the increasing willingness of universities to recognise competences acquired outside higher education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Considerable improvements and continuity of communication and cooperation has been achieved, between a wide range of stakeholders at different levels and of different education sub-systems and from labour market and researchers This is especially so through the DQR working group

478. DQR qualifications database: https://www.dqr.de/content/2316.php
479. https://www.bmbf.de/upload_filestore/pub/Das_neue_Berufsbildungsgesetz_BBiG.pdf
480. Examples include: Certified Professional Specialist (EQF level 5), Bachelor professional (EQF level 6) and Master professional (EQF level 7).
481. https://www.dqr.de/media/content/DQR_Handbuch_01_08_2013.pdf
482. DQR website: https://www.dqr.de/

(*Arbeitskreis* DQR) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Referencing to the EQF

The DQR was referenced to EQF in 2012 (BMBF and KMK, 2013). The qualifications framework for higher education – now an integral part of DQR for lifelong learning – was self-certified against QF-EHEA in 2008.

There are currently no plans to update the referencing report (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Important lessons and future plans

DQR development and continuing implementation is characterised by strong and broad involvement of stakeholders from all subsystems of education and training (general education, VET, higher education), and from the labour market, ministries and *Länder.* The DQR working group provides a forum for reaching consensus, ensuring that all measures related to the DQR are supported by stakeholders. Creating and sustaining mutual understanding and trust between stakeholders from different education sectors is seen as a key success factor and a challenge, as decisions take a lot of time owing to the need for extensive discussions and reiterations for further implementation of the DQR (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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).

The comprehensive nature of the framework has been strengthened over the years, with increasing numbers of qualifications included in the DQR register from IVET, regulated further training, higher education and general education. Qualifications outside formal education and training have not yet been included. However, the DQR and its level descriptors are increasingly used for designing qualifications in the non-formal sector. Discussions on criteria and procedures for their inclusion are continuing.

The comprehensive nature of level descriptors and the 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 implementation, as is parity of esteem between VET and higher education and efforts to include non-formal and informal learning. The contribution of increased transparency and, with the allocation of regulated further training and definition of new titles at DQR levels 6 and 7, the parity of esteem between VET and higher education, became visible and bring added value for end-users. This is reflected in the increased willingness of universities to recognise competences acquired outside higher education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Table 35. German national qualifications framework (DQR)

DQR LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctorate and equivalent arts degrees (*Doktorat und äquivalente künstlerische Abschlüsse*)	8
7	Master degrees and equivalent higher education qualifications (traditional German courses of higher education study such as the first degrees of *Diplom* or *Magister*, State examinations) (*Master und gleichgestellte Abschlüsse (Diplom, Magister, Staatsexamen)*) Strategic professional (IT) (certified) (*Strategische/r IT Professional (Geprüfte/r)*) Other advanced vocational training pursuant to the Vocational Training Act or Crafts and Trades Regulation Code (level 7) (*Sonstige berufliche Fortbildungsqualifikationen nach BBiG/HwO (Niveau 7)*)	7
6	Bachelor degrees and equivalent higher education qualifications (*Bachelor und gleichgestellte Hochschulabschlüsse*) Specialist commercial clerk (certified) (*Fachkaufmann/-frau (Geprüfte/r)*) Business management specialist (certified) (*Fachwirt (Geprüfter)*) Master craftsman (*Meister*) Operative professional (IT) (certified) (*Operative/r Professional (IT) (Geprüfte/r)*) Trade and technical school (advanced vocational training governed by federal State law) (*Fachschule (Landesrechtlich geregelte berufliche Weiterbildungen)*) Advanced vocational training pursuant to § 54 of the Vocational Training Act (level 6) (*Berufliche Fortbildungsqualifikationen nach 54 BBiG (Niveau 6)*) Other advanced vocational training pursuant to the Vocational Training Act or Crafts and Trades Regulation Code (level 6) (*Sonstige berufliche Fortbildungsqualifikationen nach BBiG/HwO (Niveau 6)*)	6
5	IT specialist (*IT-Spezialist/in (Zertifizierte/r)*) Service technician (certified) (*Servicetechniker/in (Geprüfte/r)*) Advanced vocational training pursuant to § 54 of the Vocational Training Act (*Berufliche Fortbildungsqualifikationen nach § 54 BBiG (Niveau 5)*) Other advanced vocational training pursuant to the Vocational Training Act or Crafts and Trades Regulation Code (level 5) (*Sonstige berufliche Fortbildungsqualifikationen nach BBiG/HwO (Niveau 5)*)	5
4	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate – General higher education entrance qualification (*Allgemeine Hochschulreife (AHR)*) Subject-linked higher education entrance qualification (*Fachgebundene Hochschulreife (FgbHR)*) Higher education entrance qualification for university of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulreife (FHR)*) Dual VET (three-year and three-and-a-half-year training courses) (*Duale Berufsausbildung (3- und 3 ½-jährige Ausbildungen)*) Full-time vocational school (vocational education and training governed by federal State law) (*Berufsfachschule (Landesrechtlich geregelte Berufsausbildungen)*) Full-time vocational school (vocational education and training governed by federal law in healthcare and elderly care)*Berufsfachschule (Bundesrechtliche Ausbildungsregelungen* für *Berufe im Gesundheitswesen und in der Altenpflege)*) Full-time vocational school (fully qualifying vocational education and training pursuant to the Vocational Training Act or Crafts and trades regulation Code)*Berufsfachschule (vollqualifizierende Berufsausbildung nach BBiG/HwO)*) Retraining qualification pursuant to the Vocational Training Act (level 4) (*Berufliche Umschulung nach BBiG (Niveau 4)*)	4
3	Intermediate secondary school leaving certificate – General education, 10 years (*Mittlerer Schulabschluss (MSA)*) Intermediate secondary school leaving certificate – Full-time vocational school (*Berufsfachschule (Mittlerer Schulabschluss)*) Dual VET (two-year training courses) (*Duale Berufsausbildung (2-jährige Ausbildung)*)	3

DQR LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
2	Lower secondary school leaving certificate – General education, 9 years (*Erster Schulabschluss (ESA)*)	2
	Vocational training preparation (vocational preparation scheme, prevocational training year, introductory training) (*Berufsausbildungsvorbereitung (Niveau 2; BvB, BvB-Reha, BVJ, EQ)*)	
	Basic vocational training – Full-time vocational school (*Berufsfachschule (Berufliche Grundbildung)*)	
1	Vocational training preparation (vocational preparation scheme, prevocational training year) (Berufsausbildungsvorbereitung (Niveau 1; BvB, BvB-Reha, BVJ))	1

NB: The DQR database can be accessed at: https://www.dqr.de/content/2316.php. The updated list of qualifications (August 2020) included in the DQR is available at: https://www.dqr.de/media/content/2020_DQR_Liste_der_zugeordneten_Qualifikationen_01082020.pdf

Source: German Ministry of Education and Research; EQF-NCP, 2020.

Abbreviations

ANKOM — Übergänge von der beruflichen in die hochschulische Bildung [transitions from vocational high school education]

BIBB — Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung [Federal Institute for VET]

B-L-KS — *Bund-Länder Koordinierungsstelle* [national coordination point]

BMBF — *Bundesministerium* für *Bildung und Forschung* [Federal Ministry of Education and Research]

BQFG — Gesetz über die Feststellung der Gleichwertigkeit von Berufsqualifikationen (Berufsqualifikations feststellungsgesetz) / Professional qualifications assessment Act/ Recognition Act

CVET — (regulated) continuing/further vocational education and training

DQR — *Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen* [German qualifications framework for lifelong learning]

EQF — European qualifications framework

IT — information technology

KMK — *Kultusministerkonferenz* [Standing Conference of the Ministers for Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany]]

NQF — national qualifications framework

VET — vocational education and training

Main sources of information

The federal government/*Länder* coordination point assumes the function of EQF NCP.

DQR website: http://www.dqr.de

DQR qualifications database: https://www.dqr.de/content/2316.php

BMBF and KMK (2013). German EQF referencing report. https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-06/German%20Referencing%20Report%20.pdf

BMBF and KMK (2008). Report on the compatibility of the qualifications framework for German higher education qualifications with the qualifications framework for the European higher education area. https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/pdf/Wissenschaft/BE_080918_Bericht_Zertifizierung_NQF_engl_final.pdf

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GHANA

Introduction and context

The National TVET Qualifications Framework (NTVETQF) is an eight-level hierarchical qualification framework designed to provide improvements and modernization necessary to take Ghana's technical and vocational education system into the future. The NTVETQF) is administered by the Commission for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (CTVET). It aims to harmonize different Technical and Vocational Education and Training qualifications in the country into a unified structure, to improve quality, standardize certification, increase access to TVET, and elucidate clear progression pathways for TVET graduates. It provides clear entry and exit points for learners and successful graduates. CTVET was established by the *Education Regulatory Bodies Act* 2020 (Act 1023) to regulate and administer technical and vocational education and training for transformation and innovation, and to promote sustainable development. The CTVET was previously known as Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET) established by L.I. 2195 in 2012.

Policy objectives

The following objectives guided the creation of a National TVET Qualification Framework:

- To bring all the post-basic occupation-oriented qualifications into a unified qualifications framework.
- To facilitate access to further education and training for individuals in technical and vocational occupations.
- To improve product and service quality by ensuring uniform standards of practice in the trades and professions.
- To promote and facilitate access to life-long learning for all, especially operators in the informal sector of the economy.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The NTVETQF is designed to be certificated at eight levels below and in Figure 1:
1. National Proficiency I
2. National Proficiency II
3. National Certificate I
4. National Certificate II
5. Higher National Diploma (HND)
6. Bachelor of Technology (B. Tech)
7. Master of Technology (M. Tech)
8. Doctor of Technology (D. Tech)

Figure 16. National TVET Qualifications Framework
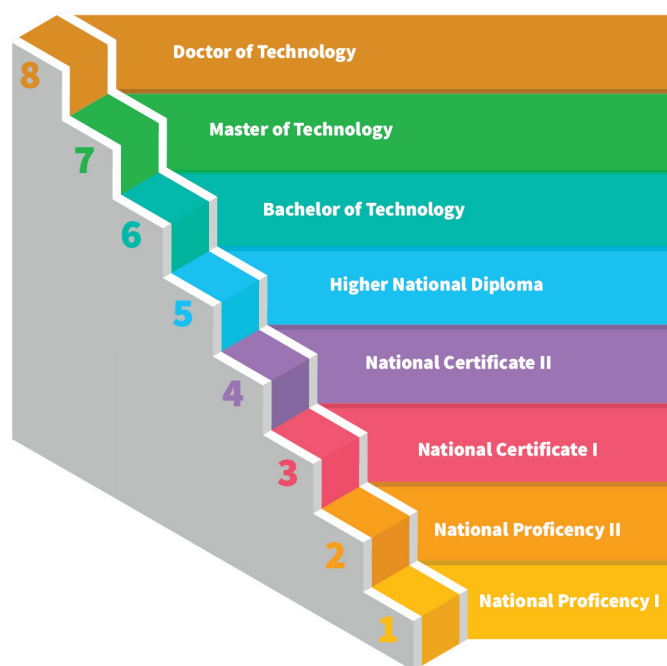
Source: Ghana TVET Report 2021.

The level descriptors of the NTVETQF is presented in Table 1.

Table 36. NTVETQF Level Descriptors

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION	KNOWLEDGE [ENABLES LEARNERS TO:]	SKILLS & ATTITUDE [ENABLES LEARNERS TO CARRY OUT PROCESSES THAT:]
1	National Proficiency I (NP I)		• Require basic skills of trade and craft and the ability to perform routine and predictable tasks. • Are repetitive and familiar. • Require close supervision. • Require practical and oral tests for qualification.
2	National Proficiency II (NP II)	• Demonstrate basic numeracy, literary and IT skills: For example, carry out limited range of simple tasks of data processing.	• Confirm competence in the handling of hand tools and machinery components. • Require performance of varied activities that are routine, predictable and non-complex in nature. • Require limited supervision. • Require practical and oral tests for qualification.
3	National Certificate I (NC I)	• Demonstrate a broad knowledge base incorporating some technical concepts. • Demonstrate knowledge of the theoretical basis of practical skills. • Demonstrate basic numeracy, literacy and Information Technology (IT) skills.	• Require a wide range of technical skills • Are applied in a variety of familiar and complex contexts with minimum supervision. • Require collaboration with others in a team.

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION	KNOWLEDGE [ENABLES LEARNERS TO:]	SKILLS & ATTITUDE [ENABLES LEARNERS TO CARRY OUT PROCESSES THAT:]
4	National Certificate II (NC II)	• Demonstrate specialized knowledge base with substantial depth in area(s) of study. • Analise and interpret a range of data and be able to determine appropriate and communicate appropriate methods and procedures and outcomes accurately and reliably to deal with a wide range of problems • Demonstrate numeracy, literacy and IT skills commensurate with this level. • Present results of their study accurately and reliably.	• Require specialized knowledge of skill competency in different tasks in varied contexts. • Require a wide and specialized technical and/or supervisory skills • Are employed in different contexts. • Require the ability to adapt and apply • knowledge and skills to specific contexts in a broad range of work activities. • Require minimum supervision.
5	Higher National Diploma (HND)	• Demonstrate considerable theoretical knowledge and solid practical skills in their area(s) of study. • Integrate, contextualize, and apply knowledge to a range of complex technical or professional activities. • Have a command of planning, analytical, supervisory and management functions under minimum direction. • Display qualities and transferable skills.	• Require a wide range of highly specialized technical and /or management and /or conceptual or creative skills. • Require qualities and transferable skills necessary for formal and self-employment. • Involve some level of organizational ability, resource management.
6	Bachelor's (Professional/ Technology)	• Demonstrate high level conceptual knowledge in a broad range of complex and changing contexts. • Demonstrate basic research skills. • Undertake tasks involving high level organizational ability, resource management and personal responsibility. • Demonstrate a significant degree of strategic thinking and judgment. • Have a high level of supervisory and management capabilities.	• Apply methods, techniques and modes of practices that they learned and reviewed, to consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding to initiate and carry out projects. • Promote further training, development of existing skills and acquisition of new competencies that will enable them to assume responsibility within organizations in self-employment. • Require qualities and transfer of skills necessary for formal and self-employment. • Communicate information in a variety of formats appropriate to both specialists and non-specialist audiences.
7	Master's (Professional/ Technology) — Technically-oriented Researched Masters	• Have a systematic understanding of knowledge and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights in their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice. • Possess comprehensive understanding of relevant techniques in research or advanced scholarship. • Demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of established techniques of research. • Critically evaluate current research, methodologies, and advanced scholarships in the discipline, and where appropriate, to propose new hypothesis.	• Involve the resolution of complex issues and making sound judgment in the absence of complex data and communicating these conclusions to both specialists and non-specialist audiences. • Require self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems and acting independently in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level. • Continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level. • Promote qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment, initiative and personal responsibility and decision making in complex and unpredictable situations, and the exhibition of independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION	KNOWLEDGE [ENABLES LEARNERS TO:]	SKILLS & ATTITUDE [ENABLES LEARNERS TO CARRY OUT PROCESSES THAT:]
8	Doctorate Degree (Professional/ Technology)	• Creation of new knowledge through research of the quality that extends the frontier of knowledge in the discipline. • A substantial acquisition of knowledge which is at the forefront of technology or area of professional practice. • Ability to conceptualize, design and implement a project to generate new knowledge, or applications at the frontier of technology or professional practice. • Comprehensive and detailed knowledge and application of research methodology applicable to complex enquiry.	• Make informed judgment on complex issues in the area of technology or professional practice often in the absence of complete data and be able to communicate ideas and conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialists in the discipline. • Exhibit qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable situations.

Source: Authors

Institutional arrangements and engagement of stakeholders

The Commission for TVET works closely with several institutions/organizations, and development partners that are key in transforming skills development in Ghana. The diagram below shows the institutional and stakeholder arrangement of the Commission.

Figure 17. Institutions and stakeholders of the Commission for TVET
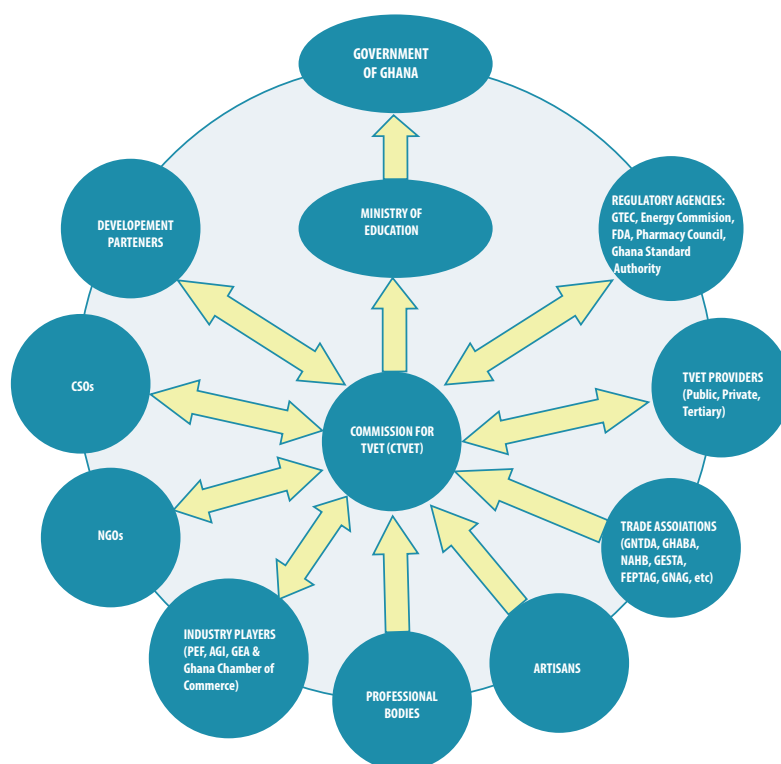
Source: Ghana TVET Report 2021.

One example of a multi-stakeholder partnership with a development partner is the Ghana TVET Project. The Commission for Technical and Vocational Education and Training has partnered German Finance Cooperation to implement Ghana TVET Voucher Project (GTVP). This is to increase access to TVET and certification on the National TVET Qualifications Framework for apprentices in the informal sector. This project is being implemented by the CTVET in Ghana and is co-financed by the German government. It targets owners of small and medium enterprises of the informal sector as well as their workers and apprentices being trained at National Proficiency I and II at the NTVETQF levels. The project objective is to improve access of the target group to demand-oriented TVET, which meets quality criteria to improve access to decent employment.

The GTVP covers the following sectors / trade areas:
1. Construction / Welding
2. Automotive Repair
3. Consumer Electronics
4. Garment Making
5. Cosmetology/Hairdressing
6. Plumbing
7. Catering/ Hospitality
8. Electrical Installation
9. Furniture Making
10. Block Laying/Tiling

The GTVP is being implemented in the following regions in Ghana
1. Greater Accra
2. Ashanti
3. Northern
4. Savannah
5. Northeast
6. Volta
7. Oti
8. Eastern
9. Western
10. Western North
11. Central

The number of beneficiaries of the GTVP is as follows and Figure 2:
• Male = 4,611
• Female = 12,367
• Total = 16,978

Accredited stakeholders across the nation
• Training Providers = 179 centres
• Trade Associations = 68
• Awarding Body = 1

A second example is the partnership with World Skills International to stimulate creativity, innovation,

and excellence in skills for economic transformation among the youth.

Ghana is the 81st member of World Skills International, and the first West African country to join. With its 85-member countries and regions, this organization helps young people who want to change their lives and the fortunes of their communities, and societies.

The World Skills Ghana (WSGh) secretariat at the CTVET was established in 2019. The unit is responsible for organizing skills competitions at the zonal and national levels and preparing competitors adequately for World Skills International competitions.

The role of World Skills Ghana in the delivery of TVET is:
• To inspire world-class excellence in skills development.
• To introduce the youth to a variety of skilled careers;
• To build capacity by providing exchange programme opportunities; and
• To engage facilitators to be trained in understanding their role as experts/judges/ technical support, in applying World Skills Standard Specification (WSSS).

Skills competitions are some of the tools used by the Commission to change the negative perceptions about TVET in Ghana and to increase enrolment in TVET institutions. They also aim to encourage creativity, innovation and competitiveness among learners and instructors in improving TVET. Furthermore, it raises stakeholder awareness and courts industry support for TVET in the country.

The maiden Skills Competition organized by the Commission in 2018, saw participants from the various technical and vocational institutions across the country and converge at the Trade Fair Centre, Accra, to compete for honors in several trade areas. The winners from that competition went on to compete at the World Skills Africa Regional Competition in Kigali. Ghana won gold in the cooking category, silver in hairdressing and electrical wiring, and bronze in mechatronics at the 2018 World Skills Africa Regional Competition.

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The CTVET has developed and operationalized a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy. This is to formalize the recognition, validation and certification

of non-formal and informal learning on the National TVET Qualifications Framework. The Commission has sensitized and trained stakeholders and TVET providers on the processes, procedures in accessing RPL for National Proficiency I and II for some trade areas. RPL is an assessment tool that takes into account a person's skills, knowledge and experiences and validates them. The RPL process involves matching the applicants' knowledge, skills, and experience with the qualification framework. The outcome will determine whether the applicant has achieved the full qualification, or some units only and needs to close the gap by presenting more evidence. RPL enables applicants to focus on developing skills and knowledge in new areas, rather than re-learning what they already know and can do. RPL can provide:

- National recognition of the skills used in one's job;
- Avoidance of duplication in learning; and
- Increased career opportunities.

The duration of the process depends mainly on the applicant's ability to present enough relevant evidence (build a good portfolio) to satisfy the assessment requirements. Anyone with the relevant knowledge, skills and/or experience required for a unit or entire programme can apply. Evidence submitted may include work produced such as documents, products, prototypes, models, materials, and reports. Other examples include certificates, qualifications and video or audio tapes. Supplementary evidence allows the assessor to infer your competency. This evidence is often obtained through written or oral questioning, tests completed off-the-job, and third-party sources (for example, reference/recommendation from a supervisor).

Applicants must build and submit a portfolio to prove competencies in the identified areas of learning. The portfolio of evidence is an organized document that represents the skills, knowledge, and competencies that the applicant has developed as a result of temporary or full-time employment, learning while participating in life-long activities or previously completed education and training. Table 2 provides types of evidence and examples of each. A candidate may be required to provide several types of evidence for each unit of competency to satisfy the requirement.

Table 37. Types and Examples of Evidence for RPL

EVIDENCE TYPES	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLES
Accredited training program	A qualification or statement of attainment including a transcript of units of competency awarded	Statement of Attainment transcript Certificate (certified true copy or originals)
Other training programmes	Documents that confirm attendance at a formal course of study	Non-accredited courses (e.g., short courses)
Work history and training	Documents that demonstrate completion of relevant workplace training and the application of those skills in the workplace	Memos, emails, certificates of attendance, CV, job description, testimonials, contract document, receipt of payment, awards
Work samples	Samples of work verified as authentic	Emails, letters, videos, photos, reports, projects, prototype, models, sequence of operations
Third-party reports	Reports from a competent manager/ Master crafts person, supervisor or colleague that confirm the candidate's level of knowledge and ability to apply skills in the workplace	Reports from managers/Master Craftsperson, colleague, supervisors and clients. Performance reviews, peer review
Interviewing / questioning	Confirms the candidate's knowledge of the profession, policy and procedures for Occupational Health and Safety in the workplace	Responses to scenarios in the form of checklist, audios, video, etc., and demonstrate knowledge of policy and procedures
Workplace documents	Workplace documents that have been created by the candidate that is relevant to their claim	Written communications e.g. reports, plans and policy, log books, permits, specimen books, sequence of operation, drawing, pictorial, video
Practical Demonstration	Direct observation by the assessor of the candidate performing the tasks in the workplace or in a simulated workplace environment	Conduct a simulated practice of example, cosmetology services, Organizational Health and Safety tasks — e.g., conduct a workplace safety induction, complete a workplace safety inspection, checklists.

Source: Authors

NQF implementation and impact

The Ghana TVET Voucher Project GTVP is currently being implemented in eleven regions in Ghana for Construction / Welding, Automotive Repair, Consumer Electronics, Garment Making, Cosmetology/Hairdressing, Plumbing, Catering/ Hospitality, Electrical Installation, Furniture Making and Block Laying/Tiling trade areas at NTVETQF Proficiency I and II levels in 114 Institutions.

Referencing to the regional framework/ other frameworks

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region is currently conducting a comparative analysis of the qualification process leading to the occupation of bricklayer in the subregion countries. The overall aim of the project is to further the recognition of qualifications and competences in relation to bricklaying by enhancing their transparency and comparability across the ECOWAS region. The specific objectives are to:

- Develop a framework for the comparative assessment of bricklaying qualifications, to be of relevance to other occupations.
- Assess and compare the nature, content and regulation of different qualifications and VET for bricklaying in the fifteen countries, representing diverse VET and labour market systems;
- Identify the learning processes whereby qualifications are acquired in each country, including non-formal and informal learning;
- Describe the place and status of bricklaying within the building sector, the qualifications, skills, competences and knowledge required of bricklayers, social and technological changes affecting these, and different bricklaying job profiles in each country;

- Relate bricklaying qualifications to the respective national qualification systems (where applicable) and assess possibilities concerning the emerging of an "area of mutual trust" related to bricklaying;
- Develop proposals for discussion among relevant stakeholders regarding a possible agreement concerning the mutual recognition of qualifications through networking of key stakeholders, wide dissemination of findings across countries, gradually building up the involvement of key target users in a sectoral qualification framework.

As an ECOWAS Member, Ghana follows and is actively involved in this regional process.

Important lessons learnt and future plans

The lessons learned and the future plans of the implementation of the NTVETQF include:
- The need to explain the NTVETQF content to the industrial practitioners;
- Harmonize all the TVET institutions and providers to provide training based on the NTVETQF;
- Convert all TVET programmes into the Ghana harmonized competency-based training format for implementation as part of the NTVETQF;
- Hold regular discussions with all stakeholders so that they feel a sense of trust and ownership of the National TVET Qualifications Framework; and
- For the government to continue to provide the necessary financial resources to support the development of new programmes and equipping TVET institutions to implement to implement CBT on the NTVETQF.

Abbreviations			
COTVET	Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training	NTVETQF	National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Qualifications Framework
CTVET	Commission for Technical and Vocational Education and Training	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
GSDI	Ghana Skills Development Initiative	WSSS	World Skills Standard Specification
GTVP	The Ghana TVET Voucher Project	WSI	World Skills International
NQF	National Qualifications Framework		

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GREECE

Introduction and context

Greece has one of the lowest percentages of students who leave education and training early in the EU and this number has been further reduced (4.1% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 10.2%). However, spending on education remains lower than in most EU countries and is mostly on salaries. Within the last 20 years, Greece had around one fifth fewer school children so investment in lifelong learning opportunities has to be increased. The basic digital skills of the Greek population remain underdeveloped, although an extensive amount of digital educational content has been developed in recent years. Since the rate of tertiary attainment at 43.1% in 2019 exceeded the EU average of 40.3% and the national target for 2020 (40%), employment prospects of recent tertiary graduates have improved along with the new university entrance system, enacted in 2019, which allows all departments to receive university entrants by central allocation based on competitive exams[483]. As of 21 December 2020, following approval by the Greek Parliament, a new law reforming vocational education and training in Greece is in place. The law has established a national system for VET and lifelong learning encompassing levels 3, 4 and 5. The main objective is to make VET a first choice, as the attractiveness of vocational education and training is still low (European Commission, 2020).

Since 2010, Greece has been implementing an eight-level comprehensive framework for lifelong learning, the Hellenic qualifications framework (HQF)[484], aiming at a coherent and comprehensive system of qualifications from all parts and levels of education and training. The qualification framework for higher education is a part of the overarching NQF[485]). The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is responsible for HQF implementation, with the National Organisation for Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) as the main actor at operational level.

The HQF is at activation stage. The legal basis of the HQF has been strengthened with the new Law 4763/2020, which was adopted by the Greek Parliament in December 2020[486]. This law is reshaping the institutional framework of VET and lifelong learning policies in Greece and formalises all operational aspects of the HQF.

The HQF was referenced to the EQF in 2015 and self-certification against the QF-EHEA is in progress.

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483. Previous policy measures have been reversed. The government abolished the university asylum law and repealed access to low-demand departments for first-time students without national exams. As before, all departments receive university entrants by central allocation based on competitive exams (European Commission, 2020).

484. Law 3879/2010 on the development of lifelong learning and other provisions set the ground for developing the HQF and introduced levels and the learning outcomes concept as essential elements of qualifications and awards.
Law 3879/2010 on the development of lifelong learning and other provisions. *Official Gazette,* 163A/2010. http://www.edulll.gr/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/nomos_-3879_2010.pdf

485. In the Greek legal framework, the main types of higher education qualification are connected to NQF levels. 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).

486. Law 4763/2020 on the national vocational education system, training and lifelong learning. http://www.opengov.gr/ypepth/?p=5632

Policy objectives

Work on the HQF is directly linked to the country's efforts to develop a framework for improving lifelong learning policies and practices, to aid transparency and comparability of qualifications, to allow recognition and certification of all kinds of education and training and to enhance horizontal and vertical mobility[487]. The HQF is seen as a communication and transparency framework but is also intended to be reforming. In recent years it has become a main instrument for reforming the Greek education system. For example, the vocational upper secondary school degree at level 5 – post-secondary cycle (one year of apprenticeship class after three years of vocational upper secondary school at level 4) – has been regulated through relevant laws[488].

A new law[489] adopted in 2020 is reshaping the institutional framework of VET and lifelong learning policies in Greece, stating at the same time the priorities of the new government in this area. The law refers to operational aspects of the national qualifications framework, thus firmly establishing its role within the Greek educational system.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The HQF has eight learning-outcomes-based qualification levels, reflecting the existing formal education and training system in Greece. Levels are defined in terms of knowledge (factual and theoretical), skills (cognitive and practical) and competence (autonomy and responsibility). Although work on level descriptors for HQF and on a qualifications framework for higher education has taken place separately, they are now integrated into the comprehensive framework, with higher education qualifications (bachelor degree, master degree and doctorate) linked to HQF levels.

The shift to learning outcomes represents a significant change in the Greek system from an 'input' approach to an outcome-oriented focus. The outcomes-based HQF is expected to support design of outcomes-based qualifications, thus moving towards lifelong learning and a more transparent qualification system. Consistent effort has been made by EOPPEP in 2020 to facilitate

the introduction of the learning outcomes approach with the development and publication of relevant guidelines.

Reforms in general education and VET were initiated under Law 4186/2013[490] on restructuring secondary education[491]. The reforms that were initiated with this law brought about developments in curriculum reform on the basis of learning outcomes and training of counsellors and teachers. 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. In the school year 2020/21, pilot skills workshops will be included in the compulsory school programme, while subjects which require written and oral assessment will be revised, based on learning outcomes[492].

In vocational education, since 2006, Greece has developed – by Ministerial decree[493] – a methodology for analysing occupational profiles (standards), incorporating the learning outcomes approach[494], as an early effort to create a methodology for modularising VET curricula. It was also seen as a precondition for setting up a system for validating informal and non-formal learning and for accrediting training programmes. EOPPEP, in cooperation with social partners, developed and accredited 206 occupational profiles (standards) 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. The legislative framework is set by Articles 2 and 41 of the new Law 4763/2020, which specifies the content of these training programmes.

A ministerial decision on a quality framework for VET curricula was adopted in 2017[495], including the definition of learning outcomes, the connection with occupational profiles and issues regarding the design of VET curricula. The curricula will include explicitly the stated learning outcomes sought, analysed by knowledge, skills and competences,

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487. An important milestone in these developments has been the Act on Lifelong Learning 3879/10.
488. These laws are: 4283/2014, 4310/2014, 4521/2018, 4559/2018, 4610/2019, 4666/2020 and ministerial decrees, for example 26381/2017, 90050/Y2/2018, F7/15572/d4/2018.
489. http://www.opengov.gr/ypepth/?p=5632

490. 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 speciality.
491. Law 4186/2013 on restructuring of secondary education and other provisions. *Official Gazette*, 193/A, 17.9.2013.
492. More information here.
493. Common Ministerial Decision 110998/2006 on the accreditation of occupational profiles. *Official Gazette*, 566/B of 2.5.2006.
494. See Dželalija (2015).
495. Ministerial Decision 26412/2017 on the quality framework of VET curricula. *Official Gazette,* 490B/2017, 20.2.2017.

per subject, sector and specialisation, and teaching material will be prepared in line with the learning outcomes sought for each subject. Other ministerial decisions[496] taken were related to the curricula of the apprenticeship courses, based on learning outcomes[497], the apprenticeship certification scheme[498] and assessment of apprenticeship courses[499]. The development of vocational education curricula for 35 specialties (336 subjects) based on learning outcomes has been undertaken by the Institute for Educational Policy and 23 of them have already been completed. EOPPEP, the body responsible for the certification of the apprenticeship graduates, has also created a database with 200 to 250 exam questions for each one of these specialties. A main pillar of the new Law 4763/2020 is the upgrade of vocational education schools (EPAL) and vocational training institutes (IEK) in terms of curricula with clearly defined learning outcomes, technical equipment and teacher training.

In higher education, the Greek authority responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes (HQAAA) uses, as evaluation criteria, the learning outcomes approach and expected competences in accordance with the national qualifications framework for higher education[500]. 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[501] and self-certification against the framework of qualifications of the European higher education area is in progress[502]. Higher education

levels are mentioned in the legislative acts that concern qualifications[503].

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Since 2011, the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) supervised by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, has been responsible for the development and implementation of the HQF, as well as for putting the HQF and procedures for validation of learning outcomes into practice and assuring quality in lifelong learning[504]. EOPPEP has been designated as the national coordination point (NCP) for EQF and is the awarding body in relation to three qualification types in the framework: certificate of vocational training school (level 3), certificate of apprenticeship class (level 5) and vocational training diploma (level 5). EOPPEP cooperates with the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (previously Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency) on quality issues in higher education. It is also the EQAVET national reference point (NRP), so there is coordination of the respective activities of the two national points on quality issues that arise from the implementation of NQF. The work programme of the national coordination point (NCP) 2018-20 included an integrated communication strategy[505] 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

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496. Ministerial Decision Φ2/181534/Δ4. *Official Gazette, 3820B/2017, 31.10.2017.*

497. As a result of Law 4186/2013 that set up the EPAL apprenticeship class, several Ministerial decrees of the Minister of Education were issued: the curricula of each specialisation are described according to the learning outcomes approach.
Ministerial Decision Φ2/165262/Δ4. *Official Gazette, 4496/B/11-10-18.*
Ministerial Decision Φ2/146353/ΓΓ4 *Official Gazette, 3643/B/1-10-19.*

498. 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.

499. Presidential Decree 40/2018. *Official Gazette, 76A/2018, 30.4.2018.*

500. This is anticipated by Law 3879/2010, Article 16, Paragraph 4, point (d), as supplemented by Article 46 of the present law.

501. In June 2016, HQAAA finished the evaluation of 36 higher education institutions.

502. Information on external evaluation of higher education institutions can be found at: https://www.ethaae.gr/en/quality-assurance/external-evaluation-reports-of-institutions

503. HQF levels 7 and 8 are mentioned in the approvals of the regulations for post-graduate and doctoral studies. Relevant information can be found in the Official Gazette (OG) 481/B/18-2-2019 (Amendment of the 3672/b/4-6-18)

504. The HQF Unit operates under the Qualifications Certification Department of EOPPEP. Since 2019, a part-time external expert supports the Unit's activities and, in particular, the ones that are related to communication with the awarding bodies and the database for the qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

505. Leaflets, handbooks and other promotional material have been produced mainly addressing teachers and students. The broader communication strategy was designed at the beginning of 2018 and was aimed at increasing the visibility of the framework to different stakeholders, as well as to a wider audience. A comprehensive plan was decided, including a research study for a rebranding of the framework, the update of the HQF site, the organisation of conferences in three Greek cities, press releases, newsletters, TV and radio spots, infographics and other promotional material. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic most plans were paused.

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during the referencing process (2014-15)[506]. A new advisory committee will be formalised for the updated referencing report of the HQF. Till then, the main work of implementing the HQF will be done by EOPPEP (as the coordinating agency). An independent administrative authority, the Authority for Quality Assurance in Primary and Secondary Education (ADIPPDE), has been established[507] and is responsible for quality assurance both in general and vocational education. It is fully operational (qualifications at levels 1, 2, 3, and 4) and is working closely with the Ministry of Education.

Involvement of social partners is very important for the implementation of the framework. Their representatives are members of the governing board of EOPPEP, the Central Examination Board for the Certification of Vocational Training (KEEPEK)[508] responsible for the accreditation of post-secondary 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 on apprenticeship issues established by Law on 26 February 2018[509]. 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)[510]. ESEKAAD now includes many representatives closely involved with VET issues. Its mandate has been extended to be the overall link between education and the labour market[511]. According to Law 4763/2020, the new committees that are responsible for the above-mentioned work are the Central Advisory Committee of VET (KSEEK), the Central Scientific Committee of VET (KEE) and the Regional Committees for the link between VET, production and the labour market (SSPAE).

A significant number of private education institutions/providers have engaged with EOPPEP and expressed interest in the inclusion of their awards (from formal or non-formal education) in the qualifications framework. A dialogue has also started with the Greek recognition and equivalence committees and competent authorities[512] 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[513]

In Greece, there has been slow progress in developing a framework for validation of non-formal and informal learning gained through work experience and other means[514] A national system for the certification of outputs that was expected to boost employment, started development in 2016, but progress has not been quick[515]. In 2020-21, development of this system remains one of the strategic objectives of EOPPEP with the support of the Ministry of Education.

Continuing vocational education and training (CVET) has been the policy priority making the biggest progress in recent years. A regulatory framework has been developed for the operation of lifelong learning centres (Kentra dia viou mathisis (KDBM)), which offer continuous vocational training, general adult education, vocational guidance and lifelong counselling. During 2020, around 30 VET curricula for the institutes of vocational training (IEK) were designed by the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning/Ministry of Education. Eight of them were checked for their compliance to standards and approved, by decision of EOPPEP's Board of Directors.

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506. 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.

507. Law 4142/2013.

508. 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 NRP Greece (2016). *Report on Greece: summer 2016.*

509. 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.

510. Law 4452/2017, Article 18.

511. 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.

512. 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 post-secondary vocational education and training.

513. This section draws mainly on input from Manoudi, A. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Greece.*

514. For example, in leisure time.

515. 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*).

A good example of validation of non-formal learning since 2014 has been adult trainers, who need to have certified educational competence/proficiency to train in non-formal learning programmes funded by public resources[516]. 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[517].

Progress has also been made on the upskilling pathways recommendation[518], in terms of offering opportunities for basic skills training to low-skilled adults. A memorandum of cooperation is planned, to be signed by EOPPEP (the validation authority) and the Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED), which is the Greek public employment service (PES). An updated version of it has been signed recently by the two parties and there is currently an ongoing dialogue regarding the subjects and the methods of cooperation. In addition, the apprenticeship semester attached to IVET (*Mathiteia* IEK) has been initiated and a quality framework has been developed[519] On a final note, the HQF level of the Greek qualification is indicated on the Recognition Decision issued by EOPPEP for foreign qualifications provided that the corresponding Greek qualification has been placed in the framework[520].

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 would also be required in favour of learning outcomes, to support steps towards recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The law[521] adopted in 2020 is intended to strengthen the certification and validation of non-formal and informal learning in the country and the active participation of social partners in the design and implementation of a lifelong learning system.

NQF implementation and impact

The HQF is at an activation stage. Its establishment in the Hellenic education and training community has been supported by several developments in education and training legislation over recent years. The new law[522] adopted in 2020 is reshaping the institutional framework of VET and lifelong learning policies in Greece, stating at the same time the priorities of the new government in this area. The law formalises the operational aspects of the HQF, establishing its role within the Greek educational system. This is a very important step in moving into a full operational stage. The reform aims at setting up a completely new model of VET at EQF levels 3 and 4 with the creation, for the first time, of model vocational education schools (EQF level 4) and the creation of pilot and thematic vocational training Institutes (IEK) at EQF level 5 (parallel to the existing ones). The law establishes permeability arrangements from VET to higher education, by giving the opportunity to graduates of IEK and students of the post-upper secondary year of apprenticeship (at level 5) to have access to level 6 of the HQF – following successful entry exams. The law increases the engagement of social partners and boosts vocational education and training's labour market relevance and attractiveness. The main objective is to change fundamentally the image of Greek VET and make it a first choice for young students in the future. The first stage in the development of the HQF has focused on the range of qualifications awarded within formal education and training and, in a long-term perspective, it is planned to accommodate qualifications awarded outside formal education and training. Inclusion of qualifications in the framework is defined through qualification type specifications. They include title of award, level, awarding body, summary descriptor, volume of learning, purpose, education sector, learning outcomes, employment relevance and progression possibilities. Qualification types from VET, general education and higher education have been assigned to HQF levels. Having already developed qualification types, which is a key element of the framework, the country is now placing, in all qualification types, each individual (named) qualification expressed in learning

516. Law 4115/2013.
517. All the details of the assessment stage are explicitly described and analysed on EOPPEP's website.
518. 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.
519. Ministerial Decree 26412/2017. *Official Gazette*, 490B/2017.
520. OPPEP recognises foreign qualifications for secondary and post-secondary vocational education and training.
521. http://www.opengov.gr/ypepth/?p=5632
522. http://www.opengov.gr/ypepth/?p=5632

outcomes. For example, in level 7 of the HQF, there is the type 'master degree'[523].

A qualifications register[524], in cooperation with the respective education institutions, has been developed, including 724 learning-outcomes-based qualifications from the formal education system. The register has been used as a pilot project to link the learning outcomes of the qualifications to the relevant ESCO pillar. Since 2018, 50 higher education qualifications have been added to the register. As a result of legislative changes concerning higher education in Greece, and a procedure that was initiated by the HQF unit of EOPPEP (regarding the update of the register's content), around 450 new higher education qualifications have been sent for inclusion in the register[525]. The qualifications of secondary vocational education that are not awarded anymore (old qualifications) are expected to be included in 2021.

HQF and EQF levels have started to be indicated on new qualifications (e.g. for EPAL apprenticeships, level 5) and on certificate and diploma supplements in VET and higher education. A number of private education bodies have expressed interest in the inclusion of their awards in the framework. 205 certificate supplements have been issued so far with reference to HQF and EQF levels, mostly for IEK diplomas and EPAL apprenticeship class degrees[526]. A dialogue has started on the role and contribution of the framework for the recognition and equivalence of qualifications.

A survey was commissioned by EOPPEP in 2017, as part of the actions aimed at evaluating the impact of the HQF and its referencing to the EQF[527]. It indicated a very high level of awareness and understanding of the framework among education and training providers and end-users (95.2% of respondents were aware of the HQF, 80.2% were aware of its structure and 74.8% were aware of how it was referenced to the EQF). Most respondents were also favourable about the usefulness of qualification frameworks in general, and in presenting the knowledge, skills and competences of employees.

An integrated communication strategy has been designed by the Hellenic EQF-NCP and it has been updated annually to increase the use and visibility of the framework. A creative design with infographics to strengthen the identity and branding of the framework was produced.

Referencing to the EQF

The HQF was referenced to the EQF in 2015 and self-certification against the QF-EHEA is in progress. The country is planning to prepare an updated referencing report but a decision about the time has not been made yet.

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 the European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations portal (ESCO). The main success factors for the HQF to reach its aims are related to the clear structure of the HQF, the use of qualifications types that facilitate the qualifications' grouping in broader categories at the same level, as well as the qualifications register that presents, in a concise way, the qualifications that are placed in the HQF. The HQF quality assurance procedures have also set an example to be followed by the rest of the training providers (European Commission; Cedefop, 2020).

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523. (a) Master degree (MSc) in renewable energy systems (Department of mechanical engineering of the Faculty of applied technology of the Technological Educational Institute (TEI) 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).

524. Greek qualification register. It is linked to the European Commission's portal on learning opportunities and qualifications

525. The qualifications of secondary vocational education that are not awarded anymore (old qualifications) are expected to be included in 2021.

526. The certificate supplements are available online here.

527. The study was conducted by the SOLIDDOP company in 2017 and is part of the actions developed by EOPPEP as the National Coordination Point of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF-NCP) entitled *Evaluating the impact of the National Qualifications Framework and its referencing to the EQF*. This evaluation served as a pilot for a nationwide research study regarding the recognition/impact of NQF-EQF within Greek society.

Involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in HQF development and implementation is seen as crucial but remains a challenge. The participatory nature of the processes and procedures necessary for the development and referencing of the HQF might be a good opportunity not only to reduce barriers between secondary and tertiary education but also to strengthen bridges between general and vocational education.

Other challenges include the preparation of an updated referencing report, referencing international sectoral qualifications to the HQF, including qualifications awarded outside the formal/regulated system and the rest of higher education qualifications to HQF levels 6 to 8[528]. 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.

According to the 2017 survey on the HQF implementation and its impact on the Greek education system, a high level of awareness and understanding of the framework among education and training providers and end-users has been observed. Future plans include the development of a methodology, by EOPPEP in cooperation with education and labour market stakeholders, for classifying qualifications acquired through non-formal education, based on knowledge, skills and competences. 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. It is planned to establish new qualification types following the introduction of the 'integrated master' qualification, or the ESK degree (47) (Level 3), that are being introduced by several higher education providers. An upgraded version of the HQF and the preparation of an updated referencing report are also expected.

The HQF is currently a communicative framework that promotes transparency, but with an important reform role as well; so far, the framework has strengthened quality assurance and helped re-shape qualifications types defined in learning outcomes, thus facilitating the qualifications grouping in broader categories at the same level. A review of all qualifications (including non-formal and informal ones) to be included in the qualifications register is required to enhance the reform role of the framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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528. For the time being foreign qualifications awarded by foreign institutions cannot be included in the HQF.

Table 38. Hellenic national qualifications framework (HQF)

HQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	Doctorate (Διδακτορικό Δίπλωμα) (Universities)	8
7	Master degree (Μεταπτυχιακό Δίπλωμα Ειδίκευσης) (Universities/technological educational institutions (TEI)-higher education)	7
6	Bachelor degree (Πτυχίο Ανώτατης Εκπαίδευσης) (Universities/TEI-higher education)	6
5	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) Vocational training diploma (post-secondary level) (Δίπλωμα Επαγγελματικής Ειδικότητας, Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης Επιπέδου 5) (vocational training institute) (Ινστιτούτο Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης, ΙΕΚ) Vocational training diploma(*) (Δίπλωμα Επαγγελματικής Ειδικότητας, Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης Επιπέδου Μεταδευτεροβάθμιας Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης, ΙΕΚ) (post-secondary level) Post-secondary non-tertiary education diploma or 'degree'** (Δίπλωμα ή Πτυχίο Ανωτέρας Σχολής)	5
4	General upper secondary school leaving certificate (Απολυτήριο Γενικού Λυκείου) Vocational school (Επαγγελματικές Σχολές) (EPAS, ΕΠΑΣ) certificate (Πτυχίο ΕΠΑΣ) Vocational upper secondary school (Επαγγελματικά Λύκεια) (EPAL, ΕΠΑΛ) 'degree'** (Πτυχίο Επαγγελματικής Ειδικότητας, Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης Επιπέδου 4- ΕΠΑΛ) EPAL certificate (Απολυτήριο Επαγγελματικού Λυκείου – ΕΠΑΛ Επιπέδου 4)	4
3	Vocational training school (Σχολές Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης, ΣΕΚ – SEK) certificate (post-lower secondary level) (Πτυχίο Επαγγελματικής Ειδικότητας Επιπέδου 3 – ΣΕΚ***) IEK certificate* (initial vocational training-post lower secondary level) (Πιστοποιητικό Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης, Επίπεδο 1– ΙΕΚ)	3
2	Lower secondary school certificate (3 years) (Απολυτήριο Γυμνασίου)	2
1	Primary school certificate (6 years) (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 cohort was expected to graduate in 2018/19.

Source: EOPPEP, 2020 (e-mail communication).

Abbreviations

ADIPPDE	Authority for Quality Assurance in Primary and Secondary Education
CVET	continuous vocational education and training
EOPPEP	National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance
EPAL	Επαγγελματικά Λύκεια [vocational upper secondary school]
EPAS	Επαγγελματικές Σχολές [vocational school]
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESEKAAD	National Council for Education and Human Resources Development
ESOM	National Apprentice Coordination Body
ESCO	European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations portal
ESK	Επαγγελματικές Σχολές Κατάρτισης [vocational training schools]
ESYP	National Council of Education
EU	European Union
HQAAA	Αρχή διασφάλισης και πιστοποίησης της ποιότητας στην ανωτάτη εκπαίδευση [Greek authority responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes of study]
HQF	Hellenic qualifications framework
IEK	Ινστιτούτο Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης [vocational training institute]
IVET	initial vocational education and training
KDVM	Κέντρα Δια Βίου Μάθησης [lifelong learning centres]
KEE	Κέντρα Επαγγελματικής Εκπαίδευσης [vocational education centres]
KEE	Central Scientific Committee of VET
KEEPEK	Central Examination Board for the Certification of Vocational Training
KSEEK	Central Advisory Committee of VET
NRP	national reference point
OAED	Manpower Employment Organisation
PES	public employment service
SEK	Σχολή Επαγγελματικής Κατάρτισης [vocational training school]
SSPAE	Regional Committees for the link between VET, production and labour market
TEI	Τεχνολογικά Επαγγελματικά Ινστιτούτα [technological educational institutions]

Main sources of information

EOPPEP (The national organisation for the certification of qualifications and vocational guidance) is the designated EQF NCP: http://www.eoppep.gr/index.php/en/

HQF and the EQF: http://nqf.gov.gr/

Greek qualifications register: https://proson.eoppep.gr/en/Qualifications

EOPPEP (2016). Greece – EQF referencing report https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/greek_referencing_report_2016.pdf

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Prepared by

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

GRENADA

Introduction and context

The Grenada National Accreditation Board has begun the task of developing a National Qualifications Framework for Grenada (GQF) as part of an educational reform initiated by the Human Resource Development (HRD) 2030 Strategy. This Strategy was mandated by the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which seeks to unlock Caribbean Human Potential. The intention of this framework is to facilitate ease of access at all levels — to provide multiple pathways to personal achievement and employment opportunities, enabling all learners to achieve their personal goals through a diversified and regionally and internationally recognized education and training system.

Grenada has signed on to the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, which stipulates that individuals have the right to have their foreign education qualifications recognized outside their country of study. Grenada has also ratified the Convention for the Recognition of Studies, Degrees and Diplomas in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean which commits the signatory State parties to adopting all necessary measures to recognize the studies, degrees, and diplomas of countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Having signed on to both conventions, the development of a national qualifications framework became the logical next step, since the framework will better facilitate the comparability and recognition of foreign qualifications.

There is also an urgent need to standardize the qualifications offered by the different higher education providers in Grenada. The GQF will ensure that qualifications are consistent and are based on standards. New institutions who begin to offer programmes or existing institutions who want to add to the programmes they offer will be guided by those standards. This implies that regardless of the education/training provider, qualifications which

bear the same title would share a high level of commonality.

There is also the need to improve the way Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is perceived by the public. The traditional view that students who pursue academic pathways are more intelligent or more successful needs to be dispelled. The GQF will promote recognition of informally acquired skills and knowledge. This is meant to add value to TVET and give holders of this type of certification equal opportunities to employment and access to higher levels of learning.

Policy objectives

The GQF is expected to:
- Facilitate the internationalization of higher education study programmes.
- Establish a medium through which all learning can be assessed and recognized.
- Increase access to jobs and opportunities for higher learning by providing certification to individuals, inclusive of those lacking formal education.
- Foster lifelong learning and the recognition of prior learning.
- Facilitate comparability which promotes transfer between learning. programmes nationwide, regionally, and internationally.
- Facilitate cross-border mobility of workers and learners.
- Stimulate social and economic development.
- Enhance the quality of education and training.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The GQF is expected to comprise ten levels which will be define by the learning outcomes to which they align. These learning outcomes reflect the following domains:

- Knowledge and Understanding
- Application and Practice
- Communications
- Numeracy and ICT Skills
- Life Skills

- Autonomy, Accountability
- Working with Others

Qualifications included in the GQF will range from the lowest level of achievement to doctoral degrees.

Figure 18. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

PROCESS MODEL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GQF
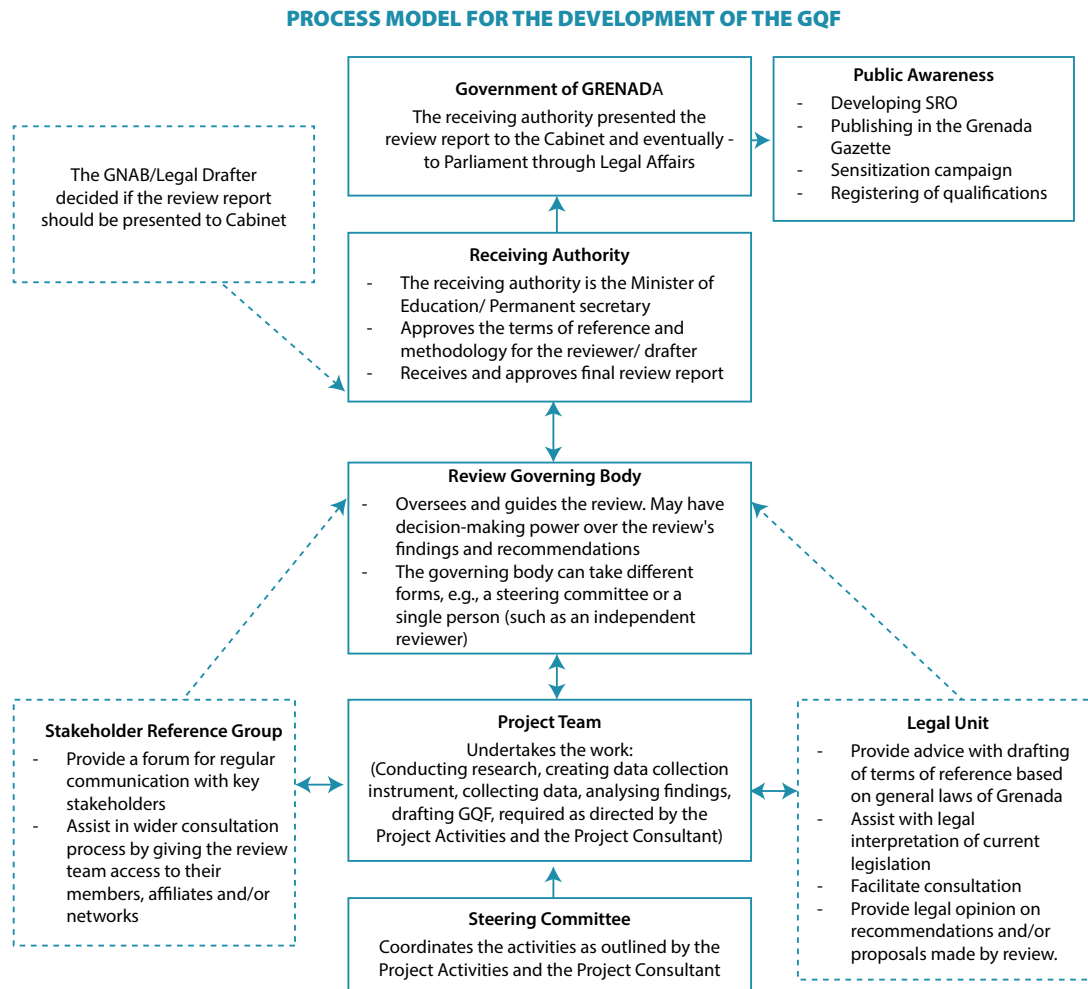
Source: Authors

The Grenada National Accreditation Board (GNAB) is the organization responsible for developing and implementing the qualifications framework. A steering committee was formed to plan and execute the activities that will bring the qualifications framework to completion. Committee members represent higher education institutions, vocational education and training institutions, government Ministries (of Education and of Labour) and Grenada's Employers' Federation. While the Steering Committee provides assistance, the GNAB's Secretariat takes the leading role and oversees the day-to-day operational decisions.

There have been consultations with a wide cross-section of stakeholders, including the Grenada Bureau of Standards, Grenada Hotel and Tourism Association, Grenada Secondary Schools Association of Principals, St. George's University, Grenada Chamber of Industry & Commerce, Ministry of Infrastructure Development, Transport & Implementation, Ministry of National Security, Public Administration, Youth Development, Home Affairs, the Information and Communication Technology sector, the disaster management sector, and the Grenada Trades Union Council.

The Secretariat is currently awaiting the completion of survey instruments by institutions that offer TVET and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

NEXT STEPS

After the data is analysed and the GQF is drafted, the Ministry of Legal Affairs will provide advice with drafting terms of reference based on the general laws of Grenada, assist with legal interpretation of current legislation, and provide legal opinion on recommendations and/or proposals made by the reviewing body. Once the Ministry of Education approves the final review, the review report is presented to Cabinet and eventually to Parliament. Following a favourable review in Parliament, the necessary steps will be taken to make the GQF a legal document.

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

One of the aims of the GQF is to foster lifelong learning and the recognition of prior learning. Learners who exited the formal education system without completing their course of study, or those who wish to re-enter the system, can identify where they are presently at, and be able to chart their way forward. Persons who acquired skills informally can have their learning assessed and the matching qualifications assigned. These individuals can now enter the formal education system using the assigned qualifications to meet entry requirements for admission into a more advanced programme.

NQF implementation and impact

The implementation of an NQF in Grenada will work to the advantage of several groups of individuals in society; for instance, underprivileged youth who would have gained skills through informal apprenticeship within their families or neighbourhoods. The GQF will facilitate inclusion by affording these individuals a better chance at finding a place in the job market and in society. Youths who have intentionally chosen technical and vocational studies will benefit tremendously as well. Traditionally, technical and vocational students would acquire rudimentary skills and begin to practice, so that the certificates they hold were most likely to be of a low level even if they would have acquired a wealth of experience along the way. With the qualifications framework in place, these individuals can attain certificates that match their level of expertise. How skills and knowledge were acquired is insignificant; what matters most is what learners know.

The GQF will offer a sense of direction to recent graduates, unemployed youth, life-long learners, and the workforce in general. By finding their position (in terms of qualification) on the framework, individuals can make decisions regarding how to get to their desired level of educational attainment. Curriculum development officers and short course providers also stand to benefit immensely. The level descriptors along with general learning outcomes for courses at varying levels would already be documented in the framework. Planning course outlines therefore becomes less demanding in terms of time and output. Institutions which are operating at substandard levels will also be able to align their curriculum with the level descriptors and learning outcomes of the qualifications framework and adjust their curriculum as needed. The GQF is geared towards setting a national benchmark for the quality of education in Grenada by providing better support for learners of all types and level of experience.

Referencing to the regional framework/ other frameworks

The GQF will be aligned with both the CARICOM Qualifications Framework and the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). This will ensure that while we create a framework that reflects our Grenadian context, learners and workers can easily fit into schools and the labour market wherever they go.

The GNAB aims to use the TQF as a tool for mapping these three frameworks (TQF, CQF and GQF) TQF, onto each other. As such, the GQF will make use of learning outcomes, level descriptors, credits and types of qualifications like those found on the CQF and TQF.

Important lessons learnt and future plans

One of the biggest challenges faced in NQF development is the level of interest key stakeholders have displayed in partnering with GNAB. Some individuals and organizations that should be an integral part of developing the framework were quite reluctant to lend support and still have not committed to the project as anticipated.

The restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have also been a setback. It has not been possible to hold face-to-face meetings with any of our stakeholder groups. While it may appear that virtual engagements are more convenient, many

attendees have been overwhelmed with meetings, making it difficult to schedule a meeting that everyone can attend. In addition, virtual meetings seem to generate less discussion and participation. As a result, stakeholder contributions have been more limited than expected or hoped.

Once all data collection from institutions is completed, they will be analysed, and the framework will be drafted. GNAB's Secretariat has made efforts to sensitize the public regarding the development of the NQF and that drive will continue in the upcoming months.

Abbreviations

CARICOM	Caribbean Community	NQF	National Qualifications Framework
CQF	CARICOM Qualifications Framework	SKN	St. Kitt's and Nevis
GNAB	Grenada National Accreditation Board	SRO	Statutory Rules and Orders
GQF	Grenada Qualifications Framework	UNSECO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions		
HRD	Human Resource Development	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
ICT	Information and Communication Technology		

Main sources of information

The CARICOM Qualifications Framework

Other Qualifications Framework (Transnational Qualifications Framework, SKN Qualifications Framework, European Qualifications Framework, etc)

Prepared by
The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in consultation with national experts

GUINEA

Introduction and background

Despite the progress that has been made through various support programmes, the Guinean education system is still faced with the challenge of improving performance in order to achieve its goals of providing equitable, quality education. This requires an adjustment of priorities and strategic objectives for education.

With that in mind, on 10 May 2017, the Ministry of Technical Education, Vocational Training and Employment organized a seminar on the development of a draft National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in the Republic of Guinea.

The general objective was to improve the relevance and efficiency of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system so that it could provide young people and adults with the necessary skills for employment, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning.

The implementation of this National Qualifications Framework will not be possible, however, unless the challenges identified by the sector ministry are met. Some of these challenges include:
- Inadequate quantity of training to meet the country's socioeconomic needs.
- Lack of understanding of current qualification needs.
- Insufficient control over the engineering of skills-based training.
- Insufficient funding for TVET in terms of quantity and diversity.

To meet these challenges, opportunities to find new solutions are being explored and will require the immediate implementation of the following measures:
- Identification of qualifications required to meet the needs of the economy
- Implementation of training standards that meet socioeconomic needs
- Development and provision of quality TVET
- Financing of TVET development

Policy objectives

in the Republic of Guinea, TVET is one of the Government's key priorities for meeting the needs of the national economy. In this regard, in November 2017, the Ministry of Technical Education, Vocational Training and Employment submitted to UNESCO a request for support for the purpose of reviewing and updating the policy concerned, taking into account all the priorities set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In response, in March 2020, UNESCO agreed to provide technical and financial support for the establishment of a TVET development strategy and the development of a Framework Act in Guinea. This process aims to provide the Ministry with a coherent TVET development strategy and policy so that it can meet the country's economic needs and adapt to the various technical and technological changes which make it harder for people to access the labour market.

The advantages of a national qualifications framework

A national qualifications framework offers many advantages for qualification and certification systems, including:
- Contributing to the cohesion, transparency, and integration of certification systems.
- Improving and targeting access to qualifications for disadvantaged groups.
- Initiating progression towards higher level qualifications and beyond.
- Introducing a certain degree of flexibility for learners, providers and users.
- Facilitating the recognition and validation of all qualifications, including those that were obtained through institutional settings and those that were not.
- Promoting continuing education and training (CET) and adult education, through self-study or access to higher education.
- Improving the links of qualifications with collective and labour market needs.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

There are no technical schools or colleges in the Republic of Guinea. This means that the sector ministry does not have a specific pool of candidates for trainee recruitment. Candidates are those students who have obtained a certificate of completion of the first stage of secondary education and who wish to pursue a vocational aptitude certificate course through competitive examinations, and those who have obtained their baccalaureate and wish to pursue an advanced vocational training certificate.

There are three types of training establishments in the TVET system:
- Type A vocational training centres (CFP).
- Type A and B national technical schools (e.g., National School of Arts and Crafts of Guinea, or ENAM; National School of Agriculture and Livestock, or ENAE; and National School of Post and Telecommunications, or ENPT).
- Post-primary and post-secondary learning centres.

Each of these establishments have different entry levels and offer different qualifications.

For vocational training centres, entry levels are determined by the candidate's school grade, usually between the final four years of secondary school.

Certification at this level corresponds to a vocational aptitude certificate (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle — CAP) or a vocational proficiency certificate (Brevet d'Études Professionnelles — BEP).

For Type B national technical schools, entry levels are subject to the attainment of a baccalaureate qualification that would lead into an advanced vocational training certificate (Brevet du Technicien Supérieur — BTS).

For post-primary and post-secondary learning centres, entry levels start from the first to the final years of primary or elementary schooling, which corresponds to a level 1 certificate of qualification (CQP1), while post-secondary levels comprise the first four years of secondary school, leading up to a level 2 certificate of qualification (CQP2). It is typically early school leavers who attend these centres.

According to international certification norms and standards, these qualifications correspond to the following levels:

CAP or BEP: Level 5

- BTS: Level 3
- CQP1 and CQP2: Level 5

Level 4 qualifications, which correspond to the technical baccalaureate, are problematic as there are currently no technical schools in Guinea.

Institutional provisions and stakeholder participation

- As a sector ministry with a cross-sectional profile in relation to the national economy, the Ministry of Technical Education, Vocational Training and Employment operates through both purely public and public–private partnerships. These partnerships target different elements, including technical and financial assistance from partners.
- The sector ministry's work is supported by the following projects, funded by the French Development Agency (AFD) and the International Organization of la Francophonie (IOF):
- Project to improve training and enable entry into the agricultural and mining sectors (PAFISAM).
- Boosting skills to improve young people's employability (BOCEJ).
- Civic service agency for development action (ASCAD).
- All these projects aim to boost students' skillsets in order to provide them with greater employability upon graduation.
- Clearly, stakeholders play a defining role in the process of training and qualification.

A recent study on the national qualifications framework was found that regulations, legislation and institutional provisions could be advantageous in the following ways:
- A regulatory framework would make it possible to establish mutual trust, reliability and sustainability in the quality of the service provided within the national qualifications systems.
- Frameworks can provide reference points, making it possible to establish sectoral and intersectoral norms.
- Frameworks may comprise regulatory provisions of interest, and which promote quality assurance.
- Frameworks can give stability to qualifications, while still allowing flexibility.

- Evolving frameworks can ensure that institutional autonomy is respected, continuous feedback is provided, and provision is maintained and reviewed without entering into the details of programmes, organization and content.
- Frameworks may allow decentralization and increase the autonomy of education and training providers.
- Frameworks may support the establishment of minimal requirements for qualification and competency standards as well as for certification; these standards may be sectoral or intersectoral.

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning and pathways to learning

These are often regulated and supervised through public-private partnerships which are embedded at the ministerial level.

The existence of organizations such as the National Federation of Guinean Artisans (FENAG), the Private Investment Promotion AgencyAPIP) and the Guinean Employment Promotion Agency (AGUIPE) offers opportunities for skills development in both formal and informal settings.

Skills are recognized in various ways and may not necessarily require the involvement of the Ministry of Technical Education, Vocational Training and Employment.

Prepared by
UNESCO in consultation with national experts

Implementation of the national qualifications framework (NQF) and impact

The NQF is still at the initial stages of its development.

REFERENCES TO THE REGIONAL FRAMEWORK AND OTHER FRAMEWORKS

a report by experts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) states that the implementation of national qualifications frameworks will strengthen TVET development at both a national and regional level, ensuring the mobility of skills across the region.

For this reason, Guinea, as a Member State of ECOWAS, has already adopted the approach of implementing its own national qualifications framework in line with the regional qualifications framework to be determined by the ECOWAS Commission.

By referring to the regional qualifications framework, Guinea has opted for the standardization, comparability and mobility of workers across the region.

For this purpose, clear general guidelines have been established for the implementation of a qualifications framework and the role of different stakeholders in the process.

HONG KONG SAR, PRC

Introduction and context

During recent decades, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, People's Republic of China has undergone a dramatic transformation to become a leading international financial centre. To stay ahead in an increasingly competitive market, Hong Kong SAR, PRC must upgrade the capabilities of its workforce constantly. However, with a shift in the region'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 provided workers with more effective training to increase their employment potential.

In response, the educational attainment of Hong Kong SAR, PRC's workforce has improved significantly. The proportion of the labour force with a post-secondary education has increased from 20.4 per cent in 1996 to 41.1 per cent in 2016 (Government of the Hong Kong SAR, PRC, 2018). However, the proliferation of training programmes and qualifications leads to confusion among learners and employers regarding qualifications and their associated competence levels.

Policy objectives

The Education Bureau (EDB) of the Hong Kong SAR, PRC Government launched the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) in 2008 to promote lifelong learning and enhance the quality, professionalism and competitiveness of Hong Kong SAR, PRC's workforce in an increasingly globalized and knowledge-based economy (Government of the HKSAR, n.d.).

The major functions of the HKQF are to:
- define competency standards clearly;
- ensure qualification quality;
- enable citizens to obtain recognized qualifications either through education and training or recognition of prior learning (RPL) mechanisms;
- promote awareness of the range of qualifications and the potential contributions of qualifications to improving the skills of the workforce;
- articulate the qualifications and clarify links between different types and levels;
- recognize practitioners' existing skills, knowledge and work experience through an RPL mechanism developed for industries that have adopted Specification of Competency Standards (SCS)[529];
- 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 indicates the time it will take to complete a learning programme and facilitates credit accumulation and transfer (CAT).

The Hong Kong SAR, PRC Government is fully committed to developing the QF. The QF Fund, with an endowment of HK$1 billion, was established in 2014 to support the sustainable development and implementation of the HKQF with a steady source of income. The government injected a further HK$1.2 billion into the QF Fund in 2018 for the continued implementation of HKQF initiatives.

The Steering Committee on QF Fund was set up in 2014 to advise the Secretary for Education on QF Fund policy, strategy and administration. In 2020, the Steering Committee on Promotion of Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) and QF replaced the Steering Committee on QF Fund for QF development, implementation and promotion.

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529. The Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) sets out the skills, knowledge and competency standards required of the practitioners to perform various job functions in industries effectively. SCS can be grouped together to form a qualification at a particular HKQF level.

Levels and use of learning outcomes

Table 39. HKQF: Award titles

QF LEVEL	AWARD TITLES						
7	Doctor						
6	Master	• Postgraduate diploma • Postgraduate certificate	• Professional diploma • Professional certificate	• Advanced diploma • Advanced certificate	Diploma	Certificate	
5	Bachelor						
4	Associate	• Higher diploma • Higher certificate					
3							
2							Foundation certificate[530]
1							

Source: HKQF (2020)

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530. Only applies to level 1 and 2

Qualifications recognized by the HKQF are characterized by three key features:
1. level: the outcome standards, i.e. depth and complexity of learning leading to the qualification;
2. award title: the nature, area of studies and range of QF level of a qualification;
3. credit: the volume of learning leading to the qualification.

Hong Kong SAR, PRC introduced the ATS in 2012 to standardize and simplify HKQF qualification titles (Qualifications Framework Secretariat, 2012). 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 and Higher Diploma 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 EDB. The use of titles outside ATS is not encouraged, as this would be contrary to the purpose of the ATS. Only in very exceptional circumstances can a provider use titles not specified in the ATS.

Since 2016, all programme titles registered on the Qualifications Register (QR) have conformed to the ATS, and the QR has included the QF credit values of all programmes at QF Levels 1 to 4 (EDB, 2014). Subsequently, all new and existing registered learning programmes at QF Levels 5 to 7 (except for research-based programmes) must have their QF credit values shown on the QR with effect from September 2020 and September 2022 respectively.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The EDB 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 (QFS) is the executive arm of the EDB 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 EDB establishes ITACs/CITACs for respective industries/ sectors. ITACs/CITACs consist of representatives of employers, employees, professional bodies, regulatory bodies and the relevant government bureaus and departments of an industry.

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 advise the Secretary for Education on matters relating to the development and implementation of the HKQF.

The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is an independent statutory body established under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance of 2007 (Cap. 1150), which represents a legislative amendment of the HKCAA (Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation) and came into effect to expand the scope of its services to cover accreditation of vocational qualifications (Government of the HKSAR, 2007). With the enactment of this ordinance, the council was renamed HKCAAVQ. In accordance with the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (AAVQ) Ordinance (Cap. 592), which came into effect on 5 May 2008, the HKCAAVQ is now the accreditation authority responsible for developing and implementing the standards and approach for accreditation of academic and vocational qualifications to underpin the HKQF (Government of the HKSAR, 2008). The HKCAAVQ also took on the statutory role of QR Authority under Cap. 592. The QR (www.hkqr.gov.hk) is a web-based database containing information on qualifications and learning programmes that have been quality assured and recognized under HKQF. It is available to the public free of charge.

To widen the scope of the HKQF, the EDB launched an initiative in 2018 for the recognition of professional qualifications. Professional qualifications recognized by the HKQF are those 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 and must complete robust written or practical assessments to obtain the qualifications. As of August 2021, the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants, the Marine Department and the Hong Kong Institute of Bankers were appointed as assessment agencies for issuing respective professional qualifications recognized by the HKQF. These professional qualifications can all be found in the QR. This initiative promotes a wider application of the HKQF and uplifts the professional image of VPET in Hong Kong SAR, PRC.

To encourage people aged 18 to 60 to pursue continuing education, a continuing education fund (CEF) of HKD$5 billion was set up by Hong Kong SAR, PRC's government in 2002. To provide fair and impartial reviews of the continuing education courses concerned, a committee of quality assurance and accreditation experts reviewed CEF, along with specialists from commerce, finance, education and training and other industries. All courses must be recognized by the HKQF to access CEF funding. With the aim of enhancing the link between CEF and HKQF and the relevancy of CEF courses to industry needs, all training courses that are developed with special reference to SCS, i.e. SCS-based courses[531], have been included in the CEF's reimbursable course list. The CEF has covered all QF-recognized courses since 2019.

A CAT system provides the flexibility needed to suit individual learners' circumstances and minimize duplication of training. The CAT system facilitates credit accumulation from courses and converts them into a recognized qualification. One QF credit consists of 10 notional learning hours, which considers the time required by an average learner in all modes of learning, including class attendance, private study, online learning, practical learning and examination. The HKQF is expected to facilitate CAT arrangements between sectors and training providers by providing a unified platform and common benchmarks.

The HKQF also plays a role in secondary education: the Specification of Generic Competencies (SGC)[532] developed by the HKQF serve as a useful reference for applied learning courses under the new structure for senior secondary education. These courses

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531. To qualify as a SCS-based course, at least 60 per cent of the course content (i.e. number of credits) must come from the SCS.
532. SGC sets out the foundation competencies from HKQF Level 1 to Level 4. These cover four strands: English, Chinese (including Cantonese and Putonghua), IT and numeracy.

enable students to understand fundamental theories and concepts and 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.

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways: Recognition of prior learning (RPL) mechanism

The major purpose of setting up an RPL mechanism, which represents a form of validation of non-formal and informal learning by the HKQF, is to enable formal recognition of knowledge, skills and experience 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.

As of August 2021, there are 17 industries implementing RPL. Successful applicants will be awarded a statement of attainment (QF Level 1 to Level 4) issued by the relevant assessment agency appointed by the Secretary for Education for the relevant industry sector. As of July 2021, over 36,000 practitioners have successfully obtained around 84,000 RPL qualifications.

RPL qualifications have been widely accepted by industry employers, professional bodies, education and training providers and government departments for purposes such as human resource management, membership vetting, credit exemption and criteria-setting for licensing regimes and tender exercises.

HKQF implementation

Since 2008, HKQF implementation is characterized as follows:
- Stakeholders and partners from various industries support and participate actively in HKQF development, providing the valuable human resources needed in a knowledge-based economy.
- A total of 22 ITACs/ CITACs for 23 industries/ sectors have been set up within the HKQF, covering over half of the total labour force in Hong Kong SAR, PRC.
- 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 (e.g. by designing recruitment advertisements, commending staff, formulating job descriptions, deploying manpower and organizing internal

training) or using the standards as references for performance benchmarking.
- More than 8,600 academic and vocational qualifications are listed in the QR. Their respective learning programmes have been quality assured and are recognized by the HKQF.

Referencing to regional frameworks

The EDB is committed to developing Hong Kong SAR, PRC as a regional education hub by internationalizing and diversifying the post-secondary education sector. To this end, it has increased foreign student admission quotas at publicly funded institutions, provided government scholarships to outstanding foreign students and relaxed employment and immigration restrictions for foreign students. The EDB has also introduced various measures to support the development of the self-financing post-secondary sector; these include grant of land at nominal premium, interest-free start-up loans, quality assurance subsidies, an enhancement and start-up grant for programmes that meet market needs but require high start-up costs, an HKD$3.52 billion (about USD$450 million) self-financing post-secondary education fund to provide scholarships to outstanding students and support projects to enhance teaching and learning quality, as well as various subsidies for students of self-financing post-secondary programmes.

In 2014, the EDB collaborated with the European Commission to conduct a comparability study of the HKQF and European Qualifications Framework (EQF) with a view to understand and compare the level-to-level relationship between the two. The major objectives of the comparability study were to promote better understanding of the qualifications offered by the HKQF and by European countries associated with the EQF, and to facilitate mobility of learners and labour.

Over the years, the EDB and QFS have also signed memorandums of understanding (MoU) with overseas QF authorities including the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP), the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the Thailand Professional Qualifications Institute (TPQI), to strengthen international networks and explore further the possibilities for collaboration with overseas partners in matters of mutual benefits and interests. The EDB and the Department of Education of Guangdong Province signed a letter of intent in 2019 to strengthen collaboration on QF development between the two places.

Important lessons and future plans

The EDB will strengthen and drive HKQF development to recognize qualifications and provide young people with quality-assured pathways for further studies and career development. In particular, the HKQF will continue to provide a solid foundation to establish vocational and professional pathways to promote and develop VPET in Hong Kong SAR, PRC.

Abbreviations

AAVQ	Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications	MoUs	Memorandums of Understandings
ATS	Award Titles Scheme	NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer	QF	Qualifications Framework
CEF	Continuing Education Fund	QFS	Qualifications Framework Secretariat
CITAC	Cross-Industry Training Advisory Committee	QR	Qualifications Register
		RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
EDB	Education Bureau	SCQFP	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership
EQF	European Qualifications Framework		
HKCAAVQ	Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications	SCS	Specification of Competency Standards
		SGC	Specification of Generic Competencies
HKQF	Hong Kong Qualifications Framework	TPQI	Thailand Professional Qualifications Institute
HKSAR, PRC	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region	VPET	Vocational and Professional Education and Training
ITACs	Industry Training Advisory Committees		

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HUNGARY

Introduction and context

Employment rates of recent graduates (ISCED levels 3-8) increased in the last decade by 10.1 percentage points (85.6% against 81.6% in the EU in 2019). However, skill shortages are relatively high and despite labour market demand for highly skilled workers, participation in higher education is below the EU average. Recent changes in the financial management of universities aims to increase their autonomy and ease cooperation with the business sector for innovation (European Commission, 2019; 2020).

One challenge in the country has been the high percentage of 15-year-olds with low achievement in basic skills (reading, maths and science) coupled with strong performance gaps among pupils from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The results of learners in basic skills are close to the OECD average in 2018, but the proportion of low achievers increased in reading and science in recent years (OECD, 2019b)[533]. Early leaving from education and training is above the EU average (11.8%, against 10.2% in the EU in 2019), especially among learners from disadvantaged groups, particularly Roma, and in vocational education and training (VET).

Despite being associated with a high overall employment rate for recent graduates (ISCED 3 and 4) (82.6% against 75.9% in the EU, in 2019), the three-year practical-oriented VET track had high dropout rates and fewer opportunities in terms of progression routes in relation to the four-year VET programmes. A mid-term strategy to reform VET and reduce drop-outs was adopted in 2019; the new VET Act[534] reforms the content of VET programmes offered as of 2020-21. The vocational component of the *Technicum* programme, extended to five years, was strengthened to improve its labour market relevance. Three-year vocational school and

Technicum programmes initiate learners in basic vocational education (in the first one or two years) before they opt for specialised vocational training leading to an occupation (European Commission, 2020). An early warning signal system for drop-out risks is being introduced in IVET schools and adult education (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2020). After primary education, an optional transition year for low performers to improve basic skills needed for entry to VET is being mainstreamed (Cedefop ReferNet Hungary, 2020).

Participation of adults in lifelong learning is low, (5.8% against an EU average of 10.8% in 2019) especially for the unemployed; half of the adult population do not have the necessary level of digital skills.

A comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) for lifelong learning was adopted in 2012[535]. It encompasses State-recognised national qualifications acquired in general and higher education, vocational qualifications included in the national register of vocational qualifications (nationally referred to as register of vocational occupations) (*szakmajegyzék*, former OKJ)[536] and certain types of adult education certificates.

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533. https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/pisa-2018_en
534. Act No LXXX of 2019 (entering into force as of 1 January 2020). https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080. tv

535. So far, the following government decisions dealt with the development of the Hungarian qualifications framework: Government Decision No 2069/2008 (VI. 6); Government Decision No 1004/2011 (I.14); Government Decision No 1229/2012 (VII. 6); Act No129 of 2013; Government Decision No 1791/2013 (XI. 7); Government Decree No 139/2015; Government Decree No 266 of 2016; Government Decree No 407 of 2017; Government Decree No 407 of 2017; Government Decree No 12 of 2020 (repealing the Government Decree No 139/2015) on the implementation of the Act on VET: https://net.jogtar. hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2000012.kor
536. *Szakmajegyzék,* effective from 1 July 2020. https://www.nive.hu/Downloads/ Szakkepzesi_dokumentumok/Szakmajegyzek/ DL.php?f=Szakmajegyzek_319_2020_07_01_korm_ rend_20200701.xlsx;

The Hungarian qualifications framework (HuQF) was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2015.

Policy objectives

The main aims for development of the HuQF for lifelong learning are to provide a comprehensive framework that includes all state-recognised 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):

d. 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;
e. to strengthen the outcome-based approach in regulatory documents;
f. to strengthen quality assurance systems;
g. to recognise learning outcomes achieved in non-formal and informal settings;
h. to strengthen coordination of education and training policies and cooperation with stakeholders;
i. to orient better the design of new qualifications and education and training programmes, and revision of existing qualifications;
j. to provide better support to individual career choices, as well as career guidance and counselling systems;
k. to systematise information about qualifications and to make the system understandable to employers in a European context;
l. to improve the relevance of qualifications in the labour market.

The HuQF can also play an important role in supporting lifelong learning. Adult participation remains a challenge, especially among the unemployed and those without qualifications (Cedefop and National Office of VET and Adult Learning, 2019). 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. In IVET and adult education subsystems, improving the labour market relevance and international dimension of qualifications are among the priorities of the 2019 VET strategy. Recent

legislation[537] clearly defines learning outcomes as standards for curricula and introduces digital skills in vocational qualifications requirements (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2020; European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The HuQF has an eight-level structure and is viewed as a 'communication framework'. The level descriptors are defined in four categories: knowledge, skills, attitudes and autonomy/responsibility (Hungarian Education Authority, 2015). These are directly comparable with homologous categories in the EQF, except for the 'attitude' category (which includes emotional, cognitive and behavioural components in relation to the object of learning) which is not present as such in the EQF.

The focus on learning outcomes has been an important part of HuQF development and implementation, with the greatest support from qualifications developers and research studies in different education and training subsystems. First findings of the recently commissioned status report of the HuQF[538] suggest that the use of learning outcomes, although widespread in regulatory documents, varies among practitioners depending on their level of awareness and established pedagogical practices. Guides and handbooks on how to write and use learning outcomes, or on the development of qualifications or on curricula design, have been prepared for VET and HE providers by different institutions (such as Education Authority, Tempus Public Foundation, higher education institutions) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

In general education a reform of the national core curriculum initiated in 2017, aiming to incorporate the learning outcome-based approach, was finalised in early 2020[539]. New national framework curricula[540] define per subject learning outcomes in terms of

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537. VET Act No LXXX of 2019 (in force as of 1 January 2020): https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080.tv Government Decree No 12/2020 of 7 February 2020: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2000012.kor implementing the VET Act LXXX of 2019 (in force as of 1 January 2020): https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080.tv
538. At the time of drafting, the report is in the publishing process.
539. The new national core curriculum was published on 31 January 2020; see modified Governmental Decree 110/2012 (IV.4.): https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1200110.kor
540. Framework curricula: https://www.oktatas.hu/kozneveles/kerettantervek/2020_nat

content (knowledge), developmental goals to be achieved by the end of a learning cycle or thematic unit (skills), the attitude to learning and the ability of autonomous learning[541].

Vocational education and training was reformed in the last decade in terms of content, funding and governance with the aim of improving its attractiveness (Cedefop and National Office of VET and Adult Learning, 2019). Since September 2018, central governance of VET and adult learning has been under the Ministry for Innovation and Technology[542] to foster links with the labour market. VET qualifications documents have included HuQF levels since 2019. The VET Act LXXX of 2019[543] reformed the national register of vocational qualifications (nationally referred to as register of vocational occupations)[544] which includes a reduced number of qualifications giving holders the right to perform a wide range of activities in a specified occupation/sector. New IVET curricula have been introduced in school-based VET as of 2020-21[545]. The development of HuQF level descriptors (particularly skills, responsibility and autonomy) reflects an increased focus on transversal competences and digital skills. In some VET programmes, learners acquire a partial qualification defined in the qualification standards of the full qualification listed in the register.

Learning outcomes have appeared in higher education qualifications requirements through regulatory measures and acts. The learning requirements and outcomes for qualifications listed in the higher education qualifications register were defined according to QF-EHEA in 2006 and further modified in line with the HuQF level descriptors in August 2016[546]. Shifting to an outcomes-based approach using learning outcomes in designing programmes and learning modules is under implementation in higher education. A five-year higher education strategy (2016) aims to align higher education programmes better with labour market needs and introduce dual programmes[547]. In September 2019, higher education was placed under the responsibility of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology[548].

The learning-outcome approach is gradually spreading in adult education and training[549] regulated by government Decree 11/2020[550] and 12/2020[551]. Adult training programmes, which are correlated with HuQF/EQF levels on the basis of new requirements expressed in learning outcomes[552], are approved by the Ministry for Innovation and Technology responsible for VET and higher education and are publicly available online together with IVET curricula[553]. The aim is to provide a flexible training offer quickly adaptable to the needs of the

541. https://www.oktatas.hu/kozneveles/kerettantervek/2020_nat/bevezeto
542. https://kormany.hu/innovacios-es-technologiai-miniszterium
543. VET Act LXXX of 2019 into force as of 1 January: 2020https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080.tv See also the subsequent legislation:
Government Decree No 12/2020 of 7 February, 2020: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2000012.kor implementing the VET Act LXXX of 2019 and the 11/2020 Government Decree (in force as of 7 February 2020) on the implementation of Act on Adult Learning: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A2000011.KOR Act LXXVII of 2013 on adult training: http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1300077.TV
544. *Szakmajegyzék*, previously OKJ; effective from July 2020: https://www.nive.hu/Downloads/Szakkepzesi_dokumentumok/Szakmajegyzek/DL.php?f=Szakmajegyzek_319_2020_07_01_korm_rend_20200701.xlsx
545. Programme requirements (*Képzési és Kimeneti Követelmények – KKK*) and curricula (*programtantervek, PTT*) https://szakkepzes.ikk.hu/kkk-ptt KKK replace the former VET framework curricula linked to OKJ qualifications. The requirements, the curricula (80-85%) and the local curriculum (15-20%) replace the previous content standards laid down in the vocational and examination requirements (*szakmai és vizsgakövetelmények* -SZVK).

546. 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 the Human Resources on the common requirements for teacher training and educational and outcome requirements for teacher training programmes.
547. https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/download/c/9c/e0000/Fokozatvaltas _Felsooktatasban_HONLAPRA.PDF
548. National reforms in higher education: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-higher-education-29_en [accessed 7.7.2020].
549. In the national context, adult education refers to school-based programmes for adults; adult training to programmes delivered outside schools to acquire a vocational qualification, as well as other specialised training, company training, etc).
550. Government Decree 11/2020 (in force as of 7 February 2020) of the implementation on Act on adult learning: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A2000011.KOR
Act LXXVII of 2013 on adult training: http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1300077.TV
VET Act No LXXX of 2019 (in force as of 1 January 2020): https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080.tv
551. Government Decree 12/2020 (II. 7) implementing provisions of the 2019 VET Act LXXX: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2000012.kor
VET Act No LXXX of 2019 (in force as of 1 January 2020): https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080.tv
552. https://szakkepesites.ikk.hu/
553. The Innovative Support Centre (*Innovatív Képzéstámogató Központ,* IKK) supports the implementation of the VET Act LXXX of 2019; it manages online both IVET curricula (https://szakkepesites.ikk.hu/) and adult training programme requirements (https://szakkepesites.ikk.hu/)

sectors and opening up the possibility to take up an exam and acquire a vocational qualification[554].

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

A comprehensive national qualification framework (NQF) for lifelong learning was adopted by the Government Decision 1229/2012[555]; it regulated the development phase of the HuQF. However, the full legislative integration of the HuQF has not yet been achieved: at subsystem level, different acts, government and ministerial decrees regulate certain details or refer, for example, to qualifications levels. To become fully operational, some important elements of maintenance, operational functioning and further development of HuQF are to be established, which would include, for example, rules on levelling and including qualifications in HuQF or quality assurance issues (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Two ministries have the overall responsibility for developing and implementing the HuQF and initiating related legislation: the Ministry of Human Resources, responsible for general education, and the Ministry for Innovation and Technology, responsible for higher education (and for the registry of qualifications obtainable in higher education)[556] and IVET qualifications standards[557]. Other ministries have responsibilities for the standards and regulations of qualifications for the sectors they oversee[558]. On a day-to-day basis, the NQF secretariat (also EQF NCP) is entrusted with functions and tasks related to HuQF; EQF NCP is integrated in the organisation of the Education

Authority as part of its Unit for International Relations. The Education Authority[559], an agency of the Ministry of Human Resources, manages the national systems of assessment in general education and the secondary school leaving exam[560]; it provides professional and secretariat support to the HuQF interministerial task force and also runs the HuQF qualifications database.[561] It currently links to and includes qualifications available in the HE and VET subsystem qualifications registers and one qualification in general education (upper secondary school leaving exam, *matura*).

The National Office of VET and Adult Learning (NOVETAL)[562] supervised by the Ministry for Innovation and Technology, ensures coordination and implementation of national VET and adult learning policies and qualification and curricula development in the VET institutions[563]. 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 adult education sector, following the VET reform introduced in 2019[564] is undergoing changes to be aligned to the new assessment and qualification standards.

The stakeholder role in the daily running of HuQF implementation has been limited to participation in an HuQF inter-ministerial task force[565] and other sector-specific committees (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). The Act CXCII[566] and the VET Act LXXX 2019[567] set up sector skills councils[568],

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554. Vocational examinations are detached from the training route (IVET or adult training programmes). The VET reform introduced accredited examination centres to be gradually established by 2025; currently VET schools have been organising vocational examinations for IVET qualifications (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2020).

555. Government Decision No 1229 of 2012 on the Hungarian national qualifications framework: http://njt.hu/cgi_bin/njt_doc.cgi?docid=151503.251504

556. https://www.felvi.hu/felveteli/szakok_kepzesek/szakleirasok/!Szakleirasok/ index.php/szakterulet

557. In the healthcare and artistic sector, the Ministry of Innovation and Technology and the Ministry of Human resources are in charge of the respective framework curricula under their responsibility; qualifications are correlated with HUQF/EQF levels.

558. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture is in charge for its own qualifications and curricula: agriculture technician: https://api.ikk.hu/storage/uploads/files/kkk_mezogazdasag_mezogazdasagi_tech_2020pdf-1589887068502.pdf

In the healthcare sector and the artistic sector programme curricula are jointly managed by the two ministries, are correlated with HuQF/EQF levels and listed in the HuQF database.

559. *Oktatási Hivatal:* https://www.oktatas.hu/

560. General upper secondary school leaving certificate (gimnáziumi záróbizonyítvány) Cedefop; National Office of VET and Adult Learning, 2019.

561. https://www.magyarkepesites.hu/, in English: https://www.hungarianqualification.eu/

562. https://www.nive.hu/

563. NOVETAL coordinates the development of programme requirements in IVET as well as textbooks and other teaching material.

564. VET Act LXXX of 2019: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080.tv, into force as of 1 January 2020.

565. The task force includes different national bodies and the major stakeholder organisations and bodies: all ministries and the relevant national institutions involved in NQF implementation; national councils at different sectors of the education systems and education sub-sectoral committees; quality assurance bodies; national economic chambers and stakeholder associations; and other national bodies. See Hungarian Authority (2015), p. 104. https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/HuQF_referencing_report.pdf

566. This act came into force in 2018 and aims at supporting practical training in dual VET programmes. https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1700192.TV&timeshift=fffffff4&txtreferer=00000001.TXT

567. VET Act LXXX of 2019 into force as of 1 January 2020. https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080.tv

568. Agazati készségtanács: https://akt.mkik.hu/

where employers are represented by at least 51%, to align VET curricula with labour market needs by making proposals to inform decision-making[569]. Skills councils took over the responsibilities of the national VET qualification board and are coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce, chamber of agriculture in some sectors (Cedefop; National Office of VET and Adult Learning, 2019) and are responsible for the development of adult training programme requirements.

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. In general education[570] quality assurance is built on the processes of accreditation, authorisation, registration, control and evaluation. The Education Authority and the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (*Magyar Akkreditációs Bizottság*)[571] support the minister responsible for higher education in higher education monitoring and external evaluation[572]. The government decree Nr.12/2020[573] introduces accredited examination centres in VET by 2025. Certified by the National Accreditation Office (*Nemzeti Akkreditációs Hivatal*), they should run the final vocational examinations for VET qualifications. The Innovative Training Support Centre (IKK), established to support the implementation of the 2019 VET Act[574], organises vocational examinations in the sectors/fields of studies where no accreditation centre is in place.

The HuQF provides the opportunity for dialogue between various education and training subsystems and institutions and between education and labour market.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[575]

The legal frameworks governing VET, higher education and adult education allow for validation and recognition of prior learning. National strategies[576] set validation as a clear objective, but without an overall validation policy and procedure. Education institutions tend to operate validation autonomously in the framework of their given legal environment. Validation practice is limited and fragmented, while essential elements (strategic goals, funding, stakeholder participation, quality assurance, preparation for participants) are missing. In each education sector, validation is developed through one-off projects.

In adult training, matching previously acquired competences with training standards, evaluation (mostly test) and exemption from a given part of the training programme are steps of the recognition procedure. The Adult Training Act[577] established prior learning assessment and recognition as an individual right. Subsequent amendments[578] made the assessment of prior learning an obligation in vocational education and language training but did not manage to ease the application process nor regulate the procedure of the assessment.

Regulation of the VET examination system has been 'open' to validation since 1993[579], making it possible for applicants to take an examination without entering a formal VET programme, though this option is not much used.

The shift to a learning-outcomes approach supports the implementation of validation in Hungary. From 2020/21, formal VET qualifications are restructured around job activities in a sector/occupation,

569. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/hungary-sectoral-skills-councils-linking-quality-vet-jobs
570. Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1100190.tv
571. https://www.mab.hu/en/home-page/#about
572. Shifting the responsibility for higher education to the Minister for Innovation and Technology has not affected the mechanisms of quality assurance and external quality assessment of higher education.
573. Implementing provisions of the 2019 VET Act LXXX: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2000012.kor
574. *Innovatív Képzéstámogató Központ* (IKK): https://ikk.hu/ VET Act LXXX of 2019: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080.tv

575. This section draws mainly on input from Tót, É. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Hungary.*
576. The lifelong learning strategy 2014-20, the mid-term strategy against early school leaving and the social catching-up strategy 2011-20.
577. Act LXXVII of 2013 on adult training. http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1300077.TV
578. The ACT CXCII of 2017 amending the acts on education, adult training and related issues: https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1700192.TV
579. Act CLXXXVII of 2011 on VET. http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/getdoc2.cgi?dbnum=1&docid=A1100187.TV

transversal competences and digital skills[580]. In adult training, new programme requirements (*programkövetelmények*)[581] are being developed for qualifications that are not regulated by law. In adult training, assessment of prior learning (competence) is compulsory.

Further NQF development and implementation is expected to support validation because the framework is open to include 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.

NQF implementation and impact

The HuQF was formally adopted by Government Decision No 1229/2012 and undergoing activation. It encompasses State-recognised national qualifications acquired in general education (primary school and secondary education, *matura*), higher education qualifications[582] (BA/BSc, MA/MSc and PhD, postgraduate specialisation training) and vocational qualifications included in the national register of vocational qualifications.

The former classification of adult training programmes ceased to exist[583]. The amended Adult Training Act[584] made a distinction only on whether adult training providers have to authorise or only declare their activity. To be authorised, programmes should follow new requirements expressed in

learning outcomes and correlated with HuQF/EQF levels; after completion of the programme and passing a final vocational examination[585] learners can acquire a vocational qualification.

HuQF developments were closely linked to the legal provisions in all subsystems of education and training: VET law (2011)[586] and amendments, law on general education (2011)[587], Act on Adult Learning (2013)[588] and amended law on higher education (2011)[589].

General education qualifications (regulated by the Act CXC of 2011) 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 bridge programme[590]. With the exception of the certificate for upper secondary school leaving examination, *matura* (HuQF level 4), the HuQF/EQF levels are not indicated on certificates or diplomas of general education. This is also the only qualification from general education that is included in the HuQF qualifications database.

In VET, using HuQF/EQF levels is regulated by law[591]; both levels are included in new certificates. Qualifications from higher education were also assigned to HuQF/EQF levels. A 2015 decree[592]

580. Following the new VET Act No LXXX of 2019 (entering into force as of 1 January 2020) https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080.tv, formal IVET qualifications are listed in the newly revised national register of vocational qualifications (nationally referred to as register of vocational occupations, *szakmajegyzék*), nationally referred to as register of vocational occupations, effective from 1 July 2020 https://www.nive.hu/Downloads/Szakkepzesi_dokumentumok/Szakmajegyzek/DL.php?f=Szakmajegyzek_319_2020_07_01_korm_rend_20200701.xlsx;

581. Regulated by government Decree 11/2020 (in force as of 7 February, 2020) on the implementation of Act LXXVII of 2013 on adult learning: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A2000011.KOR; and by Government Decree 12/2020 (II. 7) implementing provisions of the 2019 VET Act LXXX: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2000012.kor

582. Government Decree No 139/2015 on the register of qualifications acquired in higher education. Short-cycle qualifications at level 5 are included in the higher education register.

583. Delivering State-recognised vocational qualification in the OKJ register (type A), type B vocational certificates, foreign language courses certificates (type C) and type D support training (e.g. catch-up programmes, general competence development training, supported workplace training).

584. Government Decree 11/2020 (in force as of 7 February 2020) on the implementation of Act LXXVII of 2013 on adult learning: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A2000011.KOR

585. In accredited examination centres to be gradually established by 2025; the Innovative Support Centre (IKK) shall run such exams in the sectors for which no accredited examination centre is established.

586. Act CLXXXVII of 2011 on VET http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/getdoc2.cgi?dbnum=1&docid=A1100187.TV. VET Act LXXX of 2019 https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080.tv, into force as of 1 January 2020

587. Act CXC of 2011 on national public education.

588. Act LXXVII of 2013 on adult training. http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1300077.TV. Government Decree No 11/2020 (in force as of 7.2.20) of the implementation on Act on Adult Learning: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A2000011.KOR

589. Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education. http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1100204.TV

590. Bridge programmes offered as of 2020-21 are a basic competences development programme (*Dobbantó*) for young people at risk of dropping out or early leavers to remain/return in education followed by a 6 to 24 months school workshop programme (*Műhelyiskola*) available to those without basic education (or having completed the *Dobbantó* programme) to acquire a partial qualification and continue in upper secondary vocational education.

591. Government Decree No 12/2020 (II. 7) implementing provisions of the 2019 VET Act LXXX: https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2000012.kor; VET Act No LXXX of 2019 (in force as of 1 January 2020): https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1900080.tv

592. Government Decree No 87/2015. (IV.9) on the execution of certain provisions of Act CCIV of 2011 on national higher education.

made it compulsory to indicate HuQF and EQF levels in diplomas. All established higher education qualifications standards refer to HuQF as reference point. Higher education qualifications and diplomas (bachelor, master, and post-graduate specialisations) include both HuQF and EQF levels. These are also indicated on Europass documents (VET certificate and HE diploma supplements).

For future stages of development, the framework is open to linking qualifications acquired in non-formal settings, training regulated by the Adult training Act, international qualifications and other certificates awarded by private providers.

For international information, comparison and for wider public use an open access online HuQF qualifications database has been set, indicating HuQF/EQF levels[593]. It currently includes State-regulated qualifications from VET and HE and the certificate for upper secondary school leaving examination, *matura* (*érettségi bizonyítvány*). The information comes from two registers: the national vocational qualifications register, OKJ[594] and the higher education qualifications register[595] (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2020).

The national contact point (NCP) runs different activities to raise awareness about the HuQF and learning-outcomes approach. It has recently commissioned a group of experts to analyse HuQF implementation in different education subsystems; a status report on overall implementation of the HuQF is expected. First findings suggest that the use of learning outcomes, although widespread in regulatory documents, varies among practitioners depending on their level of awareness and established pedagogical practices. Integration of the HuQF in the national legislation system is not well balanced, covering formal qualifications, but having very limited influence in developing qualifications awarded outside formal education and training.

Referencing to the EQF

The Hungarian qualifications framework was referenced to the EQF and self-certified to the QH-EHEA in 2015[596]. Since its establishment, the national qualification system has been implemented in a moderate pace, particularly in VET with the inclusion of new qualifications; this suggests that an updated referencing report is not considered in the near future (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Important lessons and future plans

The HuQF has been designed as an overarching framework for lifelong learning aiming to ease communication between education subsystems and various stakeholders. So far, balanced legislative integration of HuQF in the national qualification system is only partially achieved. The HuQF was established by a government decision, while implementation among the three education subsystems (VET, higher education, general education) is fragmented (act, government decree, ministerial decree) and cooperation across these remains a challenge.

Streamlining and formalising the governance, 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 of different actors 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) including experts and practitioners in the formal education system. Awareness among guidance practitioners and employment services is underdeveloped; supporting further implementation of the HuQF by raising the level of awareness in all formal education subsystems among practitioners is essential (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020.

Following the work on HuQF development and on the referencing process, use of learning outcomes and level descriptors in formal VET qualifications is being implemented as of 2020-21; HuQF development work in the non-formal adult training and related work on validation of prior learning in non-formal training is at initial stages.

593. https://www.magyarkepesites.hu/ In English:https://www.hungarianqualification.eu/
594. https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=297
595. Available at: https://www.felvi.hu/felveteli/szakok_kepzesek/szakleirasok/!Szakleirasok/index.php/szakterulet OKJ qualifications will be gradually replaced by new types of formal VET qualifications aligned to occupational activities in the sectors; respective vocational education and training programmes are running in a phasing in and phasing out system as of 2020/21.
596. The report is available at: https://europa.eu/europass/en/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf

Table 40. Hungarian qualifications framework (HuQF)

HUQF LEVELS	TYPES OF QUALIFICATION	EQF LEVELS
8	PhD/DLA (doctor of liberal arts) (*Doktori fokozat*)	8
7	Master degree (MA/MSc) (*Mesterfokozat*)	7
	Advanced postgraduate qualifications (*Felsőfokú szakirányú továbbképzés*)– having as entry requirement a MA/MSc degree	
6	Bachelor degree (BA/BSc) (*Alapfokozat*)	6
	Advanced VET qualifications (*Felsőfokú végzettséghez kötött szakképesítés*) – having as entry requirement a BA/BSc degree	
	Advanced postgraduate qualifications (entry requirement is BA/BSc degree) (*Felsőfokú szakirányú továbbképzés*) – having as entry requirement a BA/BSc degree)	
5	Postsecondary full and add-on* VET qualifications (Érettségire épülő *szakirányú OKJ szakképesítés*) – having as entry requirement the upper secondary school leaving examination	5
	Higher Education Short Cycle qualification *(felsőfokú szakképzettség)* –having as entry requirement specific vocational qualifications	
4	Certificate for upper secondary school leaving examination, matura (*érettségi bizonyítvány*)	4
	General upper secondary school leaving certificate (*gimnáziumi záróbizonyítvány*)	
	Vocational grammar school leaving certificate (*szakgimnáziumi záróbizonyítvány*)	
	Vocational secondary school leaving certificate (*szakközépiskolai záróbizonyítvány*)	
	Full/add-on* VET qualification of vocational secondary schools (*szakiskolában megszerezhető teljes vagy ráépüléses OKJ szakképesítés*)	
	Partial**/full VET qualification of vocational grammar schools (*szakgimnáziumban megszerezhető rész- vagy teljes OKJ szakképesítés*)	
3	Leaving certificate and VET qualification (vocational schools for SEN students) (*Speciális szakiskolai záróbizonyítvány és OKJ szakképesítés*)	3
	Lower secondary and secondary*** level partial**, full and add-on* VET qualifications (*Alapfokú* és *középfokú teljes, rész- és ráépüléses OKJ szakképesítés*)	
2	Primary (general) school leaving qualification (*általános iskolai záróbizonyítvány*) – primary level educational attainment, eight years	2
	Leaving certificate of skills development (vocational schools for SEN students) eight years) (*Speciális készségfejlesztő szakiskolai bizonyítvány*)	
	Partial** VET qualification after Vocational Bridge Programme (*Híd program tanúsítvány*)	
1	Leaving certificate after six grades of primary school (6. *osztályos általános iskolai bizonyítvány*) for students who move to general secondary schools covering grades 7 to 12	1

*   Add-on OKJ 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 qualificaton. 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, 2020.

Abbreviations

IVET	initial education and training	NCP	national contact point
EQF	European qualifications framework	NVQR	national vocational qualifications
HuQF	Hungarian qualifications framework		register
VET	vocational education and training	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework of the
NQF	national qualifications framework		European higher education area

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ICELAND

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 (52.8% in 2019) and the employment rate of recent graduates is one of the highest in Europe (91.5% in 2019). Participation in adult learning also stands out, being only exceeded by Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland. Early school leaving has decreased but is still a challenge. The proportion of early leavers from education and training in 2019 was 17.9% (24.5% for males and 10.8% for females). This is the highest in the EU and EFTA countries. The percentage of underachievers in reading, mathematics and science in PISA (OECD, 2018) has improved in mathematics and science but is still high in all disciplines (26.4%, 20.7%, 25.0% respectively) (European Commission, 2020).

The youth welfare study *Youth in Iceland – upper secondary schools*[597] shows that about half of the students in Iceland's upper secondary schools believe that vocational education and training (VET) would be a more suitable option than general education. However, this does not translate into practical decisions, given that 85% of those who enter upper secondary education (age 15) select general education. Most learners would like their studies to have more electives. More specifically, around 66% of upper secondary, general education learners would be interested in taking more VET courses, which may suggest that an even greater proportion of students are interested in finding out whether VET could be suitable for them.

Iceland has been trying to tackle a shortage of teaching staff since 2015 when teaching professionals received a substantial salary increase, which attracted more young people to

the profession. Following the introduction of new measures, such as making the final year of study a salaried training period and offering special scholarships, applications for new places in teacher education in the first academic semester of 2019 increased substantially (45%).

Iceland has developed a national framework – the Icelandic national 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 reforms of the Icelandic education system, including changes in legislation and education policy. The focus on the learning outcomes principle and the national qualifications levels has been central to these changes. A first version of the ISQF was referenced to the EQF in 2013.

Policy objectives

The main objective of the ISQF, adopted in October 2016, is to make sure that all formally certified education and training is referenced to an 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. The function and the policy objectives, however, have not been changed. The ISQF is a lifelong learning framework and aims to make the pathways through the education system clearer, to increase student mobility within the country and between countries, and to support further learning.

Levels and use of learning outcomes

The ISQF consists of seven qualification levels, with two sublevels at levels 5 and 6 featuring different descriptors. Level 5.2 comprises bachelor's degree and a short cycle diploma degree is included at

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597. Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analyses (ICSRA), 2018. See : https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/iceland-vet-attractiveness-challenge-policy-makers

level 5.1. At level 6 a distinction is made between master and candidatus degrees with a research component at level 6.2 and degrees based mainly on courses at level 6.1. The former give access to doctoral studies, the latter usually not. There is no descriptor or qualification linked to EQF level 1. The framework has a clear division between levels 1 to 4 and levels 5 to 7. The development of these two parts of the framework has partly taken place separately, responding to the EQF and Bologna processes respectively. The links between them, and the overall coordination between the ISQF and the framework for higher education, are still under discussion.

Level descriptors are presented in an integrated way[598]; they reflect knowledge, skills and competences and the importance attributed to key competences and transversal skills.

Study programmes and course descriptions at upper secondary and university levels are based on learning outcomes and linked to ISQF levels. Upper secondary schools are entrusted with great responsibility and enjoy much autonomy in developing study programmes and curricula both in general education and VET, using an approach combining learning outcomes, workload and credits[599]. Descriptions must be approved by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Directorate of Education[600] performs this approval on behalf of the Ministry. There has recently been an emphasis on approving the descriptions of study programmes within upper secondary education, and in this process special attention has been given to the link to the ISQF levels, which is one of the prerequisites for approval. All study programmes are due to be completed in the school year 2019/20, however the process might be delayed by the impact of Covid-19. All higher education institutions shall follow the Icelandic national qualifications

framework for higher education (ISQFHE), which describes the qualifications that graduates should master when they finish their studies on different levels. The ISQFHE also demands that each higher education institution describes the learning outcomes of each study programme and each course (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

There is currently no single act or decree issued specifically for the ISQF. The framework builds on, and is integrated in, a set of acts on education and training[601] based on the learning outcomes approach:
a. the Compulsory School Act No 91/2008, which offers the lowest level of certified training (hence level 1 in the ISQF covers both levels 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, which provides for a decentralised approach to designing study programmes and curricula;
c. the Higher Education Act No 63/2006, which 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, which covers training for people who do not have an education qualification at ISQF level 4 (EQF level 3).

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, 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 a Statement on mutual understanding for the ISQF was formally signed by all stakeholders in October 2016[602]. The new emphasis of the framework has contributed to dialogue and cooperation between education and training and labour market stakeholders. An example of this is the cooperation, between the Directorate of Education and the newly founded

598. https://www.government.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/frettatengt2016/Haefnirammi_A4_enska_anlogo.pdf

599. A credit is defined as the standard for the work effort of the students, whether their studies are vocational or academic, and whether they take place at school or elsewhere. It equals 18 to 24 hours of work. Each study programme is composed of a certain number of credits and assigned a level in the ISQF based on the expected learning outcomes. Study programmes with final learning outcomes at EQF level 4 are generally 150 to 240 credits. Within VET, the number of credits required for professional rights can vary from 120 credits at EQF level 3 (e.g. health care assistant), up to 290 credits at EQF level 4 (some journeyman's exams) and even further with additional VET studies at EQF level 5, such as study for master of craft, film direction, creative photography and health care assistants' specialisation in elderly care (Jónsson, 2019).

600. https://mms.is/directorate-education

601. Links to all these acts in English can be found at: https://www.government.is/publications /legislation/$LisasticSearch/Search/?SearchQuery=&Ministries= Ministry+of+Education+Science+ and+Culture&Themes= Education&ContentTypes=

602. https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/frettatengt2016/Haefnirammi-um-islenska-menntun.pdf

skills centre for tourism, on the future of education in this rapidly growing sector. In this work, there has been a great emphasis on using the ISQF as a common communication tool when working with different stakeholders. The Directorate of Education has supported the centre in developing educational offers and has participated in wide-ranging policy-making on the development of educational opportunities for the tourist industry. The product of this work can be found in the report *Hæfni er grunnur að gæðum*[603].

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture coordinates developments of the ISQF. In 2018, day-to-day responsibilities for the implementation of the framework were transferred from the Icelandic Centre for Research (Rannís) to the Directorate of Education, which is also tasked with certifying provision in upper secondary and adult education. The Directorate of Education is responsible for qualifications up to ISQF level 4 (EQF level 5). All higher education institutions are accredited by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and are responsible for ISQF levels 5, 6 and 7 (EQF levels 6, 7 and 8) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[604]

Validation of prior learning (VPL) in Iceland is a systematic process whereby all knowledge and competences an individual has gained through various activities – such as work experience, work-related learning, non-formal and informal learning, formal learning, social activities and family life – are formally documented and validated. The Education and Training Service Centre (ECTS)[605] works according to contract with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture to ensure quality and to guarantee that approved methodology for validation is implemented by providing counselling to partners, coordinating training for validation staff and publishing guidelines and checklists. VPL

projects are conducted in cooperation with lifelong learning centres distributed around the country.

There is a legal framework on VPL in Iceland and its practices are based on a regulation introduced in 2011[606].

A national strategy for validating prior learning is in place for people with low levels of education and qualifications.

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 subjects at upper secondary level and formal adult education where a system of credit-based units is in place. The process focuses on assessing competences using these credit-based units. Assessment results are documented, and credit units registered 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.

The methodology of validation of prior learning is not generally used at university level, but some universities do, to some extent, consider work experience of candidates during intake procedures. A committee has been working on developing VPL in higher education; it presented its findings in a report in June 2018[607]. The committee's proposals on the development of VPL in higher education include better coordination of laws and regulations and cooperation between faculties. It also suggests that an independent third party, such as ETSC, could conduct the validation.

Validation against standards in specific jobs has not been linked to a credit system or modularised structure of qualifications. However, standards have been developed for specific jobs for validation purposes. The standards used are based on a formal process linking competences to jobs through competence analysis conducted with main stakeholders. This has proven to be successful in the service and tourism sectors, for example.

603. Haukur Harðarson et al. (2019) *Hæfni er grunnur að gæðum* [*Competence is the basis of quality*] (in Icelandic). https://haefni.is/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Haefni_er_grunnur_ad-gaedum_VEFUR.pdf
   The discussion on the Icelandic qualification framework is very noticeable in the report and can be found on pages 18 and 23.
604. This section draws mainly on input from: Lárusdóttir, F.M. (2019*). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Iceland.* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Iceland.pdf
605. Education and Training Service Centre: http://www.frae.is/um-okkur/about-us/

606. Regulation on further education (in Icelandic): https://www.reglugerd.is/reglugerdir/allar/nr/1163-2011
607. Eyþórsdóttir I.D. et al. (2018). Real skills assessment at university level: results of a working group on real skills assessment at the university level (in Icelandic): http://frae.is/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Raunf%C3%A6rnimat-%C3%A1-h%C3%A1sk%C3%B3lastigi-ni%C3%B0urst%C3%B6%C3%B0ur-vinnuh%C3%B3ps.pdf

Iceland, together with Belgium (FL), Ireland and Norway, took part in the Erasmus KA3 project *VISKA* (visible skills for adults)[608]. The project ran from March 2017 to February 2020 and was managed and coordinated by Skills Norway[609]. VISKA addressed the need to make the skills of low-skilled adults, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees more visible, to enhance their employability, improve their access to education and training offers and support active engagement in society. In Iceland the project was coordinated by ETSC and the education centre IÐAN on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The aim of VISKA in Iceland was to address the challenge linked to the lack of access and awareness of VPL services for migrants, mainly Polish, the largest cohort of migrants in the country.

The trials carried out showed that language learning in general and the lack of language support in educational pathways and career development was a main challenge. In this respect, the Icelandic project recommends that language barriers should be addressed, such as through access to professional interpreters. The Icelandic project further concludes that VISKA findings and recommendations should be part of the revised Parliamentary action plan for 2020-24.

NQF implementation and impact

The ISQF is a comprehensive lifelong learning framework covering general education, vocational education and training and higher education. It has reached activation stage. Implementation structures are in place; the main working methods and instruments are being put in place and the framework is gradually playing a role in improving transparency and comparability of qualifications at national and international level and supporting reform of education and training systems at national level.

The focus on implementing the ISQF has moved in recent years towards non-formal adult education. Quality criteria for curricula in adult education, and an accreditation process that includes the levelling of adult education qualifications to the ISQF, have been developed since 2016 and curricula have been linked to the ISQF in the accreditation process. A discussion on whether to indicate the NQF/EQF levels on certificates in adult education is ongoing.

Menntabrunur, the Icelandic database on education, was intended to be the national database but was

never fully completed. Negotiations concerning another website, *Næsta skref*, which can take over the role, are ongoing[610].

Until now the focus has been on inclusion of qualifications at levels 2-5 in the ISQF, however there is a possibility that more levels will be presented on the new website. The link between the Icelandic qualifications and the Europass will be ensured.

NQF/EQF levels are being included in some qualifications issued in upper secondary vocational education and for the Europass certificate. NQF/ EQF levels are included in diplomas and Europass supplements in higher education.

Education and training providers, practitioners in guidance, quality assurance and recognition bodies are fully aware of the ISQF and use it in their work. The employment service is also fully aware of the ISQF as all labour market stakeholders took part in developing and revising the framework. The ISQF is less familiar to end users like workers, jobseekers, learners and students if they have not been involved in development or use of the framework. The learning outcomes have played an important role in providing transparency of standards and promoting a more open mindset towards validation of non-formal and informal learning and given stakeholders a common ground for discussions.

The Directorate of Education has worked closely with education providers to ensure that all new education offers are referenced to a relevant qualification level and lead the work of developing an online manual/guidebook for educational providers (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Referencing to the EQF

The first version of the Icelandic NQF was referenced to the EQF in December 2013; the referencing report included the self-certification report to the QF-EHEA. It is not foreseen that Iceland will present an updated reference report to the EQF AG. The ISQF remains comprised of seven levels; in 2016, changes were made that entail division of level 5 and 6 into two sublevels each, i.e. 5.1/5.2 and 6.1/6.2 respectively.

608. http://www.viskaproject.eu
609. https://www.kompetansenorge.no/english/

610. https://naestaskref.is/

Important lessons and future plans

The Statement on mutual understanding of the Icelandic national qualifications framework signed in 2016 by all stakeholders has proved to be a great success; it has created a common understanding of the NQF and is a vital part of the implementation. It was signed by parties from the labour market and all parts of education and training in Iceland. Future plans are to finish implementation and increase public awareness of the NQF and EQF. This will also be the main challenge, as well as to decrease barriers between formal and non-formal education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Iceland's toughest tradesman is a competition organised by non-government stakeholders, complementing efforts by national education authorities and the industry to promote VET among young learners. It is increasingly popular among the general public. The competition demonstrates that increasing the attractiveness of VET has become a collective effort in Iceland, with individual initiatives joining and complementing those of the State and social partners[611].

During the Covid-19 outbreak, organising distance learning solutions for VET programmes has been more challenging than doing so for general education. Many learners have experienced difficulties remaining active in isolation from fellow learners or workmates. It is currently difficult to estimate the dropout rate but data on learner engagement in some study programmes raise reasonable concerns. Iceland is already highly exposed to digitalisation, but some schools have come much further than others using distance learning solutions. It is expected that experiences from this period will have a digital impact on future teaching practices[612].

Table 41. Icelandic qualifications framework (ISQF)

ISQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES		EQF LEVELS
7	Doctoral degree (*Doktorspróf*)		8
6.2	Master and candidatus degree (*Meistarapróf*)		7
6.1	Degree at master level but without a research report (*Próf á meistarastigi*)		
5.2	Bachelor degree (*Bakkalárpróf*)		6
5.1	Diploma degree (short cycle) (*Diplómapróf*)		
4	Vocational examination for professional rights – level 4 (*Próf til starfsréttinda á fjórða þrepi*) / Additional studies of vocational subjects (*Viðbótarnám á framhaldsskólastigi*)		5
3	Matriculation examination (*Stúdentspróf*) Other final examinations (*Önnur lokapróf*)	Vocational examination for professional rights – level 3 (*Réttindapróf í starfsmenntun*)	4
2	Upper secondary school leaving certificate (*Framhaldsskólapróf*) Other final examinations (Önnur *lokapróf*)	Vocational qualification for professional rights (*Próf til starfsréttinda á* öðru þrepi)	3
1	Compulsory school final examinations (*Grunnskólapróf*) Special education programmes (*Nám fyrir nemendur á starfsbraut*)		2

Source: The Directorate of Education, 2020 (email communication).

611. ReferNet Iceland (2020). Cedefop news; article published on 24.6.2020. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/iceland-competition-enhances-vet-attractiveness

612. ReferNet Iceland (2020). National news on VET; article published on 17.6.2020. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/iceland-responses-covid-19-outbreak

Main sources of information

The Directorate of Education acts as EQF NCP: https://mms.is/directorate-education

ISQF/EQF website: www.haefnirammi.is

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture: https://www.government.is/topics/education/

A new qualifications database "Næsta skref" is under development: https://naestaskref.is

Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2014). *Reference report of the Icelandic qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework of lifelong learning:* https://europa.eu/europass/en/compare-qualifications

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INDIA

Introduction and context

India, soon to be the world's most populated country, is currently experiencing a demographic transformation. However, reaping the benefits of this opportunity requires education, training and quality job creation for the 12 million young people who will join the labour market each year. Approximately 70 million additional individuals of working age (15-59 years) are expected to enter the country's labour force by 2023 – using the same estimation model, the total workforce will then include approximately 404.15 million people. This will include 59 million youth (individuals aged 15-30 years) according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) analysis of data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-2018. Strategies for reskilling and increasing the skills of the current workforce, as well as formal recognition of informally acquired skills, will also have to be reinforced (WEF, 2019).

India is also on a high growth trajectory. However, rapid growth has not translated into better outcomes in the labour market, especially for a country that has the largest youth population in the world and is likely to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of work (FoW). Women have not benefited from the growth on par with men. A strikingly low 27.4 percent of women were in the workforce in 2015-2016, as opposed to 75.5 percent of men. Low pay remains a problem and average wage rates have increased at a slower pace than average labour productivity (as measured by GDP per worker). Living standards are heterogeneous due to significant interstate and inter-district variations as a result of growth disparity, inadequate employment opportunities, inequity in access to job opportunities, skills mismatch and other historical socio-economic cultural factors. This has increased employment migration, sometimes under unsafe and distressing conditions (ILO DWCP, 2018-2022).

The Indian lockdown due to the pandemic has left millions of workers unemployed, including migrants. These workers are mainly from rural areas and stay in India's megacities for most of the year, serving as day labourers, construction workers or domestic workers. India has five major megacities, with New Delhi as the largest (Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Chennai are the other four). Most of them stayed previously in factory dormitories, which have since closed down. Many workers have recently left the metropolitan areas, where the cost of living is high, to move back to their respective rural areas. This has created a lot of unemployment.

In the education and training sector, delivery has almost been completely halted due to the pandemic. Many ongoing TVET programmes have had to stop, as well as pre- and post-training services such as career guidance, assessment and job matching. The resulting delays in the acquisition of competences are already affecting the immediate and future careers of millions of learners and workers.

The recently approved National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) for the period 2020-2040 aims to provide quality education to achieve full human potential, develop an equitable and just society and promote national development. NEP 2020 addresses vocational education and training from as early as middle and secondary school, adult education and lifelong learning, and digitalization of training systems. A little over 280,000 secondary and higher secondary schools and more than 40,000 higher education institutions will be empowered to provide TVET during the coming decade, increasing its outreach and improving pathways to education. Among the fundamental principles that will guide the education system are **flexibility**, so that learners can choose their learning trajectories and programmes and thereby choose their own paths in life according to their talents and interests; and **permeability** between arts and sciences streams, between curricular and extra-curricular activities and between vocational and academic streams, to eliminate harmful hierarchies among and silos between different areas of learning (NEP, 2020).

Formal VET in India is mostly centre-based and offered at upper secondary level, either in the form of two-year vocational programmes taught in senior secondary schools or three-year basic diploma programmes taught in polytechnics or Industrial Training Institutes (ITI). Both channels lead to National Trade Certificates, intended to facilitate entry into the labour market. At post-secondary and tertiary levels, formal VET includes advanced diploma programmes taught in polytechnics, which last for 2-3 years. In practice, ITIs constitute the bulk of the formal VET supply, with 14,254 institutes (up from 11,847 in 2014–2015) and a capacity of 3.1 million learners in 2017–2018.

Policy objectives

Realizing the need to have a unified framework that covers both TVET and general education, the government's cabinet secretariat formed an inter-ministerial committee to develop a National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF). This new framework is implemented through the National Skills Qualification Committee (NSQC) and comprises both the National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) and the National Vocational Educational Qualifications Framework (NVEQF). More specifically, the functions of the NSQC are to:
- approve the National Occupational Standards (NOS), which determine the performance criteria, knowledge and skills required by a certain job role;
- approve the accreditation norms developed by the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) for training providers in the sector;
- prescribe guidelines to ensure that implementing agencies, including training providers, address the special needs of disadvantaged sections of the population, including persons with disabilities, members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and other disadvantaged groups, including women and girls;
- review and resolve any issues or disputes among ministries, departments and regulatory bodies regarding the alignment of courses to the NSQF or credit transfer;
- 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 transitional issues, including suitable mechanisms for recognizing and aligning

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 or discipline (e.g. should a progression link be established between a nursing qualification and a medical one?);
- determine progression pathways and decide how progression will take place (e.g. how much credit would be granted for movement from one level to the next and how can it be facilitated?);
- determine progression links between courses and certifications 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.

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 learners to develop competences, transit to the job market and acquire additional skills to upgrade their competences later on.

More specifically, the NSQF provides:
- recognition of skill proficiency and competences 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 skill development;
- partnership with industries and employers;
- a transparent, accountable and credible mechanism for skill development across sectors;
- increased potential for recognition of prior learning (RPL).

The objectives of the NSQF are to:
- accommodate the diversity of the Indian education and training systems;
- develop a set of qualifications for each level based on nationally-accepted outcomes;
- provide structure for the development and maintenance of progression pathways and access to qualifications;
- enable learners to move easily and readily between different education and training sectors

and between those sectors and the labour market;

- give individuals the 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 ten 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 1). 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 industry skill needs 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 industry skill needs. The NSQF also aims to include a range of qualifications currently provided by 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.

Table 42. NSQF level descriptors

LEVEL	WHAT IS EXPECTED	PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE	PROFESSIONAL SKILLS	CORE SKILLS	RESPONSIBILITY
Level 1	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
Level 2	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, can select and apply tools, assist in professional works with no variables, differentiates between good and bad quality	Receives and transmits 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
Level 3	Can carry out a routine and predictable job requiring a limited range of activities	Basic facts, processes and principles applied in trade of employment	Recalls and demonstrates practical skills, routines and repetition in a narrow range of application	Written and oral communication with minimum clarity, basic arithmetic and algebraic principles, personal banking, basic understanding of social and natural environment	Under close supervision. Some Responsibility for own work within a defined limit

LEVEL	WHAT IS EXPECTED	PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE	PROFESSIONAL SKILLS	CORE SKILLS	RESPONSIBILITY
Level 4	Can work in familiar, predictable, routine situations of clear choice	Factual knowledge of field of knowledge or study	Recalls and demonstrates practical skills, routines and repetitions in a narrow range of applications, uses appropriate rules and tools, uses quality concepts	Written or oral communication with clarity, basic arithmetic and algebraic principles, basic understanding of social, political and natural environment	Responsibility for own work and learning
Level 5	Has a well-developed skill with a clear choice of procedures in a 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 skills, understanding of social and political environment, some skills in collecting and organizing information, communication	Responsibility for own work and learning, limited responsibility for the work and learning of others
Level 6	Has a wide range of specialized technical skills, clarity of knowledge and practice in a 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 in data collecting and organizing information, ability to communicate	Responsibility for own work and learning and full responsibility for others' work and learning
Level 7	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
Level 8	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
Level 9	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
Level 10	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: Mishra (2013)

The NSQF aims to open up several entry and exit points between TVET and general education and to 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 its own role to play in its development, implementation and maintenance. The main stakeholders are:

- **The National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET)**, set up by executive order in 2018. NCVET is envisaged as an overarching regulator for all aspects of national skill development and vocational education. It merges the functions of the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) and the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT). In particular, the NCVET has the following functions:
  - o an autonomous body registered under the Societies Act, to rationalize skill development schemes of the Government of India;
  - o to anchor and implement the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF);
  - o to create an integrated Labour Market Information System (LMIS) and engage with states to plan their skill development and facilitate skills innovation.
- **National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)**, a public private partnership entity set up to promote and fund private training providers and establish Skill Development Centres. Funds to NSDC are received through the National Skill Development Fund (NSDF). The NSDC facilitates the appointment of Sector Skill Councils (SSCs), which are autonomous industry-led bodies. SSCs design Qualification Packs (QPs) and National Operation Standards (NOS). They also implement STAR (Standard, Training, Assessment and Reward) and Udaan schemes.
- **Sector Skills Councils (SSCs)** are industry-led national partnership organizations that bring together stakeholders, develop NOS and QPs for various job roles and align them with the NSQF. SSCs supplement the existing vocational training education system for the industry sector by ensuring workforce quantity and quality. In addition, SSCs provide input to central- and

state-level implementing agencies on curriculum package development, the capacity-building of institutions and training providers and skills assessment and certification. SSCs are licensed and regulated by the NSQC.
- **Central ministries** ensure that stakeholders align the programmes being offered by institutions/bodies under their aegis with the NSQF.
- **State governments** encourage institutions and bodies to align their learning programmes with the NSQF to facilitate greater learner mobility. State governments also ensure that they do not undermine the quality assurance associated with the NSQF, although allowances are made for regional variations.
- **Regulatory institutions** (e.g. the All India Council for Technical Education, University Grants Commission, school boards) define entry and exit competences and qualifications in terms of the NSQF levels to strengthen vertical progression in both general and vocational education. Regulatory and awarding bodies also ensure that courses, programmes, affiliation and accreditation systems are aligned with and conform to the NSQF.
- **Training providers and institutions** ensure that their courses and programmes align with NSQF levels.

Implementation of the NSQF

The NSQF in India was ratified on 27th December 2013, superseding all other frameworks, including the NVEQF released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The NSQF has a five-year implementation schedule (MSDE, 2013).

Once the NSQF reached its third anniversary (27.12.2016), the following stipulations were planned:
- Government funding would not be available for any training or educational programme or course which is not NSQF-compliant.
- All government-funded training and educational institutions should define eligibility criteria for admission to various courses using NSQF levels.
- The recruitment rules of the Government of India and PSUs of the central government should be amended to define eligibility criteria for all positions using NSQF levels. The State Governments and their PSUs should be encouraged to amend their recruitment rules accordingly.

Since its ratification, 2980 qualifications have been aligned. However, the understanding of

implementation and operationalization of NSQF is still evolving.

The NCVET 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 NSQC-approved qualifications and has been published online at www.nqr. gov.in. Further qualifications files are currently being brought before the NSQC for approval. NCVET follows a standard operating procedure for the NSQF alignment process, which includes qualification file sharing with relevant stakeholders.

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

As a competency- and outcomes-based qualification framework, 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, in which the 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 no evidentiary certificates an opportunity for personal or career development or credit towards other qualifications or learning programmes. The learning they have already achieved is thus connected 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 career prospects, create opportunities to upgrade 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 a key instrument to map existing skills in the informal or unregulated economy and integrate them in the formal economy and the formal training landscape. Skills recognition and certification initiatives will provide an important pathway for the 90 per cent of Indians who work in the so-called unorganized sector (NCEUS, 2009). However, the process of skills recognition in the informal economy must be supported by an RPL infrastructure that is affordable, reliable and efficient.

Referencing to regional frameworks

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 (SFFA) 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 NQF development/review in education and training, including national qualifications frameworks in technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and to develop links between NQFs 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 plans

Development and implementation of the monitoring and evaluation framework

NCVET is developing a new monitoring and evaluation framework and tools to allow awarding bodies, assessment agencies and training organizations to implement the new quality assurance framework for training and assessment.

Across India, many learners are taking part in Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes. Through these programmes, they develop the knowledge, skills and competence needed for jobs and future careers. Quality lies at the heart of effective VET programmes. Learners, employers and the public need to be assured that the training and the NSQF qualifications provided through VET programmes are of a high quality, regardless of where they are delivered and assessed.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Framework aims to improve the quality of all VET qualifications and learning programmes in India and to develop a quality culture within the VET ecosystem.

Development and implementation of Credit Transfer

NCVET will establish a credit rating system for transfer to enhance student and worker mobility in the formal education system and pave the way for lifelong learning.

Skill development efforts should meet the need of the industry and keep the learner at the centre. Skills training should be deemed as complementary to mainstream education instead of as an inferior alternative. This can be achieved by establishing equivalence and mobility between vocational education and general education. The National Education Policy 2020 also gives impetus to credit-based courses for holistic and multidisciplinary learning through courses and projects in community engagement, value-based education, opportunities for internships with local industry and research internships. The policy proposes to establish an 'Academic Bank of Credit' (ABC) which could digitally store the academic credits earned from recognized institutions so that the degrees can be awarded that take credits earned into account.

It is imperative to establish and formalize a system of credit accumulation and transfer within the skill development ecosystem, linked to academic education to ensure seamless mobility.

NSQF Qualification Standardization

NCVET will strengthen the standard operating procedures for the NSQF alignment process. While examining qualification files (QFs) in NCVET from external Awarding Bodies, issues related to nomenclature, notional hours and entry levels were identified. As a result, improvements will be made to existing QFs, both by NCVET and NSQC.

Abbreviations

ABC	Academic Bank of Credit	NVEQF	National Vocational Educational Qualifications Framework
FoW	Future of Work		
ILO	International Labour Organization	NVQF	National Vocational Qualifications Framework
MSDE	Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship		
		PLFS	Periodic Labour Force Survey
NCVET	National Council for Vocational Education and Training	QF	Qualification Files
		QP	Qualification Pack
NCVT	National Council for Vocational Training	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
NEP 2020	National Education Policy 2020	SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
NOS	National Occupational Standards		
NSDA	National Skill Development Agency	SFFA	SAARC Framework for Action
NSDC	National Skill Development Corporation	SSC	Sector Skills Council
		STAR	Standard, Training, Assessment and Reward
NSDF	National Skill Development Fund		
NSQC	National Skills Qualifications Committee	TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
NSQF	National Skills Qualification Framework	VET	Vocational education and training
		UGC	University Grants Commission
NSSO	National Skill Survey Organization		

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IRELAND

Introduction and context

Ireland is very well situated according to several performance indicators for education and training, ahead of EU average figures and most EU targets. Strong central oversight of the education system is balanced with high autonomy for schools and higher education institutions, with an increasing layer of regional governance. Private organisations have a significant role in education and qualifications provision (QQI, 2020). According to the Programme for international student assessment (PISA) 2018 results[613], Ireland has the second lowest percentage in the EU of 15-year-olds underachieving in reading (11.8%) and relatively low shares of underachievers in mathematics and science. A low percentage of pupils leave education and training early (5.1% in 2019, compared with the EU average of 10.2%). A wider range of post-school options and the Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship in Ireland 2016-20[614] are among the measures aiming to support early leavers and increase participation in vocational education and training (VET). 20 new apprenticeship programmes became operational, and a further 36 are being developed. The employment rate of VET graduates increased from 71.9% in 2017 to 76.9% in 2018. The country has one of the highest rates of tertiary education attainment in Europe (55.4% in 2019). Efforts at modernising higher education focus on increasing participation and the gender balance in STEM subjects; the first technological university was established following the 2018 Technological universities Act[615]. Adult participation in lifelong learning increased to 12.6% in 2019. Several initiatives were introduced to support upskilling,

including the Skills to advance policy, targeting vulnerable employees with skills below NFQ level 5/EQF level 4. The greatest identified skill shortage is in transversal and digital skills among older and low-skilled workers (European Commission, 2019; European Commission, 2020).

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. Its development was undertaken by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and it was officially established in 2003 following extensive public consultation. The operation of the framework is governed by the 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act and the 2019 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (amendment) Act. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established in 2012 as the single national qualifications and external quality assurance body for post-school education and training in Ireland, and the custodian of the NFQ.

The NFQ is a comprehensive and learning-outcomes-based framework, covering all education and training subsystems. 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.

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. Studies on NFQ implementation and impact have been carried out. The framework has increased transparency and coherence in the qualifications system, and has promoted a more systematic approach to the design, development, delivery, award and recognition of qualifications,

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613. https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/pisa-2018_en
614. The Action plan has supported expansion in the range of occupations making use of dual-VET programmes and has promoted the offer of apprenticeships at higher levels of the NFQ. Post-2016 apprenticeships lead to an award at levels 5 to 10 of the NFQ (QQI, 2020).
615. The 2018 Technological Universities Act sets out a process whereby consortia can apply for Technological University designation. Technological universities focus on vocationally and professionally oriented science and technology programmes (QQI, 2020).

supporting lifelong learning and transitions into, within and from education and training (QQI, 2020).

In 2006 the NFQ was self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) and in 2009 it was referenced to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF). An updated referencing and self-certification report was submitted to the EQF Advisory Group in November 2020, reinforcing links between the NFQ and the two European frameworks.

Policy objectives

Originally, the NFQ was conceptualised as a driver of systemic change towards the objective of lifelong learning and rationalisation of further education and training (FET) qualifications. Currently, it is viewed more as an enabler, rather than driver, of wider reform, with implications for setting standards, quality assurance, developing awards, teaching, assessment, and programme design. By 2020, the framework has come to be seen as both an end in itself and a means for achieving socially useful objectives. It functions both as policy and as an instrument for policy (QQI, 2020).

Its original aims included (NQAI, 2009a):
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.

The NFQ was designed to support in several areas: communication about qualifications (e.g. for comparability); the design and specification of specific qualifications and of programmes of education and training; processes for the recognition of prior learning; and the design and specification of learning pathways (QQI, 2020).

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 in 2012, whose work has facilitated the integration of the NFQ and related policies on access, transfer and progression into quality assurance arrangements in the post-secondary education and training system (QQI, 2020). The need to embed the NFQ further in quality assurance policy and practice was seen by

76% of respondents to the 2017 NFQ policy impact assessment study (Indecon, 2017) as a high priority for the future. At the same time, stakeholders had more diverse views on other NFQ future policy priorities: communication (67% of respondents viewed this as a high priority); progression and recognition functions (60%); curriculum design function (45%); and regulatory function (41%).

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, the implementation of the framework has assumed more of a regulatory character over time. Statutory quality assurance guidelines for education and training providers[616] make repeated reference to the NFQ and related policies, embedding it in the statutory quality assurance arrangements for post-school education and training in Ireland (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The 2019 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (amendment) Act introduced important changes strengthening the comprehensive nature of the framework and its regulatory role. The concept of a qualification 'included within' the NFQ was introduced into a legal text for the first time, replacing the term 'recognised within' the NFQ, used in the 2012 Act. This implies an interest in the quality assurance arrangements for the delivery and certification of a qualification, not merely in the ex-post recognition of a qualification (QQI, 2020). The 2019 Act reinforced the legal relationship between qualifications that have been long-standing constituent qualifications of the NFQ. It also acknowledged that, as an awarding body, QQI is legally compelled to develop, deliver and award qualifications that are demonstrably included within the NFQ, and provided for a statutory scheme to facilitate voluntary access to the NFQ by a wider range of awarding bodies offering qualifications (European Commission; Cedefop, 2020).

The potential opportunities and benefits brought about by the NFQ are relevant to many of the strategic objectives set out in Ireland's *National skills strategy 2025*[617]: active collaboration between employers and education and training providers;

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616. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2016). *Core statutory quality assurance guidelines.* https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf
617. The *National skills strategy 2025 – Ireland's future* is available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf

strengthening the role of employers in skills development; and improving career information and guidance services (Indecon, 2017).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The NFQ 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) and 'a system of levels and types of awards based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by a learner to entitle the learner to an award at a particular level, and of the type concerned, within the framework'[618]. The main building blocks of the framework are the 10 learning-outcomes-based levels, level indicators and five award-types and their descriptors. The 10 levels of the NFQ capture all learning[619], from initial stages to the most advanced: qualifications achieved in schools, further education and training, and higher education and training. They are all quality assured. Over time, the NFQ also seeks to accommodate qualifications offered by international, private and professional bodies. The 2019 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (amendment) Act provides for a statutory scheme to facilitate voluntary access to the NFQ of a wider range of awarding bodies offering qualifications obtained through non-formal learning. A new category of awarding body is to be established for this purpose: listed awarding bodies will accommodate competent and trustworthy applicants that can demonstrate that they offer learning-outcomes-based qualifications that are relevant and can be mapped to the NFQ (QQI, 2020).

Each NFQ level has a specified level indicator or descriptor and one or more award types. Levels describe nationally agreed standards of learning in terms of three strands and eight sub-strands of expected learning outcomes: 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.

NFQ award types describe the purpose, volume and progression opportunities associated with a particular award. Each award type includes a wide range of qualifications. Four classes of award type were determined originally: major (the principal class of awards at each level, capturing a typical range of learning achievements)[620]; minor (for partial completion of the outcomes for a major award); supplemental (for learning that is additional to a major award); and special purpose (for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievements)[621][622]. A professional class of awards was established in 2014[623] at NFQ levels 5-9 (EQF 4-7)[624] to strengthen the capacity of the NFQ to level professional or occupation-oriented awards. The professional class implicitly introduced the concept that an award can have more than one class and type[625]. They are typically used in conjunction with original NFQ award types. Award-type descriptors are also expressed in learning outcomes; they represent the most general expression of standards for NFQ qualifications (QQI, 2020).

More detailed award standards are maintained by awarding bodies. For QQI awards, in addition to awards standards, a new policy and criteria for validation of provider programmes leading to awards was issued by QQI in 2016[626]. This requires providers to develop minimum intended programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs) for the overall programme and minimum intended module learning outcomes (MIMLOS) for each module.

As all types of qualification involve their own unique combination of technical, social and political dimensions, the principle of 'best fit' was used for allocating qualifications to NFQ levels in Ireland. The need to revisit the original levelling of certain qualifications in the light of emerging practice, experience and evidence was highlighted (Indecon, 2017). For apprenticeship qualifications leading

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618. Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (amendment) Act, 32/2019. http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2019/act/32/enacted/en/html
619. The structure of the Irish NFQ can be seen in the interactive diagram available at: https://nfq.qqi.ie/

620. https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Determinations%20for%20the%20outline%20National%20Framework%20of%20Qualifications.pdf
621. https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Descriptors%20-%20minor,%20special%20purpose,%20supplemental.pdf
622. Minor, special purpose or supplemental awards can be identified as micro credentials (with a volume of 5 or more ECTS credits at higher education levels) (QQI, 2020).
623. https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Professional_Award-types_PS3_2014.pdf
624. Their extension to doctoral level (NFQ level 10) is being considered (QQI, 2020).
625. E.g. a specific honours bachelor degree award could be classed as both major and professional and would need to be consistent with the bachelor award-type as well as the professional award-type descriptors (QQI, 2020).
626. More information on validation of provider programmes is available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Programme-Validation07.aspx

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). A study was commissioned by QQI in collaboration with SOLAS to compare the two FET and higher education qualifications that sit at NFQ level 6/EQF level 5 (advanced certificate and higher certificate); the results will inform future policy decisions. The placement of upper secondary leaving certificate (senior cycle) spanning both NFQ levels 4 and 5 (EQF levels 3 and 4) was discussed in the context of EQF referencing in 2009 and revised referencing in 2020. The original placement of the leaving certificate on the NFQ is to be revisited in the context of ongoing senior cycle reform (QQI, 2020).

The learning outcomes approach was central to establishment of the NFQ, associated legislation and system reforms. The role of communities of practice in understanding and applying learning outcomes is emphasised. Learning outcome statements are seen as partly symbolic, encoding meanings attached to them by the community of practice (QQI, 2020). It is recognised that both views of learning outcomes are valuable: as result-oriented, measurable and objective, and as process-oriented, open to negotiation and only partly measurable. The focus on learner profile and on programme context is part of the answer to this issue.

Extensive work has been undertaken across all subsystems of education and training to implement the learning outcomes approach of the NFQ. There is 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 (Indecon, 2017). The approach has started to provide common ground for different stakeholders (general education, higher education, VET, policy-makers, students, employers and trade unions) and has become the basis for shared dialogue on the purpose of education. Increased progression between VET and higher education is considered an important achievement in the steps taken so far.

QQI is responsible for external quality assurance in FET and higher education. The NFQ and the learning outcomes approach feature prominently in its activities and in statutory quality assurance

guidelines[627]. In general school education, learning outcomes are seen in the context of professional development, and are prominent in the way school subjects and examinations are specified (QQI, 2020). A review of international practice in the use of learning outcomes in curriculum reform was published in 2019[628] by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, informing development of guidelines on the use of learning outcomes for teachers[629] and a companion text, *Learning intentions and success criteria*[630]. 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.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Irish NFQ was established in law under the 1999 Qualifications (Education and Training) Act[631] and re-authorised under the 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act[632]. In 2019, the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (amendment) Act[633], further strengthened the centrality of the NFQ as a coordinating mechanism for qualifications in Ireland (QQI, 2020). Its initial development and first decade of implementation was coordinated by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), supported by the two main awarding bodies, the Higher Education and Training Award Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

627. QQI (2016). Core statutory guidelines for providers of education and training. https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Core-QA-Guidelines.aspx
QQI statutory quality assurance guidelines currently consist of: core guidelines, relevant to all providers, sector-specific guidelines for groups of providers, and topic-specific guidelines for themes or forms of provision (e.g. apprenticeship programmes, blended learning, research degree programmes). All providers offering programmes leading to awards on the NFQ must have regard to QQI guidelines in development of their quality assurance procedures (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).
628. https://ncca.ie/media/3958/learning-outcomes-an-international-perspective.pdf
629. https://ncca.ie/media/4107/learning-outcomes-booklet_en.pdf
630. https://ncca.ie/media/1927/assessment-workshop-1_en.pdf
631. Qualifications (education and training) Act 26/1999. http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1999/act/26/enacted/en/pdf
632. Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012. http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2012/a2812.pdf
633. Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (amendment) Act, 32/2019. http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2019/act/32/enacted/en/html

A new agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), was established in 2012, as an independent State agency of the Department of Education and Skills, 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. This important step enabled a systematic focus on qualifications, with stronger coordination of qualifications and quality assurance policies. The agency is responsible for promotion, maintenance, implementation, further development and review of the NFQ, on behalf of the Department of Education and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. It is at the centre of the qualification system and cooperates with ministries, higher education institutions, employers and the voluntary sector. Other functions of QQI include: 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[634]. It is also the main awarding body for further education and training qualifications and a niche awarding body for private independent higher education qualifications.

NFQ governance is currently ensured within the broader structures of QQI, which follow two strands: corporate and operational/academic[635]. Human and financial resources are in place. QQI has a dedicated framework development and integrity unit but, as an integrated qualifications and quality assurance agency, all functions have a mandate to support the operation of the NFQ, including staff in awards development, validation, quality assurance, corporate services and communication (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

QQI promotes the international academic recognition of qualifications. It is the designated EQF national coordination point and national Europass centre, it acts as the national correspondent for QF-EHEA and hosts the Irish National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC).

National awarding bodies offering qualifications included in the NFQ are currently: QQI, the State Examinations Commission, the institutes of technology, and the universities. The 2019

Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (amendment) Act strengthens the regulatory role of QQI, giving it statutory power to include qualifications issued by a broader range of awarding bodies in the NFQ (professional, private, and international awarding bodies).

Collaboration and partnership have been hallmarks of the NFQ process since the beginning. Early cooperation and collaboration has arguably led to the position where the NFQ reflects a strong consensus about the kind and complexity of knowledge, skill and competence associated with qualifications at each of its 10 levels. Providers and awarding bodies are partners in the implementation of the NFQ, while other users of qualifications are stakeholders. As the NFQ has become more settled, engagement has become more an issue of specific interests of different stakeholder groups. In 2019, a stakeholder steering group was established to oversee and advise on the preparation of the 2020 European re-referencing report, and a focus group of higher education institutions with degree awarding powers advised on specific elements. It is anticipated that this would provide necessary impetus for the establishment of a national NFQ/ qualifications forum strengthening NFQ governance and national oversight arrangements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[636]

The Department of Education and Skills[637] announced in the *Action plan for education 2016-19*[638] its commitment to establish a national policy for the recognition of prior learning (RPL). The *National skills strategy 2025 – Ireland's future*[639], published in 2016, 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 (FET) strategy and the higher education

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634. QQI (2017). *Who we are and what we do*. https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Who%20We%20Are-Booklet-August%202017.pdf

635. More information can be found at: https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/QQI-Governance-.aspx

636. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (Murphy, 2019).

637. The Department of Education and Skills was renamed the Department of Education in July 2020, when a new Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science was established.

638. Department of Education and Skills. *Action plan for education 2016-19: strategy statement*.https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/Department-of-Education-and-Skills-Strategy-Statement-2016-2019.pdf

639. The *National skills strategy 2025 – Ireland's future* is available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf

strategy called for systematic implementation of RPL in the two sectors and a national RPL framework spanning sectors.

RPL includes prior formal, non-formal and informal learning and is a powerful tool for widening participation in education and training and work. It can provide access to formal education, award of credit, exemptions within a programme and support access to the labour market. Four stages of validation consistent with those in the 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning[640] (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) are used, but the use and combination of these stages differs in practice depending on the purpose of RPL.

RPL-related initiatives over recent years grew organically and with commitment to excellent practice. 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 (ATP) 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*[641] – first published in 2003 – and the *Principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training*[642], 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 ATP. With the 2019 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (amendment) Act, providers are given a more central role in application processes for RPL.

Qualifications acquired through validation of non-formal or informal learning use the same standards as formal qualifications. The definition of levels of learning and the articulation of learning outcomes in the NFQ have been found useful for RPL purposes. Arrangements for RPL are linked to the NFQ

through a vision for learner progression, articulated in QQI's policy restatement (QQI, 2020). They are in place in all education and training sub-sectors except general education, and lead to full or partial qualifications and/or give access to education and training programmes. RPL arrangements for the low-skilled, low-qualified and other groups of learners have been put in place. The legislative framework underpinning the NFQ facilitates RPL opportunities for individuals who have been assessed as having achieved the necessary learning outcomes associated with the relevant qualification or arrangements for exemptions or credits at all levels of the NFQ. Responsibility for assessment rests with quality assured providers of education and training, which facilitates transparency and accountability in the process (QQI, 2020).

The national forum for the enhancement of teaching and learning (NFETL) commissioned a research project on RPL in higher education[643] 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 funded a parallel research project on RPL approaches and practices in FET[644], which suggested that RPL is seen as 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.

Another strength of the Irish approach to VNFIL is collaboration and sharing of practice through the voluntary RPL practitioner network[645] created in 2015 and supported by major stakeholders. It aims to contribute to policy development. These developments demonstrate a targeted and strategic approach towards RPL implementation. Among the challenges that Ireland is facing are the need for common definition and understanding, for greater data integration across sectors and regions, for the integration of guidance into RPL processes, and perceived lack of resources for capacity building.

640. 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

641. The 2015 restatement of the 2003 version is available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/ATP%20Policy%20Restatement%20FINAL%202018.pdf

642. The first version, published in June 2005 by NQAI, is available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Principles%20and%20Operational%20Guidelines%20for%20RPL%202005.pdf

643. 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.

644. Goggin et.al, (2017). *Recognition of prior learning in Irish further education and training.* A study commissioned by QQI and ETBI, available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Prior%20Learning%20Report.pdf

645. More information about the RPL practitioner network is available at: https://rpl-ireland.ie/

NQF implementation and impact

The Irish NFQ 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 NFQ is also open to fit-for-purpose qualifications offered by professional bodies and private and international awarding bodies operating in Ireland (NQAI, 2003). The 2019 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) amendment Act strengthened the role of the NFQ as central coordinating mechanism for qualifications and clarified the legal route to the NFQ for all qualifications. Section 55A-55I of the 2019 Act provides for a statutory scheme to facilitate voluntary access to the NFQ by a wider range of awarding bodies offering qualifications (European Commission; Cedefop, 2020).

The NFQ is referred to in strategic documents, legislation and regulatory instruments governing education and training[646]. It is used in the National skills strategy 2025[647] as a reference point to set up a number of targets in the National further education and training (FET) strategy 2020-24[648] providing a continuum of learning opportunities from NFQ level 1 to 6 in the FET sector, and in the National strategy for higher education to 2030[649] as a platform that has provided opportunities for improving the interface between further and higher education in terms of access, transfer, progression, quality assurance, upskilling and lifelong learning. It is also used by the National Skills Council and the Central Statistics Office in data collection on the education and training system and educational attainment, and by the Central Applications Office (CAO) in the application process for higher education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The NFQ is known and used extensively by education and training institutions and providers; NFQ levels associated with programmes and awards are mentioned explicitly in communications to prospective learners and the public. The framework is widely known and used by guidance and counselling practitioners; over 2000 posters depicting the NFQ and the EQF are distributed every year to the guidance community. It is also widely used and known by quality assurance bodies and also used regularly by NARIC Ireland to provide academic recognition advice on foreign qualifications[650].

Based on the nationally representative Omnibus survey responses, 38% of learners claim to have heard of NFQ and 28% of the EQF. According to the Union of Students in Ireland, the NFQ '[…] brings numerous benefits for students, notably facilitating progression along the NFQ and promoting international mobility, due to its alignment with other international frameworks of qualifications' (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). Among labour market stakeholders, in 2018/2019, 96% and, respectively, 69% of employers/recruiters were aware of the NFQ and EQF, and 54% and, respectively, 17% referred to the NFQ and EQF during recruitment[651]. SOLAS uses the NFQ while reporting on education and training outputs and for setting out targets[652], and Intreo [Jobs Ireland] used the NFQ in job advertisements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

QQI maintains a national database of the further education and training qualifications that it offers[653]. The Irish register of qualifications (IRQ)[654] was launched in 2019 by QQI as a central repository for information about qualifications included in the NFQ and their associated programmes. It will confirm the relationship between qualifications and the NFQ, and supply details about associated courses, providers, and awarding bodies. It is also

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646. Technological Universities Act 2018. https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2015/121/ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/act/2018/3/eng/enacted/a318.pdf
Tax and Duty Manual – Education and Vocational Training, Revenue 2017.
https://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tdm/value-added-tax/part03-taxable-transactions-goods-ica-services/Services/services-education-vocational-training-post-2015-20170630083852.pdf
Ministerial Regulation – Visa Conditions for Studying a Degree Programme in Ireland. http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Student%20Pathway
Statutory Instruments – Student Grant Scheme 2020. http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2020/si/76/made/en/pdf
Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI).
https://susi.ie/eligibility/undergraduate-student/approved-institutionscourses-for-undergraduate-students/
https://susi.ie/eligibility/postgraduate-student/approved-institutionscourses-for-postgraduate-students/
647. https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf
648. https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf
649. https://hea.ie/resources/publications/national-strategy-for-higher-education-2030/

650. E.g. https://www.qqi.ie/QualRec%20Comparability%20Statements/France_ID_44.pdf
651. https://www.qqi.ie/News/Pages/Making-Sense-of-Qualifications----How-Recruitment-Professionals-in-Ireland-view-Qualifications.aspx
652. https://www.regionalskills.ie/national-skills-updates/solas-monitoring-ireland-s-skills-supply.html
https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/da278b4ad3/national-skills-bulletin-2018.pdf
653. The QQI database for further education and training qualifications is available at: https://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/Search?searchtype=awards
654. www.IRQ.ie

anticipated to include qualifications from other awarding bodies when they become eligible, including professional and other international awarding bodies. In time, it is intended to be fully interconnected with relevant European level qualifications portals. Currently, the IRQ includes quality-assured, recognised qualifications from universities and institutes of technology, private higher education colleges, education and training boards, and private further education providers. General education qualifications are not included (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

NQF and EQF levels are indicated in the QQI database for FET qualifications and in the comprehensive IRQ. Levels have been included on all further education and training qualifications issued by QQI (since June 2015) and 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).

Materials, guidelines and tools aimed to support the use of the framework by different stakeholders include: the interactive NFQ fan diagram[655], and interactive tool qualifications frameworks – a European view[656]; a 2019 e-booklet *European qualifications framework – adding value to qualifications*[657]; the 2019 Guide to comparing qualifications in Ireland and New Zealand[658]; and the 2018 Guide to comparing qualifications in Ireland and Hong Kong[659]. The Universities Framework Implementation Network[660] includes guidance on the use of the NFQ in programme design (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Two NFQ evaluation studies have been carried out so far: a 2009 study on the impact and implementation of the NFQ[661] and a 2017 policy

impact assessment of the Irish NFQ (Indecon, 2017)[662].

The 2017 policy impact assessment of the Irish NFQ (Indecon, 2017) found that it had a positive impact on transparency and comparability of qualifications, skills and competences; most stakeholders agreed that the NFQ has made it easier to see how qualifications relate to each other (84%), to explain and understand qualifications pathways (89%) and to evaluate qualifications for work or study (80%). The NFQ is perceived to have had an impact on the design of qualifications standards and curricula (74% strongly agreed/agreed that the learning outcomes approach of the NFQ has improved the practice of course and curriculum design), and on progression between qualifications achieved in school, in further and in higher education and training (81%). 61% of responders strongly agreed/agreed that the NFQ has made it easier for qualifications achieved in other countries to be understood, compared and recognised in Ireland, and 63% strongly agreed/ agreed that the NFQ has improved the dialogue between the world of qualifications and the world of work.

The study also showed that there was continued 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 its integrity were acknowledged, including the need to revisit the original levelling of certain qualifications in the light of emerging practice, experience and evidence[663] (Indecon, 2017).

655. https://nfq.qqi.ie/
656. https://nfq.qqi.ie/qualifications-frameworks.html
657. https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/The%20%20 European%20Qualifications%20Framework%20EQF%20 10%20Years.pdf
658. https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/NZQA%20New%20 Zealand%20Webx.pdf
659. https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Comparing%20 Qualifications%20Ireland%20and%20Hong%20Kong.pdf
660. http://www.nfqnetwork.ie/
661. See NQAI (2009).

662. 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.
663. Specific recommendations included: to continue to develop and implement the NFQ as a responsive and adaptable mechanism for qualifications and skills policy; to consider initiatives to improve awareness of the NFQ among stakeholders; to revisit the operation of the NFQ for upper secondary school qualifications in Ireland and for qualifications at EQF level 5; to examine QQI's awarding function and NFQ levelling processes more generally; to ensure clarity and simplicity of communication; to include a broader range of qualifications within the NFQ; to ensure strong international engagement; to establish data to investigate transfer and progression pathways through the national qualifications system; 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, Bahrain, Hong Kong, Jordan, Malaysia and New Zealand. The importance of maintaining the international connectedness of the NFQ 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 the EQF

The Irish NFQ was the first national qualification framework to complete its referencing to the European qualifications framework (EQF), in 2009 (NQAI, 2009). The country built on experiences and conclusions of self-certification of compatibility of the Irish NFQ with the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA), completed in 2006.

Since then, significant changes in the institutional and legislative landscape have taken place, along with some technical changes. Revised referencing of the NFQ to the EQF was undertaken in 2019, involving desk research, technical drafting, and structured stakeholder engagement. A single updated report for referencing of the NFQ to the EQF and self-certification against QF-EHEA was submitted to, and approved by, the EQF Advisory Group in November 2020 (QQI, 2020).

The report confirms existing alignments to the European frameworks and details NFQ-related developments; it also covers wider reforms of the education and training system and innovations in skills policy and governance. These include the establishment of QQI in 2012; the adoption of the Technological Universities Act 2018 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (amendment) Act 2019; the establishment of 16 new education and training boards with the aim of bringing local and regional coherence to further education and training; the establishment of SOLAS with responsibility for strategic coordination and funding of the further education and training sector; the determination of a new professional class of awards along with a set of professional award-type descriptors at NFQ Levels 5-9; the recent introduction of the Irish register of qualifications (IRQ) as a key information tool supporting the NFQ; and the introduction of the category of listed awarding bodies that can have their awards included within the NFQ (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Important lessons and future plans

Following an incremental approach to implementation, the NFQ has reached an advanced operational stage. By international standards, it is well established, highly regarded, widely used and sustainable, delivering real benefits to learners, providers, employers, researchers, regulators, credential evaluators and policymakers (QQI, 2020). It has increased transparency in the qualifications system and it aids international recognition of qualifications gained in Ireland and academic recognition of foreign qualifications presented in Ireland (European Commission; Cedefop, 2020). A combination of factors contributed to its success: a mix of statutory and collaborative approaches with strong institutional arrangements; political support; and implementation and use of the framework in conjunction with other policy initiatives. 'Government and other stakeholders share the expectation that all learners in Ireland have access to qualifications that are fit for purpose, effectively regulated, and appropriately recognised nationally and internationally' (QQI, 2020,).

Three interrelated sets of activities have been outlined to guide future NQF-related developments in Ireland: design and implementation; awareness and use of the NFQ; and evaluation and impact (QQI, 2020). QQI sustains public confidence in the quality of education and training, promotes trust in the NFQ, and drives a culture of continuous improvement among education and training providers. QQI's Statement of strategy 2019-21[664] outlined a new vision, mission and strategic priorities which place the NFQ at the centre of its work. The first of the four strategic priorities is to develop, promote and protect the integrity of the NQF, and there is awareness of the need for protection of standards to achieve this. In addition, QQI prioritises analysis and impact of measures taken to improve the quality of education and training for the benefit of learners; collaboration and engagement through mutually beneficial strategic partnerships; and increased internal organisational capacity to sustain, improve and communicate its performance (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The main challenges include the continued development and implementation of the NFQ as a responsive and adaptable mechanism

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664. https://www.qqi.ie/News/PublishingImages/Pages/QQIs-Statement-of-Strategy-2019-2021%20Adding-Value-to-Qualifications/Statement%20of%20Strategy%202019-2021%20-%20Adding%20Value%20to%20Qualifications.pdf

for qualifications and skills policy; the need to strengthen monitoring and review of levelling of qualifications and to include a broader range of qualifications within the NFQ; and the establishment of a national forum for qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Among several initiatives under way, QQI has published a *Green paper on qualifications* and a companion *Technical paper on the qualifications system*[665], to stimulate dialogue among a wide range of stakeholders (learners, employers, parents, practitioners, occupational associations and professions, providers and their staff, regulators, trade unions, and the international community) and deepen understanding of trends, issues, uncertainties and opportunities in the qualifications system. A study has been commissioned on the comparability of qualification types at NFQ level 6 (EQF level 5), a review of qualifications at NFQ levels 1-4 (EQF levels 1-3) has been initiated, and the placement of the leaving certificate at NQF levels 4 and 5 is also under review. The National Academic Integrity Network was established in 2019 to promote the integrity of qualifications achieved

in Ireland. QQI has also initiated engagement with professional regulatory bodies and higher education institutions aimed at developing synergies in professional and academic accreditation[666] (QQI, 2020).

Implementation of the newly introduced provisions of the 2019 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (amendment) Act 2019 is to be taken forward, to enable access to the framework of additional awarding bodies, mainly from the non-formal sector, and to ensure transparency and robustness of procedures. In 2021, QQI plans to establish a national forum for qualifications as a mechanism for collaboration and engagement among practitioners, policymakers and other interested parties; this proposal has already been endorsed by the national qualifications authorities, quality assurance bodies, and by the steering group for the updated referencing report. The Irish register of qualifications (IRQ) was launched in 2019 and, when fully implemented, will provide a comprehensive infrastructure to support the recognition and understanding of qualifications in the NFQ (QQI, 2020).

665. https://www.qqi.ie/News/Pages/New-Green-Paper-on-Qualifications.aspx

666. See for example https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Accreditation%20Approval%20of%20Higher%20Education%20Programmes%20by%20Professional%20Bodies.pdf

Table 43. Irish national framework of qualifications (NFQ)

NFQ LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
10	• Doctoral degree • Higher Doctorate	8
9	• Master degree Postgraduate diploma • Level 9 Professional award	7
8	• Honours bachelor degree Higher diploma • Level 8 Professional award	6
7	• Ordinary bachelor degree • Level 7 Professional award	
6	• Advanced certificate e.g. level 6 advanced certificate in horticulture • Higher certificate • Level 6 Professional award	5
5	• Level 5 certificate e.g. level 5 certificate in hospitality operations • Leaving certificate • Level 5 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 / Cycle (*)	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	

(*)   The final Junior certificate examination will be held in 2021 and then all examinations will be called the Junior Cycle (QQI, 2020).

Source: Adapted from QQI (2020).

Abbreviations

ATP	access, transfer and progression	NFQ	national framework of qualifications
EQF	European qualifications framework	NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
FET	further education and training		
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council	NQF	national qualifications framework
		PATD	professional award type descriptors
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Award Council	QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
		RPL	recognition of prior learning
MIMLOs	minimum intended module learning outcomes	STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
MIPLOs	minimum intended programme learning outcomes	VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning
NFETL	national forum for the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education		

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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. http://www.qqi.ie/Documents/Referencing%20Irish%20NFQ%20to%20the%20European%20QF%20for%20Lifelong%20Learning.pdf

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ISRAEL

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

A government Resolution adopted in 2015 provided the legal basis to begin developing a national qualifications framework (NQF). It has not been adopted yet.

A working group of EU project and Israeli experts and officials are together undertaking technical development of the NQF. They advise and update an inter-ministerial steering committee, which provides strategic direction, and reports to ministers. No formal decision has been taken yet on the number of levels or the composition of the descriptors.

Israel is not a member of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) but participates in the Global Policy Dialogue of the EHEA.

A formal working group has been established and is operating. The rationale, purpose, and scope of the NQF are agreed. Israel has engaged an EU project and international experts. But drafting and testing of the level descriptors has only just begun. Israel is therefore in an early phase of the design stage of development.

Policy context

Israel and the EU signed an Association Agreement in 1995, which came into force in 2000.

GDP growth was 3.5% in 2019. The unemployment rate for those aged 15 and up was 3.8% in 2019, with no gender differences and, remarkably, almost no long-term unemployment, at only 0.3% in

2018. While it is estimated that COVID shrunk the economy by about 5% in 2020, it is expected that 2021 will see a GDP growth of about 8%, aided by a vaccination programme already globally unparalleled in its comprehensiveness.

The Covid-19 crisis has had an unprecedented impact on the labour force, with more than a quarter of workers either dismissed or put on unpaid leave

during the economic closure in the first months of the outbreak. It is still unclear what percentage will be rehired, but it is estimated that 20%, or more, of the newly unemployed will not be able to return to their jobs.

A characteristic of the labour market is high digitalisation. The labour market in Israel is moving from a traditional economy based on manufacturing and production to one based on information technology and modern services. Israel scored 16.67 out of 25 points in Cisco's Digital Readiness Index ranking and is the OECD country with the highest share of people employed in high-tech industries, at 8.2% – more than double the OECD median.

Circa 41%[667] of the upper secondary cohort are in VET. The objective of the government is to reach 48% in the next few years.

A unique feature of the education and training system is the influence, direct and indirect, of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). Most Israelis perform two or three years of compulsory military service on completion of secondary schooling, thus delaying entry into further or higher education or the civilian workforce. At the same time, the IDF is itself a major provider of - often highly advanced – training to

its members and offers approximately 2500 qualifications. While this skill training and acquisition is of course common, given that most Israelis undergo military service, it is not always understood as offering benefits in the civilian labour market, and so is frequently unrecognised or at least not formally certificated.

The education and training system reacted quickly to the COVID pandemic by increasing public

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667. "Country Fiche Israel, Education, Training and Employment Developments 2020", ETF, 2020.

investment and putting in place several new measures and approaches to facilitate 'hybrid learning'. These have included distance learning, training teachers in digital tools, emotional support for students, granting greater autonomy to schools and town councils, and equipping vulnerable groups with PCs for online learning.

NQF legal basis

Israeli government Resolution no. 147 of 28 June 2015, "Advancing the Strategic Matter of

Developing and Utilizing Human Capital", provided the legal basis to begin developing the NQF. Article 4 of the Resolution authorised establishment of a working group to address the issue of better linkage of the various sectors of the country's education and training system, to facilitate progression and pathways between them.

Following consultations, the working group reported back to the Government, indeed recommending establishment of an NQF to achieve the objectives described in the Resolution. Currently, the InterMinisterial Steering Committee (IMSC) is working on a government resolution which would adopt an Israeli NQF.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

Israel performs well in PISA. Over 90% of its population attain medium or high levels of education according to ISCED scales[668]. For high levels of attainment, that is, attainment of a post-secondary qualification at ISCED levels 5-8, the figure is 56%. But there are persistent inequalities, as Haredi (ultra-orthodox Jews) and Arab Israelis perform less well overall.

Education and training expenditure is second only to defence in the state budget, paralleled by the size of the Education Ministry staff. The Government is investing more, both for qualitative ends, but also to increase provision and space for an expanding population, as Israel experiences a combination of high immigration, low emigration, and high birth rates.

Israel's unique population characteristics require a sophisticated education and training system. A downside is complexity and some resulting segmentation. There are distinct streams for Hebrew and Arab-language populations, plus one for the ultra-Orthodox.

The Ministry of Education oversees VET provided in:
i.   high schools for those aged 16–18 at ISCED level 3;
ii. in schools offering post-secondary studies at 18 and above at ISCED level 4; and
iii. technological colleges.

Initial VET (IVET) is also provided in privately managed schools run by technological education networks and supervised by key ministries.

The MoE also supervises self-funded continuing vocational training (CVET) for adults.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs supervises:
1. vocational schools for young people, where courses include apprenticeships and one- or twoyear courses combining study and practical experience;
2. the National Institute for Training in Technology and Science (NITTS/MAHAT) colleges for technicians/practical engineers;
3. pre-VET/IVET provision for specific youth populations in education network schools;
4. CVET, including training for jobseekers and employer-led training for adults.
5. VET providers have considerable local autonomy regarding curriculum requirements and partnerships/initiatives.

The strategic plan to strengthen professional technological education in Israel for the period 2017– 2022 is being implemented. It responds to the impact of the pandemic on the economy by boosting technological education and builds on the results of the range of new experimental measures put in place in response to the pandemic. The plan aims to establish 'education chains', connecting the various school levels, from primary school to higher education and beyond, to support lifelong learning. Greater autonomy at local authority and school levels is also a likely long-term trend accelerated by COVID.

Resolution no. 147 also included instructions to ministries to pursue several other measures in the education and training domain intended to contribute to human capital development. These span actions aimed at increasing the pass rate in the school-leaving certificate, raising the attainment in the education system of Israeli Arabs, and identifying the obstacles faced by disadvantaged children in schooling. The state brought the Resolution forward because it is concerned about lost opportunities to individuals and the resulting impact on potential for economic growth.

668. Central Bureau of Statistics, cited in "Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training in Israel", ETF 2020.

Aims of NQF

The Government intends that the NQF be a tool to enhance transparency, comparability, and recognition of qualifications within Israel and with other countries, thus promoting lifelong learning, increasing national and international mobility, and facilitating the recognition of prior learning. Fostering the labour market relevance of qualifications through the introduction of learning outcomes in curricula and qualifications and the use of the NQF as a platform for social dialogue is a further objective.

Users will be ministries, schools and other providers, employers and trades unions, and learners.

Israeli ministries and stakeholders want to use the INQF to link and integrate better the national system of qualifications and their associated providers. Domestically, a specific concern is that its various qualifications and diverse provision are insufficiently linked, resulting in barriers between HE, VET and the IDF.

There are four main providers of education and training in the country: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Services, the Council for Higher Education and the IDF. They do not cooperate consistently enough to enable learners to navigate across their respective different systems' schools and colleges. There is much high-quality curricula and several thousands of qualifications available in the country, but not sufficient linkages among these. The IDF seeks recognition from academia and business of its qualifications, many of them attesting to advanced skills.

Providers should, using the INQF, be able to interpret better the qualifications presented to them by learners moving between streams. An INQF should, for example, facilitate a high-school graduate to move from the general track across to the preparatory stage of study at a technological institute e.g. to train to be a "practical engineer".

There are also short adult training courses organised by government ministries, e.g. the Ministry of Health organises continuing courses in psychology leading to a certificate. Additionally, numerous private providers offer training to adults in e.g. personal fitness trainer skills, which is often uncertificated. Developing qualifications to recognise skills acquired, and levelled in the INQF, would support internal recognition.

An INQF should also support closer and stronger relations with other countries and regions. An explicit purpose of the current EU Twinning project and an aim of the Israeli Government is alignment and compatibility with the EQF. An INQF would facilitate recognition of qualifications of any type held by incoming migrants, including from the EU. It would also enable easier recognition of Israelis' qualifications when seeking study or work abroad, in the EU but also in English-speaking countries, most of which (the USA excepted) indeed already have NQFs.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

Discussions within the Inter-ministerial Steering Committee, and with wider stakeholders, continue on the number of levels and descriptors that would best accommodate the range of qualifications in the country. Consensus currently leans to the 8-level model – Israeli actors are explicit that this choice has the advantage of allowing a future one to one level alignment with the EQF and they are also influenced by the prevalence of 8-level NQFs in the EU, especially its second-generation frameworks.

On composition of the descriptors, actors have debated the merits of education sector-specific descriptors i.e. different sets of descriptors for VET, general or higher education within the INQF, against one, generic, set. Current preference is for the latter option, a unified, all-sectors set. Column titles would be Knowledge, Skills and Responsibility and Autonomy.

The Council for Higher Education is reluctant that the sector's qualifications should "share" the upper levels with VET.

The Project and Group are currently experimenting with qualifications descriptors, drafting outcomes for individual key qualifications. However, this is a challenge as Israel has no systematic practice of outcomes in its curricula or qualifications.

Types of qualifications

A qualification type is a group of titles or diplomas or certificates which share similar characteristics in level, duration of related programme pathway and level of labour market entry. They enable the categorisation of different qualifications which are placed at the same level but differ significantly in terms of their functions, learning outcomes, volume and/or orientations.

An example of a qualification type in Israel is the Teudat Bagrut, the upper secondary matriculation qualification. In the EQF, such school leaving

certificates typically place at equivalent to Level 4. The Bagrut certifies for both general and more technical streams.

Another qualification type is the ISCED level 3 vocational certificate, attainable via study and apprenticeship combined.

It is notable that Israel has a high volume of provision at short-cycle tertiary level i.e. at ISCED 5 and EQF Level 5-equivalent. Qualifications at this level typically equip people both for access to employment, including direct entry to the labour market on graduation, and progression on to higher education. As in many other countries, learners at this level are heterogenous. In Israel, providers at

Level 5 span colleges run by the ministries and the government Institute for Technological Training (NITT/MAHAT). The Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour colleges offer certificates for practical engineers at this level. Paramedical and nursing qualifications are also popular at this level.

Quality assurance of qualifications

Ministries set standards, accredit providers, oversee, and inspect curricula, and measure attainment of individual providers and at national, system-level. Employers are engaged via ministry-chaired committees in designing curricula and qualifications.

However, there is no national mechanism for gathering and sharing labour market data to make it accessible to education and training policymakers to inform their provision.

The school matriculation certificate, the Bagrut, and the Level 5-equivalent practical engineer certificate are externally assessed.

Use of learning outcomes and standards

There is no definition of qualification in use in the country and in discussions stakeholders sometimes talk about qualifications in terms of an occupation they typically lead to, rather than in terms of a formal certificate issued for defined outcomes achieved against a standard and after an assessment process.

Most qualifications and programmes, whether in general, higher, or vocational, education, are not yet written in learning outcomes. However, there is voluntary development and use of outcomes in some universities, by teachers and programme managers on an individual basis. But this practice does not yet extend across any one university entirely, far less the whole HE sector.

The EU Twinning Project experts and Israeli experts are at the time of writing beginning to draft the NQF level descriptors and learning outcomes. They are experimenting with drafting qualifications descriptors for a limited number of reference qualifications, such as the level 3 professional qualifications and some Level 5 qualifications. The results of these tests will inform decisions on the text of the eventual NQF level descriptors.

In the Working Group and Steering Committee discussions there are sometimes differences of opinion as Higher Education opposes potential levelling of IDF-developed qualifications at upper levels of the planned NQF. As programmes have not been described in the language of learning outcomes, it is difficult to resolve this issue.

There is no systemic use of occupational standards i.e. documents which describe the tasks and activities carried out in an occupation, and which prescribe performance requirements. Use of such standards would make easier the task of developing and describing vocational qualifications.

Credit systems

Credit points indicate the volume of learning required to achieve a HE qualification, making studies and courses easier to understand. Credits acquired at one institution can be counted towards a qualification studied for at another.

Use of credits is not mandatory in Israel, and there is no nationwide credit system. Some Israeli universities do use credits in some programmes but calculated solely by the number of weekly hours a student will spend in class as part of the course – overall workload is not considered.

There is no credit system in VET.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

Coordination of the development of the INQF lies with the EU Twinning project[669], a partnership between the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR) and the Israeli Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education's Department for Evaluation of Foreign Academic Degrees (DEFAD).

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669. EU-funded TWINNING project IL15 ENI SO 01 17 (IL/14) "Establishment of the Israeli National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as a mechanism to foster the development of Israeli human capital".

An Inter-Ministerial Working Group (WG) undertakes the technical work. It comprises the project staff, other Italian and EU experts, and Israeli experts drawn from, in addition to the Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of the Economy and Industry, the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Services, the Ministry of Defence, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) and the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics.

This group advises and updates an inter-ministerial steering committee (ISC), which is chaired by the

Prime Minister's Office and includes the above ministries as well as the Ministry of Justice, the Civil Service Commissioner's Office, and the Israeli National Economic Council. The ISC provides strategic direction and reports to ministers; it has a mandate to adopt proposals related to establishment of the NQF. So, the WG proposes, the ISC adopts, and the Government decides.

Developing proposals for governance of the INQF, including what type of body should be in charge, is one of the Twinning Project's most important planned outputs. At the time of writing, these discussion have yet to start, but governance is one of the priorities for the remainder of 2021.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

VET is guided at policy level by the Ministries of Education and Labour. As indicated above, the Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education leads the NQF's development. About 90% of the country's VET students are under the Education Ministry's supervision, while the Labour Ministry supervises the remaining 10%.

There is strong social partner and wider stakeholder engagement and consultation in VET. Employers, including the Manufacturers' Association of Israel (MAI), have a strong voice in decisionmaking in education and training reforms. Histradut, the trades unions confederation, has a venerable history, dating back to 1920, the early years of the inter-war British mandate, and so predates the state's foundation in 1948. It was one of the founders of the Amal[670] network of schools, a major education and training provider.

The national Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Committee, established in 2010, seeks to improve the governance of education and training. It is a platform for exchange, engaging stakeholders such as policy-makers, TVET providers and social partners, including representatives from the Labour and Education Ministries, the IDF, the ORT[671] schools network and AMAL educational network, the MAI and Histradut. There are 19 such committees.

The Torino Process Report 2016-17 found strong support from most stakeholders for introduction of an Israeli NQF.

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

VNFIL arrangements

No national system for validation exists yet, but establishment of one is an aim of the NQF. There would be ample scope to use validation - and so return on the "investment" of building such a system - to certify the skills of the many adults engaged in informal learning e.g. with private providers or in Ministry-run courses, and to recognise the skills of people who have completed their military service.

Validation would be facilitated by adoption of modular curricula and units of qualifications, both defined in learning outcomes.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings

The Government Resolution was adopted in 2015. The EU-Israel Twinning Project and Working Group have progressed in their tasks on defining the scope of the framework, number of levels and level descriptors, and some supporting tools.

Qualifications registers and databases

The EU Twinning Project plans to develop and propose a draft model register or database; discussions and technical work are ongoing.

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670. The Amal Education Network, established in 1928, comprises 128 educational institutions across Israel, including high schools, junior high schools, and colleges, with a total enrolment of over 40,000 students. Technology, the sciences, and the arts are offered to all sections of the population.

671. An education NGO, founded in 1949, specialising in science and technology education. The network operates 210 educational institutions including engineering colleges, middle and high schools, and one elementary school, in over 55 local authorities. Some 100,000 students attend ORT Israel schools and colleges. Its students come from all sectors and populations of Israeli society.

Recognition of foreign qualifications

Israel adheres to the Lisbon Recognition Convention[672]6 in higher education, which it ratified and brought into force in 2007. DEFAD in the Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education evaluates foreign degrees for purposes of establishing equivalence and granting recognition.

An INQF would also support recognition of qualifications of any type held by incoming migrants; Israel is a country of net inward migration.

Referencing to regional framework/other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks

Israel is not a member of the Bologna Process in Higher Education, although it participates in the Global Policy Dialogue of the EHEA. Israel's higher education qualifications system is comparable, comprising the familiar structure of bachelor's, master's and doctorate (PhD) degrees.

International cooperation

Israel's preference to design its NQF on EQF principles, and so in cooperation with the EU Twinning project, signals its intent to align its future framework with the EQF. Israel participates extensively in EU education and training programmes, notably the international dimension of Erasmus Plus.

In higher education, a motive of international contact is to increase the academic quality of the Israeli higher education system and promote Israel as a leading study destination for international talent. Israel's Erasmus plus office reports impact in the country's participating universities especially in revised curricula and teaching and learning methods. In higher education, individual Israeli departments in universities have used Erasmus Plus support to revise programmes in learning outcomes terms. Israeli VET colleges and institutions also participate in the Erasmus Plus TVET networks e.g. to modernise VET teaching and strengthen links with the labour market.

DEFAD in the Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education represents Israel in ENIC-NARIC networks.

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672. Formally, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (11/04/1997). It is an international convention jointly developed and adopted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, which binds signatory countries to adopt fair practices in recognising HE qualifications.

Israel participates in ETF's Quality Assurance Forum.

Israel is a member of the OECD. It participates in the OECD's Future of Education and Skills 2030 programme, which aims to ensure high-quality, comprehensive, and equal education and promote opportunities for lifelong learning by 2030. It participates in other informal OECD Working Groups, including the Working Group on Professional Tertiary Education, which runs from 2020 to 2022.

International donor support

Development of the INQF is currently coordinated by the EU Twinning project, a partnership between Italy's Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR) and the Israeli Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education. MIUR, the Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence, or CIMEA i.e. Italy's ENIC-NARIC representative, and Studiare Sviluppo, a consultancy subsidiary of the national Ministry of the Economy, comprise the Italian team.

ETF has been a partner from the launch of the Twinning project and had earlier, in 2011 and 2016, supported discussions in Israel on the possibility of establishing an NQF.

Important lessons and future plans

The current EU Twinning Project expires in February 2022. The Project and Israeli actors have focussed so far on three components of the NQF's development: levels, governance, and legislation.

The next stage is development of level descriptors for the NQF. The country should consider development of standards, curricula, and qualifications in outcomes; and look at developing qualifications on a unit basis, which would aid implementation of validation of nonformal and informal learning, and lifelong learning more broadly.

A decision is required on governance. The Inter-Ministerial Working Group will need to look at options such as an inter-ministerial council-type body, or a dedicated agency.

A roadmap is needed, comprising components such as definition of level descriptors, procedures for levelling of qualifications, development of standards and guidelines for drafting learning outcomes in qualifications. Public and stakeholder consultations should be foreseen in any plan. Legislation will be needed to formally establish the NQF; define its

role in the country's education and training system; define its functions; and define what a qualification is. Secondary legislation, or regulations, will be required for its implementation e.g. on procedures for levelling of qualifications, quality assurance procedures, stakeholder roles, RPL etc.

Abbreviations

AMAL	School network
CHE	Council of Higher Education
CIMEA	Italian Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training
DEFAD	Department for Evaluation of Foreign Academic Degrees (Ministry of Education)
ENIC/ NARIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Union/ National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
GDP	Gross domestic product
HE	Higher Education
INQF	Israeli National Qualifications Framework
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
MAI	Manufacturers' Association of Israel
MAHAT/NITTS	(Government-run) Institute for Training in Technology and Science
MIUR	Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Services
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ORT	Association for Vocational Crafts (an education NGO)
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Main sources of information

https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/regions-and-countries/countries/israel

https://edu.gov.il/sites/international-relations/nfq/Pages/nqf.aspx

https://www.facebook.com/Establishment-of-the-Israeli-NQF-Twinning-project-1863397977304421/

Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
Online platform	https://openspace.etf.europa.eu
Twitter	@etfeuropa
Facebook	facebook.com/etfeuropa
YouTube	www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
Live&Learn	https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/
Instagram	instagram.com/etfeuropa/
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JORDAN

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

Jordan's National Qualifications Framework (the JNQF) was adopted via a bylaw in January 2019. It is a 10-level, learning outcomes-based, comprehensive framework spanning qualifications from general education, TVET and higher education. The level descriptors are defined by three domains: knowledge and understanding, skills and competencies.

The NQF is intended to facilitate permeability among the different sub-sectors of the country's education and training sector, promote use of learning outcomes in qualifications and raise their quality, contribute to broad VET quality and attract more students to VET pathways.

The Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education Institutions (AQACHEI) has overall responsibility for the NQF; additionally, it oversees the implementation of the NQF in higher education. The Ministry of Education and the new Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission (TVSDC) guide qualifications development for general and vocational education respectively. Stakeholder involvement remains consultative rather than cooperative for the time being.

Validation of nonformal and informal learning is currently used to certify candidates for several qualifications.

Jordan is a member of the Arab Qualifications Framework.

The framework has been adopted in law, and governing structures are operating. However, there is not yet a clear implementation strategy and procedures for development, validation and registering of qualifications need to be more closely defined. Learning outcomes are not in consistent use. Jordan's NQF is therefore at the adoption stage.

Policy context

Jordan has a population of 10.8 million[673], which is growing rapidly and is predominantly young - almost 70% of the country's population are under 30 years old.

Recent crises in the region, especially the wars in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, have damaged the Jordanian economy. Trade has been disrupted while the refugee influx has strained public services and the local labour market. In the years before the Covid-19 pandemic, economic growth hovered around 2%, insufficient to create an adequate number of jobs to absorb new entrants to the labour market.[674]

Jordan's labour market is characterised by a very low activity rate, at only 36.2% in 2018. Female labour force participation is among the lowest in MENA region and the world at 15%[675] . Unemployment is high, at 19% in 2019, and especially so among youth and women. In 2019 unemployment in the 1519 age group was 48%, and for those aged 20-24, 39%. Other features are high levels of young people not in employment, education and training (NEETs) and high unemployment among the tertiary-educated (23%)[676].

Public administration is the major employer in the country, absorbing 26% of the workforce. Posts in the public sector are much sought after, given the above-indicated high unemployment levels. Most enterprises are micro and small enterprises with fewer than 20 employees.

As a result of the pandemic, unemployment has risen to 24.7%[677]. COVID-19 has disrupted the

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673. Q4 2020, Department of Statistics, http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/
674. EBRD Jordan: https://www.ebrd.com/jordan.html
675. ILOSTAT
676. Ibid.
677. Q4 2020, Department of Statistics, Jordan, http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/

Jordanian economy to the extent that it is projected to contract by 6% in 2020 with a devastating impact on tourism, imports, remittances, as well as services and the informal economy.

Jordan acknowledges its deep-seated structural challenges of public dept, fiscal deficit, low competitiveness and low productivity. In response, the country's strategy "Jordan 2025: A national vision and strategy", identifies a set of national objectives which include fiscal stability, reduction of public debt, increasing foreign investment, improving labour market policies, and increasing women's participation in the labour market. Human resource development is acknowledged throughout the document as the country's principal asset.

During 2020, responding to COVID, Jordan closed its schools and delivered classes via national TV. A dedicated platform for e-Learning for VET was launched and teachers were trained in digital skills and online teaching.

NQF legal basis

The Government adopted Bylaw number 9 on the National Qualifications Framework in January 2019[678]. It provides the legal basis for the Jordanian NQF.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

Jordan has achieved nearly universal (95%) net enrolment rate for basic education and an over 70% net enrolment rate for secondary education (as of 2018). These rates are higher for girls and lower for Syrian refugees[679].

Almost 50% of the active population (% age 15+) had low (at most, lower secondary) educational attainment, 17% had medium and 33.5% had high (bachelor's degree and above) attainment.

Dynamic demographic growth and the influx of refugees has challenged the infrastructure and personnel capacities of the Jordanian education system. Demand for higher education programmes is growing.

PISA 2018 results in reading, maths and science showed significant improvements over the 2012 and 2015 assessments. 59% of students attained

at least Level 2 proficiency in reading (against the OECD average of 77%), 41% in mathematics (OECD average, 76%) and 60% in science (OECD average, 78%).

Jordanian general education starts with kindergarten at age 5 and runs to age 15. Secondary education splits into academic and vocational streams and ends with the Tawjihi – the national secondary certificate exam. Only students who pass the Tawjihi are eligible to move on to higher education.

Upper secondary VET enrolment is low - in 2017, only 14% of upper secondary students were pursuing vocational programmes, while students enrolled in VET-oriented community colleges represented only under 10% of those enrolled in universities. Very few TVET and college graduates progress to higher education programmes. VET suffers from a poor image.

VET is delivered in three main subsystems:
- the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), a semi-autonomous governmental institution, governed by a board of directors headed by the Minister of Labour. VTC delivers initial vocational training programmes in vocational centres at semi-skilled, skilled and craftsman levels. VTC also offers continuing training.

Similar programmes are also offered by the National Employment and Training Company (NET) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).
- the Ministry of Education provides vocational education programmes which last two years at secondary education level;
- technical education is provided by community colleges managed by the Al-Balqa' Applied University (BAU), which offer:
  - o vocational training programmes for students who have completed secondary education (with or without the Tawjihi) that last 1 or 2 years;
  - o technical education programmes of 2-3 years in duration for students with the general secondary certificate, the Tawjihi.

Similar programmes are also provided in the army.

The TVET system in Jordan is dominated by public providers. There are private VET centres and schools that offer training in a wide range of specialisations, although very few have been accredited and their precise number is unknown.

The National Human Resource Development Strategy (HRD) 2016–2025[680] provides an overall

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678. ETF, 2020, Torino Process 2018-2020 Jordan – national report, https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/trp/torinoprocess-2018-2020-jordan-national-report

679. Economic Social Council 2019, Public Education Sector in Jordan, Budget Brief

680. https://www.hrd.jo/nationalstrategy

framework for reforms in education and training, involving all relevant ministries. This strategy sets targets for each of the education and training sub-systems starting from early childhood education. In TVET, the HRD Strategy notes the outdated teaching practices with limited opportunities for practical training, lack of labour market relevance of the programmes and few CVET programmes. The proposed reform measures aim at a substantial increase of youth and adults with skills relevant for employment and entrepreneurship.

The Strategy envisages improving the quality of TVET through the introduction of consistent standards for TVET teachers and instructors, and alignment of quality assurance requirements for training providers. Additionally, strengthening of programmes' relevance is planned by involving the private sector in the sector governance structures. Further, promotion and recognition of all forms of learning is envisaged along with the creation of progression pathways and the introduction of new degree-level TVET programmes. Implementation of the NQF is listed as one of the projects instrumental to the achievement of these objectives.

The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2018–2022 was adopted by the Ministry of Education to guide the development of the education sector. It covers six areas: (1) early childhood education, (2) access and equity, (3) system strengthening, (4) quality, (5) human resources and (6) vocational education. The ESP includes 40 key performance indicators demonstrating a level of commitment to regular progress monitoring.

A major re-structuring of VET governance was initiated in 2019 - the Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission (TVSDC) was established by law in an attempt to integrate the governance of the fragmented TVET sector. The TVSDC oversees strategic and policy planning in TVET through its Council, chaired by the Minister of Labour. The Council includes members from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and representatives of employers and social partners.

TVSDC enjoys substantial operational and financial autonomy.

Aims of NQF
The NQF is intended to improve permeability between the different education and training subsystems, promote vertical and horizontal mobility of learners, facilitate recognition of all forms of learning, improve quality by introducing standards and adjusting education and training programmes to learning outcomes in line with level descriptors.

The framework should also encourage the development of CVET provision, in particular higher-level TVET courses, which in turn is expected to attract more students to TVET.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure
The Jordanian NQF consists of 10 qualifications levels.

General level descriptors are used for all types of qualifications. They are grouped under three domains: knowledge, skills and competencies.

Types of qualifications
The NQF encompasses all levels and types of qualifications from general education, vocational and technical education and training, and higher education.

Jordan has a complex system of VET qualifications which spans levels 2 and 6 of the NQF.

Types are:
- semi-skilled, skilled and craftsman level certificates, which correspond to NQF levels 2, 3 and 4, respectively. These qualifications are awarded by the VTC, the National Employment and
  Training Company (NET) and some accredited private training providers;
  o the general secondary education certificate, the Tawjihi, which is awarded to students who have completed vocational secondary or general secondary education, at NQF level 4;
- a vocational diploma, which is awarded by post-secondary community colleges on successful completion of a 1-2 year training programme; it is placed at NQF level 5;
- a technical/intermediate diploma, which is awarded by community colleges on successful completion of a 2-3 year training programme; the diploma places at NQF level 6.

In higher education, qualification types by NQF level are:
- BA and BSc. qualifications, level 7;
- Higher (Postgraduate) Diploma, level 8;
- MA and MSc. qualifications, level 9;
- PhD, level 10.

An important recent development is the approval of new higher education-level TVET programmes. These are called professional degree programmes - professional bachelor's, professional master's and professional doctorate. They will be placed on

the same NQF levels as the academic bachelor's, master's and Ph.D. degrees, respectively.

Quality assurance of qualifications
Traditionally, quality assurance of VET programmes and qualifications in Jordan has been fragmented between different regulators pursing different approaches and using separate criteria in the various sectors of general, higher and vocational education and in private provision.

The Government intends that the new Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission exert a unifying effect.

A number of positive initiatives have been introduced in recent years to strengthen the quality of qualifications. For example, occupational standards validated by private sector representatives have been used in TVET as a basis for development of training programmes. Occasional tracer studies and satisfaction surveys have been carried out.

However, the existing mechanisms have focused on centralised control over inputs, processes and outputs rather than evaluation of the training outcomes. The old Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) lacked the capacity and resources to sufficiently exercise its regulatory role and the procedures and the level of enforcement did not assure continuous enhancement of the system.

The NQF should introduce common policies for quality assurance throughout programme and institutional accreditation. CAQA was merged with the structures of the newly established TVSDC.

Based on TVSCD law 3, additional bylaws were adopted in 2020:
* bylaw no.15 on requirements for vocational trainers and supervisors and their classification and ranking;
* bylaw no. 19 on accreditation of TVET providers; and
* bylaw no. 20 of 2020 on approval of qualifications and certificates[681].

TVSDC is currently in charge of accrediting, supervising and evaluating programmes in secondary vocational education, vocational training and technical and continuing training, excluding only institutions and programmes which award higher education degrees. The relevance and the quality of qualifications should be strengthened by the involvement of Sector Skills Councils in their development.

AQAHEI verifies and evaluates the learning outcomes included in qualifications. Procedures for approval of qualifications, and their registration in the NQF, and which body should do what, are still under discussion.

In higher education, AQAHEI uses quality assurance standards for programmes that include eight unified criteria and accompanying sub-criteria with indicators that require evidence provision. The standards cover elements such as use of learning outcomes and feedback from students and employers regarding the education outcomes. Institutional self-assessment and its review by a panel are the main procedural elements required to obtain the quality assurance certificate. Detailed description of standards and procedures, relevant guidelines and the list of the universities with quality assurance certificate are publicly available[682]. These standards do not yet include reference to the NQF levels. Increasing number of programmes have been granted certificates of quality by AQACHEI.

The EU-funded Technical Assistance to the Skills for Employment and Social Inclusion Programme (TA SESIP) supported development of a draft policy document that can be used to initiate the implementation of a common reference framework for quality assurance under the NQF.

Use of learning outcomes and standards
Currently qualifications are mainly defined by inputs, rather than learning outcomes. Likewise, the application of standards and learning outcomes in training and assessment has so far been inconsistent.

The implementation of the NQF is intended to reinforce the outcomes orientation of the Jordanian education and training system. The NQF bylaw specifies that AQACHEI has the mandate to "audit, verify and evaluate learning outcomes" of qualifications. Qualifications have to be described in the language of learning outcomes and should comply with the defined level descriptors.

Under CAQA's oversight, vocational training curricula were developed through the Developing a Curriculum Method (DACUM) process, based on occupational standards. Employers were involved in the development and validation of standards.

In MoE, curricula and learning are developed by the National Centre for Curricula Development. Under

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681. https://tvsdc.gov.jo/en/News/bylaws-that-define-the-tvsdc-work/

682. http://en.heac.org.jo/?page_id=7609

the new TVSCD Law, the process of programme development for vocational secondary education has to be coordinated with the TVSDC and should consider sector requirements and labour market needs.

In higher education, several quality assurance standards and criteria (pertaining for example to programme development, assessment and evaluation) explicitly refer to learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are listed in the documents describing modules. However, teaching and assessment practices tend to focus on learning content rather than outcomes[683].

Selected key and transversal competencies are incorporated in some of the education and training programmes across the whole qualification system but there is no coherent framework for their consistent application.

A major shift towards describing, delivering and assessing the qualifications based on learning outcomes is yet to materialise as the concept is still relatively new to education personnel. Proper implementation of learning outcomes will require intensive capacity building activities. Teachers and instructors are often not familiar with modern teaching methods and lack sufficient industry experience.

A regular system of continuous professional development is not yet in place. The infrastructure and teaching materials need upgrading to support acquisition of practical skills. The use of work-based learning is limited, although the establishment of the TVSDC, whose governing structure includes employers has positively influenced the number of partnership agreements concluded with the private sector.

Credit systems
Learner mobility between different education sub-systems in Jordan is limited but new initiatives have been proposed to remedy the situation.

After completion of grade 10 pupils leaving primary school are streamed into academic or vocational tracks based on their scores. The highest-scoring go to general education, the rest to vocational education or VTC programmes.

The general education and vocational education programmes under MoE end with the General Secondary Education Certificate (GSEC or Tawjihi)

examination. Students' results in the Tawjihi determine whether the students will be admitted to the university, which university can they enrol in, and which programmes they can study.

Students of VTC programmes do not typically pass the Tawjihi and have generally had limited opportunities for further learning.

The community colleges accept students with general secondary education certificates (with or without the Tawjihi). Students who have passed the Tawjihi can access technical level courses that end with national comprehensive exams (Al Shamel). A high score in the Al Shamel exams opens the door to higher education. Only 5% of community college graduates access universities.

The centralised system does not leave much space for career choices based on information from the labour market career opportunities in different occupations. VET programmes are associated with the stigma of academic underachievement and jobs that do not assure decent conditions and wages. Limited progression pathways offered by the VTC programmes make them the least preferred option by students and their families.

In higher education, the recently introduced quality assurance standards require adoption of clear policies on transfer of students between universities and programmes. In addition to that, new initiatives have been proposed to facilitate bridging for TVET graduates to professional bachelor's degree programmes at technical universities; people who have substantial (4-5 years) work experience and pass a qualifying exam will be offered a preparatory year that can lead to a professional degree.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF
AQACHEI has the mandate to set the overall procedures and standards for all national qualifications. Its tasks include registering qualifications in the NQF and accrediting awarding bodies, developing procedures for entry and progression routes and standards and criteria for quality assurance and recognition of prior learning. It is also responsible for development of procedures related for mapping foreign qualifications to the framework and aligning the framework with international and regional frameworks.

In accordance with the TVSDC Law and related bylaws, institutions awarding TVET qualifications

683. British Council, Mapping the Jordanian Learner's Journey, https://www.britishcouncil.jo/sites/default/files/mapping-the-jordanian-learner-journey-full-report.pdf

undergo accreditation through the former CAQA, now incorporated into TVSDC.

The TVSDC has been established to coordinate the fragmented TVET sector. It is overseen by a

Council chaired by the Minister of Labour. The members of the Council include the Minister of

Education, the Minister of Higher Education, the president of AQACHEI, a representative of the Crown Prince Foundation and industry representatives including from the tourism, trade, construction, communication and health sectors. Private sector representatives are 60% of members in the Council. The Council does not include the trades unions.

The TVSDC law envisaged a consultative role for the Sector Skills Councils in identification of sector skills needs and development of occupational standards. The Sector Skills Councils comprise employer and trades union representatives from the respective economic sectors, plus government officials from relevant ministries.

The Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), a semi-autonomous governmental institution, is governed by a board of directors headed by the Minister of Labour. Its members include representatives from the government, civil society and the private sector.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

TVSDC is in charge of developing TVET-related policies, plans and laws; approving occupational and programme standards; accrediting and supervising TVET providers and programmes e.g. those provided by the VTC and the community colleges; developing standards for recruitment and professional development of TVET teachers and instructors; collaboration and partnership with the private sector; organisation of occupational tests to recognise prior learning as well as recognition of foreign TVET qualifications.

The Ministry of Education remains in charge of the standards and accreditation for general education.

By late 2020, 21 Sector Skills Councils had been established. International organisations have been supporting the councils in the water and energy, ICT, logistic, tourism, garments furniture and chemical sectors.

Involvement of employers in the Skills Councils has been increasing, although some employers have been advocating to move from their current consultative role to a more cooperative dialogue

whereby they are engaged in decision-making with government.

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

VNFIL arrangements

In 2016 CAQA began using an occupational test mechanism for recognition of prior learning of workers on three levels: semi-skilled, skilled and craftsman. In 2018 more than 3,000 people were certified via this scheme, over a wide range of occupations.

With the assistance of international agencies, this occupational skills certification programme has been offered to Syrian refugees.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings

The adoption of the NQF is an important step in the country's HRD Strategy; significantly the NQF was introduced alongside other major governance reforms in TVET.

These reforms are contributing to strengthening of the partnerships in skills development, which, in the TVET sector especially, should facilitate the relevance of the newly developed training programmes. Quality assurance mechanisms increasingly refer to learning outcomes.

There is an effort to develop higher-level TVET qualifications, notably the new types i.e. the professional bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees.

The main roles and responsibilities in the implementation of the NQF have been allocated. The implementation structures - TVSDC and AQACHEI - are in place and are conducting some of the NQF-related operations such as institutional and programme accreditation.

Establishment of the TVSDC is considered a major achievement in the TVET sector. It has been followed by adoption of by-laws regulating equivalencies of TVET certificates, accreditation of TVET providers, and criteria for selection and classification of TVET trainers and supervisors.

Between 2014 and 2018 (before the formal adoption of the NQF), the former CAQA approved 95 TVET

qualifications at levels 1 to 4[684]. AQACHEI has so far validated 27 higher education qualifications.

Qualifications registers and databases
There is not yet a publicly accessible register of all national, quality-assured qualifications.

Qualification documents
The certificates issued do not yet include reference to the NQF.

Recognition of foreign qualifications
The NQF bylaw attributes responsibility for international recognition of qualifications to AQACHEI. However, currently each of the bodies in charge of the respective education sub-systems implements its own procedures for recognition.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research carries out the process of recognition of foreign higher education qualifications through its Recognition & Certificates Equivalency Directorate. It runs an on-line service for equivalency requests, provides lists of accredited foreign higher education institutions and procedures for requesting accreditation.

In 2020, TVSDC issued by-law no. 20, which regulates recognition of foreign qualifications in TVET. Applications for equivalency will be processed by a specially-formed Committee. Its tasks include verifying legality of the evidence, including whether the certificate allows the holder to practise the related occupation in the country where the qualification was awarded, verification of the programme level and training hours and its comparison with the national programmes. An appeal procedure is envisaged.

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks
There are two regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs).

The Arab Qualifications Framework (AQF) is being developed by the Arab Network for Quality

Assurance in Higher Education, the ANQAHE. Jordan is a member of ANQAHE, along with Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Oman, United Arab

Emirates, Qatar, Bahrein, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. This 10-level framework was founded in 2012.

It is intended to support transparency and recognition of the respective national qualifications within the RQF and externally with other RQFs and NQF and to promote quality of qualifications. Currently, only the Higher Education levels (Levels 4 to 10) are populated, but the countries plan to include VET qualifications.

The Gulf Qualifications Framework (GQF) seeks to facilitate labour mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications. The GQF is an instrument of the of the Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC, whose members are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. A blueprint for a 10-level meta-QF has been agreed, but not formally approved. There is significant migration by Jordanians to this region.

Both regional frameworks are still under development and referencing processes have not yet been launched.

Additionally, the EQF now provides for third countries to seek comparison of their NQF with the

European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Jordan may request such an exercise in future, once it has reached a level of development indicated in the comparison criteria defined by the European Commission.

International cooperation
AQACHEI is a member of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, a nongovernmental organisation which brings together members from the Arab countries.

International donor support
Through the Jordan Compact agreed in 2016, the Jordanian government and the international community have sought to aid the Syrian refugees and their hosting communities by mobilising significant funds in grants and loans. This money has enabled, among other projects, provision of school enrolment and boosted labour market participation, of youth and women in particular.

The EU provided the Technical Assistance Skills for Employment and Social Inclusion Programme (TA SESIP) up to 2020. TA SESIP included advisory inputs on implementation of the NQF, quality assurance arrangements, credit transfer, recognition of qualifications, development of occupational profiles and capacity building on curriculum development and governance. A new budget support programme is under preparation.

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684. Based on reporting of the EU-Funded Technical Assistance to the "Skills for Employment and Social Inclusion Programme (TE SESIP)" https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/ta-sesip-

EBRD, GIZ and ILO have been supporting the Sector Skills Councils in development of strategic plans and occupational standards.

ILO has supported the recognition of prior learning and certification for Syrians and Jordanians in the construction, confectionary and garment sectors.

TVSDC has developed a donor coordination strategy to be adopted for the period 2019-2025.

ETF runs the ETF Forum for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, of which Jordan is a member. ETF is also working with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to design a skills strategy for the tourism sector.

Important lessons and future plans

Implementation of the NQF has been prioritised in the HRD Strategy.

Plans for the NQF's implementation should be guided by a strategy that clearly specifies the functions envisaged for the framework and lists policies, guidelines and procedures to be developed. Such a strategy should consider resources implications.

Reform of the TVET system has created several platforms for dialogue on qualifications, in particular through the broad membership of the TVSDC Council and through the Sector Skills Councils. Strengthening the role of Sector Skills Councils in developing qualifications via a more cooperative role

would be beneficial in bringing more labour market relevance.

The Jordanian NQF remains a loose framework – each education subsystem is in charge of providing criteria for qualifications development, delivery and assessment.

In order for the NQF to play a role in building confidence in the country's qualifications, the institutions responsible for development, revision, approval and registering of qualifications have to be strengthened and properly resourced. Currently, only one expert at AQACHEI has time specifically allocated to NQF development.

Important decisions must be made about the relationship between the NQF and quality assurance procedures, in particular: design, development and description of qualifications, validity and reliability of assessment, feedback mechanisms and procedures for continuous improvement. This applies across all education and training sub-systems.

Sustained and substantial investment in teaching and learning will be necessary to assure consistent application of learning outcomes-based approaches to qualifications.

Authorities should further implementation of validation of nonformal and informal learning.

To reach people directly, including to inform programme, qualification and career choices, authorities should develop an integrated register of qualifications and launch communication campaigns.

Abbreviations			
AQACHEI	Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education Institutions	MoHESR	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
BAU	Al-Balqa Applied University	NET	National Employment and Training Company (NET)
CAQA	Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance	NQF	National Qualification Framework
DACUM	Developing a Curriculum Method	RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
ESP	Education Strategic Plan	TA SESIP	Technical Assistance, Skills for Employment and Social Inclusion Programme
EU	European Union		
GSEC	General Secondary Education Certificate (Tawjihi)	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit	TVSDC	Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission
HRD	Human Resources Development	VTC	Vocational Training Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization		
MOE	Ministry of Education		

Main sources of information

AQACHEI: www.heac.org.jo

TVSDC: http://www.tvsdc.gov.jo/

Ministry of Education: www.moe.gov.jo

Ministry of Higher Education: www.mohe.gov.jo

Department of Statistics: www.dosweb.dos.gov.jo

EBRD Jordan: www.ebrd.com/jordan.html

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The European Training Foundation

KAZAKHSTAN

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

Kazakhstan first adopted an NQF in 2012, then produced a revised and newly approved version in 2016. The KZ QF has eight levels, accommodating qualifications from general, VET, adult, and higher education.

The National Council for the Development of Social and Labour Spheres, an inter-ministerial group, steers development and implementation of the NQF.

Kazakhstan is a member of the Bologna Process, and so participates in the Qualifications Framework of the European higher education area.

Kazakhstan has an established NQF structure and level descriptors, has adopted its NQF, has designated governing institutions and allocated key functions to stakeholders and so is at the adoption stage.

Policy context

Kazakhstan participates in the EU's European Education Initiative (EEI) in Central Asia, which fosters cooperation in education in the region. In 2020, the EU and Kazakhstan signed the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, whose remit includes education and training.

Kazakhstan has experienced high economic growth over the last 10 years, strongly influenced by oil and gas prices. In 2019, its GDP growth was 4.5%[685]. The country is seeking to diversify its economy, to reduce its current over-reliance on raw materials and resources.

The country has a high activity rate at 70% in 2018; a high employment rate of 66.6% in 2018; and low unemployment, 5% in 2018, and only 3.7% for young people.

Although the country's population is growing, it is also ageing, as the younger cohort contracts.

Kazakhstan 2050, the country's strategy for socio-economic development, calls for attracting inward investment and increasing Kazakhstan's competitiveness in new markets. Kazakhstan's State Programme for Development of Education and Science 2020-2025, the Strategic Plan for

Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) by 2025, and the State programme for IndustrialInnovative development of RK 2020-2025, provide the framework and set directions for the country's continuing VET reform.

40.3% of students at upper secondary level attend vocational programmes (2018).

Covid 19 required quick solutions from the country's education and training system. All schools and colleges moved to distance education from early March 2020. The system largely reacted with speed and efficiency, making available online education platforms, public TV networks, and providing equipment and training to teachers. Enrolments and exams also moved online, providing vocational colleges with considerable autonomy on student assessment. At the same time, the situation revealed major differences among VET providers in their digital readiness. The use of blended learning is expected to increase post-pandemic.

NQF legal basis

There are 3 principal legal acts on the NQF:
- Joint Order 8022 of 19 October 2012, adopted by the Ministries of Health and Social Development and Education and Science, approved an 8-level NQF. It also specified the other components of the National Qualifications System, namely the Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks and occupational standards;

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685. Bureau of National statistics of RK.

- the Labour Code of 2016 also addressed the NQF, Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks and assessment;
- the NQF was formally confirmed on 16 March 2016 by the tripartite committee for social partnership and regulation of social and labour relations. On 18 June 2013, Ministers adopted an implementation plan for the National System of Qualifications under government regulation number 616.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

Since 2008, Kazakhstan has launched a series of initiatives aimed at modernising and improving the quality of its education and training system, to support the country's policies of accelerated industrialisation, economic modernisation, and innovation.

Kazakhstan's State Programme for Development of Education and Science 2020-2025 provides the framework within which the country pursues VET reform, including the implementation of the KZ QF. Objectives of the Programme include improving permeability and lifelong learning orientation of the education and training system, modernising teachers' pre-service and in-service education, updating curricula, modernising VET providers' external and internal quality assurance, and expanding independent certification of VET graduates.

Pathways to HE are open for graduates from both general and vocational education and are conditional on passing the Unified National Test. Since 2018, VET graduates applying to higher education institutions have been granted a reduction in duration of their HE studies in fields related to their VET specialisation. Both government and employers want to see more VET graduates as general education graduates often struggle to find work. The Ministry of Education continues to fund more VET places.

The Ministry is also encouraging flexibility of VET provision, so that colleges and other providers can modify up to 50% of the curricula (up to 80% in dual education), as opposed to the previous system, in which curricula was highly centralised.

In 2016, the World Bank and the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development launched the project Skills and Jobs, running to 2021, which supports development of the National Qualifications System.

In 2017, an interdepartmental Committee under the Deputy Prime Minister established the programme for productive employment and the National Qualifications System, including a new classifier for employment and 70 new occupational standards. In 2018, new methodologies for Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks and for occupational standards development were adopted.

Aims of NQF

The KZ NQF has been designed as a single structure for the classification of qualifications. It will include all quality-assured qualifications achieved through all education and training programmes spanning general secondary, higher education, vocational education, and adult education. It also recognises outcomes achieved through experience in the workplace or other non-formal and informal environments.

The NQF is intended for various groups of users including citizens, employers, and educational authorities. Its objectives are to:
1. classify and compare qualifications from different educational sectors;
2. act as a reference to develop learning outcomes for individual qualifications;
3. inform, via its level descriptors, development of occupational and educational standards and curricula;
4. support development of assessment materials;
5. provide a benchmark for recognition in the country of foreign qualifications and for recognition of Kazakh qualifications abroad, by serving an instrument of comparison.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

The KZ QF is an 8-level structure. Descriptors are knowledge, skills and competences, competencies (personal and professional) and ways of achievement.

The NQF accommodates qualifications from general education, VET, post-secondary, higher education, and adult education.

Currently, levels 6 to 8 are reserved for degrees awarded in higher education. Levels 2 to 4 are reserved for general secondary education or VET qualifications. Level 5 is reserved for postsecondary education. The recently introduced Applied Bachelor's degree is placed at Level 5, but its level descriptors are currently identical to those for academic bachelors awarded by higher education institutions that sit at level 6.

Related instruments and references include the national classifier of occupations (adopted in 2018 with references to ISCED levels); the unified classifier of types of economic activities; the Union-wide classifier of workers' professions; the unified tariff-qualifications manual of workers' professions; the 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); the classifier of VET occupations and qualifications (since September 2020 it has been aligned with ISCED and NQF levels); and the classifier of higher education qualifications.

The country is implementing a gradual transfer from qualification characteristics described in the classifiers to occupational standards. Now these systems function in parallel. There is not yet a mechanism to ensure inclusion of labour market needs in curricula. Occupational standards are used, but for some curricula only.

Kazakhstan has 36 sectoral qualification frameworks (SQFs), whose main function is to certify industry personnel i.e. people already working in the sector. Between them, the 36 SQFs cover the 8 levels in the KZ QF. For example, the SQF for processing and production of oil and gas covers Levels 2 to 8, while in IT the SQF comprises levels 3 to 8. Each SQF has its own level descriptors; in addition, some have sub-levels. Each SQF includes:
- the SQF passport, covering sector analysis and reference to sector-specific types of economic activities from the unified classifier of types of economic activities;
- a description of the SQF, with sector-specific level descriptors;
- maps of vocational qualifications, which specify their relationship to: ISCO codes, the national classifier of occupations, and the unified classifier of types of economic activities for each covered qualification.

The inclusion of micro-credentials has not been proposed yet.

Types of qualifications
Qualification types enable classification of different qualifications which are placed at the same level but differ significantly in terms of their functions, learning outcomes, volume and/or orientations.

One significant new qualification type in the country is the Applied Bachelor's Degree, at Level 5, offered in VET colleges and combining study and practical work. It leads graduates to careers in occupations defined as "mid-level specialist". However, the

Applied Bachelor's programmes vary in length in practice, from two to four years and other durations in between, therefore they do not always conform to the short-cycle higher education qualification defined in the Bologna Process.

The State Programme for Development of Education and Science 2020-2025 aims to integrate the Applied Bachelor's degree programmes with HE programmes.

So far, these qualifications are available in education, health, transport, logistics, communications, and energy. By 2019, 48 VET colleges were offering this new type of qualification.

Quality assurance of qualifications
Since 2012, there has been a process for developing new and updating existing curricula for TVET. Curricula development is conducted on a modular, competency-based approach, considering occupational standards, sectoral standards, and standards of the international WorldSkills movement. In the absence of WorldSkills standards and professional standards for any qualification, employers' legal documents containing labour functions and job responsibilities are used, and mandatory consultations with the employer are held.

The Minister of Education's Order of 31 October 2018 established state standards for all levels of education. For VET, it specifies requirements for the learning outcomes- based content of education, maximum volume of study, level of qualification and duration of studies. The requirements for the qualification levels of VET graduates are defined by curricula, or basic or professional qualifications based on occupational standards[686].

External quality assurance of qualifications at the level of VET providers is implemented through several processes: licencing, accreditation, external evaluation, certification. However, there is currently no comprehensive approach to ensuring the quality of education and Kazakhstan's State Programme for Development of Education and Science 2020-2025 addresses the issue of moving from quality control to quality assurance. Accreditation of educational organizations in Kazakhstan is carried out on a voluntary basis and at the expense of educational organizations (which many colleges cannot afford).

Accreditation of providers and programmes has progressed but needs to look more at validating qualifications and at assessment procedures,

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686. https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/V1800017669#z1221

paying special attention to adapting to learning outcomes approaches. The register of accreditation organizations includes 6 Kazakhstan and 4 foreign agencies. External evaluation of the system of quality assurance of education is carried out by the state authorities on the compliance of the educational process with normative documents and legislative norms, fulfilment of license indicators.

Independent certification is currently implemented on a voluntary basis in many sectors. By 2020, 36 certification centres were established and included in the Register maintained by Atameken. 26 of the Centres are run by associations of employers, 9 by enterprises and 1 by a VET institution with support of enterprises.

The roadmap for the development of the NQS 2019-2025 includes piloting of a certification and validation system in priority sectors.

Use of learning outcomes and standards
The Order of the Minister of Education, adopted on 31 October 2018, establishing state standards for all levels of education, specifies that the content of education at all levels must be learning outcomes based.

Further, the legal act adopting the NQF in 2016 frames qualifications in outcomes terms: "Qualification is an official recognition of the acquired competences for the labour market and further education and training, giving the right to carry out work".

Occupational standards are essential for defining qualifications and learning outcomes and are probably the most advanced single feature of the country's reform of its national qualification system.

By early 2021, 582 occupational standards had been approved.

The World Bank, and the Ministry of Education, cooperating on the project "KZ Skills and Jobs", are working with the sectors to develop new sets of sectoral qualifications and occupational standards.

In December 2019, the Minister of Education and Science updated the Classifier of VET occupations and qualifications – since September 2020 the classifier has reflected both ISCED and NQF levels.

Occupational standards are being actively used in updating curricula.

By 2022, Kazakhstan plans to update all teacher training curricula in line with occupational standards. For example, the continuing professional development courses for VET teachers are aligned with overall VET reform and modernisation, including outcomes. Elements related to learning outcomes orientation, competency-based approaches, and use of occupational standards are integrated in such programmes.

Where there is insufficient use of occupational standards by sectors, by enterprises (for human resource management) and for in-service training purposes, this is partly due to heavy procedures in the validation of standards, as well as by the lack of methodological support.

Credit systems
In higher education, Kazakhstan is a member of the Bologna Process. The country has a national credit system which is comparable with ECTS, based on rules developed by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Until recently, credit was confined to HE only. However, in 2018 the Minister of Education and Science issued an order to begin implementing a credit system VET[687], based on the adaptation of the European ECVET system.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF
In 2019, the National Council for Qualifications was created, an interministerial advisory body reporting to the Government, to lead development and implementation of the NQF. It drafted a roadmap, which sets out actions for implementation of the National Qualifications System in Kazakhstan by 2025. In late 2019, the Council was integrated into the National Council for the Development of Social and Labour Spheres.

In qualifications, the Council identifies needed actions in strengthening links between the labour market and education and training.

The Council is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and comprises the following ministries:
- Labour and Social Protection;
- Agriculture;
- National Economy;
- Education and Science;
- Industry and Infrastructure Development;
- Culture and Sports;
- Digital development, innovation, and aero-space industry;

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687. https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/V1800017554#z15

- Health
- Finance
- Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources
- Commerce and Integration
- Energy.

Plus, among stakeholders:
- the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs, called "Atameken";
- the Transport and logistics Union "Kazlogistics", Association of oil and energy organisations "Kazenergy".

The Ministry of Education with the support of different entities such as Talap (previously known as

Kasipkor), the methodological innovation centre supporting VET development, and the Centre for the Bologna Process, which supports higher education reforms, is responsible for developing and validating competency-based education standards for all levels of education. Line ministries work with sectoral social partnership committees. Sectoral committees and sector experts of professional associations, with methodological support from Atameken and the World Bank, develop Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks and occupational standards.

Atameken is responsible for validating occupational standards.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders
24 sector councils operate to oversee skills development in their respective industries. They have also led development of the significant numbers of occupational standards. Businesses are gradually becoming more engaged in VET, including in qualifications and curricula.

From business, most prominent in qualifications development is the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs, or Atameken. It leads development of the sectoral qualifications frameworks, occupational standards, and the accreditation of Centres for the Certification of Specialists. These tasks were formalised in the 2016 Labour Code.

In 2020, Atameken created a dedicated subcommittee on qualifications, which will coordinate the relevant expertise to develop and propose new qualifications.

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

VNFIL arrangements
A form of validation already operates in some industry sectors – currently, 36 centres use occupational standards to assess and certify specialists. However, this is not formal certification.

The new Concept for Lifelong Learning sets a series of objectives for building a system of lifelong learning through validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The Concept would allow people to access learning at any stage of their life and - through any formal, informal, or nonformal provision - to accumulate recognised and potentially certified lifelong learning credits, building up a bank of skills and competences.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Education adopted Order N° 508 on 28 September 2018. It specifies rules for validation of adults' learning outcomes acquired through non-formal learning. The Ministry drew on analyses of existing systems and practices in other countries to develop the Order.

Further, the Education Law grants official status to recognition of non-formal learning.

In March 2021, Kazakhstan validated the list of regulated occupations that will need to undergo obligatory independent certification for graduates as of 2021. It includes 72 occupations, of which 70 are in health care, 1 in accounting, 1 in auditing. Currently, Kazakhstan regulates professional activities in 202 occupations.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
The country's strong economic growth and consequent need to develop relevant qualifications has propelled the NQF forward. In particular, the strength of industry in the country has contributed to a focus on labour market relevance, especially via occupational standards.

Atameken has helped to increase the role of different sectoral stakeholders. There is a very active group of sectoral actors, albeit some feel that they are not sufficiently involved in implementing changes in the education system.

Qualifications registers and databases
Atameken manages a register of occupational standards, and lists Certification Centres, of which there are now 36.

Kazakhstan maintains a State Classifier of VET occupations and qualifications, which reflects both ISCED levels and NQF levels. Currently, there are 213 occupations and 693 qualifications listed.

But there is no national register or database bringing together sectoral standards and frameworks. Sectoral qualifications frameworks and validated occupational standards are uploaded on Atameken website in a static, file-based, form that does not allow searching by specific profession, job function or developer.

Career information and guidance
In Kazakhstan, careers guidance is provided by schools, careers centres, national and regional chambers of entrepreneurs, youth policy institutes, employment centres and others. But there is no coordinated strategy, nor a single agency for career guidance.

A World Bank project, "Promoting Productive Innovation", working with a local enterprise, developed a unified information system for skills forecasting and careers guidance, Bagdar (www.bagdar.kz). Badgar provides information on available occupation fields and qualifications classified by sectors and subsectors; advice on required knowledge, skills and competencies; relevant educational institutions; and current and forecasted demands for these occupations.

A new tool is "Atlas", launched in 2020, by the Ministry of Labour. It forecasts what new occupations and skills will be needed, and which will be redundant, using a foresight methodology; it includes a careers guidance component. The government intends that Atlas become a reference and orientation for education providers and individuals.

Recognition of foreign qualifications
Kazakhstan has a functioning system for the assessment and recognition of foreign academic qualifications at associate degree, and bachelor's and master's levels, which is supported by legislation and in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Kazakshtan ratified the Lisbon Convention in 1998 and brought it into force in early 1999.

The country's Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Centre deals with recognition and equivalence requests for degrees, adhering to the Rules for Recognition and Nostrification[688] of Education Documents. It provides an expert

evaluation, decision and recommendation on recognition of the qualification.

Referencing to regional frameworks / other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks
Kazakhstan joined the European Higher Education Area, or the Bologna Process, as a full member in March 2011. Bologna requires that members develop a QF in higher education based on learning outcomes and that it adopt the short-cycle, bachelor's, master's and doctorate degree system of classification. More than 60 universities in the country participate. Overall, Kazakhstan is at an early stage of implementing its Bologna requirements and has not yet self-certified its NQF against the Bologna framework.

The country has recently intensified its cooperation with Russia within the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Within the EEU, 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 EEU countries will be strengthened. In the recently adopted document "On priorities of Eurasian economic integration until 2025," the five countries agreed on measures to support integration in labour migration, including achieving comparability of education systems and skills and qualifications.

International cooperation
The country's Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Centre represents Kazakhstan in ENIC-NARIC networks.

Kazakhstan has been Central Asia's major beneficiary of Erasmus+ since 2014.

Kazakhstan participates in the EU's European Education Initiative in Central Asia, which fosters cooperation - both between Central Asia and the EU, and among the CA countries themselves - in order to strengthen educational reforms in the region.

A notable action within the Initiative was the Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP) project, which included both broad policy dialogue and technical development components, including on NQFs.

International donor support
The EU, GIZ and, especially, the World Bank have contributed significantly to qualifications reform in

Kazakhstan. The World Bank is now working with national authorities and actors on the "KZ

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688. Nostrification – the process of granting recognition to a degree from a foreign university.

Skills and Jobs Project", 2016-21. It will support the development of certification and validation methodological tools; drafting of a law on vocational qualifications; harmonisation of qualifications with the countries of the EEU, CIS, and EU; piloting of qualifications in transport, construction and metallurgy sectors; and setting up of a national qualifications authority.

Kazakhstan is a member of ASEM, the Asia-Europe Meeting, a political dialogue forum which aims to enhance relations and various forms of cooperation between its partners, including in education and training.

Important lessons and future plans

Kazakhstan has made important steps in developing its National Qualifications System. The country's high industrial capacity and strong private sector have been fundamental in achieving progress.

Atameken, the key representative of enterprises, plays an important part in the NQS.

Significantly, progress is most visible in development of occupational standards, where industry plays a major role.

That said, governance structures are complex and coordination among different actors and different sectors of education and training is not always ensured. Higher education and VET could be more strongly linked.

Although outcomes are used in occupational standards, they are not yet systematically applied in teaching and learning and assessment. Methodological links between occupational standards and educational standards, programmes, and assessment should be strengthened.

The NQF descriptors should be reviewed. There is a risk of fragmentation with a very high number of sectoral qualifications frameworks. A priority is ensuring that programmes for the new Applied Bachelor's degree qualification consistently align with Bologna requirements. Descriptors for these qualifications should be revised to conform with Level 5 of the KZ QF.

The NQS is perhaps seen too narrowly as the sum of the NQF, SQFs, occupational standards and independent assessment centres. An integrated concept for the NQS, explaining its broader VET reform function, could be developed.

Kazakhstan would benefit from developing a unified national register of qualifications accessible to the public, supported by information on available programmes, educational institutions and certification processes.

Abbreviations

ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German development agency in international cooperation)
HE	higher education
KZ QF	Kazakhstan National Qualifications Framework
NQS	National Qualifications System
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
RK	Republic of Kazakhstan (RK)
TVET	Technical and vocational education

Main sources of information

World Bank KZ Skills and Jobs project reports, https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projectsoperations/project-detail/P150183

The national chamber of entrepreneurs of the Republic of Kazakhstan "Atameken", https://atameken.kz/en/

ETF, Torino Process 2018-2020 Kazakhstan: https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/trp/torino-process-20182020-kazakhstan-national-report

State Programme for Development of Education and Science of RK 2020-2025: https://primeminister.kz/ru/gosprogrammy/gosudarstvennaya-programma-razvitiya-obrazovaniya-inauki-respubliki-kazahstan-na-2020-2025-gody-9114129

Protocol on NQF validated by tripartite committee for social partnership and regulation of social and labour relations, 16.03.2016: https://atameken.kz/_uploads/content/files/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%_D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%_D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%_D0%B0%D1%8F%2%D1%_80%D0%B0%_0%BC%D0%BA%_D0%B0%20%D0%BA%D0%B2%_D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%84%D0%B8%_D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B9_2016.pdf

Methodological recommendation for development and registration on SQFs, 2016: https://atameken.kz/uploads/content/files/%D0%9C%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%_D0%BA%D0%B0%20%20%D0%9E%D0%A0%D0%9A%202016.pdf

Atlas of new occupations and competences in RK: https://www.enbek.kz/atlas/en

Bagdar unified information system for skills forecasting and careers guidance: https://www.bagdar.kz/

Roadmap for the development of NQS in RK 2019-2025: https://www.lse.ac.uk/business-andconsultancy/consulting/assets/documents/business-cooperating-with-vocational-education-andtraining-providers-for-quality-skills-and-attractive-futures.pdf

Order N° 508 of the Minister of Education and Science of RK of 28.09.2018 on VNFIL rules: https://www.ektu.kz/files/law/MonRk/v1800017588.28-09-2018.rus.pdf

Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
Online platform	https://openspace.etf.europa.eu
Twitter	@etfeuropa
Facebook	facebook.com/etfeuropa
YouTube	www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
Live&Learn	https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/
Instagram	instagram.com/etfeuropa/
LinkedIn	linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation
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Prepared by
The European Training Foundation

KOSOVO[688]

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

Kosovo's[688] parliament adopted the country's National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 2008, making it one of the early NQFs in the region. Since the 2008 law, Ministers have approved a series of regulations to operationalise the NQF, spanning approval of standards, accreditation of providers, implementation of recognition of prior learning (RPL) procedures and other functions.

The Kosovo[688] NQF is a comprehensive lifelong learning framework, encompassing qualifications from all sectors of education, plus non-formal qualifications. It consists of eight level, defined by three sets of descriptors and has been developed in close cooperation with stakeholders. It is managed by a dedicated and autonomous agency, the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), and supported by other public institutions with responsibility for the different education sub-sectors, e.g. general education, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE).

Kosovo's[688] framework closely adheres to the European Qualifications Framework's (EQF) principles and the country referenced its NQF to the EQF in 2016.

Kosovo[688] has adopted an extensive legal framework; has established a dedicated lead agency and qualifications are placed in the NQF and certificates bear level indications. However, the NQF does not yet consistently provide a platform for stakeholders, and it cannot yet be said that it fully supports or influences related reforms e.g. in curricula. Its NQF is therefore at the activation stage.

Policy context[690]

Kosovo[688] is a relatively new state, gaining independence in 2008. A Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Union (EU) and Kosovo[688] came into force on 1 April 2016.

The SAA will support the implementation of reforms and move Kosovo[688] closer to the EU.

Kosovo's[688] NQF and VET system must be placed within the context of its recent history, the ongoing political uncertainty, and the resulting economic, social and educational challenges. Unemployment levels remain high, growth is slow, the private sector is small and foreign investment limited. The country largely depends on remittances from the many Kosovars abroad and on donor support.

Before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, labour market indicators had improved, although Kosovo[688] still lags behind other Western Balkan countries against most indicators. High numbers of new labour market entrants every year and the lack of jobs translate into high inactivity and unemployment rates. In the Western Balkan region, Kosovo[688] records the lowest female activity rate (18.2% in 2019) and the highest youth unemployment rate (49.4% in 2019, though improved from 55.4% in 2018)

ETF estimated in 2019 that 52.4% of the upper secondary cohort, ISCED 3, are in VET schools. On leaving school, most young people, including those obtaining the VET Matura leaving certificate, aspire to enter higher education institutions (HEIs), given that university graduates usually fare better in the job market. Even so, employment opportunities are

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689. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)

690. This section is based on European Training Foundation (2019). Policies for Human Capital Development. Kosovo[688] an ETF Torino Process Assessment. Torino: ETF.

still limited, so that many young people access HE to defer entry into an unpromising labour market.

A national programme for the period 2017 to 2021 (Kosovo[688] Government, 2017) was adopted, consisting of four main elements:

Rule of law - combatting corruption and organised crime by introducing changes in legislation and conducting a full review of the rule of law sector;

Economic development and employment – aiming to bring sustainable economic development to an average annual growth rate of 5–7%;

Euro-Atlantic integration – strengthening Kosovo's[688] position in the international community by increasing recognition of the state by other countries and ensuring its membership in relevant international organisations;

Sectorial development – with a focus on education, health, social welfare, environment and spatial planning, as well as culture, youth and sport.

In its Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2019–2021, the government (Kosovo[688] government, 2019) addresses education and training and labour market issues by committing itself to:
- improving the quality of, and increasing the inclusion of children, in pre-university education;
- increasing the quality of VET based on labour market requirements by reviewing existing or drafting new standards, curricula and teaching materials; supplying workshop facilities, cooperating with employers and enabling professional practice in schools and companies;
- reforming higher education through completing and implementing the legal framework; developing quality assurance mechanisms; and increasing participation in international higher education and research programmes;
- increasing the access of young people and women to the labour market through quality employment services and active employment and entrepreneurship measures.

National strategies supporting these efforts, which address education and training and other sectors, are the following:
- the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2016–2021 (Prime Minister's Office, 2016);
- the National Programme for the Implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement;
- the Strategy on Education and Career Orientation 2015–2019;
- the Quality Assurance Strategy for Kosovo[688] Pre-University Education 2016–2020;

- Kosovo's[688] Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017–2021 (MES, 2016);
- the Sector Strategy of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare 2018–2022 (MLSW, 2017a); and
- the Action Plan: Increasing Youth Employment 2018–2020 (MLSW, 2017b).

NQF legal basis
Law No 03/L-060 on national qualifications, adopted on 7 November 2008, established the Kosovo[688] NQF.

Related legal and regulatory measures are the Law on Pre-University Education (Law No.04/L –032, dated of 2011), the Law on Higher Education (Law No. 04/L-037, dated of 2011), the Law on Adult Education and Training (Law No. 04-L-143, dated of 2013) and the Law on Vocational Education and Training (Law No. 04/L-138, dated of 2013).

Under the provisions of the Law on national qualifications, cited above, the National Qualifications Authority regulates 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 by other legislation.

Relevant secondary legislation includes:
- Administrative Instruction No 28/2014 on criteria and procedures for the verification of the occupational standards;
- Administrative Instruction No 31/2014 for prior learning recognition;
- Administrative Instruction No 32/2014 on criteria and procedures for quality assurance in VET institutions' internal processes;
- Administrative Instruction No 35/2014 on criteria and procedures for the validation and approval of national qualifications and accreditation of institutions providing qualifications in Kosovo;[688]
- Administrative instruction No. 09/2019 on criteria and procedures for the accreditation of institutions that implement recognition of prior learning in Kosovo.[688]

NQF-related legislation includes:
- the 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;
- Law No 04/L-032 on pre-university education in the republic of Kosovo[688] (20 August 2011) addresses levels of qualifications;
- Law No 04/L-037 on higher education in the Republic of Kosovo[688] (20 August 2011), dealing with the levels of and the accreditation of higher

education programmes and institutions, is carried out by the KAA, while the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad is carried out by MES;

- Law No 02/L-42 on vocational education and training (23 February 2006) defines qualifications standards, relating to the level of entry and several other definitions (student, diploma, etc.);
- Law No 02/L-24, on adult education and training (22 July 2005) defines certification as well as informal and non-formal learning.

Other relevant laws are:
- Law No 04/L-143, on adult education and training (2012);
- Law No 03/L-068, on education in the municipalities of Kosovo[688] (2008);
- Law No 03/L-018, on final examination and the State Matura examination (2008);
- Law No 02/L-52, on pre-school education (2006);
- Law No. 06/L-046 on the education inspectorate in the Republic of Kosovo[688] (2019).

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

The Kosovo[688] 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 Kosovo[688] NQF is explicitly intended as a reform instrument and is perceived as a key tool in building and structuring the national education system. It should therefore not only relate or link the different sub-sectors of the national system but initiate and stimulate curricular and qualifications redesign and promote institutional change.

Kosovo's[688] vision for VET system development is for an inclusive education system, based on lifelong learning principles, and offering quality education to all. The Government is continuing education reform towards increasing quality in pre-university education, improving the teacher career system, better reflection of economic demand in VET programmes and expansion of practical components.

The country's guiding document in education and training is the Kosovo[688] Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021. It is the second KESP, following the first, which ran 2011 to 2016. KESP 2017-21 was drafted by drawing on the evaluation of KESP 2011-2016, and the National Development Strategy, which recognised the need for investment and improvements in education, including VET, in order to turn Kosovo's[688] labour force into an engine

for development. KESP 2017-2021 intends to link education policy to the National Development Plan, emphasising the need for a more labour marketresponsive education and training system. KESP 2017-2021 specifies measures to improve governance and to increase the quality of education in general.

In VET, the strategy focuses on improving the relevance of school programmes in the light of labour market needs, the development of a VET-specific core curriculum in alignment with the Kosovo[688] Curriculum Framework, offering systematic provision of high quality work experience and professional practice, and, specific to Kosovo,[688] the further development and sustainability of the six Centres of Competence.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST, now the Ministry of Education and

Science - MES) established the Agency for VET and Adult Education (AVETAE) and the Council for VET and Adult Education (CVETAE) in 2014. The full functioning of these two institutions is a challenge and a prerequisite for creating a more coherent approach in VET and adult education. In essence, their function is bringing together the full range of VET stakeholders for better cooperation between the public and private sectors.

Aims of NQF

The objectives of the National Qualification System, based around the NQF, are to:
- improve the recognition of qualifications at all levels of formal and non-formal education and training;
- ensure that qualifications meet the needs of the labour market, economy and society;
- regulate qualifications, assessment and certification, based on quality and standards; improve access to assessment, including recognition of prior learning;
- make the qualifications system flexible and transparent.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

The Qualifications Law (2008)[691] defines the NQF as the national mechanism for classifying qualifications awarded within the national Qualification System according to a set of criteria.

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691. LAW NO.03/L-060 Law on National Qualifications

The Kosovo[688] NQF consists of eight qualifications levels, covering general education, higher education, and vocational education and training sectors. It is a lifelong learning framework, so that its qualifications cater to all types of learning contexts, such as formal, non-formal and informal learning. The qualifications levels are learning outcomes-based, as per the existing levels descriptors, distinguishing knowledge, skills and wider competences.

The descriptors, as well as the framework overall, are strongly influenced by the EQF and draw on elements of other existing NQFs, such as the Scottish Qualifications Framework. They have been designed and developed, though, for Kosovo's[688] conditions.

Types of qualifications

There are six specified types of qualification recognized in the NQF:
- Higher Education Qualifications
- General Education qualifications
- Combined National qualifications
- National Professional qualifications
- Qualifications based on international Standards
- Customized Qualifications.

Qualifications are developed on unit or modular structures, in both VET and HE.

Quality assurance of qualifications

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).

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 MES, AVETAE, relevant ministries and other providers, public, private and third sector. NQA itself does not develop qualifications

VET qualifications must be based on occupational standards if they are to be placed in the NQF.

Occupational standards are the starting point for outcomes-based curricula and outcomes-based qualifications. Occupational standards are developed in cooperation with: MES, MLS and other relevant ministries and social partners. They are verified by the NQA and, in theory, should be approved by the CVETAE. But as CVETAE is still not fully functioning, it is NQA which still approves the standards.

Occupational standards should be used to provide a reference point for identifying the learning outcomes that should be covered in different modules of the

qualifications. The main tasks generally identified in the occupational standards will lead to the definition of modules for learning and assessment.

The validation process of qualifications, specified in law, is transparent and consists of four stages. In stage one the institution seeking validation of a qualification/module, makes an application to the NQA, clearly stating the rationale for the qualification/module. In stage two, a panel of experts appointed and supported by 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 qualifications/modules are included in the NQF and made public.

Qualifications or modules that are proposed for validation must state the following[692]:
- title of qualification/module;
- rationale/justification;
- purpose of the qualification/module, target group;
- NQF qualification/module, level and credit value;
- entry requirements and access;
- opportunity to progress after completion of the qualification/module;
- qualification structure;
- evaluation forms for the qualification/module (assessment);
- quality assurance arrangements;
- other detailed specifications.

Decisions on the level at which each qualification is placed in the NQF are based on their match against level descriptors. Once qualifications are validated and placed in the NQF, the NQA publishes its decisions on the NQA website.

Criteria for the validation of a qualification by the NQA for inclusion in the NQF include ensuring:
- delivery, assessment and certification of the qualifications are supported by an effective quality assurance system including institutional self-assessment and monitoring;
- 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.

Kosovo[688] 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

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692. National Qualification Authority (2020). *National Qualification Framework*. https://akkks.rksgov. net/uploads/national_qualification_framework_ handbook_2020.pdf.

a functional system of quality assurance for VET qualifications and to meet the needs of Kosovo[688] society and European standards.

NQAF has six quality principles, each of which is defined by the following quality indicators:
- management responsibilities (15 criteria);
- resource management (9 criteria);
- design and development (12 criteria);
- learning, assessment and certification (28 criteria);
- self-evaluation (13 criteria);
- continuous improvement (10 criteria).

The NQA administrative instruction defines the process of accreditation[693]. So far, the NQA has accredited 60 providers/institutions (45 private vocational training centres (VTCs), 11 public VTCs (which provide training for adults, including jobseekers) and other VET providers, 2 public VET schools, 2 private VET schools). NQA has admitted 88 VET qualifications to the NQF. These come from:
- Public VET Schools/CoCs, accredited to provide 8 qualifications;
- Private VET Schools, accredited to provide 6 qualifications;
- Public VTCs & other VET public providers, accredited to provide 16 qualifications;
- Private VTC, accredited to provide 57 qualifications.

As most public VET providers have difficulties in meeting the challenging criteria for accreditation, their qualifications largely remain outside the NQF. Public VET schools, in reality, simply offer learners what they have available i.e. the prevailing conditions in the schools and the availability of subject teachers determine the programme, rather than what may be identified as labour market need. VET schools and their governing boards, as a rule, cannot freely decide about the courses they provide.

The Kosovo[688] Accreditation Agency (KAA) is the institution responsible for quality assurance in the higher education system. 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. In higher education 22 institutes are accredited and 293 qualifications are levelled in the NQF. KAA is also responsible for accrediting post-secondary VET colleges.

693. Administrative Instruction No 35/2014 on criteria and procedures for the validation and approval of national qualifications and accreditation of institutions providing qualifications in Kosovo[688].

Use of learning outcomes and standards
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 professional qualifications, the learning outcomes derive directly from the competences identified in the occupational standards.

Law No. 03/L-060 (Article 2) defines standards as measurable indicators of achievement, defined either in terms of qualitative or 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 professional qualifications for Kosovo,[688] 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.

As indicated above, defining occupational standards should be the starting point for development of curricula and assessment for outcomes-based VET qualifications and competence-based VET programmes. This is not yet the case for the combined national qualifications, not even with the latest, ongoing VET curriculum reform, which is implemented by teachers under the guidance of MES.

The specifications for a vocational education and training qualification also include a description on how the qualification links to employment structures, and evidence of consultation with labour market stakeholders.

Credit systems
One of the objectives of the NQF is to facilitate the accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes between different learning contexts or systems; this includes outcomes acquired via formal and nonformal learning. Such transfer should 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 has developed a VET credit system based on ECVET recommendations. One credit is awarded for 20 notional learning hours.

The NQA's credit system uses learning outcomes, categorises qualifications by measuring the volume

of learning, and identifies providers that have a role and responsibility in allocating credit. 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[694].

A credit system has been established for the higher education sector and is aligned to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The NQA, established in 2008, has the overall responsibility for implementing the NQF. It has 9 staff members, and a governing board of 13 members who represent VET, general education, higher education, trades unions, employers and employers' organisations, chambers of commerce and voluntary bodies. It is also the designated agency in international cooperation.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

While the NQA leads and coordinates the NQF, it shares responsibility for developing and implementing the framework with MES and the agencies, KAA for higher education and CVETAE and AVETAE in VET. However, for capacity reasons, these last two agencies are not yet able to fulfil all their functions in line with the NQF provisions. Government and donors are working with the Council to remedy this situation.

The NQA is responsible for registering VET and adult education qualifications developed by providers such as VET schools or special professional schools or academies, such as the police college, within the framework. AS indicated above, it is responsible for the accreditation of VET providers and 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.

MES oversees general education qualifications and develops secondary school-level general qualifications, such as the lower secondary leaving diploma and the upper secondary Matura.

In HE, the KAA oversees HE provision and accredits higher education institutions as providers. Universities generally develop their own qualifications, quality assured by the KAA. KAA is overseen by its governing board, the National Quality Council.

CVETAE is the advisory body for VET and Adult Education policies to the Minister of Education and

Science in Kosovo.[688] It is a tripartite body, engaging government, employers and trade unions in VET. CVETAE consists of fifteen members, who represent the education and labour ministries, other relevant ministries, NQA, AVETAE, the Kosovo[688] Chamber of Commerce and the social partners.

CVETAE has statutory responsibility for approving occupational standards for the VET system. It is the responsibility of CVETAE to ensure that the standards proposed meet the needs of Kosovo's[688] labour market as well as ensuring support from all interested parties. It forwards approved occupational standards to the NQA for the verification process.

AVETAE has extensive responsibilities in VET, including the coordination of study programmes concerning VET and adult education, engagement of social partners and supervision and coordination of the development of occupational standards. Although AVETAE is supposed to fulfil this function for all VET schools, it currently does so only for the six so-called Centres of Competence, which are donor-funded VET schools that specialise in one sector e.g. business/commerce. Its relationship with the NQA and other actors and their respective remits needs to be clarified as the agency develops.

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, it rather reflects the position in society generally, where civic institutions are still developing.

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

VNFIL arrangements[695]

Design of a system for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) in Kosovo[688]

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694. National Qualification Authority (2020). *National Qualification Framework*. https://akkks.rksgov. net/uploads/national_qualification_framework_ handbook_2020.pdf

695. This section is based on Danuza, T. (2019). *Implementation of the 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. One-off report: Kosovo.*[688]

commenced in 2011, with the endorsement of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the development of the first guidelines on the benefits and uses of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

Since then national policies, secondary legislation and training modules for the implementation of RPL have been developed. Two bylaws have been developed and endorsed by the Minister of the MES:

• Administrative Instruction No 31/2014 for recognition of prior learning, endorsed in 2014. It outlines scope, general provisions, principles, responsibilities and procedures for recognition of non-formal and informal learning, within all the levels of the NQF.

• Administrative instruction No. 09/2019 on criteria and procedures for the accreditation of institutions that implement recognition of prior learning in Kosovo,[688] endorsed in 2019. It outlines principles, responsibilities and procedures for accreditation of VET providers to implement RPL. However, it includes only the accreditation of CVET qualifications and does not cover IVET qualifications.

Both administrative instructions are in alignment with the Council Recommendation on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning.

Currently, Kosovo[688] is at the beginning of the implementation of validation in VET. For now, RPL is only possible for National Vocational Qualifications that are quality-assured by validation and approved on the NQF. Currently, there are 62 validated and approved National Professional Qualifications in the NQF. However, at this first stage of implementation, RPL is limited to the pilot qualifications: in welding, electro-installation and hairdressing. The idea of the IPA/LuxDev 2018 ESVET-PRO project is to offer RPL as an active labour market measure; project leaders launched a call for applications from people who would like to have their skills assessed and recognised for these three pilot qualifications.

Implementation of RPL was supposed to start in 2020 but was delayed due to the COVID-19 situation. So far, seven providers have applied for accreditation to conduct RPL, five for qualifications for hairdressing and two for welding. One provider (hairdressing) has been accredited and one accreditation is still ongoing. The other five submissions will be reviewed in 2021. The NQA, with support of DVV International, delivered training sessions for RPL practitioners and NQA's external assessors in October 2020.

Kosovo[688] presented the one-off report on VNFIL to the EQF Advisory Group in February 2020,

describing the legislation developed and the next steps to be taken in implementing RPL.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings

Since the 2018 Inventory, progress has been most conspicuous in preparing the conditions for the implementation of RPL. Secondary legislation has been adopted and the accreditation of providers to conduct RPL has started. Piloting is ongoing. Kosovo[688] also presented its one-off report on VNFIL to the EQF Advisory Group in February 2020.

The number of VET qualifications in Kosovo's[688] NQF has increased significantly since 2018, rising from 27 that year to the current 88. The number of occupational standards adopted has increased from the 2018 figure of 88 to 116 now. A further 20 standards are currently undergoing verification.

The NQA also published a new handbook on the NQF in Kosovo[688]: Korniza kombetare e kualifikimeve - brendia anglisht.cdr (rks-gov.net). The handbook covers the most recent revisions to the NQF.

Qualifications registers and databases

Validated qualifications are included in the register. To date, 88 VET qualifications have been validated and registered in the NQF, at levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. Currently, there are students enrolled to pursue about 90% of these qualifications. Universities develop their own qualifications, quality-assured by the KAA; 293 HE qualifications have been included in the NQF.

Qualifications in general education are awarded at the end of a learning programme by MES. These qualifications are developed, and quality assured by the pre-university education department of MES based on national standards for the qualifications and their curriculum areas. They are automatically part of the NQF. The standard general school-leaving qualifications is the Matura, at Level 4.

Qualification documents

NQF and EQF levels appear on qualification documents issued by providers in continuing VET and HE and in some cases initial VET. Europass supplements are used for both HE and VET.

Career information and guidance[696]

The MES, with support from LuxDev, has created a platform for professional orientation, career

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696. Based on Zelloth, H. (2018). Busulla.COM The Online Platform for Professional Orientation, Career Education and Guidance. *Live&Learn, 2018.*

education and guidance: Busulla.com. The platform supports both pupils and students, as well as institutes in career education and guidance.

The platform offers several tools and information on the platform concerning the following steps in career orientation:
- Self-recognition through career tests;
- Validation of career-related skills – Basic Check Potential Assessment Test
- Exploring the labour market;
- Exploring educational institutions in Kosovo;[688]
- Identifying job and/or internship opportunities;
- Online advisor.

The platform offers institutes, policy-makers and business four modules to facilitate interaction between education and the labour market:
- Industrial Liaison;
- Training Needs Assessment;
- Skills and Knowledge Needs Assessment;
- Monitoring and Evaluation.

Recognition of foreign qualifications

Kosovo's[688] NQF provides a basis for co-operation and mutual recognition of higher qualifications between Kosovo[688] and other countries. A first step is ensuring compatibility with the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" developed by ENQA.

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks

Kosovo[688] has been a member of the EQF Advisory Group since 2015 and referenced its NQF to the EQF in 2016.

International cooperation

A key objective of the NQF, specified in the NQF law, is to provide a basis for cooperation and mutual recognition between the NQF and the EQF. NQA is the designated National Coordination Point for participation in the EQF process.

ENQA has changed the status of the KAA to "under review", a downgrade of its previous assessment. The KAA is full member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA) and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). For external political reasons, Kosovo[688] does not take part in the Bologna process.

International donor support

EU assistance to Kosovo[688] under the priority sector Education, employment & social policies (financial assistance under IPA II) focuses on: i) improving the functioning of the labour market; ii) raising education standards; iii) promoting skills development; and iv) restructuring the social welfare system.

Both IPA 2017 and IPA 2018 support the further development of the NQF in Kosovo[688] and specifically the further implementation of RPL.

A large international donor community is active in the country. NQA receives donor support from DVV International. Other donor support to Kosovo's[688] VET system comes from international organizations e.g. the UN, and bilateral donors such as Luxembourg and Germany.

Important lessons and future plans

One of the most important developments since the previous Inventory in 2018 is the adoption of the administrative instruction to accredit providers for RPL, which provides for further implementation of RPL.

While the NQA is a critical actor in VET reform in Kosovo,[688] the overall education governance structure is complex. This hinders the optimal use of the NQF and its further developments. ETF's latest Torino Process Assessment[697], written in 2019, recommended that the authorities revisit the current governance arrangements in VET to achieve a more coherent structure.

The Law No 03/L-060 on national qualifications has been supported by different secondary legislation to support the implementation. Different objectives have been stated in the law and secondary legislation, but, so far, no monitoring or evaluation has been conducted to examine to what extent these objectives have been met or how far the procedures work. Evaluations could also help to revise procedures based on actual experience in order to optimise them. Specific attention could be paid to impact on end-users.

Another key challenge that remains it to ensure the full engagement and 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.

Although the number of occupational standards has substantially increased in recent years, the number

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697. European Training Foundation (2019). *Policies for Human Capital Development. Kosovo*[688] *an ETF Torino Process Assessment*. Torino: ETF.

of approvals could be increased by identifying priority occupations.

The number of accredited qualifications developed by VET providers is still limited. This also relates to another challenge, the actual implementation of the developed qualifications. VET providers need to be prepared and equipped to deliver them. Currently the VET curricula follow a subject-based approach and the system distinguishes between general subjects, vocational theory and practice teachers. So, qualifications and curricula are not closely linked. Teachers lack insight into the world of work and links to organise work-based learning are missing.

There are plans to develop more Level 5 qualifications. This is welcome, but a challenge is to ensure that candidates completing the level 5 qualifications can progress to higher education.

Main sources of information

Table 44. Infographic of the NQF/EQF overview table

KQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATIONS		EQF LEVEL
	AWARD TYPE	QUALIFICATION TYPE	
8	Doctorate - Bologna 3rd cycle	A	8
7	Master - Bologna 2nd cycle	A	7
6	Bachelor - Bologna 1st cycle	A	6
5	Diploma from formal providers Certificate from non-formal providers	A, C, D, E	5
4	Matura certificate (general or vocational education) Vocational education diploma	B, C, D, E, F	4
3	Vocational education certificate (two years) Certificates from non-formal VET providers	B, C, D, E, F	3
2	Certificates from non-formal providers	B, C, D, E, F	2
1	Certificates from non-formal providers	B, C, D, E, F	1

Source: National Qualifications Authority.

Types of NQF qualifications: Higher Education Qualifications (A); General Education Qualifications (B); Combined National Qualifications (C); National Professional Qualifications (D); Qualifications Based on International Standards (E); Customized Qualifications (F). Source National Qualifications Authority.

Abbreviations

AVETAE	Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education	INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
CVETAE	Council for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education	KAA	Kosovo[688] Accreditation Agency
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System	KESP MES	Kosovo[688] Education Strategic Plan Ministry of Education and Science
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education	MLSW NQA NQAF	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare National Qualification Authority National Quality Assurance Framework
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	NQF	National Qualifications Framework
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training	RPL VET	Recognition of Prior Learning Vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework	VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
GE	General Education		
HE	Higher Education	VTC	Vocational Training Centre

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Danuza, T. (2019). Implementation of the 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. One-off report: Kosovo.[688]

European Training Foundation (2019). Policies for Human Capital Development. Kosovo[688] an ETF

Torino Process Assessment. Torino: ETF

National Qualification Authority (2020). National Qualification Framework. https://akkks.rksgov.net/uploads/national_qualification_framework_handbook_2020.pdf

Zelloth, H. (2018). Busulla.COM The Online Platform for Professional Orientation, Career Education and Guidance. Live&Learn, 2018.

Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
Online platform	https://openspace.etf.europa.eu
Twitter	@etfeuropa
Facebook	facebook.com/etfeuropa
YouTube	www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
Live&Learn	https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/
Instagram	instagram.com/etfeuropa/
LinkedIn	linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation
E-mail info	@etf.europa.eu

Prepared by
The European Training Foundation

KYRGYZSTAN

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

Kyrgyzstan adopted a decree on a 9-level national qualifications framework (NQF) in September 2020, updating the concept adopted in 2016. The framework includes qualifications from general education, vocational education and training (VET), higher education, and adult education. Its levels are described in learning outcomes.

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (MLSD) currently lead development of the national qualification system (NQS), which task includes the implementation of the NQF. Other key actors in the NQS' development are the Agency for Primary Vocational Education and Training (APVET) and the Chambers of Commerce and Industry[698].

Some qualifications can be awarded via validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Kyrgyzstan has formally adopted an NQF. The country has developed several methodological tools, and piloted standards, curricula, and validation of nonformal learning. However, stakeholder engagement is for the time being limited to a narrow set of actors and institutional arrangements are not yet settled. Key features of the qualification system remain to be progressed, including implementation of a quality assurance system for qualifications and application of learning outcomes in the qualifications themselves. Kyrgyzstan has therefore reached the adoption stage.

Policy context

The EU and Kyrgyzstan are currently negotiating an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, expected to be signed in 2021.

Kyrgyzstan is a developing country with a youthful and growing population. Its 6.4 million people are projected to increase to 7.5 million by 2030[699].

In the last 8 years the country has sustained stable economic growth; in 2018 GDP rose by 3.5%[700]. Agriculture and construction are key industries, while the service sector is expanding quickest. But poverty is widespread. In 2019, 20.1% of the population was still below the poverty line[701]; poverty is most entrenched in the countryside.

More than 700,000 Kyrgyz are labour migrants, the majority travelling to the Russian Federation[702].

Their remittances are an important source of national revenue.

There are pronounced gender divides in the country's activity and employment rates. The activity rate was 60.1% in 2017 overall, but 45.9% for women, while the employment rate was 55.9% overall, but 41.8% for women.

Unemployment is relatively low, at 6.9 % in 2017. However, for young people aged 15-24 it was 14.8% the same year and higher still for young women at 21%[703]. The informal economy is extensive, indeed in 2018 it was estimated that 71% of all employment was informal[704].

698. The Ministry of Education and Science is currently being reorganised. It is planned that APVET become a department within the Ministry rather than function as an autonomous agency.

699. UN 2019 World population prospects, https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/
700. World Bank
701. WB open data
702. https://kyrgyzstan.iom.int/news/current-migration-situation-and-trendskyrgyzstan#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20report%20of,were%20in%20the%20Russian%20Federation.&text=Almost%204.0%25%20of%20Kyrgyz%20migrants%20to%20Russia%20are%20women.
703. National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic
704. ETF Torino Process report 2018-2020, reference to data of the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic

The National Development Strategy 2018-2040 calls for the country to become a favourable destination for foreign investment within the Eurasian Economic Union, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Belt and Road Initiative. Development of export-oriented, local natural and human resources-based light and processing industries are key.

The Strategy's education component provides for an education and training system which equips people with labour market-relevant skills, encourages lifelong learning, and offers inclusive access to education.

The Covid 19 outbreak required urgent solutions to ensure continuity. Web and TV- based distance learning was launched in early April 2020, but with more provision for general education than for VET. It proved especially difficult to maintain practical training - strict lockdown regulations cancelled all practice in enterprises, while distance learning could not substitute for this deficit. The lockdowns revealed gaps in the country's digital and distance learning readiness, but it remains to be seen if these shortcomings will prompt systemic changes in education and training.

NQF legal basis

There are several legal acts which respectively establish the NQF or provide for its development.

A joint Order on the adoption of an NQF was issued by MES and MLSD on 17 March 2016. This regulation provides the basis for future NQF development, outlines the NQF's purpose and structure, and describes the correspondence between the Kyrgyz NQF levels and those in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The Amended Law on Education of the Kyrgyz Republic, adopted on 2 May 2019, adapted the concepts of national qualification system, national qualifications framework, professional standards, and sectoral frameworks[705].

On 30 September 2019, the NQS Concept was adopted by the Government, while the related Action Plan was approved on 16 March 2020.

A Government Decree of 18 September 2020 formally adopted the 9-level Kyrgyz NQF, updating the 2016 Order.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

Approximately 35% of upper secondary students are enrolled in VET programmes.

In the Kyrgyz system, students can enter initial VET (IVET) or secondary VET (SVET) after basic secondary education i.e. after 9 years' schooling; or after full secondary education, i.e. 11 years. It is also possible to enter IVET without having completed basic secondary education.

Initial VET (IVET) providers are the vocational lyceums and vocational schools. They deliver the following:
- programmes combining general secondary education with VET, lasting a minimum of 3 years;
- VET programmes, following primary school, with a duration of 1-2 years;
- post-secondary VET programmes, following general education; duration minimum 1 year;
- retraining and upskilling VET courses, with a duration of up to 1 year.

Secondary vocational education programmes are delivered in secondary vocational and higher vocational education schools. Secondary vocational education (SVET) provides training and retraining of middle-level specialists after basic general education, or general secondary education, and leads to qualifications equivalent to level 5 in the Kyrgyz NQF.

The standard periods of full-time study in SVET are 1 year 10 months after secondary education, or 2 years 10 months of full-time study after basic general education.

The Education Development Strategy 2021–2040 guides the education and training reform programme, including further development of the NQS. It comprises supporting elements such as methodological development, improvement and updates of VET content based on occupational standards, independent assessment and certification in line with the NQF.

NQS-related objectives of the 2012-2018 National Development Strategy are supported by international projects led by external donors, who have been key players in Kyrgyz VET development.

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705. http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/111918?cl=ru-ru

These projects include:
- the 2nd Vocational Education and Skills Development project[706], and the Skills for Inclusive Growth Sector Development Programme[707], both run by the Asian Development Bank (ADB);
- Applying G20 Training, coordinated by ILO-G20[708];
- Promotion of employment and vocational qualifications, led by GIZ[709].

These programmes foster development and application of occupational standards, competence-based curricula and implementation of independent certification.

In all the Central Asian countries, the influence of the old Soviet tariff qualification system, which regulated the labour market and education provision through classifiers of occupations, plus qualification characteristics and state educational standards, remains apparent. There is still a tendency to consider qualifications as a licence to practise, rather than as a passport to multiple careers and lifelong learning.

Aims of NQF
The NQF is intended to:
- support the development of sectoral qualifications frameworks and occupational standards;
- make qualifications from the different education and training sectors more transparent and comparable to one another;
- act as a reference to develop new qualifications;
- support recognition of national qualifications, at home and abroad;
- encourage lifelong learning broadly.

The government is developing the NQF to serve users including government agencies, employers, enterprises, educational organizations, and learners and citizens.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure
The NQF has 9 levels. The NQF legal acts allow for inclusion of sublevels to respond to labour market need or changes in the education and training system. Descriptors are described in learning

outcomes, and divided by knowledge, skills, and personal competences.

The NQF accommodates qualifications from general education, VET, higher education, and adult education.

General secondary education or VET qualifications are placed at NQF levels 2 to 5, while levels 6 to 9 are reserved for higher education.

The NQF allows for award of qualifications via formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Sectoral qualifications frameworks are still to be implemented. However, an Asian Development Bank (ADB) project has developed a methodology to guide development of such frameworks in future and has already drafted a sectoral framework in pedagogy, which has been submitted for approval to the Ministry of Education[710]. It consists of 6 levels, equivalent to levels 4-9 in the new NQF14.

Currently a number of occupational classifiers are applied in the country, usually mapped to programme, rather than NQF, levels.

The Education Development Strategy identifies that the absence of regular updating mechanisms for the lists of Initial VET (IVET) and Secondary VET (SVET) occupations and related curricula is a weakness of the Kyrgyz education system and envisages a gradual transfer from the lists of IVET and SVET occupations to flexible and permeable mechanisms based on labour market needs and in line with the NQF.

Types of qualifications
In VET, the following qualifications types are offered:
- initial VET diplomas, equivalent to level 4 in the NQF;
- short-duration certificates in vocational training, retraining and upskilling; equivalent to level 3 in the NQF;
- secondary VET diplomas, equivalent to level 5 in the NQF.

Secondary education, both general and VET, concludes with a final exam and state certification. To enter higher education, applicants must pass a national exam or test administered by the Centre for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods.

706. https://www.adb.org/projects/38298-023/main#project-documents
707. https://www.adb.org/projects/50024-002/main
708. https://www.ilo.org/moscow/news/WCMS_561945/lang--en/index.htm?ssSourceSiteId=skills
709. http://www.giz-employment.kg/promotion_employment/
710. https://edu.gov.kg/ru/about/proekty/aziatskij-bank-razvitiya/programma-razvitiya-sektora-navyki-dlya-inklyuzivnogo-rosta/16politicheskih-mer/politicheskoe-dejstvie-3/ 14 https://edu.gov.kg/ru/about/obcuzhdeniya/

In higher education, a Government Decree adopted in 2011 a 2-level structure of higher education, by introducing bachelor's and master's degrees.

Quality assurance of qualifications
State educational standards for all levels of education specify the requirements for the quality, structure, conditions of implementation, general and vocational competences, and learning outcomes of curricula.

Model state educational standards were approved in 2018 for initial VET[711] and in 2019 for secondary VET[712].

Educational standards are used for the development of curricula, for mechanisms and criteria of education quality control, and for the accreditation of providers and curricula.

External quality assurance of qualifications developed by VET providers is implemented through independent accreditation. The National Accreditation Council (NAC) was set up in 2014 in order to coordinate certification of independent accreditation agencies and monitor their activities. There are currently seven independent accreditation agencies[713]. So, the NAC authorises independent accreditation agencies which then accredit schools and other providers.

A Government decree was issued in 2015[714], specifying accreditation criteria for initial, secondary, and higher VET institutions. Criteria concerning curricula stipulates that it should be formulated in learning outcomes developed jointly with stakeholders from professional associations and industries.

In 2018, the majority of educational institutions passed accreditation procedures, applied either by MES or by one of the independent accreditation agencies.

The traditional system of assessing the quality of education of the VET students and graduates includes evaluation of their current academic performance, interim and final state certification. The final state certification commission includes external experts or employers, though the degree of their involvement in the final decision-making process varies.

The VET system has been piloting for several years a model of independent certification of graduates, as well as validation of nonformal learning, supported by the GIZ programme "Promotion of Employment and Vocational Qualification".

Use of learning outcomes and standards
The development of occupational standards and their translation into competence-based curricula has been carried out through international projects.

During 2013-2019, the ADB 2nd Vocational Education and Skills Development project developed occupational standards for 45 qualifications and 26 competence-based training curricula for VET in 7 priority economic sectors. Another ADB project, Skills for Inclusive Growth and Sector Development, developed, during 2020, occupational standards for 15 specialities and 10 occupations taught in Kyrgyz VET colleges and lyceums.

These standards will be applied in the curricula of centres of vocational excellence across the country.

An ILO-G20 project developed occupational standards for 6 qualifications in the gas, milk processing and tourism and hotel sectors.

Educational standards for initial and secondary VET stipulate that programmes should be based on labour market need.

Credit systems
Kyrgyzstan ratified and brought into force within its territory the Lisbon Recognition Convention in higher education in 2004[715]. In 2011, Government Decree number 496 adopted a 2-level structure of higher education, by introducing bachelor's and master's degrees expressed in credits, in order to strengthen integration with the international education community[716].

In 2018, Government Decree number 160 adopted a model state educational standard for secondary VET. It introduced a credit system for secondary VET programmes. Adoption of a credit system in initial VET is also envisaged by the Education Development Strategy 2021-2040.

711. http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/12065
712. http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/11724?cl=ru-ru#p2
713. https://edu.gov.kg/ru/about/nacionalnyj-akkreditacionnyj-sovet/reestry/
714. http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/98206
715. Formally, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (11/04/1997). It is an international convention jointly developed and adopted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, which binds signatory countries to adopt fair practices in recognising HE qualifications.
716. http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/92802

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

MES and MLSD lead development of the NQF and the wider national qualification system (NQS) strategy. MLSD monitors and reports to the Government on the implementation of the NQS Action Plan.

The Agency for Primary Vocational Education and Training (APVET) is responsible for initial VET; it also develops legislation on validation.

The NQS Action Plan for 2020-2021 foresees the creation of a National Qualifications Council (NQC), which would be the coordinating agency for the NQF. Legislation to establish the Council is being prepared and national consultations with relevant Ministries and stakeholders are being conducted with the support of ADB.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

In principle, broad stakeholder involvement in the NQS is foreseen. The NQS Strategy calls for the NQF and wider NQS to be developed in close cooperation with professional associations, trades unions, educational foundations, employer bodies, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, ministries, and providers.

But in practice, beyond the governmental institutions, stakeholder engagement in developing the NQF has so far been limited. There are few big employers in a country whose economic activity is dominated by SMEs. Therefore, there are few employers which have the resources and expertise to contribute to education and training strategies.

Further, where present, stakeholder contribution is usually consultative rather than cooperative in nature.

However, some employers are aware of and understand NQF concepts via their involvement in the various international and donor-driven projects on the qualification system. For example, the Asian Development Bank ran a project on developing and updating occupational standards and modular curricula, which engaged employers and other stakeholders in advising on curricula content.

One area where sectors are active in the country's qualification system is validation of nonformal learning. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry has a role in coordination of independent certification, which engages employers in the assessment committees. Involvement of employers is also specified as one of requirements for independent accreditation of educational institutions.

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

VNFIL arrangements

Expanding the system of validation of nonformal and informal learning is an aim of the Education Development Strategy 2021-2040.

A pilot validation and independent certification model has been implemented since 2017 with support of the GIZ project, Promotion of Employment and Vocational Qualifications.

The Coordination Council for Independent Certification under the Chamber of Commerce and Industry develops and coordinates the system of independent certification in Kyrgyzstan. It is composed of representatives from sectoral organisations, MLSD, APVET and enterprises.

Currently, the Centre of Independent Certification in Catering and Food Services provides independent certification services.

To date, 1,500 graduates have undergone independent certification in 8 sectors with support from GIZ. In 2018 the validation methodology was tested for several occupations in personal care and food and catering sectors; 11 candidates were awarded qualifications.

In 2019 the Agency for Primary Vocational Education and Training piloted validation in the construction industry, catering, the beauty industry, housing and utilities. Currently, the Agency is developing legislative proposals for validation[717].

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings

The inclusion of NQS elements in the country's strategies and implementation plans, and the recent approval of the NQF, confirm that the NQF is a priority.

Various donor-funded projects have developed elements of a qualifications system, including

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717. http://www.kesip.kg/novosti/validacziya-%E2%80%93-eto-priznanie-vsex-vidov-professionalnyix-kompetenczij-i-znanij,nezavisimo-ot-vremeni-i-mesta-ix-priobreteniya-poluchennyix-neformalnyim-i-informalnyim-metodom

occupational standards, modular curricula, VNFIL, and careers guidance.

Qualifications registers and databases
There is currently no database or national qualifications register. However, the NQS Action Plan provides for creation of a qualifications database.

Qualification documents
Ministries are seeking to better integrate the various careers advice services available.

Information is provided via a range of media and sources nation-wide, including audio-visual information on sectors, specialised TV and radio programmes, and regular coverage of vocational guidance activities on the newly launched website https://bilim.akipress.org/.

The Agency for Primary Vocational Education and Training has collaborated with ADB and GIZ in a number of careers guidance projects, which have produced guides and other tools.

There is currently no national open access resource providing information on skills needs forecasts.

Recognition of foreign qualifications
The VET Unit within the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the recognition of foreign higher education degrees. The Kyrgyz Higher Attestation Commission coordinates recognition and nostrification[718] of PhD academic degrees and titles received in foreign countries, and issues certificates of equivalence.

Kyrgyzstan is a member of Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). EEU member countries implement mutual recognition of qualifications and degrees for labour migration purposes (except for education certificates in pedagogy, law, health, pharmaceutics)[719].

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks
Kyrgyzstan is not a member of the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna Process), but its NQF and wider higher education reforms are strongly influenced by Bologna and the EQF, which can be seen in the NQF's structure, its functions, and its

learning outcomes basis. The inter-ministerial Order on the NQF explicitly refers to these frameworks as influences.

International cooperation
Kyrgyzstan participates in the EU's European Education Initiative in Central Asia (EEI), which fosters cooperation - both between Central Asia and the EU, and among the CA countries themselves - in order to strengthen educational reforms in the region.

A notable action within the Initiative was the Central Asian Education Platform (CAEP) project, which included both broad policy dialogue and technical development components, including on NQFs.

Kyrgyzstan is a Partner country of the Erasmus + programme.

Kyrgyzstan is a member of both the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), both of which are seeking to link member countries' education systems more closely.

In the recently adopted decision "On strategic priorities of Eurasian economic integration to 2025," the five countries of the EEU agreed on measures to support integration in labour migration, including achieving comparability of education systems and skills and qualifications[720].

As a SCO member, Kyrgyzstan takes part in the SCO University – a programme of cooperation and student exchange in higher education between the SCO countries[721].

International donor support
Donors, especially the EU, ADB, ILO and GIZ, have played a major part in developing the country's qualification system.

The EU has supported education and training via budget support for education sector reform, and through the Tempus programme in higher education. Initiatives such as NQF-Quadriga under Tempus have proposed methodologies to develop an NQF.

GIZ, ADB and ILO are all driving forward projects in areas such as standards and curricula.

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718. Nostrification - the process of granting recognition to a degree from a foreign university.
719. http://www.eurasiancommission.org, Workers' rights in education in the member countries

720. http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/14-01-2021-1.aspx
721. http://uni-sco.ru/

Important lessons and future plans

Adoption of the NQF decree and the national qualification system concept and action plan signal the country's intention to reform its qualification systems on lifelong learning lines and to better meet labour market needs.

The NQS Action Plan specifies establishment of a National Qualifications Council, development of occupational standards, building of sectoral frameworks, piloting of certification in defined sectors and the creation of a national qualifications database of qualifications.

Kyrgyzstan will continue to need to draw on international support and finance to progress its NQF.

While the basic legal framework is there, stakeholder participation is limited in the range of bodies involved and in the nature of their role, which remains consultative and sporadic rather than cooperative and formalised. The government could start by launching a public information campaign on the added value of the NQS, engaging stakeholders in events and using other media to raise awareness of the NQF's role in the country's education and training system. Allocation of roles and functions to institutions remains to be carried out.

Development and application of quality assurance systems including accreditation of providers and validation of qualifications, is an important next step.

Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APVET	Agency for Primary Vocational Education
CAEP	Central Asian Education Platform
EEI	European Education Initiative
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German development agency in international cooperation)
ILO	International Labour Organisation (UN)
IVET	Initial VET
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MLSD	Ministry of Labour and Social Development
NAC	National Accreditation Council
NQC	National Qualifications Council
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQS	National Qualification system
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SVET	Secondary VET
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

Main sources of information

ETF Torino Process report, https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/trp/torino-process-2018-2020-kyrgyzstan-national-report

ETF Covid mapping report, https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020-07/etf_covid_mapping_v06_1.pdf

Law of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan "On education" and 2019 updates, http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ruru/111918?cl=ru-ru

NQF of the Kyrgyz Republic, https://www.gov.kg/ru/npa/s/2709

NQS Concept of the Kyrgyz Republic, http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/157131

Education Development Strategy 2021–2040

National classifier of occupations of the Kyrgyz Republic, https://mlsp.gov.kg/2019/04/11/obshherespublikanskijklassifikator-zanyatij/

Regulations on the activities of secondary VET institutions of the Kyrgyz Republic (including Model state educational standard), http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/11724

Regulations on the activities of initial VET institutions of the Kyrgyz Republic, http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/54384?cl=ru-ru

Model state educational standard for initial VET in the Kyrgyz Republic, http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ruru/12065

Regulations on independent accreditation in the Kyrgyz Republic, http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/98206

Eurasian Economic Commission, Workers' rights in education in the member countries, http://www.eurasiancommission.org/en/Pages/default.aspx

University of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, http://uni-sco.ru/

ADB, Second Vocational Education and Skills Development Project, https://www.adb.org/projects/38298023/main#project-documents

ADB, Skills for Inclusive Growth Sector Development Program, https://www.adb.org/projects/50024-002/main

ILO, "Applying the G20 Training Strategy", https://www.ilo.org/skills/projects/g20ts/kyrgyzstan/lang--en/index.htm

GIZ, Promotion of Employment and Vocational Qualification, http://www.giz-employment.kg/

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LATVIA

Introduction and context

In recent years Latvia has made important progress against education and training indicators. The early school leaving rate decreased to 8.7% in 2019. Participation in early childhood education and care (96.0% in 2018), the tertiary education attainment rate (45.7% in 2019) and the employment rate of recent graduates (84.1% in 2019) were above EU averages. The proportions of 15-year-olds with underachievement in mathematics and science were well below EU averages, and slightly below the EU average in reading, according to the Programme for international student assessment (PISA) 2018. Investment in education and training is relatively high (5.8% of GDP in 2018), with the highest proportion in primary and pre-primary education. Efforts continue to streamline the school network and redirect investment from maintenance of schools towards teaching and learning, linked to changes to teacher remuneration and education content reform. A new competence-based curriculum has been implemented gradually, to be completed by 2022/23; it started at pre-school level in 2019/20, and in grades 1, 4, 7 and 10 from 2020/21 (European Commission, 2020). A new system for monitoring education quality at all levels, including in vocational education and training (VET), is being developed. Starting with the 2019/20 school year, the five minority education models were replaced by three new models for basic education, specifying the proportion of teaching in Latvian, bilingually and/or in a minority language. Improvement plans for higher education aim to increase digitalisation and international cooperation, and to reduce the fragmentation of higher education programmes. As of 1 January 2019, higher education institutions can choose the quality assurance agency for their 'study directions' from the national agency, from the Academic Information Centre, or from any other agency from the European quality assurance register. The VET system reform is ongoing, with a focus on strengthening work-based learning and apprenticeships (European Commission, 2019). The employment rate of recent tertiary graduates is the highest in the EU (96.6%

in 2019), in contrast to that of VET graduates (ISCED 3-4), which is among the lowest (65.6%). Total enrolment in upper secondary VET is relatively low (38.8% out of the total enrolment in upper secondary education in 2018). Amendments to the law on VET, introducing partial awards and flexible pathways, have been under public consultation since January 2020. Participation in adult learning remains below the EU average, at 7.4% in 2019, but progress has been made to identify and address challenges (European Commission, 2020).

The Latvian qualifications framework (LQF) was adopted in 2010 and has reached operational stage. It is an eight-level framework comprising all education levels (basic, secondary and higher education) and all types of education (general, vocational and academic education), as well as professional qualifications. Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Qualifications from formal education (VET, higher education and general education) were included in the first phase of implementation, which was concluded with the publication of the Latvian report on EQF referencing and self-certification to QF-EHEA in 2012. The second phase focused on aspects such as revision of LQF levels 1 to 4, broadening the scope of the framework to include professional qualifications at levels 2 to 4, increasing the quality of vocational education and training, and development of sectoral qualifications frameworks linked to the LQF. It resulted in the adoption of the updated EQF referencing report in 2019. Revision of a number of laws (Vocational education Law, Law on higher education institutions, and Education Law) and regulations consolidated the role of the framework as an important part of the Latvian education and training system. The legal basis of the LQF was amended in 2017 to adapt the framework to the current requirements of the labour and education sectors. A database of all Latvian qualifications included in the LQF was put in place in 2016 and is being further developed.

Policy objectives

The LQF has a communication and transparency function, with the general aim to provide an unbiased reference for the levels of educational and professional qualifications awarded by education and training institutions in Latvia, and their learning outcomes. The advantages of developing a comprehensive qualifications framework linked to the EQF were outlined in the first Latvian referencing report (AIC et al. 2012) and included: increased international comparability of Latvian qualifications for further study and employability; better understanding of the education process and its outcomes by learners and employers; wider possibilities for lifelong learning; and aiding the development of learning-outcomes-based education programmes. The LQF expands individuals' opportunities for mobility between countries and between institutions and education levels. It complements the parallel process of 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 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.

The LQF is considered to have contributed to increased quality in the vocational education and training system; the existing five-level system of vocational qualifications has been referenced to the LQF[722]. A commitment to continued work on the development of the LQF was included in the 2014 Statement of the Parliament *On the approval of the education development guidelines for 2014-20*[723]. The framework is referred to in the Education development guidelines for 2021-27 *Future skills for the future society*[724], thus being recognised as an important instrument in the education and training system.

Levels, learning outcomes, and qualifications

The LQF is an eight-level comprehensive framework which includes all levels and subsystems of formal education (general, initial and continuing VET, and higher education), as well as professional qualifications awarded through validation of non-formal and informal learning at LQF levels 2 to 4. Non-government regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system are not yet included. The pre-existing five levels of professional qualifications were levelled to LQF levels 2 to 7 following amendments to the Vocational education Law in 2015[725].

LQF level descriptors 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). Regulation No 322/2017 on the education classification of Latvia[726] introduced slight changes to the original level descriptors at levels 1 to 4 and at level 8, and to the initial levelling of qualifications[727]. Discussions were held on the levelling of master craftsman and journeyman qualifications to the LQF; these qualifications are now included in the sectoral qualifications frameworks, which in turn are referenced to LQF levels. Sectoral expert councils formulate level descriptors of sectoral qualifications in the sectoral qualifications frameworks[728] and occupational standards and professional qualifications requirements[729] in line with LQF levels and level descriptors (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

722. Order of the Cabinet of Ministers 629/2009 on the concept of enhancing the attractiveness of vocational education and the participation of social partners in the quality assurance of vocational education. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=197894
723. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=266406
724. Draft version (16.07.2020). https://www.izm.gov.lv/images/IAP2027_projekta_versija_apspriesana_16072020.pdf
725. Amendments to the Vocational education Law in 2015 state how professional qualification levels are referenced to the LQF levels: level 1 of the professional qualification corresponds to the LQF level 2; level 2 corresponds to the LQF level 3; level 3 corresponds to the LQF level 4; level 4 corresponds to the LQF level 5; level 5 corresponds to the LQF levels 6 and 7.
726. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=291524
727. Special basic education qualifications that were initially placed at LQF levels 1 and 2 are now at LQF level 1. Basic education qualifications initially placed at LQF level 3 are now at LQF level 2. The certificate of vocational education (*arodizglītība*) initially referenced to LQF level 4 is now at LQF level 3. Certificates of professional qualification (obtained in continuing VET) were included at LQF levels 2 to 4. In 2018, with amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions, a new qualification was introduced at LQF level 8 – professional doctor diploma in arts. For details, please see Annexes 1 and 3 of the updated Latvian referencing report (AIC, 2018b).
728. https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/nks_saraksts.shtml
729. https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/nks_stand_saraksts_mk_not_626.shtml

There is growing emphasis on learning outcomes at policy and practice level. The development of the LQF led to increased awareness of learning outcomes among stakeholders and gave rise to discussions on the role of outcomes in education. This materialised in amendments to the Education Law in 2015, and in regulations on education content, the state examination system and on the licensing and accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes. Learning outcomes are widely used in higher education and for occupational standards.

Subject-based outcomes in general education have been defined in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Two new regulations on general basic and secondary education standards and study programmes[730] were adopted in 2018 and 2019 (in force since 2020) and contain updated learning outcomes in accordance with the new content of basic and general secondary education. However, AIC (2018b) reported that no significant changes in the implementation of a learning outcomes approach in general education have been observed following a comparison of Cabinet regulations in effect during the development of the LQF (2009 to 2011) and those currently in force. The ESF project *Competence-based approach in curriculum* (2016-21) promotes the shift to learning outcomes and aims at approving, in collaboration with 100 education institutions, a competence-based general education curriculum compliant with the description of the compulsory general education curriculum and its implementation at pre-school, basic and secondary education levels (AIC, 2018b).

A learning-outcomes-based approach has been implemented in VET since 2007 and reforms regarding the content of vocational education are ongoing. VET 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). In addition to occupational standards 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. The modularisation of vocational education is a policy priority. Development of modular vocational education programmes takes place within the ESF project *Improvement of sectoral qualifications system for the development of vocational education and quality assurance (2016-21)*, which aims at improving the content of vocational education, developing and updating occupational standards and requirements for professional qualifications in line with the LQF, and improving the content of professional qualification examinations (AIC, 2018b).

The qualifications framework for higher education is founded on the Bologna cycles and is integrated into the LQF; each qualification in the framework is described by its level, expected learning outcomes and workload in credit points[731]. The law on higher education institutions includes the term 'learning outcomes' and provides a brief definition of the term[732]. The State standards for academic and professional higher education set acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences in line with EQF levels[733]. Learning outcomes are included in the aims and content of study programmes, learning processes and assessment principles.

Since 2016, the learning outcomes of formal education qualifications have been available online[734]. Knowledge, skills and competences are published in the database of occupational standards for VET qualifications and state education standards for general basic and secondary education, as well as in information provided by higher education institutions for higher education qualifications. In higher education, the learning outcomes for each study programme are published on the website of each higher education institution.

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730. Regulation 747/2018 on the State basic education standard and basic education programme samples. https://likumi.lv/ta/id/303768-noteikumi-par-valsts-pamatizglitibas-standartu-un-pamatizglitibas-programmu-paraugiem
Regulation 416/2019 on the State general secondary education standard and the general secondary education programme samples. https://m.likumi.lv/ta/id/309597

731. A national credit point system is in use in higher education, where the conversion to ECTS credit points is by multiplication by a factor of 1.5. There is no credit point system in VET, but several ECVET principles have been already introduced as part of VET reforms.

732. Other documents focusing on learning outcomes in higher education include *The National concept of the development of higher education and higher education institutions in Latvia 2013-20* and *The Guidelines for education development for 2014-20*.

733. Regulation 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

734. www.latvianqualifications.lv

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

LQF level descriptors and the compliance of education programmes with LQF/EQF levels were first defined by the Cabinet Regulation No 931 on the education classification of Latvia[735], in force since 2010. Following amendments to the Vocational education Law[736], the Law on higher education institutions[737], the Education Law in 2015[738], and a number of regulations[739], the new Cabinet Regulation No 322 on the education classification of Latvia[740] came into force in June 2017, redefining 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.

The Ministry of Education and Science has the leading role in developing and implementing the LQF. The Academic Information Centre has been the designated EQF national coordination point (NCP) since 2008 and has played a key role in coordinating the referencing process[741], preparing and updating the referencing report, and communicating and disseminating information to all stakeholders. It also serves as the Latvian ENIC/NARIC and the Quality Agency for Higher Education of Latvia. It has the following tasks in relation to the LQF/EQF[742]:

a. to reference existing national qualifications levels to the eight levels of the European qualifications framework;
b. to ensure that transparent methodology is used to reference the national qualifications levels to the EQF;
c. to provide access to information and guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through the national qualifications frameworks or systems;
d. to promote the participation of stakeholders in the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level in accordance with national legislation and practice.

The running of the NQF/EQF NCP is supported by financial resources from the European Commission Erasmus+ grant, as well as joint financing by the Ministry of Education and Science. The joint financing of the activities of the Latvian NCP is included in the agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science, and the NCP submits quarterly reports to the Ministry. The human resources available depend on financial resources and planned activities. One to two project experts are involved as permanent full-time workers, and one coordinator, one project manager, one secretary and one senior accountant are involved as permanent part-time workers (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The Latvian NCP ensures that all relevant parties (policy-makers, students, employer organisations, quality assurance agencies, education institutions and other relevant institutions depending on the topic) are involved in discussions, events and research activities (e.g. preparing the updated referencing report, one-off validation reports, etc.). Since 2008, this has been part of the communication strategy of the NCP (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

As a result of the project *Development of sectoral qualification system and increasing efficiency and quality of vocational education* (2010-15), 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

735. https://likumi.lv/ta/id/219241-grozijumi-ministru-kabineta-2008-gada-2-decembranoteikumos-nr-990-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitibas-klasifikaciju
736. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=20244
737. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=37967
738. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=50759
739. Regulation 202/2013 – Procedures by which State recognised education documents certifying higher education are issued. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=256157/
Regulation 240/2014 on the State standard of the academic education. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=266187
Regulation 512/2014 on the State standard of the second level professional higher education. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=268761
Regulation 633/2016 – Procedure of developing occupational standard, professional qualification requirements (if occupational standard for the profession is not approved) and sectoral qualifications framework. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=285032&version_date=30.09.2016
Regulation 451/2005 amended in 2016 – Procedures by which State recognised documents certifying vocational education and professional qualifications and documents certifying acquisition of a part of an accredited vocational education programme are issued: https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=111580
Regulation 617/2018 on the state professional higher education standard for obtaining a doctor degree and the procedure for awarding a professional doctor degree in arts: https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=111580
740. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=291524
741. The initial referencing process (2009-11) was supervised by the referencing working group, comprised of the main stakeholders: ministerial representatives, national agencies, employer organisations, trade unions, student organisations and education quality assurance agencies. The group was also involved in the consultation on the Bologna process and the self-assessment report (2011-12).
742. http://www.nki-latvija.lv/en/par-nkp

students in vocational education programmes. (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Quality assurance is specified at different levels in the education system: at policy, programme and institutional level. In general education and vocational education, quality assessment is carried out by the State Education Quality Service. 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[743] and Cabinet regulations. Since 2018, AIKA[744] has been 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).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[745]

The system for validating non-formal and informal learning in Latvia was developed between 2007 and 2016 and consists of multiple frameworks covering different sectors and levels of education and training. Validation practices have three main aims:
a. assessment for awarding a general basic or secondary education certificate that sets out the education level attained (for 'external students');
b. assessment for awarding a certificate of professional qualification at levels 2 to 4;
c. assessment within higher education with the aim of awarding credit for specific modules in order to increase access and flexibility.

In VET, since 2010, the Vocational education Law stipulates that assessment of vocational competence takes into account the requirements of the respective occupational standard and that

validation of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can be carried out by accredited educational institutions and accredited examination centres delegated by the State Education Quality Service. The procedure for validating competences obtained outside formal education and training for acquisition of professional qualifications at LQF levels 2 to 4 was legally defined in 2011[746]. These regulations do not apply to regulated professions. By 2018, more than 40 accredited educational institutions and examination centres were delegated responsibility for validation, with around 3 000 persons having undergone the procedure; the only requirement to access the procedure is to be a minimum 18 years old (Ieleja, 2019).

Procedures for assessment and criteria for recognition of prior learning at LQF levels 5 to 7 were set up for higher education in 2012; the 2012 regulations were replaced in 2018[747]. The validation process in higher education is largely decentralised, with education institutions provided with rights to conduct validation. The decision regarding the recognition of learning outcomes is taken by the Commission of Learning Outcomes Recognition established in the higher education institution or college. As in VET, the basis for assessment are the professional competences as defined in occupational standards. The procedure consists of the four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, certification). There is no centralised collection of data on the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes carried out by higher education institutions or colleges.

Validation arrangements are closely linked to the LQF through the use of learning outcomes. 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, and for full general education qualifications. Obtaining a full qualification through validation is possible for professional qualifications at LQF levels 2 to 4, and the certificate obtained does not specify whether it was acquired through

743. 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 [accessed 18.1.2019].
744. The Academic Information Centre (Latvian ENIC/NARIC, Latvian national coordination point for EQF, National Europass centre and ReferNet) has also taken over the function of external higher education quality assurance in Latvia.
745. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (Ieleja, 2019)) and from the *Implementation of Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning Outcomes in Latvia Self-Assessment Report* (Academic Information Centre, 2018a).

746. Regulation 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
747. Regulation No 36/2012 of the Cabinet of Ministers: *Regulations regarding the validation of learning outcomes achieved in previous learning or professional experience*, replaced by Regulations No 505/2018 of the Cabinet of Ministers: *Regulations for validation of competences acquired outside formal education or during professional experience and learning outcomes achieved in previous education.* https://likumi.lv/ta/id/301013-arpus-formalas-izglitibas-apguto-vai-profesionalaja-pieredze-iegutokompetencu-un-iepriekseja-izglitiba-sasniegtu

attendance at an education and training programme or through validation.

Recent measures for upskilling and increased employability are supported through a range of EU-funded projects, mostly started in 2017 and lasting five years. They have a strong emphasis on validation as part of the proposed solutions[748] and target groups at risk of unemployment (persons with unfinished education, with an education level at EQF 3 or less, disabled persons, persons older than 50 years of age, refugees, NEET youth, long-term unemployed).

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.

NQF implementation and impact

The LQF is now operational. Its development and implementation 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, and resulted in the adoption of the updated EQF referencing report in 2019. The framework is firmly embedded in legislation governing the Latvian education and training system. The Education Law of 1998 was amended in 2015 and includes the definition of the LQF and its general characteristics, reaffirming the LQF as a comprehensive eight-level framework open to all levels and types of formal education (general, vocational and academic education), as well as professional qualifications. The Cabinet of Ministers Regulation 322 on the education classification of Latvia came into force in June 2017, determining the descriptions of knowledge, skills and competences and defining the LQF levels and the conformity of types of education programme with the LQF/EQF levels.

Several large European Social Fund projects have supported LQF implementation. Strong emphasis has been placed on increasing the quality of vocational education in line with labour market needs and with the EQF. Strides have been made in modularisation of VET programmes and developing a system for sectoral qualifications linked to the LQF. 15 sectoral qualification frameworks/structures were approved by 2018, specifying occupations,

specialisations and levels of qualifications, and forming a basis for the development of VET programmes (European Commission, 2019). New occupational standards are being developed and LQF level descriptions have been used as a tool to understand both the education side and the needs of the labour market (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The Latvian qualifications database (LQD)[749] was set up in 2016, enhancing the visibility and transparency of Latvian qualifications. It includes over 2 000 formal (State-accredited) qualifications included in the LQF. The LQD contains a general description of qualifications, including: LQF/EQF level, ISCED 2013, awarding body, title of the qualification, learning outcomes, previous education, diploma and diploma supplement examples. Learning outcomes are described either as a bulk text that does not distinguish between knowledge, skills and competences but includes all of them (usually for academic higher education and general basic and secondary education) or are differentiated as knowledge, skills and competences (usually for VET and professional higher education qualifications). Most of the content of the LQD is available in both Latvian and English.

Since 2013, it has been compulsory to indicate the LQF/EQF level on diploma supplements in higher education[750]. Levels are also indicated on more than 150 Europass certificate supplements (available in Latvian)[751]. From 1 January 2017, LQF levels have been indicated on vocational education certificates and diplomas (both in initial and continuing VET). No decision has been taken on including LQF and EQF levels on certificates in general education.

The LQF is used by education and training institutions in formulating learning outcomes for study programmes, and by quality assurance bodies in the licensing and accreditation of study programmes. It is taken into account by the Latvian ENIQ/NARIC in the recognition of foreign qualifications, while employers are starting to use LQF levels in vacancy descriptions. In order to disseminate the EQF to wider audiences, the NCP ensures that every year there are at least one or

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748. Activities include assessment of human resource potential and support measures such as career consultations, skills audit and validation of non-formal and informal learning

749. www.latvijaskvalifikacijas.lv; www.latvianqualifications.lv; www.lkd.lv; www.lqd.lv

750. Regulation 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 apliecinošus dokumentus*). http://likumi.lv/doc. php?id=256157/

751. https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/nks_europass_saraksts.shtml

two translations of international publications on EQF-related topics into Latvian[752]

The EQF NCP has conducted a number of studies to support LQF implementation. Most recently, a study on the *Role of the LQF in education and on the labour market*[753] aims to examine the use, visibility and impact of the LQF among various target groups (education providers, employers, workers and jobseekers and the general public). The results suggest that the LQF is well known and understood among education and training providers, and that visibility needs to be improved among the general public, employers, workers and jobseekers[754]. There is also regional variation in levels of awareness of the LQF, and a seminar in the least-reached region, Vidzeme, was organised by the NCP in autumn 2020 in response to this. Once finalised, study results will be evaluated and may be used in planning further activities by the NCP.

Previous studies include two evaluations analysing the changes in the Latvian education and training system in the context of the introduction of the LQF: in 2013[755] and 2016 respectively[756]; the 2013 study resulted in proposed and adopted changes to regulations regarding LQF levels 1 to 4. The study *International qualifications in Latvia*[757] was conducted in 2014 to describe existing practice

with regard to international qualifications in Latvia and their possible inclusion in the LQF; a crucial aspect highlighted was the need for introducing and using learning outcomes to facilitate the relevant assessment of international qualifications. Another study was conducted in 2015-16: *Terminology in the context of Latvian qualifications framework and European qualifications framework*[758]. Proposed terminology and definitions were discussed in a seminar with education and language experts and submitted to the Ministry of Education and the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. Results of these studies informed the preparation of the updated EQF referencing report in 2018 (AIC, 2018b).

Referencing to the EQF

The LQF was referenced to the EQF and self-certified to the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in October 2011; the referencing report was published in 2012 (AIC et al., 2012). An updated referencing report was presented and adopted in the EQF advisory group in 2019 (AIC, 2018b). It was informed by the results of several evaluation studies and covers developments in the Latvian education and training system and changes in laws and regulations since the initial referencing exercise.

Important lessons and future plans

The eight-level comprehensive Latvian national qualifications framework has reached an operational stage. It currently includes qualifications awarded in the formal education and training system, in general, vocational and higher education, as well as professional qualifications. Qualifications awarded outside the formal/regulated system are not yet included in the LQF. A future area of work is related to the opening up of the framework to qualifications obtained through non-formal and informal learning, master craftsman qualifications, micro-credentials and international qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The LQF is being regularly reviewed and adapted in response to changes in the Latvian education and training system and developments at European level. It has been reported that by 2018 the terminology and principles introduced with the LQF have become an integral part of education reforms (AIC, 2018b). LQF developments have been

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752. Published on the NCP website. The following have been translated into Latvian since 2018:
Kato, S.; Galán-Muros, V.; Weko, T. (2020). *The emergence of alternative credentials*. OECD Education working paper No 216.
Beverley, O. (2019). *Making micro-credentials work for learners, employers and providers*. Melbourne: Deakin University.
Cedefop; ETF; Unesco (2019). *The global inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks.* Luxembourg: Publications Office.
Cedefop (2019). *Overview of national qualifications framework developments in Europe, 2019.* Luxembourg: Publications Office.
Cedefop (2019). *Qualifications frameworks in Europe: 2018 developments.* Cedefop briefing note, May 2019.
753. The research methods used include: desk research, survey and semi-structured interviews.
754. The results (in English) will be available in spring 2021.
755. Academic Information Centre/Latvian NCP (2013). *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.* http://www.nki-latvija.lv/content/files/LQF_evaluation_of_situation_2013.pdf.
756. Academic Information Centre/Latvian NCP (2016). *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 2016.* http://www.nki-latvija.lv/content/files/LKI_attistiba_situacijas_izvertejums_2016.gada.pdf
757. http://www.nki-latvija.lv/content/files/International-qualifications-in-Latvia_EN.pdf

758. http://www.nki-latvija.lv/content/files/Terminologijas_zinojums_2016.pdf

informed by a number of studies[759] and supported by close cooperation and exchange of views among stakeholders and national authorities. Events organised by the Latvian NCP serve as a platform for discussion on EQF/LQF-related topics and current developments, such as. on lifelong learning, validation of non-formal and informal learning, learning outcomes, qualifications and micro-credentials; they are well attended and information exchange is perceived as intensive. An impact study on the role of LQF in education and on the labour market is under way, with final results expected to become available by the end of 2020 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). This evidence-based and consensus-seeking approach has been among the success factors of LQF implementation so far.

The LQF is considered to be one of the major driving forces for promoting the use of learning outcomes at all levels and in all types of education in Latvia, with influence on the content of programmes, standards and qualification requirements, on the quality assurance system, and on validation of non-formal and informal learning. LQF/EQF levels and level descriptors are frequently used in the development of occupational standards, sectoral qualifications frameworks and curricula

in higher education. The LQF/EQF were used to update and create new State education standards for general basic and secondary education (in force as of September 1, 2020). The transparency and comparability of Latvian qualifications is further supported through the Latvian Qualifications Database which currently includes over 2 000 qualifications awarded in formal education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Current challenges include: the inclusion of LQF levels on general education certificates – there is ongoing discussion and work in this regard and in communicating the LQF to the general public. Providing understandable information on the role and importance of the LQF is considered a challenging task.

The Covid-19 crisis has partly influenced the dialogue on LQF implementation among stakeholders and institutions, as it has not been possible to organise large events. In 2020, the Latvian NCP revised its activity plan to ensure communication with the relevant parties in different ways (e.g. online meetings and discussions, digital dissemination activities) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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759. For details, please see section on *NQF implementation and impact*.

Table 45. Latvian qualifications framework (LQF)

LQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctor diploma (*doktora diploms*) Professional doctor diploma in arts (*profesionālā doktora diploms mākslās*)	8
7	Master diploma (*maģistra diploms*) Professional Master diploma (*profesionālā maģistra diploms*) Diploma of professional higher education and Diploma of higher professional qualification (*profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms and augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms*)	7
6	Bachelor diploma (*bakalaura diploms*) Professional Bachelor diploma (*profesionālā bakalaura diploms*) Diploma of professional higher education and Diploma of higher professional qualification (*profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms* and *augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms*)	6
5	Diploma of first level professional higher education (*pirmā līmeņa profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms*)	5
4	Certificate of general secondary education (*atestāts par vispārējo vidējo izglītību*) Diploma of vocational secondary education (*diploms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību*) Certificate of professional qualification (at secondary education level) (*profesionālās kvalifikācijas apliecība (vidējās izglītības pakāpē)*)	4
3	Certificate of vocational education (*atestāts par arodizglītību*) Certificate of professional qualification (at vocational education (*arodizglītība*) level) (*profesionālās kvalifikācijas apliecība (arodizglītības pakāpē)*)	3
2	Certificate of general basic education (9 years) (*apliecība par vispārējo pamatizglītību*) Certificate of vocational basic education (*apliecība par profesionālo pamatizglītību*) Certificate of professional qualification (at basic education level) (*profesionālās kvalifikācijas apliecība (pamatizglītības pakāpē)*)	2
1	Certificate of general basic education (*apliecība par vispārējo pamatizglītību*) (special education programmes for learners with (severe) mental development disorders or multiple severe developmental disorders)	1

Sources: Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No 322/2017: Regulations on the education classification of Latvia. Annex 1. https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291524-noteikumi-par-latvijas-izglitibas-klasifikaciju

AIC (2018b). https://europa.eu/europass/en/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf

Latvian qualifications database (2020). https://www.latvijaskvalifikacijas.lv/en/

Abbreviations

AIC	Academic Information Centre	EQF	European qualifications framework
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	LQF NQF	Latvian qualifications framework national qualifications framework
ESF	European Social Fund	NCP	national coordination point
EQAR	European quality assurance register in higher education	VET	vocational education and training

Main sources of information

The Academic Information Centre is the Latvian EQF-NCP: http://www.nki-latvija.lv/en/

Latvian qualifications database: https://www.latvijaskvalifikacijas.lv/en/

AIC et al. (2012). *Referencing of the Latvian education system to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area: self-assessment report.* http://www.aic.lv/portal/content/files/Latvian_Self_Assessment_Report_2nd_version_May_2012.pdf

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Ieleja, D. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Latvia.* https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Latvia.pdf

Prepared by

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LEBANON

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

Lebanon plans a comprehensive 8-level national qualifications framework (NQF), covering all types of education and training.

So far, however, there is legislation only on the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) component of a future Lebanese NQF (LNQF). A ministerial decision in 2019 approved 6 levels and descriptors applicable to technical and vocational qualifications. However, this legislation does not apply to the general qualifications framework.

Since piloting in 2012, no significant technical work on the general level descriptors has been undertaken, only those applying to VET qualifications. No working group is currently sitting, and the stakeholders required to cooperate in the framework's development have not been identified or convened.

Lebanon is therefore between the explorative and design stages.

Policy context

The EU is a long-term strategic partner to Lebanon and has committed substantial funds to foster economic recovery. It has intensified its aid to the country since the war in neighbouring Syrian Arab Republic started in 2011, to support Lebanon in coping with the impacts in its territory of the conflict. Assistance has included measures targeted at promoting growth, job creation, social cohesion and education for all people living in the country.

Mobility Partnership negotiations with the EU have halted but will resume pending political stabilisation.

Lebanon is currently dealing with one of the world's worst humanitarian crises in decades. The Syrian War has brought 1.5 million refugees into the country, adding to the existing 450,000 Palestinian refugees. Combined with the repeat political upheavals, COVID 19 fallout for the economy, and the 2020 explosions in Beirut's port, and the result is a country in turmoil.

Lebanon's GDP growth fell from an average of 9% during 2007–2010 to an average of 0.5% during 2011–2019[760] . In 2019, the economy contracted by 5.6%. Given 2020's events - COVID and the port explosion - the outlook for the near future is bleak.

Unemployment was 6.6% in 2020[761], but can be expected to rise once the full effects of COVID are felt. Employment rates are low, at 43% of the 15 plus group in 2018[762]. While per capita incomes are higher than most in the region, the society is marked by inequalities, one third of its people living in poverty.

Lebanon's population increased by 38% in nine years – from 4.95 million in 2010 to around 6.9 million in 2019. It is estimated that about 65% of the Syrian arrivals are under 25. Unsurprisingly, the resulting strains caused by the influx of refugees on the labour market and education and training provision are everywhere visible.

Lebanon is also a country of emigration, and successive generations have seen significant numbers of people, especially the young and better-educated, leave the country, notably to the Gulf, Australia, Canada and the USA.

COVID and the port explosions struck two severe blows to the country's education and training system. Authorities count 163 schools which suffered damage from the port blast and now require repair, reconstruction and replacement of equipment. Up to 85,000 young people are affected.

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760 The World Bank, World Development Indicators database – https://databank.worldbank.org/home.aspx
761. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=LB
762. ETF calculations.

Because of the Covid-19 emergency in 2020, more than 1.2 million school-aged children and young people have been affected by school closures or other disruption. For many, there is a risk they will be out of school or college for prolonged periods.

NQF legal basis

No legal act has been adopted which establishes the full NQF or general framework. However, in 2019 the Minister of Education and Higher Education adopted Decision 374/M/2019, on the *VET* component of the framework, applying to levels 1-6 of the planned full LNQF. This decree approved descriptors for the 6 levels under the headings knowledge, skills, competencies, life skills, digital skills and languages. Decision 374 also specifies the types of vocational qualification available.

Decision 374, it should be noted, does refer to a "....general framework of qualifications consisting of 8 levels," thus signalling the state's intention to eventually establish a comprehensive NQF.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

The Directorate General of Vocational and Technical Education (DGVTE) in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has overall responsibility for VET, overseeing the vocational schools and institutes, and monitoring private providers. It develops curricula and designs exams.

Agricultural programmes provided by public schools come under the mandate of the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA).

Specific short vocational training courses, lasting 3 to 9 months, are offered by private and public providers and NGOs.

One characteristic of the education and training system in Lebanon is the high proportion of private providers: 60% of vocational schools are private[763]. There are two types of private providers: non-profit and for-profit schools.

The non-profit private vocational schools are mainly run by charitable foundations and NGOs. These NGOs are mostly community-based, with strong religious ties. Some private schools date back to the early twentieth century, while NGOs have been active in VET since the early 1950s, even before the creation of the DGVTE. The larger, for-profit, private vocational schools are concentrated in the major

cities. Some belong to European or North American networks and provide internationally-recognised degrees and other qualifications.

The National Strategic Framework for VET 2018-2022 (NSF) drives VET reform in the country. It sets three main outcomes to achieve: (i) expanded access and service delivery; (ii) enhanced quality and relevance of TVET provision; and (iii) improved TVET governance and systems. There are 8 components within these 3 broad outcomes, of which the planned LNQF is one. However, implementation of the NSF is hindered by shortage of funds.

Data to support education and training policy, and labour market analysis, is scarce, so making difficult evidence-based policy-making.

Aims of NQF

The LNQF should be able to classify all qualifications issued by the different sectors of the education and training system. In particular, the LNQF should ensure or contribute to:
a. the transparency and readability of qualifications and their relevance to the labour market;
b. the recognition of qualifications based on defined competences, whether acquired in formal, nonformal or informal contexts;
c. the establishment of pathways and mobility between different sectors of the education system;
d. links to qualifications frameworks of other countries;
e. development of a comprehensive system of accreditation and quality assurance;
f. the broader quality of education and training, through identifying the knowledge, skills and competences required of learners.

In 2012, the NQF was piloted in selected sectors, including education, agro-food, health, electrical works, and hospitality.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

An eight-level structure is planned. The NQF is intended to be lifelong learning in scope, covering general, VET and higher education qualifications.

For the NQF as a whole, the *draft* descriptors are knowledge, skills and competencies. For VET qualifications to be placed at levels 1-6 of the NQF, the *approved* descriptors are: knowledge, skills, competencies, life skills, digital skills and languages.

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763. ETF (2020), Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training in Lebanon.

Types of qualifications

After lower secondary education, there is a distinction between *technical* education and *vocational* education. Curricula and qualifications diverge in two streams.

Technical education prepares students for science-based careers with an applied or practical orientation. Entrants to such programmes must have studied for not less than nine years in basic general education or have seven years' basic general education in addition to holding the *vocational brevet (BP)* mentioned below.

Vocational education prepares students mainly for manual occupations or careers and/or those requiring narrower knowledge or a more limited range of skills than that needed by technical education graduates. Vocational education students pursue apprenticeships and school-based learning simultaneously, hence it is also known as the Dual System.

Technical education qualifications

Qualifications awarded through the technical stream are:

- the Technical Baccalaureate (*baccalauréat technique, BT)*: taken by students after the *BP*; it lasts 3 years; awarded to students on successful completion of the technical stream of upper secondary school or technical school; Level 4 of the planned LNQF.

Graduates awarded the *baccalauréat technique* diploma can directly enter the labour market or access further education, either university or higher technical education. If they opt for the latter course, they can pursue:

- the Higher Technician Diploma (*technicien supérieur, TS):* pursued by people who have already obtained the *BT*, or the Lebanese *Baccalaureate* in general secondary education; programmes last two years; it is positioned at Level 5 of the LNQF;
- the Technical Licence (*licence technique, LT*): available to people who hold the *TS* diploma; one year of study; it is placed at Level 6 in the LNQF;
- the Teaching Technical Licence (*licence d'enseignement technique, or LET*): taken by: (i) holders of the *BT* or the general education *Baccalaureate* – these two groups study for 4 years to obtain the *LET;* or (ii) by people who have already obtained the *TS,* who then study 2 years; Level 6 in the LNQF.

Vocational qualifications

Vocational qualifications are:

- the Vocational Brevet, (*brevet professionnel, BP*); it is awarded to students who have successfully completed the vocational stream in lower secondary/intermediate school; it is placed at Level 3 of the LNQF.
- the Secondary Vocational Diploma; entry to programmes is available to holders of the *BP* or after the general intermediate diploma (*brevet*). It is awarded to candidates on successful completion of a programme of three years of study; it places at Level 4 of the LNQF;
- the Vocational Supervisor's Diploma (*Maister*); pursued by people who: (i) have two years' work experience; they study for two years; or (ii) holders of the *baccalauréat technique (BT)* who have a minimum of three years' work experience; or (iii) holders of the general secondary education *Baccalaureate*, who also have five years' work experience. Level 5 of the LNQF.

It is possible to transfer from one track to another. Holders of the Secondary Vocational Diploma can access programmes leading to the technical baccalaureate after following one year of studies of the required general subjects e.g. maths, sciences, languages.

There are also short training certificates, placed at levels 1 to 3 of the framework.

Quality assurance of qualifications

Currently, quality assurance in VET is primarily oriented to conducting accreditation of providers against criteria largely about school infrastructure and the like, rather than aimed at improving provision and qualifications. The NSF does, though, call for a more far-reaching QA system.

DGTVE develops VET curricula and qualifications and accredits VET providers, public and private. Private providers apply to DGTVE to be licensed - only those assessed by DGTVE as approved against its criteria (mainly for equipment, infrastructure and facilities) can offer formal programmes. Private TVET schools must, however, apply the national curricula set by DGTVE for their students to be eligible to sit for national exams and receive the official diplomas.

Competency-based approaches to assessment are not systemically used and final assessments are mainly theoretical in content.

The short VET courses mentioned earlier are not systematically regulated. DGTVE gathers only quite basic information to license providers.

As indicated earlier, Lebanon does not command a comprehensive data-gathering system for labour market analysis, one consequence of which is that there is not accurate or up to date information to

support decisions on programmes and qualifications that would meet labour market and individuals' needs. A further limitation is the absence of employers and trades unions from consultative or decision-making roles in education and training. This extends also to assessment and certification, where, a recent ILO survey suggested, employers feel they lack the training to fulfil this role, as the state does not offer such support.

Use of learning outcomes and standards
There is no definition in law of "qualification". Qualifications based on learning outcomes have been piloted in construction but otherwise remain, for the most part, inputs-based.

UNICEF, working with DGTVE, is currently piloting new competency-based curricula. It is planned for implementation in 2022-2023, after training teachers in the new approach.

Qualifications are not usually unit-based. Only some courses are modular.

The Arab Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) is used on an ad hoc basis to design qualifications, but it dates from 2006. UNICEF and the DGTVE currently deliver workshops using the Developing a Curricula (DACUM) method. These workshops bring together experienced workers, trainers, and employers to analyse a given occupation, breaking down the tasks performed and identifying the needed skills, knowledge and behaviours; plus, the requisite tools, equipment, and other resources.

However, overall, few qualifications are developed based on occupational standards.

Credit systems
There is no country-wide VET credit system. However, the Minister of Education issued a decree in 2019 which provides for the adoption of a credit system limited to a few technical institutes in one occupational field, car maintenance and repair.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF
The Ministry of Education and Higher Education coordinated the 2012 NQF project and hosted the NQF working group. However, the institutional arrangements proposed by the NQF working group were never officially approved.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders
The suspension of work of the NQF has meant that no progress has been made in recent years in identifying or coordinating the stakeholders required to cooperate in its development and implementation. During the earlier NQF project, the NQF working group brought together representatives from the different sectors of the education sector but no other stakeholders such as employers, although invited, participated.

A Higher VET Council, composed of representatives from different ministries and local and economic organisations, was established to provide advice to the MEHE on policies, plans, regulations and budgets. However, the Council met only once before its mandate expired.

Lebanon's VET strategy, the NSF, plans establishment of sector skills councils, which would foster engagement of employers in qualification development and other process.

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

VNFIL arrangements
It is not currently possible to be awarded a formal qualification via validation of nonformal and informal learning.

However, VNFIL/RPL would be of great benefit to both citizens and refugees - those with work experience and skills could apply for assessment and certification, while those with limited experience or relevant skills could, following assessment, be directed to undertake identified complementary or full training.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
The full NQF is not functional yet. However, its VET element at levels 1-6 is formally approved.

Qualifications registers and databases
No register exists yet.

Qualification documents
Broadly, formal qualifications, those issued by Ministries, are termed diplomas, while the term certificates applies to qualifications issued by the non-formal sector e.g. private schools or non-formal qualifications issued by the public TVET schools.

Formal TVET diplomas, obtained via study at the TVET schools, are issued by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, with the exception of diplomas in agricultural fields, which are issued by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Certificates obtained through study at accredited private TVET schools or NGOs are issued by the school or the training centre and stamped by the DGTVE to indicate that the institution is recognized. The non-formal certificates issued by public TVET schools or training centres are issued by the institution that provides the training.

NGOs or training centres which are not formally accredited issue their own qualifications, but these are not formally recognised.

Recognition of foreign qualifications

As at 5.1, there is unexploited scope to tap human capital, as systematic processes for recognition of refugees' formal qualifications and application of equivalence procedures would support their integration into the labour market. Likewise, the country could recognise the foreign qualifications obtained abroad by returning Lebanese citizens.

A specialized committee in the DGVTE determines equivalence of diplomas and certificates obtained abroad with Lebanese qualifications.

Referencing to regional frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks

The Arab Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) has been an external reference tool influencing development of the NQF, as in other countries in the region. However, as indicated above it dates from 2006.

International cooperation

Lebanon participates in ETF's Forum for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training.

International donor support

The country's VET strategy, the NSF, was launched in 2018 with support from the International Labour Organization, UNICEF, plus ETF and other EU offices.

ETF steered the 2012 NQF piloting, supported and part-funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

ILO has a regional office in Beirut and is active in skills development via many projects and initiatives.

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ, a German development agency) has implemented numerous VET projects in Lebanon.

UNICEF has been active in VET cooperation since 2016, running many programmes, notably the TVET Modernisation Project. In the NQF, UNICEF has worked with national authorities to develop the VET component of the LNQF, including the descriptors.

Due to the Syrian conflict, other donors such as USAID, the Netherlands, *Agence Française de Développement,* are active in the country in the field of education to support refugees and vulnerable local communities and enhance employability. The Netherlands is leading the extensive ILO programme Prospects, the Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities.

Important lessons and future plans

Conditions currently inhibit serious progress in developing the full NQF. Updating existing, or developing new, qualifications, is hindered by limited labour market data and the low level of engagement of stakeholders in the education and training system. A VNFIL system would especially benefit refugees.

Table 46. Vocational and technical education qualifications framework and its descriptors

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	COMPETENCIES	LIFE SKILLS	DIGITAL SKILLS	LANGUAGES
1	Basic knowledge.	Basic skills required for simple practical tasks.	The ability to carry out work in a professional way and under direct supervision. based on safety conditions and respecting the environmental conservation.	Problem solving, cooperation, negotiation, restraint, communication, respect for diversity, empathy and participation.	Using basic mobile applications.	Familiarity with the vocabulary used in the profession to which he/she is prepared for.
2	Basic knowledge of the profession.	Knowledge and practical skills that are necessary to carry out the basic tasks of the profession professionally and according to the safety rules and solving the daily routine by using simple rules and tools.	The ability to carry out professional work according to professional and safety standards and environmental conservation in a structured context and under the supervision of a supervisor but with a certain degree of independence.	Problem solving, cooperation, negotiation, restraint, communication, respect for diversity, empathy and participation.	Using basic mobile applications.	Familiarity with the vocabulary used in the profession to which he/she is prepared for.
3	Realistic knowledge within broad contexts in the field of work and knowledge of the facts, principles, processes and general concepts in the field of the profession practiced.	Cognitive and practical skills required to carry out coordinated tasks according to the correct rules and standards, safety rules and environmental conservation, problem solving based on correct information, selection and application of appropriate methods, tools, information and materials.	The ability to carry out the tasks entrusted to the worker that are required by the occupation and that are related to the standards of occupational safety, environmntal conservation and independency in the performance. Taking responsibility for the results of the work entrusted to the worker and adapt his/her own behavior with the conditions when solving problems with other employees.	Problem solving, critical thinking, cooperation, negotiation, restraint, communication, respect for diversity, empathy and participation.	Using of mobile phones and basic uses of computers, including using properly the information search engines.	Familiarity with a foreign language, especially French or English to acquire technical vocabulary and to ensure communication. In many cases, the English is a must.
4	Realistic knowledge within a wide range of the field of work and knowledge of facts, principles, procedures and general concepts that are related to the profession, which also allows the worker to pursue his studies at the fifth level of learning.	Cognitive and practical skills required to organize and implement activities that apply methods, procedures and instructions for each activity according to the correct rules and standards, safety rules and environmental conservation, and to find solutions to the problems through information, selection and application of appropriate methods, tools, materials and human resources.	The ability to perform tasks independently within the limits of specific instructions or requirements of professional and associated standards, safety standards and environmental conservation within predictable contexts, adapting self-behavior with situations for solving problems with other workers, supervising the work of others and organizing materials and human resources that are necessary to accomplish the required tasks.	Problem solving, critical thinking, cooperation, negotiation, restraint, communication, respect for diversity, empathy, participation and self employment.	Using mobile applications and basic computer applications including information search engines, Microsoft Office especially Word and Excel.	Recognize French and English languages to acquire technical vocabulary, communicate and write a simple message or work report. In many cases, the English is a must.

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	COMPETENCIES	LIFE SKILLS	DIGITAL SKILLS	LANGUAGES
5	Comprehensive and realistic knowledge related to a specific field of work and the comprehension of the limits of these knowledges.	Skills' knowledge and a comprehensive set of practical skills that are required to organize and implement the work, supervise the workers and the distribution of tasks on them, evaluate the results through tools and objective indicators in accordance with the rules and the professional standards, the safety rules and the conservation of the environment, and to develop solutions and innovative performances to solve the problems.	The ability to exercise management and control in different work situations and tasks assigned to him/her, to face possible alternative changes, to review and develop self performance, to supervise the accurate application of public and professional safety standards and environmental conservation.	Problem solving, critical thinking, cooperation, negotiation, decision making, self-control, communication, respect for diversity, empathy, participation and selfemployment	Using mobile applications and basic computer applications, including information search engines, Microsoft Office especially Word, Excel and Power Point.	Advanced knowledge of foreign languages, especially French and English, and the ability to communicate in English and to formulate correspon-dences and work reports without major language errors.
6	Advanced knowledge in the field of work that is based on critical understanding of scientific theories and principles.	Advanced knowledge and practical procedure that indicate the distinction and the innovation required to organize and manage the work, evaluate and solve complex and unexpected problems in a specialized range of work.	The ability to manage complex technical or professional activities, to take responsibility, to take decisions in the context of work to solve problems and to adapt the changes based on the application of modern methods, to address situations that cannot be foreseen in advance, to supervise the workers, to assess their performance, to ensure the proper application of public and professional safety standards and environmental protection, to have responsibility and to develop the human resources.	Problem solving, critical thinking, cooperation, negotiation, decision making, self-control, communication, respect for diversity, empathy, participation and selfemployment	Using mobile applications and basic computer applications, including information search engines, Microsoft Office, WordExcel and Power point.	Advanced knowledge of foreign languages, especially French and English, and the ability to communicate in English and to formulate correspondences and work reports without language errors.

Source: Ministry of Education and Higher Education

Abbreviations

ASCO	Arab Standard Classification of Occupations	MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
BP	Brevet Professionnel (Vocational Brevet)	MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE)
BT	Baccalauréat technique (Technical Baccalaureate)	MOSA	Ministry of Social Affairs NCVT National Centre for Vocational Training
DGVTE/ DGTVET	Directorate General of Vocational and Technical Education	NEO	National Employment Office
		NTITE	National Training Institution for Technical Education
DACUM	Developing a Curriculum	NQF	National Qualification Framework
EU	European Union	NSF	National Strategic Framework for action, TVET 2018-2022
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit	TS	Technicien supérieur (Higher Technician Diploma)
ILO	International Labour Organization	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education	TVET QF	Technical and Vocational Education and Training Framework.
LET	Licence d'enseignement technique, (Teaching Technical Licence)	UNICEF	United Nations Children's' Fund
LNQF	Lebanese National Qualifications Framework	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
LT	Licence technique (Technical Licence)		

Main sources of information

Ministry of Education and Higher Education https://www.facebook.com/MEHELebanon/

Ministry of Labour https://www.labor.gov.lb/Default.aspx and https://www.facebook.com/pages/Ministry%20of%20Labor/472099526616736/

Ministry of Industry http://www.industry.gov.lb/

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ETF (2020), Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training in Lebanon. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020-10/quality_assurance_in_vet_lebanon.pdf

Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
Online platform	https://openspace.etf.europa.eu
Twitter	@etfeuropa
Facebook	facebook.com/etfeuropa
YouTube	www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
Live&Learn	https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/
Instagram	instagram.com/etfeuropa/
LinkedIn	linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation
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LIECHTENSTEIN

Introduction and context

Lichtenstein's education system is the responsibility of the State, which supervises State schools and private schools. The nine years of compulsory schooling (primary and lower secondary level) are followed for around 65% of young people in Liechtenstein by a basic vocational education and training (apprenticeship) with or without an integrated baccalaureate[764]. Around 25% of students attend a general upper secondary baccalaureate (*Gymnasium*). A small percentage attend upper secondary specialised school programmes or they find a job in the workplace as semi-skilled workers. The structure of Liechtenstein's education system is characterised by the small size of the country, which makes it irrational to offer a complete education system at all levels. In vocational and professional education especially, but also in higher education programmes, cooperation networks have been established with neighbouring countries. Liechtenstein makes financial contributions in these sectors. Places to study at schools and universities are obtained with the help of arrangements with foreign ministries and departments; at upper secondary level, for example, the entire school-based part of the basic vocational education takes place in Switzerland. Liechtenstein contributes both directly (through shareholding) and indirectly (through participation in inter-cantonal finance agreements) to the running costs of these education institutions. In Austria it is primarily boarding schools and baccalaureate schools that are attended by Liechtenstein pupils. Liechtenstein has only a few higher education institutions. Around 70% of higher education students attend courses at a Swiss university or at a Swiss university of applied science; around 15% study at Austrian universities (Eurydice, 2020).

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[765]. From the beginning, the development of NQFL was closely coordinated with Switzerland, with whom Liechtenstein has established a common 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 (QF-EHEA), was adopted and included in higher education law. It was self-certified against the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2013 and forms an integral part of the NQFL. The national qualifications framework for vocational qualifications (NQFL-BBV) adopted on 19 December 2017 was paving the way to full implementation of the framework. As in Austria and Switzerland, general education is currently not included in the framework.

The NQFL was referenced to the EQF in October 2016, with the referencing report published in 2017.

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):
a. describe adequately the education system, improving the transparency, the clarity and the comparability of qualifications in VET, higher VET and higher education;
b. support, in terms of labour market needs, an employer's assessment of the skills of vocational graduates from Liechtenstein and enable a

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764. Examination that certifies access to higher education.

765. Governmental Decree RA 2010/2909-4000.

similar process for graduates with qualifications from abroad;

c. 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, learning outcomes and qualifications

The NQFL comprises eight levels. Competence-oriented descriptors detail the requirements for each level; these are closely aligned with the EQF descriptors, but also adjusted to suit specific national features. Level descriptors[766] are identical to those of the Swiss NQF-VPQ.

Table 47. The main elements of the descriptors in NQFL-BBV

Knowledge	Knowledge
	Understanding
Skills	Procedural skills
	Sensorimotor skills
Competences	Professional competences
	Personal competences: • autonomy • social competences • leadership competences

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. 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[767], qualifications and curricula have been revised with a stronger focus on competences and equipping students with the competence to act (*Handlungskomptenz*) (Cedefop, 2016).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The legal basis for the national qualifications framework for vocational qualifications – *Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen des Fürstentums Liectenstein für Abschlüsse der Berufsbildung* (NQFL- BBV) – is the decree adopted 19 December 2017 and put into force on 1 January 2018.

The NQFL is supervised by the Ministry of Education. The National Agency for International Educational Affairs (AIBA)[768] has been appointed the EQF national coordination point (NCP) to carry out administration and coordination tasks connected with the NQFL.

Supervision of vocational education and training is carried out by the Office of Vocational Training and Career Counselling[769]. The educational part of dual training, vocational education at school and professional tertiary education are conducted at Swiss institutions and are therefore the responsibility of these authorities. In addition, the concept of VET includes an obligation of internal quality assurance for the providers of vocational training.

Responsible bodies in higher education are the Government and the higher education institutions themselves. The Government is the supervisory body of the higher education institutions and is supported by the Office of Education[770]. Liechtenstein does not have its own agency of accreditation. The necessary accreditations and evaluations in connection with the granting or recognition procedures and quality assurance

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766. Level descriptors are included in Annex 1 of the ordinance on NQFL-BBV.

767. 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.https://www.gesetze.li/konso/pdf/2008103000?version=3

768. AIBA is an independent institution, supervised by the Ministry of Education.

769. Office of Vocational Training and Career Counselling

770. Office of Education

are formed in cooperation with foreign agencies (Eurydice, 2020).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[771]

No major changes have been made since the 2018 inventory on non-formal and informal learning. 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 education 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 referred 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*) (NQFL-HS) 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 the conditions and process of admission without a *matura* certificate[772] and limitation of crediting learning acquired outside the higher education system. It is possible to recognise non-formal and informal learning as a 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 and impact

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 HE, underpinned by two sectoral qualifications frameworks: one encompassing HE qualifications (NQFL-HS), adopted in 2013, and one for vocational education (NQFL-BBV), in force since January 2018.Having both sectoral frameworks integrated in the NQFL offers opportunities to integrate further non-formal and informal learning outcomes. General education qualifications are not included in the NQFL.

The NQFL has reached activation stage, implementation structures are in place, main working methods and instruments being put in place and end-users being made aware of the existence of the NQF and related services. The NQF is a reference point for the use of learning outcomes and plays a role in improving transparency and comparability of qualifications at national and international levels. The NQF for higher education (NQFL-HE) is already operational.

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.

771. This section draws mainly on input from Puukka (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Liechtenstein. https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Liechtenstein.pdf

772. 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. https://www.gesetze.li/lilexprod/ lgsystpage2.jsp?formname=showlaw&lgblid=2005002000&gueltigdate=07032017

Figure 19. Y-Model of NQFL

Source: Ministry of Education (2017).

The process of assigning vocational and professional qualifications a level is carried out by Switzerland. By February 2021 a total of 588 formal vocational and professional qualifications had been attributed levels in Switzerland: 245 IVET qualifications, mostly distributed to levels 3 and 4; and 340 professional qualifications, at levels 5 to 7; and three to level 8. The process is expected to continue[773].

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 1Switzerland. So far, the Liechtenstein Government has approved 88 qualifications out of 120 (NQFL website).

Figure 2 outlines the main steps in the levelling process.

For public involvement and information, the NQFL website (*Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen Fürstentum Liechtenstein*) was established in spring 2013, providing information and updates[774].

Liechtenstein doesn't have a fully fledged qualifications database or register yet. On the NQFL website there is a section, diploma supplement,

Figure 20. Main steps of the levelling process
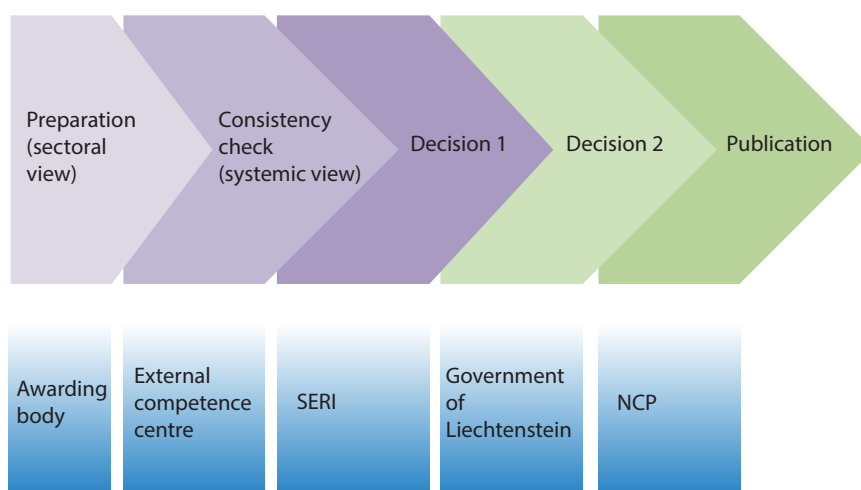
Source: Ministry of Education (2017), p. 29.

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773. For more information please consult the chapter on Switzerland in the NQF European inventory 2020.

774. NQFL website.

where vocational qualifications are registered with links to supplements including the NQFL and EQF levels[773]. These levels are indicated on certificates/diplomas and supplements in initial VET and higher education.

NQFL plays an important role for comparability and transparency of qualifications with the other European countries. It also supports the recognition of foreign qualifications, as Liechtenstein recruits 50% of their workers from the neighbouring countries (European Commission and Cedefop 2020).

Education providers particularly benefit from greater transparency. With its focus on competences, the NQFL supports transparent descriptions of expected learning outcomes in programmes and assessment and can thus make an important contribution to quality assurance in education. As the education market is international, EQF and NQFL also open up new options for international offers and cooperation in education (AIBA).

Referencing to the EQF

The NQFL was referenced to the EQF in October 2016 and the referencing report was published in 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Important lessons and future plans

An evaluation of the NQFL is not yet planned as the framework is quite new. An analysis, however, is foreseen after the framework has been used for some time.

As a next step, Liechtenstein intends to print the NQFL level on certificates and diplomas, including the link to the homepage, hoping to make the NQFL more visible.

Liechtenstein is following developments in non-formal and informal in the neighbouring countries very closely.

Table 48. Indication of qualifications types and levels in the NQF VPQ and NQFL-BBV

NQF VPQ LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	• Advanced federal diploma for higher education (tertiary federal examination) • Eidgenössisches Diplom (Höhere Fachprüfung)	8
7	• Advanced federal diploma for higher education (tertiary federal examination) • Eidgenössisches Diplom (Höhere Fachprüfung)	7
6	• Advanced federal diploma of higher education* (tertiary federal examination) • Eidgenössisches Diplom (Höhere Fachprüfung) • Advanced federal diploma of higher education issued by a college of higher education* • Diplom HF ausgestellt von einer Höheren Fachschule • Federal diploma of higher education (tertiary federal examination) • Eidgenössischer Fachausweis (Berufsprüfung)	6
5	• Federal diploma of higher education* (tertiary federal examination) • Eidgenössischer Fachausweis (Berufsprüfung) • Federal VET diploma (three- or four-year dual VET programmes) • Eidgenössisches Fähigkeitszeugnis (drei-und vierjährige duale Berufsbildung)	5
4	• Federal VET diploma* (three- or four-year dual VET programmes) Eidgenössisches Fähigkeitszeugnis (drei-und vierjährige duale Berufsbildung)	4
3	• Federal VET certificate (two-year VET programmes)* • Eidgenössisches Berufsattest (zweijärige Berufsausbildung)	3
2		2
1		1

* Standard level for this type of a qualification.

Source: SERI and AIBA, 2021 (e-mail communication).

775. 775 NQFL website.

Main sources of information

The National Agency of International Education Affairs (AIBA) is the EQF NCP: https://www.aiba.li/

NQFL website is available at: http://www.nqfl.li/

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LITHUANIA

Introduction and context

Lithuania ranks second in the EU in tacking early leaving from education and training (4% against 10.2% EU average in 2019) and first in tertiary educational attainment (57.8% v 40.3%), but with a significant gap between men (46.9%) and women (69.5%). The total employment rate of recent graduates (ISCED levels 3 to 8) is close to the EU average; while employment prospects of upper secondary graduates increased in the last decade from 57.8% in 2009 to 68.1% in 2019, they remain below the EU average (75.9%). High employment rates of tertiary education graduates (87.6% versus 85% EU average) coexist with overqualification and significant mismatches between skills supply and skills demand.

Fostering key competences at all levels is a priority. The proportion of underachievers in mathematics and reading is at the 2009 levels, though it increased in science (from 17% to 22.2% in 2019). Learner performance is strongly linked to socioeconomic status, with especially large disparities between urban and rural areas. Despite high public investment, the education network is faced with quality and efficiency challenges, especially considering a shrinking school population. The pandemic crisis (2020) calls for distance learning solutions at all education levels, support for pupils from disadvantaged socioeconomic background, and improving ICT teaching methods and teacher capacity (European Commission, 2019, 2020).

Participation in vocational education and training (VET) is low and results in poor employment outcomes calling for actions to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession, reform VET curricula and engage employers. Adult participation in lifelong learning remains low: 7% in 2019 and below the EU average of 10.8% in the same year. Reforming the tertiary education sector and quality of programmes offered is also high on the agenda. The plan for restructuring of universities is under review; the Ministry, together with OECD,

elaborated a skills strategy whose first results are expected in 2021 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The Lithuanian qualifications framework (LTQF) was formally adopted in 2010[776]. It is based on eight learning-outcomes-based levels and covers all officially recognised qualifications in general (primary and secondary) education, vocational education and training and higher education. Amendments regulated the role and functions of the framework (2011) and the classification of higher education short-cycle study programmes (2019)[777].

Joint referencing and 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 national qualifications framework is conceived to support the development and modernisation of the national education and training system. It aims to improve transparency of qualifications and support qualifications design and assessment; to ease recognition processes allowing individuals to build on outcomes of learning achieved in formal, non-formal and informal settings; and to promote a lifelong learning culture and national and international mobility (QVETDC, 2012:33). Its aims remain unchanged over time (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). The interinstitutional action

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776. Government of Lithuania (2010). *Resolution on approving the description of the Lithuanian qualifications framework*. https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/LTQF_official_translation.pdf
777. https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.BC967702800C/rYDVRYaMqu

plan for employment support 2014-20[778], which includes measures for recognition of prior learning and of qualifications acquired abroad, and the ESF investment programme 2014-20 (priority 9), for updating qualifications standards, modularisation of vocational education and training programmes and recognition of prior learning, are built in accordance with the LTQF/EQF principles. Implementation is in process through the lifelong learning action plan 2017-20[779] (Cedefop and Refernet, 2020).

Levels and use of learning outcomes

The LTQF combines the existing eight-level structure of the Lithuanian qualifications system[780] with the descriptor principles introduced by the EQF. Level descriptors are defined according to two parameters: activity characteristics and types of competence.

Table 49. Level descriptors in the Lithuanian NQF

PARAMETERS		
	Characteristics of activities	Types of competence
Criteria	• complexity of activities • autonomy of activities • variability of activities	• cognitive competences • functional competences • general competences

Source: Adapted from QVETDC, 2012.

The combination of the two parameters allows for detailed description of each level: the competence criteria broadly correspond to the EQF distinction between knowledge, skills and competence (autonomy and responsibility in the 2017 EQF recommendation) while the activity criteria elaborate further the third EQF pillar (QVETDC, 2012, pp. 36-41).

The learning outcomes (competence) approach is broadly implemented in all areas of Lithuanian vocational education and training (Lauzackas et al, 2009). Building on the progress in the past, the new

law on vocational education and training adopted in December 2017, entered in force in February 2018, with some of the articles entering into force in January 2019. It addresses current challenges, such as the lack of practical skills of VET graduates and the mismatch between skills acquired in VET, and the functions and operations performed at the labour market. Following the new legal basis, qualifications standards (nationally referred to as sectoral qualifications standards), programmes and curricula are being reformed[781]. Qualification standards have been reviewed with more focus on occupation-specific skills, general subject knowledge, and transversal skills and competences (Cedefop, 2020)[782].

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 learning-outcomes approach supports the modularisation of VET curricula. Coupled with the development of qualifications standards, the shift from subject-based to modular curricula has been developed and new guidelines and methodology for the preparation and registration of VET programmes were drafted. Since 2019, all formal IVET programmes[783] consist of mandatory and elective modules defined in terms of learning credits[784] aligned with LTQF level descriptors and along ECVET principles[785]. As of 2020/21, general education learners in grades 9 to 12 may take short vocational modules of 5 or 10 credits offered in VET schools instead of the technologies subject *(technologijų dalykas)* of

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778. Resolution of Lithuanian Government No 204 of 26 February 2014 on the interinstitutional action plan for the Employment support 2014-20 programme implementation. https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/ebe20890a52c11e3aeb49a67165e3ad3/asr

779. Decree of Minister of Education and Science No V-536 of 28-06-2017 on the action plan for development of lifelong learning in 2017-2020. https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/8d34ecd05c0411e79198ffdb108a3753/asr

780. Five vocational education levels (introduced in 1997) and three higher education levels (introduced in 1992).

781. According to the law, the qualifications standards must be reviewed and updated at least once every five years (Article 14) and the relevant VET programmes must be reviewed and updated accordingly no later than 12 months after the entry into force of the update of the standard.

782. At the end of 2020, 22 such standards were in place covering all LTQF levels.

783. In the national context, IVET programmes are considered only those delivered in lower, upper-secondary and post-secondary levels. CVET programmes are available to adults to acquire a second qualification in formal VET.

784. A learning credit is a unit of learning volume that measures learning outcomes and a learner's working time. The Qualification and VET Development Centre (2019), *Methodology for the development of formal VET programmes*, p.5. https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Moduliniu_programu_rengimo_metodika_2019.pdf

785 VET programmes vary from 30 credits (approximatively a half year), 45, 60 (one regular year), to 90 or 110 credits depending on the type/level of programme (Cedefop ReferNet, 2020). Formal VET programmes for adults consist of the same mandatory modules as in IVET.

the general education curriculum[786]; credits are recognised when enrolling in VET, shortening the programme duration (Cedefop ReferNet Lithuania, 2020).

However, overall and timely coordination of the update of qualification standards, formal revision of VET programmes and implementation has been challenging. To improve system efficiency, a methodical framework has been devised for the elaboration of qualifications standards (nationally referred to as sectoral qualifications standards) in line with the LTQF/EQF[787] (Cedefop and Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre, 2019; European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The level descriptors of the LTQF are used as an explicit reference point to improve consistency between single qualifications and across the different sectors. In the higher education sector, LTQF descriptors are taken into account when defining higher education study levels and study field descriptors; they 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 (Beleckiene, 2019). Higher education degrees (bachelor, professional bachelor and master) and doctoral degrees are referenced to NQF/EQF levels.

Work continues to reform general education competence-based curricula. Learning outcomes of lower and upper secondary general education programmes were referenced, respectively, to LTQF levels 3 and 4[788]. Guidelines drafted in 2019 for the preparation of the general curriculum framework focus on a learning-outcomes approach[789]. Work is under way; pilots are expected in 2021 with possible implementation as from 2022 (including

new formative assessment practices) (European Commission, 2020).

Significant changes in recent years are related to qualifications at level 5. This level was previously empty. Two types of qualifications are placed at this level: VET diplomas level 5 (*Profesinio mokymo diplomas*) acquired in post-secondary VET programmes, and short-cycle HE programmes leading to study certificate (*Studijų pažymėjimas*). Amendments to the higher education law[790] and LTQF framework[791] legitimated short-cycle studies at higher education level, awarding level 5 qualifications; programmes may be delivered jointly by higher education colleges and VET institutions. Preparations for short-cycle HE programme implementation are in process. Additionally, eight modular VET post-secondary level programmes leading to VET diploma, level 5 (*Profesinio mokymo diplomas*) are currently being implemented by higher education colleges and VET institutions[792].

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The role of stakeholders in LTQF implementation has been active, notably through their involvement in the referencing of the LTQF to the EQF and in setting up a framework of sector-based qualification standards. Work in this area was initiated by the Central Professional Committee (CPC), a tripartite body established in 2007 with the aim to involve stakeholders outside education and training. The law on VET of 2017 abolished the CPC; coordination of strategic issues related to development of the national qualifications system/framework and vocational training in specific economic sectors was

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786 The technologies subject aims to develop practical skills; it is offered in lower- and upper secondary general education at different fields of studies. See more here.

787 Within the framework of the 2016-21 ESF project *Development of the Lithuanian Qualifications System (Phase 1)*. https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/kvalifikaciju-sistemos-pletra-i-etapas/

788. The Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC), 2019. https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/en/information/qualifications-framework/

789. Decree No V-1317 of 18 November 2019 of Minister of Education, Science and Sport on approving guidelines for updating the general curriculum framework. https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/e3e9269009e511ea9d279ea27696ab7b
Article 47(1) indicate that the curriculum should reflect six broad competences: social, emotional and healthy lifestyle competence, cognitive competence, creativity competence, civic competence, cultural competence and communication competence.

790. Amendment No XIII-1658 of 20 November 2018 of the law on science and higher education: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/legalAct.html?documentId=eb9829b0f31911e88568e_724760eeafa
Amendment No XIII-3415 of 10 November 2020 of the law on science and higher education: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/65fcc8802b2d11eb932eb1ed7f923910

791. Amendment 535 of 24 July 2019 No 764 of the 2010 government resolution on approving the description of the LTQF: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/legalAct.html?documentId=a272f160aee011e98451fa7b5933515d
English translation of the legal act of 2010: http://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/LTQF_official_translation.pdf

792. Roofing master, bricklayer master, façade insulation master and finishing fitter master in the construction and civil engineering education field of studies, welding master and vehicle repair technician in mechanics and metalworking and ballet artist and contemporary dance performer in music and performing arts: https://www.aikos.smm.lt/Registrai/Mokymo-programos/SitePages/Pagrindinis.aspx?ss=a8a83417-f33f-4991-9c24-27abf017ca5b

delegated from 2018[793] to the sectoral professional committees (SPCs). These are advisory bodies established under QVETDC; currently 18 are in place in all sectors of the economy[794]. Each SPC is composed of at least nine members (business representatives, employers, employees, ministries and education providers). SPCs endorse qualification standards (nationally referred to as sectoral qualifications standards), consider and submit proposals on new qualifications at any LTQF level to the Ministry of Education and Science, and submit an opinion regarding the need for short cycle study programmes leading to LTQF level 5 qualifications.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[795]

There are validation arrangements to assess non-formal or informal learning in VET and HE. 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[796] must apply to an appropriate VET or higher education provider; each of these has an internal quality system which also applies to the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes. Arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET and higher education include all the elements specified in the Council recommendation of 2012[797] (identification, documentation, assessment and certification). However, an overall quality assurance framework for validation of non-formal and informal learning is missing. QVETCD is running an ESF-funded programme (2018-22) for developing a national system for the assessment and recognition of competences acquired in various settings, with a focus on recognition of general competences,

professional (and international) qualifications and tools for effective monitoring of validation processes[798]. Work has been initiated in 2020 for the development of a sub-system of non-formal qualifications acquired in the workplace and exploring how these could be integrated into the national qualifications system[799] (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2020).

NQF implementation and impact

LTQF has been designed as a comprehensive framework for lifelong learning. It currently includes qualifications from VET and higher education.

The legislation defining provisions for general education curricula stipulates that learning outcomes of lower secondary education programmes are referenced to NQF level 3 and learning outcomes of upper secondary education programmes are referenced to NQF level 4. Work continues to reform general education competence-based curricula.

The implementation of the comprehensive LTQF made visible a missing link at level 5, which has led to discussions on the education sector where these qualifications should be delivered and awarded. In VET, two programmes at level 5 were first introduced in ballet and dance studies. Progress has been made in legitimating LTQF level 5 short-cycle higher education programmes; agreeing and regulating entry requirements and delivery (duration, programme requirements, share of practical training, learning outcomes description), and updated classification in the LTQF[800] (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). Implementing provisions for the delivery of HE short-cycle programmes are expected. In 2020, eight EQF level 5 VET programmes are being implemented at post-secondary level jointly by colleges (universities

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793. Joint order 2018-11244 of 4 July 2018 of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Economy on the description and approval of the composition, tasks and financing of the sectoral professional committees: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/420ac9b07e8a11e8ae2bfd1913d66d57

794. See here.

795. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update of the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (Beleckiene, 2019).

796. Non-formal vocational programmes, informal learning (work experience, self-study) or learning from other education programmes.

797. 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

798. Project code 09.4.1-ESFA-V-734-02-0001. https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/ivairiais-budais-igytu-kompetenciju-ir-kvalifikaciju-vertinimo-ir-pripazinimo-sistemos-tobulinimas/

799. The Master Pro ESF project 09.4.3-ESFA-V-834-03. https://www.esinvesticijos.lt/lt//finansavimas/paraiskos_ir_projektai/master-pro-darbineje-veikloje-igyjamu-auksto-meistriskumo-kvalifikaciju-posistemes-modelio-sukurimas

800. Amendment No XIII-3415 of 10 November 2020 of the law on science and higher education. https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/65fcc8802b2d11eb932eb1ed7f923910 Amendment 535 of 24 July 2019 No 764 of the 2010 government resolution on approving the description of the LTQ. https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/legalAct.html?documentId=a272f160aee011e98451fa7b5933515d

of applied sciences) and VET institutions[801] (Cedefop, forthcoming).

Qualifications awarded outside formal (regulated) education and training are not included and do not refer to LTQF levels; however, the framework serves as a reference for employers to evaluate employee skills, identify underdeveloped or missing skills and plan training needs, and in job descriptions (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). Opening up the framework to qualifications outside the formal education system is considered; the Ministry of Economy and Innovation is running an initiative for developing a sub-system of qualifications for competences acquired in non-formal settings, in line with the LTQF (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2020)[802].

LTQF and EQF levels are indicated on VET diplomas[803] and Europass certificate supplements[804] and in higher education diploma supplements[805]. The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC)[806], in their decisions issued for the recognition of foreign qualifications, indicate LTQF and the respective NQF level of foreign qualification[807].

A national register of qualifications and programmes is in place, including VET and higher education qualifications and indicating LTQF and EQF levels. It is hosted within the national online open information and guidance system (AIKOS), an entry point to qualifications, education and training programmes. A revision and update of all VET programmes (modularised since 2019) and higher education study descriptors is under way. Revision of competence-based general education curriculum continues.

The LTQF is underpinned by quality assurance arrangements, which cover development, management, assessment of competences and award of qualifications included in the LTQF. LTQF is considered as an overarching principle in VET and higher education learning outcomes formation policies. LTQF descriptions are included or otherwise embedded into methodological guidelines for development and updating of standards, VET curricula and higher education study descriptors. During consultations they are presented to expert groups designing the mentioned documents. Work continues to establish a national system for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020)[808].

The LTQF is well known to education and training providers and, to a lesser extent, to other sectors and stakeholders. Information on LTQF and EQF is channelled through the NCP website and newsletter, the website of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education[809], seminars, conferences and training events. In recent years, it has been presented on various occasions to career counsellors working in general education. A methodological guide for stakeholders and employers involved in preparing qualifications standards emphasises the LTQF role in improving quality and consistency in qualification design at all levels and between and across sectors. Education and training institutions and employer representatives have been the prioritised target groups but no communication strategy has been developed (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Referencing to the EQF

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 update of qualification standards, revision of VET curricula and reform of the framework of higher education qualifications might call for an updated referencing report: discussions are in process (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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801. Roofing master, bricklayer master, façade insulation master and finishing fitter master in the construction and civil engineering education field of studies and welding master and vehicle repair technician in mechanics and metalworking. https://www.aikos.smm.lt/Registrai/Mokymo-programos/SitePages/Pagrindinis.aspx?ss=a8a83417-f33f-4991-9c24-27abf017ca5b

802 The Master Pro ESF project 09.4.3-ESFA-V-834-03. https://www.esinvesticijos.lt/lt/finansavimas/paraiskos_ir_projektai/master-pro-darbineje-veikloje-igyjamu-auksto-meistriskumo-kvalifikaciju-posistemes-modelio-sukurimas

803. Description of the content, form and award of the VET diploma and certificate and VET diploma template. https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/4d986490d23511e4bcd1a882e9a189f1

804. Example of Europass certificate supplement here.

805. Recommendations for filling in diploma supplements here.

806. SKVC is member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and listed in the European assurance register for higher education (EQAR).

807. In line with the 2013 recommendation on the use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications: https://www.enic-naric.net/the-lisbon-recognition-convention-97.aspx

808. 2018-22 ESF project code 09.4.1-ESFA-V-734-02-0001: https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/ivairiais-budais-igytu-kompetenciju-ir-kvalifikaciju-vertinimo-ir-pripazinimo-sistemos-tobulinimas/

809. SKVC 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).

Important lessons and future plans

The country reports that LTQF works effectively for VET and HE, though there are some uncertainties about its links with the general education curriculum. Further consultations are foreseen.

LTQF has been the cornerstone in updating qualification standards (nationally referred to as sectoral qualifications standards) and curricula in line with the updated VET law and reform.

LTQF application ensures systemic approach to different levels of qualifications and transferability of learning outcomes. A validation system is being developed as a part of a qualifications system and LTQF implementation. The framework supports recognition of foreign qualifications and aids in assessing, recognising and validating VET qualifications (development of a national system is under way). (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Table 50. The Lithuanian national qualifications framework (LTQF)

LTQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctoral diploma (*Daktaro diplomas*)	8
7	Master diploma (*Magistro diplomas*)	7
	Certificate of residency *(Rezidentūros pažymėjimas)*	
6	Bachelor diploma (*Bakalauro diplomas*)	6
	Professional bachelor diploma (*Profesinio bakalauro diplomas*)	
5	VET diploma, level 5 (*Profesinio mokymo diplomas*)*	5
	Study certificate *(Studijų pažymėjimas)* – short-cycle HE programmes	
4	VET diploma, level 4 (*Profesinio mokymo diplomas*)	4
	Matura diploma (*Brandos atestatas*)** (on completion of the upper secondary education programme and passing *matura* examinations)	
3	VET diploma, level 3 (*Profesinio mokymo diplomas*)	3
	Lower secondary education certificate (*Pagrindinio išsilavinimo pažymėjimas*)* (completion of lower secondary education programme and testing learning outcomes) (grades 5 to10)	
2	VET diploma, level 2 (*Profesinio mokymo diplomas*	2
1	VET diploma, level 1 (*Profesinio mokymo diplomas*)	1

*	Presently only VET qualifications are awarded at NQF level 5. Short-cycle study programmes, leading to a study certificate were introduced in legislation in 2018 (Law on science and higher education); implementation provisions are being legislated.

**	The legislation defining provisions for general education curricula stipulates that learning outcomes of lower secondary education programmes are referenced to NQF level 3, whereas learning outcomes of upper secondary education programmes are referenced to NQF level 4.

Source: Cedefop, adapted from the Qualifications and VET Development Centre, 2020. https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/en/information/qualifications-framework/

Abbreviations

AIKOS	open information and guidance system
CPC	Central Professional Committee
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European social fund
IVET	initial vocational education and training
LTQF	Lithuanian qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
NSA	National Agency for Education
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
QVETDC	Qualifications and VET Development Centre
SKVC	Centre for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
SPCs	Sectoral professional committees
STRATA	Strategic Analysis Centre
VET	vocational education and training

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Prepared by

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LUXEMBOURG

Introduction and context

Public expenditure on education in Luxembourg as a percentage of GDP is around the EU average; it was further increased to support teachers and families during the school closure period linked to the Covid-19 pandemic[810]. Strengths of the education and training system are a high rate of participation in early childhood education and care; tertiary education attainments among the highest in the EU (56.2% in 2019 compared to the EU average of 40.3%); a rate of employment of recent graduates also above the EU average; and a high percentage of adults participating in lifelong learning (19.1% in 2019 compared to the EU average of 10.8%). In contrast, levels of underachievement in reading, maths and science among 15 years old in the 2018 Programme for international student assessment (PISA) are significantly higher than EU averages: 29.3% in reading (compared to EU average 22.5%), 27.2% in mathematics (compared to EU average 22.9%) and 26.8% in science (compared to EU average 22.3%). This is strongly influenced by socioeconomic background and the ability of children to cope with the trilingual education in the country. The percentage of pupils leaving education and training early is low (7.2% in 2019) and there is virtually full employment of young secondary and tertiary graduates in Luxembourg. In 2019, the employment rate for 20-24 years old tertiary graduates was 94.2%, well above EU average of 85.0%. The employment rate among those with upper secondary or post-secondary (non-tertiary) education was also high (78.2% in 2019 against an EU average of 75.9%) (European Commission, 2020).

As a response to the European qualifications framework (EQF) initiative, the work on a national qualification framework (NQF) started in 2009. It was based on an initial government go-ahead

and 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.

Policy objectives

The development and implementation of the EQF is seen as an opportunity to make explicit and transparent the existing education and training levels and the links between them. The initial scope of the framework, acting as a non-binding and a guiding framework for stakeholders, individuals, education and training providers and the labour market, has not changed (INFPC, 2019).

An important 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. The high immigration rate and the large proportion of foreign workers make it necessary to pay attention to the coherence between the framework and those of the neighbouring countries. The adoption of the 2016 law on recognition of professional qualifications signals official commitment to the framework (Cedefop, 2020a; 2020b).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

Luxembourg has introduced an eight-level reference structure. While the number of levels corresponds with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the descriptors reflect the national tradition and context. At each level, descriptors are differentiated according to knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes (*connaissances, aptitudes, attitudes*). While the level

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810. A national learning platform was created to provide digital learning materials. Parents were allowed to take leave for family reasons if they had to look after children under 13 during the closure of their school.

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[811] as with the EQF[812]. The CLQ level descriptors are included as annex of the regulation of 17 February 2017 on the recognition of professional qualifications; this establishes the CLQ as the main reference point to which foreign qualifications should be compared[813].

The decision to use the above 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[814] and the amended Law on VET reform, 2019[815]. Competences for primary education are formulated in the *socle de compétences* (skills base)[816]; 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 and programmes have been described using learning outcomes and can be accessed via the register of the Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth[817].

In secondary VET, development of programmes (in cooperation with chambers) is based on the occupational profile[818], on the training profile[819] 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, 2019).

The VET Law of 2008, which lays down the basic objectives of vocational education and training and which also covers the main aspects of quality assurance, was amended in June 2019 and entered into force July 2019[820]. In agreement with the professional chambers, the technical adaptations are introduced to improve sustainably the quality of vocational training. The amended law incorporates into the Labour code provisions relating to apprenticeship contracts and the internship agreements that are provided for in the 2008 law; it also makes certain clarifications and amendments. The law provides that a first extension of the apprenticeship contract for one year is granted automatically if the apprentice needs it to complete his or her training and that a second extension of up to one year may be granted if the parties to the contract agree (Article L. 111-8 (2)).

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 and accumulation system). These courses are increasingly defined and described using learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are included in the new law on

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811. 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 Education and Vocational Training and Ministry of Higher Education and Research, 2014, p.19).
812. Descriptors defining levels in the European qualifications framework (EQF): https://europa.eu/europass/en/description-eight-eqf-levels
813. 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
814. 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.
815. Reform Law on Vocational Education and Training (2019): http://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/loi/2019/07/12/a497/jo
816. 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).

817. See https://portal.education.lu/programmes/Home
818. 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, 2019).
819. A training profile is based on the occupational profile by areas of competence: occupational and general competences (INFPC, 2019).
820. 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

the organisation of the University of Luxembourg[821], 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[822] on the organisation of short-cycle programmes and related student graduation.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The formal adoption of the CLQ as a lifelong learning tool is still under discussion at political level and by different stakeholders. With the adoption of the law on recognition of professional qualifications, however, the CLQ was established as the formal reference point for recognition of professional qualifications acquired outside Luxembourg[823].

The development and implementation of the CLQ is being coordinated by the Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth, which also acts as national contact point (NCP) for EQF 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 NCP'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 Education and Vocational Training and Ministry of Higher Education and Research, 2014).

Although the overall framework responsibilities have not been laid down, there are clear responsibilities for qualifications at different CLQ levels. Qualifications referenced at levels 1 to 4 are the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth[824], 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 craftsperson's diploma (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training; Ministry of Higher Education and Research, 2014). Social partner involvement is a core principle in VET policy; the professional chambers[825] are independent policy institutes and with the 2008 reform their role is reinforced (Cedefop, 2019). 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, 2018). External evaluation of the education system is outsourced to the University of Luxembourg. A National Observatory of School Quality[826] 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, 2020).

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 the process to foreign agencies and experts. The University of Luxembourg is evaluated every four years[827], with the focus of evaluation alternating between research and learning and teaching. The Minister of Higher Education and Research commissions a foreign EQAR-registered agency to perform the institutional

821. 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

822. 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

823. *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

824. Previously described as Ministry for Education and Vocational Training.

825. 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).

826. Observatoire national de la qualité scolaire: https://men.public.lu/fr/themes-transversaux/organisation-gouvernance/observatoire-qualite.html

827. 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

evaluation[828]. The 2009 law[829] 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[830] agency commissioned by the Minister of Higher Education and Research[831]. 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[832] affiliate member. For both foreign private higher education institutions and their programmes, and for short-cycle programmes in secondary schools, only accredited programmes and institutions are officially recognised by the State.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[833]

The development of validation systems In Luxembourg has been closely related to the national lifelong learning strategy[834]. Legislation recognises an individual right to benefit from the validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning (under some conditions)[835]. This process is known as 'validation of prior experiential learning' or *validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE) and

has been operational since 2010[836]. 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)[837], 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[838] 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,* DFESG*)* 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

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828. The bachelor, master and PhD programmes offered by the University of Luxembourg, created by law, are automatically recognised.

829. 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

830. EQAR is the European quality assurance register for higher education.

831. Based on the evaluation report of the agency, the Minister decides on accreditation and refusal of accreditation.

832. ENQA is the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

833. This section draws mainly on input from Duchemin, C. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning update: Luxembourg*.

834. Luxembourg reported on national developments related to the implementation of the Council recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning to the to the EQF Advisory Group in 2017, being the first member to give an insight about the development and the implementation of procedures.

835. 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.

836. 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 (implementation of the 2012 Council recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning, one-off report Luxembourg)

837. 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

838. 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

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.

The Ministry for Higher Education holds general responsibility for higher education validation arrangements, but VAE procedures are decentralised, with a key role played by the short-cycle higher education providers (*lycées*) for the advanced technician diplomas and the University of Luxembourg for bachelor, master and PhD programmes. The new law on the University of Luxembourg, affecting VAE, 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, 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, with social partners and stakeholders involved in the validation process (Houot, 2016).

Changes are expected in the coming years, creating an overarching legal framework with general principles for validation for all sectors.

NQF implementation and impact

The Luxembourg NQF is an eight-level outcome-based comprehensive framework, including all levels and types of qualifications from formal education (VET, general education, higher education); it has reached activation stage. Implementation structures are in place. The framework has an important role in improving transparency and comparability of qualifications and is established as the formal reference point for recognition of foreign professional qualifications. It is a reference point for the use of learning outcomes and is also used as reference point for renewal of qualifications and programmes. It is known to a certain number of actors in education and the labour market, but disseminating CLQ on a wider level and to larger target groups is the key challenge for the next period.

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.

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, established the CLQ as the formal reference point for recognition of foreign professional qualifications. This integration into the legislative structure signals official commitment to the framework and represents an important step towards full implementation.

The ENIC-NARIC[839] has been using the CLQ since 2016 as a reference point for the registration/recognition of foreign diplomas. The procedure for obtaining formal recognition of a higher education diploma acquired in another country is described on the portal for lifelong learning[840].

A comprehensive national database or register of qualifications has not yet been set up and there are no relevant developments in this regard. Currently there are two registers in place: information on secondary education programmes, including VET[841] and the register of national higher education diplomas[842].

NQF and EQF levels are not yet included on certificates and diplomas in Luxembourg. However, NQF and EQF levels are included on certificate supplements in VET, and the ministry requests the inclusion of levels on diploma supplements in higher education; they are already included in some higher education diploma supplements. Some

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839. https://www.enic-naric.net/luxembourg.aspx
840. The register of qualifications and accreditation http://www.lifelong-learning.lu/Detail/Article/Diplomes/registre-des-titres-et-homologation/en
841. http://portal.education.lu/programmes
842. Register of national higher education diplomas (in French): http://www.mesr.public.lu/enssup/registre_des_titres/index.html
Register of national higher education diplomas (in English): http://www.mesr.public.lu/enssup/registre_des_titres/formations-superieures-accreditees_final.pdf

qualifications awarded outside formal education and training also include NQF/EQF levels (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Some qualifications in Luxembourg 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 craftsperson qualification[843] 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 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Referencing to the EQF

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 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. Adoption of the 2016 law on recognition clarified the position of the CLQ at national level and provided the basis for development towards a more advanced operational status. Discussions continue on strengthening the role of CLQ as a lifelong learning tool, though no political decision has been taken yet. This includes the development of procedures for inclusion of qualifications from outside formal education and training system and considerations on setting up a comprehensive national database of qualifications. Started as a systematic description of qualifications from the formal education and training system (with the same standards being used also for validation of non-formal and informal learning), the CLQ may open to qualifications awarded outside the formal system, to address the high number of citizens holding unofficial and non-recognised certificates and diplomas. To accomplish this, specific approaches to accreditation and quality assurance of these qualifications, and to their inclusion in the framework, are being considered (Cedefop (2020), National qualifications frameworks developments in Europe 2019). However, there are no plans for evaluations, updates or further development of the NQF in Luxembourg for the time being.

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843. The master craftsperson qualification (*brevet de maîtrise*; ISCED 453, EQF 5) entitles holders to establish themselves in the craft industry as self-employed and to train apprentices. The qualification confers the title of master craftsperson in the particular trade. The master craftsperson qualification does not give any access right for higher education; progression opportunities depend on the certificate gained at secondary level (INFPC, 2019).

Table 51. Luxembourg qualifications framework (CLQ)

NQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctoral diploma (Phd) *(Doctorat)*	8
	Certificate following specific training course in medicine *(Diplôme de formation spécifique en médecine générale)*	
7	Master diploma *(Master)*	7
6	Bachelor diploma *(Bachelor)*	6
5	Master craftsman diploma *(Brevet de maîtrise)*	5
	Advanced technician diploma *(Brevet de technicien supérieur)*	
	Specialised advanced technician diploma *(Brevet de technicien supérieur spécialisé)*	
4	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate *(Diplôme de fin d'études secondaires)*	4
	Technical secondary school leaving certificate *(Diplôme de fin d'études secondaires techniques)*	
	Technician diploma *(Diplôme de technicien)*	
3	Vocational aptitude diploma *(Diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle – DAP)*	3
	Certificate attesting completion of middle-cycle technical secondary education *(Certificat de réussite du cycle moyen de l'enseignement secondaire technique)*	
	Certificate attesting completion of five years secondary education *(Certificat de réussite de 5 années d'enseignement secondaire)*	
2	Vocational capability certificate *(Certificat de capacité professionnelle – CCP)*	2
1	Certificate attesting completion of lower cycle, technical secondary education *(Certificat de réussite du cycle inférieur de l'enseignement secondaire technique)*	1

Sources: 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

Ministry of Higher Education and research; Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth (2014). https://ec.europa.eu/europass/sl/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf

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Abbreviations

ADQS	School Quality Development Agency	EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
BTS	*Brevet de technicien supérieur* [Advanced technician diploma]	EQF	European qualifications framework
CLQ	Cadre Luxembourgeois des qualifications, CLQ (Luxembourg qualifications framework)	NQF	national qualifications framework
		QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
DAP	*Diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle* [Vocational aptitude diploma]	VAE	*validation des acquis de l'expérience* [validation of non-formal and informal learning]
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance for Higher Education	VET	vocational education and training

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Main sources of information

The Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth acts as EQF NCP: http://www.men.public.lu/fr/index.html

CLQ/EQF web page: https://www.lifelong-learning.lu/Detail/Article/Comprendre/le-cadre-luxembourgeois-des-qualifications/en

Information on secondary education programmes: https://portal.education.lu/programmes/Home

Register of higher education diplomas: http://www.mesr.public.lu/enssup/registre_des_titres/index.html

Ministry of Higher Education and Research; Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth (2014). *Report on referencing the Luxembourg qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and to the qualifications framework in the European higher education area.* https://europa.eu/europass/sl/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf

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MALAYSIA

Introduction andcontext

Education plays an important role for Malaysia in building a resilient nation, encouraging the creation of a just society, and maintaining sustainable economic growth. It is also through education that a country can develop global competitiveness and maintain sustainable environmental development. The Government of Malaysia has been addressing these priorities in the development and the advancement of the Malaysian Education System through various strategic policies and implementations. The higher education as well as technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sectors in Malaysia continue to evolve and diversify over the years in response to the implementations of government priorities, institutional aspirations, market demands as well as regional and international developments and trends in education and training. These are reflected in the wide range of education and training programmes at various levels, through various modes or delivery approaches, with the involvement of various types of partners and through a variety of collaborative engagements.

The Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) provides the foundation of trust, comparability, recognition and transferability of Higher Education and TVET programmes and qualifications by providing an overarching national framework that integrates all forms of lifelong learning that take place in either formal, informal or non-formal settings. It was introduced in 2007 under the *Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) Act, 2007*. The implementation of the MQF is underpinned by quality assurance and accreditation practiced by the MQA and other competent bodies in Malaysia. In 2017, the MQF was revised to strengthen its responsiveness towards emerging skills and knowledge and to ensure coherency within the higher education and TVET sectors. The revised MQF is a unified and comprehensive framework that continues to serve the National Education Philosophy; the various policy goals stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education), and other related national blueprints on talent development driven by the requirements of the industry; as well as to strengthen the external comparability and recognition of Malaysian qualifications, especially with the increasing mobility of learners and talents across borders.

Policy objectives

The MQF is an overarching lifelong learning framework of post-secondary qualifications with the primary objective to nurture national talents in accordance with the values set by the National Education Philosophy, which states that:

> "*Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large.*" *The National Education Philosophy – Education Act, 1996 (Malaysia)*

The objectives of the MQF, as specified in the *MQA 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.
9. To articulate links with qualifications from outside Malaysia.

MQF also supports the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education) specifically on policy goals and initiatives which aspire to develop holistic, entrepreneurial, and balanced individuals; to develop a nation of lifelong learners; to produce quality TVET graduates and to embrace the full potential of globalised online learning.

Levels, learningoutcomes and qualifications

The MQF provides eight levels of outcome-based qualifications organized hierarchically. The framework enables clear progression along these levels, beginning with basic level knowledge and skills up to very complex and specialized 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 learning design that the descriptors are translated and contextualized, by the specific discipline, technical and vocational, and professional practices.

While level descriptors provide guidance on the expected complexities of a qualification, learning domains provide an organising scheme for the development of learning outcomes of a qualification. The MQF outlines a set of generic learning domains, which are clustered into the following five categories:
1. Knowledge and understanding
2. Cognitive skills

3. Functional work skills with focus on:
   o Practical skills
   o Interpersonal skills
   o Communication skills
   o Digital skills
   o Numeracy skills
   o Leadership, autonomy, and responsibility
4. Personal and entrepreneurial skills
5. Ethics and professionalism.

As a general practice, individual programme design should address the clusters of learning outcomes appropriately. They describe the general and specific content for knowledge and skills in a subject(s) and 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 are either integrated into the teaching and learning strategies or available through specialised courses.

The MQF contains post-secondary national qualifications, which are conferred in the (1) Academic and (2) TVET sectors. The qualifications from these sectors comply with the appropriate level descriptors despite the differences in orientations.

The development of key standards and quality criteria consistently make references to and guided by the level descriptors and the eight learning domains of the MQF. These documents, which support the curriculum design and form the basis of quality assurance, are periodically reviewed and updated to ensure their currency, relevancy, reliability, adaptability and effectiveness to address the ever-changing environment of higher education and training.

Provision for credit system is stated in *MQA Act 2007* section 36(f), "to establish a credit system to facilitate credit accumulation and transfer which is acceptable within and outside Malaysia." The MQF credit value is one credit equivalent to 40 notional learning hours. This took into consideration the semester system and assumption of availability of learning hours of average students, various learning activities, guided or independent learning and face to face or non-face to face learning. Credit(s) may also be acquired by learners through assessment and validation of prior experiential learning in other settings. The minimal credit load for each level is defined by the Framework (and is independent of the mode of delivery of learning). However, higher credit requirements for specific qualifications are established, indicated based on fields of study or for professional programmes accordingly.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The MQA was established on November 1, 2007, with the enactment of the *MQA Act 2007*. The main role of the MQA is to implement the MQF as the basis for quality assurance of higher education and training and as the reference point for the criteria and standards for national qualifications. The MQF is administered by the MQA with the involvement of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and the Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR) as well as professional bodies which regulate professional practices.

The Department of Higher Education, under MOHE, is responsible for the establishment of public universities, licensing of private higher education institutions and approval of their programmes. MQA accreditation is a prerequisite for the department to grant or retain the approval of a higher education programme. The MQA and the Department of Skills Development (DSD), MOHR accredit TVET qualifications under a streamlined and harmonised single quality assurance system for TVET. For professional qualifications, the MQA carries out joint accreditation with the professional bodies through joint technical committees to ensure synchronisation of accreditation processes and results.

The quality system in Malaysian education and training conceptually involves four components. The first component is the MQF, which is the overarching benchmark that defines the post-secondary qualifications system in Malaysia. The second component is the standards in higher education and training that provide operational benchmarks capturing various learning contexts and orientations in the national system. The third component is the implementation of audits, assessments or accreditations for assuring the quality of learning based on established standards. The fourth component is qualification referencing where quality profile and quality assurance (QA) results of programmes/qualifications are accessible and referred by various parties within and outside the country for various related purposes.

Figure 21. Quality System in Education and Training
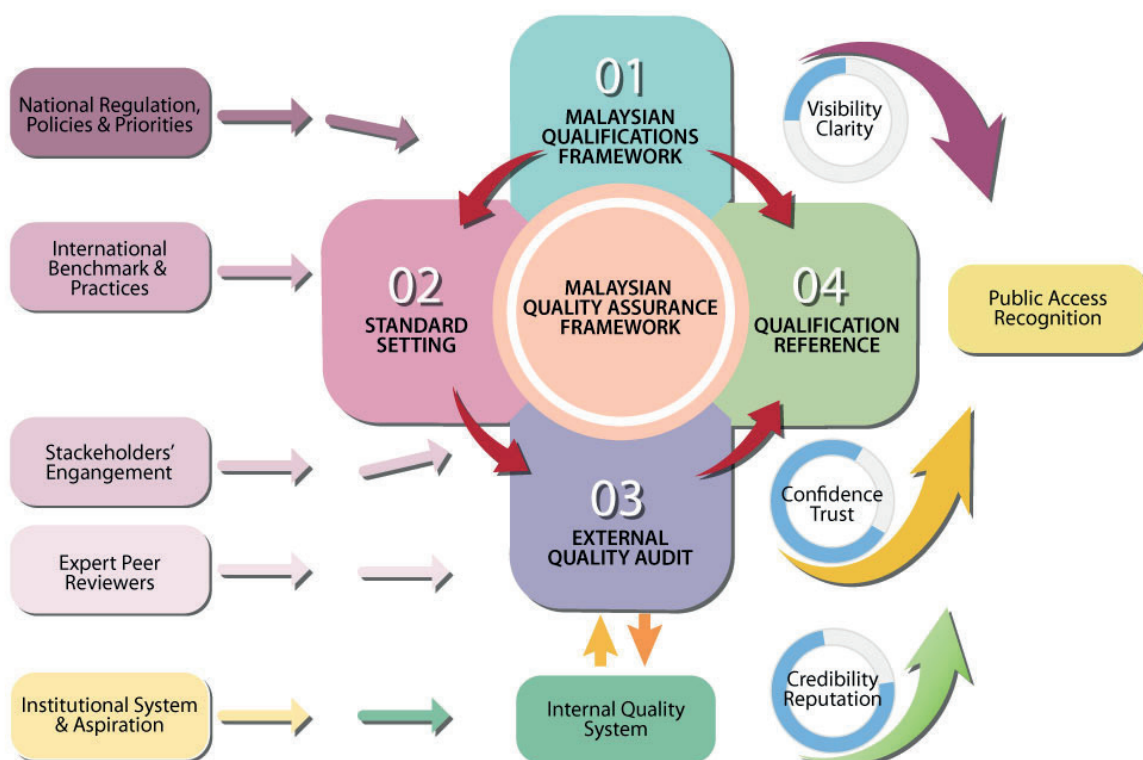
Source: Authors

These interconnected and interdependent components are aligned to the country's key policies and agenda as well as international good practices.

Its operations also require the involvement of various key parties such as policy-makers, QA specialists, field experts, the industries as well as

education and training institutions. This arrangement of MQF-based quality assurance enables Malaysia to establish a national qualifications system that is clearly understood and trusted by various parties within and outside the country.

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informallearning 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 the articulation between institutions.
2. Stackable qualifications for the TVET sector which allows multi-entry and multi-exit.
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 (APEL) 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 massive open online courses (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 a higher-level programme or where there may be other entry requirements set by higher education providers.

APEL.A (A for access) was introduced in 2011 to provide learners who lack formal qualifications but wish to pursue further education in academic or technical/vocational fields. The assessment of learners' work experiences may enable them to enrol in certificate, diploma, Bachelor or Master studies. APEL for Credit Award, known as APEL.C, was introduced in 2016 and provides a mechanism to systematically assess relevant experiential learning of an individual against the course learning

outcomes for credit awards. APEL for Qualification Award, or APEL.Q, was introduced in 2020 and provides prior learning validation for award conferment. The competency assessment scheme is also available for certification skills based on the National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS).

The *Guidelines to Good Practices: Micro-credentials* published by the MQA in 2020 supports and underscores the importance of micro-credentials within the flexible higher education framework (MQA, 2020). It seeks to ensure the micro-credentials are valued, recognized and enjoy high confidence amongst all the stakeholders. The guideline generally outlines several possible pathways for the accumulation of micro-credentials toward awarding qualifications.

QF implementationand impact

Section 37 (1) of the *MQA Act*, 2007 stipulates that no programme or qualification shall be accredited unless it complies with the MQF. As the implementation of MQF is underpinned by the quality assurance system, the introduction of MQF in 2007 had taken a gradual and transitional approach until it was fully enforced in the accreditation system in 2011. MQA administers accreditation of academic and vocational programmes from Level 3 to Level 8 MQF. MQA performs joint accreditations with professional bodies, which are statutory organizations, through a joint technical committee to ensure synchronization of accreditation processes and results. In accordance with the provisions of the *National Skills Development Act*, 2006 (Act 652), DSD accredits skills training programmes based on the NOSS from Levels 1 to 5 of the MQF. In 2019, TVET qualifications began to be accredited through the MQA and DSD, under a streamlined single quality assurance system guided by the Code of Practice for TVET Programme Accreditation. The Code was further revised in 2020 to include TVET at Level 6 MQF.

Programmes and qualifications that are in compliance with MQF and acquired accreditation are registered in the Malaysian Qualifications Register, which contains basic information on the accredited programmes for the reference of students and other parties, local and abroad. The Register, which is accessible online, includes programmes jointly accredited by MQA and professional bodies and provides a connection to the list of accredited skills programmes administered by DSD.

MQA introduced the Malaysian Qualification Statement in 2015 that provides detailed information on programmes, including the learning outcomes, accreditation status, quality assurance system, awarding institution, and is issued by institutions to the student on successful completion of the programme. It provides information to learners and users on the qualifications of the learning achievement and competencies, which facilitate assessment of qualifications by interested parties.

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 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-à-vis the MQF which serves as an advisory statement to the relevant parties.

Referencing to the regional framework/ other frameworks

The MQA has undertaken several comparability projects on qualifications and quality assurance systems with other international organisations. The accreditation system of the MQA endorsed in 2013, was 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. In 2018, MQA completed referencing its QA system to the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework facilitated by the EU-funded Higher Education in ASEAN Region project. The process of referencing the MQF to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) was completed with official endorsement by the AQRF Committee in 2019. Overall findings of the referencing show evidence of sufficient and clear good fit between MQF and AQRF.

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 to remain dynamic in addressing new emerging forms of learning and learners as well as growing demands for more flexible learning environments. The MQF, as the national standard of qualifications, has also improved the international visibility, comparability, acceptance, and recognition of Malaysian qualifications. Continuous benchmarking, 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.

Recent development shows that learning is increasingly personalized and digitalized, taking place in diverse contexts through various channels and methodologies and is offered by different types of providers. Thus, the MQF and its quality assurance mechanism must be able to retain its grit and agility in promoting, supporting, and stimulating innovative and lifelong learning culture. Some current initiatives have already focused on quality assurance, validation and recognition of virtual and blended learning formats, as well as micro-credentials and digital credentialing, and more quality interventions to be undertaken in the future.

Infographic of the NQF/NQF overviewtable

NQF levels, qualification types included, NQF levels linked to a regional qualifications framework.

Figure 22. MQF Overview

Source: www.mqa.gov.my

Figure 23. MQF Levels

Source: https://www2.mqa.gov.my/myaqrf/1.%20AQRF%20Referencing%20Report,%20Malaysia.pdf

Main sources of information

MQA: https://www.mqa.gov.my/

MQF: https://www.mqa.gov.my/pv4/mqf.cfm

MQR: https://www2.mqa.gov.my/mqr/

Quality Assurance Documents: https://www2.mqa.gov.my/qad/v2/index.cfm

Single QA for TVET: https://www2.mqa.gov.my/TVET/2020/index.cfm

APEL: https://www2.mqa.gov.my/APEL/

Malaysian AQRF Report: https://www2.mqa.gov.my/myaqrf/

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MALDIVES

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 was revised again in 2016 (MQA, 2016).

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 (MAB, 2009).
2. Cross-border higher education is both an opportunity and a challenge. Recognition of foreign qualifications obtained by Maldivian students, especially from the Asia and Pacific region, is emerging as a major concern for the MQA 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 clarified with respect to the recognition and credibility of qualifications (MQA, 2016).

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 to bachelor's and master's degrees and 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 (MQA, 2016).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

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 (SCQF) (MAB, 2009).

Table 52. The 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
5	Diploma
4	Certificate IV/ Advanced Certificate
3	Certificate III
2	Certificate II
1	Certificate I

Source: MAB (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 (MAB, 2009).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder Involvement

From 2010, the MQA has been the official higher education quality assurance 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 (DPE).

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 (MQA, 2016). 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. MNQF was revised again in 2016 (MQA, 2016).

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Assigning levels to all MQA-approved courses and including 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, are recognized under the new competency-based framework. The MQA includes a full list of all approved local programmes on its website along with the associated levels.

Some students or workers may not achieve all competences required for a full technical and vocational qualification. Nevertheless, they can still 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. Assessment within the TVET system permits 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 (MQA, 2016).

NQF implementation and impact

Under the strengthened MNQF of 2010, trainers can modularize training in addition to developing full-time training programmes. Modular programmes offer workers part-time courses to achieve a full qualification over time. The 2010 framework also allows for a combination of theoretical instruction and workplace training, with assessment results being combined to count towards a full award (MQA, 2016).

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 (MQA, 2016).

Referencing to regional and other 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 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 and related organizations.

The MQA also verifies the recognition status of intended 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 – adopted the SAARC Framework for Action (SFFA) for Education 2030 unanimously 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 a mechanism for the development and implementation of a regional framework for facilitating the comparability, mutual recognition, validation and accreditation of tertiary education qualifications through regional collaboration and partnerships, and to promote student and faculty mobility 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.

The MNQF has taught us that international recognition of the qualifications, skills and knowledge of Maldivian citizens is guaranteed to increase with a shift to a unified qualifications system. The Maldives has made all its qualifications consistent with the new national system. It has achieved this by requiring MQA approval for all existing qualifications.

The MQA has also simplified learning outcomes of qualifications for easier comprehension by students, employers, education providers and the community. 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.

Table 53. Infographic of the NQF/ NQF overview table

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION(S)	MINIMUM CREDITS	MINIMUM DURATION
Level 10	Doctoral degree	360 credits	3 years full-time
	Higher Professional Diploma	120 credits	1 year full-time
	Higher Professional Certificate	60 credits	20 weeks full-time
Level 9	Master's degree	120 credits	1 year full-time
	Advanced Professional Diploma	120 credits	1 year full-time
	Advanced Professional Certificate	60 credits	20 weeks full-time
Level 8	Graduate Diploma/ Postgraduate Diploma	120 credits	1 year full-time
	Graduate Certificate/ Postgraduate Certificate	60 credits	20 weeks full-time
Level 7	Bachelor's honours degree	480 credits	4 years full-time
	Bachelor's degree	360 credits	3 years full-time
	Professional Diploma	120 credits	1 year full-time
	Professional Certificate	40 credits	20 weeks full-time
Level 6	Advanced Diploma/ Associate degree	240 credits	2 years full-time
	Professional Certificate	40 credits	15 weeks full-time
Level 5	Diploma		
Level 4	Certificate IV/ Advanced Certificate	120 credits	1 year (30 weeks) full-time
Level 3	Certificate III	40 credits	15 weeks full-time
Level 2	Certificate II	30 credits	10 weeks full-time
Level 1	Certificate I	10 credits	3 weeks full-time

Source: Maldives Qualifications Authority

Abbreviations

DPE	Department of Public Examinations	MQA	Maldives Qualifications Authority
ICT	Information and communications technology	SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
MAB	Maldives Accreditation Board	SFFA	SAARC Framework for Action
MNQF	Maldives National Qualifications Framework	TVET	Technical and vocational education and training

Main sources of information

Main sources of information on the MNQF are as follows:

MQA's website: http://mqa.gov.mv

MQA qualifications register: https://www2.mqa.gov.my/mqr/

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MALTA

Introduction and context

Malta has been reforming its education, training and qualification systems. The Malta qualifications framework (MQF) has assisted in making the Maltese qualifications system easier to understand and review, and more transparent at national and international levels.

Malta's overall investment in education is among the highest in Europe, despite a slight decrease since 2009 (from 5.4% in 2009 to 5.2% in 2019). Several reform measures backed by substantial investment have been taken to foster quality, inclusion and improvement of learning outcomes. Steady and sustained progress has been achieved in significantly reducing the rate of early school leaving to 17.2% in 2019 (European commission, 2020). The shift towards more open-ended learning pathways in the public school system is yielding its first preliminary results; the reform My journey: achieving through different paths[844] which started implementation in lower secondary school (in the school year 2019/20) shows a positive impact within the State school system. Work is under way to improve the quality of teaching, the working conditions of teachers/trainers and the attractiveness of the profession, including improved remuneration. An increase in tertiary education attainment (50.3% for foreign-born, compared to the EU average of 35.3%) has been recorded. Despite the highest employment rate in the EU of recent tertiary graduates (ISCED 5-8), at 95% compared to the EU average of 85% in 2019, the skills shortages and mismatches remain. This may explain the fact that Malta relies on foreigners to fill skills shortages. (European commission, 2019). According to the data provided by the National Statistics Office, in 2019 almost a half of foreign workers are high-

skilled (57.7% of EU nationals and 35.2% of non-EU nationals), against 44.2% of Maltese workers[845].

Since 2007, Malta has been implementing an eight-level comprehensive framework for lifelong learning (MQF). This includes qualifications and awards at all levels acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. The main body in charge of MQF is the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE). In 2009, MQF was referenced to the EQF and to the QF-EHEA as well as the transnational qualifications framework of the small States of the Commonwealth (TQF). The referencing report was updated several times (the last in 2016).

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 national and foreign qualifications to promote and address the following issues:

a. aiding transparency and understanding of qualifications nationally and internationally;
b. valuing all formal, informal and non-formal learning;
c. improving overall consistency and coherence with European and international qualifications frameworks;
d. promoting 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;

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844. http://www.myjourney.edu.mt/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/My-Journey-Booklet.pdf

845. These percentages are provided by Malta's National Statistics Office for the purpose of this country chapter update.

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[846].

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The MQF has eight learning-outcomes-based qualification levels, plus the two entry levels below EQF level 1; introductory levels A and B. These two new levels have no equivalence on the EQF and 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[847]. The MQF levels are described in terms of knowledge, skills and competences and are accompanied by a more detailed set of learning outcomes aimed at aiding operationalisation of MQF requirements; these are defined in terms of knowledge and understanding, applying knowledge and understanding, communication skills, judgemental skills, learning skills, autonomy and responsibility, with strong focus on key competences.

MQF is a comprehensive framework with all types of qualifications, 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 and programme and qualifications design.

Strengthening the learning outcomes approach has become fundamental to education and training reform in all qualifications and at all levels. It is reinforced by the education strategy framework 2014-24 – *Sustaining foundations, creating alternatives, increasing employability*[848] – linked to the MQF and the *National lifelong learning strategy 2020*[849], and to update of learning programmes and assessment modes.

In general education, the reform of the national curriculum framework (NCF) has led to the development of learning outcomes for all subjects in compulsory education, promoting inclusion, diversity and citizenship. Following the 2016 preparation of the learning outcomes framework (LOF) by the government[850] to support the national curriculum framework (NCF), implementation started in September 2019, under the new 2017 collective agreement[851]. The LOF is intended to lead to more curricular autonomy of colleges and schools and give them the freedom to develop programmes that fulfil the framework of knowledge, attitudes and skills-based outcomes that are considered a national education entitlement for all learners in Malta. Each attainment level in the framework comprises of a list of learning outcomes and/or grading criteria in the case of vocational subjects[852]. Both the NCF and the LOF will form the backbone of Maltese education programmes and will serve as national benchmarks of excellence for schools during each of the three cycles: the early, primary and secondary years[853].

The government has also worked on a reform called *My journey: achieving through different paths*, that started implementation in lower secondary school in the school year 2019/20[854]. As of September 2019, secondary school students can choose between general, vocational or applied subjects, in addition to the core curriculum. The current focus is to move from a 'one size fits all' system to a more inclusive one catering to pupils' individual aptitudes, and to make it more equitable to reduce the number of early school leavers[855] (European Commission,

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846. This framework was officially launched in July 2015. https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/Quality%20Assurance/National%20Quality%20Assurance%20Framework%20for%20Further%20and%20Higher%20Education.pdf

847. They were introduced with the 2016 version of the Referencing report. These are not yet included in legislation.

848. Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2014a).

849. Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2014b).

850. http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/

851. 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).

852. There are three categories of (general education) subjects, one category of VET MQF level 1 subjects and entry level subjects. More information at: http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/dashboard

853. Gradual implementation will continue until the year 2022/23 when new learning programmes will be available throughout the compulsory education system (European Commission, 2019).

854. See MEDE (2016).

855. 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

2019). Measures are being taken to retain teachers in the service and attract more students to the teaching profession[856]: work conditions and teacher salaries have improved following the latest sectoral agreement and teachers currently have the possibility of accelerated career progression through professional development (European Commission, 2018).

In vocational education and training (VET), Malta is developing national occupational standards – referred to the MQF – to inform VET programmes[857]. The NCFHE has published around 80 national occupational standards in different sectors. The MQF level descriptors are utilised in the drafting, reviewing and publishing of occupational standards in the following sectors: automotive, building and construction, hair and beauty, health and social care, hospitality and tourism, IT, printing and digital media[858]. Occupational standards are used in validation of non-formal and informal learning and help guide the curriculum development[859]. 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 progress to higher MQF levels.

Learning programmes developed in higher education are being remodelled based on learning outcomes[860]. There are two types of higher education institution: self-accredited and licensed private further and higher education institutions whose courses are accredited by NCFHE; these courses are described in terms of learning outcomes (NCFHE, 2016a). The programmes of self-accrediting institutions[861] are subject to external quality assurance audits where they are checked for

a learning-outcomes base distinguishing between knowledge, skills and competences (NCFHE, 2016c). Following the setting up of ESF project 1227 *Making quality visible*[862], 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.

Malta also embarked on the VET credit conversion system project with the aim of testing and implementing the ECVET credit system at a national level[863]. Through this project, 30 courses[864] were selected from different VET providers and an ECVET conversion manual was developed[865]. Since then, ECVET in Malta is used for all VET programmes from MQF/EQF level 1 up to MQF/EQF level 4.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

A wide range of stakeholders has been involved in developing and setting up the MQF, which is firmly legally embedded. Building on the legal notice (347) of 2005[866], the legal basis of the MQF for lifelong learning as a regulatory framework for classification of qualifications and awards was further strengthened in 2012[867]. To support implementation, two more legal notices on quality assurance and licensing of further and higher education institutions and programmes were prepared; validation of informal and non-formal learning laid a firm foundation for the MQF implementation (see below).

The NCFHE (under the Ministry for Education and Employment) was established as Malta's national quality assurance agency, replacing the Malta Qualifications Council and the National

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856. This includes a higher grant to students who follow the initial teacher education (ITE) course at the University of Malta and the introduction of a number of ITE courses as part time evening courses both by the University of Malta and the Institute for Education.

857. The national occupational standards published by NCFHE consist of a set of job-related standards that highlight the performance expected from an individual when carrying out a specific function. These standards define the main jobs that people carry out, and link qualifications to the requirements of the labour market.

858. https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Pages/All%20Services/vinfl_nos.aspx

859. Malta continued to implement the 2018 Work-based Learning and Apprenticeship Act, in the year 2019-20 (European Commission, 2019).

860. The course descriptions are the ones offered by the state VET providers, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), and the higher education provider, University of Malta.

861. In Malta there are self-accrediting education and training institutions as identified by Subsidiary Legislation 327.433. These include the University of Malta; the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology; and the Institute of Tourism Studies.

862. 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

863. This was supported by the Leonardo da Vinci project for lifelong learning of the European Commission.

864. The courses represented a variety of areas and fields of study at different MQF levels from both the public and private sectors, featuring a variety of initial VET (IVET) courses and continuing VET (CVET) courses targeted for all ages of the population.

865. The ECVET manual which includes information for ECVET in the Maltese VET system, the use of learning outcomes and MQF for different stakeholders: https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/Accreditation/ECVET%20Conversion%20manual.pdf

866. See Government of Malta (2012d).

867. Government of Malta (2012). Legal notice 294 on MQF for lifelong learning regulations. (Subsidiary Legislation 327.431). http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=11927

Commission for Higher Education. It became the authority responsible for all aspects of the MQF implementation, particularly for maintaining the Malta qualifications framework[868]. 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[869]. The NCFHE acts as the competent authority for licensing, accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of providers and programmes in further and higher education. In the implementation of the MQF, the NCFHE cooperates with the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (based at the Ministry for Education and Employment) that is responsible for quality assurance and standards in compulsory education[870]. The NCFHE is also responsible for establishing a national validation system, with necessary structures, and leads development and implementation of occupational standards in cooperation with social partners and sector skills units[871] and other stakeholders such as Jobsplus and Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS). Since September 2019, the NCFHE has set up an MQF working group made up of representatives from different national stakeholders, to support the development of the MQF.

The MQF is seen to have improved cooperation between stakeholders (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020) through meetings such as the annual national colloquium and the Network on Quality Assurance Professionals in Further and Higher Education, known as Net-QAPE[872].

NCFHE is an affiliate member of ENQA[873]. As an outward looking framework, the MQF has enabled cooperation with stakeholders outside the country, such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, in the context of the impact assessment study of the MQF (see section on NQF implementation).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[874]

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in Malta is regulated by Subsidiary Legislation 327.432 of 2012[875], which sets the principles for the process and allows validation to take place up to Level 5 of the MQF. The value and importance of validation are emphasised in several national policy documents[876], reinforcing the potential of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Malta.

Malta has developed occupational standards in vocational education (see section on learning outcomes). There are around 80 published occupational standards in seven different sectors that are used in validation of non-formal and informal learning and also to help guide curriculum development. All those who successfully achieve their validation assessment in Malta receive an award in their occupation, so this process automatically links the validation process to the MQF. The NCFHE has published several leaflets[877] on the validation of non-formal and informal learning whereby it was promoted that awards obtained as such include an MQF level (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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868. Following Subsidiary Legislation SL 327.431, an MQF coordinator is appointed by the Commission and is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Malta Qualifications Framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020)

869. The Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (QRIC) within NCFHE also forms part of the European Network of Information Centres in the European Region (ENIC) and the National Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC).

870. https://education.gov.mt/en/education/quality-assurance/Pages/default.aspx

871. See Government of Malta (2016).

872. In December 2013 the NCFHE set up a 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%20 2014%20-%20First%20Meeting%20of%20Net-QAPE. pdf

873. ENQA is the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. https://enqa.eu/

874. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update of the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (Gatt, 2019).

875. Government of Malta (2012), Legal Notice 296/2012 (2012), Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning Regulations http://justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=11928&l=1

876. These documents include: Malta's *National lifelong learning strategy 2020* (Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2020) 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* published in 2015 (Parliamentary Secretariat for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport (2015) stating that the validation of non-formal and informal learning would be pursued.

877. https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/ECVET%20Leafter%20Seminar%202019_To%20Print%203mm%20bld%20CMYK.pdf

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is available in the following occupational sectors: automotive, building and construction, hair and beauty, health and social care, hospitality and tourism, IT, printing and digital media[878]. Since 2018, approximately 800 certificates stating the MQF levels for applicants who obtained their awards through the validation of non-formal and informal learning have been issued (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). Both the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the MQF have a common objective – that of enabling individuals to advance based on their learning outcomes – but ensuring that assessment and accreditation systems are geared up to meet the needs of the sector is a continued challenge. The NCFHE, in agreement with the sector skills units[879], does not implement validation itself but subcontracts other public or private entities to carry out the assessment required for the validation of non-formal and informal learning of candidates. Entities entrusted with the validation process have been extended from Jobsplus[880] in childcare, building and construction and hair and beauty to the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS). The NCFHE signed a memorandum of understanding with ITS to carry out assessment for the hospitality and tourism sector[881], which started in mid-2019. Since then, the NCFHE has collaborated with the Malta Tourism Authority which subsidised the application fee for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In the first year, 30 applicants obtained their

award through the validation of non-formal and informal learning. At the end of 2020, the Malta Tourism Authority, the Institute of Tourism Studies, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education and the sector skills unit cooperated to analyse the first year of validation in the tourism sector and see what can be done to incentivise such a measure.

In the context of making efforts to improve the quality of adult learning, the University of Malta created the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education. In 2018, the department launched the Recognition of prior learning programme for holders of qualifications and experience in adult education and training. This programme has been developed for those holding qualifications in adult education or an equivalent who wish to pursue the master degree course in adult education (European Commission, 2019).

Malta has been working towards the implementation of 2012 Council recommendations on VNFIL[882]. One of the main aims of VNFIL in Malta is to increase lifelong learning and employability, as the awards obtained through VNFIL help candidates in career development or to further their studies. The extension to a number of sectors, the increase in the number of national occupational standards and awarded certificates acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning is promising.

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878. https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Pages/All%20Services/vinfl_nos.aspx

879. Sector skills units develop occupational standards for their relevant economic sector; they identify the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform occupations within their sector. They receive advice from the Sector Skills Committee, which is responsible for formulating policies and procedures to govern them as well as criteria and standards for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The government set up the National Skills Council in 2016 with the remit of involving the labour market in the planning of labour market preparation, and to tackle skills shortages. The NCFHE and the National Skills Council have worked together to analyse which sectors would benefit from a sector skills unit.

880. Jobsplus is the successor to the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC). Its objective is to meet the needs of employers, jobseekers and employees: Jobsplus acts as assessment agency on behalf of the NCFHE in assessing individuals on their informal and non-formal learning based on occupational standards developed by the respective sector skills units: https://jobsplus.gov.mt/

881. More information available at: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/el/news-and-press/news/malta-vinfl-takes

882. See Council of the European Union (2012).

NQF implementation and impact

The MQF is operational; key documents and responsibilities for its implementation have been agreed among stakeholders and published[883].The MQF is a comprehensive framework, including qualifications from all education sectors and types[884]; the framework is firmly legally embedded and forms an integrated part of the overall national qualification system, including links to relevant legislation and policy strategies, the *Framework for the education strategy for Malta 2014-24*[885], the *National lifelong learning strategy 2020*[886], *the Education Act 2019*[887], the *National literacy strategy for all in Malta and Gozo 2014-19*[888] and the *Strategic plan for the prevention of early school leaving in Malta 2014*[889].

The MQF has a distinction between qualifications and awards, based on the workload required and measured in credit points[890]. Qualifications and awards should satisfy the following conditions in order to become accredited and included in the MQF (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.

As a first step, the NCFHE has established two lists: one of accredited further and higher education institutions and one of accredited courses and qualifications with MQF and EQF levels indicated[891]. The NCFHE maintains both lists[892] in accordance with Subsidiary Legislation 327.433 on licensing, accreditation and quality assurance[893]. Qualifications and courses from VET and higher education have been included in the lists, as well as non-formal and private ones. A national qualifications database in line with the EQF recommendation is under development, expected to be operational by November 2020[894].

MQF and EQF levels are included in general, vocational and higher education qualifications provided by public institutions. They are included in all newly developed accredited qualifications from private providers and Europass certificates and diploma supplements issued to all graduates by public and private bodies[895].

The MQF is used by education and training institutions and providers, guidance and counselling practitioners, though the level of awareness differs[896]. Malta's Public Employment Service, Jobsplus[897] also uses the MQF as its main criterion for issuing work permits[898], and MQF levels are used in incentive schemes such as scholarships and tax rebates (Cedefop, 2017). There is also cooperation and coordination between Europass/Euroguidance contact points and NCFHE in MaltaL regular meetings take place and the three networks collaborate during dissemination events, promotion materials and on a joint website[899]. An effective network to promote use of the NQF has been established with employers by the NCFHE through its qualifications recognition information centre. Other methods of informing potential users about the framework include social media and the NCFHE website, which is continuously updated, as well as dissemination of information posters, leaflets/

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883. See the relevant legislation at the end of this report: Government of Malta (2012a), (2012b) and (2012f).
884. () Sector specific international qualifications such as Microsoft qualifications and CISCO are still outside the MQF. However, the Accreditation Unit at NCFHE has started an exercise where a comparability analysis is carried out to compare the 'unrecognised' programme to the MQF. A pilot project has been done with IMLI – International Maritime Law Institute – and their Master degree in Law and Doctoral programme have been compared to the MQF Level 7 and level 8 respectively.
885. https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/ Policy%20Documents%202014/BOOKLET%20ESM%20 2014-2024%20ENG%2019-02.pdf
886. See Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2014b).
887. See Government of Malta (2019). Education Act.
888. https://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Literacy/ ENGLISH.pdf
889. https://lifelonglearning.gov.mt/dbfile.aspx?id=47
890. 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.

891. https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/register/Pages/register.aspx
892. Both registers are available at: http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/ register/Pages/register.aspx
893. See Government of Malta (2012a).
894. An eight-month extension was granted allowing the database to be ready by the end of November 2020 and linked to the QDR as well as the EUROPASS portal.
895. For VNFIL certificates, only the MQF level is indicated. Starting August 2020, all VNFIL certificates will include both EQF/MQF levels (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).
896. Jobseekers tend to check the MQF levels, depending on the job requirements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).
897. Previously known as the Employment and Training Corporation: https://jobsplus.gov.mt/
898. The majority of third country nationals working in Malta are using a single permit issued by Identity Malta. Jobsplus is only responsible for conducting the labour market check.
899. http://europass.eupa.org.mt/networks/

booklets[900] and an explanatory video aimed at public and private education institutions, local councils, and other government entities. The creation of an MQF logo, which was launched in August 2020, has given more visibility to the framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

A study on the widespread understanding and appreciation of the Malta qualifications framework (MQF) and the European qualifications framework (EQF)[901] was conducted by NCFHE in 2016. One of the key messages of the study was that the level of awareness of the MQF was high (6.9 out of 10), but awareness of the link between the MQF and the EQF was lower (6.61 out of 10). Due to the lack of systematic evidence around the framework's impact, the NCFHE has initiated an MQF impact assessment to review it. In 2019, an MQF working group was also set up to support the development of the MQF. By the end of 2020, the NCFHE aimed to assess the impact of the MQF across a wide number of sectors/stakeholders, and provide recommendations on possible areas of both policy and technical improvements for the MQF and its referencing to the EQF[902]. A final report will be issued (NCFHE, 2020).

Referencing to the EQF

The MQF was referenced to the EQF and the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in a combined report in 2009. Further editions were published in 2010, 2012 and 2016[903]. The MQF is also referenced to the transnational qualifications framework of the small States of the Commonwealth (TQF).

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 MQF is a permanent and visible feature of the national education, training and qualifications system. It improves transparency by providing a map of, and reference to, all nationally recognised qualifications and awards, indicating NQF/EQF levels on certificates and diplomas, and providing a reference point for development and review of standards and curricula. It is an important tool in the shift to learning-outcomes-based qualifications and in promoting lifelong learning by improving access, progression and mobility, and validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences. It also has a quality assurance function, supporting the national quality assurance framework for further and higher education institutions. The framework supports end-users to progress in learning, notably through the list of accredited further and higher education institutions and courses. All courses accredited by NCFHE are included in the list of accredited courses with identifiable credit points, improving quality in the educational system. Over 4 000 qualifications and awards are currently recognised on the MQF. A national qualifications database – under construction – will further improve the transparency of single qualifications: the existing list does not contain detailed information on levelled qualifications and their learning outcomes, but only lists qualifications assigned to MQF levels. The database will also include all programmes offered by the three self-accrediting institutions. These are not included in the current register.

Despite the improvements brought about by the development and introduction of the MQF, there are still issues to be addressed. The main future challenges lie with the further promotion of the MQF, the development of validation of non-formal and informal learning and the national qualifications database, as well as the transitions towards online learning[904]. The delivery of further and higher education programmes has shifted to online learning due to Covid-19 but it is early to say how effective distancing learning is and whether the technological/infrastructure setup is up to the standard required;

900. Promoting the Malta Qualifications Framework through accreditation, recognition and validation https://ncfhe. gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/The%20 Malta%20Qualifications%20Framework/Promoting%20 the%20MQF_NCFHE%20generic.pdf Internal and external quality assurance in further and higher education booklet for training providers in developing their internal quality assurance processes and procedures https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/ Documents/Publications/Quality%20Assurance/ Internal%20and%20External%20Quality%20 Assurance%20in%20Further%20and%20Higher%20 Education%20A4%20Brochure.pdf
901. See NCFHE (2016b).
902. In carrying out this project, the NCFHE is collaborating with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership as it has an established record of regularly evaluating Scotland's NQF both overall and across specific sectors.
903. See all four editions online: http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/ referencing_report.aspx

904. The NCFHE through the ECVET project organised an online webinar on digital learning for all providers to help them in the switch towards online learning.

early results have revealed a positive response. In view of the COVID pandemic and school closures, Malta shifted to e-learning to ensure a seamless transition to remote learning on Malta's already-established digital platforms. The teachers responded to online teaching in an effective manner while online support was provided to parents and students who do not have access to a computer or internet connection at home.

The planned impact study will shed light on awareness, trust, transparency and responsiveness to the needs of society, as well as the extent to which the MQF encompasses all programmes from all types of learning pathways (VET/academic, formal/non-formal/informal, all levels, all sectors) addressing adequately learner diversity and the 21st century skills (NCFHE, 2020).

Table 54. Infographic of the MQF/MQF overview table

NQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATIONS[905]		EQF LEVELS
8	Doctoral degree		8
7	Master degree		7
	Postgraduate diploma		
	Postgraduate certificate		
6	Bachelor degree		6
5	Undergraduate diploma	VET higher diploma	5
	Undergraduate certificate	foundation degree	
4	Matriculation certificate	VET diploma[iv]	4
	Advanced level		
	Intermediate level		
3	General education (level 3)	VET level 3[iii]	3
	SEC grade 1 to 5		
2	General education (level 2)	VET level 2[ii]	2
	SEC grade 6-7		
1	General education (level 1)	VET level 1[i]	1
	School leaving certificate		
B	Introductory level B*		
A	Introductory level A*		

* These are not yet included in legislation. They were introduced with the 2016 version of the referencing report.

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 (SEC) subjects at grade 6 and 7.

iii A VET level 3 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as six secondary education certificate (SEC) subjects at grades 1 to 5.

iv A VET diploma should enjoy the same parity of esteem as the matriculation certificate

Source: Adapted from NCFHE and Ministry of Education and Employment (2020).

905. Awards are not mentioned in this table. https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/The%20Malta%20Qualifications%20Framework/The%20Malta%20Qualifications%20Framework.pdf

Abbreviations

ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	Net-QAPE	Network on quality assurance professionals in further and higher education
EQF	European qualifications framework	NQF	national qualifications framework
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework in the European higher education area
LOF	learning outcomes framework		
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology	QRIC	Qualifications and Recognition Information Centre
MQC	Malta Qualifications Council	SEC	secondary school certificate
MQF	Malta qualifications framework	TQF	transnational qualifications framework of the small States of the Commonwealth
MQRIC	Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre		
NCHE	National Commission for Higher Education	UOM	University of Malta
		VET	vocational education and training
NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education	VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning
NCF	national curriculum framework		
NCP	national coordination point		

Main sources of information

The National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) is the EQF NCP: https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/default.aspx

The MQF/EQF webpage: https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/MQF.aspx

List of accredited further and higher education institutions and courses. http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/register/Pages/register.aspx

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MOLDOVA

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

Moldova adopted an NQF concept in 2010 covering all levels of education, but only the NQF for higher education was implemented. In 2017 an eight-level NQF, based on the EQF structure, was approved.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research is the lead organisation for the NQF's development. Coordination mechanisms to ensure that qualifications are developed in line with the labour market have been established.

Moldova has been a member of the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna Process, since

2005, but has not yet self-certified against the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). The country has developed tools and approaches to create new qualifications and now needs to move towards implementation and delivery. It is at the activation stage of NQF development.

Policy context

Moldova's development path in recent years has been guided by the Association Agreement it signed with the European Union in 2014. Cooperation in the field of education and training aims to promote lifelong learning and encourage cooperation and transparency at all levels of education and training, with a special focus on higher education. That cooperation focuses on modernising education and training systems; enhancing quality, relevance and access; establishing a national qualifications framework to improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences; and promoting the aims set in the Copenhagen Process on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training[906].

In June 2020, the Moldovan parliament approved the National Development Strategy 2030, known as Moldova 2030. The main policy objective of "Moldova 2030"[907] is to significantly improve the quality of life of its citizens. It focuses on four development priorities: a sustainable and inclusive economy; strong human and social capital; honest and efficient institutions; and a healthy environment. One of its long-term objectives is to ensure quality education for all and promote lifelong learning opportunities. To develop these areas up to 2030, ten long-term goals for sustainable development have been set.

No strategic document has yet been developed to follow up the Education Strategy 2014–2020. For the time being, while a specific action plan for education is still under development, Moldova 2030 will remain the overarching policy document for education and training.

The National Employment Strategy 2017-2021 aims to increase formal employment based on economic competitiveness and the appropriate level of skills and qualifications, in conditions of sustainable and inclusive development[908]. It establishes four priorities: creating formal, non-discriminatory and productive employment opportunities; developing human capital for increased employment opportunities; improving labour market governance; and capitalising on the potential of migration to support sustainable development. The human capital development priority aims to increase the attractiveness, relevance and inclusiveness of the VET system and promote participation of adults in lifelong learning.

VET is well represented at the upper secondary level of Moldova's system, and enrolment in

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906. Art. 122, 123 of the Association Agreement. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/DE/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2014.260.01.0004.01.ENG

907. http://www.parlament.md/LegislationDocument.aspx?Id=def72782-3e6a-49d8-adfe-13d0fdc2c190
908. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=98639&lang=ro

vocational programmes is increasing, reaching 46.6% in 2018, up from 37.1% in 2013.

Moldova's NQF and VET system must be seen against its generally low economic growth, high levels of outward migration and dependence on remittances from those migrants, which account for circa 23% of GDP. As migrants are overwhelmingly young, heavy migration both reduces and ages the population.

Fluctuation between significant growth followed by contraction has been a recent characteristic of the economy. GDP expanded by 4.7% in 2017, followed by a further 4.0% in 2018. But even before the Covid-19 shock of 2020, the economy had slowed sharply in the last quarter of 2019. The unfolding economic crisis will have resulted in a contraction of Moldova's economy in 2020. A fall in remittances from the country's people abroad will have further depressed private consumption.

In 2019, the employment rate for the 15 plus age group was 40%; unemployment was 5%. NEETs account for 17% of the 15-24 group.

The COVID pandemic forced the closure of all schools in March 2020 and a shift to distance and online teaching. As elsewhere, schools found it difficult to maintain the practical aspects of VET learning under such conditions. Initial plans for online graduation exams and assessment were cancelled when the Ministry of Education concluded that online assessment could undermine confidence in diplomas both in Moldova and abroad, where many Moldovans work. Instead, grades were awarded based on coursework.

NQF legal basis
In 2010, an NQF concept was adopted, covering all levels of education, but only the NQF for higher education was implemented[909]. In 2017 the National Qualifications Framework was approved by government decision[910].

The legal framework for the development of NQF includes the following laws and main regulations:
- Education Code, in particular Articles 66 and 97 (2014);
- Law on Sectoral Committees (2017);
- Government Decision on the National Register of Qualifications (2018);

- Government Decisions on the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (2018) and on the approval of the External Quality Assurance Methodology (2016);
- Methodology for the development of occupational standards (2014);
- Regulation on the organisation of the qualification examination (2018);
- Methodology for the development, revision and validation of qualification standards (2019);
- Methodology for implementing qualification standards by VET and higher education institutions (2020);
- Methodology for establishing the correspondence of the level of training of qualifications obtained until the approval of the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Moldova (2019);
- Framework Regulation on validation of non-formal and informal education (2019);
- Framework Regulation on the organisation of post-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET studies based on the Credit Transfer System (2016);
- Nomenclature of secondary VET training fields and trades/occupations (2015);
- Nomenclature of post-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET training fields, specialities and qualifications (2015);
- Nomenclature of higher education fields of study and specialities (2017); Classifier of occupations in the Republic of Moldova (2014).

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms
VET policy reform is guided by the VET Development Strategy 2013–2020[911], developed in line with the

National Development Strategy "Moldova 2020". (As indicated above, "Moldova 2030" has replaced "Moldova 2020", and an accompanying action plan for education, including VET, is now being developed).

The VET Strategy aims to modernise VET to enhance the competitiveness of the national economy. The main objective is to increase the attractiveness, quality, affordability and flexibility of VET and its relevance to the labour market needs. Specific objectives of the VET Strategy include:

909. https://mecc.gov.md/ro/content/cadrul-national-al-calificarilor-0
910. Government Decision no. 1016 of 23.11.2017 http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=372759&lang=1

911. http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&la-ng=1&id=346695

- restructuring of the VET system and optimization of the VET network, including establishing Centres of Excellence;
- ensuring VET delivery based on labour market skills needs, including through strengthening social partnership in VET, labour market skills analyses, establishing Sector Skills Committees, developing occupational standards, and introduction of a VNFIL system;
- enhancing VET quality through the development of new VET standards, the QA system, NQF, and improving the efficiency of VET funding;
- improving VET curricula, including by introducing a modular approach, a credit system for VET, and an entrepreneurship component;
- increasing teaching staff quality through modernisation of teacher training and a continuous development system based on lifelong learning principles;
- increasing VET attractiveness.

In 2014, Moldova adopted a new Education Code to create the regulatory basis for the reforms. The Code structures the education system into levels and cycles in accordance with ISCED 2011, restructures the VET system into secondary VET (VET schools), and post-secondary and postsecondary non-tertiary VET (colleges), and provides the basis for the implementation of the NQF.

Aims of NQF

The NQF aims to establish an integrated, open and flexible national qualification system covering all levels and forms of professional education, oriented to meet the needs of the labour market, promoting lifelong learning and the country's economic development, and support national policies and strategies in the field of education and vocational training, in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

The National Framework of Qualifications in Higher Education is intended to ensure transparency in higher education, academic mobility and recognition of diplomas internationally[912].

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

Moldova's NQF has eight levels and follows the EQF structure and level descriptor categories:

knowledge, skills and competences. It also presents a correspondence between the NQF qualification levels with the EQF and QF-EHEA levels. The NQF for higher education is designed to accommodate each cycle of higher education by fields of study (professional training)[913].

Types of qualifications

The NQF allocates types of education and training programmes, leading to formal education qualifications, to NQF levels, describing as well access and assessment requirements. General secondary education programmes correspond to NQF levels 1-3. VET programmes correspond to NQF level 3 (secondary VET), NQF level 4 (post-secondary VET) and NQF level 5 (post-secondary non-tertiary VET). Higher education programmes are allocated to NQF levels 6-8.

Quality assurance of qualifications

Qualifications of all NQF levels are defined in the qualification standards[914]. The development, revision and approval of qualification standards is carried out according to the methodology adopted by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MECR)[915]. Qualification standards are developed by the MECR working groups with the involvement of representatives of social partners and educational institutions. They must meet the requirements of the relevant NQF level descriptors, be validated by the corresponding Sectoral Committee and line ministry, and approved by MECR based on the decision of the National Council for Qualifications. VET qualifications are developed on the basis of occupational standards[916].

Occupational standards must be developed for the occupations included in the Classifier of Occupations. Sectoral Committees develop the occupational standards, which are then validated and approved by the relevant line ministry or central administrative authority[917].

Qualification standards define also the requirements for assessment and award of qualifications in

912. Art. 97, Education Code (2014) https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=112493&lang=ro

913. Art. 97 (3), Education Code (2014) https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=112493&lang=ro

914. https://mecc.gov.md/ro/content/cadrul-national-al-calificarilor-2

915. Methodology for the development, revision and validation of qualification standards, Order of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research No. 1617 of 10.12.2019 https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/metodologia_de_elaborare_revizuire_si_validare_a_standaardelor_de_calificare.pdf

916. Art. 66, Education Code

917. Methodology for the development of occupational standards, Government Decision no. 863 of 08.10.2014 https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=95616&lang=ro

line with the NQF. Qualifications are awarded by accredited education institutions. Both the institutional and programme accreditation are mandatory. The external evaluation shall be carried out by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) or a quality assurance agency listed in EQAR. Accreditation standards require that education programmes correspond with the relevant NQF level.

Use of learning outcomes and standards

Qualification standards define qualifications in learning outcomes. They should relate to professional and general/key competences specified in the occupational standards or occupational profiles (for VET qualifications), or competence standards (for higher education qualifications). Learning outcomes should also correspond with the relevant NQF qualification level descriptors.

The qualification standard is the basis for curriculum development, assessment and VNFIL.

Credit systems

In higher education, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is used. One academic year corresponds to 60 ECTS credits. First cycle (NQF level 6) programmes shall have 180240 ECTS credits; second cycle (NQF level 7) programmes – 90-120 ECTS, or 300-360 ECTS for the integrated programmes (in medicine, veterinary medicine, architecture).

In post-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET, the credit system based on ECVET is applied[918]. Higher education institutions may recognise up to 30 VET credits.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The development of the NQF is coordinated by MECR in collaboration with other line ministries, sectoral committees, education institutions, and social partners. MECR is responsible for the development and approval of qualification standards; review of the nomenclatures of VET training fields and specialities, and of higher education fields of study and specialities; development and maintenance of the national register of

qualifications; approval of the methodologies for applying the credit transfer and accumulation system; regulations on VNFIL; recognition of foreign qualifications; monitoring of implementation of the NQF; and monitoring of implementation of the VNFIL system.

In 2018, the National Council for Qualifications, a consultative body of MECR, was set up to facilitate the development of the NQF. It includes representatives of the relevant ministries, the National

Employment Agency, ANACIP, sectoral committees, social partners and educational institutions. Its main functions include the endorsement of qualifications standards, considering legislative acts and supporting dialogue on the NQF's implementation.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection (MHLSP) coordinates, monitors and ensures the funding of occupational standards development, while the line Ministries and central administrative authorities are responsible for their validation and approval. MHLSP is the main actor for the development of labour market policies and anticipating and matching skills demand and supply. It carries out a mid-term forecast of the labour market, and also reviews the occupations classifier.

The National Employment Agency (NEA), responsible to the MHLSP, produces annual short-term labour market forecasts, and develops employer surveys, to identify workforce requirements and labour shortages.

Sectoral Committees have been established to promote social partnership in VET at the sectoral level. They are associations with the status of a legal entity, established on a voluntary basis by employers and trade unions associations in the respective economic sector[919]. Their main functions and responsibilities include:

1. improving communication and cooperation between social partners, and between social partners and public authorities; and contributing to the development of the VET regulatory framework, including assessment and certification of competences;
2. initiating, coordinating and participating in the development and revision of occupational standards;
3. participating in the development and updating of qualifications;

918. Framework Regulation on the organization of post-secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET studies based on the Credit Transfer System approved by MESR order 234 of 25.03.2016. https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ome_nr_234_din_25_martie_2016.pdf

919. Law on Sectoral Committees (2017) http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=373349&lang=1

4. participating in the NQF's development;
5. supporting and promoting the implementation of competence-based training and assessment;
6. delegating representatives to participate in the qualification examinations, certification of competences acquired in formal, non-formal or informal contexts;
7. making proposals for updating the occupations classifier;
8. engaging in skills needs analyses and anticipation;
9. endorsing modular or subject-based VET curricula.

The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC)[920] is responsible for the external evaluation and accreditation of education institutions and programmes at all levels of education, including continuing education. It develops and periodically reviews evaluation methodologies, accreditation standards, national reference standards and performance indicators used in quality assurance and evaluation. The governing board of the agency includes representatives of higher education and VET institutions, a student representative and a business representative.

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

VNFIL arrangements
The regulatory framework for VNFIL was established by MECR in 2019. According to the MECR Regulation on validation of non-formal and informal education,[921]16 validation is carried out by VET institutions and only against their accredited programmes. The regulation establishes requirements for the VNFIL process, assessment commission and assessors. The assessment commission shall comprise at least 3 members and may include representatives of the VET institution, experts delegated by the relevant ministry, Sectoral Committee, or Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The VNFIL process must meet the requirements of the relevant occupational standard.

A particular need is validation of skills acquired while abroad by returning migrants. The ongoing EU Twinning project has addressed this dimension.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
The adoption of the NQF in 2017 enabled the resumption of qualifications reform in the country, including approval of key legislative/administrative decisions, among them the government decision on the National Register of Qualifications and its technical concept, a methodology for the development of qualifications and the Framework Regulation on validation of non-formal and informal education.

Necessary legislation and regulations are in place to ensure institutionalised participation of all key stakeholders in the NQF policy dialogue, including social partners and other non-government stakeholders. The National Council for Qualifications has been created to ensure coordinated action for NQF implementation, while the Law on Sectoral Committees has formalized roles and responsibilities of social partners among the sectors.

Qualification standards define qualifications in learning outcomes. However, the development of new, and updating of existing, qualifications is still a challenge. Until now, only a few qualifications developed have been based on occupational standards[922].

Qualifications registers and databases
VET qualifications together with occupational standards, curricula and training providers (VET schools, colleges, the Centres of Excellence) are published on the National VET portal www.ipt.md. The database is structured according to the Classifier of Occupations based on ISCO-08, and the Nomenclatures of VET training fields and specialities. The ANACEC website[923] includes the lists of accredited or authorized higher education programmes.

To date, there are 51 qualification standards published on the Ministry's website, 26 VET, 25 HE.

The National Register of Qualifications[924] is under development. It will include qualifications of all levels and related information, including learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and qualification providers.

920. http://www.anacip.md/index.php/en/
921. Approved by MECR Decision No. 65/2019 https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/regulament_privind_educatia_nonformala.pdf

922. Only 33 occupational standards have been developed so far (NRF 2020, p.73).
923. http://www.anacip.md
924. Approved by Government Decision no.1199 of 5.12.2018 https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=111365&lang=ro

Qualification documents

Two types of VET document are issued: qualification certificates to certify secondary VET (NQF level

3) and qualification diplomas to certify post-secondary (NQF level 4) or post-secondary non-tertiary VET (NQF level 5). For the supplements, the Europass format is used[925].

Qualification titles are indicated according to the nomenclatures of VET training fields (NQF level 3) or training fields, specialities and qualifications (NQF levels 4 and 5); or the nomenclature of higher education fields of study and specialities.

Career information and guidance

The portal www.ipt.md informs students about occupations linking them to VET qualifications providers. The National Employment Agency's (NEA) portal www.cariera.anofm.md provides description of occupations, including information on the related skills, trends in the labour market and average salaries, and links them to the available vacancies published on the NEA job search portal www.angajat.md.

Recognition of foreign qualifications

Moldova ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 1999. MECR hosts the National Information Centre, which is a member of the ENIC-NARIC network. The country concludes bilateral and multilateral agreements on mutual recognition of qualifications.

Tools to use the NQF

Guidelines for the implementation of qualification standards to support curriculum development, assessment, and formulation of learning outcomes were developed, including:
- a methodology for implementing qualification standards by VET and higher education institutions (2020)[926];
- methodological guidelines for translating professional competences into learning outcomes (2020)[927];
- methodological guidelines for developing the qualification assessment procedure (2019)[928].

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks

Moldova has been a member of the Bologna Process since 2005. It has not yet certified its NQF against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

International cooperation

The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) is an affiliate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and a full member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEENQA).

International donor support

The EU-funded Twinning project "Enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system" was launched in 2019. The main aims of the project are:
- to strengthen the institutional and operational capacities and staff competences of the National
- Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC);
- to continue the implementation of the NQF in Moldova;
- to build capacities for effective cooperation between VET providers and the private sector;
- to encourage VET teachers in centres of excellence to become multipliers through pedagogical training.

925. https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ome_nr._1204_din_16.12.2015_cu_modificarile_si_completarile_ulterioare.pdf

926. https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/metodologia_de_implementare_a_standardelor_de_calificare_de_catre_institutiile_de_invatamant_profesional_tehnic_si_superior.pdf

927. https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ghidul_metodologic_pentru_transpunerea_competentelor_profesionale_in _rezultate_ale_invatarii.pdf

928. https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ghid_metodologic_de_elaborare_a_procedurii_de_evaluare_a_calificarilo r.pdf

Important lessons and future plans

Moldova has developed tools and approaches to create new qualifications and now needs to move towards implementation and delivery.

Coordination mechanisms to ensure that qualifications are developed in line with the labour market have been established. Currently, there are eight sectoral committees[929], but they are facing several challenges in the implementation of their ambitious mandate. Development of the sectoral committees' capacities and competences is needed to ensure their effective operationalisation, including execution of one of their priority tasks, the development of sectoral qualification standards.

The education and training system needs to better respond to current labour market demands through the development of relevant outcomes-based qualifications. In order to develop qualification standards - which are the normative basis for training programmes - occupational standards are needed. These should capture labour market requirements in professional skills.

The legal framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning has been adopted only recently. The system is at the piloting stage and only four VET providers (colleges and centres of excellence) have been authorised so far by MECR as validation centres. A functioning and sustainable mechanism for VNFIL is still to be developed and established.

The improvement of a quality assurance system for VET is an issue of ongoing importance. Relative progress has been achieved in this field. Until now, only some universities have been accredited, and the accreditation procedure of VET institutions commenced in 2019[930]. To strengthen quality assurance processes in the VET system, ANACEC's capacities need to be raised.

Donor support plays an important role. The current EU Twinning project (begun in 2019) provides capacity-building support to MECR and ANACEC to ensure an effective implementation of quality assurance mechanisms for VET and LLL provision, support the creation of the national register of qualifications and collaboration with the private sector.

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929. in construction sector; agriculture and food processing sector; ICT sector; transport and road services sector; trade sector; non-food industry sector; water distribution, waste management and decontamination sector; and energy sector http://ipt.md/ro/piata-muncii#Comitete

930. NRF (2020), p. 8

Abbreviations

ANACEC	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research	ISCO	International standard classification of occupations
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System	MECR	Ministry of Education, Science and Research of Moldova
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training	NEA	National Employment Agency
		NCQ	National Council for Qualifications
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	NQF	National Qualifications Framework
		QF-EHEA	Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education	VET	Vocational education and training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework	VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
ISCED	International standard classification of education		

Main sources of information

Ministry of Education, Culture and Research: www.mecc.gov.md

National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research: www.anacip.md

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Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
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MONTENEGRO

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

The MQF was adopted in 2010. It is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework consisting of eight qualification levels, with sub-levels at levels 1, 4 and 7. Level descriptors are based on learning outcomes in three categories: knowledge, skills and competence. The framework includes educational qualifications from all formal education sectors (general, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education), national vocational qualifications (NVQs), and additional qualifications.

The framework is managed by the Qualifications Council, in cooperation with the National Council of Education and Higher Education Council. Its main tasks include approval and inclusion of qualifications in the MQF; the Ministry of Education provides wider strategic direction for MQF implementation.

Qualifications and educational programmes are developed based on the learning outcomes approach, at all MQF levels. The work on the establishing a VNFIL system is in progress. It is possible to attain a vocational qualification (or part of it) by completing a specific module of the VET programme, or through the VNFIL process. A vocational qualification can be recognised to continue education in a formal VET programme.

The MQF is advanced in implementation and has reached an operational stage. The legal basis and governance structures for MQF implementation are in place and operational, significant progress has been made with the development and inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications database. Montenegro is a candidate for EU accession and a full member of the EQF Advisory Group. The MQF was referenced to the EQF and self-certified against the QF-EHEA in 2014.

Policy context

Montenegro is committed to the strategic goal of European integration. It gained the status of EU candidate country in 2010, and began accession negotiations two years later. Montenegro's strategic development objective, defined in the Economic Reform Programme 2019-2021, is sustainable and inclusive economic growth to reduce the country's development gap relative to the EU average[931].

The National Employment Strategy 2016-2020 sets a priority of improving qualifications and competencies aligned with labour market needs, including promoting access and participation of adults in lifelong learning and improving the quality and relevance of education at all levels[932].

Montenegro is the first non-EU country that adopted its Smart Specialisation Strategy[933]. It has defined four strategic priority areas for development and innovation: sustainable agriculture, green energy, sustainable health tourism and information technology.

Montenegro has also been committed to implementing and monitoring the 2015 Riga Conclusions on VET and to meet EU 2020 targets in education and training[934]. Skills and qualification mismatch with labour market needs remains a challenge[935]. In 2019, youth unemployment fell to 25.2%, while the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) increased to 17.3%. These rates are still high

931. Montenegro Economic Reform Programme 2019–2021 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhoodenlargement/sites/near/files/montenegro_erp_2019-2021.pdf
932. National Strategy for Employment and Human Resources Development 2016-20 http://www.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=224091&rType=2
933. Smart Specialisation Strategy 2019-2024 https://mna.gov.me/en/ministry/Smart_Specialisation
934. Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52009XG0528%2801%29
935. European Commission (2020) https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhoodenlargement/sites/near/files/montenegro_report_2020.pdf

compared to the EU averages of 15.1% and 10.1% respectively. The employment rate of recent graduates (aged 20 to 34) was 65,4% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 81,5%.

We can expect that COVID will have reversed some of the recent gains in reducing unemployment.

Adult participation in lifelong learning remains challenging, at 2.5% in 2019 compared to the EU's 10.8%[936]. Among the country's upper secondary cohort, 67% are enrolled in VET.

COVID caused schools to close for most of 2020. Distance learning was provided by two national TV channels. Additionally, the Ministry of Education established a web site for teachers, pupils and other learners to interact and exchange digital materials, videos and ideas.

Enrolment for vocational schools for the academic year starting autumn 2020 was carried out online. Looking long term, the government has announced the start of a 'digital classroom' project, planning major investment to digitalise textbooks and educational content, as well as infrastructure development throughout the country.

NQF legal basis
The law on the MQF[937] was adopted in 2010, defining the principles and objectives of the framework, its levels and sublevels, qualification types and governance structure. Related regulations in education and training include the Law on national vocational qualifications[938]. A set of rulebooks and methodological documents set out more detailed procedures for specific aspects of NQF development and implementation[939].

The MQF is reflected in several strategic documents, such as the National Strategy for Employment and Human Resources Development 2016-20[940], the Strategy for the development of vocational education in Montenegro (2020-2024)[941], the Strategy for Adult Education 2015-2025[942], the Teacher Education Strategy (2017-2024)[943].

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms
VET reforms in Montenegro were framed by the Vocational Education Development Strategy (2015– 20) and associated action plans. Policy priorities for VET development included increasing VET quality, efficiency and relevance for the labour market; ensuring equal opportunities to acquire VET qualifications; promoting lifelong learning and mobility. To reach these aims, specific actions included the revision of existing qualifications and development of new ones based on learning outcomes, designing modular educational programmes, supporting work-based learning (WBL) and apprenticeships, promoting vocational professions, and improving teacher training[944].

The revised VET strategy (2020-2024), adopted in January 2020, focuses on providing quality and inclusive education which is the basis for lifelong learning, economic and social integration, personal and professional development of the individual, with an effective system of management and financing[945].

936. European Training Foundation. *Key Indicators on Education, Skills and Employment (KIESE) 2020* https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020-11/kiese_2020_0.pdf
Eurostat, *EU labour force survey.* https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training/eu-benchmarks
937. Law on Montenegrin qualifications framework, *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, No 45/2010. http://www.cko.edu.me/Library/files/Law%20on%20MQF.pdf
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939. Rulebook on descriptors for qualification levels and sub-levels, *Official Gazette of Montenegro,* No. 51/11.
Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level 1 to level 5, *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, No. 21/12.
Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level 6 to level 8, *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, No 21/12.

940. National strategy for employment and human resources development (2016-2020) http://www.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=224091&rType=2
941. The Strategy for development of vocational education in Montenegro (2020-2024) https://mps.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=395479&rType=2&file=Strategija%20razvoja%20st rucnog%20obrazovanja%20u%20Crnoj%20Gori%20.docx
942. the Strategy for Adult Education in Montenegro 2015-2025 http://www.cso.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=195514&rType=2&file=Strategija%20obrazova nja%20odraslih%202015-2020%20Vlada.pdf
943. Teacher Education Strategy (2017-2024) https://mps.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=376293&rType=2&file=Strategija%20obrazovanja %20nastavnika%20u%20Crnoj%20Gori%202017-%202024..doc
944. Ministry of Education (2019). Final Implementation report. The Strategy for development of vocational education in Montenegro (2015-2020) http://www.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=392829&rType=2
945. The Strategy for development of vocational education in Montenegro (2020-2024) https://mps.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=395479&rType=2&file=Strategija%20razvoja%20st rucnog%20obrazovanja%20u%20Crnoj%20Gori%20.docx

The Adult Education Strategy (2015-2025) defines five priority objectives: social inclusion of adults through lifelong learning education programmes and activities; improving knowledge, skills and competences of adults for employability, labour market mobility and competitiveness; improvement of employee competencies; quality assurance in adult education; ensuring a flexible and sustainable adult education system.

Aims of NQF

The government sees MQF development and alignment to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as an important political priority. The law on the MQF[946] defines the qualifications framework as an instrument for classification, comparison, development and understanding of qualifications, the relationships between them and the pathways for acquiring qualifications to meet the needs of the labour market and society.

Apart from its transparency and comparability functions, the MQF is seen as an important tool in reforming the qualifications system using the learning outcomes approach, increasing coherence by linking the different education and training subsystems, facilitating access to qualifications and recognising non-formal and informal learning[947].

The main policy objectives of the MQF as defined by the MQF law[948] are:
- clear definition of qualifications using learning outcomes;
- validation of qualifications of different types within the qualification system;
- supporting and promoting lifelong learning;
- connecting and aligning the different parts of the education and training system;
- indicating horizontal and vertical progression pathways across and within the education and training system;
- aiding international comparability of qualifications;
- promoting key vocational competences;
- quality assurance of the qualifications system.

The principles underlying the development of the MQF are an emphasis on learning outcomes;

classification of qualifications in levels and sublevels; credit transfer; comparability with the EQF; quality assurance of qualification development and acquisition; cooperation among all stakeholders; and transparency of procedures.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

The Montenegrin National Qualifications Framework (MQF) is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework open to qualifications acquired through formal and non-formal or informal learning. It consists of eight qualification levels, with two sublevels each at levels 1, 4 and 7.

Level descriptors are learning outcomes based, defined for each level or sublevel and increasing in complexity from level 1 to 8. They follow the EQF categories of learning outcomes: knowledge (factual and theoretical), skills (cognitive and practical) and competence (autonomy and responsibility)[949].

Sublevels descriptors within a level are similar, but were introduced to address the different types of qualifications related to the requirements of the labour market.

Types of qualifications

MQF includes qualifications of three types:
- Educational qualifications (education level qualifications) attained upon completion of a formal education programme (general education, VET and higher education) represent attainment of an education level.
- Vocational qualifications (National vocational qualifications, NVQs) are based on the occupational standards; they can be acquired through assessment after completing of a formally recognised training – either part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), or an adult education programme, or a special training programme in higher education, - or through validation of nonformal learning.
- Additional qualifications are other qualifications that are acquired outside programmes leading to educational or vocational qualifications. They supplement a person's qualification level testifying acquisition of additional knowledge, skills and competence and may be a prerequisite for working in a certain specific area of work.

946. Law on Montenegrin qualifications framework, Official Gazette of Montenegro, No 45/2010. Article 2. http://www.cko.edu.me/Library/files/Law%20on%20 MQF.pdf

947. Ministry of Education (2014). Referencing the Montenegrin qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area, p. 22. https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-06/ Montenegrin%20Referencing%20Report.pdf

948. Law on Montenegrin qualifications framework, Official Gazette of Montenegro, No 45/2010. http://www.cko.edu. me/Library/files/Law%20on%20MQF.pdf

949. Level and sublevel descriptors are defined in the rulebook on level and sublevel qualification descriptors, Official Gazette of Montenegro, No 51/11. http://www.cko.edu.me/ Library/files/Zakoni%20i%20pravilnici/Pravilnik%20o%20 opisu%20nivoa%20i%20podnivo a%20kvalifikacija.pdf

Primary and secondary general education qualifications are allocated to the NQF levels 1 and 4, VET qualifications correspond to the NQF levels 2-5, the higher education qualifications are allocated to MQF levels 6-8. Vocational qualifications can be allocated at all NQF levels[950].

Quality assurance of qualifications

The institutions responsible for the development of qualifications at levels 1 to 5 are the VET Centre and the Bureau of Educational Service. Qualifications at levels 6-8 are developed by higher education institutions.

Qualifications are developed according to the methodology and procedures adopted by the Ministry of Education[951]. Educational qualifications are developed based on several related occupational standards (in vocational education), or educational standards (in general education). Vocational qualifications are developed based on one occupational standard.

The development of qualifications entails the development of a qualification standard, which shall be validated by the relevant sectoral commission and adopted by the Qualification Council. Along with the qualification standard, a VET programme (for VET qualification) or an examination catalogue (for vocational qualification) are developed. In higher education, qualification standards are developed based on accredited higher education programmes (HE qualification) or a part of it (vocational qualification).

Use of learning outcomes and standards

The law on the MQF introduced the learning outcomes orientation as a standard for all levels of qualification. Qualification standards include the following mandatory elements: title and type of qualification, level or sublevel, qualification code, credit value, learning outcomes description of qualification (specification) and contents (entry requirements, mandatory and optional modules,

assessment methods and criteria for assessment of learning outcomes)[952].

Occupational standards are a common element for both VET qualifications and vocational qualifications. It is possible to attain a vocational qualification (or part of it) by completing a specific module of the VET programme. A vocational qualification can be recognised to continue education in a formal VET programme.

VET programmes are developed on a modular basis, in line with qualification units (units of learning). Key competences are an integral part of qualification standards and are promoted in education and training programmes.

Credit systems

The Montenegrin credit transfer system (MCTS) was introduced by the law on the MQF to determine the size of qualification. Credits are transferable and can be allocated to qualifications and their units, as well as to educational programmes or their parts (courses, modules, subjects). One MCTS credit refers to 25 hours of workload. The minimum size of educational qualification is 60 credits, which corresponds to one academic year.

The MCTS is aligned to the European credit system for vocational education (ECVET) and to the European credit transfer system (ECTS). Use of the ECTS has been a requirement for higher education institutions since 2004.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The Ministry of Education has overall responsibility for education policy and provides strategic direction for MQF development and implementation. The framework is managed by the Montenegro Qualifications Council, in cooperation with the National Council of Education and the Higher Education Council, which also provide policy advice to the ministry.

Responsibilities of the national coordination point for the EQF (EQF NCP) lie with the Division for qualifications at the ministry, established in 2011. The role of the EQF NCP is to ensure harmonisation of the MQF to the EQF and international cooperation in qualifications framework

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950. as defined by the Law on national vocational qualifications [Zakon o nacionalnim strucnim kvalifikacijama], *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, No 80/08, 14/09, 80/10, 18/11, 40/11 and 40/16. https://cso.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=313005&rType=2&file=Zakon%20o%20nacionalni m%20strucnim%20kvalifikacijama%202016.pdf

951. Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level 1 to level 5, *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, No. 21/12.
Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level 6 to level 8, *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, No. 21/12.

952. Law on Montenegrin qualifications framework, Official Gazette of Montenegro, No 45/2010. Article 8 http://www.cko.edu.me/Library/files/Law%20on%20MQF.pdf

development; to maintain the qualifications register; to propose procedures for qualification development; to ensure access to information about the MQF; to implement the measures adopted by the Qualifications Council; and to provide administrative and technical assistance.

The Qualifications Council was established with the aim to improve the qualifications system and to monitor MQF development[953]. Its main tasks include approval and inclusion of qualifications in the MQF; establishing, coordination and monitoring the work of Sectoral Commissons; proposing the development and improvement of qualifications, adopting methodological documents. The council is a permanent body and its members include representatives from Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, higher education institutions, Employment Agency of Montenegro, Chamber of Economy, employers association, trade union, VET Centre, Bureau for Educational Services, and the Examination Centre. The presidents of the National Council for Education and the Higher Education Council are also members of the Qualifications Council, to ensure coordination of work on the qualifications system.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The National Council of Education approves formal education programmes and examination catalogues, and determines the compatibility between education programmes and qualification standards. It is responsible for the qualification attainment process, and organisation of learning and teaching in formal education, adult education and special education. Its work is supported by the Bureau for Education Services and the VET Centre.

The Higher Education Council provides expert opinion on regulations in the field of higher education, makes proposals concerning the improvement and development of higher education. *The Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education*[954] is in charge of quality assurance in higher education, particularly the accreditation of study programmes, reaccreditation and ranking of higher education institutions, and proposals for improving quality of higher education.

In addition to the three councils, involvement of stakeholders in MQF implementation is carried out through 15 *Sectoral Commissions* set up as permanent bodies of the Qualifications Council, one for each of the 15 MQF sectors defined in the Law

on the MQF. These are composed of representatives of employers, trades unions, universities, relevant ministries and institutions involved in education development[955]. Sectoral commissions analyse and identify labour market needs in skills and qualifications, propose new or revision of existing occupational standards and qualifications, elaborate basic profile/specification of qualification, provide opinion on compliance of occupational and qualification standards, and examination catalogues, consider initiatives for the development of new qualifications.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare approves occupational standards upon the proposal of the Qualification Council, and adult education programmes that lead to the acquisition of vocational qualifications.

Other key institutions are *the VET Centre*, responsible for the coordination of the development of occupational standards, qualification standards and educational programmes in vocational and adult education; and the *Examination Centre*, which conducts the external assessment of knowledge, skills and competences for primary and secondary education.

Representatives of the *Chamber of Commerce* and the *Union of Employers* are members of the sectoral commissions, the Qualifications Council and the National Council for Education.

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

VNFIL arrangements

The legal framework for validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is provided for vocational qualifications of MQF levels 1-5. The relevant legislation includes the Law on the MQF (2010), the Law on national vocational qualifications (2008, amended in 2016), and the law on adult education (2011, amended in 2017)[956]. As part of the secondary legislation, the rulebook[957] defining the procedures for VNFIL in accordance with the revised law on

953. Decision of the Government of Montenegro on constitution of the Qualifications Council, *Official Gazette of Montenegro,* No 29/11.
954. https://akokvo.me/

955. Their composition is published on the MQF website http://www.cko.edu.me/Default.aspx?cid=13
956. Available at: http://www.cso.gov.me/biblioteka/zakoni
957. Rulebook on the manner and procedure of assessment of knowledge, skills and competencies in the process of acquiring vocational qualifications, Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 13/2019 https://mps.gov.me/biblioteka/pravilnici?pagerIndex=1

national vocational qualifications (NVQs)[958] was adopted in 2019.

The law on national vocational qualifications stipulates that NVQs can be acquired via formal programmes and via direct assessment of knowledge, skills and competences. Assessment for vocational qualifications at MQF levels 1-5 is carried out by licensed adult education providers based on examination catalogues. Examination catalogues are developed for each vocational qualification based on qualification standards.

The examination commission is formed by the education provider from the list of licensed examiners, on proposal of the Examination Centre. The Examination Centre organises training and licensing of assessors (examiners), and shortlists them for each vocational qualification.

Higher education institutions can carry out assessments and award vocational qualifications at MQF levels 6 - 8 based on the special training programmes accredited by the Higher Education Council, in accordance with the act of the higher education institution.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
The MQF is seen as part of the wider set of economic, labour market and education policies to support human capital development. Its aims are aligned with policy priorities for education development outlined in the national strategic documents.

The legal basis and governance structures for MQF implementation are in place and operational, referencing to the EQF has been carried out and significant progress has been made with the inclusion of qualifications in the national register. Efforts are continuing to review and redefine existing qualifications and educational programmes and develop new ones based on the learning outcomes approach, at all MQF levels.

The work on the establishing a VNFIL system is also on the reform agenda[959]. Certain elements of the Montenegrin education and training system provide a good basis for future work on VNFIL: the principles underlying the MQF, particularly the shift to learning outcomes; modular design of VET qualifications; well-established provision for development of professional competences; licencing of staff involved in the assessment for national vocational qualifications (NVQs); and work to expand the network of licenced adult education providers[960].

Qualifications registers and databases
Qualifications adopted by the Qualifications Council are entered in the database of qualifications[961]. The qualifications database currently includes more than 270 qualifications from formal VET (diplomas) and from the national vocational qualifications system (certificates) at MQF levels 2-5. Qualifications are classified according to type, size, MQF level and sector, and ISCED.

Occupational standards, VET programmes and curricula, and adult education programmes are published at the VET Centre database[962]. A database of licensed education institutions and accredited higher education programmes is available on the Ministry of Education website[963].

Qualification documents
VET qualifications are certified by *diploma*, vocational qualifications – by a *certificate*. Europass certificate and diploma supplements are issued, both MQF and EQF levels are indicated. In higher education, Europass diploma supplement is issued, with the NQF level included[964].

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958. Amendments to the Law on NVQs in 2016 transferred responsibility for assessment of knowledge, skills and competences for vocational qualifications from the Examination Centre to the adult education providers licenced by the Ministry of Education.

959. The Strategy for development of vocational education in Montenegro (2020-2024) https://mps.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=395479&rType=2&file=Strategija%20razvoja%20st rucnog%20obrazovanja%20u%20Crnoj%20Gori%20.docx

960. A total of 109 adult education providers were licensed by the end of 2019 (Montenegro: National Reforms in Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning, EACEA National policies platform). https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-vocational-education-and-trainingand-adult-learning-45_en

961. The qualifications database is available at http://www.cko.edu.me/ckoview/Default.aspx

962. http://www.cso.edu.me/default.aspx

963. https://mps.gov.me/informacije/licencirane_ustanove

964. The rulebook on the content and form of Europass documents and the manner of filling them out. *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, No 56/2018 of 3.8.2018, available at: http://www.europasscrnagora.me/images/dokumenti/Pravilnik_o_sadrzaju_i_obrascu_Europass.doc.doc 35 http://www.zzzcg.me/cips/

Career information and guidance

The Centres for professional information and counselling of the Employment Agency of Montenegro35 provide information on occupations, secondary school curricula, as well as on learning and employment opportunities. The National Europass centre[965] promotes the implementation of Europass in the country.

Recognition of qualifications

The MQF law establishes the correspondence of national qualifications awarded before its adoption with the MQF levels and sub-levels. Recognition of foreign educational qualifications is based on the comparison of a qualification with the corresponding qualification standard in Montenegro[966, 967].

Tools to use the NQF

The Qualifications Council and institutions that develop and implement qualifications adhere to the following bylaws and methodological documents: *Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from the first to the fifth level of qualifications, Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from the sixth to the eighth level of qualifications, Rulebook on description of levels and sublevels NQF, Guidelines for the development of qualifications for levels I-V, Methodology for assigning qualification codes, Basis for modularization and credit evaluation of vocational education programmes, Guidelines for the work of the sectoral commission, Rulebook on the manner and procedure of assessment of knowledge, skills and competencies in the process of acquiring vocational qualifications.*

NQF evaluation

No systematic evaluation of the NQF use or impact has yet been carried out. Based on experiences so far, the framework has played a key role in improving the qualifications system and improving education and training programmes. It has influenced to a large extent the promotion and use of learning outcomes, learning units have become credit-evaluated and transferable from one qualification to another. It has influenced the review, renewal and quality assurance of qualifications, the whole process and procedures for qualification development have become more transparent. It has also supported dialogue and cooperation between

stakeholders across education and training sectors, and between education and the labour market[968].

Referencing to regional framework/other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks

Montenegro completed the process of referencing the MQF to the EQF and self-certification against the qualifications framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) in 2014. A joint report is published on the Europass portal[969]. An updated referencing report is planned to be presented in the EQF Advisory Group in 2022[970].

International cooperation

Montenegro is a candidate for EU membership, and a participating country in the establishment of a regional economic area in the Western Balkans. The country is a member of the EQF Advisory Group.

The Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (AKOKVO) established in 2017 became an associate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

(ENQA, 2019) and a full member of the Central Eastern European Network of Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies (CEENQA, 2020). The country ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2004.

Montenegro continues to participate actively in the EU Erasmus+ programme as a partner country.

International donor support

The EU provides assistance to Montenegro for education and labour market reforms under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). Priority interventions are: active labour market measures and local employment initiatives; improvement of quality of education with particular focus on STEM and further development of

965. http://europasscrnagora.me/start/index.html
966. Law on Recognition of Foreign Educational Documents and Equalization of Qualifications. *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, No. 57/2011 and 42/2016.
967. Documents are available at: https://mps.gov.me/biblioteka/pravilnici?pagerIndex=1

968. European Commission and Cedefop (2020). Survey on implementation, use and impact of NQF/EQF [unpublished].
969. Montenegrin Ministry of Education (2014). The referencing of the Montenegrin qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area. https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-06/Montenegrin%20Referencing%20Report.pdf
970. European Commission and Cedefop (2020). Survey on implementation, use and impact of NQF/EQF [unpublished].

modularised educational programmes in line with NQF[971].

Important lessons and future plans

Work on the MQF was undertaken as part of Montenegro's accession to the EU and supported by resources and expertise accessed through EU programmes. The strategic approach to developing and implementing the framework and commitment of all key stakeholders involved are considered as key success factors in the progress achieved so far.

The challenges related to MQF implementation include the need to improve the match between the skills and qualifications demanded on the labour market and those provided through the education and training system. A wider and more systematic involvement of labour market stakeholders is needed to improve analysis and anticipation of skills and qualifications needs.

Enhancing the capacity of sectoral commissions so that they are able adequately to articulate the labour market and society's needs, identify qualification and skill gaps, and propose development of qualifications of different types and levels, remains a key challenge for upcoming period[972].

The necessity to communicate the MQF beyond the education and training system and to make it more visible and clearer to all relevant stakeholders and the general public has become apparent. Employers and their associations need to be provided with information on opportunities to launch initiatives to develop new or revise existing occupational standards and qualifications.

The main challenges to be tackled to advance VNFIL implementation include improving quality assurance mechanisms and procedures for assessment of non-formal and informal learning; addressing the lack of information about VNFIL, both among the general public and among labour market stakeholders; and promoting VNFIL opportunities in a systematic manner.

Other important key measures and policies that have been put in place or are planned include: revision and development of qualifications and programmes in line with MQF principles and labour market needs; modularization of educational programmes based on learning outcomes and inclusion of key competencies; and improving the quality assurance system[973].

971. 2015-2017 Sectoral operational programme for Montenegro on Employment, Education and Social policies (SOPEES) https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhoodenlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/montenegro/ipa/2015/ipa_2015_2017_037895_me_sectoral_operational_progra mme.pdf

972. European Commission and Cedefop (2020). Survey on implementation, use and impact of NQF/EQF [unpublished].

973. The Strategy for development of vocational education in Montenegro (2020-2024) https://mps.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=395479&rType=2&file=Strategija%20razvoja%20st rucnog%20obrazovanja%20u%20Crnoj%20Gori%20.docx

Table 55. Infographic of the NQF/NQF overview table

NQF LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS (FORMAL EDUCATION)	NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS (NVQS)*	EQF LEVELS
8	Diploma of doctoral studies	NVQ	8
7.2	Diploma of master studies** Diploma of master studies	NVQ	7
7.1	Graduate specialist academic and applied studies diploma Higher education diploma** First cycle academic and applied studies diploma**	NVQ	
6	Diploma of first cycle academic and applied studies	NVQ	6
5	Diploma of post-secondary vocational education	NVQ	5
4.2	Master craftsman examination certificate	NVQ	4
4.1	Upper secondary school leaving diploma (general, gymnasium) Upper secondary school leaving diploma (vocational, four years)	NVQ	
3	Diploma of secondary vocational education (three years)	NVQ	3
2	Diploma of lower vocational education (two years)	NVQ	2
1.2	Certificate of completed primary education (nine years)	NVQ	1
1.1	Certificate of completed first cycle of primary education or completed functional literacy programme	NVQ	

* Labour-market-oriented qualifications, attained through assessment of vocational ability to perform sets of tasks linked to an occupation. Demonstrated knowledge, skills and competences can be acquired through formal or non-formal learning, including special education programmes or part of formal education programmes that corresponds to an occupational standard.

** Pre-Bologna diplomas, in use until adoption of the Higher Education Act of 2002. Source: Adapted from the Montenegrin Ministry of Education, 2014.

Source: Adapted from the Montenegrin Ministry of Education, 2014.

Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework	NQF	national qualifications framework
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession, the EU support programme for candidate and potential candidate countries	NVQ	national vocational qualifications
		QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
MCTS	Montenegrin credit transfer system	VET	vocational education and training
MQF	Montenegrin qualifications framework	VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning
NCP	national coordination point		

Main sources of information

The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport is the EQF NCP: https://mps.gov.me/ministarstvo

Montenegrin NQF website: http://www.cko.edu.me/default.aspx

The register of qualifications: http://www.cko.edu.me/ckoview/Default.aspx

Montenegrin Ministry of Education (2014). The referencing of the Montenegrin qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area. https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-06/Montenegrin%20Referencing%20Report.pdf

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MOROCCO

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

A 2019 education law encompasses references to Morocco's national qualifications framework (NQF).

Morocco's NQF is comprehensive, covering all types of education and training qualifications, and structured in eight levels. Authorities experimented with levelling in 2015-2016.

The Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research (MENFPESRS) leads development of the NQF. Two further bodies, the NQF Steering Commission and the NQF Permanent Commission, are entrusted with strategic guidance and coordination of NQF implementation, respectively.

The NQF is included in wider education and training legislation. Elements of a modern qualification system, including outcomes approaches and systematic quality assurance measures are established. Governance arrangements are agreed and operating. But other elements including validation of nonformal and informal learning and a credit system, are yet to be implemented. Morocco's NQF is thus at the adoption stage.

Policy context

The European Union - Morocco relationship tackles common challenges such as economic development, innovation, climate change, justice, security, mobility, migration and good governance. The partnership is based on the Association Agreement[974], which entered into force in 2000. In 2008 the EU and Morocco signed a Joint Declaration establishing an "Advanced Partnership" (Statut Avancé)[975], explicitly mentioning cooperation with the EQF. Under the European Neighbourhood Policy Morocco has gradually become a privileged EU partner in political and economic cooperation as well as in trade, technical and development cooperation.

The Association Council, bringing together the Ministers of the EU and Morocco, frames the EUMorocco relationship, including the political dialogue and cooperation priorities. The last Association

Council[976] on 27 June 2019 gave new impetus to the strategic, multidimensional and privileged EUMorocco relationship. A Joint Declaration[977] was issued which defines the "Euro-Moroccan partnership for shared prosperity", based on four structural areas 1) convergence of values, 2) economic convergence and social cohesion, 3) shared knowledge, and 4) political consultation and enhanced security cooperation and two key horizontal fields: 1) environmental cooperation and the fight against climate change, and 2) cooperation in the field of mobility and migration. These actions will reinforce each other.

The Moroccan NQF is underpinned by a range of policy and legislative documents, such as the Framework Law 51-17 on Education Training and Scientific Research, adopted on 19 August 2019; the Strategic Vision 2030 for a School of Equity, Quality

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974. EUR-Lex - 22000A0318(01) - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

975. Statut avance page 12 'Renforcer le processus de certification dans le domaine de l'enseignement, en vue d'assurer la qualité et la transparence de la certification. Ceci contribuera à la modernisation du système d'éducation et de formation et à l'évolution des qualifications acquises. A terme, cela permettra d'envisager un rapprochement avec le Cadre européen des Certifications.'

976. EU-Morocco Association Council, 27/06/2019 - Consilium (europa.eu)

977. Joint declaration by the European Union and Morocco for the fourteenth meeting of the Association Council - Consilium (europa.eu)

and Promotion[978] and the Professional Training Strategy 2021[979, 980].

The government of Morocco is currently working to develop a new model of economic development for the country, which will have a special focus on competences and human development, enhanced education and vocational training programmes, and bolder policies to boost job creation in order to promote inclusive growth through a modernised social protection system. The Special Commission for the Development Model (CSMD) coordinates and facilitates an open citizens' consultation to gather proposals and views and has set up a dedicated website to this end.7

The https://www.afdb.org/en/knowledge/publications/african-economic-outlook African Economic Outlook 2020 report[981] by the African Development Bank Group (AFDB, 2020) considers that the country's location can serve as a strategic hub for foreign companies looking to operate or set-up business in Africa. The bank mentions three main structural challenges for the country, namely, a) developing human capital through education and training that meet the needs of the economy, b) rationalising the social protection system, and c) removing rigidities in the labour market and reducing youth unemployment.

The World Bank[982] reports that growth has slowed beneath its potential, constrained by a volatile, agricultural sector overly reliant on rainfall (water reserves are insufficient) and slow growth in the tertiary sector. Real GDP slowed to 2.7 per cent in 2019, while non-agricultural growth improved by 3.4 per cent (compared to 3 per cent in 2018), driven by the better performance of phosphates, chemicals and textiles. The unemployment rate declined slightly to 9.3 per cent in quarter 1 of 2019 (from 9.8 per cent in quarter 1 of 2018), underlined by a protracted fall in labour force participation, which dropped to 46.1 per cent.

Over the medium term, growth is projected to pick up gradually, mainly driven by more dynamic secondary and tertiary activities, bolstered by foreign investment. In particular, significant foreign direct investment continue to flow into automotive industries, as well as into logistics

and trade services following the expansion of the Tangiers port.

Morocco has a population of approximately 36 million, according to a report by the Haut Commissariat du Plan (HCP)[983], of whom 27 per cent are 14 years and younger.

The HCP reports that the labour market situation in the first quarter of 2021 continues to be affected by the crisis of the national economy aggravated in 2020, by the COVID-19 pandemic. The employment crisis that began in 2020 has been mainly marked by rising unemployment and inactivity, particularly among women and young people.

Unemployment rose from 10.5% to 12.5% nationally, from 15.1% to 17.1% in urban areas and from 3.9% to 5.3% in rural areas. It recorded a sharp increase among women, from 14.3% to 17.5%, among young people aged 15 to 24, from 26.8% to 32.5%, and among graduates, from 17.8% to 19.8%.

Between the first quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021, and with the creation of 56,000 urban jobs and the loss of 258,000 jobs in rural areas, the national economy lost 202,000 jobs, of which 185,00 were unpaid jobs. A year earlier, between the first quarters of 2019 and 2020, it had created 77,000 jobs. Unemployment reached 1,534,000 people nationally, increasing by 242,000.

In 2020-2021 the government reacted to Covid-19, by closing business operations and schools, causing a sharp shock to the economy, employment, and the income of the population. Covid-19 exacerbated inequality and poverty has risen. The country is now implementing an efficient Covid-19 vaccination campaign.

Morocco took measures to assure continuity of education and training through the period of Covid-19 confinement. As an illustration, in vocational education, from mid-March 2020, the *Office de la Formation Professionnelle et de la Promotion du Travail* (OFPPT, the national VET agency) prepared and made available online courses[984], including videos for practical classes on YouTube[985]. All levels and types of training of OFPPT are accessible for online learning through an app and pedagogic materials will be gathered in a common platform. During the pandemic in 2020 the

978. https://www.men.gov.ma/Fr/Documents/Vision_strateg_CSEF16004fr.pdf

979. http://www.dfp.gov.ma/images/pdfdocs/2016/Strate%CC%81gie%20Formation%20FR.pdf

980. https://www.csmd.ma/

981. https://www.afdb.org/en/knowledge/publications/african-economic-outlook

982. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/morocco/overview

983. https://www.hcp.ma/

984. https://www.ofppt.ma/fr/actualites/lofppt-lance-la-formation-a-distance

985. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8b3TmeZhCug

Ministry of Education created 6,000 pieces of digital teaching content, from a baseline of only 600.

NQF legal basis

Articles 2 and 35 of the new framework Law number 51-1713 (*Loi Cadre n°51-17*)[986] on the system of education, training and scientific research, adopted on 9 August 2019, define the objectives of the NQF.

Article 2 defines the NQF as a mechanism "to define and classify diplomas at national level, according to a reference scale of parameters applied to levels of learning outcomes and reflecting the needs of the labour market and societal development."

Article 35 stipulates the "Establishment of a NQF for certification and homologation of diplomas, and comprising, in particular, the modalities and classification criteria of diplomas, validation of learning outcomes of professional and crafts activities. This framework is conceived by an autonomous national commission created for this purpose, representing the various sectors of education and training, as well as professional organisations and sanctioned by a regulatory Act".

Other legal acts and policies related to the NQF include:
- Law 01.00 on higher education
- Law 12.00 on apprenticeship
- Law 13.00 on the statute of private professional training
- Law 60-17 on the organisation of continuing training of private sector employees, of certain categories of staff of public establishments and enterprises and other non-wage workers engaged in private activities (published on 6 October 2018).

The Law on professional training is currently under development. It is expected to play an important role in enhancing coherence and permeability in the eco-system of vocational qualifications.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

The government policy is contextualised in the Strategic Vision for Education Reform[987] (*Vision stratégique de la réforme de l'enseignement à l'horizon 2030*), addressing four major purposes:

- equity and equality of opportunities
- quality for all
- promotion of the individual and society
- efficient leadership and renewed conduction of change.

The Strategic Vision 2015-2030 is linked with other elements of the policy framework:
- the Framework Law 51-17, adopted in 2019
- the Government Executive Plan 2017-2021
- Performance Projects (three years) of the different ministerial departments
- in VET, the Strategic Vision 2015-2030 has integrated the strategic strands of the National Professional Training Strategy 2021.

The main orientations of the Strategic Vision 2015-2030 have been translated into the Framework Law 51-17. This law safeguards the integrity of the Strategic Vision from political and institutional risks, represents a national pact binding for all parties, and provides a legal basis for further development and implementation. On the NQF, the Strategic Vision specifies the following measures:

Lever 12, point 80: NQF

"Establish a national qualification system able to organise and classify certificates and diplomas, on the base of a reference grid defined by the departments in charge of education, training and scientific research. Such a framework will enable transparency and clarity, but also comparability of diplomas on the basis of a national guide of certification; will improve the instruments of assessment of learning outcomes from schooling and training and enhance their credibility and effectiveness. The framework will also assure national and international mobility of diplomas."

Lever 12, point 81: Validation of learning from professional experience

"Establish a system of accreditation of competences from professional experience to the benefit of persons with experience allowing them to access lifelong learning opportunities".

Lever 19, point 102: Validation of cognitive and professional outcomes

"Adopt a unified system of validation of cognitive and professional learning outcomes of individuals, supervised by an independent national instance, in which are represented the different departments of education, training and professional sectors".

Further, a Royal Directive, in its youth employment section, stipulates measures to implement the NQF

986. http://www.sgg.gov.ma/Portals/0/BO/2020/BO_6944_Fr.pdf?ver=2020-12-24-133647-943
987. https://www.men.gov.ma/Fr/Documents/Vision_strateg_CSEF16004fr.pdf

and establish an integrated system for validation of competences acquired through professional experience.

The Vocational Training Strategy 2021 (*Stratégie Nationale de la Formation Professionnelle 2021*) consists of a number of strategic "axes". Its fifth strategic axis "Valorisation of professional pathways through better articulation of the components of the education and training system", addresses the NQF:

"The NQF is an instrument for classification of certificates and diplomas awarded in the country, with reference to coherent levels of mastery of knowledge, skills and competences, according to a set of pertinent criteria defined on the basis of learning outcomes.

Structured in a grid of eight levels by six descriptors, the NQF is a reference system for the quality of certificates and professional diplomas delivered in Morocco and recognised by the labour market.

Certificates and diplomas classified in the NQF are registered in a national register (repertoire) of qualifications, which will comprise all public and private qualifications at all levels of education and training."

In higher education, the Action Plan for higher education (*Plan d'Action de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique, 2017-2021*) addresses the NQF via its Action 11 on pedagogic reform: "Assure, in partnership with all stakeholders, the establishment and operationalisation of the NQF and the implications in terms of review and renewal of programmes, and courses."

Since 2020 the government has been pursuing actions to implement a wide range of reforms in education and training, triggered by the Framework Law number 51-17. According to available information, nineteen reform programmes are in preparation or have started implementation, of which a number apply to all sub-sectors of education and training. One of the reform programmes – Evaluation and certification - directly concerns the NQF.

Aims of NQF
Articles 2 and 35 of the Framework Law on Education 51-17, and the 2013 reference document set aims for the NQF, which include:
- classification of qualifications;
- promotion of learning outcomes approaches;
- supporting the relevance of the education and training system to labour market and societal needs.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure
The Moroccan NQF is comprehensive of all types of education and training and comprises eight levels, each defined by six domains of level descriptors: knowledge, skills, complexity, autonomy/responsibility, adaptability, and communication.

The level descriptors in the Moroccan NQF are formulated with a degree of detail and can serve as a reference for stakeholders and practitioners involved in designing competence standards, learning programmes and assessment standards. When opting for the eventual domains, stakeholders took account of key needs such as communication skills and adaptability.

Analysis and placement of qualifications in the NQF levels was conducted on an experimental basis in 2015-2016, for middle and higher level qualifications in the construction and automotive sectors.

By recommendation of the Department of Professional Training (DFP, within the Ministry of Education), in a measure aimed at supporting practical application of the principles of the NQF, vocational training operators are required to consider the NQF level descriptors in the development of standards (*referential*) and programmes. This recommendation is in its initial stage of implementation.

Types of qualifications
The NQF Reference Document (2013) defines the types of qualifications allocated by levels.

The Moroccan NQF is structured in eight levels. Table 2, in Section 10 below, shows the correspondence between the NQF levels and education levels/respective diplomas, according to the NQF Reference Document.

Quality assurance of qualifications

Higher education

The country's National Agency for Assessment and Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Scientific Research (ANEAQ)was established[988] in 2014 by Law 80-12 on 21 August 2014[989].The agency is mandated to quality assure programmes and institutions in higher education, and in scientific research. Indicating its aspiration to support

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988. https://www.aneaq.ma/en/aneaq_en/
989. https://www.aneaq.ma/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/loi_aneaq.pdf

excellence, the website of ANEAQ opens with the keyword: "Evaluate to evolve".

In higher education[990], the introduction of the principle of quality assurance was based on the three main measures stipulated by Law 01-00 on higher education. The principle of evaluation of institutions is a lever for reform and is characterised by:
- its global nature, regularity, and ex-post approach
- mandatory self-evaluation for all higher education institutions (public and private)
- the obligation to disclose the results of evaluation to the bodies at national and regional levels
- the obligation to inform the public of the evaluation results
- audits and evaluations by specialised and independent institutions.

ANEAQ started operations in 2016, and in 2017-2018 conducted two rounds of external evaluation of programmes. During this period, over 1,600 programmes provided by public and private higher education institutions were evaluated. These were, in 2017, 771 programmes in public institutions and 255 in private institutions. In 2018, the numbers were 293 public and 323 private. In addition, ANEAQ conducted an evaluation of progress and a monitoring of a sample of programmes that had been accredited in 2017 (157 programmes in the 12 public universities). For details on the evaluation, see ANEAQ (2018), *Rapport d'évaluation et de suivi d'un échantillon de filières à accès régulé accréditées au titre de la session 2017*[991]. The pilot round of the evaluation[992] of higher education institutions in 2020-2021, which focused on 17 establishments, was successfully completed and the conclusions discussed at a high-level webinar in April 2021.

ANEAQ presented a first self-evaluation report - a starting point for the first pilot *external* evaluation of ANEAQ conducted in November 2018 - under the auspices of the project of the Africa-EU Partnership's project HAQAA. The report of the external evaluation[993] examined ANEAQ's compliance against specified African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)[994].

A fundamental development is the adoption by decree, on 11 July 2019, of the National Referential (Standard) of Evaluation and Quality Assurance[995], which defines the fields, references and criteria applied to all institutions of higher education and scientific research. The *referential* defines the processes of quality assurance :
- **Quality assurance:** processes and mechanisms for assessing the degree of achievement of objectives and agreeing on methods of continuous improvement of the institution's activities.
- **Evaluation:** a systematic audit process to measure the institution's ability to meet specific requirements and achieve specific objectives by comparing the level of performance to the institution's criteria or expectations. Its objective is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the institution given the public nature of the response and of the reports.
- **Internal assessment:** self-assessment conducted by the institution, formalised in a report called the "self-assessment report", which is addressed to a committee of external experts.
- **External assessment:** assessment conducted by independent experts external to the institution, who have no interest that could affect their judgement.
- **Quality audit:** a periodic process of quality analysis of the higher education institution or its affiliated units, by independent pairs, to verify compliance with quality requirements and to propose necessary changes.

Vocational education

The Department of Vocational Training (DFP) is tasked with the authorisation of programmes, and the accreditation and control of private professional training (providers, training programmes, quality).

In addition, DFP coordinates the policy of the subsector and in this role undertakes initiatives enabling better quality processes and the overall performance of the subsystem. Since 2014, a system of performance monitoring has been in development, of which the quality assurance framework is a component. Practical implementation is underway, currently focusing on self-evaluation of public and private providers of professional education.

Other elements of quality assurance in vocational education comprise a) the methodology of the Competence-Based Approach (*Approche par Compétences*, *APC*) and b) the regular surveys

990. Principal legal acts in higher education can be found here: https://www.aneaq.ma/textes-juridiques-2/

991. https://www.aneaq.ma/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Rapport_Visites_Evaluation_ANEAQ_Fr.pdf

992. http://www.aneaq.ma/bilan-de-la-vague-pilote-devaluation-des-etablissements-de-lenseignements-superieur2020-2021/

993. https://www.aneaq.ma/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/ANEAQ-RAPPORT_HAQAA_VF.pdf

994. https://haqaa.aau.org/activities/african-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-asg-qa/

995. https://www.aneaq.ma/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/referentiel-national-ANEAQ.pdf

of employment outcomes and further education of graduates (graduate tracer studies), whose methodology and coverage is currently undergoing substantial upgrading.

The scope of quality assurance of private professional training encompasses authorisation of programmes and accreditation of establishments, and is regulated as follows:
Authorisation of private establishments of professional training[996]: Feasibility study, pedagogic project, training project, administrative file.

Qualification of programmes of private establishments of professional training[997]: To assure compliance with standards and pedagogic and training conditions.

Accreditation of private establishments of professional training[998]: Gives authorisation to carry out examinations and deliver diplomas officially recognised by the state.

Control of private establishments of professional training[999]: the Department of Vocational Education (DFP) exercises the functions of pedagogic and administrative control.

Use of learning outcomes and standards

Use of learning outcomes in Vocational education and training

Learning outcomes as the basis for qualifications is a well-rooted approach in VET. In Morocco, the *Approche par Compétences* (APC) has been continuously promoted by the government and has gathered substantial experience through more than a decade of methodological developments, programme design and implementation, and training of APC specialists.

The notion of *competence* in the APC has distinct nuances:
- specific competence transversal competence
- output competence to be achieved at the end of a programme – described in the training project (matrix of competences, or training objects): listed in the transcript of competences
- specific descriptors – described in the APC component "Analysis of the work situation"

(AST): cognitive and motor skills, complexity, communication.

The successive APC / REAPC projects conducted between 2003 and 2016 resulted in the design and review of 159 programmes of all qualification levels of the professional training system. There were 130 APC programmes that were effectively implanted and launched in 213 public and private institutions. The APC methodological framework is detailed in a package of 17 guides and support materials.
- The website of the project REAPC[1000] published a large library of technical-methodological documentation and provides access to detailed information on all components of the approach.
- The Moroccan APC is an ecosystem to govern professional training. More than a methodological package for design of competence standards, programmes and assessment, the APC includes instruments to identify and analyse skills needs by sectors, and to evaluate the performance of professional training as a system.
- The APC methodological framework of the last generation (2015) is online[1001] and is structured and includes 11 guides.

Use of learning outcomes in Higher education

In higher education, the regulatory framework defines the rules for design of programmes (for accreditation) at all cycles and levels. The detailed structure for programmes leading to qualifications is provided in the National Pedagogic Standards (CNPN). These standards are specific for each qualification level and type. Programmes for accreditation include, among the essential components, objectives of training, competences to be acquired, employment opportunities of the qualification, admission conditions, pathways, and links with other programmes. All programmes are structured in modules of learning.

996. http://www.dfp.gov.ma/formation-professionnelle-privee/autorisation-des-efpp.html#le-projet-de-formation
997. http://www.dfp.gov.ma/formation-professionnelle-privee/qualification-des-filieres-de-fpp.html
998. http://www.dfp.gov.ma/formation-professionnelle-privee/accreditation-des-efpp.html
999. http://www.dfp.gov.ma/formation-professionnelle-privee/controle-des-efpp.html

1000. http://www.reapcmaroc.com/pages/publications_alpha.php
1001. http://www.reapcmaroc.com/pages/pub/l.php?I=3

Level descriptors of NQF compared to learning outcomes of qualifications

Testing of the "Guide on analysis and positioning of qualifications in the NQF", carried out in 2016 on two existing qualifications in higher education and two in vocational education shed light on the extent to which the learning outcomes formulated in the programmes documentation meet/match the descriptors of the assigned NQF levels.

The comparison with each of the six categories of descriptors shows that some categories are more explicitly represented in the programmes' learning outcomes than others, for example, knowledge and skills are better represented than communication and adaptability.

Use of Professional and qualifications standards

Répertoire Emplois-Métiers (REM) / Référentiel Emplois-Compétences (REC)

The REM and the REC list and classify competences by occupations within a sector. As an example, the collection REM/REC for the construction sector[1002] shows how the definition and hierarchisation of competences becomes more fine-grained in the REC, whereas the REM has a more explicit orientation to the features of the professional profile. There are 716 REM and 815 REC developed for a total of 18 sectors.

REM and REC are important references for the process of developing units of competence, programmes, and qualifications in professional education. REM/REC are sectoral classifications of occupational standards and competence profiles. Morocco has invested in developing REM/REC for 18 sectors. REM and REC are developed by professional branches and sector ministries (Tourism, Industry and others), with methodological support from DFP and involvement of the public employment institution (ANAPEC). 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 of the occupations (by sector) to reinforce coherence between learning outcomes (expressing enterprises' needs) and VET programmes. In this perspective, REM and REC contribute to the

transparency and quality of training and qualification outcomes. Finally, REM and REC are sound foundations to establish mechanisms for validation of non-formal and informal learning, and elements of career information and guidance.

In higher education

The main reference for development of programmes for accreditation in higher education are the *Cahiers des Normes Pédagogiques Nationales* (CNPN[1003]). The regulatory framework defines the rules for design of programmes (for accreditation) at all cycles and levels, and the structure of programmes. These standards are specific for each qualification level and type.

Credit systems
The core strategic and legislative base of education and training, such as the Law 01-00 on higher education and the Law 51-17 on education recognise the importance of better organised pathways between subsystems and education institutions and the introduction of *passerelles* to foster reintegration of learners, continuation of studies and reskilling in a lifelong perspective.

The higher education subsystem undertook pilot initiatives to develop a credit accumulation and training system, in cooperation with EU-supported projects. But a credit system has not yet been set in legislation and mainstreamed. In the subsystem of vocational education and national education, the adoption of a credit system is not considered a priority now.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF
By a delegation of the Government Presidency, of June 2019, the Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education, and Scientific Research (MENFPESRS) currently coordinates and leads development of the NQF. However, the Ministry and the NQF Permanent Commission have begun consulting on the set-up of a new independent body which will manage the NQF. This new agency is planned to be established in 2021 to operationalise and implement the NQF.

The Ministry (MENFPESRS) currently exercises overall lead of the NQF. It is responsible, in particular, for the approval of educational standards, for the coordination and quality assurance of

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1002. http://dfp.gov.ma/images/pdfdocs/2016/REM-REC/Classeur%20des%20REMREC%20du%20secteur%20BTP.pdf

1003. https://www.aneaq.ma/document-de-referance/cnpn/

development of APC programmes for VET qualifications and occupational standards (REM/REC), and for management of the database of VET APC programmes and standards.

Further, two other bodies are involved in the governance of the NQF, as follows:

- the National NQF Steering Commission, which is composed of ministers and the President of the Employers' Confederation (CGEM). It was created in June 2019, by letter 10/2019 of the Government Presidency, on 28 June 2019. It provides strategic guidance for the NQF's development and implementation.
- the NQF Permanent Commission, which was created by Decision 489 of the Minister of Education, on 26 July 2019. It is a multi-stakeholder commission, including the employers' confederation (CGEM), and is entrusted with the mission to consolidate and operationalise the NQF.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The Permanent Commission is composed of twenty members and is mandated to lay the ground for the NQF and to prepare for the establishment the future independent institutions, as defined by the Framework Law 51-17 on Education and by the Strategic Vision of Reform 2015-2030. The operational core of the commission is composed of seven permanent members with complementary profiles and representing the three subsystems – national education (which includes vocational education and training), professional training and higher education.

Decision 489 of 26 July 2019 defines the mission and the functions of the Permanent Commission as follows:
Mission:
Consolidation and launch of operations of the NQF
- Lay a coherent groundwork between the components of the NQF system
- Contribute to preparation of the specifications of the future national instance of the NQF to be created
- Participate in the implementation of validation of competences from experience (VAE)

Functions:
A. Consolidation and launch of the NQF operations
- Ensure coordination among the various stakeholders
- Put in place a monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the NQF
- Build capacity of the stakeholders

B. operationalisation of the NQF
- Define the approach and procedures for processing of applications for levelling and registration of qualifications on:
  o eligibility conditions of the application and components of the application file o submission of the application
- Register certifications in the register (*repertoire*)
- Define quality standards, as references for analysis of qualifications in view of their registration
- Define the configuration and components of the register (*repertoire*) of qualifications
- Set a standardised description of certifications
- Define templates and forms
- Define the terms of reference for the NQF information system, including the register, the NQF portal and interactions between stakeholders and NQF staff. Ensure the institutionalisation of the various components of the NQF.

C. reflection and advice:
- Submit proposals concerning the elaboration of the governance and organisation of the qualification system
- Define the quality process of the NQF, notably the register
- Analyse projects of international cooperation and institutional twinning projects
- Examine the referencing/reconciliation possibilities of the Moroccan NQF to national/international, multinational meta-frameworks including the meta-framework of the European Union (EQF)
- Contribute to defining the national NQF agency/institution (Framework Law 51-17)
- Contribute to the proposal on a VAE system (procedures, tools, information system, system of assessment and validation of skills / competences).

The composition of the new NQF Permanent Commission includes key players from labour market institutions, professional branches and the employers' confederation.
- ANAPEC: The National Agency for Promotion of Employment and Competences is the public employment agency, implements and coordinates active labour market policies, including training. ANAPEC has a key role in overseeing the *Repertoires Emploi-Metier* (REM).
- The Labour Market Observatory[1004]: Monitors and anticipates labour market and skills dynamics, evaluates employment policies,

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1004. https://www.travail.gov.ma/mtip-espace-observatoire-nationale-du-marche-du-travail/?lang=fr

analyses job vacancies and employers' demand for skills and qualifications.

- The General Confederation of the Enterprises of Morocco (CGEM[1005]): A committed participant of the NQF development process for more than a decade, CGEM's Training Commission participated in actions of NQF methodology experimentation and qualifications transparency projects.
- The Branch Observatory (OdB[1006]): established in 2014 under the auspices of CGEM to support the sectors in coping with rapid economic and technological change and in particular to analyse occupational change and produce the competence standards for continuing training.

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

VNFIL (VAE) arrangements

The Strategic Vision 2015-2013 foresees the development of a system of validation of learning outcomes from experience (VAE): "Adopt a unified system of validation of individuals' cognitive and professional achievements, overseen by an independent national body, where the various departments of education and training and professional sectors will be represented" (Lever 19, pg. 70).

DFP, in partnership with sector federations and sector ministries, carried out several VAE projects[1007] in sectors with high demand for qualified workers:

- 2008-2010: in construction, 138 candidates were awarded qualifications for 13 sector occupations, at three NQF levels: q*ualification* (NQF Level 3), *technicien* (NQF Level 4) and *technicien spécialisé* (NQF Level 5). 320 candidates and 62 enterprises participated.
- 2011-2012: in the textile/garments sector, 19 candidates were awarded certificates.
- In the follow-up of these successful projects, between 2012-2016, the ministry promoted additional VAE projects in different regions, in construction (100 candidates), hotels (200 candidates) and meat processing (400 candidates).

The VAE process is structured in four phases, according to DFP's VAE Handbook:

1. Information and counselling of the candidates: On the VAE process and its requirements, preliminary screening of the professional experience in view of the envisaged certification.
2. Admissibility: Instruct the application file and decide on the eligibility.
3. Follow-up: Support the candidate in the preparation of the Dossier of Description of Professional Experience and prepare for the process of certification.
4. Certification: The jury decides on the validation of the competences from professional experience – on the base of the certification standard.

The qualifications awarded as the outcome of a VAE process do not have the same value and standing as qualifications from formal VET, because the required legislation is not in place yet.

The NQF Permanent Commission is mandated to prepare the premises and legal-regulatory basis for establishment a functioning VAE system. This line of work will be fostered within the EU institutional twinning supporting the NQF, planned to start in Autumn 2020.

The *Agence Nationale de Lutte contre l'Analphabetisme* (ANLCA, or Alphabetisation Agency) offers validation of prior learning to beneficiaries in six specialised centres.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings

The NQF (*CNC*) is part of the national education and training system, although not yet regulated by a legal text. It comprises a set of principles, a concept of qualification levels and a vision for its implementation. But it is also an already-established foundation that needs to be built further upon. For its development, actors can draw on its reference history, achievements and experience gained.

The NQF's technical and methodological foundations include the REM-REC system, the competencebased approach (APC), the quality assurance framework (in particular in higher education), the basic elements for a future VNFIL / VAE system, and soon also a digitalised database of vocational training programmes and standards.

These foundations also include an essential element of any NQF: active socio-economic partners committed to a more explicit and above all functional NQF - the CGEM, the Sectoral Observatory and other professional organisations.

Two components of the qualifications system are not yet in place: a credit accumulation and transfer system and VNFIL /VAE. On the bright side, it is

1005 https://www.cgem.ma/
1006 https://observatoire.ma/
1007 http://www.dfp.gov.ma/vaep.html

worth noting that the conceptual and technical basis of the credit system in higher education have been studied with European partners. It is also expected that VNFIL / VAE can build on lessons from pilot projects and will be able to move towards a better articulation with the NQF, allowing the granting of certifications fully integrated into the NQF. Both components – the credit system and VAE – should be further considered from the angle of their contribution to progression and mobility of individuals throughout life, and the NQF is a major enabler of that strategy.

The certificates awarded through the national functional literacy programme are real opportunities for thousands of Moroccans to access education and training and qualifications placed in the NQF. Here, the framework can demonstrate its added value to social inclusion aims and its capacity to contribute to change.

Qualifications registers and databases
The number of programmes leading to qualifications offered in the subsystems of educations and training can be summarized as follows:
- *Brevet de technicien supérieur*: 22 programmes
- Vocational education (public and private): 347 programmes, distributed over four levels (2018-2019)
- Public higher education institutions: 2,345 (2018-2019).

The definition of the components and configuration of the *repertoire* of all qualifications, aligned with NQF levels and principles, is one of the tasks assigned to the NQF Permanent Commission.

In 2021 the Department of Vocational Education, working in cooperation with the EU project FORCAP, will launch a comprehensive register of VET programmes and standards.

Approved education programmes and related qualifications from the key subsystems – general education, VET and higher education – are organised in different and separate instruments: a) databases for internal use of the relevant ministerial departments, not open for public users; b) information on courses, programmes and qualifications published on the websites of different subsystems of MENFPESRS, and of education and training institutions, such as OFPPT, training centres and higher education institutions. This information on programmes and qualification is concise. The exception is the OFPPT website, which offers details on the content of each professional qualification.

The website of the Department of Higher Education[1008] publishes information on diplomas from all types of higher education institutions, public and private, and establishments classified as Schools, Academies, and Institutes. These latter providers are distinct from the universities and offer a range of subject domains e.g. health, textiles, architecture, fine arts. The same website publishes the updated list of the accredited programmes of private higher education institutions[1009]. However, a similar detailed list for public higher education institutions is not available on the website.

The Department of National Education created a separate Portal of BTS[1010] (*Brevet de Technicien Supérieur* – BTS). The portal contains information on the organisation of this qualification and its programmes. The list of BTS programmes[1011] indicates, without details on learning outcomes and organisation, the 22 programmes in two sectors leading to BTS diplomas.

The DFP website page on Youth publishes information on available courses and qualifications, namely, a) a detailed list of programmes of public providers[1012], distributed by qualification levels and by region and b) a list of programmes of accredited private providers[1013]. Information on content and learning outcomes of these programmes and qualifications is not published on the website.

The Space REM/REC[1014] of the DFP website contains a (partial) list of Repertoires *Emploi-Metier* (REM) and the *Referentials Emploi-Compétences* (REC), which represent a reference base for programmes of the subsystem. All published REM/REC contain the full content (tasks, competences) and can be used as reference by any stakeholder. Until January 2020, a total of 716 REM and 815 REC had been developed for 18 sectors. In 2021 the new online register of all REM-REC, managed by ANAPEC, will be launched.

The Website of the major public VET provider, OFPPT[1015] offers easy access to complete and detailed information on the existing programmes and qualifications VET for both types of credentials, namely, a) diplomas and b) certificates of

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1008. https://www.enssup.gov.ma/fr/Page/165-dipl%C3%B4mes-et-formations
1009. https://www.enssup.gov.ma/fr/Page/165-dipl%C3%B4mes-et-formations
1010. https://e-bts.men.gov.ma/fr/Pages/Accueil.aspx
1011. https://e-bts.men.gov.ma/Fr/BTS/Pages/Filieres.aspx
1012. http://dfp.gov.ma/offre-de-formation.html
1013. http://dfp.gov.ma/offre-de-formation/privee-accreditee.html
1014. http://dfp.gov.ma/offre-de-formation/privee-accreditee/307.html
1015. https://www.ofppt.ma/index.php/fr/organigramme

qualification. The page "Find a training programme" ("*Trouvez une formation*") displays the full repertoire of all programmes and qualification level – with concise information in standardised format on the occupational profile, learning outcomes, course organisation, occupations, and training providers. For more details: example of qualification "Technician in Office Secretariat"[1016], of level *Technicien Spécialisé*.

Qualification documents
The format of diplomas and certificates awarded on the basis of accredited and quality assured formal education and training is defined by the legislation.

Recognition of foreign qualifications
Information about recognition of foreign qualifications in Morocco[1017] is available for users on the website of the MENESFPRS. E-equivalence[1018] is the new online recognition platform, enabling application of remote procedures.

The National Agency for the Evaluation and Assurance of the Quality of Higher Education and Scientific Research (ANEAQ) is responsible for the recognition of diplomas and degrees. Law 6716[1019] of 22 September 2016, amending the provisions of Law 80-12 relating to the ANEAQ, allows the Agency to "conduct expert work on applications for equivalency applications for graduate degrees".

Most applicants are Moroccan students returning home and seeking either recognition of study periods abroad for continuation of studies in Morocco or seeking public sector employment, which requires officially recognised diplomas. It is expected that the future introduction of ECTS will allow more efficient recognition processes and practices.

Morocco is one of the four participating Southern Mediterranean countries of the Meric-Network project[1020].

Morocco's internationalisation strategy builds on improving links and cooperation with higher education institutions in the EU and Africa and supporting common efforts to strengthen vocational education and training with countries in Africa.

Morocco has cooperated with the EU and with sub-Saharan Africa on international students' mobility. A growing number of foreign students are registered in Moroccan higher education institutions, which is the first French-speaking African country to welcome African students (more than 75 per cent from sub-Saharan Africa) and the second overall after South Africa.

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks
Morocco aspires to compare its NQF to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). At the same time, the Government has expressed its commitment to join the ACQF development process and work for common objectives for qualifications in the continent.

The conceptual-technical design of the Moroccan NQF reveals the openness of the country to international developments, notably to the European Qualifications Framework and the Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA-QF, in the Bologna Process).

International cooperation
Morocco participates in several regional and cross-country initiatives and projects in QFs, notably the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) project.

ANEAQ is a member of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE)[1021] and participates in the Africa-EU Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation initiative[1022], including the piloting of ASG-QA.

International donor support
The EU is one the major donors supporting VET modernisation, in the country. The EU assists Morocco's labour migration policy through THAMM, a regional project implemented by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. Support to employment policy and labour market intelligence forms part of cooperation projects with the Ministry of Labour.

Other important bilateral partners are France, Germany and the United States.

1016. https://www.ofppt.ma/fr/filieres-de-formations/ technicien-en-secretariat-et-bureautique
1017 https://www.enssup.gov.ma/en#
1018. https://equivalence.enssup.gov.ma/login
1019. http://www.sgg.gov.ma/BO/FR/2019/BO_6774_ fr.pdf?ver=2019-05-11-150701-157
1020. http://www.meric-net.eu/en/index.aspx

1021. anqahe.org
1022. https://haqaa.aau.org/

Important lessons and future plans

The key building blocks enabling the operationalisation of the NQF are in place, namely: a) a supportive policy and legal basis, and a reform strategy that recognises the role of the NQF for formal education and validation of competences acquired via experience and non-formal learning; b) dynamic actions to establish the NQF governing institution in 2021, working in cooperation with the stakeholder group, the NQF Permanent Commission, and a budget to support NQF operations; c) a regulatory and technical-methodological framework underpinning the development, adoption and renewal of qualifications in all subsystems of education and training; d) a functioning quality assurance system in higher education, but still developing in VET; and e) professional branches and an employers' confederation committed to good qualifications and a transparent qualifications framework.

Knowledge gained during the decade-long dialogue and construction of the technical-institutional setup of the NQF are valuable to guide the Permanent Commission and the NQF Operational Institution in the new phase starting in 2021. These include the importance of flexibility, a common vision, transparent partnerships with professional organisations and the employers' confederation, evidence and experimentation and action for both quick wins and for medium-term results. The inertia that set in during long periods of disruption to the NQF dialogue and activities has had high costs for the process, seen in loss of know-how and a

diminishing of trust among actors. The slowdown of NQF activities in the period 2017-2019 has also adversely affected progress, but in 2021 the country may benefit from a range of enablers of the NQF, provided that there is leadership and political will.

Establishment of the new NQF governing institution with sufficient resources, management capacity and budget, is likely to prove a challenging undertaking at a moment of political transition after the September 2021 elections. The draft decree on the establishment of this new NQF agency is in consultation and is likely to be approved by mid-2021. This national NQF institution is an essential condition for the design and launch of the planned EU Twinning project.

Moreover, a new opportunity for cooperation with NQFs in the EU emerged in 2021, thanks to the start-up of the pilot phase of the comparison of NQFs and RQFs of third regions and continents with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Morocco may be a pilot country for this comparison, conditional on meeting the criteria and procedures which guide the process. One of the principal criteria set by the EU to initiate the comparison process is the operational capacity to support NQF implementation.

Technical cooperation to support implementation of the NQF is provided via the partnership with the EU. Ongoing projects with the DFP and ANAPEC supported the launch in 2020 of the national online Repertoire of all professional training at all levels and of all types and of the online register of REMREC.

NQF overview table

Table 56. NQF level and correspondence with levels and diplomas of the subsectors of education and training

NQF LEVEL	NATIONAL EDUCATION	VOCATIONAL TRAINING	HIGHER EDUCATION
1	• Mid-primary	• Certificat de Formation Professionnelle (CFP)	
2	• Primary	• Spécialisation	
3	• CE9	• Qualification	
4	• Baccalauréat (Bac), • Bac Professionnel (Bac Pro)	• Technicien	
5 (Bac+2)	• Brevet de technicien supérieur (BTS)	• Technicien spécialisé	• Diplôme Études Universitaires Générales (DEUG) • Diplôme des Études Universitaires Professionnelles (DEUP) • Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie (DUT)
6 (Bac+3)			• Licence Études Fondamentales (LF) • Licence Professionnelle

NQF LEVEL	NATIONAL EDUCATION	VOCATIONAL TRAINING	HIGHER EDUCATION
7 (Bac+5)			• Master (M) • Master spécialisé (MS) • Master Sciences et Techniques (MST) • Diplôme d'ingénieur (DI) • Diplôme de l'ENCG et diplôme de traduction
8 (Bac+8)			• Doctorat (D)

Note: "Bac" stands for Baccalauréat (diploma awarded at the conclusion of secondary education)

Source: Adapted from the Montenegrin Ministry of Education, 2014.

Abbreviations

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework	EQF	European Qualifications Framework
AFDB	African Development Bank	ETF	European Training Foundation
ANAPEC	National Agency of Promotion of Employment and Competences	EU	European Union
		HCP	Haut-Commissariat au Plan
ANEAQ	National Agency for Evaluation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Scientific Research	LMD	Licence Master Doctorat
		MENFPESRS	ministère de l'Éducation Nationale Formation Professionnelle Enseignement Supérieur et Recherche Scientifique
ANLCA	National Agency for the Fight Against Illiteracy/Alphabetisation Agency		
		NQF	National Qualifications Framework
ANQAHE	Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	OdB	Observatory of Professions and Competences of Professional Branches (Observatoire des Branches)
ASG-QA	African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance		
Bac	Baccalauréat	OFPPT	Office de la Formation Professionnelle et de la Promotion du Travail
BTS	Brevet de Technicien Supérieur		
CFP	Certificate of Professional Training		
CGEM	Confédération Générale des Entreprises du Maroc	QF-EHEA	Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area
CNPN	Cahiers des Normes Pédagogiques Nationales	REM	Répertoire Emplois-Métiers
		REC	Référentiel Emplois-Compétences
CSEFRS	Higher Council of Education, Training and Scientific Research	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
		VAE	Validation of outcomes of experience
CSMD	Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle de Développement		
		VET	Vocational education and training
BTS	Brevet de Technicien Supérieur	VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
DFP	Department of Professional Training		

Main sources of information

ANAPEC: http://anapec.org/sigec-app-rv/

ANEAQ: https://www.aneaq.ma/

General Confederation of Enterprises of Morocco: https://www.cgem.ma/

Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research: https://www.men.gov.ma/Fr/Pages/Accueil.aspx

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Loi n° 02.12 relative à la nomination aux emplois supérieurs bdj.mmsp.gov.ma/Fr/Document/8622-la-loi-organique-n-02

Loi n° 80.12 relative à l'Agence nationale d'évaluation et d'assurance qualité de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche scientifique. www.aneaq.ma/wp-content/uphttp://www.aneaq.ma/wpcontent/uploads/2020/03/BO_6510_-Fr_modif-equiv.pdfloads/2019/08/loi_aneaq.pdf

Loi n° 67-16 modifiant les dispositions de la loi n° 80-12 relative à l'Agence nationale d'évaluation et d'assurance qualité de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche scientifique. http://www.aneaq.ma/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/BO_6510_-Fr_modif-equiv.pdf

Loi Cadre n° 51-17 sur l'éducation, de formation et de recherche scientifique. http://www.sgg.gov.ma/Portals/0/BO/2020/BO_6944_Fr.pdf?ver=2020-12-24-133647-943

Loi n° 60.17 relative à l'organisation de la formation continue au profit des salariés du secteur privé, de certaines catégories de personnels des établissements et entreprises public et d'autres personnes non-salariées qui exercent une activité privée. http://www.sgg.gov.ma/BO/FR/2019/BO_6774_fr.pdf?ver=2019-05-11-150701-157

Loi 50.17 relative à l'organisation du secteur de l'artisanat mtataes.gov.ma/fr/blog/2020/06/30/adoption de la loi relative à l'organisation du secteur de l'artisanat

Loi 38.12 portant statut des chambres de commerce, d'industrie et des services www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_isn=100139

Prepared by

The European Training Foundation

MOZAMBIQUE

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

The country report on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of Mozambique[1023], elaborated in the context of the Mapping Study of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) project is the main source of information used in this country fiche. Several chapters of this fiche benefited of information updates, especially about the final steps in agreeing the comprehensive 10-levels NQF (July 2021) and the adoption of legislation on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (August 2021).

The qualifications framework experience in Mozambique started in 2010, with the adoption of the qualifications framework for higher education (QUANQES), by decree n° 30/2010. With the approval of the Law n° 6/2016 on professional education, amending the Law on Professional Education n° 23/2014, the 5-levels Professional NQF received legal status (QNQP).

The QNQP is effective in the sub-system of vocational education and training (TVET) and works in complementarity with the Quality Assurance System (SGQEP), and the System of Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SQTCEP), as defined by the Law n°6/2016. The online qualifications register - *Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações Profissionais* (CNQP)[1024] linked with the QNQP is accessible on the website of the National Authority of Professional Education (ANEP), the lead QNQP institution. Currently the CNQP has 151 qualifications and 19 independent modules, distributed in 15 sectors.

The National Council for Evaluation of Quality in Higher Education (CNAQ) is responsible for implementation of QUANQES. Currently the register of CNAQ has 368 higher education qualifications (levels 7 to 10 - of the new comprehensive NQF), distributed in 7 sectors.

The *system of recognition of acquired competences* (SRCA / RPL) has an important development in 2021, with the adoption of decree n°58/2021 of 17 August 2021, which gives SRCA legal status and defines its scope, principles, and implementation modalities. SRCA applies to vocational education and training, not to other sub-systems of the national education system. Operationalisation of SRCA has started, with training of SRCA professionals, and pilot implementation with 45 candidates.

CNAQ is the institution coordinating and facilitating the national process development process of the new comprehensive NQF. This process has reached its final milestones: the wider consultation with different stakeholder groups and introduction in the approval process of the NQF decree until end 2021. The NQF level structure, level descriptors, and distribution of qualifications by levels have been agreed: 10 levels (from qualification of Primary education to doctorate degree). The decree establishing the new NQF will include provisions regarding other essential operational elements such as the NQF coordination organ and the National Qualifications Catalogue.

While the two sectoral qualifications frameworks (higher education and TVET) are at the operational stage, the new comprehensive framework is at the adoption stage.

Policy context

Mozambique borders the United Republic of Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Eswatini. Its long Indian Ocean coastline of 2,500 kilometers faces east to Madagascar. About

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1023. *ACQF mapping study: Mozambique.* 2020. Country report. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. Author: E. Castel-Branco. https://www.nepad.org/skillsportalforyouth/publication/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-mappingstudy

1024. http://www.anep.gov.mz/QUALIFICA%C3%87%C3%95ES/Qualifica%C3%A7%C3%B5es

two-thirds of its population of more than 31 million (2020) live and work in rural areas. It is endowed with ample arable land, water, energy, as well as mineral resources and newly discovered natural gas offshore; three, deep seaports; and a relatively large potential pool of labour. It is also strategically located; four of the six countries it borders are landlocked, and hence dependent on Mozambique as a conduit to global markets. Mozambique's strong ties to the region's economic engine, South Africa, underscore the importance of its economic, political, and social development to the stability and growth of Southern Africa as a whole.

The Republic of Mozambique adopted a holistic National Development Strategy (2015-2035)[1025], whose vision for Mozambique is of a prosperous, competitive, sustainable, secure and inclusive country. The development model is based on integrated policies and geared towards generation of wealth to assure improved living conditions of the population and fair income distribution. The strategy is oriented to transform, expand and diversify the economy, by promoting industrialisation. This process is seen as the result of the interaction of policies in four pillars: a) human capital development; b) organisation and construction of physical infrastructure of productive nature; c) research, innovation and technological development in the areas of agriculture, animal production and fishery, energy, mineral resources, management of water resources and information technologies; and d) institutional capacity, articulation and coordination.

In the definition of the pillars of industrialisation, the National Development Strategy (2015-2035) gives high priority to the role of education and training and calls for massive investment in training for middle- and higher-level qualifications in areas of current and prospective demand of the economy. Investment in training should go hand in hand with measures to retain specialised and trained human resources, minimising brain drain.

The International Monetary Fund reports[1026] that Mozambique has made significant progress in restoring macroeconomic stability, but challenges remain related to governance, business environment, rule of law and more recently a new surge of risks to peace and security. Mozambique's economic situation was improving until Tropical Cyclones Idai and Kenneth hit the country in March and April 2019, respectively, and as a result

the economic activity decelerated sharply. GDP growth declined from 3.3% to 1.8% between 2018 and 2019.

The World Bank[1027] reports that Mozambique's economy is expected to gradually recover in 2021, but substantial downside risks remain due to uncertainty surrounding the path of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. While the economy registered its first contraction in 2020 in nearly three decades, growth is expected to rebound over the medium-term, reaching about 4% by 2022. As the recent Mozambique Economic Update (March 2021) notes, the country needs to press ahead with its structural reform agenda as the pandemic subsides. In the near-term, measures to support viable firms and households would be crucial for a resilient and inclusive recovery. In the recovery phase, policies focusing on supporting economic transformation and job creation, especially for the youth, would be critical. Targeted interventions to support women and alleviate gender inequalities as well as to harness the power of mobile technology would support sustainable and inclusive growth in the medium term.

Another major challenge for the economy is to diversify away from the current focus on capital-intensive projects and low-productivity subsistence agriculture toward a more diverse and competitive economy, while strengthening the key drivers of inclusion, such as improved quality education and health service delivery, which could in turn improve social indicators.

Data of UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS)[1028] shows progress in enrolment rates at all levels of education. However, the country faces an important challenge to achieve a sustained increase of enrolment in secondary education and in higher education to levels commensurate with the national strategic objectives. Net enrolment rates in primary education increased by more than 10 percentage points between 2011 and 2019, reaching 97.6% (total) and 96.3% (female). Despite a growth of 9 percentage points in the same period, the gross enrolment ratio of secondary education (2017) was very low (35,41%). In higher education, the gross enrolment ratio grew from 4.9% in 2011 to 7.3% (2018), with a disadvantage for women (6.5%).

1025. http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/moz147210.pdf

1026. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/
Issues/2019/06/18/Republic-of-Mozambique-2019-
Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-
Statement-46996

1027. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mozambique/
overview

1028. http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/mz

NQF legal basis

The legal basis of the two operational sectoral qualifications frameworks comprises specific legal Acts, listed in 'References' of this report. The most important legal acts are:

- QUANQES: Decree Nr 30/2010: Regulation on the NQF for higher education
- QNQP: Law Nr 6/2016 on professional education, amending the Law on Professional Education Nr 23/2014. The law defines and interlinks all pillars of the subsystem, including the scope and principles of the QNQP, of the System of Credit Accumulation and Transfer in Professional Education (SATCEP) and of the Quality Assurance System (SGQEP).

Draft legal Acts (in consultation and adoption process)

- Decree on the unified NQF (revised in August 2021), establishing the Regulation of the NQF of Mozambique. In the final stage of consultation for approval (foreseen by end 2021).
- Decree on revised QUANQES, of March 2019

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

The chapter on education and training of the National Development Strategy (pages 23-24) recognises that Mozambique faces severe shortages of human resources in the technical-professional domain and requires the education and training system to continue the reforms to rapidly respond to demand. This call for reform implies closer collaboration with the private sector and employers in defining the set of needed competencies and in designing curricula. The specific orientations of the National Development Strategy 2015-2035 include:

- Increase training provisions relevant for the priority sectors: agriculture and animal production; mining and hydrocarbons; hydroelectric energy; construction.
- Associate education in higher education institutions with processes of validation of competencies to increase the competitiveness of graduates.
- Promote access, equity and expansion of technical-professional education
- Expand the project of higher education, science and technology and increase the number of graduates with scientific and technological qualifications.
- Develop a policy of public technical education with strong emphasis on science, information technology and systems and commercial activities.

- Develop strategic partnerships with the private sector to improve technical-professional education, in particular by strengthening internships in enterprises, work-based learning and co-funding of training.
- Develop a public system of labour market information, oriented to the wider public and providing learners and graduates timely information on employment opportunities.
- Strengthen and disseminate information on public employment training and active labour market measures, developed in cooperation with the world of work.

The Strategic Plan of Education 2013-2016 is concluded. The Ministry of Education and Human Development with UNESCO's support carried out the Review of Education Policies[1029], published in 2019. The report presents recommendations to the identified policy issues and challenges of the system, categorised in three domains:

- Policy and general planning of the system
- Policies for teacher training and professional development - Quality of education

The National Education System (SNE) is composed of six subsystems:

- Preschool education
- General education
- Adult education
- Professional education
- Education and training of teachers
- Higher education

In the period 2014-2018, Mozambique adopted two fundamental laws underpinning reforms of the structure of education and training and introducing new policy instruments geared to transparency, articulation and quality of qualifications: the Law n° 18/2018 on the National Education System and the Law n°6/2016 in the Professional Education (amending Law n° 23/2014). Since 2018, INDE[1030], the lead institution in curriculum planning and development under the Ministry of Education and Human Development, has carried out the reform of curriculum of primary education and of teacher training.

Aims of NQF

The objectives of the two co-existing sectoral frameworks (QUANCES and QNQP) are defined in the respective legal base and share some common features.

1029. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371701
1030. http://www.mined.gov.mz/IST/INDE/Pages/estrutura.aspx

a) Higher education:

QUANQES (Decree 30/2010) has the following objectives:

- Instrument to classify qualifications and courses of higher education.
- Integrate and coordinate the qualifications of different institutions, assure transparency in access, progression and quality of qualifications in relationship with the labour market and society.
- Main Objectives:
  - Establish parameters and common criteria for design of qualifications and to ease their comparability in the higher education subsystem;
  - Establish coherence and transparency in the higher education subsystem, easing
  - understanding and articulation of different qualifications in a uniform and harmonised system;
  - Facilitate harmonisation with the higher education subsystems of the region, in view of better mobility, employability and competitiveness.
- Principles: Equality, equity, transparency, and flexibility.

b) TVET: QNQP

- Structures the programmes, curriculum content and final outcomes of professional education in terms of qualifications and competencies of the workforce, combining them with level descriptors with the aim to improve the quality and relevance of professional education and contribute to employability of graduates and competitiveness of the national economy.
- Objectives:
  - Promote a professional education that responds to the requirements of the labour market and the development needs of the country.
  - Assure mechanisms for permanent dialogue, active participation and articulation among employers, workers, and civil society with the institutions of the system of professional education in the definition of the competence standards.
  - Establish a framework for equivalence between professional training acquired in the institutions and outside with the aim to recognise and valorise training in the labour market. o Provide qualified human resources and expand the supply of workforce for development.
  - Operationalise the principle of LLL, facilitating recognition of short-term courses and competencies acquired outside of training institutions. o Encourage flexible learning

pathways, permanent apprenticeship and continuous training of the workforce.
  - Provide a framework for equivalence between professional and general qualifications.
  - Establish the framework for evaluation and certification, in terms of professional outcomes. o Provide a base for the accumulation and transfer of credits in and between qualifications.
  - Align the national system of professional education with international and regional requirements, especially SADC.

Comprehensive NQF

The draft Decree defines seven objectives, briefly summarized as follows:

- To facilitate clarity and articulation of all qualifications in an integrated framework and promote competency-based education.
- Establish coherence and transparency of qualification in the frame of the national education system (SNE) and facilitate mobility and recognition of degrees and other qualifications.
- Define parameters to compare qualifications in the SNE. o Facilitate horizontal and vertical mobility of holders of qualifications within the SNE.
- Ensure the portability of qualifications, mobility of learners and workers, and lifelong learning.
- Facilitate alignment of national qualifications with Southern African Development Community Qualifications Frameworks (SADCQF) and other qualifications in Africa and in the world.
- Facilitate the access to qualifications offered within the context of the SNE through processes of recognition of acquired competencies.

Principles of the new comprehensive NQF: equality, equity, transparency, flexibility, mobility, internal adequacy, external adequacy, mandatory application, and technical authority.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

Scope

With the upcoming adoption of the comprehensive NQF, three sectoral qualifications frameworks will co-exist, but will be structured and function and under the umbrella of the comprehensive NQF: general education framework, vocational education and training framework and higher education framework. The draft decree of the comprehensive NQF indicates that:

- The new NQF will operate as a comprehensive national framework, defining common principles and descriptors, and the general procedures, standards and tools for the design, registration and revision of qualifications within the context of the SNE.
- At the same time, the sectoral frameworks will remain responsible for the definition of the specific procedures, technical standards and tools for the design, registration and revision of qualifications within the respective sectoral frameworks. These specific procedures and standards are to be compatible with those established by the unified NQF.

Levels

Currently, the two legally approved and operational qualifications frameworks are structured as follows:

1. **Higher education** (QUANCES)
- 3 cycles leading to degrees: Licenciatura (180-240 credits); Master (120 credits); Doctorate (180 credits).
- Short-term programmes (not degrees):
  - Graduation and postgraduation: certificate "A" (50-60 credits); certificate "B" (25-30 credits)
  - Specialisation: diploma of specialisation, at the level of second cycle (50-60 credits)

2. **QNQP** (vocational education and training) - 5 levels, two types of qualifications:
  - Vocational certificates: levels 1-5
  - Occupational certificates: levels 1-5

The QNQP's levels and level descriptors, as well as progression routes between levels are published at ANEP[1031].

3. **Levels of the comprehensive NQF** (draft decree in advanced consultation process towards approval by end 2021): 10 levels. The graphic representation of the structure of the future comprehensive NQF is presented in Chapter 10 of this fiche.

The draft Decree of the comprehensive NQF (revised in August 2021) defines a 10-level structure (refer to Chapter 10 of this fiche), based on the articulation of three sub-frameworks: general education and adult education (under the mandate of Ministry of Education and Human Development); vocational education and training (coordinated by ANEP), and higher education (coordinated by CNAQ).

1031. http://www.anep.gov.mz/
QUALIFICA%C3%87%C3%95ES/Quadro-Nacional-de-Qualifica%C3%A7%C3%B5es-Profissionais

The draft proposal (revised in August 2021) of the comprehensive NQF is inclusive of all types of qualifications in the TVET domain (vocational and occupational certificates) from levels 1 to 9 of the NQF, and when approved, this version of the NQF can represent a major reform of the qualifications system towards inclusiveness and articulation of all forms of learning and acquisition of qualifications.

The debate and negotiation towards the unified NQF in 2019-2021 have shed light on articulation issues between higher education, TVET and general education. This negotiation is visible in the discussion on positioning of qualifications in NQF levels, especially on the classification in the middle zone of the framework, where the higher levels of non-tertiary vocational education and upper-secondary interact higher education. Besides technical-methodological dimensions, the NQF development debate tackled aspects of governance and cooperation between subsystems to engineer a coherent and common language under the umbrella of the unified NQF.

Domains of learning - level descriptors

Despite their specificities, the two operational sectoral frameworks and the new comprehensive NQF share similarities as regards the domains of learning:
- QUANCES: Knowledge; skills; competence
- QNQP: Knowledge; skills; degree of autonomy and attitudes
- Comprehensive NQF: Knowledge; skills; autonomy and responsibility

The design of the (draft) comprehensive NQF has a double layer of level descriptors:
1. **Level descriptors of qualifications:** Characterise the learning outcomes of each level in general terms as a summary of knowledge, skills and competencies. The level descriptors act as references for the definition of the exit profile and the learning outcomes specific of each education and training programme leading to qualifications of the SNE. The level descriptors of the proposed unified NQF are presented in Annexure 1.2 of this report.
2. **Level descriptors by category of competence:** The summary of competence developed at each level comprises ten categories:
  - Knowledge
  - Application of knowledge
  - Methods and procedures
  - Problem-solving
  - Ethics and professional practice
  - Access, processing and management of information

- o Production and communication of information
- o Context and systems
- o Capacity to learn independently
- o Responsibility and accountability.

The level descriptors by category of competence have a purpose distinct from level descriptors of qualifications. They act as references for the definition of performance standards expected as learning outcomes in each education and training programme leading to a qualification of the SNE.

Types of qualifications

The legal-regulatory framework defines *Qualification as the formal result of an evaluation and validation process obtained when the learning results are achieved according to previously defined requirements*. This definition provided in QUANQES (Decree nº30/2010) has been confirmed in the draft decree of the comprehensive NQF (August 2021, Article 14) and applies to all sub-frameworks.

Higher education – QUANQES

QUANQES (Decree nº30/2010) established the types of qualifications as follow:

- **Certification** – The formal recognition of the successful realisation of a defined set of results.
- **Certificate** – A qualification conferred and relating to the successful completion of a course or study programme, distinct from a degree.
- **Diploma** – The qualification awarded in higher education after the successful completion of a postgraduate course or programme.
- **Degree** - The qualification conferred by higher education institutions after the successful completion of a cycle or program of studies.

TVET – QNQP

The operational QNQP has two types of qualifications:

- Vocational certificates (CV)
- Occupational certificates (CO)

Occupational certificates span Levels 1 to 5, as do Vocational certificates. The difference lies with the fact that occupational certificates certify learning outcomes of a predominantly practical nature, shaped through training and assessment with a lower proportion of theoretical learning, and a larger share of work-experience-related learning. comparison of the different types of competencies encapsulated in the two types of certificates. ANEP argues that the intrinsic value of the outcomes of COs is equivalent to the outcomes of CVs, justifying similar levelling for both types of qualifications in the unified NQF.

Quality assurance of qualifications
Higher education - QUANCES

QUANQES operates in close articulation with the National System of Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance (SINAQES). Decree n° 63/2007 laid down the legal base of SINAQES. The system is based on a sequence of processes: a) self-evaluation of higher education institutions, b) external evaluation, c) accreditation.

CNAQ submitted its first self-evaluation report[1032] in 2018, which laid down the reference points for the pilot external evaluation in the context of HAQAA to test the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)[1033]. CNAQ self-evaluation report aligned CNAQ with the ASG-QA. The report of external evaluation of CNAQ (HAQAA Initiative, 2018) was elaborated upon a mission to Mozambique and presents recommendations on compliance with African Standards and Guidelines (AG-QA) – Part B.

Mozambique participates in the project HAQAA of the Africa-EU Partnership. HAQAA focuses on harmonisation of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education.

TVET - QNQP

Law 6/2016 defines System of Registration, Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Professional Education (SNAQEP) as the overarching framework for quality assurance with multiple interconnected dimensions, spanning from implementation of the QNQP (levels, descriptors, qualifications standards, units of learning outcomes, registration in Catalogue of Qualifications) to accreditation of professional education institutions. Quality assurance is based on governance, rules and standards at macro- and microlevels.

At macro-level (national system) SNAQEP encompasses:

- QNQP
- Regulation on the design and validation of qualifications and skills standards
- Accreditation of professional education providers
- Registration and certification of trainers, evaluators and verifiers (internal and external)
- Quality assurance in the evaluation process

At micro-level (training institutions), SNAQEP involves:

- System of self-evaluation and external accreditation, which promotes bottom-up change, participation, transparency of

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1032. http://www.cnaq.ac.mz/index.php/estudante/relatorios
1033. https://haqaa.aau.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/ASG-QA_Manual_en_09.FINALE-with-License.pdf

management. It is based on the key areas: leadership, student school success, personnel management, programmes/curricula, teaching and learning, resource management, learning environment community involvement, school buy-in.

Use of learning outcomes and standards
The learning outcomes approach is well rooted in higher education TVET qualifications. The legal basis of both QUANCES and QNQP define learning outcomes as a principal component of the respective conceptual-technical design and implementation. Learning outcomes as a notion of policy, methodological and practical nature is rooted as a core pillar in the design of qualifications and related courses, application of credit accumulation and transfer system, application of quality assurance of programmes and for assessment of acquired learning.

The methodological underpinnings of qualifications and curriculum design, delivery and assessment are competency-based (units of learning outcomes, modules). Both subsystems developed and use a methodological framework and guidance materials to support providers and quality assurance experts in developing programmes and qualifications, and in evaluating them.

Higher education - QUANQES
In Article 6, Decree 30/2010 defines the four basic components for implementation of QUANQES: learning outcomes, knowledge, and skills and competencies.

The basic elements of the credit accumulation and transfer system include a) Learning outcomes, expressed in terms of competencies to be acquired, and b) Workload (Article 9 of decree 32/2010).

TVET - QNQP
The Law nº6/2016 on Professional Education defines that programmes and curricula of all levels and volume (duration, workload) are based on competence standards, in accordance with the QNQP, and are structured in a manner allowing the accumulation and transfer of credit. This rule applies to all types of professional education: technical-professional, professional training, and validation of competencies acquired out of education and training institutions. The applied methodological framework for design of qualifications and curricular modules is centred on units of competence (COREP, 2011a and 2011b). The Sectoral Technical Committees and the System of Quality Assurance (SNAQEP) guarantee that all qualifications and related programmes are based on the competence-based approach.

Comprehensive NQF (draft proposal)
In Article 1, the draft legal Act of the new NQF states that promotion of competency-based education is one of the objectives of the NQF. The NQF's level descriptors characterise the learning outcomes of a qualification at defined levels, in terms of knowledge, skills, and autonomy and responsibility.

Practical application

The subsystems of higher education and professional education defined principles, norms and procedures underpinning the processes of design, validation and renewal of qualifications and related programmes. Both subsystems developed methodological guidance and technical orientations for developers of programmes and for accreditation of qualifications aligned with the quality assurance frameworks and the systems of credit accumulation and transfer.

A fundamental difference between the two subsystems relates to autonomy versus centralisation:
- In higher education: The higher education institutions have the academic autonomy to design their programmes and submit them in the quality assurance process as defined by legislation.
- In TVET: ANEP is responsible for the design of programmes and qualifications of the QNQP, working in close cooperation with the Sectoral Technical Committees.
  The adopted methodological base underpinning the development of qualifications is competencebased and its use is aligned with the QNQP level descriptors. These key elements of QNQP are in implementation as demonstrated by qualifications included in the ANEP Catalogue of Qualifications[1034].
  o COREP (2011a), Manual for development of qualifications and curricular modules
  o COREP (2011b), Methodological Orientations and Tools for the Development of Qualifications
  o COREP, Manual for validation and registration of qualifications
- CNAQ evaluates and accredits programmes and the related qualifications in higher education.

1034. http://www.anep.gov.mz/ QUALIFICA%C3%87%C3%95ES/ Qualifica%C3%A7%C3%B5es

Credit systems

QUANQES and QNQP operate in close articulation with the respective systems of credit accumulation and transfer, which are mandatory for all programmes and qualifications.

Legal base:
- Higher education (SNATCA): Decree 32/2010
- Professional education: Law 6/2016

The credit system of QUANCES (SNATCA) defines one credit unit = 25 to 30 hours of learning workload, which is defined as including not only hours of direct contact with teachers in theoretical, practical and laboratory classes, but also the hours necessary for individual study, elaboration of assignments, preparation for exams (Art 14, Decree nº 32/2010).

In TVET the volume of qualifications is expressed in credits and has the following features:
- 1 credit corresponds to 10 normative hours of learning workload
- Vocational certificates (CV) correspond to 120 credits by level (five levels), corresponding to one year of learning. The continuum of CV3-CV4-CV5 represents three years of learning (360 credits QNQP).
- Learners may exit at each level (CV3, CV4, CV5) to labour market or other activities. Learners may progress vertically. Horizontal mobility to other programmes is eased by the system of credit accumulation and transfer.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF
Policy institutions

Two ministries define, coordinate, and implement education and training policies related with the National Education System:
- Ministry of Education and Human Development: in charge of schooling (all levels up to 12ª class) and adult education.
- Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific research
- State Secretariat of Technical Education and Professional Training, established in December 2020.

The government established at the end of 2020 a new body in charge VET sector policy: The State Secretariat of Technical Education and Professional Training. The organic Statute of the new State Secretariat, published on 07/01/2021 in the Bulletin

of the Republic[1035]13, stipulates "The Secretary of State for Professional Technical Education is the central body of the State apparatus that directs, plans, implements, coordinates and controls the activities in the field of Professional Technical Education and Vocational Training according to the principles, objectives and tasks defined by the Government".

The State Secretariat supervises ANEP and has the following structure: a) Inspection of Professional Technical Education; b) National Directorate of Training; c) National Directorate of School Management; d) National Directorate of Infrastructure, Projects and School Equipment; e) Directorate of Administration and Human Resources; f) Legal Office; g) office of the Secretary of State; h) Department of Planning, Statistics and Cooperation; i) Department of Information and Communication Technologies; j) Department of Communication and Image; k) Department of Purchases.

Governance of the two operational qualifications frameworks

- QUANQES: CNAQ – supervises implementation of the qualifications framework of higher education, and coordinates the process of development of the new comprehensive NQF.

CNAQ is an institution of public law, with legal personality and technical and administrative autonomy. CNAQ was created by Decree 63/2007 to implement the system of quality assurance inn higher education (SINAQES), and this is the focus of CNAQ's action. In addition, CNAQ was mandated to implement and coordinate QUANQES.

- QNQP: ANEP coordinates and leads implementation of the TVET qualifications framework

The statute of ANEP is defined by Decree 52/2016 of 7 November 2016. ANEP is the Regulatory and Quality Assurance body of professional education in Mozambique. ANEP was created by Law No. 23/2014 of 23 September, which was subsequently amended and replaced by Law No. 6/2016 of 16 June, in the framework of the vocational education reform underway in the country.

The Institute for Vocational Training and Labour Studies Alberto Cassimo (FPELAC), an institution

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1035. https://gazettes.africa/archive/mz/2021/mz-government-gazette-series-i-dated-2021-01-07-no-4.pdf the NQA will work with students and teachers from the three subsystems of education, professional orders and associations, employers and civil society.

working under the umbrella of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security is an active participant of QNQP´s governance.

Governance of the unified NQF
The analytical and consultative process of the new unified NQF is coordinated and animated by CNAQ, in partnership with the working group. The working group is composed of representatives from public institutions: National Authority of Professional Education (ANEP), National Institute of Distance Education (INED), National Institute for the Development of Education (INDE), National Institute of Examinations, Certifications and Recognition (INECE), National Directorate of Quality Assurance (DNGQ), National Directorate of Higher Education (DNES), National Directorate of Teacher Training (DNFP), National Directorate of Secondary Education (DNESG), National Directorate of Primary Education (DNEP), National Directorate of Adult Education (DNEAE).

The draft decree of the unified NQF proposes the establishment of the lead coordination and management organ - National Qualifications Authority (NQA). Apart from the institutions listed above,

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders
Managing professional qualifications is a component of the quality assurance system of the subsystem of professional education and ensures that qualifications are relevant and meet the needs of the labour market, have credibility among actors and users of the vocational education system and are aligned with the QNQP and registered in the National Catalogue of Qualifications. To this end ANEP supports and works with Sector technical committees (CTS).

CTS play a key role in assuring relevance and quality of the design of qualifications, by providing advice to ANEP on occupational groups and subgroups in the various sectors of economic activity and their occupational profiles. Currently, 20 CTSs are created for various professional areas/fields, such as industrial maintenance, civil construction, hotels and tourism, ICT, mining, hydrocarbons, agriculture and agro-industry, and also several sectors of public administration. ANEP website publishes information on CTSs and their composition. CTSs include representatives of the public and private sectors, NGOs, training institutions, companies and industry associations, employers' organisations and trade unions. IFPELAC and the National Directorate of Technical Education (DINET) participate in all CTSs.

CNAQ cooperates with professional organisations and employers in developing higher education qualifications and programmes in the engineering domain.

The stakeholders' consultation process before adoption of the NQF decree in 2021 will be an important step to increase awareness and buy-in, and to better involve professional organisations, employers', and workers' organisations in shaping this ground-breaking policy for integration and clarity of pathways, and recognition of the value of all types of learning.

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

VNFIL / RPL (RCA) arrangements
Among the four modalities of professional training, Law n°18/2018 on the national education system (SNE), acknowledges the modality of extra-institutional training, that is, learning acquired outside of training institutions and schools. In complement, Law n°6/2016 (Art 15 and 16) acknowledges the possibility of recognising and attributing value to learning acquired outside of formal training settings (institutions), under the condition that such learning is aligned with the competence standards of the QNQP.

QNQP validates and certifies learning obtained outside of training institutions and enables the access to regular courses offered by the formal training system. With the adoption and publication of decree n°58/2021 of 17 August 2021[1036], the new *System of Recognition of Acquired Competences* (SRCA) received legal status, and the supporting SRCA Regulation must be adopted in the coming 60 days. SRCA applies to vocational education and training, not to other sub-systems of the national education system.

The objectives of SRCA include:
- Regulate and facilitate certification of skills and competences from lifelong learning (LLL)
- Increase employability of the population, by making visible and formalising skills and competences from LLL.
- Support further training for individuals who dropped out of education and training.
- Social and formal recognition of skills and competences from LLL.
- Increase supply of qualified and certified professionals.

1036. Boletim da República n° 158 de 17 agosto 2021: https://www.inm.gov.mz/pt-br/content/br-n%C2%BA-158-de170821-boletim-da-rep%C3%BAblica-i-serie

- Support development of professional careers and progression within organisations and service.

SRCA's principles and mechanisms apply to all processes of recognition of competences (RCA) acquired through LLL, in contexts of work, and non-formal and informal learning.

Main features of SRCA:
- Eligible population: individuals aged 18 and above with at least 3 years of proven professional experience in a domain related with the target qualification of the RCA process.
- SRCA is closely linked with QNQP, through the mandatory use of the qualifications standards registered in the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications (CNQP).
- RCA processes are conducted only by RCA Centres, which must be accredited by the regulatory body of vocational education and training. Such Centres can be established VET institutions, public and private enterprises and institutions.
- Quality assurance of evaluation and validation of candidates' skills and competences, as defined in the RCA Regulation.
- Phases of RCA: evaluation, validation, and certification of acquired skills and competences - The certificates obtained via RCA are identical to those obtained as outcome of formal training.
- Candidates can obtain a full or a partial qualification (module), according to the results of the RCA.

Operationalisation of SRCA has started in 2021, with training and certification of 14 SRCA professionals, and further accreditation of RCA Centres in which these professionals operate. RCA pilot implementation started with up to 45 candidates seeking a qualification in one of the three occupations: electrician, plumber, welder. Lessons learned from this phase will inform the next steps towards improvement and mainstreaming of SRCA.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings

Mozambique's qualifications framework experiences went from implementation of two separated sectoral frameworks to a national and home-grown process of integration into a comprehensive 10level NQF, which integrates three sub-frameworks.

The design of the 10-level NQF takes into account the SADCQF and structural elements of other NQF experiences in the SADC region. Formal alignment to SADCQF will be undertaken after approval and operationalisation of the comprehensive NQF and upon government's decision. Alignment to SADCQF aims to support regional integration and to ease recognition of qualifications, mobility and fair professional and labour market integration of migrants, and in practice SADC is taking measures to strengthen implementation of the regional qualifications framework and support capacity development at national level of all member countries.

In last half-decade the existing sectoral qualifications frameworks (QUANCES and QNQP) achieved several results and contributed to reform and strengthen quality and coherence of qualifications and their classification by levels.

More specifically on achievements of QNQP:
- The QNQP has been legally defined and organised as a component of the system of vocational education and training, working in complementarity with the system of quality assurance, the credit system, the national catalogue of professional qualifications (CNQP) and from August 2021, also with the system of recognition of competences acquired in lifelong learning and in work experiences. The CNQP has been populated with 151 qualifications and 19 modules, developed according to the competence-based approach following a coherent methodology, with participation and contribution of sectoral technical committees. The CNCP is available online and all qualifications standards and related documentation is accessible to all users.
- Pilot testing of the newly adopted system of recognition of acquired competences (SRCA) has been initiated for candidates in three qualifications and a pool of 14 evaluators and facilitators of RCA have been trained.

In higher education QUANQES has been closely linked with the system of quality assurance, and gradual introduction of learning outcomes approach in programmes; but has been less influential than QNQP for the VET system.

Qualifications registers and databases

Both CNAQ and ANEP developed and apply guidance and procedures for the registration of qualifications, closely related with the respective systems of evaluation, accreditation and quality assurance of programmes and institutions.

The register (information system) of higher education qualifications managed by CNQA is not available online. It includes 368 qualifications of levels 7 to 10 of the (unified) NQF, with a strong predominance of level 7 (72% of total).

The National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications is the instrument for public use and information on all registered professional qualifications. The main Catalogue A includes 151 qualifications (levels 2 to 5 of QNQP), and 19 independent modules. Catalogue B, foreseen for qualifications from private corporations, has not yet registered qualifications.

Besides the classification by levels, both qualifications frameworks classify their qualifications by sectors (15 sectors - QNQP) and by fields of study (7 fields - QUANQES).

Qualification documents
The format and award of certificates and diplomas included in QUANCES and in QNQP are regulated by legislation. Qualifications documents use a marking system to ensure authenticity and minimise the risk of tampering.

ANEP awards the certificates registered in QNQP. Transparency of the qualification document is ensured by
- The QNQP level of the qualification is clearly indicated.
- The transcript of all units learning outcomes composing the qualification is attached to the certificate.
- The document contains security marks (antifraud). ANEP uses three security marks.

Recognition of foreign qualifications
INECE is responsible for the organisation and delivery of qualifications' recognition services for all levels of education.

The webpage of INECE[1037]15 contains information and the official forms for users' applications for homologation and equivalence of diplomas and certificates.

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks
Mozambique is committed to cooperation and alignment with SADCQF. Mozambique chaired SADC in the 12-month period from August 2020, and successfully led the Ministerial meeting of Education, Science and Technology in June 2021 and several meetings of the Technical Committee for Certification and Accreditation of SADC (TCCA) of SADCQF.

Alignment to SADCQF will be possible upon approval of the new comprehensive NQF and decision of the government.

International cooperation
Different ministries and institutions participate in international cooperation initiatives related to qualifications frameworks, such as:
- UNESCO: Addis and Global Recognition Conventions
- Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)
- African Qualifications Verification Framework (AQVN)
- African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)
- African Union Commission – Specialised Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST)
- Cooperation on education and quality assurance within the frame of Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP)
- Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA)
- Bilateral cooperation with quality assurance and qualifications agencies, such as with Portugal's Agency of Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES), with the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA).

International donor support
The World Bank is a fundamental donor in the domain education and training system, VET and quality assurance of higher education. 'MozSkills' is one of the prominent projects supported by the World Bank.

Other donors active in education, training and skills development include the European Union, GIZ and the Portuguese cooperation.

Important lessons and future plans

Can the NQF contribute more effectively to its objective of integration of the subsystems of education and training and promotion of lifelong learning?

The process of co-construction of the comprehensive and unifying NQF started in 2019, has involved all institutions of the education and training system and employment policy. The process reflects the dynamics towards the agreement on a unified comprehensive framework and the interplay between two operational frameworks of partial coverage (QUANQES and QNQP) to engineer a coherent and common language under the umbrella of the unified framework.

1037. http://www.mined.gov.mz/IST/CNECE/Pages/ Formulários.aspx

The NQF development process is fully home-grown, coordinated by CNAQ, and the working group discussed key aspects of governance and cooperation between subsystems and the NQF, besides technical-methodological dimensions of levels and allocation of qualifications to levels. This negotiation is visible in the discussion on positioning of qualifications in NQF levels, especially on the classification in the middle zone of the framework, where the higher levels of non-tertiary professional education interact with higher education. The consultation round in July 2021 allowed well-grounded review of the allocation of qualifications to levels, and conclusive agreements on levelling of VET qualifications and upper-secondary qualifications at level 5. The draft proposal (August 2021) of the comprehensive NQF is inclusive of all types of qualifications in the TVET domain (vocational and occupational certificates) from levels 1 to 9 of the NQF, and when approved, this version of the NQF can represent a major reform of the qualifications system and step towards inclusiveness of all forms of learning and acquisition of qualifications.

Future plans include development and establishment of the new NQF regulations, NQF coordination organ, National Catalogue of Qualifications and communication with the wider public. The world of work – employers' and workers' organisations, professional organisations, sectors – need to be part of the NQF process and the starting stakeholders' consultation phase until end 2021 offers an opportunity to better involve this essential group in understanding the NQF and providing inputs in NQF policy and legal instruments.

The motivation behind working towards a unified NQF is rooted on national objectives, such as the promotion of an integrated vision of all qualifications from all subsystems and facilitation of lifelong learning based on competencies. It also has links with the SADC regional integration agenda and commitments to harmonise qualifications systems. Dynamics of mobility of Mozambican workers and learners in the SADC space, especially to South Africa, require well-functioning mechanisms assuring portability and efficient recognition of qualifications.

Infographic of the NQF/NQF overview table

Table 57. Structure of the comprehensive NQF. From the revised draft proposal elaborated in August 2021, and currently in consultation for approval.

		COMPREHENSIVE NQF - LEVELS			
CNAQ - Qualifications of higher education	Doctorate	10	----	----	
	Master	9	Vocational certificate 9; Specialist Professional Master	Occupational certificate 1 (CO1)	
	Licenciatura (> 4 years education with professional practice); postgraduation	8	Vocational certificate 8; professional licenciatura	Occupational certificate 1 (CO1)	
	Academic licenciatura	7	Vocational certificate 7; professional licenciatura; Teacher training TVET	Occupational certificate 1 (CO1)	
	----	6	Vocational certificate 6; Teacher training for basic education; Professional upskilling	Occupational certificate 1 (CO1)	
MINEDH- Qualifications of general education	Diploma 12º classe	5	Vocational certificate (CV5)	Occupational certificate 1 (CO1)	ANEP - Qualifications of Professional Education
	----	4	Vocational certificate 4 (CV4)	Occupational certificate 1 (CO1)	
	----	3	Vocational certificate 3 (CV3)	Occupational certificate 1 (CO1)	
	9ª classe	2	Vocational certificate 2 (CV2)	Occupational certificate 1 (CO1)	
	6ª classe	1	Vocational certificate 1 (CV1)	Occupational certificate 1 (CO1)	

Source: Authors

Abbreviations

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework	CO	Occupational certificate
ANEP	Autoridade Nacional de Educação Profissional (National Authority of Professional Education)	CV	Vocational certificate
		ETF	European Training Foundation
		EU	European Union
AQVN	African Qualifications Verification Framework	HAQAA	Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation
ASG-QA	African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance	IFPELAC	Instituto de Formação Profissional e Estudos Laborais Alberto Cassimo
A3ES	Agencia de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior (Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education)	OMT	Observatório do Mercado de Trabalho
		QNQP	National Professional Qualifications Framework
AU	African Union	QUANQES	National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education
AUC	African Union Commission	SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
CNAQ	Conselho Nacional de Avaliação de Qualidade do Ensino Superior (National Council for Evaluation of Quality of Higher Education)	SAQA	South African Qualification Authority
		STC-EST	Specialised Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology
CPLP	Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries)	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Main sources of information

ANEP: http://www.anep.gov.mz/

CNAQ: http://www.cnaq.ac.mz/

Ministry of Education and Human Development: http://www.mined.gov.mz

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Prepared by

UNESCO in consultation with national experts

NAMIBIA

Introduction and context

The Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) was established through an Act of Parliament in 1996. One of the mandates of the NQA is to set up and administer a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for Namibia. The NQF is the framework for all legal, registered and quality assured qualifications in Namibia.

Implementation began in 2006 and a review exercise was undertaken in 2013 where all stakeholders were consulted. It was generally agreed that the NQF of Namibia would remain structurally intact, with only a few recommendations to amend in the established regulations.

The NQF requires a review of qualifications every five years, primarily to ensure relevance. This has also taken place and many qualifications have been reviewed and re-registered on the NQF.

In addition, employers have aligned the job profiles and requirements such as qualifications to the NQF. This is to ensure alignment between the competence needs of the employer with those of the applicants.

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 is capacity; both in terms of human resources as well as financial and other resources. The COVID-19 pandemic has also caused issues at the global level, requiring frameworks to be expanded to include virtual learning and virtual quality assurance.

As the regional and international level, the NQA participates in activities aimed at streamlining and ensuring better alignment among different system such as the South African Development Community (SADC) initiatives. Alignment with the SADC qualification framework (SADCQF) is underway, as part of Namibia's efforts to become streamlined with the regional framework. The NQA is currently working on this initiative.

Policy objectives

The objective of the NQF is to increase the transparency of qualifications so that all stakeholders have the same definition of the types of qualifications and agreed standards.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The NQF of Namibia is an integrated framework, consisting of ten levels defining the level of complexity of the qualification and or outcome of learning. The NQF uses a credit system, which consists of notional hours of learning. Ten notional hours of learning are equivalent to one NQF credit.

Figure 24. The Namibian Qualifications Framework
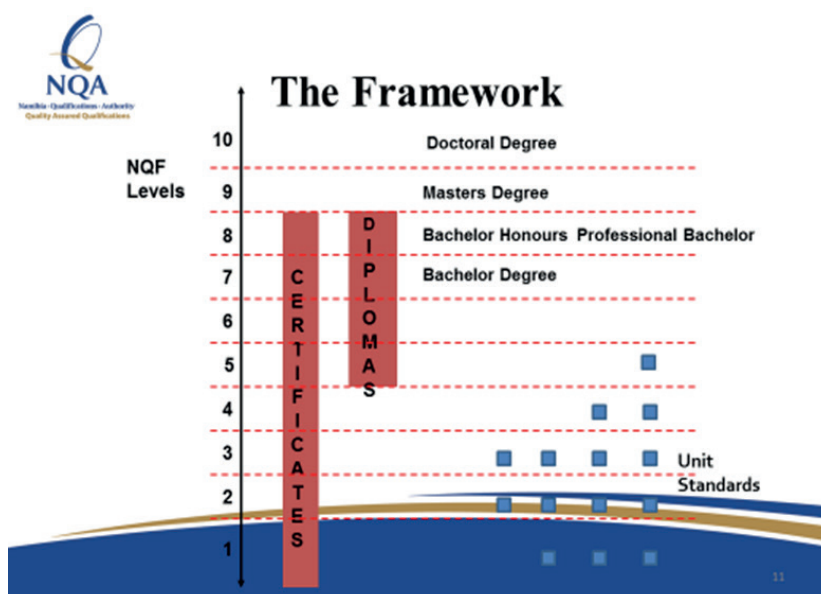
Source: Namibia Qualifications Authority

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The objectives of the NQA are:
- To set-up and administer a national qualifications framework.
- To be a forum for matters pertaining to qualifications.
- To set the occupational standards for any occupation, job, post, or position in any career structure.
- To set the curriculum standards required for achieving the occupational standards for a given occupation, job, post, or position in a career structure.
- To promote the development of, and to analyse, benchmarks of acceptable performance norms for any occupation, job, post, or position.
- To accredit persons, institutions and organisations providing education and courses of instruction or training of meeting certain requirements as set out in section 13.
- To evaluate and recognize competencies learnt outside formal education.
- To establish facilities for the collection and dissemination of information in connection with matters pertaining to qualifications.
- To inquire into whether any particular qualification meets the national standards.
- To advise any person, body, institution, organization or interest group on matters pertaining to qualifications and national standards for qualifications.

The NQF is working across the entire education sector, from basic education to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education. All role-players use the NQF when reference to any qualification is made. The labour market provides input to the curriculum to ensure reduced gap or misalignment between the labour market needs and the labour skills.

Recognition and validation non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Namibia has a national Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy, which so far has been implemented only in the vocational sector. Some other areas have been tested out through pilot programmes but are not yet fully implemented. Candidates can access RPL qualifications by way of a rigorous application, evaluation and verification process.

NQF implementation and impact (4)

The NQF is a register of all legal, relevant, and quality assured qualifications in Namibia. The development of qualifications and unit standards require consultation of key national stakeholders such as employer bodies. This is an endeavor to bring the requirements of the world of work and that of the training provider into context. The NQF levels are broadly used when recruitment criteria are specified in recruitment adverts. This clarifies the qualification type and the level required,

related to the competence requirements for the specific occupation or job role. Every five years, qualifications are reviewed to ensure they remain appropriate as well as relevant to the needs of the market. The NQF is comprehensive, as all qualifications are covered, from end of school to TVET certificates as well as higher education diplomas, Bachelor, Professional and Master's and Doctorate degrees. Only new qualifications are outside the framework at the present time.

A National Qualifications Framework Information Management System (NQFIMS) has been developed. The NQFIMS is currently only partly populated, and data capturing is ongoing. The framework is used as a reference point by education and training institutions and bodies in charge of review and renewal as well as quality assurance of qualifications. All qualifications are reviewed every five years and the reference point is the framework.

The NQF is used for career information and guidance, as well as by the labour market stakeholders. It is also used to identify official statistics on educational attainment in the country.

A plan for stakeholder engagement to discuss the impact of the NQF has been crafted and has been slightly delayed by COVID-19 and other related activities; however, it is expected to become a regular activity once the implementation of other systems like the NQFISM is completed.

Referencing to the regional framework/ other frameworks

The process of alignment to the regional framework is currently underway: Namibia is finalizing the reference report before it is submitted to the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA).

Important lessons learnt and future plans

Namibia's plans for the future include:
- An established framework
- Quality assurance systems that ensure better quality in the Education and Training sector in Namibia

- Establishing standard-setting bodies to help to bring the world of work and the world of training together. This will work to set up standards that will guide on a number of things, including curriculum development.

Abbreviations

HE	Higher Education
NQA	Namibia Qualifications Authority
NQFIMS	National Qualifications Framework
TCCA	Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training

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UNESCO in consultation with national experts

NEPAL

Introduction and context

Nepal is a landlocked country in South Asia and is bordered by China and India. It is in the Himalayas and contains eight of the world's ten highest peaks. The total population is 28,608,710 and the annual population growth rate is 1.837 per cent, as reported in 2019. Nepal is a federal democratic republic with a multi-party-political system. The federal structure of the country presents a unique opportunity to start a new era with political stability, socio-economic transformation and prosperity. The Government of Nepal (GON) has prioritized inclusive economic development and ensured shared prosperity for its citizens. Nepal's recent economic progress is remarkable. The economic growth rate is recorded as 7.1 per cent in the fiscal year 2019, in contrast with a previous average of 4.1 per cent per year between fiscal years 2007 and 2016. The contributions from sectors such as agriculture and service and from remittances are noteworthy in the increased economic growth rate in Nepal (World Bank, 2019).

Nepal's constitution highlights employment as a fundamental right, however, unemployment remains a pervasive problem. Out of the country's total labour force of 7.99 million, nearly 1 million (11.7 per cent) are unemployed. Out of the employed labour force, 39.3 per cent is underemployed (Government of Nepal, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019). In addition, at least 500,000 young people enter the labour market every year. Many of them either do not find appropriate jobs or are paid inadequately, which forces young people to migrate overseas in search of work and higher income. One of the main reasons for the persistent unemployment and underemployment is the lack of appropriate skills and competencies, which in turns leads to low productivity. The costs of vocational training, including an often-high element of opportunity cost, make participation unaffordable for many. Training arrangements in terms of timing, methodology and facilities often do not consider the living and learning conditions of many poor or otherwise disadvantaged young people. Therefore, in the absence of formal vocational training and provision of recognition of prior learning (RPL), many young job seekers accept

work as unskilled labourers or remain unemployed or underemployed (ILO, 2010).

After the promulgation of the federal constitution in 2015, Nepal was able to start anew. Although the shift to federalism has posed new challenges, such as clarification of the function and accountability of federal, provincial and local governments in different sectors, it has also opened up opportunities for reform, in particular, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector (CTEVT, 2016a).

Nepal now recognizes the TVET system as a crucial instrument to achieve economic prosperity. There is a growing consensus among policy-makers that a stronger TVET sector provides young people with access to employment opportunities leading to increased productivity and ultimately contributing to economic development. Based on the *National TVET Policy 2012*, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) and major stakeholders from public and private sectors agreed that a National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) is urgently required and that the National Skill Testing Board (NSTB) should be enabled to make the transition into a National Vocational Qualification Authority (NVQA) to manage such a framework. Accordingly, GON approved the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) on 3 May 2020 and gave principal approval to prepare the details of the framework, its legal structure and the necessary arrangements for its implementation (Swiss Foundation for Technical Cooperation, 2020). The NVQF is an integral part of the NQF.

Policy objectives

NVQF is on Nepal's TVET reform agenda. The underlying logic of the NVQF is that it aspires to become the 'national language' of the TVET sector for describing qualifications and the relationships between different certificates/diplomas and diploma levels, to reduce barriers to access and

progression and to promote a culture of lifelong learning. Furthermore, NVQF integration into the NQF would open learning and career pathways to all Nepalese people, regardless of their previous formal education, training or work experience. It facilitates the advancement of personal, social and economic development (UIL, 2014).

Specifically, the NVQF aims to:
- open unrestricted mobility between vocational and general education by alignment of degrees with the NVQF;
- promote RPL, allowing transition from non-formal to the organized job market;
- encourage strong industry participation in setting competency standards and assessment criteria to meet industry demands;
- approve National Competency Standards (NCS) as national standards for TVET;
- set up a national quality assurance framework as a standardized, consistent quality assurance system with nationally acceptable training outcomes;
- enhance national and international mobility for the skilled workforce by achieving international NVQF equivalence;
- systematize progression pathway mapping within and across sectors (Dahal, 2020; Swiss Foundation for Technical Cooperation, 2020; UIL, 2014).

The vocational qualification system for Nepal is envisioned as eight qualification levels (Levels 1 to 8) that align with general education to increase transparency between the two streams. Qualification levels should further align with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). This allows Nepal's NQF to be internationally transparent and comparable, improving mobility for individuals wishing to train, learn or work abroad (Caves & Renold, 2019).

When integrated with the NVQF, the NQF is expected to play a vital role in clarifying relationships among programmes, showing vertical and horizontal mobility options for a fully permeable system and using RPL as a mechanism to bring knowledge and skills from non-formal and informal learning into the formal qualification system. Finalization of the NQF requires a great deal of stakeholder consensus among government ministries, the private sector and experts from Nepal and abroad.

Levels and learning outcomes

The levels, learning outcomes and qualifications as explained in the NVQF guideline are presented below in Table 1.

Table 58. NVQ Levels, Learning Outcomes and Qualifications

NVQ LEVELS	LEARNING OUTCOMES	QUALIFICATIONS
Level 1	• Can perform a limited scope of routine tasks safely in diverse intra-sectoral environments while co-operating with and respecting seniors.	Entry Skill Certificate
Level 2	• Can perform basic tasks safely in defined contexts under direct supervision with limited control of resources and concepts.	Basic Skill Certificate
Level 3	• Competent in a broad range of tasks using resources with some autonomy under limited supervision. • Can coordinate with a small team and apply Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) skills.	National Skill Certificate
Level 4	• Competent in an extended range of complex technical tasks. Can perform tasks in unpredictable contexts with some autonomy. Exhibits creativity and interpersonal skills. Can interpret drawings and designs to perform tasks with OHS skills. Communicates well.	National Technician Certificate
Level 5	• Competent in a comprehensive scope of sector-related tasks. Completes tasks autonomously and creatively. • Can build and lead teams and monitor work effectively. • Exhibits managerial leadership and resource management skills within the given scope in a planned manner. Applies OHS and communicates well.	National Diploma
Level 6	• Demonstrates mastery in the relevant field. • Solves complex and unpredictable problems innovatively.	Bachelor (Technical)
Level 7	• Can solve specialized problems. Competent in research and innovation. Can integrate knowledge from different fields to create new knowledge.	Masters (Technical)
Level 8	• Can apply the most advanced and specialized skills and techniques, including evaluation and innovation. Can solve critical problems in research and/or innovation. • Can redefine existing knowledge or professional practice.	PhD

Sources: Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training; Nepal Vocational Qualifications System/National Skill Testing Board & Swiss Foundation for Technical Cooperation (2019); Dahal (2020).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

When approving the NQF to be integrated with the NVQF on 3 May 2020, GON gave principal approval to prepare the details of the NQF, its legal structure and the necessary arrangements for its implementation. As a line ministry for education, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) is currently forming an internal task force to manage the details. The fully-fledged institutional arrangements are therefore subject to policy arrangement.

The required TVET Act has not yet been drafted completely. However, CTEVT, NSTB and the National Vocational Qualifications System (NVQS) formulated a NVQS implementation roadmap in 2021 (Pradhan, 2020). In the roadmap, the NVQ governance system should comprise mainly government bodies ministries, MoEST/CEHRD (Centre for Education and Human Resources Development), CTEVT, qualifications awarding bodies (QABs), business and industry, the NVQ equivalency body, NVQ implementing institutions and monitoring and evaluation wings (ibid). Importantly, the roadmap highlights establishment and operationalization of an NVQA (ibid).

Until this is completed, CTEVT oversees TVET in Nepal, constituted by the CTEVT Act of 1989, and the skill testing system is regulated by National Skills Testing Board (NSTB), an autonomous body formed under the jurisdiction of CTEVT. NSTB is made up of representatives from government organizations, 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, 27 occupational sector-related technical committees are working to develop National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS)/profiles and to regulate skill-testing activities. At present, there are 300 occupational skill standards being developed and implemented by NSTB. Since 1989, Nepal has been implementing a five-level skill certification system, from elementary level to Levels 1–4. The system has certified 439,744 graduates so far (National Skill Testing Board / Nepal Vocational Qualifications System, n.d.a.). The NSTB skill level descriptor and the overall skill assessment process are presented in Table 2.

Table 59. NSTB Guide to Determining Job Levels

SKILL LEVEL	JOB LEVEL
Level – 4	Can perform a wide range of technical tasks at a very high level of competence. Possesses the cognitive skills to translate professional theories into practical and economic action in the workplace and the social/supervisory skills necessary to lead and direct others. Functions at this level primarily, involving supervisory or co-coordination of group work activities. Skill possession in the particular field of work and in the practical use of materials, tools, and machines involved is essential as supervisors/technicians participate frequently in the tasks of workers in lower-level categories.
Level – 3	Can perform a wide range of skilled tasks at a high level of competence. Possesses the cognitive skills to solve problems, make decisions, understand work processes and assist in directing the activities of workers in lower-level categories. An emphasis is placed on manual skills and the application of an organized body of knowledge related to materials, tools, machines and principles associated with the occupation, particularly when selecting appropriate materials, tools, machines and principles.
Level – 2	Can work very efficiently and hone skills to a consistent standard. Decision-making and an organized body of related knowledge are confined to determining work procedures as they affect a particular task. Tasks at this level primarily involve dexterity and the use of hand-tools, machines and materials.
Level – 1	Possesses some useful skills. Performs routine tasks involving little or no latitude for judgment. Adherence to rigid standards or specifications is not usually necessary as a supervisor or a worker at a higher level assigns tasks with simple instructions and makes clarifications or suggestions when necessary.

Sources: National Skill Testing Board/ Nepal Vocational Qualifications System (n.d.b); International Labour Organization (2012).

Figure 25. The Overall Skill Testing Process
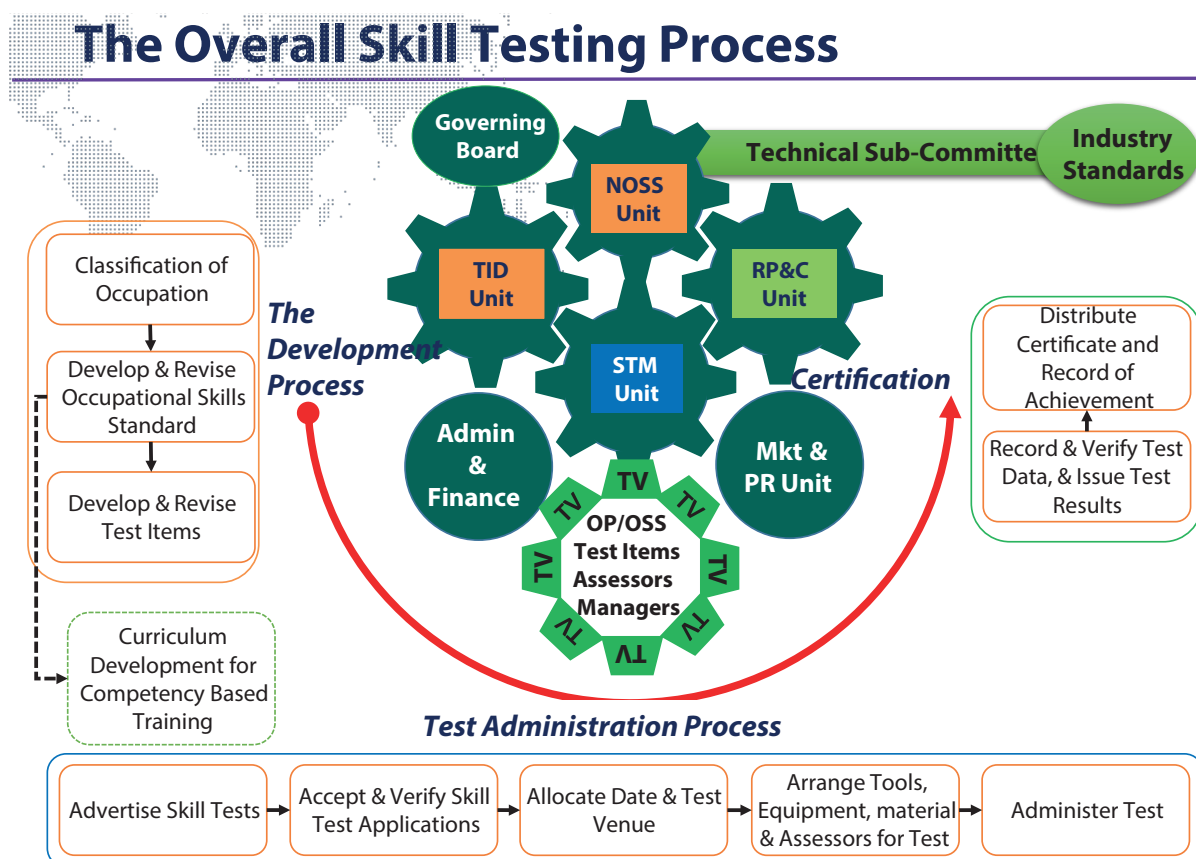
Source: Bahadur Malla; CTEVT/NSTB (2020)

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and CTEVT signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2013 committing to work jointly to facilitate the development of the Sector Skills Committees (SSCs) and the NVQS. Since then, development of the NVQF and the Vocational Qualifications System (VQS) has been gradual with involvement by SSCs, private sector, academia and the government (SDC, 2013).

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

The orientation and awareness of the importance of the skill test among the informal learners are slow off the mark because the stakeholders have limited knowledge and practices of the skill test. The importance of integrating formal education through informal learning is almost nonexistent. The value of the skill test certificate is less appreciated by the private sector employers and never demanded such certificates while applying for the job there. Similarly, the people, who have received the skill

test CTEVT certificates, have not used the certificate for any purpose. Despite 45 years since the establishment of NSTB, its access is not ensured to all parts of the nation. Therefore, to integrate the informal learners into the formal education system for the decent employment, gainful income and to eliminate the underemployment, massive awareness about the testing authority is imperative. The orientation on the benefits of the testing centre and dissemination of the information and process of the test need to be rigorously expanded to larger public (Bajracharya, 2022).

The NVQF for Nepal incorporates RPL into the formal TVET system as one of the crucial elements of mainstream non-formal and informal learning. The initiation and institutionalization of RPL has already begun in 2021. 'The RPL process can help … acquire a formal qualification that matches their knowledge and skills, thereby improving their employability, mobility, lifelong learning, social inclusion and self-esteem' (Aggarwal, 2015, p. 29).

At present, TVET that leads to a diploma or certificate is only available in certain institutions (which include constituent technical schools/training

centres, affiliated technical colleges/ institutes and Technical Education in Community Schools (TECS)). Implementing NVQF in Nepal will open pathways to young people by embracing all forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Figure 26. A flow chart of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessment process.

Stage1. Counselling	1. Information and Inquiry	2. Guidance to Portfolio Application	3. Support to Self-Assessment
Stage2. Assessment	4. Portfolio Evaluation	5. RPL Interview	6. Practical Assessment
Stage3. Post-Assessment	7. Certification and Record Keeping	8. Post-Assessment Moderation	
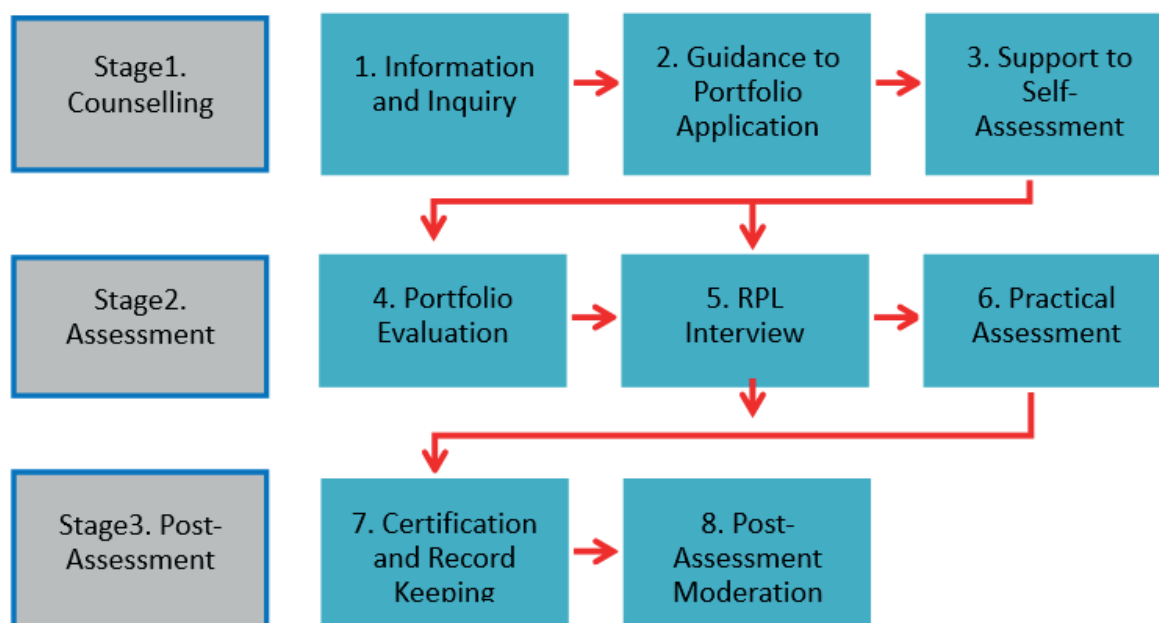
Source: Diagram based on information from the International Labour Organization (2018); Kumar Panthee (2022).

NQF implementation and impact

The NQF is being developed by integrating the NVQF and is in the process of detailing the qualifications framework, its legal structure and the necessary arrangements for its implementation. The expected impact is that the TVET system is systematically restructured with the NVQF and a National Vocational Qualifications Authority (NVQA) to manage it. Other impacts include an increase in the average wage for young people in the national and international labour market, an increase in satisfaction among young people and employers with the benefits, an increase in productivity, a reduction in costs and an increase in living standards resulting from the NVQS (National Skill Testing Board / Nepal Vocational Qualifications System, n.d.c).

There is currently no NQF implementation or related impact visible at the end-user level. However, the second phase (continuation of the first phase) of the NVQS project was launched in mid-2020 to help guide the entire TVET delivery system towards greater inclusion, relevance, mobility and social standing. The goal of NVQS Project (NVQS-P) Phase II is to establish a sustainable NVQS that will increase the employability of Nepali youth. The federal and provincial governments will lead NVQS implementation. Businesses and industries will ensure the relevance of vocational training for the labour market. The project will support the GON and private sector actors to develop NVQS policies, laws, frameworks, processes and guidelines. The project will strengthen the roles and capacity of all three spheres of government to adequately include businesses and industries in the implementation of the NVQS. This will help to frame, shape and streamline the entire TVET delivery system in Nepal towards more inclusion, higher relevance, higher mobility and an improved social image. The project has three outcomes:
1. certified Nepali youth gain employment in domestic and international markets through the NVQS;
2. the CTEVT/NSTB implement the NVQS on behalf of the MoEST;
3. provincial governments implement the Vocational Qualification System (VQS).

As part of the progress towards NVQS implementation, the main achievements to date can be illustrated as follows:
- wider consensus and learning on NVQF among policy and implementation level stakeholders;
- information on NVQS reached the population en masse (over 3 million);

- piloting of RPL approach in the hospitality and construction sectors ready for wider implementation;
- capacity development of staff of CTEVT, NSTB, TITI (Training Institute for Technical Instruction), government officials and private sector stakeholders through national and international training and a study exposure visit to five countries;
- master assessors, model assessors and new assessors developed, and RPL system initiated;
- piloting of RPL in two occupations completed;
- NSTB service quality assurance system in place;
- NOSS process development guide, NCS and assessment package development;
- assessors' accreditation system initiated, development and mobilization of 35 master and 3,700 assessors with capacity building training in process;
- credit transfer system guideline prepared;
- skill test initiated through Accreditation of Skill Assessment centres in the provinces;
- sector skill committees in construction, automobile and hospitality sectors fully functional and additional two (in IT and Agriculture) currently in formation;
- development of NCS (Levels 1 to 5) initiated and upgrading of 80 NOSS completed as per the guideline (Swiss Foundation for Technical Cooperation, 2022).

In the third and final phase (2024–2026) of the NVQS-P, it is expected that the qualifications offered by the NVQA will be recognized for entry to higher-level education and training, both in Nepal and abroad.

Referencing to regional frameworks/other 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 and 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.

The NVQS project has already initiated collaboration with destination countries (especially Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Malaysia) to further align the VQF for better relevance and employability (SDC, 2016).

Important lessons and future plan

Implementing the NVQS takes time. Timely formulation of related policies and institutional structures are the keys to its success, along with wider consultations and coordination with and the involvement of the GON, academics and private sector stakeholders. Furthermore, the GON should play a proactive lead role in policy-making, organizational structuring, governance and financing to establish and operationalize the envisioned NVQS.

Despite the private sector's key role in effective NVQS design and implementation, its engagement in skill development is poor. The owners and managers of industries and the office bearers of industry and trade associations have admitted to a need for reassurance from government laws for their roles and active representation in the development and implementation of the TVET system. They also expect incentives to invest in skill development. The GON must acknowledge the crucial role of active private sector participation, as demonstrated successfully by NVQSs from around the world.

While the details of the NVQF for Nepal are still being finalized, its legal basis and other necessary structures and arrangements take first priority. As federalization progresses gradually in Nepal, actors can prepare to implement NVQS at the provincial and local level by prioritizing clear roles and mandates of the three pillars of government priority for the days ahead.

NQF overview

The following NQF/NVQF overview (Figure 2) was approved by the GON's Council of Ministers on 3 May 2020 and is currently being implemented.

Figure 27. NQF Overview

National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Nepal – Update

Non-Formal and Informal Learning	NVQ Level	TVET Qualification Title	GE Qualification Title	NQ Level	Non-Formal and Informal Learning	ISCED Level

Formal Education & Training System

	NVQ 8	QA → PhD	PhD ← QA	NQ 8		ISCED 8
	NVQ 7	QA → Masters (Technical)	Masters ← QA	NQ 7		ISCED 7
Lifelong Learning and/or Continuing Education and Training	NVQ 6	QA → Bachelor (Technical)	Bachelor ← QA	NQ 6	Lifelong Learning and/or Continuing Education	ISCED 6
	NVQ 5	QA → National Diploma	School Leaving Certificate Exam ← QA	NQ 5		ISCED 3
	NVQ 4	QA → National Technician Certificate	Secondary Education Exam ← QA	NQ 4		ISCED 2
	NVQ 3		Basic and Compulsary Education Through Grade 8	NQ 3		
	NVQ 2			NQ 2		ISCED 1
	NVQ 1			NQ 1		

TVET: Technical and Vocational Education and Training
(+) : Indicates additional technological and practical components as required for each level of NVQF
QA: Qualification Assessed as per the set criteria by National Qualifications Authority (NQA)
GE: General Education   RPL: Recognition of Prior Learning.
ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education

Source: Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training; Nepal Vocational Qualifications System/National Skill Testing Board & Swiss Foundation for Technical Cooperation (2019).

Abbreviations

CEHRD	Centre for Education and Human Resources Development	NVQS	National Vocational Qualification System
CTEVT	Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training	NVQS-P	Nepal Vocational Qualifications System Project
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council	QABs	Qualifications Awarding Bodies
GON	Government of Nepal	SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
ILO	International Labour Organization		
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education	SFFA	SAARC Framework for Action
		SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding		
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	TECS	Technical Education in Community Schools
NCS	National Competency Standards	TITI	Training Institute for Technical Instruction
NSTB	National Skills Testing Board		
NVQA	National Vocational Qualification Authority	TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
NVQF	National Vocational Qualifications Framework	WTO	World Trade Organization

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THE NETHERLANDS

Introduction and context

The Netherlands has exceeded most EU 2020 benchmarks for education and training. Schools and teachers have a high degree of autonomy and responsibility with regard to resource allocation, pedagogical processes, content and methods, aiming at innovation in teaching and learning. Student performance in basic skills in science and mathematics is above EU averages according to the Programme for international student assessment (PISA) 2018[1038], but has dropped below average in reading. Performance gaps between students are related to differences between schools and education tracks[1039]. Over half of the population in the 30-34 age group holds a tertiary education degree (51.4% in 2019), and the employment rate of recent tertiary graduates was at 91.9% in 2019[1040]. The vocational education and training (VET) sector performs well and is closely linked to the labour market. A relatively high percentage of upper secondary students are enrolled in VET (67.5% in 2018, compared to 48.4% EU average)[1041], with the highest increase in the school-based pathway (bol). The employment rate of recent VET graduates was 90.4% in 2019, one of the highest in the EU[1042]. The integration of the pre-vocational (vmbo) and vocational (mbo) tracks was recommended as part of measures to tackle school drop-out. Vocational schools shape their own strategy and priorities in consultation with regional partners. Partnerships with the labour market are strongly supported. There is continued focus on improving quality in initial VET and making continuous VET more flexible. A relatively high percentage of adults participate in lifelong learning (19.5% in 2019)[1043], although fewer among the low-skilled. The forecast demand for highly skilled and medium-skilled workers until 2025 surpasses the expected supply. The introduction of individual learning accounts is being planned to facilitate lifelong skill development (European Commission, 2019).

The Dutch national qualifications framework (NQF) (*Nederlands Kwalificatieraamwerk*, NLQF) was adopted in 2011, building on and integrating the qualifications framework for higher education which had been self-certified to QF-EHEA in 2009. The comprehensive NLQF is a systematic classification of all qualifications in the country, aimed at transparency and increased comparability. It has eight levels, an entry level below EQF level 1, and a sublevel at level 4 (4+). Level descriptors are defined as knowledge, skills, responsibility and independence, and context. The framework 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 operational. Progress has been made in levelling non-regulated qualifications to the NLQF, with 103 qualifications of this group included by November 2020. A comprehensive database for all Dutch qualifications with an NLQF level has been developed and is available online from mid-2020.

Several evaluations of different aspects of the NLQF and the NLQF/EQF NCP were conducted. A dedicated NLQF law is foreseen to be adopted in 2021, formally acknowledging the NLQF, its levels and level descriptors, and regulating the indication of NQF and EQF levels on qualification documents.

NLQF referencing to the EQF was completed in January 2012. An updated referencing report addressing developments over recent years was presented and adopted in 2019.

1038. https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/pisa-2018_en
1039. 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, 2018).
1040. Data from European Commission, 2020.
1041. Idem.
1042. Idem.
1043. Idem.

Policy objectives

Development of the NLQF was prompted by the 2008 recommendation on a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning[1044]. Its purpose is to support lifelong learning, and national and international mobility of students and employees, enabling them to identify their level of education and training, and to find appropriate programmes; to understand the levels of national and international qualifications; and how different qualifications contribute to improving workers' skills in the labour market. The main objectives of the NLQF include: to increase transparency and comparability of qualifications and learning routes within the Netherlands and within Europe; to stimulate thinking in terms of learning outcomes as building blocks of qualifications; to increase understanding of qualifications levels across the labour market and aid communication between stakeholders in education and employment (van der Sanden et al., 2012). The aims of the NLQF respond well to the renewed focus of the Dutch government on lifelong development, which includes actions to increase people's insight into formal and non-formal education and learning options, the creation of personal learning accounts; and the creation of the right preconditions to empower people in their learning and work life (NCP-NLQF, 2019).

Providing a systematic classification of all existing qualifications in the Netherlands, grouped into two categories (government-regulated qualifications and non-regulated qualifications), the NLQF reflects the nature of the Dutch qualifications system, where private and public providers supplement each other. 84% of adult learning takes place in the private sector and non-regulated private qualifications often have a strong 'qualifying power' in the labour market. Their inclusion in the NLQF increases their visibility and further strengthens their value.

The NLQF has no role in reforming education and training, in regulating transfer and access, or in entitlements to qualifications and degrees. In the formal system, education pathways are regulated by law. However, the process of provider validation and classification of non-regulated qualifications into the NLQF has led to an overall increase in the quality of these qualifications (Ockham IPS, 2017). The NLQF has also supported the revision of qualifications and development of new ones in the formal system,

especially in VET. Thus, its influence beyond its descriptive role and its potential to support system-level developments is becoming apparent.

In a context characterised by a strong tradition 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 as 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, learning outcomes and qualifications

The NLQF covers the entire spectrum of Dutch qualifications:
a. 'government-regulated qualifications' awarded in the formal education system (pre-vocational education (vmbo), senior secondary VET (mbo) and general education (havo), pre-university education (vwo), and higher education (wo and hbo)) and regulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science; traditionally they are classified in 17 qualification types and were levelled to the NQF *en bloc.*
b. 'non-regulated qualifications' outside government regulation, awarded by stakeholders in the labour market (private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies).

The NLQF has one entry level (below EQF level 1), eight levels equivalent to those in the EQF, and a sublevel (4+). The entry level was created to support low-qualified individuals to get a certificate and increase their motivation to participate in further learning. Level 4+ was introduced to distinguish the pre-university pathway (*vwo*) from upper secondary general and VET qualifications classified at level 4. The reallocation of specific upper secondary VET qualifications from NLQF level 4 to level 5, based on their learning outcomes, has been under discussion, proposed by stakeholders in VET and opposed by those in higher education (NLQF NCP, 2019). Associate degrees were introduced in 2017 as a separate level in higher professional education (*hogescholen*) at NLQF level 5. In principle, all NLQF levels are open to all qualifications of all education sectors, based on a comparison of the learning outcomes of that qualification with the NLQF level

1044. 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

descriptors, and not related to a particular study load[1045].

Level descriptors of all nine NLQF levels are learning-outcomes-based, inspired by EQF descriptors and with some important differences resulting from elaboration and partial reorientation. They are defined in terms of knowledge, skills (applying knowledge, problem-solving skills, learning and development skills, information skills, communication skills), and responsibility and independence. A separate context descriptor has also been defined, used along with the described knowledge to determine the grade of skills difficulty. The subdomains introduced for skills are meant to make descriptors more relevant to the Dutch context, reflecting experiences in applying learning outcomes, for example in VET (mbo). Guidelines were developed to avoid different interpretations of the descriptors when classifying qualifications[1046]. Since their adoption, level descriptors have been tested and fine-tuned in the process of classifying non-regulated qualifications. The updated descriptors are in use as of January 2020, without any changes in the initial levelling of qualifications.

Dutch education and training had a strong tradition of a competence and learning outcomes orientation before the development of the NLQF. Qualifications in secondary education are based on 'attainment targets'. VET is probably most advanced in competence orientation: a new VET competence-based qualifications structure has been developed and implemented; and VET qualifications were revised using the NLQF level descriptors and their number was reduced. A learning-outcomes-based qualifications framework for VET, using NLQF level descriptors, 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. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is supporting higher education providers to use learning outcomes related to the NLQF levels in pilot projects aiming to develop

flexible partial learning pathways[1047]. This has supported access to and participation in higher education. Parts of qualifications do not receive a separate NLQF level but are denominated as 'this partial qualification is part of a regulated qualification with NLQF-level 'X''. The NCP-NLQF supports owners of non-regulated qualifications in describing their qualifications in learning outcomes and has developed guidelines for this purpose[1048]. It is also looking into ways to classify non-regulated partial qualifications to NLQF levels (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). A discussion concerning the use of micro-credentials and *edubadges* has also started, including if and how the NLQF can play a role in it.

Higher education qualifications are accredited by the Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), taking into account both QF-EHEA and NLQF level descriptors. The Inspectorate of Education verifies compliance with quality assurance regulations in all education sectors, including higher education. ECTS is used in higher education and ECVET principles are applied in VET. Discussions have started on the development of an integrated credit system for all education sectors that would take the NLQF into consideration (European Commission; Cedefop, 2018).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for the development and implementation of the NLQF, which was adopted in September 2011 by the Dutch Government and the Parliament. The need to strengthen the legal basis has been noted by stakeholders and a dedicated NLQF act is expected to be adopted in 2021. The legislative proposal for the new act was subject to two public consultations in 2015 and 2016. It is foreseen that the new NLQF act will acknowledge formally the levels and level descriptors of the NLQF, the generic classification of government-regulated qualifications and the possibility to classify non-regulated qualification; it will regulate the indication of NLQF/EQF levels on qualification documents and will address the legal status of the NCP as an independent organisation (NLQF-NCP, 2019).

1045. Initially, classification and inclusion into the NLQF of non-regulated qualifications was possible only for qualifications requiring a substantial volume of learning of minimum 400 hours of nominal study time. This requirement was subsequently amended and smaller qualifications with a volume less than 400 hours can be included provided they demonstrate labour market relevance.

1046. The level descriptors of the NLQF and guidelines for their application are available in NLQF-NCP (2019), Annex 4.

1047. The Accreditation Organisation for Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) has developed a dedicated accreditation framework for these pilots, focusing on learning outcomes instead of input requirements.

1048. They are available on the NLQF-NCP website, at: https://nlqf.nl/images/downloads/Verzoek_tot_inschaling/6_Handleiding_Inschaling_Formuleren_van_Leerresultaten_13042018.pdf

The day-to-day running of the framework is carried out by the NLQF/EQF NCP. Since 2012 this has been hosted by the CINOP foundation[1049], an independent organisation funded by, and reporting to, the Ministry of Education. The main tasks of the NCP are: levelling non-regulated qualifications to the NLQF (levelling of formal government-regulated qualifications is the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Education); maintaining the NLQF register of non-regulated qualifications and the new comprehensive NLQF database; maintaining and evaluating the NLQF and its links to the EQF; monitoring implementation; communicating the NLQF and supporting its main stakeholder groups. Systematic work has been carried out since 2012 informing potential labour market stakeholders about the framework.

The NCP accomplishes its tasks through its bureau[1050], has 2.5 full-time employees (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020), and is supported by several independent external structures. Its Programme Council decides on the classification of non-regulated 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 from the regulated formal education sector and one from the non-regulated education and training sector. An Appeal Commission has also been set up. The activities of the NCP are funded by the Ministry of Education, through the European Commission grant, and through revenues from classification of non-regulated qualifications.

Main stakeholders (social partners, associations of education, the Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and Labour Market (SBB), the Education Inspectorate, NVAO, the association of private education providers (NRTO), NLQF experts, NLQF Commissions and NLQF Programme council) were consulted in the process of updating the EQF referencing report. It has been noted that communication with stakeholders has been intensified as an effect of preparing the updated report (NLQF NCP, 2019).

A mechanism for systematic stakeholder involvement has been recently set up, in the form of a new sounding board, to advise the NCP on policy aspects and to act as ambassador to a wider audience. It is composed of employer and employee associations, NRTO, the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA), a representative of the staffing industry, and NVAO. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has an observatory role (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[1051]

A national system for validation of prior learning (VPL) (*Erkenning van Verworven Competentie* (*EVC*)) has been in place since 1998, aiming to bridge the gap between education supply and labour market demand by taking stock of existing knowledge and skills. It was based on the recognition that learning through practical experience can deliver the same professional skills and qualifications as formal classroom-based learning. Quality assurance came into focus in 2006, including linkages to national qualifications, sector standards, function profiles, career paths and citizenship activities. A new national policy on validation was initiated in 2013, with an orientation towards a participative society where all stakeholders take ownership for their role in lifelong learning, and increasingly focused on personalised learning. Effective since 2016, it has been a dual instrument operating on two routes: one linked to the labour market, and the other to the education system.

In the labour market route, VPL is aimed at career guidance and development for adults to support employability and better matching between employee capacities and occupational profiles or on-the-job learning. Prior learning outcomes are validated against sector/industry standards or national qualification standards. VPL tools used include the intake assessment, e-portfolio, the 'experience profile', 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*) recognising vocational and general competences in relation to sectoral or formal education standards, and/or a 'certificate of professional competence' (*vakbekwaamheidsbewijs*) linked to professional

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1049. The website of the CINOP foundation is available at: https://www.cinop.nl/1_3128_About_CINOP.aspx
1050. The NLQF NCP Bureau comprises a programme director, three consultants, communication and project support staff.

1051. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update of the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (Duvekot, 2019).

standards and competences, or a 'certificate of generic and transversal competences' (*competentiebewijs*) linked to human resources systems.

In the education route, the goal is to validate formally/non-formally/informally acquired competences against national qualification standards, to support further learning: 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 VET and higher education. 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 2-4. In higher education, VPL is mainly offered in higher professional education (HBO), though less in research universities, which usually accredit only formally acquired learning outcomes. Initiatives based on the learning outcomes approach have been piloted since 2016 to make learning routes more flexible for students in part-time and work-based programmes, integrating independent learning and validation. VPL tools used include intake-assessment, e-portfolio, competence tests, and principles of the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET). The 'certificate of experience' can also be used, but it is no longer essential for obtaining exemptions or a partial/full qualification. Qualification awarding bodies can also use interviews, performance assessments and other learning-independent assessment techniques.

The focus at this stage is on increasing the quality and effectiveness of VPL services, better linking of VPL in the two routes, development of tailored learning and occupational options, a critical review of legal frameworks for VPL, and better communication on the recognition and value of VPL results. The NLQF aids implementation of the VPL policy. It makes relationships between non-regulated 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 beyond their performance on an occupational level. Sectoral organisations can 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. Work is under way to create links between national and sector standards through the NLQF (Duvekot, 2019).

NQF implementation and impact

The NLQF is operational. 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 103 non-regulated qualifications had been included by November 2020[1052]. Netherlands is part of a working group set up by the EQF advisory group to look into the possibilities for inclusion of international qualifications into NQFs and their referencing to the EQF. One international qualification has been included in the NLQF at level 3.

The criteria and procedures for inclusion of non-regulated qualifications into the NLQF are presented in Box 1.

1052. Data from the register of non-regulated qualifications: https://www.nlqf.nl/database-nlqf-kwalificaties/register [accessed 24.8.2020].

Examenkamer). If the provider does not use one of these external quality systems, an on-site organisational audit is carried out. Validity is granted for six years, during which the applicant can submit qualifications for inclusion and levelling. Validity is assessed by the Quality Commission, and the final decision is made by the Programme Council of the NLQF NCP.

The organisation indicates the level it sees most appropriate for a qualification, based on comparison of learning outcomes with NLQF level descriptors. In addition, the workload, the approach to assessment/examination, and links to the relevant occupational profiles must be specified. The application for classification is assessed by two independent experts and the Classification Commission. The final decision is made by the Programme Council. The 'best fit' principle is used. Once approved, the classification is valid for six years and the qualification is included in the NQLF 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. Re-evaluation of organisational validity and of the classification of a qualification (every six years) costs EUR 1 000 each.

Source: NLQF-NCP (2019).

Several registers have been developed for qualifications from the different education and training subsystems. Non-regulated qualifications levelled to the NLQF are entered into the NLQF register of non-regulated/private qualifications, operated by the NLQF NCP since 2013. A comprehensive database covering all qualifications with an NLQF level has been developed and is operational as of 2020[1053]. By November 2020, it had been populated with 671 qualifications from general education and VET, and from the non-formal education sector. It includes search and filter functions (EQF and NLQF levels, field (Isced-F), education sector, qualification owner and awarding body, workload (hrs) and ECTS), and descriptions of learning outcomes of qualifications[1054]. EQF and NQF levels are indicated in the comprehensive NLQF database and the NLQF register of private qualifications, on Europass certificate supplements and diploma supplements for VET and higher education qualifications. EQF levels are indicated on new qualification documents in VET and higher education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). The obligation to indicate NLQF and EQF levels on all qualification documents from formal education, and the possibility to indicate levels on non-regulated qualifications, will be regulated by the new NLQF act, expected to be adopted in 2021.

Several evaluation studies on different aspects of the NLQF have been conducted[1055]. One of the most recent (Ockham IPS, 2017) included an inventory of stakeholder views on the functioning of the NLQF and the NLQF NCP, and on the draft proposal for the NLQF law and its potential impact, and recommendations for possible adjustments to the legislative proposal and to the implementation process. A new impact analysis is being carried out[1056], with results expected by the end of 2020. It aims to assess the impact of the NLQF on participation in lifelong development and to identify actions to increase awareness about it. Preliminary findings suggest that the NLQF needs to be better communicated to a wider audience; that the procedures for classifying non-regulated qualifications are robust, but may be sometimes complicated for providers; and that the requirement for describing qualifications in learning outcomes

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1053. It currently contains all VET qualifications, those from general secondary education, and non-regulated qualifications. Higher education qualifications will be added in the future. It is available at: https://database.nlqf.nl/

1054. All government-regulated qualifications and most non-regulated qualifications in the database are described in learning outcomes (European Commission and Cedefop; 2020).

1055. The Hobéon Study (2013). *Implementatie van het NLQF- Juridische modaliteiten en consequenties (Implementation of the NLQF, legal modalities and consequences)* https://www.hobeon.nl/uploads/nieuws/130628_juridische_ implementatie_nlqf_ onderzoeksrapport_ocw_huisman_hendriks_def.pdf Ockham IPS (2013). *Implementatieonderzoek naar het NCP NLQF (Research on the implementation of the NLQF NCP)*: https://www.nlqf.nl/images/Eindrapport_ OCKHAM_IPS_ definitief_29112013_NCP_NLQF.pdf Profitwise (2014). *De waarde van het NLQF – Onderzoek naar kenmerken, eigenschappen en voordelen (The value of the NLQF – Research into characteristics, properties and benefits)*: https://www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/De_Waarde_van_het_NLQF_-_Eindrapportseptember2014_-_ProfitWise.pdf ProfitWise Onderzoek & Advies (2015) study on communication and marketing 'Goed voorbeeld doet goed volgen': https://nlqf.nl/images/Eindrapport_ ProfitWise_onderzoek_SCQF-NCP_NLQF-definitieve_ versie.pdf Ockham IPS (2017). *Onderzoek NLQF* (*NLQF Research*): https://ockham-ips.nl/nl/project/onderzoek-nlqf

1056. It includes interviews with the main stakeholders and a questionnaire for NLQF users (providers, employers, employees and students).

is sometimes considered a barrier (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The NCP has developed a set of tools to support providers of non-regulated qualifications in the process of classification: a toolbox, validity and classification application manuals, guidelines for communication and use of the NLQF logo, and for description of qualifications in learning outcomes. The NLQF is known by nearly all education and training providers in the Netherlands; though it is not used by all, there has been an increasing demand from market-oriented departments of public providers to classify qualifications to the NLQF. Recognition authorities and bodies, quality assurance bodies and labour market stakeholders at national level are also well informed about the framework. It is less known among guidance and counselling practitioners, labour market actors at regional and local levels, workers and students (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). Research commissioned by the NLQF NCP over recent years on the use of the NLQF/EQF in vacancies on the labour market showed that there was minimal, yet increasing, use of NLQF/EQF levels, mainly in the south of the country, in the healthcare sector. A communication campaign will be initiated by the Ministry of Education when the new NLQF act is adopted (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Referencing to the EQF

The Netherlands referenced its NQF to the EQF in parallel to the development of the framework. The referencing report (van der Sanden, K.; Smit, W.; Dashorst, M., 2012) was approved in the EQF advisory group in January 2012.

An updated referencing report (NLQF-NCP, 2019) was presented and adopted in 2019. It addresses developments over recent years, including: the criteria and processes of classifying non-regulated qualifications, results of studies and evaluations of the NLQF and the NCP, the update of level descriptors, the development of the law on the NLQF, and current challenges for implementation.

Important lessons and future plans

The Dutch NQF is operational and it is open to qualifications from all education and training subsystems, at all levels. Social partners recognise its added value, as well as the need to implement and communicate the NLQF further. Demographic and economic trends, such as an aging population, fast-changing labour market demand, insufficiency

of medium and highly skilled workers, and recently the Covid-19 crisis, have led to renewed focus on lifelong development among policy-makers. The NLQF is well suited to support new policy initiatives in this direction, making the education and training offer more transparent, strengthening the quality of qualifications awarded on the labour market, supporting the creation of more flexible training routes, and potentially aiding with the introduction of individual learning accounts[1057]. NLQF levels and level descriptors are being used in current work on development of partial qualifications and flexible pathways in VET and higher education. The framework is also linked with the policy on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Procedures for inclusion of non-regulated qualifications in the framework are considered transparent, robust and intensive, and interest in the framework among labour market stakeholders has been growing. No influence of the Covid-19 crisis has been observed on requests for classification into the NLQF; online meetings of the commissions continued well, and online information sessions had a good level of attendance (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). A possible high increase in the number of requests for classification in the future may represent a challenge to the current capacity of the NLQF-NCP and its external structures, requiring their expansion. A new sounding-board of key stakeholders has been set up by the NCP to advise on the wider social and political context and support in communicating the framework and clarifying misconceptions about it (NQFL-NCP, 2019).

The adoption of a dedicated NLQF legal act (foreseen for 2021) is expected to accelerate NLQF implementation and to raise its profile, including through the regulation of the inclusion of EQF/NLQF levels on qualification documents. A national communication strategy is foreseen once the new act is adopted, to inform the wider public about the NLQF in the context of promoting lifelong learning.

Other challenges that have been identified for the following period are the classification of international qualifications, which is currently a time-consuming and complex process for which solutions are being sought at EU level, and the open question of whether specific VET qualifications currently at NLQF level 4 could be reclassified at level 5. Recognition of foreign qualifications can also be a challenge as, in some cases, similar qualifications from different countries may be referenced to different EQF levels; examples of qualifications from

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1057. Studying for a qualification with an NLQF level might be one of the criteria for using funds from the individual learning account (NLQF-NCP, 2019).

the Netherlands, Germany and Flanders having this issue have been identified, and it has been suggested that the countries work together to map the differences and reach a solution (NQFL-NCP, 2019). The use of 'achieved learning outcomes' instead of 'intended learning outcomes' in the classification of qualifications has been contested by some higher education stakeholders; the NCP, in collaboration with NVAO, has tested during 2019 the effects of using 'achieved learning outcomes' in the process of classification. The test will be discussed with the Ministry of Education, NVAO and the Inspectorate (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Table 60. Dutch national qualifications framework (NLQF)

NLQF LEVELS	FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS	OTHER QUALIFICATIONS (*)	EQF LEVELS
8	Doctorate (*Doctoraat)*) Designer *(Ontwerper)* Medical specialist *(Medisch specialist)*		8
7	Master degree	Example: • Social studies	7
6	Bachelor degree	Examples: • Anesthetist employee (*Anesthesiemedewerker*) • Certified leader excellent level (*Gecertificeerd leider uitstekend niveau*) • Dialysis nurse (*Dialyseverpleegkundige*) • Secondary defence formation (Middelbare defensie vorming) • Officer Royal Military police (*Officier koninklijke marechaussee onderbouw*) • Officer Navy force (*Officier korps zeedienst*)	6
5	Associate degree	Examples: • Consultant payroll services & benefits (CPB) • Hotel service management • Operational technician energy production technology (*Operationeel technicus energie productietechniek*) • Instructor 5 (*Opleider 5*) • 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 (*Opleider 4*) • Airport service agent • Application training food technology (*Applicatie opleiding levensmiddelentechnologie*) • Industry diploma all-round beautician (*Branchediploma allround schoonheidsspecialist*) • Industry diploma medical pedicure (*Branchediploma medisch pedicure*)	4
3	VET level 3 (*MBO 3*)	Examples: • Dog grooming (*Hondentoiletteren*) • General investigator (*Algemeen Opsporingsambtenaar*) • Swimming teacher (*Zwemonderwijzer*) • Trainer-coach 3 • Industry diploma pedicure (Branchediploma pedicure)	3

NLQF LEVELS	FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS	OTHER QUALIFICATIONS (*)	EQF LEVELS
2	VET level 2 (*MBO 2*) 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 (*vavo*) Basic education 3 for adults (*Basiseducatie 3*)	Examples: - Military police security (*Marechausseebeveiliger*) - Assistant swimming teacher (*Assistent zwemonderwijzer*) - Sales employee (*Verkoopmedewerker*)	2
1	VET level 1 (*MBO 1*) Pre-vocational secondary education – basic vocational pathway (*vmbo bb*) Basic education 2 for adults (*Basiseducatie 2*)	Examples: - Operating assistant (*Bedieningsassistent*) - Kitchen assistant (*Keukenassistent*)	1
Entry level	Basic education 1 for adults (*Basiseducatie 1*)		

* 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.

Source: Adapted from NQFL-NCP (2019). Additional information: https://www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/Artikelen/NLQF_Brochure_Engels_2018_site.pdf and the NLQF register of private qualifications: http://www.nlqf.nl/register

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Abbreviations

BOL	school-based pathway	NQF	national qualifications framework
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system	NVAO	the Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training	QF-EHEA	Qualifications framework for the European higher education area
EQF	European qualifications framework	Vavo	general secondary education for adults [*Voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs*]
EVC	validation of prior learning [*Erkenning van Verworven Competenties*]		
Havo	upper secondary general education [*Hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*]	Vmbo	lower secondary general and pre-vocational education [*Voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*]
HBO	higher professional education [*Hoger beroepsonderwijs*]	VET	vocational education and training
		VWO	pre-university secondary education [*Voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs*]
MBO	upper secondary vocational education [*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*]		
NLQF	qualifications framework for the Netherlands		

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NEW ZEALAND

Introduction and context

The New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) covers senior secondary school and tertiary education based on outcomes and sets out 10 level descriptors relating to knowledge, skills and the application of said knowledge and skills. It provides information on the knowledge and experience that holders of qualifications are expected to have and the education and employment pathways related to a given qualification.

The NZQF was established in 2010. It replaced the previous National Qualifications Framework, which was introduced in 1991, and the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, which was founded in 2001.

The establishment of the NZQF followed a targeted review of the qualifications system in 2008/09. The review identified a need to make qualifications better understood by learners, employers and industry, reduce the number of qualifications and ensure that qualifications 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.[1058]

The NZQF is fundamental to New Zealand's tertiary education system[1059]. Government funding for tertiary education providers is only available for qualifications that are quality assured and listed 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[1060] and/or other communities.

1058. Māori are the indigenous peoples of New Zealand. Mātauranga Māori refers to a distinct knowledge related to the Māori worldview and experience.

1059. 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.

1060. 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 (see https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/maori-and-pasifika/pasifika/).

Outcomes

Clear learning 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 communities.

Flexibility

Qualifications can be achieved in different settings, including the workplace and education institutions. Having programmes of study and industry training leading to a qualification allows learners to achieve that qualification in ways best 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, learning outcomes and qualifications

The 10 levels of the NZQF demonstrate an increasing complexity of learning outcomes (Level 10 being the most complex) across the domains of knowledge, skills and the application of knowledge and skills.

Knowledge refers to what a graduate knows and understands. It is described as a progression from 'basic general knowledge' to knowledge that 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 dimensions of integration, independence and creativity are important to describing skills progression and reflect 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, more accountable and 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 to compare qualifications. Different learners will achieve the outcomes in different ways, so the outcome statement indicates the minimum achievement expected for a qualification to be granted.

Each outcome statement includes a/an:
- *graduate profile* describing 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 competencies required.
- *education pathway* identifying other qualifications in which a graduate could enrol after completing this qualification. Where qualifications are standalone and do not prepare graduates for further study, the outcome statement should make this clear.
- *employment pathway* determining the areas in which graduates may be qualified to work or contribute to their communities.

Table 61. The levels of the New Zealand Qualifications Framework

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 (2016)[1061]

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The NZQF is established under section 436 of the Education and Training Act 2020 ('the Act'). It was first brought in as a single unified framework on 1 July 2010 under section 253 (1)(c) of the former Education Act 1989 and was fully introduced into the Education Act 1989 in the August 2011 legislative amendment (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 433 of the Act).

There are two quality assurance agencies with responsibilities for separate parts of the tertiary education sector (section 253 of the Act). 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
NZQA operates an integrated quality assurance system in which all components support each other. The quality assurance system includes the

registration of private training establishments, approval of training schemes and qualifications across the 10 levels of the NZQF and approval of micro-credentials (introduced in 2018). It also includes assuring the consistency of graduate outcomes of New Zealand qualifications at Levels 1–6; moderation of assessment standards set by NZQA; monitoring of programme delivery across all levels of the NZQF; conducting external evaluation and review, and risk management.

The *external evaluation and review* (EER) process is an integral component of NZQA's evaluative quality assurance framework during which NZQA reaches independent judgements on the quality of education delivered by non-university TEOs. This is done by focusing on learner achievement, outcomes and key contributing processes. All non-university TEOs must participate in periodic EERs. The normal cycle is four years, but EERs will occur more frequently if problems in a TEO's performance are identified. 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. NZQA evaluates the TEO's educational performance and capability in self-assessment and reports a level of confidence in both areas. The final EER 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

1061. See NZQA website, available at https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/Studying-in-NZ/New-Zealand-Qualification-Framework/requirements-nzqf.pdf.

stakeholder needs, evaluating the effectiveness of organizational processes and practices, and using the understanding gained to make improvements to outcomes and learner achievements.

Quality assurance of universities

The New Zealand Vice-Chancellor's Committee[1062] (operating as Universities New Zealand - Te Pōkai Tara) is the statutory body with responsibility for quality assurance matters in the university sector under section 253 of the Act. It has the authority to approve university programmes, training schemes and qualifications for listing on the NZQF and to accredit, along with ancillary powers under section 453 of the Act.

There are two bodies overseeing the quality assurance of universities: the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) and the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA).

The Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP)

CUAP establishes and applies 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 the promotion of course development that allows learners to transfer between programmes and institutions.

The Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA)

AQA provides external academic quality assurance for all New Zealand universities. It supports universities to achieve excellence in research and teaching by carrying out cyclical academic audits of universities and by promoting quality enhancement practices.

Audits are carried out 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 that form the basis for the sharing of progress and good practice.

1062. For more information, please refer to the website: https://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz/.

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Section 452(1)(n) of the Act states that NZQA may prescribe the details for credits, cross-credits, recognition of prior learning and moderation. NZQA currently performs this function through its *NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules* (NZQF, updated version in 2021).

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, NZQA has published guidelines with the following key features for effective CRT and RPL policies:

In *Recognising learning for credit: Guidelines for the recognition and award of credit for learning* (NZQA, 2017), NZQA outlines that TEOs should:
- integrate CRT and RPL in their overall systems, regulations, policies and practice e.g. in programme development, assessment and organizational self-assessment;
- approve appropriate quality assurance and academic regulations, policies and procedures for CRT and RPL that apply across all learning areas of the organization;
- promote information about CRT and RPL to learners through all relevant means;
- provide accessible academic advice and support to assist learners in applying for credit through CRT and RPL;
- ensure decisions about CRT and RPL are timely, transparent, robust, consistent and for the maximum benefit of learners.

NZQF implementation and impact

The *NZQF Qualification Listing and Operational Rules 2021* set out the general listing requirements for qualifications at Levels 1–10 on the NZQF. Sections 436 and 452 of the Act mandate NZQA to make rules associated with listing requirements.

Qualification developers must seek approval to list qualifications on the NZQF. NZQA approves and lists all non-university qualifications and CUAP approves qualifications developed by universities.

For new qualifications at Levels 7–10 on the NZQF, NZQA considers the qualification alongside the 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 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.

Qualification developers use a variety of approaches when deciding the level of a qualification on the NZQF. The first is to compare the graduate outcomes of the qualification with the level descriptors on the NZQF. Another approach is to assess the level at which the qualification should 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 that the qualification is relevant and fit for its purpose.

NZQA and the Ministry of Education are directly involved in developing several qualifications. NZQA develops qualifications for Māori, Pasifika and for some generic skills. The Ministry of Education develops the National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) for senior secondary school. Other government agencies may participate in or initiate the development of qualifications to meet particular policy objectives.

Referencing to regional frameworks or other frameworks

NZQA has completed several projects with other jurisdictions that compare the NZQF to other qualifications frameworks 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). In 2016, NZQA and the Malaysian Qualifications Agency published a report on the comparability of New Zealand and Malaysia's Bachelor, Master's and Doctoral degrees.

NZQA is currently progressing work to enable increased recognition of Pacific qualifications and frameworks in the Pacific region under the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus agreement.

Important lessons and future plans

NZQA has learned that reviewing and developing a new qualification requires all parties to work collaboratively to identify and understand industry, community and cultural needs. 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 their purpose.

New Zealand is currently undergoing reform in vocational education to unify the system and ensure it is fit for the future of work, and that it delivers the skills that learners, employers and communities need to thrive. This work includes a redesign of the structure and components of vocational qualifications to enable seamless transition for learners between workplace, online and in-class study, to improve consistency of learner outcomes and to enable the influence of the end-user voice in the system.

A key change is the introduction of Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) to set standards, develop qualifications, endorse programmes that lead to industry qualifications, moderate assessments and help shape the curriculum of vocational education. Some of these functions are currently carried out by industry training organizations or NZQA and will transition to WDCs in October 2021. Te Pūkenga (the New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology) was established in April 2020 and brings together New Zealand's existing 16 institutes of technology and polytechnics into one organization. Over time, this organization will be able to support work-based, campus-based and online learning as a unified system.

The introduction of WDCs and Te Pūkenga into the qualifications system also means that NZQA will need to review its approach to quality assurance, to ensure it fully supports the intent of vocational education reform and any changes made by NZQA to vocational qualifications.

This body of reforms also incorporates work to review the NZQF, including:
- opportunities to reflect mātauranga Māori within the qualifications system;
- a bilingual architecture for the NZQF to give more prominence to te reo Māori[1063] and mātauranga Māori;

1063. Te reo Māori is the indigenous language of New Zealand.

- changes to the NZQF level descriptors that embed three transferable competencies and reflect vocational training and practical skills throughout.

NZQA has engaged with stakeholders on NZQF changes and is currently preparing final consultation proposals.

Abbreviations

AQA	Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities	NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
CRT	Credit recognition and transfer	NZQF	New Zealand Qualifications Framework
CUAP	Committee on University Academic Programmes	RPL	Recognition of prior learning
		TEO	Tertiary education organization
EER	External evaluation and review	WDC	Workforce Development Council
NCEA	National Certificates of Educational Achievement		

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NIGERIA

Introduction and context

The Nigerian government has prioritized human capital development aimed at accelerating the country's socio-economic development. Nigeria's long-term development agenda, Vision 2020, recognizes education as a basic human right instrumental for national development and social change. It also prioritizes investments in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) "to provide skilled manpower in applied science, engineering technology and commerce to operate, maintain and sustain the nation's economic activities for rapid socioeconomic development."

To operationalize Vision 2020, the country has, over the years, introduced various policies to reinforce the provision of relevant education to produce skilled manpower:
- The Four-Year Strategic Plan for the Development of the Education Sector, 2011-2015 emphasizes TVET as the 'master key' to unlocking the country's development potential.
- Nigeria's National Policy on Education was revised in 2013 to align with national aspirations articulated in Vision 2020.
- More recently, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) has started to develop a **Ministerial Strategic Plan** in recognition of the cardinal position of education in all national development efforts.

Policy objectives

The National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF), formally called the National Vocational Qualification Framework (NVQF), is a system for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge, understanding and competencies acquired by individuals, irrespective of where and how the training or skill was acquired. The system provides clear guidelines as to what the learner must know or be able to do, whether the learning took place in a classroom, on the job or less formally. The framework indicates the comparability of different qualifications and how one can progress from one level to another. The framework aims to:
- Promote lifelong learning
- Provide quality assurance and recognition
- Understand occupational learning routes and qualifications and how they relate to each other
- Provide access to vocational education and training opportunities.
- Make progression routes easier and clearer
- Improve career mobility
- Increase the scope for recognition of prior learning

Lifelong learning is necessary to enhance an individual's employability in a rapidly changing world of work. People should have opportunities for training to meet needs arising from technological and economic development and changing career paths. The NSQF can offer Nigerians a tool to promote the development of new qualifications, making delivery more flexible and widening the range of providers. In that sense, the NSQF also aims to provide quality assurance and recognition, thus ensuring that qualifications are relevant to perceived social and economic needs. This also ensures that National Occupational Standards are defined in terms of agreed-upon learning outcomes and are applied consistently, that training providers meet defined quality standards and that national qualifications are internationally recognized.

Table 62. Levels, Learning outcomes and qualification

S/N	NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM/ STANDARDS	COMPETENCY-BASED ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION/EXPERIENCE.
1	postgraduate	NSQ Level 6
2	HND/Degree	NSQ Level 5
3	ND/NID/ANTC/ANBC	NSQ Level 4
4	NTC/NBC/NVC/Trade Test1	NSQ Level 3
5	NVC2, Trade Test 2	NSQ Level 2
6	Pre-vocational JSS3, NVC1&Trade Test3	NSQ Level 1

Source: Authors

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Sector Skills Councils: Identify, define, and update employment-based standards of competence for agreed occupations. These people effectively represent the interests of the trade or industry concerned, to which the particular NSQ relates. Sector bodies define what the job entails.

Awarding bodies: Design assessment and quality assurance systems and gain sector bodies' endorsement prior to submission to NBTE for accreditation of the qualification. Awarding bodies approve training and assessment centres to offer qualifications. Awarding bodies are the top-level training certification organizations while they do not deliver the training, they do design the structure of the qualification and accredit the certification, which the training organizations and assessment centres use and deliver.

Awarding bodies engage with sector bodies and training organizations; they also engage with client organizations if they are large enough to have their own training and delivery departments. Training organizations are effectively distributors of the awarding bodies' qualifications system.

They undertake external verifications to ensure that candidates are being assessed fairly and consistently across all centres.

Regulatory bodies: The NBTE accredits proposals for qualifications submitted by awarding bodies and monitors awarding bodies offering NSQs. NBTE effectively manages the whole system on behalf of the government.

Assessment centres: carry out assessments according to awarding body criteria.

Training providers: Deliver training in partnership with industry, register candidates, assess and guide candidates towards achieving national qualifications.

The following organizations are those that have so far been approved to support the institutionalization of national qualifications in Nigeria.

Table 63. Organisations approved to support the institutionalization of national qualifications

S/NO	ORGANIZATIONS	ROLE IN NVQ DELIVERY	REMARK
1	National board for technical education. NBTE	Regulatory body	By law
2	National business and technical examination board (NABTEB)	Awarding body (General)	By law
3	Nigerian institute of wielding	Awarding body for wielding	By professional recognition
4	Nigerian institute of building	Awarding body for building related	By professional recognition
5	Nigerian society for engineer	Awarding body for engineering	By professional recognition
6	Institute for tourism professionals (ITP), lagos	Awarding body for hospitality	By professional recognition
7	National power training institute (NAPTIN)	Training provider for the power industry	By law
8	Industrial training fund (ITF)	Training provider (General)	By law
9	Wavecrest college of hospitality (Lagos, Ogun and Enugu)	Training centre for hospitality	By professional recognition
10	C-STEMP, Abuja	Training centre for construction	By law

S/NO	ORGANIZATIONS	ROLE IN NVQ DELIVERY	REMARK
11	Centre of Excellence for TVE	Training centre for quality assurance managers	By law
12	Kaduna Polytechnic Kaduna	Training centre (General)	By law
13	Yaba college of technology, yaba-Lagos	Training centre (General)	By law
14	Hussainiadamu Federal Polytechnic kazaure	Training centre (General)	By law
15	Federal Polytechnic oko	Training centre (General)	By law
16	Council for the regulation of engineering in Nigeria (COREN)	Sector skills council for engineering	By law
17	Council of registered builders of Nigeria	Sector skills council for building	By law
18	National institute for hospitality and tourism (NIHOTOUR)	Sectors skills council for hospitality and tourism	By law
19	National automotive design and development council (NADDC)	Sector skills council for automotive industry	By law
20	National institute for hospitality and tourism (NIHOTOUR)	Training centre for hospitality and tourism	By law
21	Skills care development organization	Sector Skills Council for education and care	By professional recognition
22	Quality skills empowerment (QVSE)	Awarding organization for education and care	By professional recognition
23	Talent and skills managers (TASK)	Training provider for NVQ quality assurance manager	By professional recognition

Source: Authors

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning

The RPL system is centred around the National Skills Qualifications (NSQ):

- NSQs are work-related, competence-based qualifications that certify an understanding of the theory of the work in progress and the competency of the individual as evidenced in their specific job role issued by a recognized awarding body.
- NSQs reflect the skills and knowledge needed to do the job effectively.
- NSQs are about practical performance as well as knowledge and understanding.
- NSQ standard are sector specific and set by the industry sectors themselves
- The standards state what a competent person in a job could be expected to do.
- Employees are trained and assessed at their normal place of work.
- An NSQ can be completed as a standalone qualification.
- NSQs are open to individuals of all ages.
- NSQs are quite different from conventional qualifications they are about demonstrating skills and competencies for a job.

Referencing to the regional framework/other frameworks

Nigeria is currently participating in the process of harmonizing qualifications systems in ECOWAS countries, supported by UNESCO.

Important lessons and future plans

In the future, it is expected that the government will continue to recognize TVET as pivotal to the nation's rapid economic and industrial development. Indeed, TVET is one of ten key education subsectors captured in the Ministerial Strategic Plan. As noted in the Ministerial Roadmap, the Federal Ministry of Education will address the challenges of TVET through the following:

- Review and revise the National TVET curriculum and policy to ensure its responsiveness to national industry skills needs.
- Construct and equip 16 new Federal Science and Technology Colleges and equip 21 existing ones.
- Establish a National Institute of Technology in Abuja to act as a Centre of Excellence in Science and Technology Education and Innovation.
- Conduct national outreach campaigns to make citizens aware of TVET courses/training programmes.
- Conduct skills gap assessment between TVET and industries.
- Train and retrain TVET teachers.

Finally, in the future, Nigeria plans to develop science and technology education policy documents.

Infographic of the NQF/NQF overview table

Figure 28. The NSQ Framework
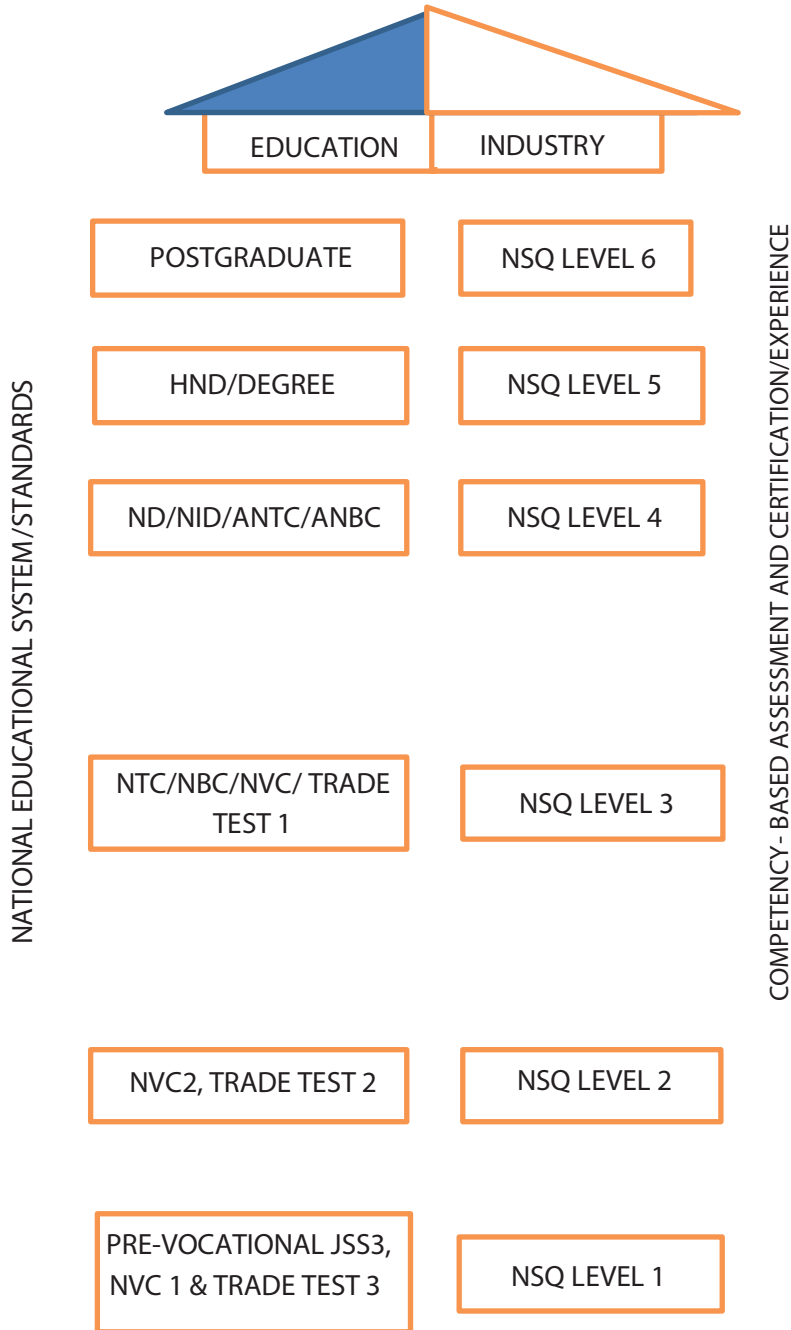
Source: National Board of Technical Education

Abbreviation

NSQF	Nigerian Skill Qualification Framework	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
NSQs	National Skill Qualification(s)		
AB	Awarding Body	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SSC	Sector Skills Council	NOS	National Occupational Standards

Main sources of information

Operational manual, Nigerian Skills Qualifications Framework by National Board for Technical Education and the Internet

REFERENCE

Nigerian Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF)

Prepared by

UNESCO in consultation with national experts

NORTH MACEDONIA

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

The NQF in North Macedonia was adopted by law in 2013. It is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework, consisting of eight levels, of which levels 5 to 7 have two sublevels each. There are three sets of level descriptors, namely knowledge and understanding, skills and competence.

Coordination of the North Macedonia Qualifications Framework (NMQF) lies with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, which guide its development and implementation. Operational management, including approval of qualifications and their allocation to the NMQF levels, is the responsibility of the National Board for the NQF.

All new and reformed qualifications are based on learning outcomes. Reformed vocational programmes are linked with qualification standards and occupational standards. Authorities are progressing establishment of a system for validation on non-formal and informal learning.

North Macedonia is a candidate for EU accession. The country is a member of the EQF Advisory Group and referenced its NQF to the European Qualifications Framework and self-certified against the Bologna framework in higher education, in 2016.

NQF governance arrangements are in place; most of the necessary enabling regulations have been adopted; instruments and systems for quality assurance are being applied; and the framework has begun to play a role in improving transparency and comparability of qualifications domestically and internationally. Therefore, the NQF in North Macedonia is at the activation stage of NQF development.

Policy context

The NQF is a key reform instrument in the country's principal economic, social, employment and education strategies.[1064] The Employment and Social Reform Programme 2020[1065] and the Economic Reform Programme 2018-20203 provide the broad policy framework in employment and education. These strategies specify the NQF's role in improving the quality of the education and training system, adapting it to labour market needs, and promoting lifelong learning and mobility.

Before early 2020, labour market data had shown some improvement. Employment rates of those aged 15 and over had risen from 37.9% in 2010 to 43.7% in 2018. For the 20-64 years span, the 2018 figure was 56%. Unemployment affects one in five adults and nearly half of young people. We can expect that COVID will have reversed some of the recent employment gains.

VET enrolment, according to ETF's analysis, accounts for 60% of the country's upper secondary cohort.

Responding to the COVID crisis in 2020, the authorities closed schools in early March. Online and distance learning for all school and university students was introduced later that month, with a rolling digital training scheme for teachers. Daily distance learning lessons broadcast by two national TV channels and donors also provided support for online learning. Work-Based Learning was suspended. Final exams (the state Matura) were cancelled, replaced by final grades based on cumulative scores and online assessments.

1064. British Council; IME (2017). *Framework for strategic engagement of employers in Northern Macedonia.* http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Ramka-za-stratesko-vklucuvanje-na-rabotodavaci.pdf

1065. Government of the Republic of Macedonia (2017). *Employment and social reform programme 2020* (in English). http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/word/esrp_dokumenti/ESRP%20Macedonia%20-%20final%20(ENG).pdf 3 Ministry of Finance (2018). *Economic reform programme 2018-20* (in English). https://www.finance.gov.mk/files/Macedonia_ERP_2018.pdf

NQF legal basis

The VET system is mainly regulated by the Law on Vocational Education and Training approved in 2006 and amended in 2015. The NQF in North Macedonia for Lifelong Learning was formally adopted in 2013 via the law on the NQF[1066], No 137/2013, which came into effect in 2015. It defines the principles and goals of the framework, its structure, levels, sublevels and level descriptors, mandatory elements of qualification standards, volume and types of qualifications, as well as its governance, quality assurance aspects and the roles of stakeholders in the qualification system.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

Significant improvement in transition to higher levels of education and training has been facilitated in the past decade through a number of education policies, such as making secondary education compulsory for all, streamlining progression routes of graduates from three-year VET programmes to four-year VET programmes giving access to higher education, and stimulating participation in higher education.

Higher education institutions have been reforming their curricula and qualifications in implementation of the Bologna principles. Notably, amendments to the law on higher education in 20105 introduced learning-outcomes-based study programmes.

The key sector-specific strategic documents are the Strategy for Vocational Education and Training in a lifelong learning context 2013-20[1067], the Comprehensive Education Strategy 2018-2025[1068], the Adult Education Strategy 2019-20238 and the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2017-2020.

The government adopted in 2018 the Comprehensive Strategy for Education 2018–2025. It defines a vision of a comprehensive, inclusive and integrated education system focused on the learner, based on modern programmes for equipping people with the knowledge, skills and competences for participation in society and the labour market. It addresses all education sectors, including VET and adult education. It will review and seek to improve the education system infrastructure, including building facilities, equipment and teaching and supporting technologies; capacities of human resources including managers, teaching and support staff; the autonomy of education institutions; and legislation, management and funding.

The main policy priorities established for VET are to harmonise VET with labour market needs, improve the learning environment and quality of VET, increase enrolment, and improve capacities of human resources.

In 2019, in view of the reforms planned in the new Comprehensive Strategy, the government started to review the entire education legislative framework.

Aims of NQF

The framework aims to improve education and training through implementation of the learning outcomes approach; to aid access to learning in every context and make learning outcomes explicit for every citizen; to raise the overall level of qualifications of the population; and to strengthen the links between qualifications and employment prospects[1069].

The main goals of the NQF are to integrate and coordinate the education sub-systems and to improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and the civil society10. The main policy objectives listed in the law on the NQF[1070] are to:

- define the learning outcomes at the different levels;
- establish a system for validation of different qualifications within the overall qualifications system;
- encourage and promote lifelong learning;
- demonstrate clear links between different parts of the education and training system;
- indicate transfer and progression (horizontally and vertically) across and within all types of education and training (formal, non-formal and informal);

1066. Law on national qualifications framework. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No 137/2013 and 30/2016. http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/NQF-LAW_MKD-EN_rev-final-1.pdf5 Law on higher education. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia,* No 115/10.

1067. Strategy for vocational education and training in a lifelong learning context and action plan 2013-20. http://www.csoo.edu.mk/images//vet%20strategy_en%20-%20final.pdf

1068. *Education strategy for 2018–2025 and action plan*, Skopje: Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia, 2018. http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Strategija-za-obrazovanie-ENG-WEB-1.pdf 8 Стратегија за Образование на Возрасни 2019-2023/ Strategy on adult education [in Macedonian]. https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/strategija-za-obrazovanie-na-vozrasni-2019-2023-mk.pdf

1069. Education strategy for 2018-2025 and Action plan. http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Strategija-za-obrazovanie-ENG-WEB-1.pdf 10 The Roadmap for Further Development and Implementation of the MQF (2016) http://mrk.mk/?page_id=918&lang=en

1070. Law on national qualifications framework. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No 137/2013 and 30/2016. http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/NQF-LAW_MKD-EN_rev-final-1.pdf

- enable international comparability of qualifications;
- promote the importance of key and professional competences;
- ensure mobility of participants in education and training and inclusion in the labour market at national and international levels;
- create a single system for quality assurance;
- balance quality of service providers;
- ensure cooperation of all stakeholders;
- ensure harmonisation with national economic, social and cultural needs;
- be part of the developments related to the EQF.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

The NQF in North Macedonia is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework. It consists of eight levels, of which levels 5 to 7 have two sublevels each to reflect the specificities of the national education and training system and meet the requirements of employers[1071].

Level descriptors are defined in terms of expected learning outcomes and follow the EQF domains: knowledge and understanding, skills and competence. They were developed for each level taking into account the EQF level descriptors, the Dublin descriptors for levels 6 to 8, the characteristics of national education and training levels, and strategic national priorities. Different dimensions of the Dublin descriptors have been integrated into the three domains of the NQF.

Levels 5 to 7 have two sublevels each, so that the framework contains Levels 5A and 5B, 6A and 6B and 7A and 7B. The learning outcomes are the same in the A and B sublevels. Instead, the function of the extra levels is to cater for different types of qualifications (see below).

Types of qualifications

The NQF includes qualifications of two types defined by the NQF law[1072]: educational qualifications from all formal education sectors (general education, VET, higher education), and vocational (or occupational) qualifications based on occupational standards. The general education qualifications are allocated to the NQF levels 1 and 4, VET qualifications correspond to the 2-5B NQF levels, the higher education qualifications are allocated to the 5A-8 NQF levels. Vocational qualifications can be allocated at NQF levels up to 5B according to their level of complexity.

Only educational qualifications enable vertical progression in the formal education system. Vocational qualifications are regarded as partial (CVET) qualifications[1073], which can be acquired by completing a formally recognised training course – either part of a formal education programme (modules, courses) or a verified special programme for adult education; or through validation of non-formal learning.

Quality assurance of qualifications

The NQF law establishes the competent bodies and procedures for the development and quality assurance of qualifications. The institutions responsible for the development of qualifications at levels

1 to 5B are the VET Centre, the Centre for Adult Education and the Bureau for Development of Education. Qualifications at levels 5A to 8 are developed by higher education institutions. The approval and allocation of qualifications in the NQF are the responsibility of the National Board for the NQF.

Vocational (CVET) and VET qualifications are developed based on occupational standards, and awarded by the verified or accredited providers. Educational and training programmes are verified both in formal VET as well as Adult Education.

Higher education qualifications are awarded by accredited education institutions. All higher education institutions are obliged to undergo both institutional and programme accreditation by the Agency for Quality of Higher Education.

1071. Ministry of Education and Science (2016). EQF referencing report of the Macedonian qualifications framework and self-certification to the QF-EHEA., p. 63

1072. Law on national qualifications framework. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No 137/2013 and 30/2016. Article 11. http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/NQF-LAW_MKD-EN_rev-final-1.pdf

1073. Vocational qualifications constitute proof that smaller groups of learning outcomes have been achieved or combinations of learning outcomes that do not meet the requirements for achieving the education level (Art. 12 of the NQF law) http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/NQF-LAW_MKD-EN_rev-final-1.pdf

Use of learning outcomes and standards

All new and reformed qualifications are based on learning outcomes. The law on the NQF stipulates the following mandatory elements of qualification standards: title and type of qualification, level or sublevel, qualification code, credit value, description of qualification (measurable indicators of learning outcomes relating to the acquired knowledge and understanding, skills and competence) and contents (entry requirements, number of mandatory and optional subjects, assessment methods and criteria for assessment of learning outcomes)[1074].

Reformed VET programmes are based on the qualifications standards linked with relevant occupational standards. Programmes are modular. In adult education, verified non-formal training programmes are designed in learning outcomes and based on occupational standards.

Since 2010, higher education institutions have designed their programmes in learning outcomes. In accordance with the law on higher education[1075], higher education programmes should contain learning outcomes according to the national framework for higher education qualifications[1076].

Credit systems

The volume of qualifications is expressed in credits, using three credit systems. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) is used for higher education qualifications, the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) for VET qualifications, and the North Macedonian credit system for general education (NMCSGE) for primary and general secondary education. ECTS has been applied to all three cycles of higher education since 2005.

1074. Law on national qualifications framework. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No 137/2013 and 30/2016. Article 6. http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/NQF-LAW_MKD-EN_rev-final-1.pdf

1075. Ministry of Education and Science (2018). *Law on higher education*. Article 140. https://uklo.edu.mk/filemanager/2019/Zakon%20za%20visikoto%20obrazovanie.pdf

1076. Decree on the national framework for higher education qualifications. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No 154, 30.11.2010. http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Appendix_1_Decree_for_the_NQF_HE.pdf

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The NQF law stipulates that the development, adoption, approval and classification of qualifications are the responsibility of the National Board for NQF, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Bureau for Development of Education, VET Centre, Centre for Adult Education, and Sectoral Qualifications Councils.

The Ministry of Education and Science has overall responsibility for developing the NQF and for EQF referencing; it is the EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP). It has a coordinating role, shared with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in leading the NQF's development and implementation. In quality assurance, it verifies programmes for formal VET and runs accreditation and verification of VET and adult education providers.

The National Board for the NQF, created in October 2015, ensures the involvement of stakeholders in framework governance. Its role is to evaluate education, employment and regional development policies, to help forge links between education and the labour market, to propose development of qualifications and decide on their allocation in the NQF in North Macedonia, to set up and supervise the sectoral qualifications councils; it also has a monitoring and methodological role. It has two representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science and one from each of the following:

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, VET Centre, the Centre for Adult Education, the Bureau for Development of Education, the National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility, higher education, the chambers, the Organisation of Employers, and the Independent Union for Education, Science and Culture.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy proposes the development of qualifications, adopts occupational standards and is responsible for setting up a system for collecting information on labour market needs and changes in required competences.

Sectoral qualifications councils are provided for by the NQF law, one for each of the 16 NQF sectors[1077],

1077. Law on national qualifications framework. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No 137/2013 and 30/2016. Article 18. http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/NQF-LAW_MKD-EN_rev-final-1.pdf

of which 10 have so far been established. Their members represent the Ministry of Education and Science, the ministry responsible for the sector, the employers association for that sector, the relevant trades unions in the sector, universities, the VET Centre, the Centre for Adult

Education, the Bureau for Development of Education, and the relevant body for regulated professions. The mandate of sectoral qualifications councils is to analyse labour market trends, propose and promote qualifications in a particular sector or subsector, evaluate current qualifications and propose priorities in developing new ones, give opinions on the compliance of examination programmes (assessment standards) with occupational and qualification standards, and establish commissions for assessment and validation of non-formal learning.

The VET Centre is responsible for the VET content: development of occupation standards, VET qualifications, programmes and curricula, and monitoring of their implementation. *The Bureau for Development of Education* is responsible for the development of programmes and curricula for primary and general secondary education, including the general subjects taught in VET programmes. *The Centre of Adult Education* proposes the development of vocational qualifications, verifies adult education programmes and monitors their delivery, develops programmes and curricula for primary and secondary education of adults.

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

VNFIL arrangements
Development of a validation system in North Macedonia is tied to development of the NQF and largely inspired by the EU's 2012 Recommendation. So far, while authorities have devised plans and adopted some legislation, the system is not yet implemented on the ground.

A *Roadmap for implementing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning*[1078] adopted in 2016, set out measures that became integrated in the new Comprehensive Education Strategy

2018-25[1079], the strategy on adult education for 2019-2321 and the concept document on lifelong learning. The Ministry of Education and Science and the Centre for Adult Education are the leading institutions; the Ministry has overall policy responsibility and will be the accrediting body for institutions providing VNFIL services, while the Centre for Adult Education provides coordination, technical and capacitybuilding support.

The regulatory framework for VNFIL is not fully established yet. A draft legal act containing the main principles and provisions for setting up and implementing the VNFIL system was developed in 2019. According to the draft law on Adult Education[1080] validation can be carried out by accredited education institutions or adult education providers. Validation will be possible only for vocational qualifications included in the NQF or education qualifications at NQF level 1. The assessment commission shall comprise three certified assessors, one of whom represents the VNFIL service provider, and two others to be nominated by the Centre for Adult Education.

The methodology package for VNFIL was introduced in 2017. Two substantial methodological documents were developed – the *Guide note on VNFIL processes* and the *Handbook for assessment in the context of validation of non-formal and informal learning*[1081].

The law on higher education[1082] stipulates that higher education qualifications may be awarded via VNFIL as well, but quality assurance regulations are yet to be adopted.

1078. *Roadmap for implementing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning.* http://mrk.mk/wpcontent/uploads/2015/05/VNFIL-Roadmap_angl-1.pdf

1079. *Education strategy for 2018–2025 and action plan*, Skopje: Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia, 2018. http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Strategija-za-obrazovanie-ENG-WEB-1.pdf 21 Стратегија за Образование на Возрасни 2019-2023/ Strategy on adult education [in Macedonian]. https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/strategija-za-obrazovanie-na-vozrasni-2019-2023-mk.pdf

1080. Draft law on Adult Education (2019) https://ener.gov.mk/default.aspx?item=pub_regulation&subitem=view_reg_detail&itemid=55701

1081. CAE; ETF (2017). *Guidance note on VNFIL processes* [in Macedonian] *http://cov.gov.mk/2485-2/* . CAE; ETF (2017). *Handbook for assessment in the context of validation of non-formal and informal learning* https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/event/22Nov2017_Handbook%20VNFIL%20assessment_fYR%20Macedonia_Engl_with%20Intro_FINAL.pdf.

1082. Ministry of Education and Science (2018). *Law on higher education.* https://uklo.edu.mk/filemanager/2019/Zakon%20za%20visikoto%20obrazovanie.pdf

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings

The NQF is now an integral part of the qualifications system, seen as an important reform tool embedded in several strategies. North Macedonia reached a milestone in 2016 when it referenced its NQF to the EQF.

Reform of VET and adult education programmes in line with the NQF is in progress. Two and threeyear VET programmes (NQF levels 2-3) have been revised or newly developed based on learning outcomes. The four-year programmes (NQF level 4) are being updated and their implementation started in 2017. In adult education, a total of 555 verified programmes based on learning outcomes are currently available. A qualifications register was set up and inclusion of qualifications in the register started in 2017. Currently it includes over 70 qualifications at NQF levels 2-5.

The work on establishing a VNFIL system is in progress. The Centre for Adult Education has developed a concept and roadmap for VNFIL, procedures and guidelines and has trained assessors in line with principles of the 2012 EU Council recommendation. VNFIL provisions have been included in the draft of a new adult education law.

Qualifications registers and databases

Qualifications approved by the National Board for NQF are registered in the NQF Register[1083]. It is designed as a comprehensive NQF register to include all NQF qualifications, however higher education qualifications are not included yet[1084].

As a starting point for the development of a qualifications register, a comprehensive inventory of qualifications was made in 2015 in cooperation with the ETF. It covered all formal qualifications from higher education, general education and VET, and the verified non-formal adult education programmes[1085].

Qualifications are classified according to type, NQF level and sector. For higher education qualifications, OECD classification of Fields of Research and Development is applied. Occupational standards, VET programmes, curricula and examination programmes are published at the VET Centre portal http://csoo.edu.mk/.

Qualification documents

VET qualifications are certified by a certificate for vocational training (NQF level 2) or diploma (NQF levels 3-5), vocational (occupational) qualifications are certified by a certificate. NQF levels are indicated only in higher education diplomas and diploma supplements[1086].

Career information and guidance

The Centre for Adult Education portal http://cov.gov.mk/ provides information on adult education providers and programmes. The Employment Service Agency uses these programmes as part of its active labour market measures.

Recognition of foreign qualifications

Recognition of foreign qualifications is carried out by the ENIC/NARIC Centre, housed in MES. The NQF law establishes the correspondence of national qualifications awarded before its adoption with the NQF levels and sub-levels.

Tools to use NQF

Several documents were produced to support the development of qualifications and their allocation in the NQF: Procedure for development of qualifications; Format of qualifications; Protocol for cooperation among the stakeholders involved in the process of NQF and Methodology for including qualifications in NQF[1087].

NQF evaluation

No systematic evaluation of the NQF use or impact has yet been carried out. Based on experience so far, the framework has influenced use of the learning outcomes approach; the review, renewal and quality assurance of qualifications; and dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders across education and training sectors and between education and the labour market[1088].

1083. available in Macedonian at: http://registar.mrk.mk/registri-kvalifikacii/

1084. A sub-register of higher education qualifications is available at http://mrk.mk/?page_id=1374&lang=mk

1085. The inventory is available on the official NQF website at http://mrk.mk/?page_id=960&lang=mk

1086. A bylaw that stipulates the indication of levels on higher education qualifications was adopted in June 2018. *National Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No 102, 1 June 2018. http://www.slvesnik.com.mk/Issues/751f8cc071e44013865e3b3401f440a3.pdf

1087. Documents are available at: http://mrk.mk/?page_id=73&lang=en

1088. European Commission and Cedefop (2020). Survey on implementation, use and impact of NQF/EQF [unpublished].

Referencing to regional framework/other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks

North Macedonia referenced its NQF to the EQF in 2016 and self-certified in the same report against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process).

The report is published on the NQF website and the Europass portal[1089].

MES is the designated National Coordination Point for participation in the EQF process.

International cooperation

North Macedonia's strategic priority is accession to the EU and it has been a formal candidate for EU entry since 2005. Its socio-economic and education and training reforms are geared to contributing to achieving membership of the Union.

North Macedonia adopted the RIGA 2015 conclusions on a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015-2020. 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

In deploying EU assistance in education and training, the country prioritizes widening access to quality education, training and lifelong learning; raising attainment; developing VET and promoting work-based learning to facilitate transitions to the labour market; and improving the quality and labour market relevance of higher education. North Macedonia also participates in EU programmes such as Erasmus Plus, as a programme country.

In regional cooperation, North Macedonia is a member of the Regional Cooperation Council of SouthEast Europe. RCC's aims include establishment of a Regional Economic Area which foresees such actions as promoting mobility of professionals, students, researchers and academics. South East Europe Strategy 202032 addresses smart growth needs and also aims at increasing the share of highly skilled people in the region.

The new Agency for Quality of Higher Education (AQA) established in 2019 is an affiliate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

International donor support

National and international actors have provided the funding for the functioning and capacity-building of NQF structures. International donors, notably the World Bank and the EU, through its Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), fund most of the NQF implementation activities.

The IPA twinning project "Further improvement of the system for development and implementation of the national qualifications framework (2016-2017)" aimed at activities for review of NQF-related legislation; strengthening institutional capacity; and development of methodologies and qualifications in line with the NQF.

The IPA project "Enhancing / Strengthening Lifelong Learning through modernising VET and adult education systems (2015-2017)" supported the development of 3-year VET programmes and adult education by developing new qualification and occupation standards, reforming curricula and strengthening cooperation between stakeholders and VET teachers. The 4-year programmes (NQF level 4) are being updated by the World Bank project "Skills Development and Innovation Support" (2014-2021), making these programmes outcomes-based and linked with qualification and occupational standards.

Projects have also supported the modernisation of post-secondary education[1090]; cooperation between higher education institutions and the business community[1091]; and building capacity of the EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP) and other relevant stakeholders[1092].

The ETF has supported the referencing of the NQF to the EQF, capacity- building for stakeholders, revision and analysis of qualifications, and levelling of a number of VET qualifications using learning outcomes.

1089. Ministry of Education and Science (2016). *EQF referencing report of the Macedonian qualifications framework and self-certification to the QF-EHEA*. https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-06/North%20Macedonian%20Referencing%20Report%20.pdf33 IPA project *Support to the modernisation of the system for post-secondary education (2016-2017)*.

1090. IPA project *Support to the modernisation of the system for post-secondary education (2016-2017)*.
1091. IPA project *Cooperation between higher education institutions, private sector and relevant public bodies*. (2016-2017)
1092. Erasmus + grant (2016).

Important lessons and future plans

The Comprehensive Education Strategy for 2018-25[1093] identified the further development and sustainability of the NQF as a national priority, acknowledging a number of challenges, including funding and legislative arrangements, capacity-building, stakeholder engagement and cooperation.

The existence of a legislative gap between the implementation of pilot initiatives and their scaling up at national level is considered to be a common reason across such pilots for limited impact of reforms37. The review of different legislative frameworks is currently ongoing to address different new policies (e.g. review of the adult education law for the introduction of VNFIL), however there are still contradictions and inconsistencies between the NQF law and other relevant legislation.

Further efforts are needed for qualifications to become more responsive to labour market and

individuals' needs. Insufficient involvement of stakeholders representing the labour market and a need to take labour market information more into account remain a challenge.

Adult education programmes are still to be better placed within the qualification system. Their features - they are linked to occupational standards, follow a common structure, and are designed using learning outcomes fit them for the vocational qualification type. Adult education programmes leading to vocational qualifications that are included in the NQF could ensure better links with VNFIL arrangements, strengthen the involvement of the private sector and address fragmentation of the adult education offer.

During 2020, COVID-19 some education and training programmes were slowed. Ensuring the financial and human resources for the functioning of the newly established NQF structures, and ensuring coordination and coherence of the different actions and of the multiple projects aimed at reforming VET qualifications in line with NQF principles, are factors that will impact the extent to which the NQF will be successfully implemented.

1093. The Education strategy for 2018-25 and the action plan are available at: http://mrk.mk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/10/Strategija-za-obrazovanie-ENG-WEB-1.pdf 37 National Torino Process report 2018-2020 https://europa.eu/!qb77hT

Table 64. Infographic of the NQF

NQF LEVELS		EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF
8		Doctorate diploma	NVQ	8
7	A	Second cycle master of science diploma (from 60 to 120 ECTS)	NVQ	7
	B	Second cycle diploma for specialist studies (60 ECTS)	NVQ	
6	A	• First cycle university diploma (240 ECTS) • First cycle vocational diploma (240 ECTS)	NVQ	6
	B	• First cycle university diploma (180 ECTS) • First cycle vocational diploma (180 ECTS)	NVQ	
5	A	Short cycle higher education (vocational) diploma	NVQ	5
	B	Post-secondary diploma for specialist education Craftsman diploma	NVQ	
4		• Upper secondary general education diploma • Upper secondary technical diploma • Upper secondary arts diploma	NVQ	4
3		Vocational diploma (three years)	NVQ	3
2		Vocational certificate (two years)	NVQ	2
1.1		Certificate of primary education	NVQ	

*   According to the law on the NQF, vocational/occupational qualifications can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education, or through validation of non-formal learning.

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Education and Science, 2016.

Main sources of information

The Ministry of Education and Science is the EQF NCP: https://mon.gov.mk/

NQF/EQF website: http://www.mrk.mk

Register of qualifications: http://registar.mrk.mk/

Ministry of Education and Science (2016). *EQF referencing report of the qualifications framework of the Republic of Macedonia and self-certification to the qualifications framework in the*

European higher education area. https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-06/North%20Macedonian%20Referencing%20Report%20.pdf

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Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
Online platform	https://openspace.etf.europa.eu
Twitter	@etfeuropa
Facebook	facebook.com/etfeuropa
YouTube	www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
Live&Learn	https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/
Instagram	instagram.com/etfeuropa/
LinkedIn	linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation
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NORWAY

Introduction and context

The performance of Norwegian 15-year-olds in reading and science has decreased compared to three years ago in the 2018 Programme for international student assessment (PISA).

The EU target of having underachievement below 15% in all three disciplines has not been met. Norway has surpassed the other EU 2020 targets. The proportion of early leavers from education is now below 10% (9.9%), however there is a significant gender gap (11.6% for males and 8.1% for females). Tertiary educational attainment is amongst the highest in Europe (49.1% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 40.3%) and the employment rate of recent graduates is exceeded only by Germany, Iceland, Malta and the Netherlands (European Commission, 2020).

As part of the government's strategy for better teaching professions[1094], an initiative to keep good teachers in the classroom has been piloted since 2015/16 on a new professional career path for teachers to become teacher specialists. Their main function will be teaching, but they can take on several other tasks related to their specialisation, like cooperating with universities and university colleges in development projects. Initially, the initiative was addressed to Norwegian language and mathematics teachers. Since 2019, the scheme has been expanded to include teachers in several other fields.

Based on the government's skills policy since 2013, including the Skills reform 2017-21 developed in close cooperation with the social partners and the

Skills Policy Council[1095], the Norwegian government presented a white paper on a skills reform to the Parliament in April 2020[1096]. Upskilling, reskilling and closing the competence gap are the two main objectives. It focuses on establishing a flexible system for skills to make sure the education system can offer flexible modules which can be combined with work. As a first step in the reform, the government, in cooperation with the social partners, is establishing programmes for training that target sectors and industries where workers are in particularly high need of upskilling or reskilling. The government is also funding the development of short, flexible courses, that can be combined with work, for more advanced digital skills such as cyber security, artificial intelligence and the internet of things. These courses will be designed in cooperation between businesses and universities, and vocational education institutions. To strengthen the vocational colleges' ability to respond better to the needs of the labour market, the government will suggest removing the restriction on the minimum length of the programmes which is currently half a year. Also, the government will put forward a strategy for higher vocational education and training (VET) during 2021.

The Norwegian national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (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

1094. Teacher Education 2025. National strategy for quality in teacher education: https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/d0c1da83bce94e2da21d5f631bbae817/kd_teacher-education-2025_uu.pdf

1095. The Skills Policy Council is monitoring the implementation of the National skills policy strategy 2017-21: https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/3c84148f2f394539a3eefdfa27f7524d/strategi-kompetanse-eng.pdf

1096. Meld. St. 14 (2019-2020). Kompetansereformen – Lære hele livet (in Norwegian). https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/afb66fbbcdfb47749f1b7007b559d145/no/pdfs/stm201920200014000dddpdfs.pdf

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[1097] and, following amendments of the relevant laws relating to education and training, further legally defined in a regulation in December 2017[1098].

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. More specific objectives include:

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 NQF is not itself regulating education and training, though it defines minimum standards and levels for learning outcomes in all accredited study programmes. It provides general descriptors for learning outcomes and the level descriptors play a key role in clarifying the similarities and differences between qualifications. They are a point of reference for developing and updating qualifications. In this way the framework acts as a tool for improving

the quality and relevance of qualifications and for increased transparency and mobility. Today, while the main objectives remain the same, the NQF is a strong regulating tool for education and training through quality assurance and through development of curricula.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

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 to ensure a structure that better parallels the levels of the EQF. Qualifications in the NKR generally represent full attainment of a formal education or training level, except at level 3 which includes partially completed upper secondary education and training. Levels 5 and 6 have two sublevels each, with different level descriptors, duration and credits; sublevels 5.1 and 6.1 accommodate full qualifications defined by learning outcomes of lower complexity compared to those at sublevels 5.2 and, respectively, 6.2. The learning-outcomes-based level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge (*kunnskap*), skills (*ferdigheter*), and general competence (*generell kompetanse*). At level 4, two parallel sets of level descriptors have been developed: one for vocational education and training and one for general education.

There is no descriptor or qualification linked to EQF level 1.

1097. The Norwegian qualifications framework for lifelong learning adopted by the Ministry of Education and Research on 15 December 2011, is available at: https://www.nokut.no/siteassets/nkr/20140606_norwegian_qualifications_framework.pdf
1098. 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

Table 65. Main NQF level descriptor elements defining levels 2 to 8 in Norway

LEVEL DESCRIPTOR ELEMENTS		
Knowledge	Skills	General competence
Understanding of theories, facts, concepts, principles and procedures in a discipline, subject area and/or profession.	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.*

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 particularly significant; 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 to support validation of prior learning. Today's curricula are based on the Knowledge promotion reform and include the core curriculum[1099], quality framework[1100] and subject curricula. The core curriculum elaborates on the aims stated in the Education Act[1101], 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, elaborates on the Education Act and its statutes and sets out 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[1102] 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[1103]. 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 to 8 of the national qualifications framework in all study programmes by the end of 2012. In many sectors, however, it has taken longer. There is currently a major restructuring of national curriculum regulations in health and welfare, including to make these more

1099. Ministry of Education and Research (1994). *Core curriculum for primary, secondary and adult education in Norway*. https://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/lareplan/generell-del/core_curriculum_english.pdf

1100. Directorate for Education and Training (2006). *National curriculum for knowledge promotion in primary and secondary education and training: the quality framework*. https://www.udir.no/globalassets/upload/larerplaner/fastsatte_lareplaner_for_kunnskapsloeftet/5/prinsipper_lk06_eng.pdf

1101. The Education Act: https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/1998-07-17-61

1102. https://www.udir.no/in-english/

1103. Report No 28 to the Storting, 2015-16, on in-depth learning and better understanding; a renewal of the Knowledge promotion reform. https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-28-20152016/id2483955/

future-oriented. The learning outcomes should be formulated in accordance with the NKR and national and international regulations. The task of developing curricula for health and welfare education programmes has been named RETHOS[1104]. New national curriculum regulations are being developed for 20 programmes that will be statutory and must be adhered to by all the higher education institutions concerned. The curricula will be implemented in the period 2020-21. According to the plan, RETHOS will also cover specialisation programmes; this is currently in the planning phase.

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 vocational college education and of higher education[1105]. This means that learning outcomes are assessed as part of all accreditations and reaccreditations of study programmes.

The NKR is indirectly providing a basis for validation of prior learning and informal competences in the Norwegian system. Arrangements related to validation of prior learning (VPL) 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 VPL.

There has been no national decision on the implementation of ECVET credits. Possible implementation of ECVET was assessed in a public consultation in 2015, involving major stakeholders such as the social partners. The conclusion outlined several possible strands of action, but no measures have been initiated. ECVET is used in Norway only as a project tool for cross-border mobility in VET.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The regulation on the NKR and the referencing to EQF are embedded in legislation in the education system.

The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for the overall development and implementation of the national qualifications framework. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) has the role of national coordination point (NCP) for the EQF. The coordination point is responsible for information, guidance and maintenance. It serves as information centre, coordinates activities related to the NKR and the EQF, and is responsible for the main web presentation[1106].

NOKUT, established in 2003, is a professionally independent agency under the Ministry of Education and Research. NOKUT's role is to assure the quality of higher and vocational college education in Norway and to recognise and inform about foreign qualifications. The agency is also Norwegian ENIC-NARIC information centre and national contact point for the diploma supplement and for the directive for regulated professions.

Quality assurance in Norwegian higher education is a dual responsibility. All higher education institutions are responsible for the quality of their own educational provisions, and it is NOKUT's responsibility to ensure that all institutions follow the legal requirements and provide education of high quality.

There are two main entrances to quality assurance in Norwegian higher education. The first relates to accreditation of educational provisions and the second to audits, supervisions and revision of accreditation. Accreditation is mandatory and universal for all formally recognised higher education. The accreditation formula combines institutional and programme accreditation. Institutional accreditation gives universities and university colleges certain rights to self-accredit programmes. Thus, new provisions in accredited institutions that go beyond the self-accreditation authority must be accredited by NOKUT. NOKUT accredits vocational college education programmes and supervises quality. Vocational colleges can, under certain conditions, receive accreditation for subject areas.

1104. The RETHOS project 2017-20. This 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; Children and Equality. It follows a 2012 white paper on welfare education to draft revised guidelines – including learning outcomes – for all relevant study programmes.

1105. 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

1106. NOKUT NCP: https://www.nokut.no/en/about-nokut/international-cooperation/national-coordination-point-ncp-for-the-european-qualifications-framework-for-lifelong-learning-eqf/

Central to the Norwegian education and training system below tertiary level is the Education Act. It covers primary, lower and upper secondary general education and VET, including apprenticeship training, for young people and adults, delivered by both public and private institutions. It states that the Ministry of Education and Research has overall responsibility for national policy development and administration of all levels covered by the act. The counties and municipalities are responsible for organising and financing within their jurisdiction.

Norway has a well-established and regulated system of cooperation between social partners and the government. They negotiate through collective bargaining to control wage levels and influence prices. This tripartite cooperation is also important in upper secondary VET. The Education Act gives the social partners representation in all important advisory bodies for upper secondary VET at national and county level. The National Council for Vocational Education and Training gives advice on an overarching level. Eight Vocational Councils give advice in specific groups of trades, one for each VET programme. The County Vocational Board for each county gives advice on quality, career guidance, regional development and the provision in the county to meet local labour market needs.

For vocational college education, the social partners are consulted through the National Council for Tertiary Vocational Education. This council has less of a formal function than the vocational training councils have at upper secondary level, as the education and training providers at this level design their own programmes. Skills Norway[1107] hosts the secretariat.

As quality assurance at primary and upper secondary levels is embedded in the legal framework, the State is responsible for inspecting all activities stipulated in the Education Act. The Ministry of Education and Research has delegated this responsibility to the Directorate for Education and Training[1108]. The directorate is responsible for developing and supporting inspections, to ensure unified inspection throughout the country and to provide guidance on legislation.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[1109]

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 of prior learning is based on agreed common principles that have been developed for many years as part of overarching lifelong learning policies since these were launched through the 1998 white paper on the Competence reform (Meld. St. 42 (1997-98) *Kompetansereformen).* One of these principles 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.

In Norwegian legislation and practice, validation comprises all prior learning: formal, non-formal and informal. In terms of validation, there is no distinction between these different kinds of learning, as it is not seen as useful to categorise in which arena the learning has taken place.

Responsibility for local provision in primary, lower and upper secondary education (levels 2 to 4) is decentralised to municipality and county education administrations respectively and VPL is based on the learning outcomes described in the curricula. Statutory rights for adults to complete upper secondary education and training were introduced in 2000 and for primary and lower secondary education in 2002. At this level, the outcome of validation of VPL 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 VET, individuals must pass the final trade examination to obtain the final VET (trade or journeyman's) certificate.

Validation for admission to vocational college education was introduced with the original law for this level in 2003; the possibility to grant exemption from parts of programmes was introduced through regulation in 2013. Adults from the age of 23, without required formal qualifications, may be validated for admission to studies and/or exempted from parts of a study programme based on VPL. In higher education, VPL is regulated by law stating that adults from the age of 25, without

1107. Skills Norway: https://www.kompetansenorge.no/english/
1108. The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training: https://www.udir.no/in-english/

1109. This section draws on input from: Ure, O.B. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Norway.* and *The implementation of validation arrangements in Norway* (Skills Norway, April 2019).

required formal qualifications, may be validated for admission to studies and/or exempted from parts of a study programme based on prior learning. At levels 5-8, 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 VPL. However, in 2013, as a follow-up of a 2009 white paper on the education strategy[1110], Skills Norway developed two guidelines on assessing prior learning together with representatives from the sectors: one related to admission to vocational college education, and one to recognition of prior learning in (as part of) higher education.

Norway together with Belgium (FL), Iceland and Ireland took part in the Erasmus KA3 project VISKA 2017-20 (visible skills for adults)[1111]. The project ran from March 2017 to February 2020 and was managed and coordinated by Skills Norway. VISKA addressed the need to make the skills of low-skilled adults, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees more visible, in order to enhance their employability, improve their access to education and training offers and support active engagement in society. In Norway, the focus was on developing methods and processes to increase the access of migrants to validation of prior learning processes, education and work. During the trial period, 612 asylum seekers went through the two first phases of the validation process (identification and documentation) using an electronic tool for self-registration (*Kompass*)[1112] followed by career guidance. A total of 74 persons also finalised the two last phases (assessment and certification) against upper secondary education and training. The VISKA project was given an exemption from the regulations in the Education Act to carry out assessment in languages other than Norwegian and Sami as it was essential to the trials to allow candidates to speak their own language and to use interpreters. It was a strong recommendation from the project that assessment in upper secondary education for this target group depends on the regulations of the Education Act opening for assessment in languages other than Norwegian and Sami. The regulations in question have now been changed in that respect[1113].

There are validation mechanisms in enterprises (such as the 2018-21 social partner agreement on documenting workers' competence, Paragraphs 18-4[1114]). Internal validation procedures at the workplace, linked to wage negotiations or competence development in companies, can be found outside the formal system of validation. In these instances, validation references are based on local requirements defined by the company concerned.

Although the Norwegian VPL system has a firm foundation in legislation and at policy level, and has developed in a positive direction over the years, challenges remain. A crucial factor in a successful VPL system is trust: that the system has legitimacy across all levels of the education sector as well as in the labour market. In certain areas of education, non-formal and informal learning may not be seen to have equal value to formal learning. Also, mistrust can spring from a lack of knowledge about validation, or lack of clarity and coherence in routines and processes. In the labour market, mistrust may be at the root of a perceived lack of interest in and acceptance of validation, for similar reasons. The substantial regional variations in practice may also serve to undermine trust in the VPL system. According to Skills Norway's report on the implementation of validation arrangements in Norway, the challenges related to information, practice and statistics should be further discussed. To improve access to VPL and awareness and knowledge about the possibilities and limitations of the system, information is of major importance. Although much information can be found online, it still takes a lot of sifting through to find the right detail. Most is in Norwegian only and is not easily accessible for newly arrived migrants, a relevant target group for VPL.

Challenges linked to practice relate to good processes and strong staff environments. Improvements that might strengthen the trust in the VPL system include support for staff in the form of better, more robust and updated ICT systems for better data flow and clearer descriptions of procedure for both staff and candidates.

A sound base of statistical evidence is crucial for research and development of the validation system, as well as for governance and policy development. Several studies, most recently the 2018 NIFU report (NIFU 2018:10)[1115], point out a great many shortcomings in this area. One major

1110. Report No 44 to the Storting, 2008-09. The education strategy. https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/stmeld-nr-44-2008-2009-/id565231/

1111. (VISKA report: https://www.viskaproject.eu

1112. *Kompass* comprises 15 languages and has many similarities with the EU Skills Profiling Tool for Third Country Nationals.

1113. https://lovdata.no/dokument/LTI/forskrift/2019-12-02-1691

1114. *Basic agreement between the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises, 2018-21*: https://www.nho.no/siteassets/publikasjoner/basic-agreement-lo-nho-2018-2021.pdf

1115. *Realkompetansevurdering: En studie av systemet for vurdering av realkompetanse i utdanning og arbeidsliv, NIFU-rapport, 2018:10*: https://nifu.brage.unit.no/nifu-xmlui/handle/11250/2502219

reason, especially at primary and secondary levels of education, is that the systems for collecting data are inadequate and disconnected. The situation is considerably better for higher education but only for admission, not for exemption. There is no statistical evidence on validation for working life.

In sum, information, practice and statistics are areas in VPL in need of improvement across all levels of education. Deficiencies in the VPL system may hinder efficiency and effectiveness; deter potential candidates and frustrate staff; and weaken trust in the system both within education and in working life (Skills Norway, 2019).

NQF implementation and impact

The NKR is operational and included in relevant regulations on education and training. All qualifications in the Norwegian formal education system are included in the NKR; most formal qualifications are included *en bloc* per type of education programme. 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 question of opening up the framework to qualifications awarded outside formal education and training has been extensively discussed but no decision has been taken so far. In the Norwegian strategy for skills policy 2017-21[1116], 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. Linked to the strategy, a project led by four of the social partners has developed a method for describing qualifications based on trade needs in the retail trade[1117]. An external evaluation of the project concluded that the model had clarified requirements for competence in the retail trade but that testing on a larger scale is needed to see the added value for the labour market and the individual.

A public committee has recently provided a green paper on lifelong learning for change and competitiveness (NOU 2019:12), which suggested the development of a procedure for assessment of non-formal training programmes against a quality standard to enhance comparison with formal education. This proposal is taken forward in the recent white paper on the Skills reform. The government will support initiatives to develop methods for describing competence acquired in working life, but it is up to the branches themselves if they want to introduce common standards for how to describe and test such competence. The government will also support a more comprehensive testing of the model for evaluating skills acquired in the workplace, if this becomes relevant.

NOKUT uses the national qualifications framework to support recognition of qualifications and aims at taking national qualifications frameworks 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 revised criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications, a subsidiary text of the Lisbon recognition convention[1118]. According to NOKUT, the recognition of upper secondary and post-secondary VET qualifications is challenging because of the great variation in vocational education and training systems at these levels. NOKUT is therefore exploring ways in which this connection can be supported better and in which the EQF and the NQFs can help communicate and support recognition of foreign qualifications. Current EQF- relevant databases are *Utdanning.no* and *Study in Norway*[1119]. 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. The database includes, to a lesser degree, level descriptors and level indicators. Learning outcome descriptions don't figure in the database. *Study in Norway* contains study programmes in English in higher education extracted from *Utdanning.no*.

1116. *Norwegian strategy for skills policy, 2017-21.* https://www.kompetansenorge.no/contentassets/06b4044721e849ed8116604f9af4faa5/norwegian_strategy_for_skills.pdf

1117. Skjerve, T; Simeou, E. (2018). *A Balancing Act – Describing skills acquired in the workplace.* https://www.virke.no/Statistikk-Rapporter/a-balancing-act/

1118. *Revised recommendation on criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications* (adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its fifth meeting, Sèvres, 23 June 2010): https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/Criteria%20and%20procedures_En.asp

1119. https://www.utdanning.no/ and https://www.studyinnorway.no/ (study programmes taught through English, extracted from utdanning.no).

NKR levels are currently included on most diplomas from vocational college education. In higher education, NKR levels are included on the diploma supplement, automatically and free of charge to all graduates. NKR and EQF levels are included on certificate supplements in vocational upper secondary education and training. The Norwegian NQF regulation states that all new diplomas and certificates from the formal education system can indicate NQF levels and that EQF levels can be indicated on supporting documents. There are no plans to introduce further demands.

There is little clear evidence for the impact of the NQF. An evaluation has been in planning in 2019 and 2020 and should begin in 2021. Changes in legislation concerning higher vocational education[1120] have prompted a more comprehensive evaluation, including consideration of parallel structures for vocational and higher education, and an overall impact review (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Referencing to the EQF

Norway referenced its national qualifications framework to the EQF in June 2014, along with the self-certification to the QF-EHEA.

Important lessons and challenges

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 common reference points between authorities and stakeholders in education and training.

The Covid-19 outbreak has had a huge impact on the Norwegian economy, working life and, not least, the education sector. The unemployment rate has increased significantly, and education institutions report increases in the number of applicants. In the revised national budget for 2020 submitted on 12 May the government proposes to establish 5000 new student places at vocational colleges, university colleges and universities. These student places will be established in fields of study where there is a great need for competence in the years ahead, such as technology, health and social care, and teacher training (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, revised national budget 2020).

1120. New legislation for higher VET from 2018 makes it possible to have higher VET degrees with a duration of three years: https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2018-06-08-28

Table 66. The 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 (*Diplom, kunstnerisk utviklingsprogram*)	8
7	• Master degree (*Mastergrad*) • 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 (*Bachelorgrad*) • Diploma for general teacher education programme (*Vitnemål fra allmennlærerutdanning*, *Vitnemål fra grunnskolelærerutdanning*)	6
6.1	• University college degree (*Høgskolekandidatgrad*)	
5.2	• Diploma for vocational college education (1.5 to 2 years, 90 – 120 credits) (*Vitnemål fra fagskoleutdanning*)	5
5.1	• Diploma for vocational college education 0.5 to 1.5 years, 30 – 90 credits (*Vitnemål fra fagskoleutdanning*)	

NKR LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES		EQF LEVELS
4	• Certificate for upper secondary vocational education and training (*Vitnemål fra videregående opplæring, yrkesfaglige utdanningsprogram*) • Craft certificate (*Fagbrev*) • Journeyman certificate (*Svennebrev*)	• B. Certificate for upper secondary general education (*Vitnemål fra videregående opplæring, studieforberedende utdanningsprogram*)	4
3	• Document of competence for partially completed upper secondary education (*Kompetansebevis*)		3
2	• Certificate for primary and lower secondary education (10 years) (*Vitnemål fra 10-årig grunnskole*)		2
-	• Not part of the NQF		1

Source: Adapted from Regulation on the national qualifications framework for lifelong learning and its referencing to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (FOR-2017-11-08-1846) – Annex II https://lovdata.no/static/SF/sf-20171108-1846-03-01.pdf?timestamp=1579568777000

Abbreviations

EEA	European economic area	NQF	national qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework	QF-EHEA	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area
EU	European Union		
NKR	*Nasjonalt kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring* [national qualifications framework for lifelong learning]	VET	vocational education and training
		VPL	validation of prior learning
NOKUT	*Nasjonalt kompetansesenter for utenlandsk utdanning* [Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education]		

Main sources of information

NOKUT (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) is the national coordination point: https://www.nokut.no/en/about-nokut/international-cooperation/national-coordination-point-ncp-for-the-european-qualifications-framework-for-lifelong-learning-eqf/

Databases of qualifications and study programmes: https://utdanning.no/ https://www.studyinnorway.no/

Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research – Information on NKR: https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/utdanning/voksnes_laering_og_kompetanse/artikler/nasjonalt-kvalifikasjonsrammeverk/id601327/ (in Norwegian)

Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research: *Referencing the Norwegian qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certification to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA):* https://europa.eu/europass/sl/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf

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Prepared by

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

OMAN

Introduction and context

The Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF) is a comprehensive, integrated and mandatory National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that includes qualifications from all public and private sectors of education and training in Oman. It is based on a common set of generic level descriptors, which provide the basis for the recognition of learning, regardless of where that learning has been achieved. The OQF enhances the quality standards for all qualifications across the different education and training sectors and promotes parity of esteem between academic, technological, vocational and professional qualifications.

Policy Objectives

To support national economic and educational needs, eleven objectives for the OQF have been identified by the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) in consultation with education and training stakeholders. They are the following:

- Describe, compare and classify all qualifications in Oman, including general education (school), technological, vocational, academic and professional qualifications;
- Support the revision of existing qualifications, as required;
- Support the design and development of new qualifications to consistent standards, based on learning outcomes that are assessed and quality assured.
- Support and strengthen the on-going development of processes for quality assurance in education and training;
- Support lifelong learning, by providing clarity on the routes by which learners can progress through the qualification system in Oman, and support the development of new, more flexible progression possibilities for learners, including Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL);

- Support the recognition of foreign and international qualifications in Oman, and the recognition of Omani qualifications abroad;
- Support the recognition of learning achievements that take place in all contexts, including formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- Support the recognition of a wide range of vocational and technological qualifications;
- Support the recognition of professional qualifications;
- Support the recognition of learning awarded for the achievement of small sets of learning outcomes, such as skills courses, micro credentials, or part-qualifications;
- Enhance parity of esteem between the qualifications awarded in the four educational pathways.

Levels, Learning Outcomes, and Qualifications

Scope of the OQF
All formal and licensed Omani qualifications must be placed on the National Register of Qualifications (NRQ) through a process called "listing." Listing a qualification on the OQF is defined as "an evaluation, of all the units, modules or courses of a programme ('modules' hereafter) leading to a qualification to determine the overall OQF Level and OQF Credit Value of that qualification."

The OQF includes the following:
- Quality-assured qualifications, from all sectors of education and training, owned and awarded by professional bodies, and by awarding bodies in Oman;
- Module-based qualifications and training programmes;
- School qualifications such as the General Certificate of Basic Education (Grade 10) and the General Education Diploma (Grade 12);
- Part-qualifications that contribute to a whole qualification;

- Programmes where the volume of learning is 100 notional learning hours or more (ten OQF Credit Points); and

Qualifications that provide recognition for the achievement of those with special educational needs and adults returning to basic education

Companies that develop and deliver their own training programmes, including in-house training, can voluntarily seek to have their programmes listed on the OQF.

Qualifications awarded by foreign and international awarding bodies must be aligned to the OQF. This is defined as the process of comparing and evaluating a foreign or international qualification against the OQF level descriptors to determine where the qualification sits in relation to the OQF levels.

OQF Structure
The design of the OQF takes into account the diverse range of qualifications currently offered in Oman and those planned for development in the future. The OQF comprises the following broad structure:
- Ten levels: derived from the range of formal qualifications in Oman;
- Three bands: namely, Access, Schooling and Higher Education (post-school);
- Four educational pathways: namely, Academic, Technological, Vocational and Professional; and

One strand for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): reflecting the importance of RPL in Oman.

The OQF has been developed in alignment with this structure, which reflects the following benefits:
- Provides a sufficient degree of differentiation for the range and variance of existing qualifications and for new types of qualifications that may be developed in the future;
- Accommodates all types and levels of education and training, regardless of the provider;
- Promotes parity of esteem between academic, technological, vocational and professional qualifications;
- Is compatible with the draft Higher Education Law that defines all post-school learning as higher education;
- Clarifies progression routes for learners within the four Educational Pathways and opens up opportunities for new progression routes to be developed;
- Allows for the recognition of professional qualifications through the Professional Pathway;
- Recognizes that vocational education continues at all levels;

- Provides for the recognition of foreign and international qualifications; and
- Supports lifelong learning through Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and RPL.

OQF Level and Credit
The OQF uses two measures for listing or aligning qualifications, namely OQF Level and OQF Credit. The OQF Level indicates the complexity of learning and OQF Credit indicates the size or volume of the learning. Together, these two measures provide help in understanding and comparing the different qualifications in Oman.

The allocation of an OQF Level and OQF Credit Value help to:
- Clarify the relationship between the different qualifications in Oman;
- Clarify the exit points in some qualifications and routes for progression; and
- Provide opportunity for CAT and RPL.

The ten OQF levels are derived from the range of formal qualifications in Oman. From OQF Level 1 for elementary education and training, each OQF level increases in complexity, depth of knowledge and learner autonomy. OQF Level is based on an evaluation of the learning outcomes, assessment arrangements and other relevant information as measured against OQF Level Descriptors.

OQF Level Descriptors
An OQF Level is defined by OQF Level Descriptors. These are fundamental to the OQF and common to all sectors of education and training. They set out, in brief and generic terms, the expected outcomes of each of the ten levels of the OQF in relation to the following six characteristics:
- Knowledge
- Skills
- Communication, Numeracy, Information Communication Technology (ICT) Skills
- Autonomy and Responsibility
- Employability and Values
- Learning to Learn

The OQF Level Descriptors provide a national reference for establishing the level of all qualifications and must be used by awarding bodies to list or align qualifications. They also provide a useful reference to support the development of new qualifications. The OQF Level Descriptors:
- Provide the means to determine the appropriate level of learning;
- Support the development of new programmes and qualifications;
- Provide a reference to assist with consistency and transparency of qualifications;

- Contribute to the ability to provide broad comparisons on the level between national and international qualifications;
- Contribute to the development of a shared, common understanding of the general outcomes at each OQF Level; and
- Support CAT and RPL

Institutional Arrangements and Stakeholder Involvement

A Royal Decree No. 9/2021 Regarding the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) was issued on 13 January 2021. This Royal Decree has given the Authority the legal basis to be responsible for the governance, management and implementation of the Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF). The Royal Decree mentions the following roles and responsibilities in relation to the OQF:

- Prepare and develop the comprehensive Oman Qualifications Framework, list Omani qualifications on it and align the foreign and international qualifications with it;
- Publish the results of the quality assurance and accreditation processes as well as the results of listing Omani qualifications on the Oman Qualifications Framework and alignment of foreign and international qualifications with the OQF, in accordance with Authority's regulations; and
- Train educational personnel in the fields of quality assurance of school and higher education and the Oman Qualifications Framework

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education has the sole responsibility in Oman for the OQF operations. The OQF is an integrated element of the National Quality Management System in Oman. The OAAAQA Board is responsible for the overall strategy decisions regarding the OQF and the OAAQA Executive Office is responsible for the day-to-day operational decisions related to the OQF.

Recognition and Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning

Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and the Recognition of Prior Learning contribute to the OQF objective of supporting lifelong learning. A strand for RPL is included in the OQF Framework Diagram. CAT and RPL can minimize duplication in learning for individuals. This is particularly helpful for those who need, or want, to change career path in response, for example, to changing labour markets or personal circumstances.

CAT is a process that allows OQF Credit (which counts towards an award) to be accumulated by a learner and then partially or wholly transferred from one qualification to another. The regulations of the Awarding Body govern the amount of OQF Credit that can be transferred.

NQF Implementation and Impact

The Oman Qualifications Framework has not been implemented yet. Therefore, its impact cannot be determined at this stage.

Reference to Regional Framework

The Oman Qualifications Framework has not been referenced to other national qualifications frameworks.

Important Lessons and Future Plans

Success factors:
- There is buy-in from different stakeholders in Oman for a comprehensive qualifications framework.
- There is political will for a comprehensive qualifications framework in Oman. This political will was reflected in the issuance of a Royal Decree to give the OAAAQA the authority for the governance, management and implementation of the OQF.
- The OQF was recognized as one of the national projects to diversify the economy in Oman.

There is high interest in Oman to enhance vocational education and training, reflected by Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik on upgrading technical and vocational education in post-basic education. There, the OQF is of national importance in recognizing vocational education and training.

Challenges:
- There is a high need for trained and qualified human resources to operate the OQF.
- There is a high need for financial resources to operate the OQF.

There is a high level of support needed by awarding bodies, or training or education providers in Oman to implement the OQF.

Future Plans:
- Managing and implementing the listing and relisting of Omani qualifications in the OQF.

- Managing and implementing the alignment of foreign and international qualifications to the OQF.
- Maintaining the National Register of Qualifications (NRQ).
- Providing support, guidance and training for awarding bodies and other stakeholders, as required.
- Updating and maintaining the OQF and associated documentation as required in response to developments in education and training and other relevant national agendas.
- Carrying out capacity-building on the OQF for awarding bodies, OQF external reviewers and other stakeholders, as required.
- Establishing a robust internal quality assurance system to implement the listing, alignment, relisting and re-alignment processes.
- Developing and implementing OQF communication plans for the national and international promotion of the OQF.
- Developing and implementing a national system for the Recognition of Prior Learning.
- Referencing the OQF to another NQF.

Table 67. OQF Structure

BAND	LEVEL	PATHWAY				STRAND
		PROFESSIONAL	**ACADEMIC**	**TECHNOLOGICAL**	**VOCATIONAL**	**RPL1**
Higher Education (Post-School)	10	Professional Qualification 5	Doctorate	Doctor of Technology	[New qualifications may be developed]	N/A2
	9	Professional Qualification 4	Master's Degree Post-Graduate Diploma	Master of Technology	[New qualifications may be developed]	
	8	Professional Qualification 3	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor of Technology	[New qualifications may be developed]	
	7	Professional Qualification 2	Advanced Diploma	Advanced Diploma of Technology	[New qualifications may be developed]	
	6	Professional Qualification 1	Diploma	Diploma of Technology	Vocational Diploma	
	5	Introductory Professional Qualification	[New qualifications may be developed]	[New qualifications may be developed]	Certificate of Vocational Competency 3	
Schooling	4	General Education Diploma (Grade 12)			General Vocational Education Diploma / Certificate of Vocational Competency 2	
	3	General Certificate of Basic Education (Grade 10)			General Vocational Education Certificate / Certificate of Vocational Competency 1	
Access	2	Literacy 2				
	1	Literacy 1				

Source: Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition		
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer	OAAAQA	Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Schools
NQF	National Qualifications Framework		
NRQ	National Register of Qualifications	OQF	Oman Qualifications Framework
		RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning

Main Sources of Information

Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education http://www.oaaa.gov.om/oqfmain.aspx

Prepared by

UNESCO in consultation with national experts

PALESTINE

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot
Palestine plans an eight-level qualifications framework (NQF) based on learning outcomes and covering all education and training sectors.

An NQF Working Group developed a draft NQF in 2010, but the Cabinet did not approve it. No law on a Palestinian NQF has been adopted yet. At the time of writing, work on the framework is in abeyance. Once work is resumed on the framework, the Government plans to assign responsibility for its development to a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Commission.

International donors play a major part in supporting development of the country's VET system, including the NQF.

Authorities have defined the purpose, scope and objectives of the NQF; a working group has been established; international experts and donors are supporting the initiative; and engagement of some local stakeholders has been undertaken to raise awareness and signal the state's intention to build an NQF. However, no law has been adopted yet and no roles or functions allocated to actors and stakeholders. Palestine is therefore in the early phases of the design stage.

Policy context
Palestine's economy was contracting before COVID struck in 2020. Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in 2019 had declined by 1.6% compared to 2018, as population growth exceeded that of GDP. GDP is significantly higher in the West Bank than Gaza, which suffers even more from the prevailing political and economic conditions. Palestinian and international bodies, such as the World Bank, were predicting further contraction even before the 2020 pandemic. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and the Palestinian Monetary Authority (PMA) estimate that COVID could potentially cut GDP by up to 7%.

Palestine has a young and rapidly growing population, which puts pressure on the labour market and education and training capacities and provision. Between 2000 and 2016, the working-age population in Palestine increased by 83%. Jobs are hard to come by, especially for younger people.

Employment rates are very low, at 33.1% in 2019, and particularly for women, 10.6% in 2019. Unemployment levels are high and persistent – in 2019, the overall unemployment rate for Palestine stood at 25.3%. Figures are higher for women at 41%; young people 15–24, 40.1%, and in Gaza, 45%.

The country is over-reliant on public sector employment, which employs 20% of the workforce. About 13.2% of workers work in Israel and the settlements, while the remaining 66.1% are employed in the private sector.

Responding to the COVID 19 pandemic, all schools closed in March 2020. There was little prior experience of online and remote learning, but a combination of government, stakeholder, civil society, private sector, and international donor initiatives ensured continuity of service, for the most part. The Ministry of Education (MoE) issued a five-page guideline to teachers on distance learning. Higher education institutions, especially the technical colleges, used distance learning techniques and platforms. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHE) helped technical colleges through offering special training programmes in e-learning for teachers and instructors. The Ministry also provided 9 colleges with programming software. In Jericho, the YMCA Vocational School used online methods to teach a course in sustainable agriculture, with students using home gardens and video reports to complete assignments.

NQF legal basis
No law has been adopted.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

The National Policy Agenda 2017–2022 recognises the importance of education for economic growth and sustainable development. It identifies quality education for all as a national priority. Sectoral strategies have been developed within the Agenda. In education and training, the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017–2022 comprises three strategic goals: ensuring safe, inclusive and equitable access to quality education at all levels of the system; developing a student-centred teaching and learning pedagogy and environment; enhancing accountability and results-based leadership, governance and management.

Developing the NQF is one of the actions in the Plan. The NQF also supports delivery of the Ministry of Labour Strategy 2017-2022, in particular its aim to equip people for the needs of the labour market

One of the objectives of the newly revised Labour Sector Strategy 2020–2022 is to increase the effectiveness of the TVET system and to make it more relevant to the needs of the labour market. It also highlights the need for a functioning TVET governance system that is regulated by legislation in line with international standards.

The National TVET Strategy dates from 2010 and is being revised.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for general education from kindergarten to upper secondary school, while the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is responsible for higher education in universities and technical colleges. In VET, in addition to the MoE, other players are the centres affiliated to the Ministry of Labour (MoL), the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Former Detainees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), civil society organisations (CSOs), including those that are faith-based, and private for-profit training providers e.g. the Electricity Company.

The Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) are non-formal VET providers, either operated and overseen by the Ministry of Labour or privately run. They offer flexible provision, day and evening courses. The state-run centres number circa 15-29, while the private sector runs almost 200. The VTCs overall are popular, often having to turn down requests for places.

Due to the fragmented VET system, it is difficult to say with certainty what the enrolment rates are in VET. ETF estimates that about 15% of students in the upper secondary education age cohort (16–18 years), pursue VET paths.

But it does appear that enrolments in VET are increasing, partly due to government efforts, which include diversifying the programmes available. In recent years, the Ministry of Education has made efforts to increase enrolment in VET and to lower the barrier between VET and general education by introducing vocational units and a technology track in general education. VET subjects have been included in grades 7-9 in general education. Technical education is provided by 41 colleges in the West Bank and Gaza, offering a range of specialisations.

In higher education, some universities are now also providing technical education. ETF's Network for Excellence includes a Palestinian Centre, Al-Quds University, which operates a dual study programme, academic study combined with work experience and other exposure to the workplace.

VET levels are linked with the Arab Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) as follows: 1. Semi-skilled worker; 2. Skilled worker; 3. Craftsman 4. Technician and 5. Specialist.

Providers offering programmes at these levels include:
- the Vocational Training Centres (VTCs), at ASCO 1 and 2;
- the Vocational Secondary Schools (VSSs) at ASCO 3;
- the technical colleges and universities at ASCO 4 and 5.

Aims of NQF

Authorities intend that the planned NQF:
- improve understanding of qualifications and levels of qualifications; and give a clear picture of the relevance of educational outcomes to individuals and employers;
- define the meaning of qualification and introduce learning outcomes into the education and training system;
- contribute to structuring an integrated system of qualifications, by facilitating progression and pathways between qualifications and programmes in different institutions, providers and education sectors;
- through use of labour market analysis and standards, ensure the relevance of qualifications to labour market and employer needs;
- support regional and international recognition of qualifications;

- enable recognition of prior learning (RPL);
- act as the national reference point for qualifications, to allow recognition both at home and abroad of national qualifications;
- be the basis of a comprehensive accreditation system;
- contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure
Authorities and stakeholders have agreed in principle on an 8-level framework spanning all levels of qualifications and all education and training sectors. The proposed draft descriptors are knowledge, skills and competences, plus a range of technical and social competences e.g. maintenance of information and flexibility.

Experts and officials have been guided in NQF development by drawing on the Arab Standard Classification of Occupations system (referred to above), which classifies occupations by the categories of Specialist, Technician, Craftsman, Skilled worker, and Semi-skilled worker. Mapping these categories to the proposed NQF qualifications levels resulted in the following comparisons:
- Qualifications for ASCO Specialist would map to NQF level 6;
- Qualifications for ASCO Technician would map to NQF level 5.
- Qualifications for ASCO Craftsman would map to NQF level 4.
- Qualifications for ASCO Skilled Worker would map to NQF level 3.
- Qualifications for ASCO Semi-skilled Worker would map to NQF level 2.

Types of qualifications
Officials from the engaged ministries and GIZ have provisionally mapped vocational qualifications types to the proposed NQF model.

This analysis provisionally allocates the following types by NQF level (see also the graphic in Section 10):
- NQF level 8, Doctorate and similar advanced university degrees;
- NQF level 7, Master's degrees; and the Higher Diploma;
- NQF level 6, the Technical Baccalaureate, taken in higher technical education;
- NQF level 5, the Technical Diploma;
- NQF level 4, the Secondary Vocational Certificate;

- NQF level 3, Certificate of Education, taken in 10th grade; and vocational training certificate level II;
- NQF level 2, Certificate of Education, taken in 6th grade; and vocational training certificate level I.

Vocational school students take the vocational general secondary examination, leading to the Secondary Vocational Certificate, at Level 4. Technical college students take the comprehensive applied examination. VTC students take practical and theory examinations.

Quality assurance of qualifications
The Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC) licenses higher education institutions and colleges and accredits their programmes.

The Ministries of Education and Labour run the systems for accrediting and licensing VET institutions and the adoption of their programmes. However, there is not yet a systematic availability and application of qualification standards, and assessment and certification standards and guidelines, to quality-assure qualifications and their assessment and award.

Use of learning outcomes and standards
Learning outcomes are the conceptual basis of the planned level descriptors and future qualifications. In 2016, a pilot exercise was conducted to reference existing qualifications in the fashion design sector to the framework. Results from this exercise can inform a future levelling methodology which would guide referencing of qualifications to the framework.

Curriculum development for vocational training has been developed in accordance with the Arab Standard Classification of Occupations at the first and second NQF levels and was approved and launched by the Ministry of Labour at the beginning of the 2019-2020 academic year.

Credit systems
No credit systems operate yet in VET or HE.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF
Until 2019, the Ministries of Labour, Education and Higher Education steered the NQF's development, cooperating with the TVET Development Centre, which was concerned with technical and operational issues. The government plans that the planned TVET

Commission will lead and initiate development of the NQF. The Commission was approved by the cabinet in 2020 but is still awaiting approval from the Prime Minister's office. So, there is currently no designated institutional leader of the framework.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

A range of stakeholders, including those ministries in charge of TVET provision, social partners, public and private education providers, learners, students, parents, employment offices, awarding bodies and quality assurance agencies, were engaged in the formulation of the first proposal for an NQF in Palestine.

Labour market data to support identification of in-demand occupations and so required occupational standards and qualifications, is scarce. The Palestinian Federation of Chambers and Commerce (FPCCI), the Palestinian Federation of Industry (PFI) and the trades unions are obvious partners in informing authorities of such need.

Local Employment and Training (LET) councils, established by the MoL with the support of GIZ, and which comprise representatives from the government, the private sector and civil society, are an additional potential stakeholder platform to draw on.

However, there is currently no active committee or NQF working group engaging stakeholders given that work on the NQF has halted.

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

VNFIL arrangements1

Establishing a system for validation of nonformal and informal learning is one element in the NQF plan, but it is lower in the priority list behind adopting legislation, defining the level descriptors etc., so no work has been undertaken yet.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings

Given that the NQF has not been legally established and is not operational, there is no impact or use by citizens or stakeholders. TVET stakeholders have been developing technical documents necessary for operationalisation of the framework, but none is yet completed or can be applied.

Career information and guidance

In recent years, career guidance in TVET institutions has improved significantly, and a number of systemic and sustainable changes, for instance the establishment of career guidance units in universities have been made. Career guidance services for adults are also available.

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks

The Arab Standard Classification of Occupations has been the key external reference tool in developing the NQF.

International donor support

The first design of the NQF was developed with support from GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internationale Zusammenarbeit), a German development agency. ETF has worked with GIZ and national authorities in developing the NQF.

ENABEL, Belgium's development agency, is active in supporting VET in Palestine broadly e.g. in work-based learning methodologies and projects.

UNRWA was an early actor in establishing the TVET system. The agency offers training to refugee students and refugees' children in its TVET institutions.

Important lessons and future plans

Although the Ministries of Labour, Education and Higher Education have approved the NQF design, there is still no law and progress has been limited to piloting some methodologies in a few sectors in cooperation with donors. Future development depends on settled leadership of the NQF, which in turn depends on activating the planned new TVET Commission by providing it with sufficient financial and human resources.

Table 68. Infographic: draft tvet levels framework

LEVELS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING TVET	LEVELS ACCORDING TO THE ARAB STANDARD CLASSIFICATION OF OCCUPATIONS (ASCO)	QUALIFICATIONS COVERED BY THE LEVEL	LEVELS ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK NQF	ISCED LEVELS
Higher technical education (Technical Baccalaureat e)	Specialist	Third university degree (PhD) and equivalent qualifications from previous learning	8	8
		Second University Degree (Master's) and Higher Diploma at Master's level, courses and specialized training programmes equivalent to the Masters degrees and equivalent qualifications obtained from previous learning	7	7
		First university degree (baccalaureate), specialized courses and training programmes of the level of baccalaureate and the equivalent qualifications obtained from previous learning	6	6
Technical Education (Technical Diploma)	Technician	Intermediate and technical diploma certificate, and specialized training programmes and courses equivalent to the diploma and the equivalent qualifications obtained from previous learning	5	4
Vocational secondary education (Secondary Vocational certificate)	Craftsman	Academic and vocational high school diplomas and equivalent qualifications from previous learning	4	3
Vocational training (Long-term training programmes)	Skilled worker	Certificate of basic education for the tenth grade and certificate of vocational training level II (long-term training programmes) and the equivalent qualifications obtained from previous education.	3	2
Vocational training (Short Term Training Programmes)	Semi- skilled worker	Certificate of basic education for the sixth grade and certificate of vocational training level I (short-term training programs) and the equivalent qualifications obtained from previous education.	2	1
		Pre-school certificates and unskilled qualifications obtained by experience	1	0

Source: General Directorate for Vocational Training - Ministry of Labour

Note: the above table is a provisional analysis of existing qualifications types against ASCO classifications, and NQF and ISCED levels. It has no official status.

Once activated, any working group or committee should prioritise completion of, and agreement to, the levels descriptors, and engaging stakeholders to advise on these. Further, a law encompassing the NQF e.g. within a wider VET law, should be adopted, phrased in flexible language to allow for more specific secondary regulations later to cover implementation arrangements e.g. stakeholder roles and functions, institutional arrangements, QA systems and tools and validation arrangements.

Abbreviations

ASCO	Arab Standard Classification of Occupations	MoSD	Ministry of Social Development (MoSD)
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training	OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ENABEL	Belgian development agency	PCBS	The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)
EQF	European Qualifications Framework		
GDP	Gross domestic product	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
GE	General Education	PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (development agency)	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
HE	Higher Education	UNWRA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO)		
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training	VET	Vocational education and training
MoE	Ministry of Education	VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education	VTCs	Vocational Training Centres
MoL	Ministry of Labour		

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ETF Quality Assurance fiche (2020): https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/202101/quality_assurance_ in_vet_palestine.pdf

Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
Online platform	https://openspace.etf.europa.eu
Twitter	@etfeuropa
Facebook	facebook.com/etfeuropa
YouTube	www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
Live&Learn	https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/
Instagram	instagram.com/etfeuropa/
LinkedIn	linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation
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POLAND

Introduction and context

Poland performs well on most EU key indicators. Very few students leave education and training early (5.2% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 10.2%), and the high rate of participation in school is paralleled by a high rate of tertiary education attainment (46.6% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 40.3%). According to the 2018 Programme for international student assessment (PISA), Poland has reached the EU benchmark 2020 in reading, mathematics and science, with fewer than 15% underachievers in all three fields. The employment rate of recent graduates at 84% in 2019 is well above the EU average of 80.9%. Among areas for improvement are participation in early childhood education and care (93.0% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 94.8%), and participation of adults in lifelong learning at 4.8% in 2019; it is far below the EU average of 10.8%. Although the education system gradually opens up to non-formal adult education and informal learning, the results remain week.

At policy-making level, the priority is to develop the implementation models for the Integrated skills strategy 2030[1121]. The implementation of the VET reform since 2016 continues. In February 2019, a new regulation was adopted defining core curricula for all occupations in a new classification, including vocational skills for selected occupations. In 2019, the Ministry of National Education published the first forecast of demand for employees in vocational occupations. In 2020, local governments will receive increased State subsidies for VET learners in high-demand occupations identified in the forecast. Higher education institutions are implementing the latest reform aimed at improving quality provided for in the Act on Higher Education adopted in July 2018. 2019/20 was the first full year of implementation

of the reform. Higher education institutions are putting in place new statutes, reorganising their staff and setting up scientific councils (European Commission, 2020).

Poland has developed a comprehensive national qualifications framework, the Polish qualifications framework (PQF), which was formally adopted through the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System, which entered into force in January 2016[1122]. It is part of the integrated qualifications system (IQS), together with the integrated qualifications register (IQR)[1123], and arrangements for quality assurance and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The integration and combined use of several instruments for reform in a wider policy strategy, with the overall shift to learning outcomes at its core and addressing all levels and subsystems of education and training, is one of the marks of the Polish approach. The PQF is an important tool for increasing transparency and consistency of education and training and the wider qualification system, including qualifications awarded outside education and training system. Beyond its role in describing existing qualifications, it has contributed to the redesign of programmes, standards and curricula, and is embedded in legislation that regulates formal learning.

In 2017 the government adapted the Strategy for responsible development 2020 (with a perspective

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1121. *Integrated Skills Strategy 2030* (in Polish): https://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/images/zsu.pdf (general part). https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/zintegrowana-strategia-umiejetnosci-2030-czesc-szczegolowa–dokument-przyjety-przez-rade-ministrow (detailed part).

1122. Parliament of Poland (2015). Act of 22 December 2015 on the integrated qualifications system. *Journal of Laws*, No 226/2020. Subsequent amendments to the act were adopted in 2016, 2017 and 2018. https://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/D2020000022601.pdf

1123. The integrated qualifications register became available online in July 2016 at: https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/

to 2030)[1124]. This strategy includes further development of the IQS as a strategic project. It also resulted in the need to verify and update the integrated development strategies binding at that time, including the Human capital development strategy 2030[1125], which explicitly mentions strategic projects aimed at further development and implementation of the IQS, based on the PQF. The IQS and issues related to lifelong learning, including improving the competences and qualifications of adults, are also included in the Integrated skills strategy 2030, which is to integrate national strategic documents, including the Strategy for responsible development and others. The Council of Ministers, on January 25, 2019, adopted a resolution approving the general part of the Integrated skill strategy 2030 and on December 28, 2020, the adoption of the detailed part followed. The strategy states that the IQS is one of the tools of the State's policy for skills development. It also foresees further development of validation arrangements and vocational guidance for improved accessibility of high-quality qualifications. Ministers managing government administration departments, supported by opinions from industry stakeholders, under the IQS Act, decide on the inclusion of market[1126] and regulated qualifications, awarded outside the formal education and training system, to the national qualifications system, creating a sector policy on skills and qualifications. Development and renewal of qualifications in different sectors of the economy shall be consistent with the objectives and assumptions of the Integrated skills strategy. The Ministry of National Education was responsible for preparing the adopted strategy[1127]. The IQS Act and the related legislation was amended in a number of instances and can be found at the designated webpage[1128] (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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[1129]. 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.

The original purpose of the PQF has not changed since its creation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020):
a. to help integrate the various qualifications subsystems in Poland;
b. to increase the accessibility to and quality of qualifications;
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.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The PQF has eight learning outcomes-based levels, covering all types of qualifications. The IQS Act establishes the typology of qualifications, the principles of inclusion of qualifications in the IQR, 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:

1124. Strategy for responsible development (in Polish): https://www.gov.pl/web/fundusze-regiony/informacje-o-strategii-na-rzecz-odpowiedzialnego-rozwoju Summary in English: https://www.gov.pl/documents/33377/436740/SOR_2017_streszczenie_en.pdf
1125. The human capital development strategy 2030 (in Polish): https://www.gov.pl/web/rozwoj-praca-technologia/strategia-rozwoju-kapitalu-ludzkiego-2030
1126. Market qualifications are non-regulated qualifications awarded by private sector.
1127. *Integrated skills strategy 2030*, general part (in Polish): https://efs.men.gov.pl/zintegrowana-strategia-umiejetnosci-2030-czesc-ogolna/
1128. *Integrated qualifications system* (in Polish):https://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/o-zsk/prawo

1129. 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 r. 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).

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 provided they meet agreed quality criteria (market qualifications).

One important aim of the IQS is to extend systemic solutions for quality assurance to all qualifications listed in the IQR. Such qualifications must now comply with uniform quality assurance requirements, consistent with European guidelines and standards. In the case of qualifications awarded in the formal education system (general, VET, higher education), quality assurance is ensured by relevant existing institutions functioning according to European standards and recommendations. In the case of market and State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training, all awarding bodies (certifying institutions) must have a system of internal quality assurance and also be included in an external quality assurance system. External quality assurance is provided by an external quality assurance institution selected by the relevant minister from a list of entities administered by the minister coordinator (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

A distinction is made between full and partial qualifications, included in the PQF; full qualifications are awarded exclusively within the formal system, where partial qualifications can also be awarded. All non-formal qualifications (both regulated and non-regulated) are considered partial qualifications.

At a very early stage of PLQ planning, a seven-level framework was envisaged, 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 HE qualifications as well as advanced vocational qualifications, such as technicians in selected technology-intensive professions (currently 29) or the master craftsperson qualifications (*Meister*).

Levelling of some of the master craftsperson 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 craftsperson, in comparison to 'typical' vocational learning outcomes. The decisions by a team of experts, based on comparison of learning outcomes with PQF descriptors, were taken to place each

of the 14 master craftsperson qualifications at PQF level 5. Challenges in terms of levelling have also been encountered with regards to diplomas awarded after postgraduate studies: so far three of these qualifications have been included in the IQS, with others rejected as qualification descriptions were found to be insufficient to allow levelling. Expert support is being provided to higher education institutions to improve qualification descriptions for postgraduate study programmes.

In an effort to connect subsystems of education and training and to facilitate synergistic developments within sectors and sub-sectors, the PQF introduces level descriptors with different degrees of generality and for different purposes:
a. universal descriptors (first stage); these 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, separate descriptors for level 5 qualifications;
c. descriptors for sectoral qualifications frameworks (third stage, not indicated in Figure 1); 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 1.

Figure 29. Structure of level descriptors in the PQF
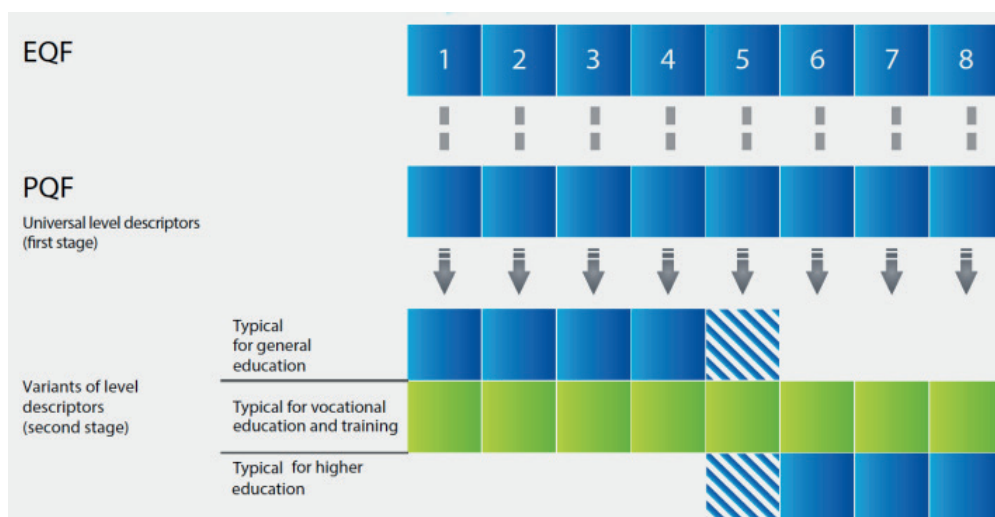
Source: Educational Research Institute, 2017.

The first stage (universal) learning outcomes descriptors developed for the PQF refer to the key learning domains in Table 69. These descriptors are based on an agreement between stakeholders in general, vocational and higher education and are the common reference point for developments at subsystem (second stage) and for sectors (third stage) levels.

Table 69. First stage generic descriptors (universal)

Knowledge	Scope
	Depth of knowledge
Skills	Problem-solving and applying knowledge in practice
	Learning
	Communication
Social competence	Identity
	Cooperation
	Responsibility

Source: Adapted from 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 as follows:

Table 70. Categories of the level descriptors for general education and VET

GENERAL EDUCATION (LEVELS 1 TO 4)	VET (LEVELS 1 TO 5)
Knowledge	
• language and communication • mathematics and natural sciences • social functioning	• theories/principles • phenomena and processes • organising work • tools and materials
Skills	
• language and communication • mathematics and natural sciences • social functioning • learning	• information • organising work • tools and materials • learning and professional development
Social competence	
• language and communication • health and the environment • social functioning	• following rules • cooperation • responsibility

Sources: Authors

While the coexistence of several qualification subframeworks 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 formal general, vocational and higher education 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, 2020). When, for example, the financial sector was developing a specialised sectoral qualifications framework[1130], 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 revised 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, applies 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[1131] 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[1132] replaced the notion of learning outcomes in individual areas with the concept of

'qualification characteristics' or 'descriptions'[1133] in full accordance with the IQS. These developments were aimed at promoting lifelong learning and recognition of learning acquired outside the formal system (Duda, 2019). To reduce bureaucratic burdens, a new regulation on the characteristics of levels 6 to 8 of the PQF was adopted in 2018[1134]. 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[1135]; 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 to have its own set of qualification characteristics.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Formal adoption of the framework in 2015, with the IQS Act, 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 while the Education Research institute (IBE)[1136] is responsible for the coordination of works and substantive support in the implementation of the IQS. The IQS Stakeholder Council was set up in September 2016 as an advisory and consultative body to the Ministry of Education and Science. 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 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:

1130. Sectoral qualifications frameworks are formally established by an act of law. Sectors develop them and propose their inclusion into the system.

1131. 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

1132. 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

1133. 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.

1134. 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. xsp?id=WDU20180001818

1135. OECD (2007). *Revised field of science and technology (FOS) classification in the Frascati Manual.* https://unstats.un.org/unsd/EconStatKB/ KnowledgebaseArticle10269.aspx

1136. Education Research Institute: http://www.ibe.edu.pl/en/

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 in the IQS;
d. advising on proposals to include sectoral qualifications frameworks in the IQS.

Since October 2016, the Minister of National Education is the EQF NCP. The inter-ministerial task force for lifelong learning and the integrated qualification system, established in 2010 continue to operate, monitoring IQS implementation at a more strategic level.

The IBE continues to play a key role in the qualifications system and framework, supporting the ministry with technical and organisational solutions and monitoring implementation. The institute has been nominated to support and coordinate the development and inclusion in the IQS of qualifications attained outside formal education. It is also responsible for operating the IQR 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. 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. As of the end of 2020, there are 16 sectoral qualifications frameworks (SQF)[1137], all being developed with the support of the IBE. According the definition from the IQS Law, SQF is a description of levels of qualifications functioning in a given sector or branch; levels of sectoral qualifications frameworks refer to appropriate levels of the PQF. Sectors (trade unions, sector organisations) have the opportunity to include SQFs in the IQS. If the SQF is included, it may serve in the process of levelling as a reference. So far, four sectoral qualifications frameworks have been included in the IQS. 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.

In the process of the design of the SQFs, involvement of various stakeholders is assumed, including education and the labour market as this is a good opportunity for a constructive discussion about the actual needs of a labour markets and future trends. From the perspective of a given sector, the SQF is a reference point and a tool to organise competences and qualifications in the sector.

In Poland, SQF has become a response to the deregulation that has occurred in many sectors. It is also the reference point for analysing the demand and supply of competences and qualifications in a given sector. In 2017-18, SQF pilot tests were carried out in the telecommunications and banking industries as a tool supporting human resources processes in large enterprises. The outcomes of these pilots are regarded as satisfying and indicate that SQF is an important tool supporting the identification and comparison of specialised industry competences (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[1138]

A key element of the 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.

1137. In banking, sports, IT, tourism, telecommunications, development services, construction, fashion industry, public health, car industry, trade, chemical engineering, agriculture, mining, real estate and energy.

1138. This section draws mainly on input from Duda, A. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Poland*; and on Gmaj et al. (2019), the Polish one-off report on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Poland (in last section).

The IQS Act introduced a formal definition of validation, as 'assessing whether a person seeking to have a qualification awarded has attained a distinct part or all of the learning outcomes required for that qualification, regardless of the person's learning path (IQS Act, 2015)'[1139]. 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 relevant matters: 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 IQR; 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 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 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.

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).

Providing guidance is a key aspects of lifelong learning policies. Despite the lack of provisions in the IQS Act directly referring to vocational guidance, other legally regulated solutions already functioning in Poland are intended to help people in identifying and documenting learning outcomes in accordance with the 2012 Council recommendation on validation on non-formal and informal learning. These solutions relate mainly to the labour market and the formal education system. They have a long history and function in different contexts; in consequence, they utilise many different frameworks – such as reference to what is being identified and documented – besides learning outcomes (a relatively new tool in vocational guidance), and measuring competences, predispositions and motivations. The same applies to diagnostic methods, databases of qualifications/occupations, and the possible results of the guidance process (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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[1140] (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

In May 2019 the report *The validation of non-formal and informal learning in Poland – Implementation*

1139. Act of 22 December 2015 on the integrated qualifications system. *Journal of Laws*, No 4226/2020. Subsequent amendments to the act were adopted in 2016, 2017 and 2018. https://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/D2020000022601.pdf

1140. These include: Gmaj, I. et al. (2019). *The validation of learning outcomes in Poland: new opportunities for attaining qualifications*. Warsaw: Education Research Institute; digital tools and solutions such as the catalogue of validation methods, a database of good practices in validation and quality assurance; *My Portfolio*, a tool for creating digital portfolios.

of the 2012 Council recommendation, was presented to the EQF Advisory Group. Several national strategies in Poland define lifelong learning, adult education and the validation of non-formal and informal learning as key ingredients for sustainable socioeconomic development. One of the aspects requiring extra attention is the promotion of validation as a process that includes the identification and documentation of learning outcomes as well as assessment, accompanied by specialised guidance that could supplement other forms of support already available to individuals. This is strongly linked to building trust in less conventional validation methods, such as the portfolio. Another challenge that needs to be addressed is to identify the synergy between the vocational guidance offered by schools or public employment services and the IQS (Gmaj, I. et al., 2019). Further development of both validation and vocational guidance is envisaged in Poland's Integrated skills strategy 2030.

NQF implementation and impact

The PQF has reached an operational stage and is well embedded in legislation and related policies. It is a permanent and visible feature of the national education, training and qualifications system, improving transparency by providing a reference point for development and review of standards and curricula as well as providing a platform for cooperation of stakeholders across education, training and employment. It has eight learning-outcomes-based levels applicable to all Polish qualifications, from general education, vocational education and training (VET), higher education, and those outside the formal education and training system (regulated and non-regulated, as long as they meet agreed quality criteria)[1141]. Full and partial qualifications are included[1142].

Along with the adoption of the framework, the IQS Act established the IQR, coordination of the IQS and the role of stakeholders, a typology of qualifications and the related terminology, principles for quality

assurance[1143] and principles for the inclusion of qualifications (including non-formal qualifications) in the IQS[1144].

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. Inclusion of regulated (statutory) and non-statutory (market) qualifications awarded outside the formal education system in the IQR is decided by the competent minister for that qualification; in the latter case this follows a request made by the awarding body. By February 2021, 10 312 qualifications were included in the IQR[1145], most of which are formal qualifications from general education, VET, and higher education.

The focus in the current phase of implementation is on the development, levelling and inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the IQS. The Educational Research Institute supports this work, in line with the principles that govern all qualifications included in the IQS, and manages projects. According to the implementation schedule of IQS, the goal is to include in the register 200 non-regulated qualifications (market qualifications) by 2023. A mid-term target, to include 40 qualifications by end 2018, has been achieved. As of March 2021, 119 such qualifications have already been included in the register and 217 have been proposed for inclusion; they are at various stages of formal and substantive evaluation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

PQF levels are indicated in the IQR and on all formal qualifications included; work is in progress to indicate EQF levels as well. Both PQF and EQF levels are indicated on certificates and diplomas in general education, IVET and higher education, as well as Europass certificates and diploma supplements[1146]. PQF and EQF levels are indicated on continuous VET and qualifications awarded

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1141. Two criteria distinguish different types of qualifications in the IQS, although they are not stated explicitly in the legislation. The first is whether the qualification relates to a level of formal education or not. The second criterion is the legal basis that governs the process of awarding the qualification

1142. The IQS Act states that full qualifications are those awarded in the formal general and vocational education system (system *oświaty*) after completing stages of education and the first, second and third cycle qualifications as defined in the Act on Higher Education. Full qualifications are included in the IQS by law.

1143. Such as 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

1144. The criteria and procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the IQS address relevant national and/or international awarding bodies and focus on: why the qualification is needed and for whom; how the qualification is linked to similar qualifications; which are the target groups for the qualification; conditions for validation; typical use of the qualification; entitlements following from the qualification; and learning outcomes required for the qualification, including sets of individual learning outcomes.

1145. See data here.

1146. National Europass Center

outside formal (regulated) education and training certificates, if included in the IQR.

Implementation is supported by a number of projects and studies. In 2019, the final report on the IQS evaluation was completed[1147], summarising main outcomes with the objective to assess the efficiency and complexity of the process of including market qualifications. The case studies[1148] had the objective to gain knowledge of the potential of the examined institutions that will play the role of the external quality assurance institution to ensure the quality of the process of awarding qualifications in IQS. The key message from both reports is that procedures for including qualifications in the system need to be made more efficient. They provide evidence for planned changes to IQS Law, mentioned above.

The PQF has been communicated and promoted in Poland as part of, and along with, the entire integrated qualifications system. So far, the communication strategy has focused on disseminating knowledge and building awareness of 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, the website of the EQF NCP[1149], public relations activities, seminars, conferences, debates, participation in industry events, publications and media materials. The IBE has undertaken and continues to undertake a number of information activities, including consultation seminars addressed to career counsellors working in labour market institutions and those providing advisory services in education. During these seminars, participants learn the assumptions around the implemented solutions, the structure and principles of the IQS functioning,

the procedure of including qualifications, and tasks and functions assigned to individual entities in the system. During the meetings, the detail of the opportunities offered by the IQS to its beneficiaries, the final recipients, are also discussed. There are also materials to support experts and general public interested in IQS: to learn and understand learning outcomes and the main tool of the IQS and PQF. These are the primary source of information for entities applying for the status of a certifying authority or external quality assurance entity. So far, several dozen different guides on the functioning of the IQS have been published[1150].

Referencing to the EQF

The PQF for lifelong learning was referenced to the EQF in 2013[1151]. A separate *Self-certification report of the national qualifications framework for higher education*[1152] to the QF-EHEA was prepared at the same time.

An updated referencing report is expected to be presented in 2022 after planned amendments to the IQS Act are in place to reflect recent modifications of qualification procedures, accreditation of certifying bodies and quality assurance arrangements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

1147. Dybaś-Stronkowska, M.; Pieńkosz, J. (2019). *Actors and qualifications. Analysis of selected aspects of the implementation of the Integrated Qualifications System. Warsaw:* Educational Research Institute. https://kwalifikacje.edu.pl/aktorzy-i-kwalifikacje-analiza-wybranych-aspektow-wdrazania-zintegrowanego-systemu-kwalifikacji/?lang=en

1148. Markowska, M. (2018). *Case studies of external quality assurance providers.* Warsaw: Educational Research Institute.

1149. https://prk.men.gov.pl/en/2en/

1150. Dictionary of the integrated qualifications system, Polish qualifications framework. User guide. Describing qualifications awarded outside the education and higher education systems. Assigning the PQF level to qualifications awarded outside the education and higher education systems. Including qualifications in the integrated qualifications system. Validation: new opportunities for acquiring qualifications. Qualifications framework, ECTS and ECVET for lifelong learning. Integrated qualifications register in practice. https://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/publikacje-zintegrowanego-systemu-kwalifikacji

1151. https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-06/Polish%20Referencing%20Report.pdf

1152. Educational Research Institute (2014). *Self-certification report of the national qualifications framework for higher education:* http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=702

Important lessons and future plans

The implementation of the IQS and PQF is considered one of the key actions of the Polish government in developing policies aimed at increasing the quality of human capital in Poland. After adopting the IQS Act, national authorities wanted to make the system functional as quickly as possible so that qualifications could be included in the IQS and, at the same time, awarding bodies could begin awarding these qualifications.

Implementation of the PQF 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. The progress made in introducing the learning outcomes approach in the different subsystems 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. After putting in place the legal and organisational infrastructure of the IQS and carrying out the capacity building activities for the entities involved in operating it, regulated (statutory) and non-statutory (market) qualifications, awarded outside formal education have been included. Good progress has been achieved and plans for the future are ambitious.

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. 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. Important progress has been achieved in this area. 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 processes. 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.

In the coming years, activities undertaken so far will be continued. In addition to the development and inclusion of qualifications outside formal education and training in the IQS, future steps include capacity building of ministries, awarding bodies and validation institutions to implement the solutions of the IQS. External quality assurance institutions will be prepared to perform external evaluations, coordinate the work on producing descriptions of qualifications awarded outside of the formal education and training in accordance with the standards of the IQ, and monitor and evaluate the development of the IQS and PQF.

Table 71. Polish national qualifications framework (PQF)

PQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATIONS FROM THE FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM	REGULATED AND NON-STATUTORY QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF LEVELS
8	• Doctoral Diploma *(Dyplom doktora)* • Postgraduate qualification *(Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych)*		8
7	• Second cycle of higher education diploma (master) *(Dyplom ukończenia studiów drugiego stopnia)* • Integrated first and second cycle diploma *(Dyplom ukończenia jednolitych studiów magisterskich)* • Postgraduate qualification *(Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych)*	**E.g.** • Diagnosis and psycho-oncological help for the ill, for people after cancer, and their families and surroundings – Psycho-oncologist (*Diagnoza i pomoc psychoonkologiczna osobom chorym onkologicznie, osobom po chorobie nowotworowej oraz ich rodzinom i otoczeniu – Psychoonkolog*) • Checking and evaluating responses to examination tasks for matriculation examination in mathematics *(Sprawdzanie i ocenianie odpowiedzi do zadań egzaminacyjnych egzaminu maturalnego z matematyki)*	7

PQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATIONS FROM THE FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM	REGULATED AND NON-STATUTORY QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF LEVELS
6	• First cycle of higher education diploma (bachelor) *(Dyplom ukończenia studiów pierwszego stopnia)* • Postgraduate qualification *(Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych)*	**E.g.** • Conducting environmental therapy for children and adolescents *(Prowadzenie terapii środowiskowej dzieci i młodzieży)* • Conducting judicial and extrajudicial mediation in business matters *(Prowadzenie mediacji sądowych i pozasądowych w sprawach gospodarczych)* • Designing of fire protection – sound warning systems – DSO) *(Projektowanie zabezpieczeń przeciwpożarowych – dźwiękowe systemy ostrzegawcze – DSO)*	6
5	• Certificate of professional competence in the profession *(Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy**)* – full qualification • Certificate of professional qualification in the profession *(Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej**)* – partial qualification • Certified specialist diploma – short cycle*** *(Świadectwo dyplomowanego specjalisty/ specjalisty technologa)*	**E.g.** • Planning, creating and distributing content marketing *(Tworzenie oferty, planowanie i prowadzenie sprzedaży skierowanej do klientów biznesowych – handlowiec)* • Conducting training using activating methods *(Prowadzenie szkoleń metodami aktywizującymi)* • *Conducting skills assessments Prowadzenie procesu bilansowania kompetencji* • Data recovery from HDD hard drives *(Odzyskiwanie danych z dysków twardych HDD)* • Restaurant work management *(Zarządzanie pracą restauracji)* • Planning, creating and distributing marketing content *(Planowanie, tworzenie i dystrybuowanie treści marketingowych)*	5
4	• Upper secondary school leaving exam certificate *(matura) (4-year general secondary school – liceum ogólnokształcące) (Świadectwo dojrzałości)* • Certificate of professional competence in the profession *(Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy**)* - full qualification • Certificate of professional qualification in the profession *(Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowe**)* – partial qualification	**E.g.** • Designing computer graphics *(Projektowanie grafiki komputerowej)* • Designing websites *(Tworzenie witryn internetowych)* • Active sales to business customers – sales representative *(Aktywne prowadzenie sprzedaży skierowanej do klientów biznesowych – przedstawiciel handlowy)* • *Creating clothing templates for the production of industrial clothing (Konstruowanie szablonów odzieżowych do produkcji przemysłowej odzieży)* • Piloting tourist events *(Pilotowanie imprez turystycznych)* • Service in health tourism *(Obsługa w turystyce zdrowotnej)*	4

PQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATIONS FROM THE FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM	REGULATED AND NON-STATUTORY QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF LEVELS
3	• Certificate of professional competence in the profession *(Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy**)* – full qualification • Certificate of professional qualification in the profession *(Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej**)* – partial qualification	**E.g.** • Assembly of construction woodwork (*Montowanie stolarki budowlanej*) • Programming and servicing 3D printing (*Programowanie i obsługiwanie procesu druku 3D*) • Preparing food in accordance with market trends and the principles of healthy nutrition (*Przygotowywanie potraw zgodnie z trendami rynkowymi i zasadami zdrowego żywienia*) • Programming and operating 3D printing process (*Programowanie i obsługiwanie procesu druku 3D*) • Office service (*Prowadzenie obsługi biura*) • Preparing dishes in accordance with market trends and healthy eating principles (Przygotowywanie potraw zgodnie z trendami rynkowymi i zasadami zdrowego żywienia) • Mounting and servicing of connections and indoor installations in fibre optic technology *(Montowanie i serwisowanie przyłączy oraz instalacji wewnątrzbudynkowych w technologii światłowodowej)* • Joinery installation (*Montowanie stolarki budowlanej*)	3
2	• Lower secondary school leaving certificate**** *(Świadectwo ukończenia gimnazjum)* • Certificate of professional competence in the profession *(Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy**)* – full qualification • Certificate of professional qualification in the profession *(Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej**)* – partial qualification • Primary school leaving certificate (8 years)**** *(Świadectwo ukończenia szkoły podstawowej (8-letniej)*	**E.g.** • Installation and maintenance of autonomous detectors: carbon monoxide, smoke, heat and gas (*Montaż i konserwacja autonomicznych czujek: tlenku węgla, dymu, ciepła i gazu*) • Computer skills certificate – basic level (*Certyfikat umiejętności komputerowych – poziom podstawowy*)	2
1	• Primary school leaving certificate (6 years)**** *(Świadectwo ukończenia szkoły podstawowej (6-letniej)*		1

* State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system and non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications) which have a PQF level assigned and have been included in the integrated qualification system (IQS) and the integrated qualification register.

** A new structure of upper secondary education is being gradually introduced starting 2019/20, to be completed in 2023/24. Persons who learn based on the core curriculum for vocational education applicable from 1 September 2019 may obtain a certificate of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession (Dyplom zawodowy and Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej, respectively).

*** Not yet available, but officially possible according to the 2018 Law on Higher Education.

**** Part of the 2017 reform, lower secondary schools have been phased out; the last group of pupils from these schools graduated in June 2019; pupils graduating from grade 6 of primary school continue education in grade 7 of 8-year primary schools.

Source: Ministry of National Education, 2020 (email communication). The integrated qualifications register: https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/

Abbreviations

CVET	continuing vocational education and training	OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system	PISA	Programme for international student assessment
EQF	European qualifications framework	PQF	Polish qualifications framework
EQF NCP	EQF national coordination point	SQF	sectoral qualifications framework
IBE	Educational Research Institute [*Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych*]	QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
IQR	Integrated qualifications register	VET	vocational education and training
IQS	integrated qualifications system	VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning
IVET	initial vocational education and training		
NQF	national qualifications framework		

Main sources of information

The Unit of Integrated Qualifications System (in the Department of Strategy, Qualifications and Vocational Education) of the Ministry of National Education acts as EQF NCP: https://prk.men.gov.pl/en/2en/

IQS portal: http://kwalifikacje.edu.pl/

The integrated qualifications register: https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/

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Parliament of Poland (2015). Ustawa z dnia 22 grudnia 2015 r. o Zintegrowanym Systemie Kwalifikacji [Act of 22 December 2015 on the integrated qualifications system]. *Journal of Laws*, No 226/2020. https://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/D2020000022601.pdf

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PORTUGAL

Introduction and context

The performance of Portuguese education and training has improved in several areas over recent years. The rate of early school leaving has decreased significantly from 30.9% in 2009 to 10.6% in 2019[1153]. The 2018 results of the Programme for international student assessment (PISA)[1154] indicate an increase in the percentage of 15-year-olds who underperform in reading and science, similar to the EU trend; however, there was a slight improvement in maths compared to 2015, and regional differences in education outcomes have reduced. Reorganisation of basic education[1155] by merging its first and second cycle has been recommended to smooth transitions but is considered complex to implement. Curricular autonomy and flexibility (up to 25% of teaching load) has been introduced in all schools, expected to impact positively both general education and vocational education and training (VET) pathways. Government efforts to develop VET aim to increase its relevance to labour market demand. The percentages of upper secondary students enrolled in VET and of recent VET graduates in employment have declined. Tertiary education attainment follows an upward trend, though it is below the national target of 40%, at 36.2% in 2019[1156]. Recent measures in higher education are aimed at promoting access through an expanded offer of two-year short-cycle higher education professional courses (Cursos Técnicos Superiores Profissionais) and master programmes, and more support for students. Cooperation between higher education and the business sector in student mobility, dual programmes, curriculum shared design and delivery, and lifelong learning is above EU averages. The employment rate of recent graduates (ISCED 3 to 8) was 80.3% in 2019.

Adult participation in education and training is just below the EU average, at 10.5% in 2019[1157]. Adult learning is supported through implementation of the national skills strategy and the Qualifica programme launched in 2017[1158]. A national information campaign is under way, targeting businesses, the creation of local qualification networks, and increased awareness of skills development among at-risk groups (European Commission, 2019).

Development of a national qualifications system started part of VET reform in 2007, aiming to promote attainment of secondary education as a minimum level of qualification. The national qualifications system has several elements, including the national qualifications catalogue (NQC); the national qualifications framework (NQF) (Quadro nacional de qualificações, QNQ); the national credit system for VET; a network of adult learning centres (Qualifica centres); and an instrument for lifelong development, recording individual qualifications and competences (Qualifica passport). The national system for recognising non-formal and informal learning (RVCC) was integrated into the NQF and reformed, to address training, guidance, and skills validation better.

The comprehensive NQF is a single reference for classifying all qualifications awarded in the Portuguese education and training system, acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. The framework was legally adopted in 2009. It includes eight levels, with level descriptors defined in terms of 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

1153. Data from European Commission, 2020.
1154. https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/pisa-2018_en
1155. Basic education in Portugal is currently organised in three cycles (nine years in total) and covers primary and lower secondary (ISCED level 1 and 2) (Cedefop; Directorate-General of Employment and Industrial Relations, 2019).
1156. Data from European Commission, 2020.

1157. Idem.
1158. The Qualifica programme is an integrated strategy to support the training and qualification of low qualified adults, unemployed people and NEETs. https://www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/

is operational and has promoted the introduction of a learning-outcomes approach in all education subsystems. National qualifications and curricula have been progressively aligned with the NQF level descriptors. Over 300 qualifications at NQF/EQF levels 2, 4 and 5 are included in the national qualifications catalogue (September 2020); higher education qualifications are included in a separate database.

The NQF is well integrated in the legislation governing the education and training system. A key competence framework based on EQF principles, related to the 'Students' profile at the end of compulsory education'[1159], is being implemented. The NQF and the EQF are referred to in new legislation in the context of curricular reorganisation and admission to higher education[1160]. NQF levels and terminology are also mentioned in labour market and transversal policy documents[1161].

The NQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in 2011, and the framework for higher education qualifications was self-certified against the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in the same year.

Policy objectives

Developed as part of reforms aiming to raise qualification levels of the whole population, the NQF is seen as 'both a central anchoring device and a mechanism that drives forward the process of reform' (ANQ, 2011). It responds to the need to integrate and coordinate qualifications from the different education and training subsystems (general education, VET, higher education, and those awarded through validation of non-formal learning) into a single classification. It aims to improve the transparency and comparability of Portuguese qualifications, their quality and relevance, and 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 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 and coordination solution and quality control mechanisms for education and training pathways;
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.

1159. Legislative Order 6478/2017 on the students' profile by the end of compulsory schooling: https://dre.pt/application/file/a/107756793
1160. Decree-Law 55/2018 establishing the curriculum of basic and secondary education and principles for its operationalisation: https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/136.html
Legislative Order 6944-A/2018 approving the Essential learning of basic education: https://dre.pt/application/conteudo/116279697
Ministerial Ordinance No. 223-A/2018 regulating the educational offers of basic education: https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/147.html
Decree-Law No. 11/2020 on special admission contests for secondary double certification holders and specialised artistic course graduates: https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/447.html.
1161. The Social and economic stabilisation programme: https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc22/comunicacao/documento?i=programa-de-estabilizacao-economica-e-social
The Dynamic reference framework of digital competence for Portugal: https://www.incode2030.gov.pt/sites/default/files/qdrcd_set2019.pdf
ATIVAR.PT – Reinforced employment and professional training support programme: https://pees.gov.pt/emprego/ the Professional internships initiative: https://www.iefp.pt/documents/10181/7118590/FS_Est%C3%A1gios+Profissionais_19-05-2020/73cffec1-a844-47ba-8aa6-761ed24ef139

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The NQF is a comprehensive framework with eight levels, including all qualifications from the different education and training subsystems, regardless of means of access: basic, upper secondary and higher education, vocational training and the processes of recognition, validation and certification of competences obtained through formal, non-formal or informal learning.

Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills (cognitive or practical) and attitudes. The term 'competence' is 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 attitudes descriptor 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'; it is divided into the subdomains responsibility and autonomy[1162].

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. Discussion on NQF level 5 may also be necessary; a post-secondary non-tertiary qualification has already been placed at NQF level 5, the diploma in technological specialisation[1163], which gives access to higher education through a special competition for holders of the diploma; there is also a modality of short-cycle higher education, specialised advanced technical courses (CTeSP)[1164], designed using the learning outcomes approach but, as yet, with no assigned level.

The NQF has been a driving force behind incorporation of the learning-outcomes approach into the education and training system. Fine-tuning learning outcomes in qualifications with the NQF level descriptors is a challenging task and is work in progress: it includes upgrading both the NQC and general education qualifications. The VET sector has seen most progress, with reforms aimed at developing qualifications standards and curriculum development. VET qualifications are included in the NQC at levels 2, 4 and 5, and are organised in units of competence. Each qualification at levels 2 and 4 includes a professional profile, a training standard (that awards a double certification) and a recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) standard. Level 5 qualifications include a training standard. A methodological guidebook for the design of qualifications at levels 2, 4 and 5 of the NQF and revision of existing ones was developed in 2015[1165]. Following curricular reforms and diversification of qualifications included in the NQC, a new methodology for the design of qualifications was published in 2020 (ANQEP, 2020), re-emphasising the focus on skills and learning outcomes. Involvement of both sector qualification councils and the National Agency for Qualifications and VET (ANQEP) in the redesign/ revision of qualifications serves as quality assurance (Cedefop, 2020).

The use of learning outcomes in qualification design also enabled the creation of the National credit system for vocational education and training[1166], aligned with some ECVET principles and aimed at increasing permeability between VET pathways and higher education. This enables the allocation of credit points to level 2, 4 and 5 NQF qualifications included in the NQC, and to certified training included in the integrated information system for the management of education and training provision (SIGO), compliant with the quality criteria in place[1167] (European Commission; Cedefop, 2020).

In general education, revision of the curriculum structure for basic and secondary education led to the definition of new programmes and curriculum

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1162. Ministerial Order No 782/2009.
1163. Obtained through technological specialisation courses (CET). Through agreements with higher tertiary institutions CET graduates are credited 60 to 90 ECTS points. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/portugal
1164. CTeSP are short-cycle higher technical courses launched in 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.

1165. ANQEP (2015). New methodological guidebook: design of qualifications based on learning outcomes. http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/boDocumentos/getDocumentos/561
1166. 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.
1167. The national credit system for VET is based on three complementary dimensions: (a) the attribution of credit points to formally certified units of qualifications in the national qualifications catalogue; (b) the accumulation of credit points; and (c) the transfer of credit points.

outcome targets (metas curriculares) for several subjects, introduced gradually starting in 2013/14. The curriculum outcome targets are focused on knowledge and essential skills students need to master in different school years and cycles. The 'essential learning' of each school subject, the reference for delivering new curricula, 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.

Since 2020, the 'essential learning' for professional and for specialised artistic teaching courses have also been elaborated and approved. They are described in learning outcomes, by year/cycle and module.

Higher education institutions are responsible for implementing 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.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

A new governance model was created in Portugal in 2007 to develop the national qualifications system and its main instruments, the NQF and the national qualifications catalogue (NQC), established through Decree-Law No 396/2007[1168]. The legal basis was amended in 2017 (Decree-Law no. 14/2017), updating the governance structure, processes

and main elements[1169]. The National Agency for Qualifications and VET (ANQEP), previously the National Agency for Qualifications (ANQ), under the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security and the Ministry of Education, continues to assume a central role[1170] coordinating implementation of education and training policies for young people and adults and the system for recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC).

The NQF was published by Ministerial Order No 782/2009[1171] and came into force in October 2010. It is currently under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education[1172]. NQF coordination is shared between ANQEP and the General Directorate for Higher Education (under the latter ministry), involved in qualifications at levels 5 to 8. ANQEP has been nominated as national coordination point for the EQF (EQF NCP), the leading structure for NQF implementation. Its responsibilities include: referencing the national qualification levels to the EQF; providing access to information and guidance on how national qualifications are referenced to the EQF; and encouraging participation of all relevant parties (higher education and VET, social partners, sectors and experts).

The EQF NCP collaborates horizontally with other 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 General Directorate for Education is consulted on general education qualifications. Currently, there are no

1168. Decree-Law No 396/2007 on the national qualification system: https://dre.pt/application/dir/pdf1s/2007/12/25100/0916509173.pdf amended by Decree-Law No 14/2017: https://dre.pt/home/-/dre/105808927/details/maximized

1169. Updates refer to the introduction of the national credit system for VET, new developments related to the Qualifica programme (the Qualifica passport and the new Qualifica centres), and the processes for updating standards in the national qualifications catalogue.
1170. ANQEP coordinates the work of other bodies involved in the qualifications system: the Directorate-General for Education; the Directorate-General for Employment and Labor Relations; the Institute of Employment and Professional Training; structures related to financing education training policies; the sectoral qualification councils; the network of adult education centres; basic and secondary education establishments; the 'poles of excellence'; and other entities with structures for certified training (Decree-Law No 14/2017).
1171. Ministerial Order No 782/2009 on the NQF: http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/boDocumentos/getDocumentos/163
1172. Initial work on the NQF was carried out by the former Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, with support from the Ministry of Education. It was coordinated by ANQ through a steering committee representing bodies involved in the regulation of qualifications and quality assurance in education and training. A technical working group supported the process. Other stakeholders were also consulted (ANQ, 2011).

human resources dedicated exclusively to the EQF NCP; the staff working on the NQF are involved in other ANQEP technical departments and services. This arrangement allows flexibility and development of synergies (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

ANQEP is supported by 18 sector qualifications councils[1173] involved in defining qualifications and competences, including new qualifications in the NQC and updating existing ones. If an accepted proposal concerns a new qualification, a three-stage process takes place leading to the publication of the new qualification in the official Bulletin for labour and employment and inclusion in the NQC (Cedefop; Directorate-General of Employment and Industrial Relations, 2019).

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).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[1174]

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is an important element in Portugal of the comprehensive national system for recognition, validation and certification of competences (Reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências, RVCC) it was introduced in 2001 to increase levels of school education and vocational qualification of adults, to facilitate employability. Initially, only competences equivalent to the ninth year of schooling (basic education) could be validated. The RVCC system has undergone major changes since its establishment. It was expanded to promote upper secondary qualifications as a minimum level of qualification for the population. It currently operates through a new network of adult learning centres introduced in 2016 (Qualifica

centres)[1175], which 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; their activity is managed by ANQEP. They have similar functions as the previous new opportunities centres, and include a focus on people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) and other disadvantaged groups. An online instrument was created for recording education and training experiences and providing guidance to obtaining a qualification, the Qualifica passport, replacing the previous Individual skills booklet. Individuals under 23 years of age need to have three years of professional experience to access RVCC processes. Since 2016, adult learners must attend a minimum of 50 hours of training to acquire the competences in the key competences standard, and another 25 hours in preparation for the final examination for certification.

The RVCC system is incorporated in the national qualifications system and framework. It has two main processes:

a. education RVCC process, aimed at obtaining a school leaving certificate (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 the key competences standards used in formal education and training for adult pathways: one for basic education established in 2001 and updated in 2002 and 2004, and another for secondary education established in 2006. Separate key competences standards have been developed for adults with special education needs and other disadvantaged groups;

b. professional RVCC process, aimed at obtaining a professional qualification (offers school and professional certification at levels 2 and 4 of the NQF/EQF); the professional competences standards used for validation are based on training standards used in the formal VET system, and are part of the national qualifications catalogue (NQC), updated as necessary. The NQC includes more than 300 qualifications from 45 education and training areas (December, 2020).

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

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1173. The councils are composed of social partners, training providers, bodies responsible for regulating professions; public structures that oversee business sectors; technology and innovation centres; professional associations; companies; competitiveness clusters and independent experts. They can also include representatives of the Directorate-General for Higher Education, and higher education establishments. Two new sector councils were created in June 2020, in addition to the previous 16.

1174. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (Guimarães, 2019).

1175. Qualifica centres were introduced by Ordinance No 232/2016. They replaced the centres for qualification and vocational training (CQEP), which in turn replaced the previous new opportunities centres.

from levels 1 to 4 in the NQF that have the same value as those awarded in formal education and training. Using the RVCC system is free of charge. Between 2000 and 2017, 600 272 adults obtained certification through RVCC, most of them at lower secondary level (ANQEP, 2018); however, numbers have dropped significantly compared to those 10 years ago. While validation is 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.

In higher education (levels 6 to 8 of the NQF/EQF), validation is generally linked to the credit system and module-based structure of courses and degrees. Students can obtain European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credits through validation that can be used for granting exemptions from part of a degree course. These credits are valid only in the programme of studies in which a student is enrolled. There is a limit for validation processes up to one third of the total number of ECTS credits relevant for a particular course. General rules for validation apply to all higher education institutions, complemented by specific validation procedures established by each institution, that have to be published in the government's official journal.

NQF implementation and impact

The Portuguese NQF has reached an operational stage. Qualifications from general education, VET, higher education, and those awarded through RVCC have been assigned to levels, and quality assurance arrangements have been put in place. Private/non-regulated qualifications have not yet been included. All VET is already organised around the NQF and access to financial support also takes the framework into consideration[1176]. The national qualifications catalogue (NQC)[1177] has been developed as a strategic management tool for non-higher national qualifications and a central reference tool for VET provision, linked to NQF levels. It is based on the principle of double certification and aims to bridge the gap between education and training and the labour market; it therefore excludes general education pathways that lead only to an education certificate. The NQC includes more than 300 qualifications from 45 education and training areas at NQF/EQF levels 2,

4 and 5. It also includes international qualifications, which are partial qualifications. Since January 2018, 22 new qualifications (levels 2 and 4) were included, 307 qualifications were updated (level 2, 4 and 5) and 6 were excluded (level 4); eight professional RVCC standards were included (levels 2 and 4), 25 professional RVCC standards were updated (levels 2 and 4) and three professional RVCC standards were excluded (levels 2 and 4). NQF and EQF levels are indicated in the NQC. The catalogue is continuously updated by ANQEP, in a process supported by the 18 sector qualifications councils. A range of sectoral studies are being launched to diagnose qualifications and competence needs and to develop qualifications standards for the NQC, based on the new methodology for designing qualifications published in 2020 (ANQEP, 2020).

A database for higher education qualifications has also been created, containing information about the institution, type of education, area and course of study. A comprehensive database including all qualifications within the NQF has not yet been set up.

Qualification documents from VET and those acquired through RVCC indicate the corresponding NQF level. EQF levels are indicated only on some qualifications[1178]. NQF and EQF levels are not yet indicated in general education, and are indicated on some higher education qualifications. 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. It is mandatory to indicate NQF and EQF levels on certificate and diploma supplements, such as Europass supplements.

The NQF NCP has developed a guide (Understanding the NQF – User support guide) to support stakeholders in using the NQF, and leaflets and flyers aim to reach a wider audience, including employers. The framework has become increasingly used by education and training institutions and providers (in advertising courses and in certification), the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training, and by employers (in advertising job offers). Cooperation between the NQF NCP and the Euroguidance Centre has been increased. Since

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1176. For instance, in order to access certain professional traineeships, it is mandatory to have a certain NQF level.
1177. The structure and organisation of the national qualifications catalogue (CNQ) and its model for skills-based qualifications were established by Order No 781/2009.

1178. 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.

2019 ANQEP has invested in the modernisation of the National catalogue framework. The website of the national qualifications catalogue is currently being renewed, and will integrate information about the NQF / EQF. An assessment study on the implementation and impact of the NQF has not yet been conducted, but it has been discussed. It is considered necessary to monitor the impacts of these actions (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Key challenges for further NQF implementation include: the alignment of the national qualifications and curricula in all education sectors with NQF descriptors (there is a diversity of approaches and concepts and the level of implementation varies across subsystems); increasing awareness of learning outcomes among different stakeholders; and the dissemination of information to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, especially on the labour market (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Referencing to the EQF

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

Several steps were taken in Portugal to develop the national qualifications system and to reach its aims: a new institutional model was developed to maximise coordination and participation of stakeholders and quality assurance; the national qualifications framework (NQF) and the national qualifications catalogue (NCQ) were established; and the national system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) was incorporated into the NQF and reformed, promoting equal value of qualifications placed at the same level, regardless of how competences are acquired. The NQF brings together qualifications from all education and training subsystems into a single framework. It is considered to have improved

the transparency and comparability of qualifications, public trust in the quality of qualifications, and to have reduced barriers between subsystems. Qualification levels provide insight into the relative position and value of certificates and diplomas. The NQF has aided the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and has showed that certificates and diplomas obtained through RVCC have the same legal value as those obtained in any other way.

The NQF has been a crucial element in orienting focus in the education and training system on learning outcomes. A new methodology for designing VET qualifications, based on learning outcomes, has recently been created and the process of reviewing and renewing VET qualifications continues. However, further encouraging discussion and raising awareness of learning outcomes among different stakeholders is needed. One issue that may be addressed in the near future is the review of NQF level 5, which currently includes a post-secondary non-tertiary level qualification (the diploma in technological specialisation, CET), while a short-cycle higher education qualification (specialised advanced technical courses, CTeSP) has not yet been assigned to a level. Another key challenge is the integration of international qualifications in the framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

There is a need to disseminate the framework to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including those from the labour market. The indication of NQF/EQF levels on all certificates and diplomas at all levels of education and training could increase awareness of the NQF among end-users and this has been a priority in the NQF NCP's work.

In the context of Covid-19, the Ministry of Education issued guidelines for professional schools on attendance, training plans, assessment, final exams and work-based learning, to ensure continuity in the delivery of qualifications. Specific guidelines were made available also for Qualifica centres, and use of digital technologies made possible the continuation of school and professional RVCC processes, distance learning and lifelong guidance (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Table 72. Portuguese national qualifications framework (QNQ)

NQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	• Doctoral degree (Doutoramento)	8
7	• Master degree (Mestrado)	7
6	• Bachelor degree (Licenciatura)	6
5	• Diploma in technological specialisation – post-secondary non tertiary education (Diploma de Especialização Tecnológica)	5
4	• Upper secondary education and professional certification (Ensino secundário obtido por percursos de dupla certificação) • Upper secondary education and professional internship – minimum six months (Ensino secundário vocacionado para prosseguimento de estudos de nível superior acrescido de estágio profissional – mínimo de seis meses)	4
3	• Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate (Ensino secundário vocacionado para prosseguimento de estudos de nível superior)	3
2	• Third cycle of basic education (3º ciclo do ensino básico obtido no ensino regular) • Third cycle of basic education and professional certification (3º ciclo do ensino básico obtido por percursos de dupla certificação)	2
1	• Second cycle of basic education (2º ciclo do ensino básico)	1

Sources: ANQ (2011); ANQEP (2020) (email communication).

Abbreviations

A3ES	Agency for the Accreditation and Assessment of Higher Education
ANQ	National Agency for Qualifications [Agência Nacional para a Qualificação]
ANQEP	National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training [Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional]
CQEP	centres for qualification and vocational training [Centros para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional]
ECTS	European credit transfer system
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
EQF NCP	national coordination point for the EQF
FHEQ	framework of higher education qualifications
MCTES	Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education [Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Ensino Superior]
NQC	national qualifications catalogue
NQF	national qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NEETs	people not in education, employment or training
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework of the European higher education area
QNQ	Portuguese qualifications framework [Quadro Nacional de Qualificações]
RVCC	system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences [reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências]
SIGO	integrated information system for the management of education and training provision [Sistema integrado de informação e gestão da oferta educativa e formativa]
VET	vocational education and training

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Introduction and Context

The Korean Qualifications Framework (KQF) is a system of standards that enables assessment of academic achievements, qualifications, workplace experience and training results based on the country's National Competency Standards (NCS) (Choi, 2017). The KQF offers a basis for a common understanding of quality, facilitates access, mobility and progression and recognizes learning outcomes acquired in different settings: formal, non-formal and informal. It is an overarching framework that improves the alignment and coherence of system among general and vocational education, vocational training, vocational qualifications and workplace learning.

Policy objectives

The KQF aims to:
- acknowledge the individual's capacities, be they in the form of experience, qualifications or other learning outcomes;
- prevent duplicated learning;
- support learners' career progression, develop their capacities and promote lifelong learning, vocational training and learning through onsite experience;
- guarantee quality by encouraging performance-centred training;
- promote the free movement of labour by integrating qualifications, on-site experience, training results and academic degrees (Choi, 2017).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The KQF is composed of eight levels, domains and descriptors. The levels are based on the systems practised overseas, including National Competency Standards (NCS) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Domains are described based on learning outcomes, consisting of knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility. Knowledge refers to cognitive ability encompassing facts, principles, theories and concepts acquired through performance or learning. Skills connote the ability to use materials and tools while employing knowledge to perform tasks and solve problems. Autonomy and responsibility signifies the degree by which one performs tasks independently or the ability to manage and supervise the job performance of others. The level descriptors serve as a standard to allocate individual competency to a specific level of the KQF (see Table 1).

Table 73. Levels, domains and descriptors of the KQF

CONSTITUENT/ LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	AUTONOMY AND RESPONSIBILITY
8	Employing convergent knowledge of top expertise in pertinent and related fields	Employing convergent technology required to expand and redefine relevant knowledge	Creating new ideas and processes affecting organization and bringing about comprehensive changes while assigning specialist authority and responsibility for the entire organization
7	Employing connective knowledge of top expertise in pertinent and related fields	Employing connective technology required to develop new knowledge and procedures while integrating relevant knowledge	Suggesting new strategic solutions, managing results of the organization and evaluating others' performances

CONSTITUENT/ LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	AUTONOMY AND RESPONSIBILITY
6	Employing in-depth expertise in pertinent field	Employing technology required to solve unpredictable problems in pertinent field	Performing tasks within the general scope of authority and managing organizational tasks
5	Employing comprehensive top expertise in pertinent field	Employing technology required to solve extraordinary problems in pertinent field	Performing tasks within general scope of authority and managing organizational tasks
4	Employing limited top expertise in pertinent field	Employing technology required to solve specific problems in pertinent field	Performing tasks within limited scope of authority and managing the assigned tasks of others
3	Employing comprehensive basic knowledge in pertinent field	Employing technology required to perform ordinary tasks and solve ordinary problems in pertinent field	Performing assigned tasks within limited scope of authority
2	Employing limited basic knowledge in pertinent field	Employing technology required to perform ordinary tasks	Performing fixed tasks under ordinary instruction
1	Employing general knowledge, e.g. literacy and calculating ability	Employing technology required to perform simple tasks	Performing fixed tasks under concrete instruction and supervision

Source: Choi et al (2017)

The KQF oversees qualifications across multiple sectors (VET, HE, general education, adult education, etc.) and links these to the relevant sectoral frameworks. Additional sectoral frameworks are currently being developed in several sectors, including ICT. The Republic of Korea has quality assurance arrangements for the development and award of national qualifications. These qualifications are created and managed by the State in accordance with statues. The levels of the KQF are based on learning outcomes and are also currently under development. The aim is to embed the levels not only in all educational sectors, including VET, HE and general education, but also in general educational standards, curricula and assessments. However, this process is still under review and requires consensus by all stakeholders. NCS will play a major role in the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes using credit systems.

Institutional arrangement and stakeholder involvement

In 1973, the vocational qualification system was introduced by the Ministry of Employment and Labour (MoEL) based on the National Technical Qualification Act (NTQA). Previously, vocational qualifications had been administered by individual ministries or stipulated by certain legislations for specific purposes. In 1997, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) established the *Framework Act on Qualification*, which systemized the management and operation

of the qualifications system and promoted the development of lifelong learning.

The Republic of Korea has been developing an articulation system between its traditional higher education system and vocational training and qualifications systems, such as the Korean Skills Standards (KSS), the National Occupation System (NOS) and the KQF. The NOS has been developed and is operated by MoEL and the KSS by the Ministry of Education (MoE).

The KSS and NOS were integrated into the NCS in December 2010 by the Office for Policy Coordination. These efforts were designed to link various VET systems and vocational qualifications systems together and to enhance the development of the competence-based VET system. The merger also aimed to reinforce an overall coordinating function and conduct effective qualifications-related policy.

The Korean Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET) has promoted the KQF by setting out an integrated system of levels common to academic and vocational qualifications.

The KQF was initiated by MoEST in consultation with other departments, including MoEL and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Development of the KQF began in 2013, when the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment and Labour jointly established the basic blueprint for a national qualifications framework. Businesses, academics

and the government concluded a memorandum of understanding in 2014 to launch pilot projects in four fields: beauty, car maintenance, hotel management and information technology.

In 2016, the stakeholders formulated a proposal for the KQF and held nationwide public consultations on the framework later that same year. They then developed operational guidelines in 2017 and the government put forward a draft of the framework in January 2019.

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The Republic of Korea's mechanisms for the recognition and accreditation of prior and/or non-formal learning have developed in tandem with the KQF and NCS. The country has made efforts to reorganize the national qualifications system in such a way that allows learners to accumulate credits towards a qualification and a college degree via the Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS).

About 500 education and training institutions participate in the ACBS. The Ministry of Education develops the basic accreditation plan and issues final approval by sending a certificate of accreditation to each institution, while the country's 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 a certain number of credits have accumulated. At present, six sources of credits are recognized by the ACBS:
- credits transferred from formal higher education institutions;
- credits obtained by taking part-time courses at formal higher education institutions;
- credits transferred from non-formal education and training courses accredited by NILE;
- 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);
- credits recognized for national vocational qualifications (above the level of industrial technician);
- credits transferred from the Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-Education (BDES), a national system that enables learners to obtain an academic degree without attending a regular

college or university by passing an examination conducted by NILE.

Of these six recognized sources of credits, the first two pertain to university study. These credits 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 skills 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 (LLAS), which is designed to validate all types of learning by promoting the recognition and certification of both academic and vocational qualifications. The LLAS allows individuals to accumulate lifelong learning experiences and to 'invest' these experiences in moving up the career ladder.

The KQF recognizes results of non-formal and informal learning, including on-site experience as recognition of prior learning (RPL), and manages them once credits have been calculated; however, they are not allotted in the KQF. Results of on-site experience and non-formal and informal learning are evaluated and recognized according to the NCS and other equivalent standards before being handled by each industry.

Degrees, qualifications, non-formal and informal learning and on-site experience are connected in the KQF using descriptive indicators in accordance with the Sectoral Qualification Framework (SQF) level of basic degrees, such as the NCS and qualifications. Results of non-formal and informal learning, as well as managed and verified on-site experience, are recognized in the SQF according to RPL standards and procedures. In other words, once the SQF level is either recognized or converted to a unit of NCS capacity, the results are then connected with one's degree (GPA) or qualifications prior to being adopted (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 30. Interrelationship of degrees, qualifications, non-formal and informal learning, and workplace experience
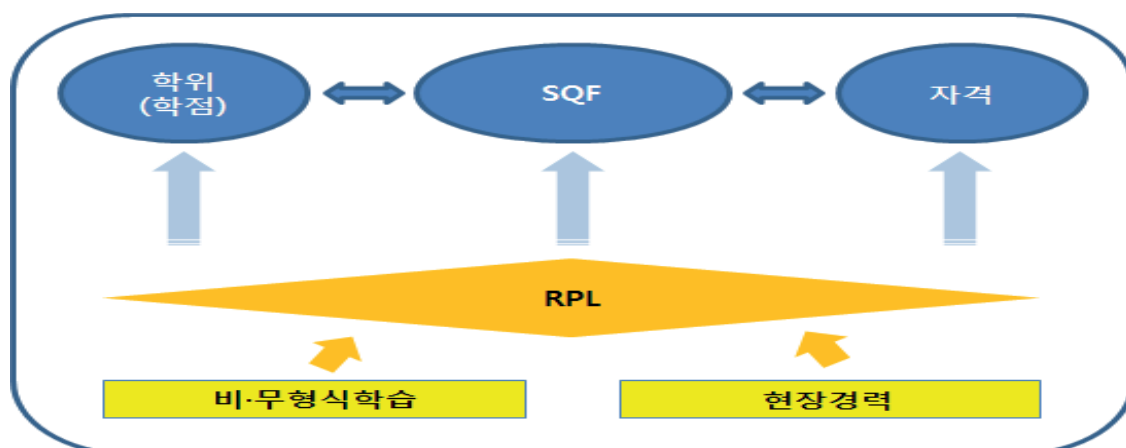
Source: Choi et al. (2017)

At present, development and implementation of validation of prior learning/non-formal and informal learning in the KQF has not yet begun. However, the Education Act (2007) and the Higher Education Act (2017) have afforded systems to recognize on-site experience, resulting in follow-up plans to link current legislation with the KQF in pursuit of a mutual connection.

NQF implementation and impact

The KQF was established in the Republic of Korea in early 2019 and offers comprehensive and general guidelines as an encompassing framework. The KQF provides principles, standards, direction and support to establish and operate the SQF under KQF guidelines. The SQF is currently being established in numerous fields. There are also plans for the KQF to balance the SQFs, providing an advisory function and quality control standards to counter inflation.

The SQF is intended to reflect guidelines proposed by the KQF while maintaining autonomy in each industry. It is also designed to maintain consistency with the KQF as it pertains to names, definitions and descriptive indicators. The SQF will be equipped with degrees and qualifications and will manage on-site experience, as well as non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as RPL.

The Republic of Korea has proposed and continues to pursue procedures for the following factors:
- inclusion of qualifications in a qualification register (criteria and procedures, quality assurance);
- monitoring, evaluation and review of the NQF;
- public reach;

- use of the NQF by labour market actors during the process of recruitment;
- sectoral bargaining.

Current forecasts suggest that these some fields may be realized on a preferential basis within the next two to three years.

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

The Republic of Korea seeks to align its own qualifications framework with those under development in other countries of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum to enable mutual recognition of qualifications across the region, thus enhancing mobility.

Important lessons and future plans

The KQF needs to be better understood by 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 is to bring about its full intended benefits.

In the future, links to the KQF will make the ACBS, LLAS and qualifications more reliable and convenient, not only for learners but also for employers and educators. The KQF could play a role in facilitating an NCS-based curriculum across education and training institutions. Credits from NCS-based education and training programmes might be a new way to link KQF and TVET (technical vocational education and training) qualifications.

At the national level, the issues that remain unaddressed include the establishment of mutual recognition between education and qualification and the development of tools to accredit informal or non-formal learning and experiences. MoEL has sought the development of four SQFs on a yearly basis from 2018.

The Korean Government has commissioned several research tasks in connection with the KQF. For example, KRIVET conducted research on the amendment of existing acts on education, skills development and qualification.

Abbreviations

ACBS	Academic Credit Bank System	NCS	National Competency Standards
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation	NILE	National Institute for Lifelong Education
BDES	Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-Education	NOS	National Occupation System
KQF	Korean Qualifications Framework	NTQA	National Technical Qualification Act
KRIVET	Korean Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
		SQF	Sectoral Qualifications framework
KSS	Korean Skills Standards	TVET	Technical vocational education and training
LLAS	Lifelong Learning Account System		
MoE	Ministry of Education	VET	Vocational education and training
MoEL	Ministry of Employment and Labour		
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology		

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ROMANIA

Introduction and context

Relatively low government investment in education and training (3.2% in 2018)[1179] particularly affects pre-university education; there is a need for system modernisation, increased quality, equity, and efficiency. School reform has included the introduction of a competence-based curriculum in primary and secondary education, and training of teachers to use it. While declining, the percentage of pupils who leave education and training early is still high (15.3% in 2019)[1180], with large disparities between urban and rural areas. An early warning mechanism is being developed to tackle this issue and the availability of second chance programmes has been improving. Integrating the Roma population into education and onto the labour market remains a challenge. The rate of tertiary education attainment is low (25.8% in 2019, compared to 40.3% EU average)[1181], coupled with a high rate of emigration. The employment rate of recent tertiary graduates was 76.1% in 2019, below the EU average of 80.9%[1182] and skill shortages remain a challenge; efforts are needed to increase the labour-market relevance of higher education and VET. Participation in VET at upper secondary level is relatively high (56.2% in 2017) (European Commission, 2019). An increasing number of students are enrolled on the dual VET pathway launched in 2017/18, leading to an NQF/EQF level 3 qualification, and efforts are being made to expand this (Cedefop and Refernet, 2020). Very few adults participate in lifelong learning (1.3% in 2019)[1183], despite a need for upskilling and reskilling. Legislative measures to establish community lifelong learning centres were adopted in 2017, but implementation is slow (European Commission, 2019).

The Romanian national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (ROQF) was adopted in 2013 by Government Decision No 918/2013 (further amended in 2015 and 2018), in response to the EQF initiative, aiming to increase transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications. It closely follows the eight-level structure of the EQF and covers the whole spectrum of nationally recognised qualifications regardless of learning context, including those acquired through validation of non-formal learning. The framework builds on reforms in VET and development of competence-based qualifications since the 1990s. Parallel work in higher education resulted in the development of a national qualifications framework for higher education (QFHE) in line with the Bologna process, self-certified to QF-EHEA in 2011, and now a constitutive part of the comprehensive ROQF. The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) was established in 2011 by merging previous bodies responsible for qualifications and was tasked with the development and implementation of the comprehensive ROQF. The NQA is the national contact point for the EQF (EQF-NCP) and, since 2018, it has also been the National Europass Centre.

The ROQF is now operational. Implementation work has focused on developing qualifications registers, clarifying procedures and methodologies for inclusion of qualifications in the registers, and updating the legal basis. The framework was slightly revised following the adoption of the 2017 Council recommendation on the EQF for lifelong learning. As of 1 January 2019, it is required that all qualification documents and supplements, and all qualification registers, include a reference to the corresponding NQF level. The ROQF is believed to have an increasing influence on the review of qualifications, curricula, and qualification, occupational and training standards.

The ROQF was referenced to the EQF in April 2018.

1179. Data from European Commission, 2020.
1180. Idem.
1181. Idem.
1182. Idem.
1183. Idem. Participation in non-formal training concluded without a certificate may not always be perceived by learners as lifelong learning and may not be reported as such (Cedefop, 2019).

Policy objectives

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 of non-formal learning, adult participation in lifelong learning, and transitions between education and work. For instance, NQF/ EQF level 1 has recently been used to support upskilling of low-qualified adults: a six-month apprenticeship programme (not yet available) was created, and occupational standards and a training offer are being prepared (European Commission, 2019)

The ROQF is linked to a number of policy strategies in education, training and employment. One of the action lines of the Strategy for VET (2016-20)[1184] called for the update of tools for describing occupations and qualifications, curricula and curricular auxiliaries according to NQF qualification levels, for better interconnection among subsystems, for increased mobility in VET, and increased relevance for the labour market. Developing the ROQF and better coordination between stakeholders was highlighted as a cross-cutting action contributing to two of the strategic pillars of the National strategy for lifelong learning 2015-20[1185]: Pillar 2, increasing quality and relevance, and Pillar 3, partnerships. The national sustainable development strategy *Horizons 2013-2020-2030*[1186] also makes reference to the ROQF.

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.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The ROQF comprises eight qualification levels that can be acquired in education and training, in initial and continuing vocational education and training (IVET and CVET), apprenticeship, general education and higher education, 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[1187].

There is commitment to, and visible preoccupation with, strengthening the learning outcomes approach as part of the national reform programme. The VET sector is at the forefront, 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[1188]. Vocational training standards have been developed in collaboration with the social partners, validated by sectoral committees, and approved by the Ministry of Education and Research. The National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training offers methodological support. New curricula have been designed. Occupational standards are used in continuing vocational education and training (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 (Cedefop, 2019). The new occupational standards include a curriculum unique to each occupation listed in the classification of occupations. Implementation of the learning outcomes approach in adult education is at an early stage, partly due to a diversified institutional landscape with different types of institutions, programmes and organisational arrangements. Within the project National coordinators for the implementation of the European agenda for adult

1184. The Strategy for VET 2016-20 (in Romanian): https://edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2016/strategii/Strategia_VET%2027%2004%202016.pdf

1185. The National strategy for lifelong learning 2015-20 is available in Romanian at: https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2016/strategii/Strategie%20LLL%20(1).pdf

1186. The National sustainable development strategy is available in English at: http://www.mmediu.ro/beta/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/2012-06-12_dezvoltare_durabila_nsdsenglish12112008.pdf

1187. The third category of level descriptors, initially called 'competence', was amended to 'responsibility and autonomy' in 2018, 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).

1188. 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.

learning[1189], NQA developed a guide for writing learning outcomes in cooperation with education and labour market stakeholders, and carried out dissemination activities.

In higher education, qualifications are linked to the European credit transfer system (ECTS), which is compulsory for all higher education institutions in Romania. Study programmes are based on occupational standards, which aim to express learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences. According to a Cedefop study, there is a challenge in using competence-based models in designing curricula, learning resources and assessment tools (Cedefop, 2016). A methodological framework for developing study programmes based on learning outcomes, to be used mainly by universities, is planned to be developed in 2021 in the frame of an ESF-funded project[1190] (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The involvement of stakeholders in the development of the NQF is underpinned by the National Education Law No 1/2011[1191]. The NQF itself was adopted through Government Decision No 918/2013, subsequently amended by Government Decision No 567/2015 and Government Decision No 132/2018[1192]. 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 (NCP) for EQF and, since 2018, it is also the national Europass centre. NQA was established in

June 2011, under the coordination of the Ministry of Education and Research, bringing together 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 NQA proposes elements of national policies and strategies, develops and updates methodologies for NQF implementation, and develops instruments for monitoring and evaluating the NQF. It is responsible for the national qualifications registers and for ensuring compatibility of the national qualifications system with European and international qualifications policies and tools. The bodies responsible for general education and initial VET are, respectively, the Ministry of Education and Research 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 Pre-University Education. These are responsible for accreditation of education providers and programmes in higher education and, respectively, in general education and initial VET. The NQA is responsible for quality assurance in non-formal and informal learning, through the National Accreditation Centre, which authorises assessment centres for competences obtained by ways other than formal. The National Group for Quality Assurance is an inter-institutional structure that ensures coordination of quality assurance in vocational education and training. Sectoral committees play an important role in the development and quality assurance of VET qualifications.

The clear governance structure for the development of the NQF, the strong role of NQA as initiator of legislation, and a good human resource capacity are positive aspects. However, approval and implementation of legislative proposals may be slow.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[1193]

A legislative framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in Romania

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1189. 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://www.anc.edu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Ghid_Metodologic_privind_scrierea_rezultatelor_invatari.pdf

1190. Project: *Increasing the administrative capacity of NQA and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection through legal systematisation and simplification in the field of qualifications* (Operational programme 'Administrative capacity').

1191. Article 340 of the National Education Law No 1/2011 (in Romanian): https://edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Legislatie/2019/Legea%20nr%201%20Educatiei%20Nationale%20actualizata%202019.pdf

1192. Government Decision No 918/2013 on the approval of the NQF (in Romanian): http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/170238
Government Decision No 567/2015 (in Romanian): http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/170190
Government Decision No 132/2018 (in Romanian): http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/199134

1193. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (Balica, 2019).

dates back to 2004[1194] when the process of assessment and certification of professional competences obtained in ways other than formal was first defined and described. The National Education Law No 1/2011[1195] reaffirmed the role of validation in lifelong learning policies, defined as 'the process of assessment and certification of informal and non-formal learning'. The National strategy for lifelong learning (2015-20)[1196] provided a direction for developing validation mechanisms and addressing issues related to financial incentives, information, counselling and access to validation, especially for disadvantaged groups. The action plan for the implementation of the strategy included 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 National Centre for Accreditation (NQA) has contributed to improving validation system coordination. The centre is responsible for authorising professional competence 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 focus in recent years was on increasing the quality of the validation process and regulating the selection of staff involved in validation services[1197].

Current work on the national qualifications framework and registers, including the 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[1198] is 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 be obtained through validation of non-formal and informal learning up to ROQF level 3[1199].

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. Validation is linked with occupational standards that relate only to CVET qualifications in the ROQF. These 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 competence assessment centres. 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 approximatively 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.

Development of community lifelong learning centres has been foreseen in legislation[1200]. It

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1194. 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.
1195. National Education Law No 1/2011 (in Romanian): https://edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Legislatie/2019/Legea%20nr%201%20Educatiei%20Nationale%20actualizata%202019.pdf
1196. The National strategy for lifelong learning 2015-20, (in Romanian): https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2016/strategii/Strategie%20LLL%20(1).pdf
1197. 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.

1198. 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).
1199. According to Government Decision No 918/2013 for the approval of the national qualifications framework, amended by Government Decision No 567/2015.
1200. The chapter on lifelong learning in the National Education Law No 1/2011, available in Romanian at: https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2017/legislatie%20MEN/Legea%20nr.%201_2011_actualizata2018.pdf

aims to 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 methodology for their establishment has been proposed for public debate, but has not yet been approved; many stakeholders believe that they may increase access to validation services of specific disadvantaged groups, especially in rural and isolated communities.

NQF implementation and impact

The ROQF is well embedded in national legislation and linked to policy strategies in education, training and employment[1201]. It has been revised following the updated 2017 Council recommendation on the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning[1202] and is considered to have reached an operational stage (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). It covers qualifications from all education and training sectors, including those acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning in accredited assessment centres.

The ROQF for lifelong learning includes the framework for higher education adopted in 2011. In 2014 a ministerial order[1203] regulated the 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 the ROQF. The 2013 government decision on approval of the NQF was amended in July 2015, clarifying the 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. A further amendment in 2018 requires, as of 1 January 2019, indication of the NQF level on all qualifications and

qualification supplements, as well as all qualification databases. Other existing regulations refer to the inclusion of NQF levels on qualification documents and registers in the different sectors[1204]. NQF and EQF levels are taken into account in the recognition of foreign qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Inclusion of qualifications from general education, higher education and vocational education and training was given priority. The national register of qualifications in higher education (NRQHE) was first introduced in legislation in 2011; it currently includes around 4500 qualifications (September, 2020) at NQF 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. Since 2018, it has been mandatory for registered qualifications to be described in 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. A national register for postgraduate programmes has also been put in place, covering programmes for continuous professional development, specialisation, and programmes for adults; 142 such programmes, assigned to NQF level 6, had been included by September 2020. In VET, the 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 initial VET, was established in January 2018[1205] and subsequently incorporated into the national register of professional qualifications (NRPQ), approved by Government Decision No 917/2018. Methodology for developing, updating and

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1201. The National strategy for lifelong learning 2015-20; the Strategy for VET 2016-20; the National sustainable development strategy (for links to these documents, please see section *Policy objectives* above).

1202. Council of the European Union (2017). Council recommendation 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

1203. Order of the Ministry of Education No 3973/2014, available in Romanian at: http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/160559

1204. 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; Order No 3475/2017 on the approval of the methodology for registering higher education qualifications in National register of qualifications in higher education; Order No 4750/2019 on the approval of the framework methodology for organising and registering postgraduate programmes by higher education institutions.

1205. Order No 3023/2018 regarding the verification of training standards and their entry into the national register of professional qualifications in education.

managing the NRPQ was approved in 2019[1206]. The NRPQ covers all nationally recognised vocational qualifications corresponding to NQF levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, obtained in education and vocational training, in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, including adult education. It currently includes around 200 qualifications at levels 3 to 5 (September 2020).

All registers include the mandatory elements stipulated in Annex VI of the 2017 Council recommendation on the EQF, and some optional elements (credit points or workload, external quality assurance body, source of information, links to the relevant supplements, expiry date, relationship to occupations or occupational fields). The main registers (NRPQ and NRQHE) are to be brought together under the umbrella of a unified national qualifications register[1207].

As the referencing of the ROQF was finalised in 2018, evaluation will be approached at a later stage. The framework is thought to have an increasing impact by promoting the use of learning outcomes in designing curricula and qualifications, occupational and training standards, and the review and quality assurance of qualifications; and by facilitating contact and cooperation between stakeholders, including with those on the labour market. An ESF joint funded project[1208] aims to increase efficiency of the qualifications system through four main objectives: revision of existing regulations on qualifications and reinforcement of the current legal basis; development of an instrument for evaluation of qualifications to increase the quality of evaluation of professional competences; increased alignment of qualifications in the national register with the national classification of occupations and the ROQF through the development and revision of 250 occupational standards; and staff development. A tool for assigning qualification levels to existing and new occupations in the national classification of occupations has been developed and is undergoing testing; it is to be used by parties interested in developing occupational standards, sectoral committees, and other stakeholders. A

methodological framework for developing learning-outcomes-based study programmes in higher education is planned to be created in 2021 within the same project (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The framework is made visible to potential stakeholders through a variety of actions carried out by the NQA. The EU-funded project *National Europass Centre + EQF NCP 2018-20* aims to raise awareness of 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.

Referencing to the EQF

Romania referenced its national qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the EQF in 2018 (Romanian Ministry of Education; NQA, 2018). The qualifications framework for higher education was self-certified against the QF-EHEA in 2011. A revision of the referencing report is not yet planned (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Important lessons and future plans

The ROQF is a comprehensive framework covering all nationally recognised qualifications awarded in general education, VET and higher education, adult education, and qualifications awarded through validation. Since its introduction in 2013 and referencing to the EQF in 2018, Romania has focused on updating the legal basis of the ROQF, developing qualification registers, clarifying procedures, and updating methodologies for inclusion of qualifications in the registers. Three qualification registers are currently operated by the NQA: one for qualifications obtained in higher education at NQF levels 6 to 8; one for postgraduate programme for specialisation, continuous professional development and adult education; and one bringing together professional qualifications at levels 1 to 5 obtained in the formal VET system and through validation of non-formal learning. The similar structure of the qualifications registers is increasing transparency in the qualification system and facilitating comparisons. A unified national register of qualifications (RNC) is envisaged, bringing together the main registers in the future.

1206. Order No 3177/660/2019 regarding the approval of the Methodology for developing, updating and managing the National register of professional qualifications in Romania. http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/212230
1207. The Government Decision regarding the national qualifications register and all its components is pending approval.
1208. Project: *Increasing the administrative capacity of NQA and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection through legal systematisation and simplification in the field of qualifications* (Operational programme Administrative capacity).

One key challenge to ROQF implementation so far has been the introduction of the learning outcomes approach in all sectors of education and training. The need for increased quality assurance has become more apparent. Increasing efforts are being made in this regard to raise awareness and understanding of learning outcomes and to create tools for the development of learning-outcomes-based study programmes, qualification standards, and occupational standards aligned to the ROQF.

For the ROQF fully to reach its aims, it is important to have good cooperation between different stakeholders and structures. The role of the National Qualifications Authority, responsible for the comprehensive NQF as well as for adult learning and the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning, is essential in supporting coherent approaches and effective communication between stakeholders from education and training and the labour market. Increasing contact between different stakeholders, supported by NQF-related projects, has been observed. Progress has been made in linking the ROQF to developments in validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, though this is limited to qualifications up to ROQF level 3.

Through its 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 has become an important feature of the national qualifications system.

Table 74. Romanian national qualifications framework (ROQF)

ROQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	• Doctoral degree (*Diploma de doctor*) - third cycle of higher education • Certificate for postdoctoral studies (*Atestat de studii postdoctorale)* -postdoctoral study programmes	8
7	• Master degree (*Diploma de masterat*) - second cycle of higher education • Combined bachelor and master degree (*Diploma de licenta si master*) -5 to 6 years	7
6	• Bachelor degree / Engineering diploma / Urbanism diploma *(Diploma de licenta / Diploma de inginer / Diploma de urbanist*) - first cycle of higher education • Certificate attesting professional competence (*Certificat de atestare a competentelor profesionale*) – Postgraduate programmes for professional training and continuing professional development organised by higher education institutions • Graduation certificate (*Certificat de absolvire*) – Postgraduate programmes for professional improvement organised by higher education institutions • Graduation certificate (*Certificat de absolvire)* – Professional development programmes organised by authorised training providers • Graduation certificate (*Certificat de absolvire)* – Postgraduate programmes for continuing education organised by higher education institutions • Professional conversion diploma (*Diploma de conversie profesionala*) – Professional conversion programmes organised by higher education institutions	6
5	• Graduation certificate (*Certificat de absolvire*) – Postgraduate programmes for professional improvement organised by higher education institutions • Post-secondary certificate / Qualification certificate (*Certificat de calificare*) – post-secondary non-university tertiary education)	5
4	• Upper secondary school leaving certificate (*Diploma de Bacalaureat*) - general, technological or vocational high-school, four years of study and baccalaureate exam • VET certificate level 4 / Qualification certificate (*Certificat de calificare*) - technological / vocational high-school, four years of study and certification exam • VET certificate level 4 / Qualification/Graduation certificate (*Certificat de calificare/ absolvire*) – authorised training provider – adult learning • VET certificate level 4 / Qualification certificate (*Certificat de calificare*) - authorised training provider – adult apprenticeship programmes in the workplace	4

ROQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
3	• VET certificate level 3 / Qualification certificate (*Certificat de calificare*) - authorised training provider - adult apprenticeship programmes in the workplace • VET certificate level 3 / Qualification certificate / Certificate of professional competence* (*Certificat de calificare / Certificat de competente profesionale*) – accredited assessment centre - validation of non-formal learning • VET certificate level 3 / Certificate of professional competence* (*Certificat de competente profesionale*) – authorised assessment centre – validation of non-formal learning • VET certificate level 3 / Qualification/Graduation certificate (*Certificat de calificare/ absolvire*) – authorised training provider – adult learning • VET certificate level 3 / Qualification certificate (*Certificat de calificare*) - at least two years of study in technological/vocational high school and practical exam • VET certificate level 3 / Qualification certificate (*Certificat de calificare*- vocational training programme in dual system lasting at least three years • VET certificate level 3 / Qualification certificate (*Certificat de calificare*) - VET programme lasting at least three years)	3
2	• VET certificate level 2 / Qualification certificate (*Certificat de calificare*) - authorised training provider - adult apprenticeship programmes in the workplace • VET certificate level 2 / Qualification certificate / Certificate of professional competence* (*Certificat de calificare / Certificat de competente profesionale*) – accredited assessment centre – validation of non-formal learning • VET certificate level 2 / Certificate of professional competence* (*Certificat de competente profesionale*) – authorised assessment centre – validation of non-formal learning • VET certificate level 2 / Qualification/Graduation certificate (*Certificat de calificare/ absolvire*) - authorised training provider - adult learning	2
1	• Certificate of professional competence* (*Certificat de competente profesionale*) – authorised assessment centres – validation of non-formal learning • Qualification certificate (*Certificat de calificare*) – authorised training provider -adult learning) • Graduation Diploma (*Diploma de absolvire*) (first eight years of compulsory education)	1

NB: The term VET generically includes both the vocational and technological education and training routes available in the national education system, offering qualifications at levels 2-5 EQF, and the education and training offered by training providers in contexts other than the formal education system, for adult learning, also for qualification levels 2-5 EQF, preparing learners for occupations and the labour market.

* The Certificate of professional competence is awarded to adults who have undergone validation of non-formal learning against training standards or occupational standards.

Source: Romanian Ministry of Education & NQA (2018). Order No 5039/2126/2018 on 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. Order no. 4750/2019 on the approval of the framework methodology for organising and registering postgraduate programmes by higher education institutions.

Main sources of information

The National Qualifications Authority (*Autoritatea Nationala pentru Calificari* – ANC) is the EQF NCP: http://www.anc.edu.ro

National register of qualifications in higher education:http://www.anc.edu.ro/registrul-national-al-calificarilor-din-invatamantul-superior-rncis/

National register of professional qualifications: http://www.anc.edu.ro/rncp/

National register of postgraduate programmes: http://www.anc.edu.ro/registru_rnpp/

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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 8 levels and 4 sublevels.

The NQFS Law defines four qualification types:
- general - basic education and secondary education;
- vocational education and adult education;
- academic - higher education;
- vocational - higher education.

The NQFS Law specifies the institutional framework:
- an NQFS Council for strategic management of further NQF development and implementation. The Council is 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 performs administrative and technical tasks for the Council.
- sector skills councils, whose main function is to define the needs for qualifications in the labour market in Serbia.

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 levels 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the NQF. Operational details will be regulated in a bylaw. A pilot to implement RPL was scheduled to start in late 2020 to early 2021.

Serbia is an EU candidate country and participates in the EQF Advisory Group. Serbia completed referencing of the NQFS to the EQF in February 2020.

The implementation structure is established, and the principal working methods and instruments have been developed and put in place. The NQFS is gradually playing a role in improving transparency and comparability of qualifications at national and international level. Therefore, Serbia is at the activation stage.

Policy context

Serbia is an EU candidate country. The Economic Reform Programme (ERP) identifies significant challenges in the areas of labour market and employment, education and skills, social inclusion and social protection. The ERP builds on various strategic documents such as the National Employment Strategy 2011-2020 and the Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2012-2020.

The main objectives of the National Employment Strategy 2011-2020 are:
- encouraging employment in less developed regions and development of regional and local employment policies;
- improving the quality of human capital (this includes development of career counselling, competence development of unemployed people by establishing a system of short training programmes, plus RPL);
- institutional capacity development and expansion of active employment policy programmes.

The Strategy for Education Development 2012-2020 is covered in detail in the Policy Objectives section below.

Another important strategic document in this context is the Digital Skills Development Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2024 ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 21 of March 6, 2020)[1209].

1209. http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/ SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2020/21/2/ reg/

NQF legal basis

There is one main legal act for the NQFS, the Law on the National Qualifications Framework of Serbia, adopted by parliament in April 2018.[1210] Amendments to the Law on the NQFS were adopted in early 2020. The Law on Foundations of the Education System, the Law on Higher Education and the Law on Adult Education are consistent with the NQFS.

Based on the Law on the NQFS, the following bylaws have so far been adopted by Ministers3:

- Rulebook on the content and appearance of the initiative form for the development and adoption of qualification standards (Official Gazette of RS, No. 53 of April 9, 2020);
- Rulebook on standards of career guidance and counselling services (Official Gazette of RS, No. 43 of June 19, 2019);
- Rulebook on standards and manner of conducting the procedure of recognition of prior learning ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 148/2020);
- Rulebook on the methodology for the development of qualification standards ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 156/2020);
- Rulebook on the content and method of maintaining the Register of the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 159/2020);
- Rulebook on the system for classification and coding of qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia; ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 159/2020).

Several other bylaws are expected, including on additional quality assurance mechanisms and external evaluation of Publicly Recognised Organisers of Adult Education Activities (PROAEAs).

The education system of the Republic of Serbia is regulated by the following laws[1211]:

- the Law on Foundations of the Education System ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 88/2017, 27/2018 – other law, 10/2019, 27/2018 – other law and 6/2020);
- the Law on Preschool Education (RS Official Gazette, No 18/10, 101/17, 113/17–other law and 10/19);
- the Law on Primary Education (RS Official Gazette, No 55/13, 101/17, 27/18–other law and 10/19);
- the Law on Secondary Education (RS Official Gazette, No55/13, 101/17and27/18–other law);
- the Law on Dual Education (RS Official Gazette, No 101/17)[1212];
- the Law on Adult Education (RS Official Gazette, No 55/13,88/17–other law and27/18–other law);
- the Law on Dual Model of Studies in Higher Education (Official Gazette of RS, No. 66/2019)[1213, 1214];
- the Law on the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia (RS Official Gazette, No 27/18, 6/20);
- the Law on an Education Inspectorate (RS Official Gazette, No 27/18).

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

2020 is the last year of the current Strategy for Education Development. Serbia has begun drafting the new strategy for the period 2020-27, adoption of which is expected by mid- 2021.

The main objectives set forth by the Strategy for Education Development 2012-2020 are:

- increasing the quality of the processes and outcomes of education to the maximum attainable level - arising from scientific knowledge on education and proven effective educational practice;
- increasing participation by all demographics in education and training at all educational levels, from preschool education to lifelong learning;
- achieving and maintaining the relevance of education, particularly where fully or partially funded by public resource, by aligning the educational system structure with the immediate and developmental needs of individuals and economic, social, cultural, media, research, educational, public, administrative and other systems;
- increasing the efficiency of use of all education resources i.e. completion rate within the stipulated period, with minimum extended duration and reduced dropout rates.

The Action Plan7 for the implementation of the Strategy for Education Development in Serbia was adopted in 2015. The Action Plan describes individual actions, defined by objectives and priorities of the Strategy, and the method of their implementation, deadlines, key actors and facilitators, including monitoring tools and performance indicators.

1210. RS Official Gazette, No 27/2018; http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ZAKON-NOKS-18.pdf 3 http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/sr_lat/zakoni-i-propisi/

1211. http://www.mpn.gov.rs/dokumenta-i-propisi/zakonski-okvir/

1212. http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/zakon-o-dualnom.pdf

1213. http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ZAKON.pdf

1214. http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Akcioni_plan.pdf

In the ERP 2020-2022, Serbia will focus on the reform of secondary vocational education by further implementation of the dual education system, introduction of industry 4.0 into the dual education system, implementation of a dual model of higher education studies, further development of the NQF and the establishment of regional training centres. These reforms should ensure a more efficient education system response to the needs of the economy and labour market, support technological innovation in education and meet the need for modern competencies.

Aims of NQF

The aim of the NQFS is to structure and improve the qualification system in such a way that it is aligned with the requirements of socio-economic development, supports lifelong learning and facilitates workforce mobility[1215].

The goals of establishing the NQFS are[1216]:
- ensuring the readability and transparency of qualifications, as well as their interconnection;
- developing qualification standards based on the needs of the labour market and society as a whole;
- ensuring a learning outcomes-based education system;
- improving access and flexible learning paths in both formal and non-formal education;
- ensuring identification and recognition of non-formal education and informal learning;
- affirming the importance of key, general and cross-curricular competencies for lifelong learning;
- enhancing cooperation between relevant stakeholders and social partners;
- establishing a quality assurance system for the development and acquisition of qualifications;
- ensuring comparability and recognition of qualifications acquired in Serbia with those acquired in other countries.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

NQFS is an instrument to identify, create and classify qualifications in accordance with the demands of the labour market, lifelong learning, science and society.

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 consists of 8 levels and 4 sublevels. Levels 6 and 7 are each divided in two sublevels, reflecting qualifications of different volume at the same NQF level (e.g. level 6.1 180 ECTS, level 6.2 240 ECTS).

NQFS level descriptors have been defined in terms of learning outcomes and use the domains "Knowledge", "Skills" and "Abilities and Attitude".

Types of qualifications

The NQFS Law defines four qualification types:
- General qualifications: this type of qualification covers primary education and gymnasium education.
- Vocational qualifications: covering vocational secondary education and training. This type of qualification also includes secondary artistic qualifications.
- Academic qualifications: covering accredited academic study programmes (bachelor, master, specialised and doctoral studies). This type of qualification also includes academic artistic qualifications.
- Applied qualifications: covering accredited applied study programmes (bachelor, specialised and master).

Qualifications belonging to regulated professions are determined by a separate law, in accordance with EU Directive 2013/55 / EU, and are an integral part of the NQFS.

For the moment, Serbia does not foresee partial qualifications being included in the NQF. But through non-formal education in accordance with a qualification standard, it is possible to recognise sets of learning outcomes or individual vocational competencies acquired, or to obtain a certificate for a partially accomplished standard of vocational competencies.

1215. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (2020). *Report on referencing National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and Self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.*
1216. National Qualifications Framework in the Republic of Serbia http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/wpcontent/uploads/2019/10/Национални-оквир-квалификација-у-Републици-Србији.pdf

Quality assurance of 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 NQFS Law describes specific arrangements and procedures for:

The qualification standard: the qualification standard describes the qualification itself and the link with the occupational standard. However, as occupational standards are not developed yet, job descriptions are used. A methodology for development of qualification standards has been adopted and is published in the Official Gazette. In addition to the basic qualification data, the qualification standard also contains 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: an initiative for developing and adopting standards for a new qualification can be submitted by a Sector Skills Council, the Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education, the National Education Council, the National Council for Higher Education, the National Employment Service, a higher education institution, a state body or other legal entity (a company, a PROAEA, etc.). The proposal is submitted to the Qualifications Agency, which assesses whether the proposed qualification standard is already covered by an existing qualification standard in the Register (if so, the applicant will be notified). If the proposed standard is new in scope, the Agency will send the proposal to the relevant Sector Skills Council for a recommendation. On a positive recommendation by the Sector Skills Council, the Agency will develop the proposed qualification standard.

Drafting a new qualification standard: the Qualifications Agency will draft the new qualification standard and submit it within 60 days to the NQFS Council. On positive advice of the Council, the Minister responsible for education will adopt the new qualification standard for inclusion in the Register.

Inclusion in the Register: the Qualifications Agency enters qualifications in the national qualifications sub-register. General and vocational qualifications of NQFS levels 1 to 5 that are adopted by the minister responsible for education are added to the register by the Qualifications Agency within eight days from the date of receipt of the act by the ministry. Academic and vocational qualifications at NQFS levels 6.1 to 8 that are accredited in accordance with the law governing higher education are registered in the national qualifications sub-register by the Agency after receiving an accreditation notification from the National Body for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Use of learning outcomes and standards

The NQFS is based on qualification standards and learning outcomes. Description of learning outcomes is one of the elements of a qualification standard. Learning outcomes are used in the following standards in the Serbian education system[1217]:

Education standards: these standards include general cross-curricular competencies describing the goals and outcomes of general pre-university education, as well as the key competences based on the European framework of key competencies for lifelong learning.

Qualification standards: these standards are based on a description of the duties (vocational competencies) and tasks (units of competency) for a specific occupation or group of occupations and cover knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes at the level of the overall qualification.

Certification standards: these standards are used in primary, general secondary and secondary vocational education (including adult education) and include assessment criteria based on learning outcomes and aimed at the evaluation of the final achievement of competencies prescribed in the education and qualification standards.

Standards in higher education: these include standards for the initial accreditation of higher education institutions and standards for accreditation of study programmes. The first standard is respecting the Dublin Learning Outcome Descriptors for a given study level. The second, concerning study programmes, describes general and subject-specific competencies of graduates of a specific study programme in terms of learning outcomes.

Credit systems

The NQF Law mentions credits in terms of ECTS points for HE programmes only. The descriptions of the qualifications in the NQFS database http://noks.

1217. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (2020). Report on referencing National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and Self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.

mpn.gov.rs/en/ give 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 e.g. level 6.1 180 ECTS, level 6.2 240 ECTS.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF
Based on the NQFS Law, an NQFS council, a dedicated qualifications agency and 12 sector skills councils have been established.

The *NQFS Council*, exercises strategic management of the NQFS' development and implementation.

The Council is an advisory body appointed by the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

The Qualifications Agency is a specialised, technical body which performs administrative and technical tasks and expert support for the Council and proposes quality assurance measures throughout the entire education system.

The Sector Skills Councils' main task is to define the need for qualifications in the labour market in Serbia.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders
The NQFS Council is an advisory body that gives 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:
- proposes qualification standards for all levels of the NQFS;
- proposes to the Government the establishment of sector skills councils for specific sectors of work or activities;
- monitors the work of the Sector Skills Councils and makes recommendations for the improvement of their work, based on regular progress reports;
- gives opinions to the minister responsible for education on the recommendations of the Councils regarding the enrolment policy in secondary schools and higher education institutions;
- makes recommendations on the process of planning and development of human resources in accordance with the strategic documents of the Republic of Serbia;

- makes recommendations on improving links between education and labour market needs;
- gives opinions on standards for self-evaluation and external quality assurance of PROAEAs;
- performs other duties in accordance with this Law.

The *Qualifications Agency* has been established to perform quality assurance and professional support to the NQFS Council and other competent organizations 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:
- considers initiatives for the introduction of new qualifications;
- provides expert support to the Sector Skills Councils and prepares proposals for qualification standards;
- provides administrative and technical support to the work of the Councils;
- maintains the Registry and takes care of the entry of data into the appropriate sub-registries;
- classifies and encrypts qualifications according to the National Qualifications Classification

System (CLASSNQFS):
- performs procedures for recognition of foreign school documents;
- carries out 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;
- performs the first validation of a foreign study programme, in accordance with the NQFS law and the law regulating higher education;
- grants approval to organizations requesting PROAEA status;
- decides fee levels for the recognition procedures of foreign school documents and higher education documents;
- keeps records of professional recognition in accordance with the NQFS law and the law regulating higher education;
- conducts an external quality control of the PROAEAs, once every five years;
- 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;
- prepares development projects, and carries out analysis and research relevant to the development of qualifications;
- monitors and measures the effects of the implementation of (new) qualifications on employment and lifelong learning;

- proposes measures for the improvement of quality assurance in the entire system;
- performs other duties in accordance with this Law.

Sector Skills Councils are advisory bodies established on the principle of social partnership. Their main task is to define the need for qualifications within a certain sector in secondary, vocational, higher and adult education. The NQFS Law describes the competences of the sector skills councils as follows:
- analyse the existing qualifications and determine the necessary qualifications in a specific sector;
- identify the qualifications to be modernised;
- identify those qualifications that no longer meet the needs of the sector;
- recommend development of new qualifications standards within its sector; (the Qualifications

Agency will draft the standard, or arrange its drafting);
- give an opinion on the expected outcomes of knowledge and skills within the sector;
- promote dialogue and direct cooperation between the world of work and education;
- promote opportunities for education, training and employment within the sector;
- identify opportunities for training adults within the sector;
- consider the implications of the national qualifications framework on qualifications within the sector;
- propose lists of qualifications by levels and types that can be acquired by recognizing prior learning;
- perform other duties in accordance with the NQFS Law.

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

VNFIL arrangements
The NQFS Law defines recognition of prior learning (RPL) as one of the paths for acquisition of qualifications. The Law foresees RPL procedures, based on the standards of qualifications, for qualifications at levels 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the NQFS. Operational details are defined by the bylaw.

A working group developed the "Concept of recognition of prior learning" in 2015. This concept note describes the framework for the introduction and development of the RPL system in Serbia. It defines the basic principles, assumptions, guidelines and standards for the future organisation and implementation of RPL. In June 2019, a new

working group was formed to implement activities within the project: "Support to the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework in the Republic of Serbia". As part of this project, an RPL piloting plan has been prepared, qualifications and schools were selected to be involved in piloting and the following RPL procedures and different guidelines and rulebooks have been drafted:
- draft guidelines for quality assurance for RPL providers;
- draft guidelines for assessing the RPL process;
- draft Rulebook on Standards and Implementation of the Procedure for Recognition of Prior Learning;
- guide for Schools for Acquiring the Status of Publicly Recognised Organiser of Adult Education Activities.

RPL procedures will shortly be piloted[1218] in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, and the National Employment Service (NES). Within the pilot, special attention will be paid to train schools and NES advisors to implement the RPL procedure.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
Following adoption of the NQFS law in 2018, the NQFS Council, the Qualifications Agency and the Sector Skills Councils were established in 2019. They are now implementing the NQFS. An important milestone was the referencing of the NQFS to the EQF in February 2020.

Further progress has been made with the development of RPL procedures which will be piloted from late 2020. The methodology for developing qualification standards has been revised. By the end of 2020, 32 standards based on this new methodology and with the involvement of the Sector Skills Councils had been adopted. 26 of these 32 qualification standards were published in the Official Gazette in 2020, while the remaining six standards are expected to be published in 2021.

Significant progress has also been made with the new NQFS register.

Qualifications registers and databases
The current Register consists of several sub-registers, including a National Qualifications sub-register (records data on qualifications, classified by level and type, in accordance with CLASSNQFS)

1218. The pilot is conducted with support of the IPA 2014 project 'Development of and integrated National Qualifications Framework in Serbia'

a Qualification Standard sub-register and a sub-register of Publicly Recognized Organisers of Adult Education Activities.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) manages the Qualifications sub-register, accessible at: http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/qualifications-database/, in Serbian and English. By the end of 2020, 156 qualifications had been entered into the Qualifications database, of which 101 had been developed using either the previous or the new qualifications standard format.

A new NQFS register is under development, which will better integrate the various sub-registers identified above. The different elements of the register have been defined and based on these definitions and software is being developed. The Ministry began piloting the new register in late 2020. The NQFS register will be an integral part of the Unified Information System of Education for the Republic of Serbia, which should facilitate exchange of data between the sub-registers. The bylaw on the NQFS Register has been forwarded for publication in the Official Gazette and was expected to be adopted by late 2020 or early 2021.

Qualification documents
NQF and EQF levels are not yet included on certificates, diplomas and Europass supplements. A revision of the bylaw concerning certificates and diplomas is foreseen for 2021.

Career information and guidance
A national strategy for career guidance was adopted in 2010[1219]. The focus of the strategy was on coordinating activities between the stakeholders of the relevant sectors: youth, education and employment.

The Law on the Foundation of the Education System, its subsidiary Laws on Primary education and Secondary education and Adult education mention career guidance and counselling as a part of the school activities and introduce career guidance programmes in schools. Also, the Law on Youth emphasizes the importance of career guidance and defines aims and activities.

In 2019, the Rulebook on Standards for Career Guidance and Counselling Services was adopted (Official Gazette of RS, No. 43/19). Standards of career guidance and counselling services are part of public policies applied by state bodies, institutions and other organizations in the field of education, employment, social protection and youth policy[1220].

In accordance with Article 11 of the NQFS Law, the NQFS Council in 2019 adopted Recommendations for the implementation of the plan for the application of standards of career guidance and counselling services[1221].

The National Employment Action Plan for 2020 provides for the promotion of careers guidance services and for the training of people in career guidance and counselling services[1222].

In accordance with the specified documents, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, in cooperation with NGOs specialised in career guidance and counselling services, has provided training to private providers on the standards of career guidance and counselling services. Moreover, career guidance and counselling has been included in numerous continuing professional development programmes for teachers and assistants in formal education from primary to secondary and adult education providers.

Recognition of foreign qualifications
Recognition of foreign qualifications is carried out by the ENIC/NARIC Centre, which is housed within the Qualifications Agency. The NQFS Law distinguishes between recognition of foreign school documents and those from foreign higher education. The Law stipulates recognition procedures and criteria for admittance to further education. Foreign qualifications receiving recognition are considered equivalent to the corresponding public document obtained in Serbia.

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks
Serbia referenced its NQF to the EQF in February 2020 and self-certified in the same report against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process).

1219. Strategija karijernog vodenja i savetanja u Repbulici Srbiji, Official Gazette of the RS, No. 16/2010

1220. http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/reg/viewAct/828f5355-f5dc-42dd-a088-f0fb4ff84b79
1221. http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Nacionalni_akcioni_plan_zaposljavanja_2020.pdf
1222. http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Nacionalni_akcioni_plan_zaposljavanja_2020.pdf

International cooperation

Serbia adopted the RIGA 2015 conclusions on a new set of medium-term deliverables in VET for the period 2015-2020. 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.

MoESTD and the Qualifications Agency receive support from the IPA 2014 project "Development of an integrated National Qualifications Framework in Serbia", to develop the capacity of the Agency and the standards and bylaws that should support the further implementation of the framework. IPA20 will focus on the development of non-formal education and further capacity building of the PROAEAs, the Sector Skills Councils, the Institute for the Improvement of Education and the Qualifications Agency.

Important lessons and future plans

Implementing the NQF Law has required new institutional arrangements, namely the NQF Council, the Qualifications Agency and the Sector Skills Councils. Coordination of tasks and competences between these new institutions and existing ones will be a significant challenge and a condition for successful implementation of the NQF Law.

The newly established Qualifications Agency is currently working with 60% of its planned staffing levels. Capacity-building of the Agency's staff to equip them for their tasks is crucial for the further implementation of the NQFS. IPA14 and the future IPA20 projects indeed provide for such training of Agency personnel.

Another challenge will be to find the right balance between the various procedures to ensure the quality of qualifications and the flexibility required to respond quickly to changing labour market needs. This cannot be solely the task of the Sector Skills Councils, which operate at national level. Regional and local actors must be involved. Structural arrangements to involve stakeholders at national, regional and local level can provide a continuous insight into obstacles and opportunities on the labour market and a solid basis for the Sector Skills Councils, Qualifications Agency and NQF Council to act upon.

After all the work on the NQFS, it will be important to communicate the framework to the different stakeholders. This can go hand in hand with the further development and implementation of the framework.

During 2020, COVID-19 slowed down implementation of the NQFS. Adoption of bylaws on the development of qualification standards, the new NQFS Register, CLASSNQFS, standards and the procedure for recognition of prior learning, was delayed as it was difficult to organise the required consultation processes with social partners. Also due to the pandemic, the pilots planned to test the RPL procedure had to be postponed.

Table 75. Infographic of the nqf/nqf overview table

NQFS LEVELS		QUALIFICATIONS	EQF LEVEL
8		• doctoral studies volume of 180 ECTS credits (with previously completed integrated academic, i.e. master academic studies)	8
7	7.2	• specialised academic studies scope of at least 60 ECTS credits (with previously completed master academic studies)	7
	7.1	• integrated academic studies scope of 300 to 360 ECTS credits master • academic studies scope of at least 60 ECTS credits, with previously achieved bachelor • academic studies scope of at least 240 ECTS credits, • master academic studies scope of at least 120 ECTS credits (with previously achieved • bachelor academic studies scope of 180 ECTS credits),	
		• master applied studies scope of at least 120 ECTS credits (with previously achieved bachelor applied studies scope of 180 ECTS credits)	
6	6.2	• bachelor academic studies scope of at least 240 ECTS credits, specialised applied studies scope of at least 60 ECTS credits	6
	6.1	• bachelor academic studies scope of at least 180 ECTS credits bachelor applied studies scope starting from 180 ECTS credits	
5		• craftsman, i.e. specialist education lasting up to two or one-year non-formal adult education lasting minimum of six months	5

NQFS LEVELS		QUALIFICATIONS	EQF LEVEL
4		• four-year secondary school education (vocational education, arts education, general education)	4
3		• secondary vocational education lasting three years, non-formal adult education with training duration of minimum 960 hours	3
2		• vocational training lasting up to one year, education for work lasting up to two years, informal adult education with 120-360 hours of training	2
1		• primary education, primary adult education, primary music education, primary ballet education	1

Source: National Qualifications Framework in Serbia: http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/

Abbreviations

ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System	NQFS	National Qualifications Framework of Serbia
CLASSNQFS	National Qualifications Classification System	PROAEA	Publicly Recognised Organiser of Adult Education Activities
EQF	European Qualifications Framework	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
ERP	Economic Reform Programme		
NES	National Employment Services		
NQF	National Qualifications Framework		

Main sources of information

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (2020).

Report on referencing National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and Self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (2012). Strategy for education development in Serbia 2020. https://erasmusplus.rs/wpcontent/uploads/2015/03/Strategy-for-Education-Development-in-Serbia-2020.pdf

Overview of laws and bylaws under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological

Development of the Republic of Serbia: http://www.mpn.gov.rs/dokumenta-i-propisi/zakonski-okvir/

National Qualifications Framework in Serbia: http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/

Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
Online platform	https://openspace.etf.europa.eu
Twitter	@etfeuropa
Facebook	facebook.com/etfeuropa
YouTube	www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
Live&Learn	https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/
Instagram	instagram.com/etfeuropa/
LinkedIn	linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation
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SLOVAKIA

Introduction and context

Slovakia is focusing on digital education, adopting a 2030 broad strategy for digital transformation of the Slovak Republic[1223] aiming to enhance digital competences, improve access to digital education content, and modernise the existing infrastructure. However, gaps in digital skills remain: in the wider population in 2019, the proportions (aged 16-74) with at least basic digital skills (54%) and above basic digital skills (27%) were below the EU-27 average (58% and 33% respectively); and systemic policy evaluation is missing (European Commission, 2020b). A current challenge is the need to improve educational outcomes and to increase the quality and equity of education, particularly for the Roma population. The achievement of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science basic skills has worsened over recent years, especially among pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The first action plan of the 10-year education strategy, the *National programme for the development of education and training 2018-27*[1224] has been implemented; from 2021, Slovakia is making efforts to introduce compulsory education from age five, improve the continuing development of teachers and improve the quality assurance system in higher education, aligning it to European guidelines for accreditation[1225] (European Commission, 2020a).

Strengthening early childhood education and care and improving the attractiveness of the teaching profession are key aspects in tackling the country's challenges. The tertiary education attainment rate has increased in recent years (40.1% in 2019) and has reached the EU average of 40.3%. Slovakia has a high rate of employment of recent graduates (ISCED levels 3-8) and a relatively low rate of early leavers from education and training (83.9% and 8.3% respectively in 2019); still, systemic solutions are needed to address the gap between policy and implementation. Participation in vocational education and training (VET) at 67.8% in 2018 is stable and significantly above the EU average of 47.8%. The Act on VET adopted in 2015[1226] 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[1227]. The ESF project *Sector driven innovations for an efficient labour market in the Slovak Republic*[1228] was launched in 2019, focusing on initial and continuing vocational education and training (European Commission, 2020a).

Work on the Slovak qualifications framework (SKKR) started with a 2009 government decision on the European qualifications framework (EQF) implementation. The 2009 Act on Lifelong Learning, amended in 2012[1229], stipulated the legal background for development of a national qualifications system and framework. An eight-level comprehensive framework was developed and is being implemented. The new law on lifelong learning planned for 2022 will further legally embed

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1223. Available in Slovak here.
1224. Available in Slovak here.
1225. An amendment to the Higher Education Act and a law on quality assurance in higher education were approved in 2018: 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 here.

1226. Act No 61/2015 Coll. on vocational education and training.
1227. Amendments to this act, in force since September 2018, further support school-company cooperation (European Commission, 2018).
1228. The project aims to contribute to the identification of skill needs by monitoring the demand of enterprises for skilled labour. More information can be found here.
1229. Act No 568/2009 on lifelong learning and modifying and supplementing certain laws is available in Slovak here. 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.

the SKKR[1230]. In line with the preparation for this law, a new Strategy for lifelong learning and career guidance for 2021-30 (to be called Lifelong learning strategy) is being prepared[1231]. This strategy will be based on measures grouped around different thematic areas[1232] (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The SKKR was referenced to the EQF in October 2017.

Policy objectives

The SKKR aims to provide a transparent and comprehensive classification of all qualifications, to pave the way for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, ease communication within education and training and with the labour market, improve quality of qualifications, and promote student and workforce mobility.

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.

The function and policy objectives of the SKKR have not changed since 2018 but future developments will be influenced with the development of the occupational qualifications sub-framework in the country. This development is related to the flexibility of qualifications and the openness of the occupational sub-framework to combined qualifications and micro-credentials, in line with the system of recognition for non-formal and informal qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The SKKR[1233] is a comprehensive and overarching framework that has eight learning-outcomes-based levels and includes qualifications from all subsystems. It is organised in four sub-frameworks: for general education[1234], VET[1235], higher education[1236], and occupational qualifications (awarded outside the formal system, as a result of further education, adult education and validation of non-formal learning)[1237]. The SKKR served as a tool to develop a typology of qualifications in the national context[1238]. Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge (general and vocational/professional), skills (cognitive and practical) and competence (responsibility, autonomy and social competences).

From the beginning of the framework's development, a distinction was made between full and partial qualifications, also reflected in the national qualifications register; a full qualification entitling the holder to perform all tasks within an

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1230. An amendment to the Act on Lifelong Learning aims to legally embed the SKKR further; it was planned to be put forward for approval in Parliament in September 2019, but a decision to propose a new law on lifelong learning for 2022 was made.
1231. This is planned to be approved by the national government in November 2021.
1232. The thematic areas are: Improving educational pathways for adults with low levels of basic skills, applying the system for the recognition of non-formal and informal qualifications (including micro-credentials, support for further vocational education and training, linking education and the labour market, increasing participation in lifelong learning; reducing barriers to participation in adult learning (Individual learning accounts and support for adults' civic education) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

1233. The website of the national qualifications system, including the SKKR, is available here. Information on the SKKR and the national qualifications register is available here.
1234. General education qualifications are governed by the Act No 245/2008 Coll. on education and training (the Education Act), assigned to SKKR levels 1, 2 and 4
1235. Vocational qualifications are governed by the Act No 245/2008 Coll. on education and training (the Education Act), awarded in formal VET (secondary and post-secondary), assigned to SKKR levels 2, 3, 4 and 5
1236. Higher education qualifications are governed by the Higher Education Act, assigned to SKKR levels 6, 7 and 8
1237. Occupational qualifications are governed by Act No 568/2009 Coll. on lifelong learning, amended in 2012 and awarded outside the formal education system, as a result of further education, adult education and validation of non-formal learning, assigned to SKKR levels 2 to 7.
1238. 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.

occupation, and a partial qualification allowing performance of one or a limited set of tasks within that occupation[1239]. 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[1240]. The new Law on lifelong learning planned for 2022 foresees a new approach to the design of qualifications based on smaller components/ blocks of learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2020).

In general education, the shift to learning outcomes was marked by the 2008 Education Act. This strengthened quality assurance measures, introduced performance standards defined in knowledge, skills and competences, and a two-level model of curriculum for both general education and VET: State curricula and school curricula (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017). Assessment standards specify criteria and assessment procedures for achieving performance standards corresponding to the respective school environment (Cedefop; State Institute of VET, 2019).

In VET, the outcomes approach has been reinforced through the VET Act of 2009[1241] and the 2015 Act on VET. Since 2015, developing curricula for dual VET has been in progress, based on requirements from chambers and employers' representatives; companies offering practical training directly participate as co-authors of the respective school educational programmes. From 2019, the same educational programmes apply for school-based (with practical training in school workshops or facilities, or with contracted segments of practical training in companies) and dual VET (Cedefop; State Institute of VET, 2019).

In higher education, a KA 3 Erasmus + project SIHE19[1242] – from 2016 to 2018 – indicated solid progress towards learning outcomes, but learning- outcomes-based programming has remained insufficiently visible (Vantuch, 2019). Following the 2013 *Criteria for the accreditation of higher education study programmes*[1243] a new legal framework was adopted in 2018[1244], with a new system of accreditation in higher education institutions. The framework was developed according to the quality principles set by Law No 269/2018 on the quality assurance of higher education[1245]. This system aims to increase the importance of quality assurance in line with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA (European Commission, 2020a). The new Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education[1246], operational since 2020, is currently developing internal quality assurance standards and study programme standards that focus on the expected level of learning outcomes of graduates, through the achievements of higher education and their compliance with the required level of the national qualifications framework[1247].

According to the Education Act, quality of education and training is monitored and evaluated by the school or school facility, the State School Inspection, the Ministry of Health, for the professional part of preparation of education for healthcare programmes at secondary healthcare schools, as well as the National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements. In adult education, the Accreditation Commission for Further Education is an advisory body of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, which validates education institution ability to provide educational programmes and recommends that the Ministry issues a certificate of accreditation of an educational programme if the requirements are met[1248]. There has been strong consensus and

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1239. This approach is considered to be reducing flexibility in the provision of qualifications. For this reason, the term 'partial qualification' will be exempt from the Act on lifelong learning via the amendment already in preparation (Vantuch, 2019).
1240. 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*).
1241. Act of 23 April 2009 on VET and amendments to certain acts (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic). http://www.tnuni.sk/fileadmin/dokumenty/univerzita/dolezite_dokumenty/Zakon_184_2009_o_odbornom_vzdelavani.pdf

1242. More information (in Slovak) regarding the support for implementation of reform tools in Slovak Higher Education - HISE (Podpora reformných opatrení v slovenskom vysokoškolskom vzdelávaní), can be found here.
1243. Available in Slovak here.
1244. Act No 269/2018, the amendment to Act No 270/2018.
1245. Internal management of higher education institutions will be amended, study programmes focusing on professions will provide a better connection with the labour market. Read more here.
1246. The Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (SK) was established on 1 November 2018 by Act No 269/2018 Coll. on quality assurance of higher education. The Agency is a public institution that carries out external quality assurance activities in higher education and is based in Bratislava. Read more about the Agency (in Slovak) here.
1247. More information can be found at Eurydice.
1248. More information can be found here.

support to the SKKR from all quality assurance bodies and the Slovak community so far (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The SKKR is legally embedded in the Act No 568/2009 on lifelong learning, and its 2012 amendment (Act No 315/2012 Coll., in force since 1 January 2013)[1249], introducing the SKKR and its definition as a framework. The new Law on lifelong learning planned for 2022 aims to strengthen further the legal basis of the SKKR.

Since 2016, the governance structure has been simplified: it now consists of the State Vocational Education Institute (ŠIOV), currently hosting the EQF NCP and playing a coordination, technical and methodological role, supported by 24 sector councils[1250]. The State Vocational Education Institute is also the contact point for other EU initiatives (EQAVET, ECVET, European Agenda for Adult Learning). The Ministry of Education maintains overall competence and responsibility for SKKR development and implementation and is the highest approval body for qualifications and the national qualifications register; however, the memorandum of cooperation, signed in 2014 with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, aimed for better alignment between labour market needs and the education system[1251] (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017).

The functions of the EQF NCP include the promotion of the SKKR, EQF and Slovak qualifications, managing the process of referencing the SKKR to the EQF, and maintaining the national qualifications register and its links to European portals (State Vocational Education Institute, 2017).

The main strength of the current governance structure of the SKKR is the active participation of stakeholders, including the Slovak Rectors' Conference and Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education; this requires effective communication strategies yet to be developed. ŠIOV participates directly in the EHEA-QF network and ensures information transfer to relevant bodies. ŠIOV cooperates with national and international stakeholders: the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, national institutions in education, education providers and NGOs, and NCP contact points in other Member States. In relation to the lifelong learning strategy, the Ministry of Labour is involved in the cooperation with the other ministries[1252] (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Activities related to the introduction and implementation of the SKKR were mainly project-based. Since 2016, ŠIOV is financed by a yearly renewable contract with the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports and uses financial support from the Erasmus+ Programme in order to develop its activities (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[1253]

There is currently no systemic approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in Slovakia. However, certain elements of a national approach for validation have been introduced through the 2009 Act on Lifelong Learning (amended in 2012)[1254], creating some of the conditions for gradual development of a validation system[1255]. Although no direct SKKR impact on VNFIL is expected in the short term, the completion

1249. Act No 568/2009 on lifelong learning and modifying and supplementing certain laws is available in Slovak here. 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.

1250. These councils play 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 and establishing partnerships for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning. The role of sector councils is defined by Act No 5/2004 on employment services and on amendment of certain laws: https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2004/5

1251. Stakeholder involvement from the world of work was vital, including employers' chambers, unions, confederations and other professional associations.

1252. Working groups for reskilling and upskilling strategies and strategies for active aging with the representatives of the Ministry of Labour are being prepared. Career guidance services, in line with the Upskilling pathways strategy, are planned to address low skilled adults (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

1253. This section draws mainly on input from Vantuch (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018, update: Slovakia. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Slovakia.pdf

1254. Act No 568/2009 on lifelong learning and modifying and supplementing certain laws is available in Slovak here. 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.

1255. 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.

of the referencing process in 2017, the description of more than 1000 qualifications aligned to the SKKR, with their related qualification standards defined in learning outcomes, and their inclusion in the national qualifications register, are completed preconditions for the development of a VNFIL system[1256]. 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[1257].

The 2009 Lifelong Learning Act (amended in 2012) refers to the 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. This case 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 competition of a programme. In the second case, validation practices refer to the 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)[1258]. 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.

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; labour office counsellors[1259] serving the unemployed have received training in the first two stages of validation (identification and documentation)[1260]. Extending this methodology to the education sector is under discussion.

The lifelong learning strategy, presented by the end of 2019[1261], and the ESF-funded project *System of verifying qualifications* (SOK)[1262], initiated in 2018, which includes a VNFIL-related component, are expected to support the development and implementation of validation of non-formal learning and clarify conceptual and terminological inconsistencies. This forms the basis for the new Act on Lifelong Learning, introducing a clear conceptual framework which was expected to be in force in 2020; however due to the changes within the priorities of the new Government (elected in March 2020) and due to COVID 19, the plan was postponed for 2022-23 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

NQF implementation and impact

The SKKR is a comprehensive and overarching framework with eight learning- outcomes-based levels. It covers all sub-systems of formal education and includes regulated training and qualifications awarded outside formal education. The SKKR is organised in four sub-frameworks, based on sectoral legislation: for general education, VET, higher education; and for occupational qualifications (awarded outside the formal education system, as a result of courses and work experience). In the future the occupational qualifications sub-framework will include international qualifications and those of private awarding bodies. The SKKR has reached activation stage.

The SKKR development 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 with eight learning-outcomes-based levels and the national qualifications register (NQR)[1263]. Development of the two was closely related. The NQR[1264] includes

1256. The qualifications recently included in the NQR were identified in cooperation with the sectoral stakeholders as those most demanded in the labour market. However, the national qualifications framework contains more than 7 000 qualifications, most of them placed in the formal system education system.
1257. The existing database of qualifications www.kvalifikacie. sk is expected to be merged with ISDV following the adopted lifelong learning strategy and the new law on lifelong learning, planned for 2022.
1258. Article 17 on the verification and assessment of professional competence.
1259. The Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic can be accessed here.
1260. They were trained to assess basic skills in low-skilled adults under the *Blueprints for basic skills development in Slovakia* (BLUESS) project in 2020.

1261. 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.
1262. The SOK project follows the recommendation of the *Learning Slovakia* strategy paper to develop assessment manuals to complement existing qualification (and assessment) standards. All documents concerning the development of the *Learning Slovakia* paper are available here.
1263. The national qualifications register can be found here.
1264. The NQR is closely related to the national occupations register (NOR), including occupational standards composed of professional knowledge, professional skills and general competences, that has been under development in parallel. Available here and also visible in the ISTP portal (Internet guide through the labour market).

qualifications with the description of qualifications (general information on the qualification, qualification standard, assessment standard, and guidelines for validation and certification of learning outcomes)[1265]. By April 2021, more than 1000 qualifications at levels 2 to 8 were described in learning outcomes, and included in the NQR; of these, approximately one third can be obtained in formal education and two thirds through non-formal and informal learning[1266]. General education qualifications are not yet included into the register, but they are placed at SKKR levels 1,2 and 4 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Qualifications were levelled to SKKR based on the 'best fit' principle, following analysis of learning outcomes defined in qualification standards and their comparison with national level descriptors. This methodology was also used by the sector council members and their sectoral working groups as a tool for defining learning outcomes in qualifications standards and for better understanding of the whole process. Thus, defining learning outcomes in line with level descriptors has strengthened the cooperation between members of sector councils from the labour side and the education authorities (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

NQF and EQF levels are indicated on qualification documents and Europass supplements for all qualifications included in the SKKR[1267]. No evaluation of the SKKR has been carried out so far. An evaluation is planned, in line with the measures stated in the new lifelong learning strategy, focusing on occupational and sectoral qualifications (regulated by sectoral legislation and awarded by varying sectoral authorities) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The EQF NCP has been disseminating information about the framework to increase its visibility. Tools were developed to facilitate the use of the framework by different stakeholders[1268]. 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 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 *System of verifying qualifications* (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.

Referencing to the EQF

The overarching SKKR was referenced to the EQF in 2017. The report on the fulfilment of self-certification criteria against QF-EHEA will be presented at a later stage. An updated referencing report is not planned before 2023 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Important lessons and future plans

Important progress has been achieved in developing the SKKR and populating it with qualifications in recent years. A comprehensive framework with a clear structure and ambitious objectives has been put in place and reached activation stage. A national register of qualifications has also been developed. More than one thousand qualifications, ranging from levels 2 to 8, have been described in learning outcomes, assigned to SKKR levels and included in the register. The influence of the framework is evident in the transparency and comparability of qualifications, and the design of qualifications standards and curricula in terms of learning outcomes. The cooperation between the members of sectoral councils from labour side and the education authority in setting up the qualification standards has been strengthened as the SKKR provides the platform for cooperation. More time is needed to implement quality assurance procedures and better address higher education qualifications, with stronger involvement of higher education stakeholders.

One of the key challenges in developing and implementing the SKKR is its division into four sub-frameworks (for general education, VET, higher education and occupational qualifications). Establishing adequate relationships between them

1265. All obligatory elements of Annex VI of the EQF Recommendation are included.
1266. The exact number can be seen in the statistics page.
1267. The 2019 Decree No 124/2019 refers to the indication of NQF/EQF on certificates related to occupational qualifications issued by accredited educational institutions. It is available here.
Decree No 124/2019 on the level of NQF/EQF on Diploma supplements issued by universities and higher education institutions is available here.
1268. Cedefop's European handbook on defining, writing and applying learning outcomes – see Cedefop (2017) – was translated in Slovak. The translation can be accessed here. Guidelines for the experts in qualifications development (2020, Slovak language) – based on the new findings of the EQF AG and the working group for the horizontal comparison of qualifications were developed and can be accessed here.

would help minimise any barriers that might occur between the different parts of education, training and qualification and would support individual progression. Strengthening the learning outcomes approach across all levels of the education system is a key challenge in the implementation of the SKKR; 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.

Future plans include eliminating terminological inconsistencies and establishing effective links between formal, non-formal and informal pathways to qualifications in order 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, the planned new act on lifelong learning, and by the new ESF-funded SOK project. As the SKKR is considered a basis for setting up upskilling and

reskilling pathways for the lower qualified, it could be extended towards including lower levels of adults focusing on basic skills. The first draft of the additional levels was proposed within the BLUESS projects in cooperation with the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. In line with the planned lifelong learning strategy, there is a clear need to make the system of qualifications more flexible by introducing micro-qualifications in the occupational qualifications sub-framework as well as introducing individual learning accounts (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

COVID-19 has had an impact on the mode of delivery for online learning but not on the certification of qualifications; the school calendar for VET has been extended and flexibility has been allowed regarding practical experience in the workplace, while work-based learning modules will be exceptionally integrated with a project module so that the work environment-related objectives can be addressed (European Commission, 2020a).

Table 76. Slovak national qualifications framework (SKKR)

SKKR LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	• Diploma (*Vysokoškolský diplom*) + Certificate of State exam (*Vysvedčenie* o štátnej *skúške*) + Diploma supplement (*Dodatok k diplomu*)	8
7	• Diploma (*Vysokoškolský diplom*) + Certificate of State exam (*Vysvedčenie* o štátnej *skúške*) + Diploma supplement (*Dodatok k diplomu*) • Certificate of qualification (*Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii*)	7
6	• Diploma (*Vysokoškolský diplom*) + Certificate of State exam (*Vysvedčenie* o štátnej *skúške*) + Diploma supplement (*Dodatok k diplomu*) • Certificate of qualification (*Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii*)	6
5	• *Maturita* certificate (*Vysvedčenie* o *maturitnej skúške*) + Certificate of apprenticeship (*Výučný list*) • *Maturita* certificate (*Vysvedčenie* o *maturitnej skúške*) • *Certificate of final post-secondary exam (Vysvečenie o absolventskej skúške) +* • *Absolutorium diploma (Absolventský diplom)* • Certificate of qualification (*Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii*)	5
4	• *Maturita* certificate (*Vysvedčenie* o *maturitnej skúške*) + • Certificate of apprenticeship (*Výučný list*) • *Maturita* certificate (*Vysvedčenie* o *maturitnej skúške*) • Certificate of qualification (*Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii*)	4
3	• Certificate of final exam (*Vysvedčenie* o *záverečnej skúške*) + Certificate of apprenticeship (*Výučný list*) • Certificate of qualification (*Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii*)	3
2	• Lower secondary education certificate with supplement (*Vysvedčenie s doložkou*) • Certificate of final exam (*Vysvedčenie* o *záverečnej skúške*) + Certificate of apprenticeship (*Výučný list*) • Certificate of qualification (*Osvedčenie o kvalifikácii*)	2
1	• Primary education certificate with supplement (*Vysvedčenie s doložkou*)	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) and the EQF NCP website: https://siov.sk/medzinarodna-spolupraca/slovensky-kvalifikacny-ramec-a-europsky-kvalifikacny-ramec/

Main sources of information

The State Vocational Education Institute (ŠIOV) is the EQF NCP: http://www.siov.sk/

Website of the national qualifications system: http://www.kvalifikacie.sk/

National qualifications register (NQR): http://www.kvalifikacie.sk/kartoteka-kariet-kvalifikacii#/

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SLOVENIA

Introduction and context

Slovenia's recent developments focus on digital education, aiming to enhance digital competences of teaching staff and students, improve access to digital education content and improve infrastructure, has been accelerated by the Covid19 pandemic. Digital skills are integrated into school education and the digital skills of young people are better the EU average (European Commission, 2020).

Slovenia also performs well in relation to most other European benchmarks for education and training. It invests more in education and training than the EU average (5.4% compared to EU average of 4.6 in 2018, though spending is still lower than before the previous economic crisis). The country has exceeded EU 2020 targets for tertiary education attainment: at 44.9% in 2019 it is above the national and Europe target of 40% and the 2019 EU average of 40.3%. Enrolment, though, is in long-term decline due to smaller cohorts. There is also a wide gap between men and women and between native and foreign born. The share of students in STEM is high (29.3%). Early leaving from education is among the lowest, at 4.6% in 2019 compared to the EU average of 10.2%. Student achievements in reading, mathematics and science are above the EU average in all three competences and in math and science among the best in Europe. The share of low-achieving students is below the EU average (in science at 14.6%, maths at 16.4% and reading at 17.9). Improvements in equity in education have also been recorded, though disparities in performance linked to socioeconomic status and migrant background persist. Gender gap and gaps between native born and pupils with migrant background are pronounced at all education levels. Employment rates of recent graduates ISCED 3-8, at 86.0% in 2019 is above the EU average of 80.9% in 2019, though there was a fall from 84.5% in 2018 to 79.1% in 2019 for VET graduates. Participation of children in early education and care is 93.1%, approaching the EU benchmark for 2020 of 95%. The proportion of students in vocational education and training (VET) is among the highest in Europe, increasing from 65.9% in 2013 to 70.9% in 2018. The (re)introduction of apprenticeship schemes, piloted from the 2017/18 school year, has continued and expanded to new sectors and occupations. Slovenia has been closely monitoring its implementation and has published the third rounds of evaluations with a focus on assessment of apprenticeships (National Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2020b). Population aging is accentuating the need to increase participation in adult learning, particularly for the low-skilled. A total of 11.2% of Slovenian adults participated in adult education in 2019, slightly above the EU average of 10.8%; however, the engagement in lifelong learning it is still low among the low-skilled. An important step to address the policy challenges is the design of a new National master plan for adult education (2021-2030 (European Commission, 2020).

Embedded in this context, the 10-level comprehensive Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF) was adopted by the Slovenian Qualifications Framework Act[1269] and came into force in July 2016, serving as the legal basis for SQF implementation and full operationalisation. Its comprehensive nature covers three categories of qualifications included in the framework and the register of qualifications: educational qualifications, vocational qualifications and supplementary qualifications awarded outside the regulated qualifications system.

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.

1269. The SQF Act is available here (in Slovenian).

Policy objectives

The SQF is primarily a framework of communication whose purpose is to achieve transparency and recognisability of qualifications in Slovenia and the EU. Its fundamental objectives are to support lifelong learning, by including all levels and types of qualifications and showing relationships and support pathways between them; 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.

Although the SQF is not seen as a tool for reform, its potential lies with its focus on learning outcomes and promotion of quality assurance in its contribution to the establishment of the comprehensive, responsive and flexible system of qualifications, supporting lifelong learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

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 SQF includes three categories of qualification covering all subsystems of formal education and training, as well as further learning:
a. educational qualifications are awarded after completion of formal education programmes at all levels of formal education (general, vocational/technical and higher);
b. vocational qualifications are awarded by an NVQ certificate, issued in accordance with the national regulations governing NVQs[1270], or another document certifying completion of training or continuing education, issued in accordance with the regulations governing technical and higher education;
c. supplementary qualifications are acquired in further and supplementary training on the labour market (linked to supplementing abilities and competences) and not nationally regulated; they have strong labour market focus and are awarded by an employer, a group of employers or by the Employment Service of Slovenia.

Input criteria are used additional 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 qualifications and assessment standards of learning outcomes are defined, not the programmes or pathways that lead to the NVQ.

The learning-outcomes approach was already embedded in the Slovene education system before the establishment of the SQF and well accepted, following reforms carried out since the 1990s. Education programmes have moved from content-based to an objective-based approach in 1990's. 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 SQF 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 principles of the European credit system for VET, is used in vocational education to describe the volume and weight of programmes and units/modules.

1270. The National Professional Qualifications Act, 2000, last amends in 2009: http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1626

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. Learning outcomes are described in terms of general and professional/subject-specific competences. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) has been obligatory in higher education since 2002. In 2017-18, three Slovenian public universities participated in a project on creating innovative learning environments and innovative didactical approaches by integration of ICT into learning processes (European Commission, 2020)[1271],

The learning-outcomes approach was central to establishment of the SQF. The analysis of the curriculum documents that was part of the recent SQF evaluation has shown 'a considerable impact with its approach to learning outcomes, which is reflected in two aspects in particular: it has brought a more clearly formulated logic of qualification levels and thus an increase in learning outcomes into the system' (Subic Ermenc, Mikules and Biloslavo, 2020, p. 32). HE stakeholders highlight a positive impact of the SQF on HE qualifications in defining competences, differentiating between levels and improvement in practice of assessing learning outcomes.

Now all qualifications in the SQF qualifications register (educational, vocational and supplementary) are described in learning outcomes[1272].

The Slovenian EQF NCP prepared the Guidelines on the use of learning outcomes in practice. This is a practical tool to support professionals, when describing and updating qualifications and assigning them to the SQF levels[1273].

SQF as a 'gate-keeper' has an important quality assurance function. Each qualification, included into the SQF register, must be quality assured and fulfil a number of requirements: be accredited, be described transparently with legally prescribed parameters, be described in learning outcomes, the learning outcomes must reflect SQF descriptors on appropriate level. In that way, the SQF creates

an overall quality assurance environment for designing, providing and awarding qualifications. The Ministry of Education is responsible for overall quality assessment and assurance processes in pre-higher education, and, in part, in higher vocational schools. Quality assurance is based on the principle of internal quality assurance and external quality assessment, including external assessment of learning outcomes (standards of knowledge) in secondary education. The National Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) – also the EQAVET national reference point – gathers information about quality assurance in VET schools, monitors 11 quality indicators at the national level and supports VET schools with training, publications and cooperation in international quality assurance projects. Education institutions must carry out self-evaluation every year and report on it to their managing authorities. School inspection is responsible for administrative supervision. The Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (NAKVIS) is responsible for the development and operation of the quality assurance system (accreditation of study programmes and institutions) in higher education and evaluation of higher vocational education in line with European standards and guidelines.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The SQF was legally established with the entry into force of the SQF Act, in July 2016[1274]. This law summarizes the main responsibilities of stakeholders in designing and awarding qualifications at different levels and defines the tasks of the national coordination point (NCP) for SQF-EQF and the NCP SQF-EQF expert committee. It regulates the referencing of SQF levels to the EQF and the QF EHEA, funding provisions, and the maintenance of the SQF register. The SQF Act refers to procedures and methods of allocation of qualifications from formal education and training and NVQs as defined in sectoral legislation. One important development brought by the SQF Act is the definition of procedures and quality criteria for inclusion in the SQF of supplementary qualifications awarded outside the regulated qualification system.

The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, has the overall competence and responsibility for development and implementation of the SQF. The leading institution at the operational level is the

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1271. See for instance http://ikt-projekti.uni-lj.si/GeneralANG. html
1272. Available in Slovenian and English here.
1273. Available in Slovenian here.

1274. http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/ pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO6958

National Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI). This is the central national development and policy supporting body, that carries out a number of projects and activities for both ministries and cooperates closely with social partners (for example, coordinating 10 sectoral committees in charge of developing occupational standards, NVQ assessment standards, coordinating development of national VET framework curricula, and supporting in-service teacher training)[1275]. It 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 SQF secretariat within the institute coordinates the implementation of the framework. Its roles and responsibilities have been stipulated in the SQF Act to 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[1276]. The running of the SQF secretariat is financed from different sources (EU and national funding).

In its role as NCP for the EQF, 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 established the NCP SQF-EQF expert committee, under the coordination of the NCP, which is appointed for 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[1277]

Slovenia has long-standing of experience in validation of non-formal and informal learning. The most widely implemented system is that of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) under the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. This is legally embedded in the National Professional Qualifications Act from 2000 (with several amendments, the latest in 2009)[1278] and targets adults over 18 years old. According to this act, NVQs can be fully acquired and awarded based on validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences. The basis for validation is nationally approved occupational and qualifications/ assessment standards. There are currently 323 NVQs included in the NVQ register[1279].

Since 2006, validation of non-formal and informal learning is also possible in all formal education subsystems, regulated by sector-specific acts and regulations. It 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 general *matura* exam without being enrolled in formal education. Non-formally acquired knowledge and skills are taken into account to shorten the length of studies. The 'master craftsman' qualification can also be acquired through validation, though participation in preparatory programmes is possible and common. In higher education, the Higher Education Act (2012) ([1280]) 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.

In all subsystems of formal education, validation arrangements are measured against the learning outcomes of formal education programmes (VET, higher education and general education), included in the SQF. Also, the NVQ system is fully integrated

1275. More information available here.
1276. https://www.nok.si/en/sqf-register

1277. This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (Pavkov, 2019); and the report on validation (CPI, 2020a).
1278. http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/ pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1626
1279. The NVQ register is available here. It is fully integrated in the SQF register of qualifications.
1280. http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO172

into the SQF and register, covering EQF levels 2 to 5.

The third group of qualifications included in the SQF is supplementary qualifications, that can be positioned on levels 2-8. These are awarded outside the regulated qualification system by companies or Employment Service of Slovenia. Supplementary qualifications are awarded after completing a training programme and passing a prescribed assessment procedure; validation of non-formal learning is also possible.

Not only are validation arrangements well embedded in the SQF, the links to it are becoming increasingly visible and understandable to the wider public due to the numerous awareness-raising activities implemented within ESF-funded projects.

Among the challenges to be addressed is establishing more efficient links between different categories of qualifications included in the SQF, for instance between the system of NVQs and formal education system, by having any NVQ certificate which is an integral part of a formal VET education programme in terms of its content automatically recognised in the process leading to educational qualifications. A comprehensive SQF can help build bridges and support more smooth progression possibilities not only vertically, but also horizontally in a life-long and life-wide perspective.

NQF implementation and impact

The SQF is a comprehensive and overarching framework of all nationally regulated qualifications from the formal education and training and NVQ system, including those based on sectoral legislation. Also, legacy awards and qualifications awarded before the Bologna reform are included in accordance with the SQF Act. One important development brought by the SQF Act since 2016 is the definition of procedures and quality criteria for inclusion of supplementary qualifications – not nationally regulated – 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.

The national Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET assesses the completed application and prepares opinion on the suitability of the application and training programme. If the assessment is positive, the NCP SQF-EQF expert committee – nominated by Ministry of Labour – drafts a proposal for placing of the supplementary qualification into SQF. The inclusion is finally approved by the minister

responsible for labour. The criteria for including supplementary qualifications into the SQF include the suitability of the applicant, relationships 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. 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. To date (April 2021) 13 supplementary qualifications have undergone the accreditation process successfully and were consequently included in the SQF, at SQF levels 3 to 7.

An important technical tool of the SQF is the comprehensive qualifications register[1281] that describes all included 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. The register contains around 1 690 qualifications (1 342 educational qualifications, 323 NVQs and 13 supplementary qualifications); it is linked to the new Europass[1282] and ESCO enabling comparison between Slovenian qualifications and those of other EU countries.

With adoption of by-laws[1283] and inclusion of SQF in policy documents and strategies (e.g. Resolution of national programme of higher education) the SQF is well integrated into the national qualifications system and education and training strategies and legislation. It has reached full operational stage.

An NQF/EQF communication strategy has been developed for different target groups to raise awareness about SQF and EQF among students, education and training institutions, employees, career counsellors, professional and recognition

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1281. Available here.
1282. Find and compare qualifications frameworks | Europass Courses | Europass
1283. Rules on public documents forms referring to SQF/ EQF levels for all types and levels of qualifications are available here:
- in primary schools: http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/ pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV9024
- in secondary education, including certificate supplements: http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/ pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV9039)
- in higher vocational education: http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/ pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV9158)
- on diploma supplements: http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/ pregledPredpisa?id=ODRE1985)
- on the NVQ certificate http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/ pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV10347
- on supplementary qualification certificates: http:// pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV12846

bodies. Target videos for different groups have been prepared[1284].

Increasingly, the framework is visible and used by education and training institutions and learners. SQF/EQF levels are indicated on all certificates, diplomas and Europass supplements for general education, VET, higher VET, higher education, NVQs and supplementary qualifications, and in the online register and when preparing and renewing education programmes and qualifications. The SQF and corresponding qualifications register plays an important role in guidance and counselling services, offering comprehensive information on qualifications. The SQF register[1285] was upgraded with new functionality in the presentation of possible career paths on the selected professional fields. It enables users to plan more easily the future steps in their learning and professional career.

The first comprehensive evaluation of the SQF and the register of qualifications was carried out in 2018-19 (Skubic Ermenc et al., 2020)[1286]. A combined quantitative and qualitative research approach was used for evaluation purposes with a number of different research tools developed and used to collect data (questionnaires for the general and professional public, focus groups and semi-structured interviews with key national stakeholders). The evaluation focused on the understanding, awareness and use of the SQF and qualifications register among the main national stakeholders as well as on the influence of the SQF on the education system. Overall, the findings show that the SQF is positively accepted among different stakeholders and users. Stakeholders appreciate its contribution to the transparency, understanding and comparability of Slovenian qualifications nationally and internationally. This indicates that the communication function of the SQF is well received. At the same time, the stakeholders believe that the SQF as a comprehensive and overarching framework has contributed to the systematic organisation of the qualifications system by integrating all its parts (formal education, NVQs, supplementary qualifications). The evaluation also shows that the SQF is recognised among different users, but only generically. A more detailed knowledge of the content, use, and purpose of the SQF is available only to those users who directly use the SQF in their work (including qualifications and study programme developers, experts involved in preparation of occupational standards).

There is some evidence that employers use SQF/EQF levels in recruitment, procedures and vacancy notices; however, the SQF/EQF levels are not used in collective agreements and some regulation at the local level. The SQF links to the EQF help employers compare qualifications internationally when recruiting candidates from other EU countries. The SQF also enables the placing of supplementary qualifications by which companies can formalise and promote training and learning at the workplace

The SQF is also used in recognition processes, when presenting the information of SQF/EQF levels for comparing qualifications and understanding their quality assurance processes.

The evaluation brings a number of recommendations for the next steps of SQF implementation:

(a) promoting at national level an expert debate on the role and purpose of different categories and types of qualifications and the relationship between them in a lifelong learning perspective;

(a) encouraging professional debate with labour market stakeholders on their needs for supplementary qualifications and further elaboration of methodological foundations for the placement of these qualifications to the SQF;

(b) further activities to increase visibility and promote the practical use of the SQF among key stakeholders and the general public;

(c) providing further professional support on the use of learning outcomes and the SQF level descriptors to developers of qualifications and programmes (Skubic Ermenc e al.,2020, pp 33-34).

Referencing to the EQF

The SQF was referenced to the EQF and self-certified to QF-EHEA in a joint report in 2013.

Important lessons and future plans

An incremental approach and gradual implementation of the SQF can be observed in Slovenia, taking into account the results of education reforms in all subsystems of education in last two decades, and a good situation in education, training and qualifications developments compared to EU benchmarks. Important progress has been achieved in last 10 years; the SQF and the SQF register are fully operational.

1284. Available here.
1285. Available here.
1286. Final report in English is available here.

The first evaluation of the SQF was carried out in 2018-19. It shows that the SQF is positively accepted by different groups of stakeholders as a tool that has contributed to transparency of qualifications, nationally and internationally, and to the systemic organisation of qualification system, with all levels and types of qualifications, including those awarded outside the regulated qualification system. In future implementation, special attention and expert debate shall be encouraged to link/ bridge better 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 in a lifelong learning perspective. This is in line with the comprehensive nature of the SQF and its policy objectives. There are also some groups of qualifications that are currently not included in the SQF, such as regulated sectoral or international qualifications. 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 as graduate destinations. The SQF is expected to strengthen further the quality assurance of learning outcomes, when designing, reviewing, providing and awarding qualifications at all levels and of different types.

One question for further discussion 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 CPI, 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.

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.

Further planned developments will focus on implementation of the main recommendation raised by SQF evaluation: strengthening cooperation between different stakeholders in developing and implementing effective lifelong learning policies and practices and bringing added values for end-users.

Table 77. Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF)

NQF LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	NVQS	SUPPLEMENTARY QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF LEVELS
10	• Doctoral degree (*Diploma o doktoratu znanosti*)			8
9	• ** Post-graduate research Master of science degree (*Diploma o magisteriju znanosti*) • ** Specialisation diploma following academic higher education *(Diploma o specializaciji)*			8
8	• Master degree *(Diploma o strokovnem magisteriju)* • ** Specialisation diploma following pre-Bologna professional higher education *(Diploma o specializaciji)* • ** Pre-Bologna diploma of academic higher education *(Diploma o univerzitetnem izobraževanju)* • ** Higher education diploma *(Diploma o visoki izobrazbi)*			7
7	• Academic bachelor diploma *(Diploma o izobraževanju prve stopnje – univerzitetna, UN)* • Professional bachelor diploma *(Diploma o izobrazevanju visokem strokovnem, VS)* • ** Pre-Bologna professional higher education diploma *(Diploma o visokem strokovnem izobraževanju)* • ** Specialisation diploma following old short cycle higher education *(Diploma o specializaciji)*		Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF level 7)	6
6	• Short-cycle higher vocational diploma *(Diploma o višji strokovni izobrazbi)* • ** Old short-cycle higher vocational diploma *(Diploma o višješolski izobrazbi)*	NVQ certificate (level 6)	Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF level 6)	5

NQF LEVELS	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	NVQS	SUPPLEMENTARY QUALIFICATIONS*	EQF LEVELS
5	• Vocational *matura* certificate (Secondary technical education, four years) *(Spričevalo o poklicni mature)* • General *matura* certificate *(Spričevalo o splošni mature)* • Master craftsman examination certificate *(Spričevalo o opravljenem mojstrskem izpitu)* • Foreman examination certificate *(Spričevalo o opravljenem delovodskem izpitu)* • Managerial examination certificate *(Spričevalo o opravljenem poslovodskem izpitu)*	NVQ certificate (level 5)	Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF level 5)	4
4	• Final examination certificate (Secondary vocational education, three years) *(Spričevalo o zaključnem izpitu, Srednja poklicna izobrazba)*	NVQ (level 4)	Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF level 4)	4
3	• Final examination certificate (Lower vocational education, two years) *(Spričevalo o zaključnem izpitu)*	NVQ (level 3)		3
2	• Elementary school leaving certificate (nine years) *(Zaključno spričevalo osnovne* šole*)*	NVQ (level 2)		2
1	• Certificate of completing grades 7 or 8 of elementary education *(Potrdilo o izpolnjeni osnovnošolski obveznosti)* • Elementary school leaving certificate *(Zaključno spričevalo osnovne* šole*)*			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; https://www.nok.si/en

Abbreviations

CPI	National Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training	NQF	national qualifications framework
		NVQ	national vocational qualification
		QF-EHEA	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system		
		SIAE	Slovenian Institute for Adult Education
ECVET	European credit system for VET	SQF	Slovenian qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework	VET	vocational education and training
KLASIUS	classification system of education and training		
NAKVIS	Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education		
NCP	national coordination point		

Main sources of information

The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET is the EQF NCP: http://www.cpi.si/en/

SQF/EQF portal: https://www.nok.si/en

SQF register: https://www.nok.si

National Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET (2014). Referencing the Slovenian qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area: final report. https://europa.eu/europass/en/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf

Evaluation of the Slovenian qualifications Framework and the register of qualifications of the SQF. Link: spremljava_registersok_eng_int.pdf (nok.si)

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National Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET (2014). *Referencing the Slovenian qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area: final report.* https://europa.eu/europass/sl/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf

Prepared by

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SPAIN

Introduction and context[1287]

In recent years, Spain has focused on digital education as the pandemic crisis revealed a socioeconomic divide in students' access to digital technology. The national education curriculum includes digital competences, either as a compulsory separate subject in upper secondary education (including VET) or in other compulsory subjects in primary and lower secondary education. The Digitalisation and digital competence development plan (*Plan de digitalización y desarrollo de la competencia digital*)[1288] together with the 2020 digital education plan (*Educa en Digital*) try to address digital gaps among students, teachers and schools. Although the digital competences of students are improving, they have lower confidence (in data literacy and digital content creation, problem solving and safety) than the EU average in lower and upper secondary education, and use of digital means for teaching is limited[1289] (European Commission, 2019).

The new education law, in effect since January 2021[1290], not only aims to adapt the education system to digital advances but also improve access to, and the quality of, education, especially because students' educational outcomes have not improved[1291] and regional differences persist. Another aim is to give schools further flexibility on curriculum content and put greater focus on competence-based learning. The early school leaving rate has fallen progressively in recent years (23.6% in 2013, 20% in 2015, 18.3% in 2017, 17.3% in 2019), but rates still vary between regions and progress has slowed. Overall participation in vocational education and training (VET)[1292] remains low and the employment rate of recent VET graduates (70.0% in 2018 to 66.0% in 2019), continues to be below the EU average of 79.1%. VET graduate tracking is under development, with the creation of an integrated information and monitoring system, coordinated by the State Public Employment Service (SEPE). Measures to increase the attractiveness of VET and continue VET online have been taken as a response to the Covid-19 crisis. From January 2020, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training has been responsible for all VET regulation, including initial and continuous VET[1293]. 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 (29% in Spain; EU average 13%) (MEFP, 2019) and are not improving. While the rate of tertiary education attainment is one of the highest among EU countries (44.7%), and above the EU average of 40.3%, graduates are very often interested in fields which are not in demand in the labour market. The employment rate of recent graduates (ISCED 3-8, total) at 73.0% in 2019, has improved but is still lower than the EU average of 80.9%. Qualifications mismatch in Spain remains high and there are significant skills imbalances (European Commission, 2020).

Spain has been developing the Spanish qualifications framework for lifelong learning (*Marco Español de Cualificaciones,* MECU) ([1294]). A royal decree setting the legal basis for implementation

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1287. The Spanish NQF fiche will be further elaborated when the referencing to the EQF has been completed.

1288. https://portal.mineco.gob.es/RecursosNoticia/mineco/prensa/noticias/2021/210127_np_digital.pdf

1289. 51% of teachers let students use ICT for project or class work (EU-22 47%), higher than in TALIS 2013 (37%) according to the 2018 TALIS survey (OECD, 2019)

1290. New 2021 Organic Law on Education LOMLOE amending the Organic Law 2/2006. The law can be accessed here.

1291. The law aims to reinforce support for students lagging behind by additional support measures, lower requirements for class progression and to obtain academic degrees, and new gateways between regular education and VET (European Commission, 2020).

1292. In 2018, the share of upper secondary Spanish students in VET (35.8%) remained below the EU average (48.4%) (European Commission, 2020).

1293. At this stage, the Ministry of Labour will keep a few VET initiatives to address short and specific workplace training needs (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2021)

1294. MECU: Spanish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning. http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/mc/mecu/mecu.html

is pending and is expected to be adopted in 2021. A qualifications framework for higher education (*Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior*, MECES) has been put in place separately and self-certified against the QF-EHEA in 2014[1295] as part of Spain's continuing commitment to the Bologna process (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2014)[1296].

Policy objectives

The MECU is envisaged primarily as a communication and information instrument. One of its main objectives is to make Spanish qualifications easier to understand by describing them in terms of learning outcomes, clarifying relationships between them, and indicating the qualification level on certificates and diplomas. It aims to promote and improve access to, and participation in, lifelong learning, to promote the recognition of qualifications and to facilitate comparability within Spain and Europe. The framework is expected to raise trust in Spanish qualifications and make mobility of learners and workers easier.

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. The MECU aims to include, all nationally recognised diplomas and certificates from formal education and training while remaining open for inclusion of official qualifications issued by other administrative sectors.

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 cycles of the FQ-EHEA[1297] *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 vocational education and training (VET) is considered higher education (HE) 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.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The draft comprehensive framework is based on learning outcomes and has eight levels, with descriptors defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence[1298]. 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. The four highest levels are compatible with the Spanish qualifications framework for higher education, based on the level descriptors of cycles for QF-EHEA.

Once the legal basis is in place, the framework is expected to include qualifications awarded at all levels in the formal education system and will also integrate qualifications obtained through validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Spanish Council of Ministers approved a new education organic law in 2020, which became effective in 2021[1299], repealing the 2013 Organic Law for the improvement of quality of education (LOMCE)[1300]. The law (as can be seen below) aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning, promote equity and excellence and increase school autonomy and the coherence of the national system in line with international standards.

1295. 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.
1296. http://www.aneca.es/Sala-de-prensa/Noticias/2014/Informe-sobre-la-Autocertificacion-del-Marco-Espanol-para-las-Cualificaciones-de-la-Educacion-Superior-MECES
1297. See *Overarching QF-EHEA* (revised in 2018) http://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/EHEAParis2018_Communique_AppendixIII_952778.pdf

1298. Based on draft MECU level descriptors [unpublished].
1299. New 2021 Organic Law on Education LOMLOE amending the Organic Law 2/2006. It became effective on January 19, 2021. Its coming into force has repealed Organic Law 8/2013 of December 9, for the improvement of education quality (LOMCE). An implementation process has begun that will conclude in the 2023/2024 academic year. The law can be accessed here.
1300. Government of Spain (2013). *Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la mejora de la calidad educativa* [Organic Law 8/2013 of 9 December 2013, for the improvement on the quality of education]. *Boletín oficial del estado*, No 295. http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2013/12/10/pdfs/BOE-A-2013-12886.pdf

The level of implementation of learning outcomes varies across subsystems. The Ministry of Education and VET (previously Education, Culture and Sports) has established in legislation national core curricula for the various levels of education: pre-primary, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and vocational training. These are determined by central government, though regional administrations, and the schools take responsibility for developing part of the curriculum[1301]. 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. The National Institute for Educational Evaluation is the body of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training responsible for evaluation of the Spanish education system, in collaboration with the education authorities.

The most developed and elaborated implementation of learning outcomes is in VET. The VET qualification system is defined by the law on qualifications and vocational training[1302] that establishes the *National catalogue of professional qualifications* (*Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales*, CNCP)[1303]. It lists 680 occupational standards[1304] defined in competences and is continually updated[1305]. 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[1306]. At the end of 2019 the Council of Ministers approved the First strategic plan for vocational training of the

educational system 2019-22[1307] aiming at having an updated national qualification catalogue (with companies taking a major role in the design of occupational standards) and a widespread training offer[1308]. The National Institute of Qualifications (INCUAL), which is responsible for defining, updating and adapting the national catalogue, focused in 2019 on designing the new occupational standards[1309] and redefining learning outcomes. The 2020 organic law on education is another important boost to vocational training as it aims to improve social recognition, make vocational training more flexible, and move towards an integrated system of initial and continuous VET, accessible and with a lifelong learning perspective[1310]. The law sets the framework for reform of the curriculum towards a more competence-based approach. In addition, according to the law, students who pass a basic VET programme[1311] will receive the ESO (compulsory secondary education) graduate degree, which will allow them access to upper secondary education. Therefore, basic VET programmes integrate general and vocational subjects. For those over the age of 17 – who left the education system without a qualification – vocational programmes are organised to allow them to obtain a general education certificate or technician qualification. Integrated vocational training and dual vocational training centres are also promoted with the new law[1312].

The new educational law of 2021 has also introduced changes in the 2001 Organic Law on

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1301. The central government is responsible for designing 65% of the curriculum (55% in those autonomous communities which have their own language); the remaining part of the curriculum at regional level differs between autonomous communities.

1302. Government of Spain (2002). *Ley orgánica 5/2002, de 19 de junio, de las Cualificaciones y de la Formación Profesional* [Organic Law 5/2002 on qualifications and vocational training]. *Boletín oficial del estado*, No 147. https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2002/06/20/pdfs/A22437-22442.pdf

1303. http://incual.mecd.es/bdc and http://incual.mecd.es/documents/35348/80300/CNCP_listadoQ.pdf/ (last updated in January 2021).

1304. Occupational standards inform development of IVET programmes that lead to vocational diplomas as well as CVET programmes leading to professional certificates (*certificados de profesionalidad*). Each professional certificate includes a compulsory on-the-job training module (*módulo de formación práctica en centros de trabajo*) whose learning outcomes must be assessed in the workplace (Cedefop and Fundae, 2019).

1305. All the vocational programmes refer to the *National catalogue of vocational qualifications*. More information is available here.

1306. Learning outcomes are closely related to work activities and required professional competences.

1307. *I Plan Estratégico de Formación Profesional del Sistema Educativo 2019-2022* [Strategic plan for vocational training of the education system 2019-2022].

1308. This plan will facilitate individualised training itineraries with the implementation of a modular offer of personalised vocational training that will allow students to enrol in one or more modules, depending on their educational and employment needs, without having to take all the modules that make up a degree or a specialisation course (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2021).

1309. In 2020, 136 occupational standards were updated: 20 of these are new occupational standards, 45 have been updated, and 71 partially modified. In January 2021, 38 updates of occupational standards were published (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2021).

1310. Access and admission conditions become more flexible, establishing links with the rest of the education system. More information can be found here.

1311. The structure of VET is the following: basic VET programmes (ISCED 353), intermediate VET programmes, leading to professional training technician qualification and higher VET programmes (ISCED 554) leading to an advanced technician qualification (Cedefop, forthcoming).

1312. Compulsory secondary education (students aged 12-16) is organised into two cycles: the first is composed of the first, second and third years. The second cycle, consisting of a single year, the fourth, is of a preparatory nature for either general or vocational education.

universities[1313], on university admission exams[1314] and access to higher VET programmes[1315]. Higher education study programmes must 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 *Acredita/ Renovación de la acreditación* 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 or unit's internal quality assurance systems during audit procedures.

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) and the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) ([1316]).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Ministry of Education and VET, Directorate General for Vocational Training, (through the General Secretariat for Vocational Training) has overall responsibility for developing and implementing the Spanish framework for lifelong learning (MECU). A wide range of stakeholders were involved and consulted in the development phase: other ministries (Labour, Migrations and Social Security,

Industry, Trade and Tourism, Health, Consumption and Social Welfare, Economy and Business), 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 (such as State School Council, Vocational Training Council, Arts Education Council, University Council), agencies for evaluation, professional associations and regional councils for education. From January 2020, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training has been responsible for the whole VET regulation, including initial and continuous VET[1317].

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 the MECU, in accordance with the Spanish constitution, lies with central government. In 2020, the Sectoral Education Conference of the National System of Qualifications and Vocational Training for Employment was set up, together with the regional authorities from the autonomous communities[1318]. This is the new body for cooperation between the General State Administration and the autonomous communities to coordinate policies on vocational training for employment (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2021).

Cooperation with the Bologna process is ensured, with members represented in both the committee for MECU and in the group for MECES[1319] to achieve methodological and structural coherence, making possible the alignment of the two frameworks[1320].

1313. More information (in English) here.
1314. The admission procedure to universities is re-established under conditions of equality, regardless of where the previous studies were carried out or the specific need for educational support or disability. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-higher-education-70_en
1315. The degree of Professional training technician will allow access to both the higher VET programmes and the higher arts and design programmes. The equivalence between advanced degrees is reinforced and those students who pass the corresponding studies will be able to obtain the title of Bachelor degree in advanced artistic education. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-higher-education-70_en
1316. 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 Andalusia, and UNIBASQ for the Basque Country) are members of EQAR: https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/

1317. Overall competence/responsibility (of the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy) related to training within the national qualifications system – particularly vocational training for the unemployed and vocational training for the employed, including national and regional calls for subsidies, when these correspond to training linked to professional certificates and dual VET-were transferred to the Ministry of Education and VET (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2021).
1318. More information can be found here.
1319. MECES was established by the Ministry of Education under royal decree in 2011.
1320. MECES was formulated by a formal committee established under Royal Decree 900/2007: 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 2007, on the establishment of the Committee for the definition or the Spanish qualifications framework in higher education]: *Boletín Oficial del Estado, No 172*. https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2007/07/19/pdfs/A31371-31372.pdf

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[1321]

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 new organic law on Education, in effect since 2021, 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 ([1322]) which is currently being revised[1323] established the procedure for the validation and recognition of professional competences acquired by work experience and non-formal training; this is common to gaining qualifications previously from the employment administration (*certificados de profesionalidad*) and now from the education administration through specific calls for validation[1324].

Validation has been emphasised in different recent strategies, covered by the Spanish strategy for employment activation 2017-20[1325] and the 2018

VET national strategy[1326]. The latter focuses on the revision of the procedure for the recognition of professional competences and its simplification by making it more accessible through permanent open calls. The *Reconoce* project[1327], approved in 2017 by the Spanish Youth Institute (INJUVE) and the youth departments of the autonomous communities, created a new recognition system for non-formal education, covering the youth sector in the country. In addition, the validation of skills acquired through non-formal, informal, or work experience is one of the 11 strategic lines included in the 2020 plan for the modernisation of vocational training[1328] (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2021). One of the actions of this plan was the approval of a 2021 royal decree[1329] that establishes a cumulative accreditation system so that the beneficiary can complete the training that leads to obtaining the corresponding professional training title or professional certificate (*certificados de profesionalidad*)[1330]. In February 2020, the one-off report for validation of non-formal and informal learning of Spain was also presented to the EQF advisory group (Ministry of Education and VET, 2020)

Progress has been achieved in higher education; universities have developed procedures to validate and recognise working experience to access study programmes (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

1321. This section draws mainly on input from Vale, P. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Spain*. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Spain.pdf

1322. 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 2009 on the recognition of professional competences acquired through working experience]. *Boletín oficial del estado*, No 205. https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2009/BOE-A-2009-13781-consolidado.pdf

1323. The law is revised to allow for the creation of an open procedure, so that any citizen with work experience or non-formal training can apply for validation of their skills without having to wait for the competent administrations to publish the call for applications for the units of competence they wish to validate. In this context, the Ministry of education and vocational training is processing the modification of specific aspects of the law regulating validation procedures and allowing the creation of an open and flexible procedure (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2021).

1324. 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.

1325. Royal Decree 1032/2017, of December 15, approving the Spanish strategy for employment activation 2017-20

1326. The 2018 national VET strategy is focused mainly on a change in methodology to guarantee the early detection of job trends and their quick implementation in the National Qualifications Catalogue, VET Diplomas and Professional Certificates (Vale, P., 2019).

1327. Throughout this project, the network organised an online system for accreditation of volunteering, starting with more than 1 000 youth volunteers. Related information can be found here.

1328. Its aim is the generalisation of the procedure set in 2009, with a special concern for people expelled from the labour market during the Covid-19 crisis. Training courses of a modular, short duration, and certifiable nature, will be added in the *National catalogue of professional qualifications*, making them as accessible as possible in any situation. The Plan for the modernisation of vocational training [*Plan de Modernización de la FP*] can be accessed here.

1329. Government of Spain (2021) *Real Decreto 143/2021, de 9 de marzo, por el que se modifica el Real Decreto 1224/2009, de 17 de julio, de reconocimiento de las competencias profesionales adquiridas por experiencia laboral*. [Royal Decree 143/2021, of March 9, which modifies the Royal Decree 1224/2009, of July 17, of recognition of the competences professionals acquired through work experience] *Boletín oficial del estado*, No 59. https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2021/03/10/pdfs/BOE-A-2021-3700.pdf

1330. This procedure is related to the total number of the professional competence units included in the professional training offer linked to the *National catalogue of professional qualifications*.

outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, and through work experience. Once the Spanish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (MECU) is in place, the competences 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 and impact

Technical work on the design of the framework was completed in 2018. The royal decree setting the legal basis for implementation is pending and it is expected to be adopted in 2021. Once the legal basis is in place, qualifications from formal education and training, and previously from the employment administration (*certificados de profesionalidad*), will be given priority. A MECU committee will be established, including stakeholders such as ministries, representatives of professional associations, trade union and business representatives, and qualifications framework experts from different sectors. The committee will have the mandate to decide on assignment of framework levels to the Spanish qualifications and to submit proposals to the government for approval (Cedefop, 2020).

Qualifications in higher education are being designed taking into account compatibility between the two frameworks and linking the highest four MECU qualification levels to MECES, as it is a more advanced framework.

The national qualifications will be assigned to MECU levels based on three criteria:
a. comparability of qualification type descriptors defined in learning outcomes and the MECU level descriptors;
b. implementation of the common quality assurance criteria for qualification in line with annex IV of the 2017 EQF recommendation ([1331]);
c. public consultation with bodies involved in the design, award and use of qualifications in a relevant field.

Qualifications from formal education and training, and previously from the employment administration (*certificados de profesionalidad*), will be assigned first. 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.

1331. Available here.

Referencing to the EQF

The qualifications framework for higher education (*Marco Español de Cualificaciones de Educación Superior* (MECES)) has been self-certified against the FQ-EHEA (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (2014). MECU is planned to be referenced to the EQF in 2021.

Important lessons and future plans

Development of the Spanish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (MECU), including all levels and types of qualifications, aims to strengthen the links between different parts of qualification system and between education and employment, but there are various challenges at different levels. Links between the two frameworks, MECES and MECU, need to be established. Dialogue and interaction with different stakeholders from education and employment has to continue; involving administrations that provide and award qualifications in different sectors will be part of the MECU implementation process. Government is taking initiatives to support cooperation between universities, businesses and research centres. The new institutional structure with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP) undertaking in 2020 all responsibilities also related to vocational training for employment (through the new General Secretariat for Vocational Training) aims to promote vocational training and to create a system that brings together initial and continuous vocational training.

The First strategic plan for vocational training in the education system for 2019-22 was an important development towards lifelong learning; it aimed to improve VET standards and make VET more attractive to young people by introducing flexible learning paths in secondary education and developing new programmes to meet the demands of the future of work (Cedefop, forthcoming). The new 2020 Education law also aims to improve the vocational training system in the country. However, 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.

NQF development in Spain also shows the importance of political processes, governance structures 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.

Table 78. 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 (Doctorado)	Third cycle
7	3	Master degree (Master)	Second cycle
6	2	Bachelor degree (Grado)	First cycle
5	1	Advanced technician (Técnico superior)	Short cycle
4			
3			
2			
1			

Source: 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 (FQ-EHEA)*. http://www.aneca.es/Sala-de-prensa/Noticias/2014/Informe-sobre-la-Autocertificacion-del-Marco-Espanol-para-las-Cualificaciones-de-la-Educacion-Superior-MECES

Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework	MECES	*Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior* [qualifications framework for higher education]
ESQF	Spanish qualifications framework for lifelong learning		
INQUAL	National Institute of Qualifications	NQF	national qualifications framework
IVET	initial vocational education and training	QF-EHEA	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area
MECU	*Marco Español de Cualificaciones* [Spanish qualifications framework]	VET	vocational education and training

Main sources of information

[URLs accessed 1.4.2021]

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MECU website: http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/mc/mecu/mecu.html

The National Catalogue of Occupational/Professional Standards (Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales - CNCP): http://incual.mecd.es/bdc

The National Repertoire of Professional Certificates (Repertorio Nacional de Certificados de Profesionalidad): https://www.sepe.es/HomeSepe/que-es-el-sepe/comunicacion-institucional/publicaciones/publicaciones-oficiales/listado-pub-formacion/repertorio-certificados-profesionalidad.html

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Prepared by

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

ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

Introduction and context

The education system within the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis is divided into five major categories, namely: early childhood, primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education.

In 2016, the St. Kitts-Nevis National Qualifications Framework (SKN-NQF) was developed and introduced to serve as a mechanism for quality assurance that would facilitate access to education at all levels. The SKN-NQF makes it possible to consolidate education and training qualifications under a single framework that maps progress and pathways within the education system.

In 2017, after a revision of the *St. Christopher and Nevis Accreditation of Institutions Act*, the St. Kitts-Nevis Accreditation Board (SKNAB) was made responsible for hosting and implementing both the SKN-NQF.

The SKN-NQF has proven instrumental in evaluating qualifications and facilitating coherence within the formal, and informal, education systems.

Policy objectives

The major objectives of the SKN-NQF are to
- Establish standards to achieve internationally comparable quality education and training at various levels.
- Increase transparency of qualifications awarded to provide clarity about expected learning outcomes associated with levels of qualifications.
- Improve articulation between formal and informal programmes and demonstrate commonalities across different qualifications.
- Strengthen linkages with business and industry to ensure that education and training programmes and awards are relevant to the current and anticipated needs of the labour market.

- Contribute to human development by providing entry points and pathways for continuing and further education for all learners.
- Facilitate recognition of qualifications in and strengthen linkages between general education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET).
- Serve as a roadmap for lifelong learning.
- Facilitate comparisons and benchmarking with qualifications obtained at regional and international levels.
- Facilitate processes for the Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) by better enabling a match between knowledge and competencies of an individual with those at a particular level in the NQF.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The SKN-NQF is made up of two Access levels that encompass achievements and entry level qualifications, as well as eight levels ranging from lower secondary to CVQ/NVQ Level 5 and Doctoral Degrees. Each level is broadly described by specific learning outcomes. The five levels level descriptors are as follows:

Knowledge and Understanding: Described as theoretical and/or factual; possessing the ability to recall and present information, including the demonstration of knowledge and understanding of specific facts, concepts, principles, procedures and theories.

Application and Practice: Described as the cognitive (logical, intuitive, and creative thinking) and practical (manual dexterity and the use of methods, tools and instruments) competencies to achieve results.

Communication, Numeracy and Information and Communication Technology (ICT): Described as literacy in verbal and non-verbal communication,

in numerical and graphical tasks and in ICT applications, demonstrated through the ability to use a range of skills, in context, to access, process, produce and respond appropriately to information.

Life Skills: Described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "the abilities for adaptive positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." Life skills promote mental well-being and social competence. They include abilities related to: problem-solving, decision-making, critical and creative thinking, interpersonal relationships, empathy, emotional and self-awareness, coping with stress, and effective communication.

Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others: Described as the nature of working relationships, levels of responsibility for self and others and managing change; the ways in which individuals work; and the impact of this on their job role and other individuals. The levels progress from working alone on simple and routine tasks under direct supervision to becoming increasingly autonomous and accountable within a work role, becoming either more independent or more focused on management and leadership, becoming more self-critical and being able to reflect on ethical and professional issues.

Qualifications in the SKN-NQF

Certificate
A certificate is an award made in a variety of contexts including beyond the secondary cycle in the education system. Certificates awarded in general education by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) include the Certificate of Secondary Level Competence (CCSLC) and the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC). Certificates are also awarded by other providers to persons who successfully complete pre-vocational courses/programmes. Certificates awarded at higher levels are for specific standalone courses or for units/modules or credits towards a higher-level qualification. The upper secondary certificate (CSEC) can be used for entry to four-year Bachelor's Degree programmes and is a prerequisite for the Advanced Level Certificate.

Advanced certificate/diploma
The Advanced Certificate/Diploma is for an award based on a programme of study in a narrow range of subject/skill areas. The learner may select a mix of subjects for breadth of study or may opt for depth of study of a narrow grouping of subjects. The Advanced Certificate/Diploma is usually used for

matriculation into Bachelor's Degree programmes or for employment. The programmes prepare learners to work with reduced supervision and for self-directed learning at higher levels.

Associate degree
The Associate Degree is an award based on successful completion of a broad-based and coherent grouping of subjects/skills. The programmes prepare learners for

matriculation in Bachelor's Degree programmes or for entry employment in para-professional areas. The programmes usually last for two years. In some cases, the

Associate Degree enables an individual to get exemption and credits for the first year of a three-year Bachelor's Degree programme in a 2+2 arrangement.

Bachelor's degree
The Bachelor's Degree is based on a systematic programme of studies for greater depth, theoretical and technical knowledge and understanding of a discipline. The learner is enabled to acquire and apply a range of analytical and research skills and to analyse and interpret qualitative and quantitative data. The programme is usually for four years if the learner enters with CSEC qualifications (or an equivalent) or for three years with Advanced level/Diploma certification or the Associate Degree.

Post-graduate diploma/certificate
This is an award made after completion of a first degree. It is usually based on a programme that enables the learner to acquire specialized knowledge and skills in a defined area or applicable to a particular occupation. It involves self-directed study and the use of advanced research methodologies for data collection, analysis and interpretation. The duration of this programme is usually for one year full-time.

Master's degree
The Master's Degree is based on programmes for greater breadth and depth of study of the theoretical underpinnings of a particular discipline/profession. The programmes involve self-directed study and application of specialized advanced knowledge, understanding and a range of techniques for research and analysis and interpretation of complex data. The programme is usually delivered for one or two years on a full-time basis.

Doctoral degree
The Doctoral Degree involves substantial independent research and demonstration of

scholarship, creativity and innovation in the application and practice of specialized knowledge in activities to further understanding of the specialized area and to create new knowledge.

There are two types of Doctoral Degrees: the Research Doctorate which requires the application of research skills in a given discipline and involves writing a thesis which should reflect original thought and extend knowledge of the particular discipline; and, the Professional Doctorate which comprises a mix of course work and research. The programme is usually based on studies related to specialized area or occupation.

Caribbean vocational qualification (CVQ) and National vocational qualification (NVQ)

The CVQ and the NVQ are TVET awards based on Occupational Standards developed by industry personnel. There are five levels of the award.
1. **Level 1**: Semi-skilled, supervised worker
2. **Level 2**: Skilled worker
3. **Level 3**: Technician/Supervisor
4. **Level 4**: Master Craftsman/Technologist
5. **Level 5**: Advanced Professional/Senior Manager

Programmes developed at the national level for the NVQ can be submitted to the Caribbean Association of National Training Authorities (CANTA) for assessment and then for approval by the CARICOM Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) for use at the regional level and for the award of the CVQ. Similarly, under the auspices of the TVET Council, Regional Occupational Standards (ROS) approved by CANTA can be utilised by TVET institutions such as AVEC and NSTP, for training and assessment leading to either a full NVQ or units of competency.

Assessment of prior learning

A critical component of the NQF is its use in the establishment of mechanisms to certify people employed in the formal and non-formal sectors and who are knowledgeable and skilled in various occupational areas but are without any formal qualifications.

These skilled people can be assessed against occupational standards developed locally or regionally and the learning outcomes given in the Level descriptors in the NQF. The Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) must be done by trained assessors and in approved facilities either in an institution, for example, AVEC or at the workplace. The APL enables individuals to obtain either a full NVQ or CVQ or Units of competence in recognition of the competencies they have acquired. Other types of qualifications can also be awarded using the APL processes. The qualifications obtained

can then be used for matriculation to higher-level programmes and for mobility within the region for further study or employment.

The Ministry of Education, through its *Education Sector Plan 2017-2021*, has sought to align learning outcomes and the graduation criteria for all secondary schools with that the SKN-NQF.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The SKN-NQF was developed in consultation with a wide contingent of stakeholders including members from the SKNAB, TVET Council and Secretariat, Industry of Labour and Commerce, Higher Education Institutions, and members of the private and public sector.

According to Section 23 (1) of the *St. Christopher and Nevis Accreditation of Institutions Act*, 2017, "There is established a framework known as the National Qualifications Framework, that has the following objectives:
- The consolidation of the education and training qualifications under a single regime to facilitate the smooth entrance and progression of learners, both horizontally and vertically within the education system.
- The improvement of access to education in Saint Christopher and Nevis
- The improvement of quality education that is delivered in Saint Christopher and Nevis..."

Section 23 (2) of the *St. Christopher and Nevis Accreditation of Institutions Act* states, "The National Qualification Framework shall be administered and monitored by the Board which shall be responsible for
- the overall development and implementation of the Framework; and
- making necessary adjustments so as to ensure the efficient functioning of the education system."

Examples of uses of the SKN-NQF
- The SKNAB and by extension the Accreditation Secretariat uses the SKN-NQF to aid with recognition and evaluation of quality assured qualifications.
- The Ministry of Education has revised its curriculum and aligned the learning outcomes and proposed graduation criteria with the SKN-NQF to ensure learners are competent and able to meet or exceed the expectations of the prescribed primary and secondary qualifications levels.

- The SKN TVET Council uses the SKN-NQF to inform the development of training programmes and qualifications to determine the competencies needed to attain learning outcomes at the various levels on the SKN-NQF

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The SKN-NQF was established with links and facilitation arrangements for the recognition and /or validation of non-formal and informal learning. The SKN-NQF provides the mechanism for the validation of learning that was acquired outside of the traditional or formal education and training system by generally stipulating the learning attainments or outcomes at the various levels.

To guide the SKN-NQF objective of access facilitation and flexibility along with advancement within the education, training, and career paths, the SKN TVET Council developed national guidelines on Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition (PLAR). Under PLAR, the following types of learning are considered for recognition of prior learning:

1. **Formal learning:** learning obtained through organized training in a school setting be it from pre-school to university leading to a qualification award.
2. **Non-formal learning:** learning obtained through organized training not leading to a qualification award;
3. **Informal learning:** learning obtained through work experience, on the job training etc.

PLAR is the process that involves the identification, documentation, assessment and recognition of the learning you have acquired through formal and informal study. The process of recognizing and giving credit for knowledge, skills, and competencies that have been acquired experientially, that is, through work experience, unrecognized education or training, self-study, volunteer activities, and hobbies. The type of learning known as prior learning, may occur:

- On the job
- Through volunteer activities
- Through a hobby or interest
- In military service
- Through travel
- In training courses
- Through independent study
- Through family and life experiences

NQF Implementation and impact

N/A

Referencing other regional framework/ other frameworks

- CARICOM Qualifications Framework
- CXC Qualifications Framework
- Jamaica National Qualification Framework
- Transnational Qualifications Framework

Important lessons and future plans

Success
The implementation of the SKN-NQF has significantly improved the processes for revision, evaluation and recognition of qualifications to determine levels that are comparable regionally and internationally. It has encouraged closer relationships and collaboration with all units at different levels of the education system and has introduced a single cohesive framework that encompasses all learning outcomes and pathways.

Challenges
Some of the major challenges for the use of the SKN-NQF have been as a direct result of COVID-19. Promotional activities were cancelled. Institutions are no longer operating at full capacity which has slowed the progress of alignment. The number of requests for evaluation of qualifications has declined.

Due to COVID 19, budgetary constraints have also led to a shortage of resources for further strengthening the SKN-NQF. For example, additional staff are required to staff the National Qualifications Register.

Future plans
The following are envisaged for the future use of the SKN-NQF:
- Revision of National Occupational Standards in alignment with the NQF.
- Development of national curricula for general education and TVET based on the NQF.
- Continued development of NVQs and CVQs in alignment with the NQF at the various levels.
- Get recognition for employers — especially in the public sector — to align pay scales and responsibilities with the NQF to ensure parity for both academic and TVET qualifications.
- Continued enhancement of the NQF to align with international frameworks as necessary.

Table 79. Infographic of the NQF/NQF overview table

TABLE 1: LEVEL	GENERAL EDUCATION	SECTORS			LIFELONG LEARNING
		TVET	POST-SECONDARY	TERTIARY EDUCATION	
8		CVQ/NVQ Level 5		Doctoral Degree	Assessment of Prior Learning (APL)
7				Master's Degree	
6				Post-Graduate Certificate Diploma	
5		CVQ/NVQ Level 4		Bachelor's Degree	
4		CVQ/NVQ Level 3		Associate Degree	
3	Advanced Certificate/ Diploma	CVQ/NVQ Level 2	CVQ/NVQ Level 2		
2	Certificate II (Upper Secondary)	CVQ/NVQ Level 1	CVQ/NVQ Level 1		
1	Certificate I (Lower Secondary)				
ACCESS 2	Entry qualifications for secondary level; Partial completion of programmes for CVQ/NVQ Level 1 qualifications; re-vocational qualifications.				
ACCESS 1	Achievements in programmes for literacy and nnumeracy; short pre-vocational skills training.				

Source: Authors

Abbreviations

APL	Assessment of Prior Learning	SKN-NQF	St. Kitts Nevis National Qualifications Framework
CVQ	Caribbean Vocational Qualification		
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification	SKN-NQR	St. Kitts Nevis National Qualifications Register
PLAR	Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition		
		TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
SKNAS	St. Kitts Nevis Accreditation Secretariat		

Main source of information

St. Christopher and Nevis Accreditation of institutions Act, 2017.

SKN-National Qualification Framework

SKN- National Qualification Register Final Report

www.education.gov.kn

Prepared by
UNESCO in consultation with national experts

SWEDEN

Introduction and context

This report is part of the systematic mapping and analysis of the development process of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) in countries participating in the EQF process, that Cedefop has carried out since 2009. These reviews, done in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group and the European Commission, have directly supported the development of operational and sustainable NQFs. The report offers a detailed description of the structure and scope of the Swedish NQF, its objectives, functions and institutional arrangements, as well as data on the framework's implementation and impact to broader policy areas.

The Swedish NQF is a comprehensive NQF, which was referenced to the EQF in 2016. It is structured in eight levels, including all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training and lifelong learning qualifications for adults and people completing specialised courses for professional development. The NQF is using knowledge, skills and wider competences as level descriptors and it is in activation stage.

Sweden invests substantially in education and training, exceeding EU targets for most key indicators. The rate of tertiary education attainment is one of the highest in the EU (52.5% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 40.3%) and the rate of employment of recent graduates is also high at all qualification levels. According to the 2018 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 below EU averages. However, student performance is increasingly linked to socioeconomic background and disparities also exist between native and foreign-born students. There is a widening gap between schools with the highest results and those with the lowest. Several education reforms are being considered to address inequality and education quality. Participation in initial vocational education and training (VET) is low, 35.4% in

2018 compared to EU average 48.4%, though the employment rate of recent VET graduates is one of the highest in the EU (87.4% in 2019, exceeding the EU-27 average (79.1%) and almost as high as that of tertiary education graduates. Participation in adult learning (34.3% in 2019) is the highest in the EU and substantially above the EU average (10.8%).

The need for more substantial upskilling remains, however, and new investment continues. Investments are particularly relevant for sectors such as health care, construction and ICT. A government bill on municipal adult education[1332] was adopted by the Parliament in June 2020: it aimed to strengthen competence provision, accelerate the integration of immigrants and aid re- and upskilling of adults. Adults will be given additional opportunities to participate in further education and training, and the conditions for study loans will be improved.

There is a serious teacher shortage. According to the National Agency for Education[1333], projections to 2033 show that 18 000 additional teachers will be needed but only about 144 000 will graduate, leaving a shortfall of around 45 000. Teacher shortages are worst in rural areas of northern Sweden where, in some schools, no teacher is certified for the subject they teach. From 30 June 2021 a law will enable the use of distance education as a response: pupils would be in the classroom but taught by a qualified teacher from another school. Frequent changes of principal also somewhat affect the quality of education. There is a government initiative for unqualified experienced personnel to complete teacher training. A teachers' union survey shows that 49% of unqualified teachers have started, but not completed, teacher training. An inquiry is looking into how to increase the quality

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1332. https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/66ADDF6F-526A-4AC6-AF6B-ED57BD70F637
1333. https://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=5394

of teacher training and make it easier to become teachers (European Commission, 2020).

Sweden has developed a comprehensive, learning-outcomes-based NQF for lifelong learning (SeQF) with eight levels, following the basic structure of the EQF. Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence, and have been adapted to the Swedish context. The added value of the SeQF, it is argued, depends on its ability to address explicitly different areas and actors, such as branch organisations, sports associations or education providers within liberal (popular) adult education, and to include certificates and qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system. As of May 2020, eight such qualifications have been included in the Swedish NQF.

Policy objectives

Unlike most 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. Linking qualifications not regulated by national legislation and awarded outside formal education and training to the NQF is seen as crucial for increasing the overall transparency of qualifications in Sweden. This focus on the inclusive character of the framework responds to specific features of Swedish education and training.

Initially designed to aid transparency and international comparison of Swedish qualifications, the SeQF is increasingly seen as playing a role in supporting better cooperation between the education and training system and the labour market.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

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 those outside the 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 extended in the SeQF 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 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 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.

There is no formal decision on how the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) could be adapted to Swedish vocational education and training. However, upper secondary VET in Sweden, being course-based, is considered in line with the intentions in the ECVET recommendation. In the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, the government announced at the end of March 2020 that an additional temporary investment in higher vocational education should be implemented. This will generate more study places at existing programmes and also support the expansion of the newly introduced short courses/programmes. Short courses/programmes should be offered to develop flexibility and the ability to respond to the need for more in-depth, broadened or renewed skills in working life. Priority in the first application round was given to courses/programmes that meet the need for increased expertise in digitalisation, automation, energy efficiency, climate change and sustainability (source: ReferNet Sweden). A second application round was aimed more broadly to meet general competence needs and the emerging labour market needs following the pandemic.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The legal basis supporting the SeQF came into force on 1 October 2015[1334]. Appendix 2 of Decree SFS 2015:545 provides the SeQF levels for all qualifications in the Swedish formal education system. The decree also stipulates an application procedure for inclusion of other qualifications.

The Ministry of Education and Research has overall responsibility for work on the SeQF and referencing to the EQF. It is supported by the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education[1335] (*Myndigheten for Yrkeshögskolan*, NAHVE) as EQF national coordination point with the responsibility to implement the SeQF in cooperation with social partners, relevant authorities, providers of education and training and learners. NAHVE was set up in 2009 to manage the new strand of higher vocational education in Sweden; it has a clear position on the role of non-academic qualifications at levels 5 and 6.

A set of procedures and criteria has been developed for the inclusion and levelling to the SeQF of qualifications outside the formal education system; an advisory council (*Rådet for den nationella referensramen* för *kvalifikationer*) assists NAHVE with the basis for deciding what level a qualification corresponds to in the national qualifications framework[1336]. It consists of the chair and up to 14 members from various organisations of interest and government agencies. The members are appointed for a three-year period and will meet at least four times a year depending on the number of applications received. The meetings are chaired by the director of the NAHVE.

The key function of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (NAHVE) is to ensure that higher vocational education (HVE) programmes meet the needs of the labour market for a qualified workforce. The agency analyses the labour market, decides which programmes qualify to be offered as HVE, allocates government grants, conducts reviews, produces statistics and promotes quality improvement in HVE. NAHVE is also responsible for two types of post-secondary education: arts and culture courses, and interpretation courses and programmes.

NAHVE is also assigned to follow and support the continuous development of validation nationally and regionally including dissemination of knowledge and comprehensive information on validation. According to its instructions, the agency shall promote the use and development of validation within the education areas for which the authority is responsible. It must provide information on the industries' models for validation and support them in the development and quality assurance of the validation models.

NAHVE has an extensive network in various industries and sectors in Sweden.

The Swedish National Agency for Education[1337] is the central administrative authority for the public-school system, and for adult education. The agency prepares knowledge requirements, regulations, general recommendations and national tests. It is also responsible for official statistics in this education sector and conducts follow-ups and evaluations. As a reference centre for vocational education, the agency supports education providers, employers and other organisations in their efforts to improve the quality of upper secondary vocational education.

The Swedish Higher Education Authority[1338] is an independent government agency. It evaluates the quality of higher education and research and is responsible for official statistics about higher education. Higher education institutions and the Higher Education Authority have a shared responsibility for quality assurance in higher education.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[1339]

Sweden has made significant progress towards fulfilling the objectives of the 2012 recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning,

1334. 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]*. https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/forordning-2015545-om-referensram-for_sfs-2015-545

1335. National Agency for Higher Vocational Education: https://www.myh.se/In-English/Swedish-National-Agency-for-Higher-Vocational-Education-/

1336. The annual appropriations directive for the National Agency for Higher Education (2011:1162); §9 regulates that the Agency is NCP for EQF and in §13b and §15 regulates the advisory body and the appointment of its members: http://rkrattsbaser.gov.se/sfst?bet=2011:1162 (in Swedish)

1337. The Swedish National Agency for Education: https://www.skolverket.se/andra-sprak-other-languages/english-engelska

1338. The Swedish Higher Education Authority: https://english.uka.se/

1339. This section draws partly on input from: Kristensen, S. (2019) *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update; Sweden.*

particularly related to assessing and recognising immigrants' prior learning.

Validation activities have generally increased since the 1990s and standards and guidelines have been developed for many areas. However, validation is practiced and defined in different ways, both within the different forms of education and in the area of employment. Views of what validation is and what elements it should include may vary. Although intentions and incentives are included in laws and regulations both in the education sector and the employment service, there is no uniform legal framework to regulate validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the sense of defining the responsibilities and tasks of the providers and rights of the individual. The National Delegation for Validation set up by the government in 2015[1340] to develop and promote a national policy for validation has delivered its final report *Validation – for skills supply and lifelong learning (SOU 2019:69)*[1341]. In this report, the delegation submits its proposals for measures for a coherent, national and permanent system for validation, so that more people can have their knowledge and skills identified, assessed and recognised. The Delegation's work to develop these proposals was conducted in broad cooperation with relevant stakeholders at national and regional level. Representatives of national authorities, regions, industries, the social partners, education sector actors and others have participated in this work.

The National Delegation for Validation proposes to change the definition of validation in the Education Act to underline that validation should be defined as a structured process for in-depth identification, assessment and recognition of knowledge and skills that a person has, regardless of how they were acquired. Further proposals are to work out a coherent strategy for skills supply and lifelong learning, in which validation is an important component, and set up a council with overall responsibility for validation as part of this strategy. To support sector validation, the delegation proposed to establish a government grant regulated to develop validation of vocational skills. This has now been established through the Ordinance (2020:268)[1342]. From 2020 the new State grant is available for social partners who, in collaboration, want to develop new or adapt existing qualifications and validation models.

Several stakeholders have signalled their interest in using SeQF as a reference for their work; one example is the Property Promotion Branch Association that 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. Other examples are the construction sector, where the framework is being used to indicate alternative progression routes for those wanting to qualify as construction site managers, and the financial sector, where the framework is seen as an opportunity to highlight the training activities taking place within the sector.

NAHVE has the task of following and supporting the development work on validation nationally and regionally. The agency is also required to support the economic sectors with developing, and quality assuring, models for validation[1343]. Given that MYH is also responsible for implementing the SeQF, a close link between the national qualifications framework and validation has been established.

To support the further development of sectoral validation, the National Agency for Higher Education has run an ESF-funded project since 2018 called BOSS (operational and strategic collaboration in sectoral validation) to help about 20 sectors to develop and quality assure their models in a network where they can all learn from each other. The starting point for the project's activities is the SeQF, and Standard and guidelines for sectoral validation. When the sectors formulate qualifications in accordance with the SeQF, the learning outcomes for a specific qualification become clear and can be validated and recognised via sectoral models. There are important synergies between these tools. The project has been successful and has recently been granted support for two more years (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Starting in October 2020, NAHVE and partners from Finland and Iceland will carry out an Erasmus+ funded project related to both the non-formal qualifications and validation arrangements in the Nordic countries. The main focus of the project will be to examine how non-formal qualifications are levelled in national qualifications frameworks

1340. The National Delegation for Validation: http://www.valideringsdelegation.se/in-english/national-strategy-validation/

1341. *Validation–for skills supply and lifelong learning* (SOU 2019:69): https://www.regeringen.se/48db64/contentassets/dfe0be15844c46f38630f6a2fb847a4f/summary-in-english-validation--for-skills-supply-and-lifelong-learning

1342. Ordinance (2020:268): http://rkrattsbaser.gov.se/sfst?bet=2020:268 (in Swedish).

1343. MYH (2017). *Standard och riktlinjer* för *branschvalidering avyrkeskompetens* [*Standards and guidelines for sectoral validation of vocational competence*]. https://www.myh.se/Documents/Publikationer/Informationsmaterial/standard_branschvalidering.pdf

and if those qualifications can be awarded through validation procedures. The foreseen output of the project is both policy recommendations and support tools aimed at stakeholders designing non-formal qualifications and validation procedures[1344].

NQF implementation and impact

The Swedish NQF is a comprehensive framework, including all levels and types of qualifications from formal education (VET, general education, higher education). It has reached activation stage. Implementation structures and main working methods and instruments are in place but work is still needed with regards to indication of levels on some of the qualification documents and increasing availability of information via databases and registers.

The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (NAHVE) plays a key role in implementing the SeQF. Since January 2016, awarding bodies outside the formal education system have been able to have their qualifications assessed and given an SeQF level by applying to NAHVE. Guidelines for applying are available through the SEQF portal[1345]. An advisory body assists the agency in deciding the relevant level for a qualification based on certain 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[1346]. 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 quality audit 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.

Eight qualifications have been levelled in the SeQF by NAHVE as of May 2020: cleaners (level 4), key account managers (level 5), authorised payroll consultants (level 5), military assistant nurse (level 5), performing artists (level 6), business administrators (level 6), Montessori educators (level 6) and site manager within the construction sector (6).

It is a key challenge to communicate the purpose and possibilities of the SeQF; to get past the first threshold of applying for qualifications outside the formal education system to be levelled in the framework, NAHVE is developing a common language for the writing 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 in the SeQF. NAHVE has published a manual for the design of qualifications and there are also instructions on how to write learning outcomes. During the autumn, the agency will work on updating handbooks, application guidelines and information for various stakeholders.

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 now include the three levels from the qualifications framework for higher education. While the relationship between the national qualifications framework for higher education and the SeQF for lifelong learning was extensively discussed during initial development stages, levels 6 to 8 of the SeQF are now open both to academic and non-academic qualifications.

The SeQF is known to education authorities and bodies, and to labour market stakeholders, but there is still room for improvement, and awareness is more variable among education and training institutions and providers and guidance and counselling practitioners. The general public has more limited knowledge. The recognition authorities and bodies use EQF in some cases as a guidance instrument. The Enic-Naric office (within the Swedish Council for Higher Education) has developed a web function making it possible to search for equivalence of foreign qualifications within the Swedish system. A reference to the appropriate SEQF/EQF-level is attached[1347].

There has been no evaluation of the SeQF, though NAHVE continuously monitors its work to identify development areas and possible improvements for the implementation of SeQF.

Sweden does not yet have a comprehensive database for all national qualifications; instead, several different databases are in place. An embryo structure can be found in the database

1344. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/2020-1-SE01-KA202-077983

1345. https://www.seqf.se/sv/Sa-funkar-det/Ansokan/Anvisningar-SeQF/

1346. https://www.government.se/government-agencies/higher-education-appeals-board/

1347. https://www.uhr.se/bedomning-av-utlandsk-utbildning/enic-naric-sverige/referensramar-for-svenska-kvalifikationer/ (in Swedish).

associated with the EQF NCP[1348]. Qualifications levelled in the SeQF by NAHVE are 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 *Utbildningsguiden* (information about education) includes search tools for education paths and providers throughout the formal education system[1349].

NQF and EQF levels are indicated on the two qualifications within higher vocational education and on qualifications levelled by NAHVE as well as on Europass supplements for vocational diploma at upper secondary level and higher vocational education. EQF levels are indicated on diplomas and Europass supplements for higher education. NQF levels are indicated on qualifications included in the database.

Referencing to the EQF

The SeQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in June 2016, but the finalised referencing report has not yet been published.

A separate qualifications framework for higher education was developed and self-certification to the QF-EHEA was carried out in 2012. It is included in SeQF levels 6-8.

Important lessons and future plans

The greatest added value of the comprehensive SeQF is the learning outcomes providing a common language and making the content of qualifications easier to understand and compare for different education providers, both within the education system and in sectors and also between the different actors.

The sectors that, with the support of NAHVE, have designed qualifications for levelling in SeQF, find they are given better opportunities to communicate different competence requirements for different vocations with education providers. It also gives them the opportunity to develop relevant validation systems that, among other things, aid staff recruitment and the opportunity to create clear career paths.

For the SeQF to be able to operate as a comprehensive national qualifications framework, the relationship between higher education and other education sectors requires further clarification and continuous dialogue. Possibilities for transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes across education sectors is available as a general opportunity in Sweden, through regulation in the respective ordinances. However, there is room for improvement when it comes to implementation. Dialogue continues between NAHVE and the Association of Higher Education Institutions[1350], an organisation for institutional cooperation on a voluntary basis, about how a degree from higher VET can be credited into higher education.

There is continuing dialogue between social partners, national agencies and sectors within the national skills councils for each vocational programme. Within this dialogue the sectors have informed the National Agency for Education about their work on designing qualifications that partly corresponds to upper secondary diploma (IVET) and how the validation models developed by the sectors may be of interest when further developing validation tools used in upper secondary education. These informal discussions provide input for further agency consideration (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

1348. https://www.seqf.se/sv/Sa-funkar-det/Kvalifikationer/ (in Swedish).
1349. *Utbildningsguiden*: https://utbildningsguiden.skolverket.se/

1350 https://suhf.se/in-english/

Table 80. Swedish national qualifications framework (SeQF)

NQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES (FORMAL EDUCATION)	AWARDED OUTSIDE FORMAL EDUCATION***	EQF LEVELS
8	• Degrees, third cycle, Annex 2 to Higher Education Ordinance 1993:100 (*Examina på forskarnivå enligt bilaga 2 till högskoleförordningen 1993:100*) • Degrees, third cycle, Annex to Regulation 1993: 221 (*Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitet Examina på forskarnivå enligt bilagan till förordningen (1993:221) för Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet Förordning (2017:276)*)		8
7	• Degrees, second cycle, Annex 2 to Higher Education Ordinance 1993:100 (*Examina på avancerad nivå enligt bilaga 2 till högskoleförordningen 1993:100*) • Degrees, second cycle, Annex to Regulation 1993: 221 (*Examina på avancerad nivå enligt bilagan till förordningen (1993:221) för Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet*)* • Degrees, second cycle, in the Annex to Regulation 2007: 1164 (*Examina på avancerad nivå enligt bilagan till förordningen (2007:1164) för Försvarshögskolan*)**		7
6	• Degrees, first cycle, Annex 2 to Higher Education Ordinance 1993:100 (*Examina på grundnivå enligt bilaga 2 till högskoleförordningen 1993:100*) • Degrees, first cycle, Annex to Regulation 2007:1164 (*Examina på grundnivå enligt bilagan till förordningen (2007:1164) för Försvarshögskolan*)** • Degrees, first cycle, Annex to Regulation 1993: 221 (*Examina på grundnivå enligt bilagan till förordningen (1993:221) för Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet*)* • Advanced diploma in higher vocational education (*Kvalificerad yrkeshögskoleexamen från yrkeshögskolan*)	• Performing artist • Business administration (*Marknadsekonom*) • Montessori educator (*Montessoripedagog*) • Site manager building and construction (*Platschef bygg och anläggning*)	6
5	• Qualified graduate from upper secondary engineering course (*Gymnasieingenjörsexamen från gymnasieskolan*) • Diploma in higher vocational education (*Yrkeshögskoleexamen från yrkeshögskolan*)	• Key account manager (*Säljare*) • Authorised payroll consultants (*Auktoriserad lönekonsult*) • Military assistant nurse (*Militär undersköterska*)	5
4	• Diploma from a national programme in upper secondary education – qualification title for students starting 2011 onwards (*Gymnasieexamen från gymnasieskolan*) • Final grades from a complete national or specially designed programme (*Slutbetyg från ett fullständigt nationellt eller specialutformat program i gymnasieskolan*) • Diploma from municipal adult education and training at upper secondary level – qualification title for students starting 2011 onwards (*Gymnasieexamen från kommunal vuxenutbildning*) • Final grades from municipal adult education and training at upper secondary level (*Slutbetyg från gymnasial vuxenutbildning*) • Certificate from the general course at upper secondary level from folk high school (*Intyg om godkänt resultat från allmän kurs på gymnasial nivå från folkhögskola*)	• Cleaners (*Städare*)	4
3			3

NQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES (FORMAL EDUCATION)	AWARDED OUTSIDE FORMAL EDUCATION***	EQF LEVELS
2	• Final grades from compulsory school (*Slutbetyg från grundskolan*) • Final grades from special school at compulsory level (*Slutbetyg från specialskolan*) • Final grades from municipal adult education and training at compulsory level (*Slutbetyg från kommunal vuxenutbildning på grundläggande nivå*) • Certificate from upper secondary education for individuals with learning disabilities (*Gymnasiesärskolebevis från gymnasiesärskolan*) • Certificate from special education for adults at upper secondary level (*Gymnasiesärskolebevis från särskild utbildning* för *vuxna på gymnasial nivå*) • Grade from Swedish for immigrants course D, or equivalent awarded by a folk high school (*Betyg från utbildning i svenska* för *invandrare kurs D, eller motsvarande utbildning som bedrivs vid folkhögskola*) • Grade from municipal adult education in Swedish for immigrants course D, or equivalent awarded by a folk high school (*Betyg från kommunal vuxenutbildning i svenska* för *invandrare kurs D, eller motsvarande utbildning som bedrivs vid folkhögskola*) • Certificate from the general course at compulsory school level from folk high school (*Intyg om godkänt resultat från allmän kurs på grundskolenivå från folkhögskola*)		2
1	• Final grades from compulsory school for pupils with learning disabilities (*Slutbetyg från grundsärskolan*) • Final grades from special education for adults at compulsory level (*Slutbetyg från särskild utbildning* för *vuxna på grundläggande nivå*)		1

* The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

** The Swedish Defence University.

*** These qualifications are added to the table for comparability reasons.

Source: Adapted from the SeQF website (2020): https://www.seqf.se/

Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework	NQF	national qualifications framework
NAHVE	National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (Myndigheten for Yrkeshögskolan)	SeQF	Swedish qualifications framework
		VET	vocational education and training
		VPL	validation of prior learning
NCP	national coordination point		

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SWITZERLAND

Introduction and context

Switzerland is 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 the second highest (56.1% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 40.3); employment of recent graduates at 87.9% in 2019 exceeds the EU average of 80.9%; adult participation in learning was 32.3% in 2019, also one of the highest in Europe; and early leaving from education is among the lowest (4.4% in 2019), well below the EU average of 10.2% (European Commission, 2020).

In the global PISA education ranking in reading, mathematics and science, the Swiss 15-year-olds' underachievement in mathematics and science is well below the EU average and close to EU average in reading (OECD, 2018).

Swiss vocational and professional qualifications, also referred to as vocational and professional education and training (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 (SERI, 2020). 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 for higher education – Qualifikationsrahmen für den schweizerischen Hochschulbereich (NQR-CH-HS/NQF CH-HS)[1351] in line with the Bologna framework. A national qualification framework (NQF) for vocational and professional qualifications – Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen für Abschlüsse der Berufsbildung (NQR-CH-BB/NQF-VPQ)[1352] – was adopted on 27 August 2014[1353] and put in force from 1 October 2014. 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).

Policy objectives

The NQF-VPQ aims to improve transparency and comparability of Swiss vocational and professional qualifications. More specific objectives (SERI, 2015, p. 33) are to:
a. map the Swiss VPQ system adequately and thus improve the transparency, clarity and comparability of Swiss vocational and professional qualifications in relation to European ones;
b. promote equal recognition and valuing of vocational and professional education and training in society in comparison with academic qualifications;
c. 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;
d. strengthen, as part of an overall strategy, the recognition of Swiss higher vocational and professional education and training;

1351. NQF CH-HS

1352. Also referred to in English as NQF-VPET.

1353. Government of Switzerland (2014). *Verordnung überden nationalen Qualifikationsrahmen für Abschlüsse der Berufsbildung V-NQR-BB* [*Regulation on the NQF for VET qualifications*]. https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20140910/index.html

e. improve the opportunities for Swiss-educated professionals to get jobs abroad and so increase overall mobility.

There have been no changes to the function and policy objectives since 2018 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The level descriptors of the NQF-VPQ reflect the competence approach[1354] already in use in Swiss vocational and professional education and training. The main elements of the descriptors are presented in Table 81.

Table 81. The main elements of the descriptors in Swiss NQF

Knowledge	Knowledge
	Understanding
Skills	Procedural skills
	Sensorimotor skills
Competences	Professional competences
	Personal competences: • autonomy • social competences • leadership competences

Sources: SERI, 2015; Swiss Government, 2014.

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-VPQ 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-VPQ; university qualifications are assigned to the NQF CH-HS[1355].

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 VET qualification is not described in competences it must have undergone revision before it can be assigned an NQF-VPQ 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.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Swiss NQF-VPQ is legally embedded in the Ordinance on the NQF-VPET qualifications, in force from 1 October 2014[1356]. The responsibilities of bodies involved in referencing and implementing the framework are clearly defined in Annex 6.3 of that ordinance and the explanatory note to the ordinance[1357].

1354. Two models are commonly used in Switzerland to structure competence-oriented documents: competence-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).

1355. It includes diplomas from cantonal universities, federal institutes of technology, universities of applied sciences, universities of teacher education and other specialised institutions.

1356. https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/201
40910/201410010000/412.105.1.pdf

1357. *Erläuterungsbericht*

The Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), is in charge of implementation of the NQF-VPQ. 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-VPQ. It provides all necessary information to awarding bodies and other stakeholders and assists in the assignment of qualifications. Guidelines[1358] on the NQF-VPQ (SERI, 2015, Annex 4) have been developed, that describe in detail individual steps and responsibilities in relation to the assignment of qualifications to the NQF-VPQ.

The Swiss federal institute for initial and continuing 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-VPQ.

There are no plans to change the scope of the NQF or the relevant procedures, at the moment.

Quality assurance of VPET 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[1359]

The organisation and decision-making responsibilities in the Swiss education system are complex and translate into a variety of approaches and projects in the field of validation. Nevertheless, 'essentially, validation procedures are integrated within each education and training sector' (Salini et al., 2019, p. 4). 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.

If someone already has certain occupation-specific competences before starting a VET programme, they can prove them; they must be appropriately credited as already acquired educational achievements. This recognition process must be completed before the start of the VET programme as it has influence on the possible pathways to a VET qualification. Once the educational achievement has been awarded, the candidate must complete a 'qualification procedure' taking examinations. The recognition of educational achievements is regulated in VET legislation and is available for all VET programmes.

In VET it is also possible to take part in the validation procedure, in which candidates prove that they have all the required competences. At the end of this procedure, candidates are awarded a vocational qualification without having taken a final examination. The validation procedure includes five phases: information and advising, self-evaluation, assessment, accreditation (or partial certification) and certification. The validation of educational achievements is available in VET programmes that show a corresponding need, for which the body responsible has formulated a regulation and implementing provisions recognised by the SERI. A total of 22 IVET qualifications (out of 230 different occupations in IVET) are accessible through validation, in various Swiss cantons, although the possibility of validation varies from canton to canton, as each decides on which IVET diplomas can be offered by in this way.

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.

NQF implementation and impact

Switzerland has established two sectoral qualifications frameworks: one encompassing vocational and professional education (NQF-VPQ) and a separate one for qualifications in Swiss higher education (NQF CH-HS). The alignment of the two national qualifications frameworks to the respective overarching European qualifications framework

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1358. Guidelines in German, Italian and French available at https://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/education/mobility/nqf-vpet/das-vorgehen-zur-einstufung.html

1359. This section draws on input from SERI (2020) and Salini et al. (2019).

indirectly makes their systemic complementarity transparent (SERI, 2015).

The NQF-VPQ can be considered to have reached operational stage, given that a significant proportion of existing vocational and professional qualifications, have been included.

At the start of NQF-VPQ implementation, single qualifications were assigned NQF-VPQ 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 seeking individualised referencing of qualifications[1360]. For simplified assignment of levels, qualifications are assigned according to a standard level for a type of qualification, proposed by SERI[1361]. 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 one might be assigned higher levels within the NQF-VPQ. 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.

SERI maintains a list of qualifications that have been referenced to the NQF-VPQ. It updates this list twice each year, in January and July. The assigned NQF-VPQ reference level of a given qualification becomes official as soon as it has been added to this list.

A total of 498 of roughly 740 formal vocational and professional qualifications have been attributed levels; 206 initial VET qualifications distributed to levels 3 and 4; 10 initial VET qualifications at level 5; 274 tertiary professional qualifications, at levels 5 to 7; and three at level 8[1362] (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The process is expected to continue. Continuing vocational education and training (CVET) is not integrated into the NQF-VPQ (Salini et al., 2019).

The NQF-VPQ plays an important transparency role. The classification of qualifications did not imply any change in Swiss vocational education and training. In the same vein, validation of non-formal and informal learning and the links to the NQF-VPQ 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[1363]. NQF and EQF levels are indicated on Europass supplements for VET and tertiary professional qualifications[1364]. Learning outcomes are described in the supplements available for download in the register for all qualifications included in the NQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Tools have been developed for professional organisations wishing to include their qualifications[1365]. Accordingly, the NQF-VPQ has been promoted mostly though professional organisations and sectors.

Referencing to the EQF

The NQF-VPQ was referenced to the EQF in May 2015. Table 82 shows the approximate alignment of EQF and NQF-VPQ levels and how different types of qualifications fit into the framework.

1360. NQF-VPQ referencing process
1361. SERI proposes a standard reference level for each type of a 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.
1362. List of referenced VPQ qualifications updated July 2020 can be found here.

1363. https://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz
1364. https://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/education/mobility/nqf-vpet.html
1365. https://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/education/mobility/nqf-vpet/das-vorgehen-zur-einstufung.html

Table 82. Swiss qualifications framework for vocational and professional qualifications (NQF VPQ)

NQF VPQ LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS
8	• Advanced federal diploma of higher education (tertiary federal examination) • Eidgenössisches Diplom (Höhere Fachprüfung)	8
7	• Advanced federal diploma of higher education (tertiary federal examination) • Eidgenössisches Diplom (Höhere Fachprüfung)	7
6	• Advanced federal diploma of higher education (*) (tertiary federal examination) • Eidgenössisches Diplom (Höhere Fachprüfung) • Advanced federal diploma of higher education issued by a college of higher education* • Diplom HF ausgestellt von einer Höheren Fachschule • Federal diploma of higher education (tertiary federal examination) • Eidgenössischer Fachausweis (Berufsprüfung)	6
5	• Federal diploma of higher education* (tertiary federal examination) • Eidgenössischer Fachausweis (Berufsprüfung) • Federal VET diploma (three- or four-year dual VET programmes) • Eidgenössisches Fähigkeitszeugnis (drei-und vierjährige duale Berufsbildung)	5
4	• Federal VET diploma* (three- or four-year dual VET programmes) • Eidgenössisches Fähigkeitszeugnis (drei-und vierjährige duale Berufsbildung)	4
3	• Federal VET certificate (two-year VET programmes)* • Eidgenössisches Berufsattest (zweijährige duale Berufsausbildung)	3
2		2
1		1

* Standard level for this type of a qualification.

Source: SERI

Abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
NQR-CH-BB/	
NQF-VPQ	*Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen für Abschlüsse der Berufsbildung* [national qualifications framework for vocational and professional education and training]
NQR CH-HS/	
NQF CH-HS	*Qualifikationsrahmen für den schweizerischen Hochschulbereich* [qualifications framework for the Swiss higher education area]

VPET	vocational and professional education and training
SERI	*Staatssekretariat* für *Bildung, Forschung und Innovation* [State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation]

Main sources of information

State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) acts as EQF NCP: https://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home.html

NQF VPQ website: https://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/education/mobility/nqf-vpet.html

List of assigned vocational and professional qualifications: https://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/bildung/mobilitaet/nqf-vpet/das-verzeichnis-der-eingestuften-abschluesse.html

A database of all State-recognised occupations and professions (available in German, French and Italian): https://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz

Swiss EQF referencing report (SERI (2015): https://europa.eu/europass/en/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf

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Prepared by

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

TÜRKIYE

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

Turkey adopted its NQF in 2015. The TQF has eight levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications and certificates.

The Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA), the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) jointly developed and are implementing the framework.

Turkey is a member of the EQF Advisory Group and participates in the European higher education area (the Bologna process). The framework was referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and self-certified to the framework of qualifications for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2017.

Implementation structures, main working methods and instruments are established and the TQF is a reference point for the use of learning outcomes, for the continuous revision and renewal of qualifications, and the allocation of qualifications to levels. There are nearly 29,000 qualifications, the great majority outcomes-based, already placed in the TQF Database. Inclusion of qualifications in the TQF itself started in 2020[1366].

The implementation of the TQF is progressing at different speeds in the different subsectors of the qualifications system, so that while some aspects of the TQF such as the levels, level descriptors, learning outcomes and quality assurance approaches are operational, the TQF overall is in the activation stage.

Policy context

Turkey signed an Association Agreement with the EU in 1964 and a customs union was established in 1995. The European Council granted Turkey candidate country status in 1999, leading to

the opening of accession negotiations in 2005. However, the EU has now paused Turkey's accession negotiations.

In the economy, after a sustained boom e.g. growth rates of GDP 8.5% in 2010 and 6% in 2015, growth has dropped dramatically e.g. to 0.9% in 2019.

Employment rates are lower than for most OECD countries, 45.7% for those aged 15 and upwards in 2019. Unemployment remains high – in 2019, it stood at 13.7% for the 15 and up population.

Turkey's Economic Reform Programme 2020–2022 specifies measures for VET reform, notably updating curricula, including digital content. The Education Vision 2030 strategy aims to raise the VET sector's performance by measures including establishing new centres of excellence, enhance VET's responsiveness to support innovation, modernising teacher training and increasing access and inclusiveness.

Almost half of students at upper secondary attend vocational education.

COVID 19 compelled the government to close all schools, including VET institutions, in March 2020. Distance learning and academic, pedagogical, and psychological support were made available via online teaching, radio, television, and other media. Assessments were carried out through online exams or projects. However, as in other countries, the pandemic also exposed inequities in the Turkish education system, including in access to broadband for online education, the supportive environments needed to focus on learning and the wider misalignment between resources and needs.

An issue of direct relevance to the TQF is the presence of circa 3.6 million Syrian refugees, whom the authorities are seeking to integrate into local society. Their successful settlement in part depends

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1366. Turkey Qualifications Database https://tyc.gov.tr/yeterlilikarama

on their absorption into the workforce, that in turn requiring, among other measures, Turkey's adapting and applying effective recognition and validation practices.

NQF legal basis
The TQF was formally established by the "*Regulation on the Procedures and Principles on the Implementation of the Turkish Qualifications Framework*," adopted by the Council of Ministers via Decision 2015/8213, and published in the Official Journal of 19 November 2015.

A second key legal act is the "Regulation *on the Quality Assurance of Qualifications to be included in the TQF*," adopted in 2018.

Some institutional arrangements predate the TQF legislation. The Vocational Qualifications Authority Law no 5544 (2006) was amended in 2011 to adapt it to NQF developments, notably designating VQA the responsible body for developing and maintaining the NQF.

Quality assurance of qualifications and consistency in the use of the TQF and the placement of qualifications in the framework are key objectives of recent legislation[1367]. A number of legislative arrangements were in the approval process at the time of writing, reflecting new developments.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms
The Ministry of National Education's Strategic Plan (2015–19), the Vocational and Technical

Education Strategy Paper and Action Plan (2014–18), the National Lifelong Learning Strategy (2014–18) and the National Employment Strategy of

Turkey (2014–23) comprise the framework within which Turkey pursues VET reform, including the implementation of the TQF.

The Employment Strategy and its Action Plan[1368] attribute a core role to the Turkish Qualifications Framework in strengthening the link between education and employment and the quality of the VET system.

Turkey's lifelong learning strategy and Action Plan (2014-2018) paid particular attention to improving access to lifelong learning beyond the formal education system and promoted Validation of NonFormal and Informal Learning (VNFIL). However, there is not yet a new strategy for lifelong learning, while Education Vision 2023 does not allocate much space to lifelong learning.

Aims of the NQF
The TQF has been designed as a single integrated structure for the classification of qualifications. It includes all quality-assured qualifications achieved through all education and training programmes including primary, secondary, and higher education, special needs education and continuing training. It also recognises outcomes achieved through experience in the workplace or other non-formal and informal environments.

The TQF's objectives are to:
- provide a clear and consistent means of describing, classifying and comparing qualifications;
- provide one integrated framework including all quality-assured qualifications (achieved in general, vocational and academic education and training programmes and in other learning environments);
- improve qualifications continuously so that the system can provide appropriate recognition of qualifications achieved in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts;
- contribute to training so that individuals are employable and equipped with defined and measurable qualifications, and so help reduce unemployment;
- strengthen institutional cooperation among all parties, primarily awarding bodies, industry and social partners;
- provide a benchmark for recognition in Turkey of foreign qualifications and for recognition of Turkish qualifications abroad and serve as an instrument of comparison.

1367. Regulation on the Quality Assurance of Qualifications to Be Included in the Turkish Qualifications Framework has been published in the Official Journal on 25 March 2018 http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/the-regulation-on-thequality-assurance-of-qualifications-to-be-included-in-the-turkish-qualifications-framework-i18.html; The Principles and Procedures for the Inclusion of Qualifications into the Turkish Qualifications Framework has been approved on 28 November 2019; http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/the-principles-and-procedures-for-the-inclusion-ofqualifications-into-the-turkish-qualifications-framework-i80.html ; The Principles and Procedures for objections to decisions relating to TQF http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/turkiye-yeterlilikler-cercevesinin-uygulanmasina-iliskinverilen-kararlar-hakkinda-yapilacak-itirazlarda-izlenecek-usul-ve-esaslar-i66.html Procedures and Principles for Use of TQF Logo http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/turkiye-yeterlilikler-cercevesi-logosunun-kullanimina-iliskin-usul-veesaslar-i65.html

1368. http://www.uis.gov.tr/Media/Books/UIS-en.pdf

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure

The TQF has 8 levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications and certification. Its level descriptors are described in terms of learning outcomes and use the domains Knowledge, Skills and Competence.

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.

Skill is defined as "utilisation of knowledge" and "problem solving", which requires the ability to use logical, intuitive, and creative thinking and dexterity, methods, materials, tools, and instruments acquired in an area of work or learning.

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.

The TQF primarily includes:
- qualifications awarded under the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), spanning its respective Directorates for Basic Education, Special Education and Guidance Services, Secondary Education, Vocational and Technical Education, Lifelong Learning, and Religious Education;
- qualifications awarded under the mandate of the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) by the 239 authorized certification bodies (frequently called by their acronym ACBs);
- higher education qualifications awarded under the coordination and supervision of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE).

In time, the TQF will include other qualifications awarded under the mandate of certain responsible institutions. Currently, the TQF database includes 51 other qualifications types which are not yet formally included in the TQF i.e. many qualifications are developed and used but not counted for the NQF. Currently this figure of qualifications in the database but not in the NQF approaches 29,000.

The inclusion of micro-credentials has not been proposed yet.

Types of qualifications

Qualification types enable the categorisation of different qualifications which are placed at the same level but differ significantly in terms of their functions, learning outcomes, volume and/or orientations.

An example of a qualification type is the Level 5 Associate Degree, offered in post-secondary or higher VET, where Turkey has significant provision. Universities and colleges (MYOs) offer Level 5 Associate Degrees, which may be academic or more vocational in orientation. These fall within the remit of the Council of Higher Education.

Another qualification type at Level 5 is the Vocational Qualification Certificate, awarded by the industry-linked authorised certification bodies.

A type at Level 4 is the Vocational Upper Secondary Education Diploma, usually awarded to students on successful performance after four years at upper secondary vocational or technical high school, or sometimes at vocational education centres, multi-programme high schools and private vocational schools.

The Mastery Certificate is awarded to those successfully completing an apprenticeship programme. The Skilled Worker Certificate also appears at Level 4.

There are several qualification types in the TQF which were updated recently after discussions with the responsible bodies. Types have been identified with qualification type descriptors[1369]. The interpretation of them is ongoing.

Quality assurance of qualifications

All qualifications that are part of the TQF must be quality-assured and expressed in learning outcomes.

In 2018, the "Regulation on the Quality Assurance of Qualifications to be Included in the TQF[1370] was adopted. It stipulates that quality assurance systems shall meet the following criteria:
a. a qualification form is prepared and approved.
b. valid and reliable assessment and evaluation process is carried out;
c. certification processes are conducted in a transparent and impartial way;
d. processes related to the qualifications are subject to self-assessment and external evaluation;
e. units, teams or bodies conducting the external evaluation are subject to regular review;

1369. https://tyc.gov.tr/yayinlar?kategoriId=17ea6ce7-8885-4f2d-aaa4-174a0833a09c&search=
1370. https://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/the-regulation-on-the-quality-assurance-of-qualifications-to-be-included-in-theturkish-qualifications-framework-i18.html

f. improvement activities are carried out in the light of the findings of self-assessment and external evaluation;

g. involvement of stakeholders is maintained in the processes related to the qualifications;

h. processes related to qualifications are implemented based on explicit and measurable objectives, criteria and guidelines;

i. allocation of sufficient and appropriate resources for all processes are maintained;

j. feedback mechanisms are established and implemented;

k. electronic accessibility to the outcomes of all processes is maintained.

The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is responsible for development of qualifications under its mandate. MoNE has launched a curriculum reform in secondary education, for both general and vocational and technical schools. Vocational curricula are modularised and MoNE has a database of more than 3,500 modules that are also used for the licensing and certification of adult learning.

Although curricula are advanced, most initial vocational qualifications are not yet utilized and fully learning outcomes-based. Modules based on learning outcomes are used for learning, but they are not separately assessed and often lack an assessment component.

VQA accredits the authorised certification bodies (ACBs), which conduct assessment, evaluation and certification of candidates for the Vocational Qualification Certificate type mentioned above. These ACBs are first accredited by Türkak, the Turkish accreditation agency that deals with accrediting conformity with international industry and service standards, using the ISO 17024 standard on personnel certification.

The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) coordinates and supervises 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.

Use of Learning Outcomes and standards
Learning outcomes are the underpinning principle of the TQF. According to the TQF regulation, the TQF must ensure that qualifications are designed based on learning outcomes to make qualifications transparent and comparable.

Modules of the VET training programmes of MoNE are all defined by learning outcomes. However, MoNE VET programmes do not have yet separate qualification specifications defined by learning outcomes. This situation has created a challenge in populating the Qualifications Database with qualifications.

VQA is the competent authority for preparing national occupational standards and national qualifications. Qualifications under VQA's mandate are based on occupational standards and learning outcomes.

General education qualifications developed under MoNE's mandate are not always defined by learning outcomes.

In higher education, all qualifications are based on learning outcomes. There are precise outcome statements for specific programmes types by level and academic or professional orientation in the Turkish Qualifications Database.

Credit systems
A credit system should support TQF aims of facilitating learner access to, and progress between, qualifications by using credit-rated learning outcomes to compare and link qualifications and transfer outcomes.

Turkey seeks to apply both the European systems, ECTS in HE and ECVET for VET.

ECTS is used in higher education in accordance with the principles of the ECTS Users' guide[1371].

Turkey also has actively explored the possibilities of ECVET.

The TQF Council proposes an evaluation and credit system associated with workload that will allow credit 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 1500 - 1800 hours. This approach complies with both ECTS and ECVET. The regulating bodies will determine the credit range of the qualification types and the credit values of the qualifications.

Although the principles and procedures for the credit transfer systems were planned to be developed by mid-2019, they have not been published yet. The withdrawal of the ECVET recommendation regarding the use of ECVET points

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1371. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/ehea_bologna_2020.pdf

may require Turkey to reposition its own approach to allocation of credits.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The Ministry of National Education initiated the TQF's development in 2005, responding to the first EQF consultation. Since the VQA was established, it has managed and coordinated the framework, cooperating most closely with the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education.

Each of these three entities is responsible for the quality assurance of the qualifications under its authority.

For higher education, the Turkish Higher Education Quality Council of Turkey (THEQC) was founded in 2015 as a public legal entity with administrative and financial autonomy, with the aim of evaluating the quality levels of higher education institutions' education and research activities and administrative services in accordance with the national and international quality standards. THEQC is actively using the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) in HE. TQF Quality Assurance Criteria are fully compatible with the ESG and EQF Quality Assurance Principles.

Quality assurance for qualifications outside the scope of MoNE, CoHE, higher education institutions and VQA responsibility will be ensured by the other institutions and organizations specified in related legislation.

There are two bodies which oversee and determine implementation of the TQF, the TQF Coordination Council and the TQF Council. VQA houses the TQF Secretariat that supports both councils.

The TQF Coordination Council is the highest decision-making body. It consists of the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of National Education, the President of the Council of Higher Education, and the Director of the Vocational Qualifications Authority. The TQF Coordination Council evaluates and approves proposals for procedures, principles, and decisions submitted by the TQF Council.

The TQF Council is a technical body which consists of twenty-two members, including:
- 5 members from MoNE, all of whom are heads of the Ministry's Directorates;

- 4 members assigned from CoHE, one Executive Board member, one university dean by rotation, two THEQC board members, and one member representing the National Student Council;
- 3 members from VQA, one of whom is the vice president;
- 1 member from the Union of Chambers and Exchange Commodities of Turkey;
- 1 member from the Confederation of Turkish Tradesmen and Craftsmen;
- 1 member each from the three largest confederations of trades unions;
- 1 member each from the education unions within the trade union confederations;
- 1 member from the largest employers' confederation.

The TQF Council prepares the action plans for TQF implementation and a communication strategy to raise awareness about the TQF. It prepares principles, procedures, and criteria for issues such as quality assurance of the TQF, the Qualifications Database, progress routes, credit accumulation and transfer, validation of non-formal and informal learning, updating, modification and withdrawal of qualifications.

The Turkish Qualifications Framework Department within MoNE has acted as the TQF Secretariat since 2016, in line with the Vocational Qualifications Authority act. The Secretariat comprises the

head of unit, four experts and a secretary, who are VQA staff. The staff of the Secretariat is supported by temporary national and international experts.

The Secretariat:
- assists the technical and administrative tasks of the Coordination Council and TQF Council;
- drafts action plans, annual work plans and activity reports under the management of the Council;
- ensures the implementation of the communication strategy;
- develops and maintains the Qualifications Database;
- prepares or performs background research, draft procedures;
- carries out other tasks requested by the Chairman of the Council.

According to the TQF Regulation, a TQF Consultation Committee with broad participation of relevant stakeholders should convene annually as a negotiation platform to evaluate the issues regarding the TQF and for stakeholders to present their views. The members of the TQF Consultation Committee are identified and invited by the TQF Council.

The Committee has met once to date, at Ankara in late 2019, with the participation of more than 100 representatives from ministries, public institutions, professional organizations, trade unions and nongovernmental organizations. Due to the COVID 19, crisis the meeting planned for 2020 was postponed.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

Labour market stakeholders i.e. employers, trade unions, and employment services, have a strong representation in TQF management structures. They play an active role in all TQF activities and participate in all decision-making processes and have contributed to setting the criteria for the inclusion of qualifications in the TQF and other quality assurance criteria.

However, the use of the TQF by labour market stakeholders can be strengthened further, particularly at grassroots levels. Turkey has a system of sectoral committees[1372] that play an important role in the national vocational qualifications system under VQA. Sectoral committees perform tasks related to development and maintenance of occupational standards and qualifications for their sector. Sectoral committees are tripartite structures with state, employer, and trades unions representation.

Education and training institutions and providers are developing or updating their quality assurance mechanisms in line with the TQF Quality Assurance criteria. They are also updating existing curricula based on the TQF Level Descriptors and TQF Qualification Type Specifications. Moreover, they are developing mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in line with the TQF.

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

VNFIL arrangements

The TQF Regulation includes provision for Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL), stipulating that all qualifications included in the TQF can be obtained through VNFIL. Learners should be able to use validation of non-formal and informal learning to access programmes, sit exams, obtain exemptions, obtain certification of units, and accumulate and transfer credits.

VNFIL legislation has been updated, notably the October 2017 regulation on principles and implementation of VNFIL, regarding accreditation,

measurement and evaluation, and the March 2018 revisions to the regulation on secondary education, which allows for use of validation in the sector.

The 2014-2018 Lifelong Learning Strategy Document promoted extensive use of VNFIL, including via EU projects. A new lifelong learning project is planned to start in 2021. Piloting is also advancing through Erasmus projects such as the EQF-oriented assessment tools for prior learning in adult education, coordinated by the Çorum Public Education Centre.

In January 2019, VQA published a Turkish version of the European Guidelines on validation[1373]. VQA plans to develop a procedure for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in line with the TQF regulation by the end of 2021. The responsible bodies - VQA, MoNE and the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) - will be responsible for applying these general principles and procedures for the qualifications within their respective remits.

VQA has organized and supported the implementation of a VNFIL system to award national vocational qualifications to adults; the ACBs conduct the assessment, evaluation, and certification of such candidates. The involvement in VNFIL of stakeholders such as employer organisations, through their presence in the ACBs, has created visibility and trust in the VQA qualifications and the validation process.

Validation has been given a huge quantitative boost by the law *requiring* certification for 143 designated occupations. More than 1.3 million certificates have been issued thus far, of which 1.2 million have been awarded for qualifications in occupations defined hazardous[1374]. However, this use of validation as a compulsory measure differentiates Turkish practice from the generally voluntary European approach to VNFIL, in which it is the learner who initiates the process and seeks certification or other validation[1375].

Despite the huge number of people certified so far, female participation in validation is only 2%[1376]. This is because most validation has been of workers employed in the 143 occupations defined in the regulation, which are male-dominated. Steps to

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1372. http://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/tr/sektor-komiteleri

1373. http://tyc.gov.tr/indir/yaygin-ve-serbest-ogrenmelerin-dogrulanmasi-rehberi-i22.html

1374. https://portal.myk.gov.tr/index.php?option=com_istatistik

1375. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/etv/Information_resources/EuropeanInventory/publications/EC_common_p rinciples_validation_20040303.pdf

1376. https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Turkey.pdf

improve access for women, and other categories such as migrants, are being taken by VQA, the ACBs and MONE, which are developing new validation arrangements.

As indicated above, MoNE Department of Lifelong Learning has established a database of modular programmes to support non-formal learning, which are also used for the certification of adult learning[1377]. Ensuring that these modularized programmes are obtainable through validation will widen the possibilities for lifelong learning, as it will allow for recognizing part qualifications.

VNFIL was legally introduced to the Turkish higher education system in 2011 but there has been only slow progress in that sector. To realise a fully national system for VNFIL, CoHE is expected to align with the initiatives pursued by the VQA and MoNE.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
VQA qualifications are all based on occupational standards and expressed in learning outcomes and are subject to a levelling process, in accordance with the TQF level descriptors.

However, there is not a common approach between those VET qualifications issued under MoNE, higher education qualifications and national vocational qualifications. Some qualifications are described in detail, while others are described more broadly. The next step is development of a common approach.

Almost all qualifications awarded in Turkey appear in the vast TQF Qualifications Database. Numbers currently included in the NQF itself remain small. This is because currently the TQF Council is required to conduct the labourious process of verifying every single qualification to ensure it meets requirements. The Council acknowledges the bottleneck and is looking for a more practical way to evaluate the inclusion of individual qualifications.

The inclusion of qualifications in the TQF is also important for the indication of TQF and EQF levels on new certificates and diplomas. TQF and/or EQF levels are already indicated on the Europass supplements.

Vocational curricula are modularised, and the Ministry of National Education has a database of approximately 3,500 modules that are also used for the certification of adult learning. It is, however,

important to ensure modular approaches are extended to validating all formal qualifications.

Qualifications registers and databases
As of early 2021, the TQF database http://portal.tyc.gov.tr contains almost 29,000 entries of which:
- 27,373 are HE qualifications covering Levels 5-8;
- 930 are qualifications issued by the Ministry of National Education, covering Levels 1-4;
- 511 are national vocational qualifications issued under the responsibility of VQA, covering Levels 2-6; these span 27 sectors.

The NQF and EQF Levels of qualifications are provisionally indicated in the database.

The TQF Database does not record any associate degrees, which are at Level 5, whereas many bachelor's and master's degrees are included. There are, however, 92 national vocational qualifications at Level 5, and 27 at Level 6, lodged in the database.

The Database already offers plenty of information on qualifications to end users. Individual users can contact VQA directly with queries. The database is compatible with the Annex VI of the EQF Recommendation, as it has been developed through EU grants.

Career information and guidance
Use of guidance and counselling to support learners and jobseekers in navigating curricula and qualifications available is one aspect to be strengthened in the education and employment sectors.

Recognition of foreign qualifications

Turkey has a functioning system for the assessment and recognition of foreign academic qualifications at associate degree, and bachelor's and master's levels, which is supported by legislation and in line with the Lisbon Convention. The Equivalence Office of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) deals with recognition and equivalence requests in these degrees. The TQF is used for the recognition of foreign qualifications by the responsible bodies such as ENIC-NARIC Turkey and MoNE.

Pursuing a craft profession in Turkey requires a master certificate. Foreigners can establish a business or work as an employee if the equivalence of their certificate is recognised by the Ministry of Education[1378]. VQA is responsible for the confirmation of the authenticity of vocational

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1377. http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/modulerprogramlar/

1378. See Law N° 3308 on vocational training (as amended by Law No 4702).

qualifications held by foreigners who are seeking to work in Turkey.

Many professions in Turkey are regulated. Requirements to pursue a regulated profession are defined in different laws. The Turkish Council of Higher Education adopted a Regulation on the Harmonisation of the Minimum Training Requirements for the seven regulated professions stipulated by the EUDirective 2013/55. The General System under the European Directive 2013/55 may be important as well for other regulated professions that are regulated in the EU member states and those that require a VQA certificate to practise. This issue has not been addressed yet.

Referencing to regional frameworks/other frameworks

Turkey is an EU Candidate Country, a member of the EQF Advisory Group and participates in the Bologna process in higher education. It simultaneously referenced the TQF to the EQF and selfcertified against the Bologna framework in 2017. It will present an updated referencing report in 2021 to reflect progress in the TQF's implementation.

Turkey is at an advanced stage in implementing the Bologna Process.

International cooperation
Turkey participates in the Riga Process of cooperation in VET among EU, EEA, and Candidate Countries. It has progressed since 2015 on the Riga medium-term deliverables (MTDs) in the priority areas of work-based learning, quality assurance, access to VET, qualifications, key competences, and teacher professional development.

In quality assurance, the Turkish Higher Education Quality Council of Turkey joined ENQA in 2020.

The Council of Higher Education represents Turkey in ENIC-NARIC networks.

International donor support
The EU, UN agencies and World Bank have all been significant actors in Turkey in recent years, notably in assisting in efforts to support the Syrian refugees located in Gaziantep.

The UNHCR and the ILO piloted validation for Syrian refugees in different occupations in cooperation with the Gaziantep Chambers of Commerce. In 2017, ETF cooperated with the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in developing a tool to guide local services in

recognition of Syrian qualifications and validation of their skills for formal certification.

Important lessons and future plans

VQA assesses that the TQF is in its activation stage, but in many aspects, it is already operational.[1379] That almost 28,000 qualifications are outcomes-based and already placed in the TQF database tells a positive story. At the same time, an efficient mechanism needs to be developed to accelerate verification which allows qualifications in the database to be approved for entering the NQF. Current procedures appear ponderous.

Turkey is an active player in the EQF, in the Riga Process in VET, in the Bologna Process in HE, and in related EU and international projects.

VQA drives the TQF forward, and there is genuine co-ownership with MoNE and CoHE.

Distinguishing the TQF from many other counterparts, the governing structures such as the TQF Council and the TQF Consultation Committee ensure a stronger stakeholder, especially employer, say in the TQF's running.

However, there are many thousands of providers, non-governmental organisations, and companies in Turkey and it is a challenge to reach all of them. More generally, it would be useful to support all the TQF's intended beneficiaries i.e. individual learners, parents, job seekers and workers, providers, and companies in the practical use of the TQF and the EQF, via making strong links between the framework and information, guidance and counselling services.

While almost all qualifications are described in learning outcomes, there is not a common approach between VET qualifications issued under MoNE, higher education qualifications and national vocational qualifications.

In quality assurance there are tensions between, on the one hand, quality control for conformity, and on the other, quality enhancement, among different actors in the education and training and qualifications systems. Principles such as self-assessment and external evaluation are still new to some actors in Turkey. Different expectations could create difficulties and/or delays in reforming the

1379. Qualification frameworks and their development stages, Cedefop & ETF, 2020. Presented in the 54th EQF AG Meeting.

existing quality assurance systems in line with the TQF quality assurance principles.

Lifelong learning is gaining importance in Turkey. The country would benefit from a longer-term vision and strategy in adult learning, which could be much more prominently positioned within a wider LLL strategy and the Education Vision 2023. More attention to adult learning will require new means of recognition that go beyond the current set of qualifications in the TQF.

Critical for an inclusive system promoting lifelong learning is wider implementation of validation, including in higher education, where progress is slower than in VET.

There is not yet an integrated credit and qualifications system.

One looming issue is the burden on VQA. The institutional arrangements for the TQF have been very much focused on the Authority. Yet the people inside the VQA tasked with coordinating the framework's implementation are few for the scale of the work in front of them, which comprises managing an expanding qualifications system. The numbers of authorised certification bodies, providers and qualifications is increasing. Existing or forthcoming relevant regulations, which specify compulsory certification for certain occupations and validation of certain qualifications, will add to this volume.

It is also time to start monitoring and evaluating the impact of the TQF, even if it is not yet fully operational.

Infographic of the NQF

Figure 31. Qualification types and levels of Turkish qualifications framework and responsible bodies
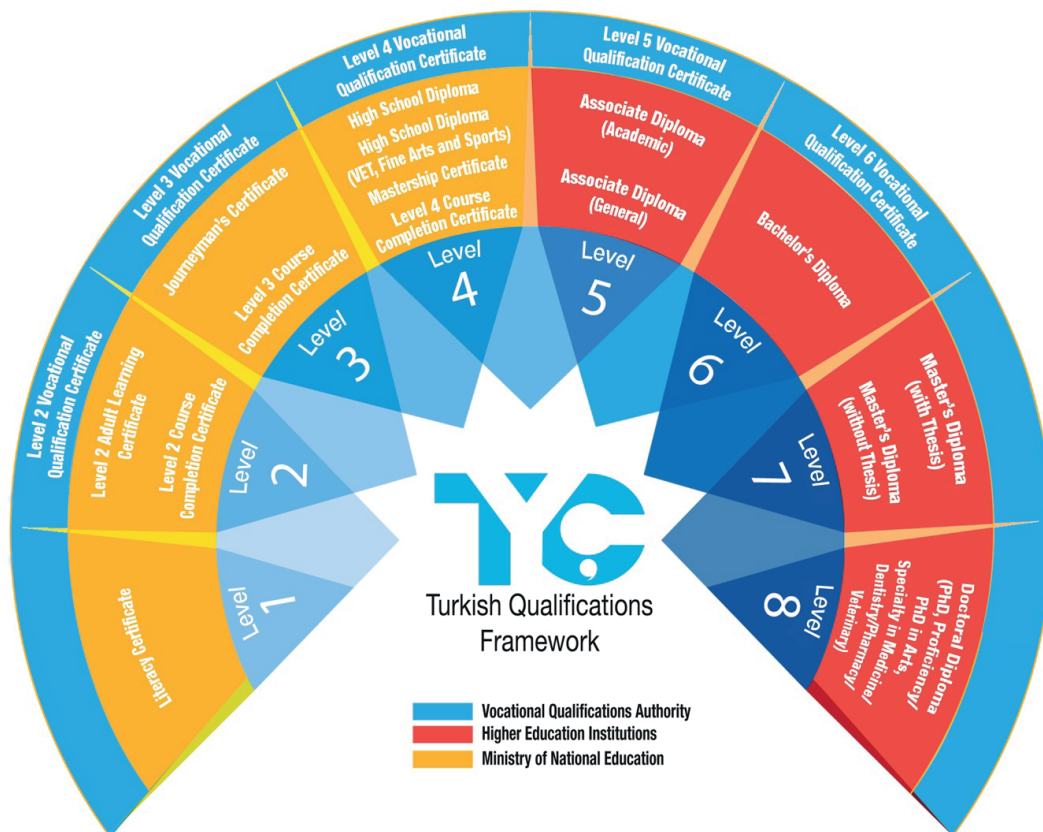
Source: Vocational Qualifications Authority.

Table 83. Turkish National Qualifications Framework (TQF)

TQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES AWARDED IN FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM	NVQ	EQF LEVELS
8	• Doctoral diploma • (PhD, proficiency in arts, specialty in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, veterinary)		8
7	• Master's diploma (with thesis) • Master's diploma (without thesis)		7
6	• Bachelor's diploma	Level 6 vocational qualification certificate	6
5	• Associate diploma (academic) Associate diploma (general)	Level 5 vocational qualification certificate	5
4	• High school diploma • High school diploma (VET, fine arts and sports) • Mastership certificate • Level 4 course completion certificate	Level 4 vocational qualification certificate	4
3	• Journeyman's certificate • Level 3 course completion certificate	Level 3 vocational qualification certificate	3
2	• Level 2 adult learning certificate • Level 2 course completion certificate	Level 2 vocational qualification certificate	2
1	• Literacy certificate		1

Source: European Training Foundation, 2020.

Abbreviations

ACBs	Authorised Certification Bodies	ISCO	International standard classification of occupations
CoHE	Council of Higher Education		
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System	NQF	National Qualifications Framework
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	QF-EHEA	Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area
EQF	European Qualifications Framework	THEQC	Turkish Higher Education Quality Council of Turkey
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training	TQF	Turkish Qualifications Framework
ISCED	International standard classification of education	VQA	Vocational Qualifications Authority

The VQA is the EQF NCP: https://www.myk.gov.tr/

The TQF and EQF website: https://www.tyc.gov.tr/

TQF database: https://portal.tyc.gov.tr/

EQF referencing report: https://tyc.gov.tr/trr.pdf

Qualifications framework for higher education, information about programmes: http://www.tyyc.yok.gov.tr/

Guideline on learning outcomes http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tyc-ogrenme-kazanimlari-rehberi-i85.html

Turkish version of EQF Note 4 on learning outcomes http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/ogrenme-kazanimlariyaklasimi-i20.html

Quality Assurance Handbook http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tqf-quality-assurance-handbook-i83.html

Guideline on validation of non-formal and informal learning http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/yaygin-veserbest-ogrenmelerin-dogrulanmasi-rehberi-i22.html

TQF Communication Strategy http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tyc-iletisim-stratejisi-i33.html

TQF Glossary http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tyc-terimler-sozlugu-i1.html

Turkish versions of EQF Brochure and Infographic: http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/ayc-10-yil-infografigi-i73.html ; and http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/ayc-10-yil-kitapcigi-i24.html

Brochure on TQF, EQF and Level Descriptors : http://www.tyc.gov.tr/indir/tyc-infografigi-2019-i63.html

Where to find out more

Website	www.etf.europa.eu
Online platform	https://openspace.etf.europa.eu
Twitter	@etfeuropa
Facebook	facebook.com/etfeuropa
YouTube	www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa
Live&Learn	https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/
Instagram	instagram.com/etfeuropa/
LinkedIn	linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation
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Prepared by
The European Training Foundation

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Introduction and context

In the United Arab Emirates, the Ministry of Education National Qualifications Centre (NQC) is mandated to manage the national qualifications framework, the QFEmirates.

The QFEmirates was approved in 2012 and is a learning outcomes-based framework consisting of ten qualification levels that are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. The QFEmirates covers school (general) education, vocational education and training, higher education, work-based training, and professional education and training.

The NQC's key functions can be summarized as:
- Designing, developing and implementing a comprehensive and unified qualifications framework, the QFEmirates, to place, design, develop and recognize qualifications in the UAE.
- facilitating the transfer, articulation and continuity of learning of individuals between different education pathways and promoting further education principles.
- establishing and maintaining standards and regulations for qualifications and national occupations.
- promoting the principles of lifelong learning with Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and articulation as its key basis.
- establishing, accrediting and quality assuring Awarding Bodies (AWB) and Registered Training Providers (RTPs).
- Developing policies and standards related to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the UAE in accordance with international best practices.

The NQC is committed to the national agenda (UAE Vision 2021, UAE Centennial 2071 and 'The Principles of the 50' to build a strong education and training system that helps to equip citizens with the skills, knowledge, and attributes necessary to succeed in the world of work.

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:
- Provide a frame of reference, enabling all qualifications to be described and compared.
- Accommodate qualifications in all education sectors (general education, TVET, and higher education) to recognize achievements in learning from the most elementary task to the most complex.
- Assist in the recognition of non-formal and informal activities.
- Develop and maintain a qualifications system to promote the concept of lifelong learning.
- Facilitate international mobility of learners.

The QFEmirates ensures that academic program offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) recognized by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) at the Ministry of Education are appropriate to the level of the qualification.

The CAA 2019 Standards for Institutional Licensure and Program Accreditation state that programme learning outcomes need to be appropriate to the level of qualification awarded as defined in the QFEmirates. The framework gives more transparency to the possible pathways for students to progress from one qualification to the next across the spectrum of qualifications. 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 program of study.

The ten levels of the QFEmirates readily relate to the European qualifications framework (EQF), the framework for qualifications of the European higher

education area (QF-EHEA), as well as other national frameworks. Table 1 shows how the QFEmirates aligns to the EQF and QFEHEA.

Table 84. 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	

Source: MoE NQC

The NQC is currently in the process of directly aligning the QFEmirates levels with the EQF levels, by moving from a ten-level framework to an eight-level framework.

The NQC has established ties of cooperation with different countries for the purpose of measuring and benchmarking the quality of education in the UAE. The QFEmirates allows for alignment with national qualifications frameworks in other countries. In addition, the NQC signed bilateral referencing agreements aligning the QFEmirates with the qualifications frameworks of various countries.

Levels, learning outcomesand qualifications

The key features of the QFEmirates are as follows:
• The QFEmirates ranges from Certificate 1 to Level 10 Doctorate (see Table 2 below) covering all education sectors. Each level represents a hierarchy of relative challenge, complexity, and depth. The higher the qualifications framework level is, the greater the challenges and the demands are made on the learner in order to be awarded a qualification.

Table 85. National Qualifications Framework for the UAE

LEVEL	PRINCIPAL QUALIFICATION TITLES USED IN THE OF *EMIRATES* (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(G12)
3	Certificate	Certificate 3	-	TBA
2	Certificate	Certificate 2	-	-
1	Certificate	Certificate 1	-	-

Source: MoE NQC

• Learning outcomes in the QFEmirates are expressed in terms of strands of learning outcomes (Table 3) that reflect the knowledge, skills, and aspects of competence that a learner is expected to achieve at the respective level, for each qualification.

Table 86. Strands of Learning Outcomes

Level X	Strand 1	Strand 2	Strand 3	Strand 4	Strand 5
	Knowledge	Skill	Autonomy and responsibility	Role in context	Self-development

Aspects of competence

Source: MoE NQC

A set of learning outcomes for each level is referred to as a level descriptor.

The framework requires common titling of qualifications and adding credit value to qualifications 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.

Key competences required for effective participation and performance in the workplace, learning, and everyday life are referred to as CoreLife Skills. There are seven CoreLife Skills in the QFEmirates.

The framework includes a selection of confirmed qualifications that encompass qualification types, profiles and related specifications used by recognized accreditation/awarding bodies in their respective processes for the development/ accreditation/recognition of qualifications.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The NQC works closely with various other Ministries and Authorities within the UAE, and its approved awarding bodies, education providers, and other related entities to implement the QFEmirates, determine the quality standards, and identify current and future labour market needs.

NQC also collaborates with industry whose role is to take the lead in shaping the future direction of TVET in the country. Representative organizations can apply to the NQC to form a Recognized National Development Committees (RNDC) to develop professional standards and relevant vocational qualifications for their industry to be able to meet current and emerging skills requirements.

All accredited Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UAE are required to demonstrate that programme learning outcomes are aligned with the QFEmirates.

Recognition and validation non-formal and informal learning

In cooperation and coordination with representatives from all sectors of education in the UAE, the NQC conducted a project that resulted in the development of a Recognition of Prior Learning policy that complements the QFEmirates. The project helped gain insight and deep understanding of the specific needs of the workforce and UAE citizens and 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.

The resulting RPL policy caters for both the future needs of an individual and the UAE labour market needs. The NQC is currently working in close cooperation with approved awarding bodies, leading UAE universities and training providers in implementing the RPL at a wider national scale.

In addition, the CAA allow universities to implement RPL based on guidance highlighted in Annex 20 of the 2019 Standards for Institutional Licensure and Program Accreditation.

NQF implementation and impact

All UAE accredited educational institutions are committed to developing and aligning their programmes and vocational qualifications with the QFEmirates framework.

The NQC has developed guidelines that provide practical guidance and information for stakeholders who are involved in developing, reviewing, validating and maintaining national vocational qualifications. As a result, RNDCs have developed a wide range of qualifications in different industry sectors that meet labour market needs.

A review of the QFEmirates is currently underway and is expected to conclude with, amongst other things, a recommendation to move from a ten-level framework to an eight-level framework to align with the EQF, a revision of the notional hours associated with qualification credits, implementation of learning domains and revision of the associated level descriptors.

The overarching goal of the QFEmirates remains the same, which 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 framework generates nationally and internationally recognized qualifications that meet the needs of industry, government, community, and learners.

Referencing to the regional framework/ otherframeworks

The NQC has aligned the QFEmirates Levels with the UK Qualifications Framework Levels. Additionally, an alignment agreement has been signed between other international Frameworks, such as the Australian Qualifications framework and the New Zealand Qualification Framework.

Furthermore, NQC and the Australian Qualifications Authority completed a joint technical report mapping the level descriptors of the two countries' national qualifications frameworks. The NQC has also signed an agreement with France Compétences (the French national governance body for vocational training) to align their qualifications frameworks to improve transparency, comparability, and portability of learners' qualifications and for supporting the principles of lifelong learning.

Important lessons and future plans

The NQC is currently in the process of directly aligning the QFEmirates levels with the EQF levels by moving from a ten-level framework to an eight-level framework in order to easily compare qualifications awarded internationally.

The Ministry of Education is offering an educational pathway known as the Applied Stream. This programme will equip Emirati students with vocational expertise as well as CoreLife Skills. The curriculum of the Applied Stream offers students a set of core and vocational subjects that provide them with a wide range of choices from which they will select a vocational path that matches their capabilities, skills and interests. Students continue to study the core subjects together with units related to their vocational choices.

The NQC is expanding interest among organizations, employers, providers, etc., to accredit their programmes by bringing them in line with the requirements of the QFEmirates to be nationally recognized.

Future plans for the UAE TVET sector include greater focus on skills development through the implementation of apprenticeship programmes.

Table 87. Infographic of the NQF/NQF overview table

LEVEL	PRINCIPAL QUALIFICATION TITLES USED IN THE OF *EMIRATES* (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(G12)
3	Certificate	Certificate 3	-	TBA
2	Certificate	Certificate 2	-	-
1	Certificate	Certificate 1	-	-

Source: MoE NQC

Main sources of information

National Qualifications Centre website — https://www.nqa.gov.ae/

QFEmirates Handbook — https://www.nqa.gov.ae/en/our-responsibility/qualifications- framework-department/national-qualifications-framework-handbook.aspx

Commission for Academic Accreditation — https://www.caa.ae/

National Qualifications Framework for the UAE

NQF levels, qualification types included, NQF levels linked to a regional qualifications framework.

REFERENCES

National Qualifications Centre website

QFEmirates Handbook

Commission for Academic Accreditation website

UAE Government Future, 2021, 2021-2030, 2030-2117

UAE Government — Strategies and Plans

UAE Government — UAE Vision 2021

UAE Centennial 2071

The Principles of the 50

UNESCO. Level-setting and recognition of learning outcomes: the use of level descriptors in the twenty-first century.

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Recognition, validation and accreditation of youth and adult basic education as a foundation for lifelong learning.

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Global inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks. Volume II: National and regional cases.

Prepared by
UNESCO in consultation with national experts

THE UNITED KINGDOM

The UK education and training system performs relatively well according to most EU 2020 benchmarks[1380]. Participation of children aged four and above in early childhood education and care has reached 100% (in 2018) 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 2018). The percentage of students who leave school early has slightly passed the EU average (10.7% in 2018); unlike in most EU countries, it is higher among native students (11.0%) than among those born outside the UK (8.9%). The employment rates of recent graduates are above EU averages for all levels of qualification. One of the main challenges that remains in the school system is the availability and retention of teachers; the government has made efforts to tackle the high proportion of teachers leaving the profession due to workload in all parts of the UK; the government has flagged teacher recruitment and retention in England as a priority, and therefore included pay increases to teachers each summer between 2018 and 2020. The tertiary educational attainment rate is among the highest in the EU (48.8% in 2018), despite concerns around the high levels of student debt. The consequences of Brexit for UK higher education were not clear, so the government announced a UK Shared Prosperity Fund to help compensate for the end of access to European structural and investment funds. In 2019, the Welsh government also announced the content of the school reform to be implemented from 2022 to 2026: developing a new curriculum, introducing a digital competence framework and more freedom in teaching[1381]. Initiatives to develop vocational education and

training (VET) are being implemented in all parts of the UK. Efforts are focused on investing in the further education (FE) sector, developing apprenticeship programmes, improving the quality of provision and running UK campaigns to raise the attractiveness of VET. England will introduce new qualifications as part of ongoing reform of upper secondary VET.

Adult participation in lifelong learning is above the EU average, at 14.6% in 2018. Various policy measures and initiatives across the UK aim to support retraining and upskilling of individuals throughout the lifespan and promote adult learning (European Commission, 2019).

Several qualifications frameworks have been operational in the UK: the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) and the national qualifications framework (NQF) have been superseded by the regulated qualifications framework (RQF); the Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF); the credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW); the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) of degree-awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland which applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland[1382]; and the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS) which applies in Scotland. The FHEQ, QCF and NQF operated in parallel in England and Northern Ireland until 2015. The SCQF and the CQFW are comprehensive frameworks, covering all levels and types of qualifications, including lifelong learning. The developments show that frameworks evolve and change continuously, and their visibility and overall impact depends on the political context they operate within. This is particularly visible in England and Northern Ireland, where although the existence of parallel frameworks may have partly contradicted their ability to support transparency, the regulated qualifications framework (RQF) (replacing the QCF

1380. This country report may include UK analysis based on research conducted before the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union on 31 January 2020. EU averages or other statistical parameters including the UK reflect the situation in the European Union before 31 January 2020 and should not be considered as representative of the situation in the EU thereafter. This section contains information from the Education and training monitor 2019 as there was no country chapter produced for 2020.

1381. See more information here.

1382. In Wales the FHEQ is a constituent part of the CQFW, while in England and Northern Ireland it works in parallel with the RQF.

and the NQF), lifted the standardised requirements for the design of qualifications.

The abolition of the QCF has also influenced the credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW), where, starting from 2015, the regulated qualifications (called 'regulated qualifications pillar') refers to the new RQF level descriptors while non-regulated qualifications (defined as 'lifelong learning pillar') and higher education qualifications continue to refer to the CQFW descriptors. The Scottish framework is considered a key tool for stakeholders and is increasingly emerging as the most visible and consistent of the UK frameworks. Separate referencing reports for the CQFW (Wales), SCQF (Scotland) and RQF (England and Northern Ireland) were produced describing each country's context.

England and Northern Ireland

Introduction and context

In England and Northern Ireland there are two sectoral qualifications frameworks: the regulated qualifications framework (RQF) and the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ). The RQF, introduced in England and Northern Ireland in October 2015, replaced the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) and the national qualifications framework (NQF). The RQF[1383] covers all vocational and general education qualifications regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)[1384] in England and the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment Regulation (CCEA)[1385] in Northern Ireland. It also allows for the inclusion of qualifications developed for the third sector (community and voluntary sector) international and sectoral qualifications. The framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) of degree-awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland covers higher education qualifications awarded by organisations with degree-awarding powers, at levels 4 to 8 and sets out the different qualification levels and national expectations of standards of achievement. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) manages it.

The RQF uses eight levels (plus three entry levels) as did the former QCF/NQF. Levels 4 to 8 of the RQF are comparable to those in the FHEQ. The RQF builds on the descriptors used by the QCF/NQF, partly informed by EQF descriptors.

The main difference between the abolished 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 RQF gives awarding organisations more freedom to design qualifications, while setting consistent measures for size and level of qualifications. The role of the RQF is to ensure a transparent description of qualifications and show their relationships to other qualifications, not to regulate them.

The QCF was referenced to the EQF in February 2010, as a part of the overall UK referencing process. Before Brexit, the four UK countries prepared and presented three updated referencing reports addressing recent developments. In June 2019, England and Northern Ireland presented a joined updated referencing report that referenced the RQF levels to the EQF levels. With the 2019 updated referencing report the FHEQ, self-certificated to the QF-EHEA in 2008, was also formally mapped to the EQF.

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. 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 high-quality qualifications that met learners' and employers' needs (Ofqual, 2014). Following a public consultation, the new RQF was established (replacing the QCF and the NQF) as a single, inclusive and descriptive framework aiming to help individuals understand qualifications better and how they relate to each other[1386].

1383. In Wales, from 2015, the regulated qualification domain refers to the RQF level descriptors, while non-regulated qualifications (part of the lifelong learning domain) refer to the credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW) level descriptors.
1384. Ofqual webpage
1385. CCEA webpage

1386. The level descriptors of the RQF are also referred to the regulated qualifications in Wales.

The RQF has a transparency and communicative purpose; different from the (abolished) QCF, the RQF does not aim at being regulatory and prescriptive. It retains key transparency functions but plays a limited role in regulation of qualifications; this is carried out by Ofqual (in England) and CCEA Regulation (in Northern Ireland). The RQF 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, while allowing 'awarding organisations to be innovative in how they design qualifications to meet the changing demands of learners and employers' (Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA, 2019).

The transition from the QCF to the RQF 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.

The framework is now an integrated part of the regulated qualification system in England and Northern Ireland, aiming to ensure understanding, 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; they include a condition on the recognition of prior learning, providing a mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The RQF is an eight-level framework that 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, 2020)[1387]. Levels 4 to 8 are consistent with the levels of the FHEQ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The level descriptors[1388] 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/NQF 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 skills. Removing the autonomy and accountability column of the descriptors implies a change in the relationship to the EQF descriptors (autonomy and responsibility), an issue that was discussed during the presentation of the 2019 EQF referencing report. This simplification is due to the difficulty in finding a relationship between the levels and the autonomy and responsibility descriptors[1389]. However, the removal of these descriptors does not prohibit a qualification from seeking to recognise levels of autonomy and accountability (Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA 2019).

The new framework includes all qualifications regulated by Ofqual in England and CCEA Regulation in Northern Ireland. Many regulated qualifications that are part of the RQF are designed to meet the needs of particular occupations or jobs and some serve as a licence to practise. Other qualifications provide broader preparation for work, but not for a particular job or occupation. Other regulated qualifications are general or academic in nature. Qualifications related to music, dance, sport or that have a value for individuals working in a range of community settings as volunteers are also part of the framework. Northern Ireland Apprenticeships can include regulated qualifications at RQF level 2-8 (none available at level 8 yet). In England, all apprenticeships that have regulated end point assessments are assigned an RQF level and higher and degree apprenticeships were introduced in 2015. From 2017-18 Northern Ireland, introduced higher level apprenticeship (level 4,5,6,7) that will include a degree if awarded at levels 6-8. From September 2020 a new suite of technical courses

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1387. See Section E of Ofqual handbook: Design and development of qualifications.

1388. The level descriptors are available in the Ofqual handbook.

1389. European Commission (2019). Minutes of the 49th and 50th meeting of the EQF advisory group: https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/ expert-groups-register/screen/meetings/consult?lang =en&meetingId=19133&fromExpertGroups=true

(T level) leading to RQF level 3 was launched[1390]. These courses offer a mixture of classroom learning and on-the-job experience and are based on the same standards as apprenticeships, designed by employers and approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Institute).

RQF implementation is supported by the *General conditions of recognition and statutory guidance* (Ofqual, 2020), 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). Ofqual and CCEA Regulation conduct ongoing awarding organisation auditing and monitoring activities to ensure compliance with their general conditions of recognition. Awarding organisations are required to review qualifications regularly and submit annual statements of compliance to Ofqual and CCEA Regulation to demonstrate compliance with the *General conditions of recognition.*

England and Northern Ireland have had a long history of using the learning- outcomes approach even before the introduction of the QCF and RQF. It is common practice for qualifications to specify learning outcomes, while the curriculum and the teaching and learning approach is for providers to determine. The learning-outcomes approach can be used to facilitate transfer of qualification components and progression in learning. Under the QCF, qualifications had to be designed from units with learning outcomes, assessment criteria, levels and credit value. While these specific regulatory design rules for qualifications were lifted with the introduction of the RQF, the awarding organisation can offer unit-based qualifications and assign credit values to a component (unit) of a qualification which would also require a level to be assigned to that component (Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA 2019).

The *General conditions of recognition* require awarding organisations to take a consistent approach to determining the level (RQF level descriptors must be used by recognised awarding organisations) and describing the size of regulated qualifications. '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[1391]. The concept of 'guided learning hours' (GLH)[1392] 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 GLH 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 credit value of a qualification or component of a qualification is calculated by dividing 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. All qualifications frameworks in the UK calculate credits in the same way and credit systems are based on the same principles, ensuring consistency in the UK approach and easing recognition and mobility (Ofqual; CCEA Regulation and QAA, 2019).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The RQF was introduced in October 2015, replacing the NQF and the QCF, after extensive consultation with key stakeholders. From 2011 the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), which was set up in 2010 as a non-ministerial government department reporting to the Parliament,[1393] has the main responsibility for qualifications and framework developments in England.

Since 2015 Ofqual has been responsible for the implementation of the RQF. It 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 and CCEA Regulation host the EQF respective

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1390. Content for 25 employment area is being designed. The main difference with apprenticeships is the balance between time spent on-the-job and time spent in the classroom, with more time spent in the classroom (80%) for T Level. Additional information on T Level: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/introduction-of-t-levels/introduction-of-t-levels

1391. Currently, parts of this condition do not apply to GCSEs, AS and A levels; Ofqual-regulated apprenticeship end-point assessments; and certain qualifications undergoing withdrawal (Ofqual, 2020).

1392. 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.

1393. The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/22/contents

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[1394] and in 2015[1395]. 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;
e. the institutions and bodies in charge of the two sectoral frameworks (the RQF and the FHEQ).

The referencing, for the first time, of the two sectoral qualifications frameworks to the EQF has required cooperation and coordination among different actors. This common work has also prompted reflections on the relationship between VET and Higher Education, especially at EQF level 5 (Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA, 2019).

For the purpose of updating the referencing of the RQF and the FHEQ to the EQF, the three relevant bodies for England and Northern Ireland worked together, involving key stakeholders via the jointly managed steering group which comprised institutions and bodies in charge of the RQF and FHEQ, ministerial departments, stakeholders representing the different areas of the qualification system (general, VET, HE, regulated), trade unions and international experts. The four UK EQF NCPs have also worked together through the UK European Coordination Group for Vocational Education and Training Initiatives (UKCGVETI) to ensure coordinated preparation of the three updated referencing reports component[1396].

Many of the same vocational, technical and professional qualifications which are part of the RQF are available in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. For their design and development,

awarding organisations must consult with users of the proposed qualifications. These usually are representatives of students, schools, teachers, employers, employees, trade bodies, professional associations, government departments and further and higher education institutions (Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA, 2019). Prior to 2017, the network of sector skills councils (SSCs)[1397] were involved in the development of work-based qualifications in the UK as a whole, through their work on developing and reviewing national occupational standards (NOS). From 2016/2017 the Skills policy in England has shifted away from NOS: the network ceased to receive automatic public funding and government reforms led to the closure of the SSCs[1398]. However, the content of the NOS database remains publicly available and in Northern Ireland (as well as in Wales and Scotland) the NOS are used as the basis for work-based and vocational qualifications as well as apprenticeships. In some sectors, awarding organisations in England continue to draw on the NOS in their qualifications design (Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA, 2019). In England in 2017 the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Institute)[1399] was established, as a non-department public body sponsored by the Department for Education, to work with employers for the development and approval of apprenticeship standards and assessment plans, the review of existing apprenticeships and development of technical qualifications[1400]. The standards approved by the Institute are also used for designing the content of the new T Levels[1401].

The RQF is aligned with the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ). The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), a registered charity, manages the FHEQ. With QAA lies the UK Quality Code for Higher Education[1402] that is the reference point for academic standards for HE qualifications in the UK. QAA is included in the European quality assurance register for higher education (EQAR) and in a 2018 assessment by

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1394. Relevant documents available here.
1395. Relevant documents, including an analysis of the responses, are available here.
1396. Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA (2019). Referencing the qualifications frameworks of England and Northern Ireland to the European qualifications framework. Update to the EQF advisory group, June 2019.

1397. Sector skills councils (SSCs) are independent, employer-led organisations in specific economic sectors; currently there are 13 SSCs in the UK.
1398. Skills Development Scotland has taken over the management of NOS and related activity.
1399. Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education :
1400. Relevant documents are available here.
1401. Newly introduced two-year technical courses (for 25 employment areas) with a mixture of classroom and learning 'on the job' experience that lead to a regulated technical qualification at RQF level 3. Additional information on T Levels is available here.
1402. 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.

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.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[1403]

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.

Any RQF qualification can be achieved through the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning providing the awarding organisations respect the General conditions, which also require the awarding organisation to set out and publish their RPL policy (Ofqual, 2020). The actual implementation of RPL depends on the providers. However, qualifications are rarely awarded only on the basis of recognition. 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. The Education and Skills Funding Agency in England in March 2019 has published guidance[1404] to support the implementation of initial assessment and recognition of prior learning in apprenticeship, to adapt the training content and check that the apprenticeship is an appropriate training programme for the individuals.

There is also a long tradition of recognising prior learning in higher education. RPL is referred to in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Code for higher education, 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 are 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.

On the labour market, national vocational qualifications (NVQs)[1405] are work-related, outcomes-based, competence-oriented qualifications based on national occupational standards. They can offer people in work or on an apprenticeship programme 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, 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[1406] but no arrangement in place to coordinate validation activities taking place in the different sectors.

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

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1405. The qualification type 'national vocational qualification', as a result of the review of qualification types, is expected to be called 'occupational qualification'. More information here.

1406. 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).

1403. This section draws mainly on input from the 2019 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (Richardson, 2019).

1404. Relevant information here.

learning opportunities[1407]. Consequently, 'there is no question of whether the outcomes of validation are 'trusted' by stakeholders and in society, since they are the same outcomes' (Richardson, 2019).

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[1408] 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 are 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 and impact

The RQF covers all regulated qualifications from general and vocational education in England and Northern Ireland[1409]. It also allows for the inclusion of qualifications developed for the third sector (community and voluntary sector) and international and sectoral qualifications. The RQF has been operational since 2015 and forms an integrated part of the regulated qualifications system. There is also a range of qualifications outside of the RQF; some of these are also highly recognised and established in their sectors, managed and quality assured through their own industry or professional body (Ofqual; CCEA Regulation and QAA, 2019).

On July 2018, Ofqual proposed to revise the list of qualification types[1410] available (and visible on the register) setting a timeline through which awarding organisations are expected to review the way qualifications are categorised and proposing guidance on how to classify qualifications. Qualification types can give an indication of the nature of the qualification, the type of assessment, the level and guided learning hours. The migration of the qualifications over to the new categories is still in process and should improve consistency in the way qualifications are classified[1411] (Ofqual, 2021).

The Ofqual *Register of regulated qualifications*[1412] includes qualifications from general education up to RQF level 3 (EQF level 4) and vocational, technical and professional qualifications ranging from entry level to level 8[1413]. Recognised awarding organisations can submit qualifications compliant with the *General conditions of recognition* to the Ofqual *Register of regulated qualifications*. All

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1407. There is no limitation on the potential outcomes of RPL as it is up to awarding organisations and should be explained in their policy on RPL. See Condition E10. Ofqual (2020). General conditions of recognition. Ofqual handbook.
1408. Ofqual and CCEA Regulation recognise 158 and, respectively, 99 awarding organisations which can award credits and qualifications in England and Northern Ireland.

1409. There are 17 783 and 11 759 regulated qualifications available in England and Northern Ireland, respectively (January 2019).
1410. Main qualification types are: general; life and personal skills; vocational, technical and professional. Further information on qualification categories can be found here and here.
1411. Ofqual (2021). Annual qualifications market report: academic year 2019 to 2020, Background information accompanying statistical release.
1412. Ofqual Register of regulated qualifications.
1413. The qualification category Vocational, technical and professional can include: Technical qualifications that can be obtained, for example, with a T level programme; Occupational qualifications – previously called National vocational qualifications (NVQ) – which have a clear and direct link to one or more occupations; Vocationally-related qualifications that are broader in scope than Occupational qualifications; Other vocational qualification, that are qualifications in vocational subjects that are not occupational or vocationally-related qualifications and include qualifications that are work-related but may be relevant across multiple vocations. More information on category types can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-to-awarding-organisations-qualification-type-on-register

qualifications entered into the register become part of the RQF.

The EQF level is displayed along with the RQF level for each qualification in the register. The RQF level is indicated on qualification documents[1414] and Europass certificate supplements for all qualifications included in the framework. Qualification levels are widely recognised and understood in England and Northern Ireland (Ofqual; CCEA Regulation and QAA, 2019). Some qualifications and certificate supplements include EQF levels, but this is not widespread. As a result of a consultation carried out with awarding organisations, the indication of the EQF level on qualification certificates is optional, at the decision of awarding organisations.

Several operational activities were closely associated with RQF implementation: accreditation process for certain types of qualifications in England and for all RQF qualifications in Northern Ireland; auditing of awarding organisations against regulatory requirements[1415], 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[1416].

The influence and the use of the RQF (and its predecessor QCF) have 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 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-ENIC 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[1417] 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.

Ofqual and CCEA Regulation work on qualifications and on the RQF is promoted through their websites, publications, web-based leaflets[1418], 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

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1414. 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.

1415. Both CCEA and Ofqual can withdraw the recognition status of an awarding organisations and Ofqual can also impose a financial penalty on awarding organisations that breach its rules.

1416. Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA (2019). Referencing the qualifications frameworks of England and Northern Ireland to the European qualifications framework. Update to the EQF advisory group, June 2019.

1417. QAA et al. (2019). Qualifications can cross boundaries: a guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland. https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-can-cross-boundaries.pdf?sfvrsn=a852f981_12

1418. Such as:
Ofqual 'postcards' outlining Ofqual's work, with an emphasis on current reforms to qualifications in England: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/your-qualification-our-regulation-gcse-as-and-a-level-reforms
Ofqual's publication describing the new RQF: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulated-qualifications-framework-a-postcard
Ofqual handbook: General conditions of recognition: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook
CCEA's website: http://ccea.org.uk/qualifications
Ofqual Bookcase postcard: https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/137/2015/10/RQF_Bookcase.pdf

had access to clear information as required[1419]. With 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. Further to the alignment of the FHEQ to the EQF as of 2019, documentation published by the QAA, when relevant, will include reference to the EQF.

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; while they are not widely referred to as L1/2/3 qualifications, their vocational and technical alternatives are generally referred to by learners and employers using the RQF level[1420]. 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[1421].

Referencing to the EQF

The QCF had been referenced to the EQF in February 2010 as a part of the overall UK referencing process (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership et al. 2010). An update on developments in England and Northern Ireland was presented in the EQF advisory group in June 2019, and an updated referencing report to reference the RQF and FHEQ[1422] took place in June 2019. The report reflects the changes having taken place in

England and Northern Ireland since 2010 and gives a comprehensive overview of qualifications in England and Northern Ireland and how they relate to each other. It covers the introduction and evolution of national qualifications frameworks and the transition from QCF/NQF to RQF. Using the 2017 Revision of the EQF recommendation as a reference, the report provides information on quality assurance and credits. It also includes information on the introduction of degree apprenticeships in England and the introduction of higher-level 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[1423] 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;

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.

1419. 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 119 responses – 104 from awarding organisations, and 15 from individuals – with each response carrying equal weight.

1420. European Commission and Cedefop (2018). Survey on implementation, communication and use of NQF/EQF [unpublished].

1421. Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA (2019). Referencing the qualifications frameworks of England and Northern Ireland to the European qualifications framework. Update to the EQF advisory group, June 2019.

1422. The FHEQ was self-certified to the QF-EHEA in 2008, but it was not referenced to the EQF.

1423. Ofqual (2008). Regulatory arrangements for the qualifications and credit framework. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/371294/2008-08-15-regulatory-arrangements-qcf-august08.pdf

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, 2020) focus on what the awarding organisations 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.

In the transition from the QCF to the RQF 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 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 for 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 and will continue to evolve. The RQF provides a good basis for understanding the relationships between diverse qualifications. Future developments will aim at reviewing and streamlining the current qualifications offer to ensure they are of high-quality, with a clear purpose and support progression to further study or employment. With this scope, the new suite of technical courses (T level) leading to RQF level 3 was developed and introduced from 2020. In Northern Ireland the implementation of the reformed system of apprenticeship and youth training to encourage progression is under way, with a major commitment to higher-level apprenticeships that will be extended to a wider range of occupational areas. In terms of designing learning-outcomes-based qualifications, a more flexible rather than rigid approach on the use of occupational standards is spreading, with the core standard of

a qualification complemented with context-tailored content[1424].

In the context of updating the EQF referencing report, the mapping of RQF and FHEQ to the EQF has triggered domestic reflection on the relationship between VET and higher education qualifications. The RQF and FHEQ descriptors for level 4 (EQF level 5) will be further explored and may be reviewed. The relationship between EQF level 5 and school leaving qualifications will also be further explored[1425].

Further to the exit of UK from the European Union, the UK-EU relationship remains unclear, but the aim of the RQF is to support intra-UK and international mobility and recognition of qualifications (Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA, 2019).

1424. Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA (2019). Referencing the qualifications frameworks of England and Northern Ireland to the European qualifications framework. Update to the EQF advisory group, June 2019.
1425. As above.

Table 88. Regulated qualifications framework (RQF) for England and Northern Ireland

RQF LEVELS	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVELS*
8	• Vocational, technical and professional qualifications level 8 • Degree apprenticeship* (England) • Higher apprenticeship* (England) • Higher level apprenticeship* (Northern Ireland)	8
7	• Vocational, technical and professional qualifications level 7 • Degree apprenticeship** (England) • Higher apprenticeship*** (England) • Higher level apprenticeship**** (Northern Ireland)	7
6	• Vocational, technical and professional qualifications level 6 • Degree apprenticeship** (England) • Higher apprenticeship*** (England) • Higher level apprenticeship**** (Northern Ireland)	6
5	• Vocational, technical and professional qualifications level 5, • Higher national diplomas (HND) • Degree apprenticeship** (England) • Higher apprenticeship*** (England) • Higher level apprenticeship**** (Northern Ireland)	5
4	• Vocational, technical and professional qualifications level 4, • Higher national certificates (HNC) • Degree apprenticeship** (England) • Higher apprenticeship*** (England) • Higher level apprenticeship**** (Northern Ireland)	5
3	• Vocational, technical and professional qualifications level 3, • GCE AS and A levels • Advanced apprenticeship*** (England) • Apprenticeship NI (Northern Ireland)	4
2	• Vocational, technical and professional qualifications level 2, • GCSEs at grade A* – C and from 2017 grade 4-9, • Functional skills level 2 (England), • Essential skills qualifications (NI) • Intermediate apprenticeship*** (England) • Apprenticeship NI (Northern Ireland)	3
1	• Vocational, technical and professional qualifications level 1, • GCSEs at grade D-G and from 2017 grade 3-1, • Functional skills level 1 (England), • Essential skills qualifications (NI)	2
Entry level 3	• Entry level certificates (sublevel 3), • Functional skills (England) • Essential skills qualifications (NI)	1
Entry levels 1-2	• Entry level certificates (sublevels 1 and 2)	-

*   Not yet developed

**   Degree apprenticeship must include a degree

***   Higher/Advanced/Intermediate apprenticeship may include a qualification

****   Levels 4-8 primarily based on a single higher-level qualification at each level

Sources: Adapted from QAA; SCQF, CCEA Regulation; Ofqual; CQFW Welsh Government and QQI (2019). *Qualifications can cross boundaries: a guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland.* https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-can-cross-boundaries.pdf?sfvrsn=a852f981_12

Main sources of information

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) acts as EQF NCP for England: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about

The 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

Register of regulated qualifications: https://register.ofqual.gov.uk/

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership et al. (2010). Referencing the qualifications frameworks of the United Kingdom to the European qualifications framework   https://europa.eu/europass/en/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf

Ofqual; CCEA Regulation and QAA (2019). Referencing the RQF and the FHEQ to the EQF. Update to the EQF advisory group, June 2019. https://europa.eu/europass/en/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf

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Ofqual (2008). *Regulatory arrangements for the qualifications and credit framework.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-arrangements-for-the-qualifications-and-credit-framework

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Ofqual (2020). *General conditions of recognition.* Ofqual handbook. https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook

Ofqual (2021). *Annual Qualifications Market Report: academic year 2019/20. Background information accompanying statistical release.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/959977/Background_information_for_annual_qualifications_market_report_academic_year_2019_to_2020.pdf

QAA et al. (2019). *Qualifications can cross boundaries: a guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland.* https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-can-cross-boundaries.pdf?sfvrsn=a852f981_12

Richardson, M. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: United Kingdom – England and Northern Ireland.* https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_United_Kingdom_England_Norther_Ireland.pdf

Prepared by

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

Scotland

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 a better understanding of Scottish qualifications and the role they play in lifelong learning and workforce development. Apart from providing a set of levels and level descriptors, the SCQF is characterised by its qualification database[1426], the SCQF credit system[1427], arrangements for recognition of prior learning[1428], and extensive guidance and support material for different stakeholders (employers, educators and advisers, learners and parents, credit-rating bodies)[1429]. SCQF levels are indicated in all qualification documents awarded and all qualifications published on the database include also EQF levels. The framework was referenced to the EQF in 2010, as a part of the overall UK referencing process. An updated report for referencing the SCQF to the European qualifications framework (EQF) was presented in December 2018. The framework is fully operational and fully integrated in the Scottish education, training and qualification landscape. Numerous studies look at its impact across different sectors. 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 development.

Policy objectives

Since its introduction, the SCQF has gradually been revised and refined. Learner progression and transition between different learning contexts are the key policy objectives that led to its introduction in 2001.

The SCQF is intended to be an enabling framework supporting lifelong learning by[1430]:
a. allowing for the inclusion of any learning at any level;
b. clarifying entry and exit points for qualifications and learning programmes[1431] at all levels;
c. helping people understand how to plan learning journeys and progress through appropriate education and training over their lifetime, to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential;
d. making transparent the level and credit (size) of different types of qualification;
e. enabling credit transfer between qualifications or learning programmes to assist learners to build on previous successes.

It also enables learners, employers and the public in general to understand[1432]
a. the full range of Scottish qualifications and assessed learning;
b. how qualifications relate to each other and to other forms of assessed learning;
c. how Scottish qualifications relate to those in other countries;
d. how using SCQF level descriptors can assist with qualifications development and benchmarking skills and experience in all sectors;
e. how different types of qualification and learning can contribute to improving the development and utilisation of workforce skills;
f. how using the SCQF levels can assist with effective recruitment.

The SCQF is an 'open framework' in that, in addition to working directly with the public and third sectors, it explicitly addresses the private sector and employers, and encourages them to have their training provisions recognised under the framework. The benefits for employers and employees include[1433]:

1426. SCQF qualification database: https://scqf.org.uk/about-the-framework/scqf-database/
1427. SCQF credit system: http://scqf.org.uk/media/1118/credit-point-explained-march-2017-web.pdf
1428. Arrangements for the recognition of prior learning: https://scqf.org.uk/guide-to-rpl/
1429. Guidance and support material: https://scqf.org.uk/support/
1430. SCQFP (2019). Referencing the Scottish credit and qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework - Update 2018.
1431. The term learning programmes is about learning which is assessed, quality assured and assigned a level and credit. The term is used to describe certified learning not part of the main national qualifications offered through schools, colleges and universities. (SCQF Partnership, 2019)
1432. SCQF Partnership (n.d.). SCQF Partnership: our strategic objectives 2019-22. https://scqf.org.uk/media/hmaoj53d/strategic-plan-2019-22-final.pdf
1433. SCQF (n.d.). Maximise workforce potential: an employer's guide to the SCQF: assisting employers with recruitment and selection, learning and development, and recognising in-house training. https://scqf.org.uk/media/1115/scqf-employer-guide-mar-2017-web.pdf

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.

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. Well-embedded in the Scottish education, training and qualification landscape, it underpins key government strategies[1434]. By providing a tool that can support progression, recognition of prior learning and improve social inclusion, the SCQF also supports the Scottish Government aims of fair work and social justice[1435].

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The SCQF is a comprehensive, 12-level inclusive framework, which integrates and builds on existing frameworks. It covers all levels and types of qualifications and all learning contexts. The first three levels are seen as important in addressing individuals that tend to be most disadvantaged and furthest from the labour market (SCQFP, 2019). For some, these levels can function as a way back to formal education and training. Learning-outcomes-based level descriptors, revised in 2012, are defined in terms of knowledge and understanding; practice (applied knowledge, skills and understanding); generic cognitive skills; communication, ICT and numeric skills; and autonomy, accountability and working with others. They tend to be inclusive, so being used for a wide range of learning[1436]. The 2012 revision was mainly aimed at clarifying some of the wording to make the descriptors easier to use (SCQFP, 2019); it can be seen as part of continuous evolution of the framework based on experiences gained.

The SCQF is a comprehensive framework covering all types of qualification including general, higher, and vocational. It also covers a range of non-formal qualifications and programmes from all sectors and providers, including qualifications developed by third-sector and voluntary organisations, social partners, employers, professional bodies and public services. Examples of programmes which show the diverse nature of the framework include the European computer driving licence (ECDL), International mountain leader, Teaching in colleges today, Autism trainer award, and the Army cadet, achievement and citizenship award. The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS)[1437] is a constituent part of the SCQF.

In recent years, the number of qualifications with work-based learning components included in the SCQF has also increased because of an expansion of the apprenticeship offer[1438]. New Graduate apprenticeships have been developed which combine degree qualifications with work-based learning; other apprenticeships[1439] require the apprentices to complete one or more qualifications ranging in level from SCQF 5 upwards. Scottish vocational qualification system (SVQ) (SCQF level 4-11), is used to underpin most of the apprenticeship programmes. SVQs are composed of SVQ units which are linked to national occupational standards (NOS)[1440]. NOS are developed in consultation with employers and other stakeholders across the UK nations and are used in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland they are also used to develop other types of qualifications such as national progression awards (SCQF level 2-6); professional development awards (SCQF 6-11), higher national certificate (SCQF level 7) and diplomas (SCQF level 8).

The inclusiveness of the SCQF requires a consistent quality assurance approach underpinning all the qualifications included (SCQFP, 2019). Although a national quality assurance model does not exist, all credit rating bodies (CRBs), which are responsible for giving levels and credits to qualifications, should adhere to the principles indicated in the

1434. Examples are: Developing the Young Workforce strategy 15-34 Learner Journey
1435. SCQFP (n.d.). SCQF Partnership our strategic objectives 2019-22. https://scqf.org.uk/media/hmaoj53d/strategic-plan-2019-22-final.pdf
1436. SCQFP (2012), SCQF Level descriptors. https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/SCQF-LevelDescriptors.pdf

1437. Different from the rest of the UK countries that use the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ), Scotland has a separate framework for Scottish undergraduate higher education.
1438. The use of apprenticeship has expanded in recent years as a result of government policies such as Developing the young workforce. More information here .
1439. Types of apprenticeships developed in Scotland are foundation, modern, technical, higher, graduate, and professional.
1440. https://www.ukstandards.org.uk/About-nos

SCQF Handbook[1441]. This includes establishing 'systems of internal and external quality assurance and arrangements for the retention of evidence confirming decisions on level and credit' (Principle 9, SCQF Handbook).

To be included in the framework and in the SCQF database, qualifications, learning programmes and units of qualifications must be written in learning outcomes. 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 qualifications and learning programmes in different sectors (SCQFP, 2019). The SCQF level descriptors, which describe outcomes of learning, are used as a reference point to allocate SCQF levels and credit points (credit rating process) to every qualification and learning programme.

The SCQF level descriptors can also be used when designing and developing qualifications and learning programmes, designing assessment and recognising prior learning[1442]. Bodies submitting qualifications for SCQF inclusion have also to detail assessment methods and evidence that assessment criteria and processes are appropriate to the defined learning outcomes and appropriate SCQF level (Principle 2, SCQF Handbook). The SCQF level descriptors provide a common vocabulary to allow comparison of qualifications and learning programmes achieved in different contexts[1443],also supporting the recognition of prior learning.

All qualifications on the SCQF (except research degrees) have a level and credit value allocated (credit rating process) with one credit point corresponding to 10 hours of learning. 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, reduce barriers between sectors and allow learners to move more flexibly from one sector to another[1444].

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The SCQF, formally launched in 2001, was established on a voluntary basis (and not by law). Created by bringing together existing qualifications and frameworks, it has never been a regulatory framework and it has always operated outside a legislative framework. The SCQF is managed by SCQFP which is an independent, company limited by guarantee and a charity established in 2006. The SCQFP aims are to[1445]:

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.

The SCQFP Board is made up of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Universities Scotland, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA Scotland), and the College Development Network. Employers are represented on the SCQFP Board and the Scottish Government – which has no direct role in the functioning of the framework – has an observer status in it and provides a good part of the funding[1446]. The SCQF Quality Committee comprises experts from a range of sectors and provides the SCQFP and the Board with recommendations on the maintenance and quality assurance of the framework as well as its relationship to other frameworks. The SCQF Forum, composed of representatives from the fields of education, training, business and other learning communities, advises the SCQFP on the development and maintenance of the framework engaging in debate on the use of the SCQF as tool to support lifelong learning policies (SCQFP, 2019).

In the context of updating the SCQF referencing to the EQF, a steering group was formed and a range of stakeholders consulted in the process for comments and opinion. In the context of the updated referencing activity, the four UK EQF NCPs worked together through the UK Coordination Group for European Vocational Education and Training Initiatives (UKCGVETI) to ensure a coordinated preparation of the three updated referencing reports

1441. SCQF Partnership (n.d.), SCQF Handbook. https://scqf.org.uk/media/svxnjdts/scqf_handbook_web_final_2015.pdf
1442. SCQFP (n.d.) SCQF credit rating: criteria explained. https://scqf.org.uk/media/zayef4ff/criteria-explained-final-web-oct-2017.pdf
1443. SCQFP (n.d.) SCQF credit rating: criteria explained. https://scqf.org.uk/media/zayef4ff/criteria-explained-final-web-oct-2017.pdf
1444. 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.

1445. http://scqf.org.uk/about-us/the-scqf-partnership/
1446. Budget is provided by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council. Additional income was generated through consultancy work and through European qualifications framework (EQF) subsidies.

presented to the EQF Advisory group in 2018 and 2019[1447].

Responsibility for the day-to-day quality and integrity of the framework is shared between SCQFP, SQA, QAA and credit rating bodies (CRBs). CRBs are responsible for allocating SCQF levels and credit points to their own and other organisations qualifications (third party rating process)[1448]. Although there is no single national quality assurance model, all CRBs should adhere to the principles within the SCQF Handbook[1449]. CRBs are responsible for their quality assurance arrangement and for monitoring the quality assurance of submitting bodies. In turn, CRBs are subject to quality assurance monitoring by different agents: SCQFP for Colleges and other SCQFP-approved CRBs; QAA Scotland for higher education institutions and universities; and Scottish Government for SQA qualifications. SCQFP is responsible for the approval of new SCQFP-approved CRBs and supports them in their functions. A revised quality assurance model[1450], rolled out in 2021, sets out the criteria which must be adhered to for the approval, annual monitoring and review of the SCQFP-approved CRBs.

SCQF development and implementation rely on a wide range of stakeholders working together. A high degree of framework ownership can be observed in all sectors of education and training as well as among labour market stakeholders. However, engagement of employers and general education schools is considered to require more attention. 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. The SCQFP has launched the Inclusive recruiter campaign[1451], to encourage employers to use SCQF levels in their recruitment advertising, and now has ambassador programmes for both schools and colleges[1452], with 123 schools engaged and seven colleges. The schools programme aims to raise awareness amongst teachers, learners, parents and carers of the different qualifications and learning pathways available to young people; it encourages schools to view progression in terms of SCQF levels rather than specific qualifications which opens up a wealth of new pathways. The college programme focuses on promoting better understanding by college staff of the diversity of the framework, including equality of qualifications, development of learning pathways and the benefits of credit rating. There is work underway to link the school and college ambassador programmes to promote stronger pathways and partnerships.

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. 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.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[1453]

There is no single strategy or government body responsible for validation (referred to as recognition of prior learning or RPL) in Scotland[1454]. Still, the principle of RPL is well embedded in the policies and guidelines of a number of organisations, including the SCQFP, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland (QAA Scotland), the SQA, and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). There are guidelines, tools and resources for

1447. Ofqual; CCEA regulation and QAA (2019). Referencing the qualifications frameworks of England and Northern Ireland to the European qualifications framework. Update to the EQF advisory group, June 2019.

1448. Initially, only those institutions involved in the development of the framework could credit rate qualifications (Scottish Qualification Authority, Scottish Universities and Higher Education Institutions). As of 2006 also colleges received the status of credit rating. In 2009 the SCQF Partnership established a process for approving other CRBs. The list of CRB is accessible here.

1449. SCQF Partnership (n.d.), SCQF Handbook. https://scqf.org.uk/media/svxnjdts/scqf_handbook_web_final_2015.pdf

1450. Higher education institutions, SQA and college remain subject to specific alternative arrangements. The new quality assurance model for SCQFP approved CRB is accessible here .

1451. Inclusive recruiter: https://scqf.org.uk/support/support-for-employers/scqf-inclusive-recruiter/

1452. School Ambassador programme College Ambassador Programme

1453. This section draws mainly on input from Scott, D. (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: United Kingdom - Scotland. https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_United_Kingdom_Scotland.pdf

1454. Scotland's approach to validation covers prior formal, non-formal and informal learning in all sectors.

RPL[1455], mainly delivered through the SCQFP. The SCQFP aims to promote the concept and use of RPL more widely and takes an active role in promoting the use of the SCQF to support both formative and summative recognition[1456]. An online RPL toolkit[1457]
was launched in October 2019 to make it easier for a diverse group of individuals to engage with it[1458]. This toolkit is regularly reviewed and includes links to information on RPL from key stakeholders.

The SCQF Handbook[1459], published in 2015, serves as a technical guide on how the SCQF can be used to support and develop Scotland's lifelong learning agenda; it includes a section on how the SCQF can assist RPL for recognising all types of learning. Among the strengths of the Scottish approach to RPL are its compliance with agreed standards equivalent to those for qualifications obtained through formal education, the use of SCQF level descriptors as a common reference point for all learning, and the transparent quality assurance measures in line with existing quality assurance frameworks. The use of SCQF credit facilitates transfer of credit form one qualification into another, supporting learners to move more flexibly from one sector to another and ensuring that the learner

does not have to repeat any assessed and certified learning[1460].

Most RPL activity so far has been related to higher education and VET. The national RPL framework for higher education (QAA Scotland, 2014) 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. RPL is also an integral part of the new Graduate apprenticeships (GAs)[1461]. RPL can be used for access to programmes where universities and other providers are asked to consider candidates' prior learning and experience case by case during the selection process.

In VET, RPL can be used to assess complete or partial units[1462] 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 works with the Scottish Government on specific policies and initiatives that support the learning journey. It supports the roll out of the RPL model for refugees and asylum seekers[1463]. It is leading a project to map qualifications of veterans who have served in the armed forces to the SCQF, so to provide better recognition of their qualifications once they exit into civilian life[1464]. The SCQFP also works with NHS Education for Scotland (NES) to roll out a national RPL project for NHS staff, to make the most of the informal learning which occurs in the workplace[1465].

1455. SCQFP (2010). Facilitating the recognition of prior learning toolkit. Glasgow: SCQPF. https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/RPLToolkitUpdatedDecember2010.pdf
SCQF Partnership (n.d.). SCQF Handbook. https://scqf.org.uk/media/svxnjdts/scqf_handbook_web_final_2015.pdf
QAA Scotland (2014). Recognition of prior learning: national framework for Scottish higher education. Glasgow: QAA Scotland. http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/enhancement-and-development/recognition-of-prior-learning---framework-for-scottish-he.pdf?sfvrsn=ae7cf581_10
SCQFP's Guide to RPL and RPL tool: http://scqf.org.uk/guide-to-rpl/rpl-tool/;

1456. There are three types of RPL and the four stages of validation – identification, documentation, assessment and certification – that are likely to be used to varying extents, depending on the type of recognition taking place:
RPL for personal/career development (formative recognition);
RPL to gain entry to a learning programme (summative recognition);
RPL for the award of SCQF credit points to gain entry with credit or advanced standing in a programme/qualification (summative recognition).

1457. http://scqf.org.uk/guide-to-rpl/rpl-tool/

1458. SCQFP (n.d.). The SCQF: leading the way in Scotland's learning, 19/20 Annual Impact Report. https://scqf.org.uk/media/gfynhmp5/scqfp-annual-impact-report-final-web-single-page-nov-2020.pdf

1459. SCQF Partnership (n.d.). SCQF Handbook. https://scqf.org.uk/media/svxnjdts/scqf_handbook_web_final_2015.pdf;

1460. Receiving institutions decide the exact number of credit points that can be transferred. Therefore, the value can vary.

1461. Graduate apprenticeships (GAs) 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 awarding body. https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/apprenticeships/graduate-apprenticeships/

1462. 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 here.

1463. SCQFP (n.d.). Delivering our strategic objectives through the operational plan 2021/22. https://scqf.org.uk/media/qyyb4s5f/scqfp-operational-plan-2021-22-final-may-2021.pdf

1464. More information here .

1465. More information here .

In 2020, the SCQFP worked with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to create a resource, provide training and develop quality assurance to support a recognition process for redundant apprentices (Apprenticeship transition plan[1466]). The aim of this resource is to produce a Record of Achievement outlining any qualifications and/or units completed by the apprentice at the point of redundancy, a skills statement outlining any skills demonstrated but not formally assessed, and a statement of transferable skills benchmarked to the SCQF levels.

According to the SCQFP, recognition of prior learning is gaining momentum, with more sectors engaging and a growing demand from learners[1467]. The outcome of the review of the 15-24 Learner journey[1468] will have relevance for RPL[1469]; one of the ideas behind the review is to ensure more efficient connections between parts of the systems, including recognition of prior learning[1470]. Revision and implementation of a strategy for future RPL activities and promotion is also a SCQFP strategic objective for 2021/22[1471].

NQF implementation and impact

As one of the oldest comprehensive NQFs in Europe, the SCQF has reached an advanced operational stage. Since 2017 the SCQF coverage continued to expand, including international and non-formal qualifications (including qualifications developed by employers or professional body qualifications, qualifications developed by the third sector and voluntary organisations). By February 2020, approximately 11 800 qualifications from a range of providers were included in the SCQF database. Of these, approximately 1 100 are qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system, by social partners, trade unions, employers and professional bodies. The possibility for credit rating bodies to give

levels and credits to qualifications offered by other organisations (third-party credit rating process) has provided a 'a gateway for the inclusion of a wide range of qualifications on the SCQF' (SCQFP, 2019).

The SCQF database[1472] is the online national register of all SCQF qualifications. It aims at being a central, comprehensive and user-friendly source for information on all qualifications and learning programmes that are levelled and credit rated. Among the SCQFP key activities for 2021/22 there is a review of the database to ensure it continues to meet user needs and generates useful public information. The SCQFP will also explore options for sharing data with and from other organisations[1473].

Both SCQF and EQF levels are visible on the SCQF database. SCQF levels are included on certificates, diplomas, and Europass certificate and diploma supplements, while there is no mandatory requirement, but the possibility, also to include EQF levels. This approach results from a consultation in 2015[1474] with awarding bodies regarding the visibility of the EQF on qualification certificates.

The SCQF has been at the centre of Scottish education since its inception in 2001 and underpins key government strategies on developing an education and skills system[1475]. It is widely recognised by education and training providers, learners and parents (Ashbrook Research & Consultancy, 2013); well embedded in curriculum decision-making processes, aiding the development of progression pathways and highlighting gaps in provision; and also used in quality assurance processes (Kerson Associates Ltd, 2015). However, there is room to increase awareness further among key stakeholders such as teachers, pupils and parents (University of Glasgow, 2017). The SCQF School Ambassador programme and the College Ambassador programme[1476] have been developed with this purpose. In the context of the School ambassador programme, which trains teachers and senior pupils to pass on information about the framework, evidence so far shows that parents have a better understanding of qualifications (in terms of

1466. More information here .
1467. SCQFP (n.d.). SCQF Partnership our strategic objectives 2019-22. https://scqf.org.uk/media/hmaoj53d/strategic-plan-2019-22-final.pdf
1468. More information here.
1469. SCQFP (n.d.-a) SCQF Partnership our strategic objectives 2019-22. https://scqf.org.uk/media/hmaoj53d/strategic-plan-2019-22-final.pdf
1470. Scottish Government (2019). The 15-24 Learner journey. https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/progress-report/2018/05/15-24-learner-journey-review-9781788518741/documents/00535273-pdf/00535273-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00535273.pdf
1471. SCQFP (n.d.). Delivering our strategic objectives through the operational plan 2021/22. https://scqf.org.uk/media/qyyb4s5f/scqfp-operational-plan-2021-22-final-may-2021.pdf

1472. The SCQF database is available here.
1473. SCQFP (n.d.). Delivering our strategic objectives through the operational plan 2021/22. https://scqf.org.uk/media/qyyb4s5f/scqfp-operational-plan-2021-22-final-may-2021.pdf
1474. 2015 final report for the UK European coordination group for VET initiatives on EQF level visibility on qualification certificates. https://scqf.org.uk/media/w2hf0gpk/eqf-level-visibility-reportonline_2015.pdf
1475. SCQFP (n.d.) SCQF Partnership: our strategic objectives for 2019-22. https://scqf.org.uk/media/hmaoj53d/strategic-plan-2019-22-final.pdf
1476. College Ambassador Programme

achievements and possible progression routes)[1477]. Providing a structure for conversation about learning pathways, the SCQF is well known and used also by guidance counselling practitioners (University of Glasgow, 2017).

According to the SCQFP[1478], the SCQF level descriptors are also used to provide a broad comparison of foreign qualifications, and UK-Enic take note of the SCQF levels in their recognition work. The UK and Ireland national contact points also produce a document[1479] 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[1480].

In recent years there has been a significant increase in number of private and public employers seeking to include their qualification in the SCQF (SCQFP, 2019). The inclusion of non-formal qualifications has encouraged other qualifications owner (e.g. in business, trade associations, trade unions, social agencies) to consider SCQF inclusion (SCQFP, 2019). Between 2010/11 and 2016 the use of the SCQF by employers in job adverts increased (153 in 2015/16) (University of Glasgow, 2017). A strategic priority of the SCQFP is to encourage employers to use the SCQF further and use its resources to develop more inclusive workforce recruitment[1481]. The Inclusive recruiter campaign[1482] has targeted employers to encourage them to use the SCQF levels in their recruitment advertising rather than specific qualifications, which ensures a more inclusive approach to recruitment. Employers undertake some simple training and sign a memorandum of understanding which sets out commitments on both sides and generally promotes involvement from and understanding by employers of the SCQF.

Efforts to promote the visibility of the framework, increase its understanding and its active use are made through the overall SCQF communication strategy with presentations, workshops, guidance material, social media, leaflets and resources addressing various target groups[1483]. The 2016 review of the SCQF impact (University of Glasgow, 2017) showed yearly growth in the SCQF's social media and website reach.

SCQF developments and refinements have been informed by systematic evaluations (Ashbrook Research & Consultancy, 2013; Kerson Associates Ltd, 2015; University of Glasgow, 2017) and in response to wider policy developments in education and training. The 2016 impact assessment found that the SCQF is a well-established feature of Scotland's education and qualifications landscape and that its reach and use has increased steadily across all target groups. The SCQFP was shown to have been instrumental in several key developments: embedding of SCQF levels in the school curriculum and in Scotland's national training programmes; replacement of SVQ levels with SCQF levels; inclusion of qualifications and programmes from outside formal education and training; establishment of new credit rating bodies; and development of adult achievement awards allowing for the recognition of skills acquired in non-formal settings

Referencing to the EQF

The SCQF was referenced to the EQF in February 2010 as a part of the overall UK referencing process[1484]. Following the revision of the SCQF level descriptors in 2012, the redefinition of the SCQF principles (part of the new 2015 SCQF handbook[1485], the expansion in the number of qualifications on the SCQF and other SCQF developments, Scotland presented an updated referencing report to the EQF Advisory group in December 2018.

Important lessons and future plans

The SCQF is one of the oldest comprehensive NQFs in Europe. It has been at the centre of

1477. More information here
1478. European Commission; Cedefop (2018). Survey on implementation, communication and use of NQF/EQF [unpublished].
1479. QAA Scotland et al. (2019). Qualifications can cross boundaries: a guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland.https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/news-and-events/qualifications-can-cross-boundaries-guide-to-comparing-qualifications-in-the-uk-and-ireland.pdf?sfvrsn=3715c981_4
1480. More information at: https://scqf.org.uk/services-partnerships/international-european-tools-and-projects/international-referencing/
1481. SCQFP (n.d.). SCQF Partnership: our strategic objectives for 2019-22. https://scqf.org.uk/media/hmaoj53d/strategic-plan-2019-22-final.pdf
1482. More information here.

1483. SCQFP (n.d.). Delivering our strategic objectives through the operational plan 2021/22 https://scqf.org.uk/media/qyyb4s5f/scqfp-operational-plan-2021-22-final-may-2021.pdf
1484. 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).
1485. SCQF Partnership (n.d.). SCQF Handbook. https://scqf.org.uk/media/svxnjdts/scqf_handbook_web_final_2015.pdf

Scottish education since its inception in 2001 and underpins key government strategies on developing an education and skills system[1486]. 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 SCQF has a secure position as a permanent feature of the national qualifications system, underpinning all education and training policies. 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 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[1487]:

a. maintaining the quality and integrity of the framework, also by supporting credit rating bodies and providing an overarching quality assurance model for SCQFP-approved credit rating bodies;
b. maintaining and promoting the SCQF database;
c. implementing the School ambassador programme, the College ambassador programme, the Inclusive recruiter programme which are engagement strategies to extend the use of the framework by specific groups;
d. promoting the concept and use of RPL more widely through the SCQF;
e. working with Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council on specific policies and

initiatives which would support the learning journey
f. promoting the reputation of the SCQF internationally, also considering alternative methods of partnership working in Europe post Brexit.

1486. SCQFP (n.d.) SCQF Partnership our strategic objectives 2019-22. https://scqf.org.uk/media/hmaoj53d/strategic-plan-2019-22-final.pdf
1487. SCQFP (n.d.-a) SCQF Partnership our strategic objectives. https://scqf.org.uk/media/hmaoj53d/strategic-plan-2019-22-final.pdf
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Table 89. Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF)

SCQF LEVEL	SQA QUALIFICATIONS			QUALIFICATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS	APPRENTICESHIPS & 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	
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 • National progression award		• Modern apprenticeship, • Foundation apprenticeship, • SVQ	4
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, 2020: https://scqf.org.uk/about-the-framework/interactive-framework/

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

THE UNITED KINGDOM

The UK education and training system performs relatively well according to most EU 2020 benchmarks[1488]. Participation of children aged four and above in early childhood education and care has reached 100% (in 2018) 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 2018). The percentage of students who leave school early has slightly passed the EU average (10.7% in 2018); unlike in most EU countries, it is higher among native students (11.0%) than among those born outside the UK (8.9%). The employment rates of recent graduates are above EU averages for all levels of qualification. One of the main challenges that remains in the school system is the availability and retention of teachers; the government has made efforts to tackle the high proportion of teachers leaving the profession due to workload. in all parts of the UK; the government has flagged teacher recruitment and retention in England as a priority and therefore included pay increases to teachers each summer between 2018 and 2020 The tertiary educational attainment rate is among the highest in the EU (48.8% in 2018), despite concerns around the high levels of student debt. The consequences of Brexit for UK higher education were not clear so the government announced a UK Shared Prosperity Fund to help compensate for the end of access to European structural and investment funds. In 2019, the Welsh government also announced the content of the school reform to be implemented from 2022 to 2026: developing a new curriculum, introducing a digital competence framework and more freedom in teaching[1489]. Initiatives to develop vocational education and

training (VET) are being implemented in all parts of the UK. Efforts are focused on investing in the further education (FE) sector, developing apprenticeship programmes, improving the quality of provision and running UK campaigns to raise the attractiveness of VET. England will introduce new qualifications as part of ongoing reform of upper secondary VET.

Adult participation in lifelong learning is above the EU average, at 14.6% in 2018. Various policy measures and initiatives across the UK aim to support retraining and upskilling of individuals throughout the lifespan and promote adult learning (European Commission, 2019).

Several qualifications frameworks have been operational in the UK: the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) and the national qualifications framework (NQF) now part of the regulated qualifications framework (RQF); the Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF); the credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW); the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) of degree-awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland which applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland[1490]; and the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS) which applies in Scotland. The FHEQ, QCF and NQF operated in parallel in England and Northern Ireland until 2015. The SCQF and the CQFW are comprehensive frameworks, covering all levels and types of qualifications, including lifelong learning. The developments made show that frameworks evolve and change continuously, and their visibility and overall impact depends on the political context they operate within. This is particularly visible in England and Northern Ireland, where although the existence of parallel frameworks may have partly contradicted their ability to support transparency, the regulated qualifications framework (RQF) (replacing the QCF

1488. This country report may include UK analysis based on research conducted before the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union on 31 January 2020. EU averages or other statistical parameters including the UK reflect the situation in the European Union before 31 January 2020 and should not be considered as representative of the situation in the EU thereafter. This section contains information from Education and training monitor 2019 as there was no country chapter produced for 2020.
1489. See more information here .

1490. In Wales the FHEQ is a constituent part of the CQFW, while in England and Northern Ireland it works in parallel with the RQF.

and the NQF), lifted the standardised requirements for the design of qualifications.

The abolition of the QCF has also influenced the credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW) where starting from 2015, the regulated qualifications (called 'regulated qualifications pillar') refers to the new RQF level descriptors while non-regulated qualifications (defined as 'lifelong learning pillar') and higher education qualifications continue to refer to the CQFW descriptors. The Scottish framework is considered a key tool for stakeholders and is increasingly emerging as the most visible and consistent of the UK frameworks. Separate referencing reports for the CQFW (Wales), SCQF (Scotland) and RQF (England and Northern Ireland) were produced describing each country's context.

Wales

Introduction and context

The credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW) was adopted in 2002 and launched in 2003[1491]. It has both communication and reform functions. 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 qualifications in Wales.

The CQFW is operational and can be seen as a second-generation framework, departing from sector frameworks established from the 1990s onwards. The CQFW is an open framework, with a unit-based approach and oriented towards a multitude of awarding bodies and education and training contexts, including school, further education, higher education and work-based learning. This aids inclusion of units developed, for example, by the private sector and as part of continuing and enterprise-based education and training.

Following evaluation of the CQFW in 2014 (Welsh Government, 2014)[1492] a number of changes have been introduced, partly reflecting the setting up of Qualifications Wales[1493], 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 (QCF) 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[1494]. Qualifications Wales has published its level descriptors for knowledge and skills from entry through to level 8 on the CQFW. All awarding bodies recognised by Qualifications Wales must adhere to its requirements as set out in the Qualifications and components levels regulatory document. The level descriptors build on those used within the qualifications and credit framework (QCF), credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW) and the European qualifications framework (EQF). Levels 4–8 are intended to be consistent with the five levels within the framework for higher education qualification in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ).

Non-regulated qualifications (related to the lifelong learning pillar) and higher education qualifications continue to refer to the 2009 CQFW level descriptors, which include autonomy and accountability.

Policy objectives

The CQFW has been designed to provide greater clarity on the qualifications system in Wales. It has both communication and reform functions. The framework is seen as an enabling tool for the Welsh Government's skills and economic development policies and goals: it is used in the development and award of qualifications, and has been embedded in Welsh Government targets, such as for apprenticeship provision and learner attainment. Its purpose is to act as an overarching structure to provide clarity on existing education subsystems. It is also a communications framework that aims 'to provide a language and route map to make it easier

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1491. Qualifications have undergone considerable reform since 2012, with the aim of developing a high-quality, robust and distinctive qualifications system for Welsh learners.
1492. See the relevant webpage of the Welsh Government here .
1493. Qualifications Wales webpage .

1494. See the chapter on UK England and Northern Ireland of the European NQF inventory 2018.

for learners, parents, education professionals and employers to understand progression routes' (Welsh Government, 2014).

The CQFW embraces three common principles:
a. expression of achievement as learning outcomes;
b. the demands made by that learning on the learner (level);
c. 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 higher education and 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.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The CQFW has eight learning-outcomes-based levels plus three entry levels, and it is organised in three pillars: higher education qualifications (levels 4 to 8), regulated qualifications (including general and vocational qualifications) and quality-assured lifelong learning[1495] (which includes unitised accredited learning[1496] and vendor, industry and professional learning[1497]. It 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). Two measures are used to describe qualifications in the CQFW: the level of outcomes of learning and the volume of outcomes, described by the number of CQFW credit points.

Learning outcomes are evident in qualification specifications produced by awarding bodies, as well as in individual assessments and in regulatory criteria and standards (such as national occupational standards, NOS) that inform the content of qualifications. This has been a feature of the Welsh qualification system since the foundation of the CQFW (Welsh Government, 2019). The CQFW approach to learning outcomes allows for flexibility in how they are expressed. This is to ensure that the wide variety of learning which is included in the framework can comply with this principle and to allow agencies across the three pillars to apply them within their own context (Welsh Government, 2019).

The CQFW level descriptors were revised in 2009 and are structured in three categories: knowledge and understanding; application and action; and autonomy and accountability[1498]. With the introduction of RQF in England and Northern Ireland in 2015, the revised RQF level descriptors – defined in terms of knowledge and skills[1499] – were adopted for the regulated qualifications pillar. Since Qualifications Wales was established, it has published its level descriptors which map to the CQFW. There is a knowledge descriptor and a skills descriptor for each level within the framework. The descriptors apply to all regulated qualifications, general and vocational ones.

Table 90. Changes to level descriptors

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE DESCRIPTOR (THE HOLDER…)	SKILLS DESCRIPTOR (THE HOLDER CAN…)
Level 1	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. Is aware of aspects of information relevant to the area of study or work.	Use basic cognitive and practical skills to complete well-defined routine tasks and procedures. Select and use relevant information. Identify whether actions have been effective.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook/section-e-design-and-development-of-qualifications#level-descriptors

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1495. 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.
1496. This is called 'unitised accredited learning' (UAL) which is unit-based provision and has a credit value.
1497. This is called 'vendor/industry/professional' (VIP) learning that tends to be sector/industry specific training and/or workforce development programmes (Welsh Government, 2018a).

1498. Detailed graph on level descriptors: https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/level-descriptors.pdf
1499. A decision was taken to remove autonomy and accountability from the level descriptors for Regulated Qualifications. This was informed by reflection on the regulatory framework that Qualifications Wales and the other regulators follow. By removing specific descriptors for autonomy and accountability at each level, while also maintaining further requirements for the content of qualifications through other regulatory means, Qualifications Wales has streamlined its regulatory requirements (Welsh Government, 2019).

In the regulated pillar, the qualifications, the awarding bodies that offer them and the wider qualification system, are regulated by Qualifications Wales. All qualifications regulated by Qualifications Wales must have an assigned level and total qualification time/guided learning hours. To maintain public confidence in regulated qualifications, and ensure that they meet the reasonable needs of learners, all regulated awarding bodies must continue to comply with Qualifications Wales' requirements. Higher education qualifications are assigned to levels in accordance with the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland[1500]. The lifelong learning pillar continues to use the 2009 CQFW level descriptors.

Quality assurance of the lifelong learning pillar 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)[1501], nor is there a regulatory process for approval of vendor/industry/professional (VIP) learning. Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) guidance[1502] has been developed for the implementation of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ), a constituent part of CQFW. This guidance applies to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other awards granted by a higher education institution.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW) is managed by a strategic operational partnership comprising the Welsh Government, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and Qualifications Wales, supported by the CQFW advisory group that includes a wide range of stakeholders (Figure 1). The CQFW advisory group (which comprises a wide range of external stakeholders representing government, regulators, awarding bodies, training providers) also engages other stakeholders, including learners, learning providers and employers, to ensure more effective

and strategic implementation of the framework[1503]. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)[1504] is a membership organisation representing the seven largest awarding bodies offering qualifications in the UK, including GCSEs, A levels and vocational qualifications. All awarding bodies offering GCSEs and GCEs in Wales must meet criteria to become recognised by Qualifications Wales and develop, deliver as well as award these qualifications. Qualifications Wales, HEFCW and the Welsh Government are owners of their respective pillars within the CQFW. The Welsh Government retains oversight of the CQFW and coordinates activity on behalf of the strategic partnership.

Several changes were introduced in 2015, including the CQFW governance structure. Qualifications Wales was set up as a new government-sponsored body, funded by the Welsh Government but independent of it, to regulate all qualifications other than degrees in Wales. Qualifications Wales has a range of powers to support the system and take action if there is non-compliance. Its principal aims are to promote the effectiveness of qualifications and the qualifications system in order to meet the reasonable needs of learners and promote public confidence. An awarding body must be recognised by Qualifications Wales to offer regulated qualifications in Wales (Welsh Government, 2018).

Changes were also introduced to the lifelong learning pillar of the framework, resulting in the exclusion of informal learning from the scope of the CQFW. A light stakeholder review of the CQFW was undertaken in 2020; it highlighted that stakeholders continue to value the CQFW as a vehicle to describe the devolved skills and education system in Wales and to underpin strategies related to qualifications and learning. A notable benefit of maintaining the CQFW is to aid learner mobility and progression via alignment with the other UK and European Qualification Frameworks. Stakeholders agreed that the recommendations made in the 2014 CQFW Review had been addressed and strengths identified in 2014 were all considered still to be important.

1500. 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.* https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf

1501. 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).

1502. More information on Quality Assurance Agency can be found here.

1503. The advisory group annually agrees specific, measurable and achievable objectives, examples of which include commissioning animated video clips to explain and publicise the CQFW and developing e-learning modules (Welsh Government, 2019).

1504. More information can be found at JCQ website.

Figure 32. 2021 CQFW governance structure
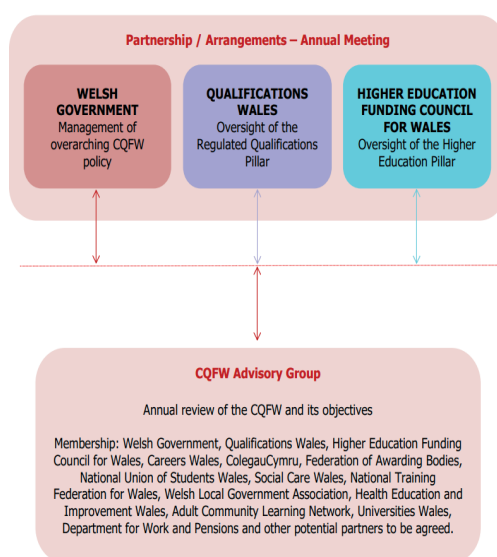
Source: Welsh Government (2021). https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/202006/Wales%20Referencing%20Report%20.pdf

Colegau Cymru is a national non-governmental organisation which represents Wales' Further Education Institutions (FEIs). Colegau Cymru was delegated as the national coordination point for matters related to the EQF by the Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2019).

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 policy decisions 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 HEFCW. This body ensures the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is in place for assessing the quality of higher education. It also scrutinises the performance of regulated providers (Welsh Government, 2019). HEFCW was given regulatory powers through the introduction of the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015, with duties relating to monitoring higher education institutions' compliance with fee and access plans and assessing the quality of education.

As part of the Welsh Government's 2021 legislative programme[1505], the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill will be brought forward. The bill, if it is passed following scrutiny by Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament, will establish a new Commission for

Tertiary Education and Research and replace the current Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). It is proposed that the new Commission would become responsible for the tertiary education sector, including further and higher education, adult community-based learning, apprenticeships and mainstream sixth forms. The proposals include the Commission having certain regulatory (and funding) functions, but this does not include regulatory responsibility for qualifications.

1505. https://gov.wales/welsh-governments-legislative-programme-announced

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways[1506]

While the CQFW recognises the importance and benefits of recognition of prior learning (RPL), there is no national policy or strategy relating to it and its use remains at the discretion of individual providers[1507]. There are also no systems to coordinate validation across the different sectors of learning in Wales and no sectors are given priority. The terms recognition of prior learning (RPL), accreditation of prior learning (APL) and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) are used interchangeably. 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 CFQW high-level pillars[1508] and it has no set objectives in terms of learning outcomes.

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[1509]. Access to higher education courses includes opportunities for recognition of prior learning. Data are not collected at national level, except in the higher education sector, where they are only collected in relation to RPL provision (APEL modules) and not in relation to access aided via RPL[1510]. Opportunities for RPL are developed from a sectoral perspective, with different approaches for VET, 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[1511].

In 2017, the publicly funded National Health Service of Wales – NHS Wales – 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). In 2020, Qualifications Wales developed guidance for awarding bodies on recognition of prior learning. All recognised awarding bodies that offer RPL must have a policy published and easily accessible for users of their qualifications.

The lifelong learning pillar of the CQFW is also intended to recognise non-formal learning provision on the CQFW. The focus is on accrediting learning provision from outside the higher education and regulated qualifications pillars of the CQFW. Gaining CQFW credit value is dependent on the learner completing assessment based on learning outcomes[1512]. National vocational qualifications (NVQs) 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.

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 considered a potential enabler for validation in Wales. One of the main impacts identified by stakeholders is greater recognition of prior learning, with particular benefits for disadvantaged learner groups, helping to raise aspirations and promote progression opportunities: the recognition of vendor/industry/professional qualifications and smaller, bite-size units of accredited learning is very important for disadvantaged learners (Cedefop and UK NARIC, 2019). Stakeholders identified the flexibility created by the CQFW as a benefit and, through RPL,

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1506. This section draws mainly on input from Scott, D. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: United Kingdom - Wales*. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_United_Kingdom_Wales.pdf

1507. In 2018, the Welsh Government published a brochure (not a regulatory document) on the CQFW (Welsh Government, 2018a) that includes an outline of principles related to RPL. Its content is aimed at those working within the education/training and advice and guidance sectors. https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-01/cqfw-brochure.pdf.

1508. The high-level pillars refer to the credit, learning time, recognised standards, levels/level descriptors, title, purpose, learning outcomes and assessment criteria (Welsh Government, 2019).

1509. 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).

1510. () 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

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1511. () Since 2016, the Welsh Government has also published its national strategy Prosperity for all, acknowledging the importance of lifelong learning both for national prosperity and individual development.

1512. 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).

the framework is said to have helped employers and employees to avoid duplication of training. If the proposal to develop the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) is successful, it will provide an opportunity to develop a single RPL policy position for the whole of the post compulsory sector (Welsh Government, 2019).

NQF implementation and impact

The CQFW was formally adopted in 2002 and was launched in 2003[1513]. The CQFW is an all-inclusive meta-framework designed to improve access, flexibility and progression in learning, assessment and certification, through qualifications and learning that is credit-based. It encompasses all levels and types of qualifications and credit-based accredited training. This means that the framework incorporates formal qualifications which assess learners at the end of standardised periods of learning, as well as more flexible, less formal learning opportunities (Welsh Government, 2019). It consists of three pillars: regulated qualifications, higher education qualifications and lifelong learning. The CQFW has evolved to reach an operational stage. From 2015 onwards, all regulated qualifications adhere to Qualifications Wales' 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.

The 2019 updated referencing report included changes to the level descriptors related to the regulated qualifications pillar of the CQFW, the creation of Qualifications Wales as an independent regulator in relation to this pillar and the distinction between different types of learning within the lifelong learning pillar of the CQFW (Welsh Government, 2019). This review activity was strongly informed by the findings of a qualitative impact review of the CQFW commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2014.

Wales has a database of regulated qualifications called QiW[1514] which is owned and managed by Qualifications Wales, the regulator of regulated qualifications and the qualification system in Wales. The database contains information on qualification titles, numbers, level, the awarding body that awards each qualification as well as links to further qualification information. Over 100 000 current

and archived qualifications are included. CQFW levels are indicated on Europass certificates[1515] and diplomas as well as in the qualification database. However, EQF levels have not been included on certificates/diplomas or supplements but are included in the database. For awarding bodies in the regulated pillar there is a regulatory requirement to include the level on certificates.

An evaluation of the CQFW was carried out in 2014, and its positive and constructive role in the Welsh qualification landscape was recognised, in relation to its contribution to the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and learner progression. It found that the CQFW was particularly well-established in the higher education, and adult and community learning sectors. For other sectors, however, engagement was lower. 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 light-touch stakeholder review undertaken in 2020 highlighted that stakeholders continue to value the CQFW as a vehicle to describe the devolved skills and education system in Wales, that strengths identified in 2014 remain important, and that the 2014 recommendations had been addressed. A comprehensive referencing exercise was conducted in 2019 and the evidence presented showed that the CQFW is well-established and embedded across Wales[1516].

The NQF is used by different stakeholders. Credit size and levels are used by universities in setting entry requirements and selecting students. Members of the CQFW advisory group are promoting the CQFW widely amongst learners, FEIs, HEIs, schools and employers. The fan and pillar diagrams, e-brochure and web animation will continue to be strategically distributed throughout the system to communicate the features of the CQFW and improve understanding of levels and pillars. The levels of qualifications are included in job advertisements, while accessible publicity materials (leaflets, videos[1517]) 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.

1513. The 10-year implementation plan which ran from 2003 to 2014, reflected the view that framework implementation takes time and requires a long-term development perspective.

1514. More information on the qualification database: https://www.qiw.wales/

1515. More information on Europass certificate supplements: UK Naric homepage

1516. https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/202006/Wales%20Referencing%20Report%20.pdf

1517. https://beta.gov.wales/credit-and-qualifications-framework-cqfw-overview.

Referencing to the EQF

The CQFW was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) as a part of the overall UK referencing process in February 2010. An updated referencing report was presented to the EQF advisory group in June 2019. A framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) was linked to the Bologna process; it was self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2009[1518] and was incorporated in the updated referencing to the EQF in 2019.

Important lessons and future plans

The framework has matured over time and has become an integral part of the qualifications system in Wales. The independent stakeholder review of the CQFW (2014) presented recommendations as to how the Welsh Government should improve and promote the CQFW.

The changes introduced in Wales in recent years aimed to increase the awareness of the framework and simplify levels of understanding and its profile. Other main changes included the formation of the CQFW advisory group and of Qualifications Wales. 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 (Scott, 2019).

The CQFW advisory group will continue to review its objectives annually and take forward recommendations identified in the 2020 Review of the CQFW. Recommendations include maintaining the CQFW's high-level principles, promoting and raising the profile of the CQFW, maintaining alignment with other qualification frameworks and agreeing on a five-year cycle of review. It also highlights an opportunity to consider whether the existing management and governance arrangements remain appropriate to support the CQFW moving forward, considering the proposal to establish the Commission for Tertiary Education and

Research (CTER), through the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill that forms part of the Welsh Government's 2021 legislative programme. If the Bill is approved by the Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament, the CTER would become a Welsh Government sponsored body and, once established, would have oversight of the post-compulsory education and training system in Wales, including FEIs (Welsh Government, 2019).

1518. QQA (2009). *Verification of the compatibility of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) with the framework for qualifications of the European higher education area (FQ-EHEA)* http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Qualifications_frameworks/81/2/FHEQSelfCert_596812.pdf

Table 91. 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 degree • Vocational qualifications • Professional certificate in education • Apprenticeships	6
5	• Foundation degree • Vocational qualifications • Higher national diploma • Apprenticeships	5
4	• Certificates of higher education • Vocational qualifications • Higher national certificate • Apprenticeships	
3	• Skills challenge certificate - advanced • Vocational qualifications • AS / A level • Access to higher education • Apprenticeships	4
2	• Vocational qualifications • Essential skills • General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) (grades A* to C) • Apprenticeships	3
1	• Skills challenge certificate - foundation • Vocational qualifications • Essential skills • General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) (grades D to G)	2
Entry level 3	• Entry level qualifications • Essential skills	1
Entry levels 1-2	• Entry point for learners with additional learning needs	-

Source: Adapted from Welsh Government (2019). *Credit and qualifications framework for Wales: referencing the credit and qualifications framework for Wales to the European qualifications framework.* https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/202006/Wales%20Referencing%20Report%20.pdf

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Abbreviations

APEL	accreditation of prior experiential learning
APL	accreditation of prior learning
CQFW	credit and qualifications framework for Wales
CTER	Commission for Tertiary Education and Research
EQF	European qualifications framework
FHEQ	framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
FQHEIS	framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland
GCE A level	general certificate of education advanced level
GCSE	general certificate of secondary education

HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
JCQ	Joint Council for Qualifications
NHS	National Health Service of Wales
NOS	National Occupational Standards
NQF	national qualifications framework
NVQs	national vocational qualifications
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QCF	qualifications and credit framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
RQF	regulated qualifications framework
UAL	unitised accredited learning
VET	vocational education and training
VIP	vendor, industry, professional learning

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UKRAINE

Introduction and context

NQF snapshot

Ukraine's NQF was adopted in 2011 as a ten-level framework. The Law on Higher Education in 2014 linked higher education qualifications to the NQF. The Law on Education in 2017 established the basis of a competency-based system of education and lifelong learning and linked existing qualifications to 11 NQF levels. It distinguished between educational and professional qualifications, the latter having a clear function in the labour market. It also laid the legal basis for the National Qualifications Agency[1519] as a tripartite collegial body.

The National Qualifications Agency became operational in 2019. In 2018 Ukraine established an independent Quality Assurance Agency for higher education[1520]. In 2020 the NQF levels were revised[1521] to bring them into line with the EQF for lifelong learning. The EU4Skills[1522] project, which started in late 2019, supports the implementation of the NQF and the introduction of 100 new competency-based vocational qualifications, based on occupational standards. Since 2016, Ukraine has been implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning for cooks in three cities (Odessa, Rivne and Kiev). Qualifications centres are planned to take over this role for a growing number of occupations, issuing professional qualifications. The National Qualifications Agency will accredit these Qualification Centres.

In 2021, Ukraine had begun preparing for self-certification with the Qualifications Framework for the European Area for Higher Education. It is also currently participating in a pilot to compare its NQF to the EQF. The National Qualifications Framework is intended for use by public authorities and local governments, institutions and organizations, educational institutions, employers, other legal entities and individuals for the development, identification, correlation, recognition, planning and development of qualifications.

The NQF is an instrument to harmonize approaches to qualifications in the labour market and education and training system and to promote national and international recognition. It is also a tool for European integration as the NQF is mentioned in the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU[1523]. All educational and professional qualifications need to be described in learning outcomes formulated in accordance with the descriptors of the NQF, which are: knowledge, skills, communication, responsibility and autonomy.

Ukraine is still in the activation stage but moving towards the operational stage.

Policy context

Ukraine is a priority partner for the EU. An Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), was signed in 2014. It is the main tool for bringing Ukraine and the EU closer together: it promotes deeper political ties, stronger economic links and the respect for common values. The

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1519. https://nqa.gov.ua/
1520. National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (naqa.gov.ua)
1521. Рівні Національної рамки кваліфікацій | Міністерство освіти і науки України (mon.gov.ua)
1522. EU Programme "EU4Skills" Supports Ukraine in Reforming System of Vocational Education and Training | Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (mon.gov.ua)
1523. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0529(01)&from=EN

Agreement entered into force on 1 September 2017. Ukraine and the EU have jointly defined a reform agenda – the Association Agenda[1524].

There is a commitment from both sides to support the development of an operational NQF based on European experience - the Association Agreement (Article 432) speaks of "establishing a national framework to improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications and skills, drawing, where possible, on the EU experience".

The EU is Ukraine's main trading partner, representing 42% of Ukraine's total trade. Ukraine's export profile is gradually becoming more diversified; moreover, the value added of products and services exported is increasing. However, foreign direct investment remains low.

An increasing number of workers, known as platform workers, are involved in online work for clients in the European Union, facilitated by digital and language skills and good internet connections. Ukraine is one of the major countries of origin of new labour migrants in the European Union.

NQF legal basis
The NQF was adopted by Resolution Number 1341 of the Cabinet of Ministers on 23 November 2011, confirming the NQF as a ten-level framework for lifelong learning covering all learning from preschool to PhD and including adult learning. An implementation plan was developed for the period 2012-2015.

The Higher Education Law, Law Number 1556-VII, adopted 1 July 2014, made a direct link between higher education and the NQF by allocating HE qualifications to the NQF levels.

The Law on Education, Law Number 2145-VIII adopted on 5 September 2017, gave a central role to the NQF and competence- based education. The law supported principles for lifelong learning, giving a central place to learning outcomes and key competences and more attention to independent assessment. The law established a competency-based approach for general education and secondary VET through the New Ukrainian School concept.

VET standards should be based on occupational standards. The law distinguished between educational qualifications, delivered through formal education, and professional qualifications, focused on use in the labour market. The law on education

introduced Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks and partial qualifications.

The Law on Education introduced an additional 5th level for pre-higher education to the NQF (Article 10.2), making it an eleven-level framework (covering levels 0-10). In 2020, the level descriptors of the NQF were again revised, moving from 11 to 8 levels. The revised NQF Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of 25 June 2020[1525] also means that vocational education qualifications are limited to levels 25, while levels 6-8 are reserved for higher education. Professional qualifications linked to specific occupations can span the whole range of levels of the NQF. This may make the NQF at the higher levels less adapted to recognising lifelong learning.

The Law on Higher Education was amended in 2019, stating that accredited higher education institutions are allowed to issue diplomas and degrees only for accredited study programmes, making the NQF a quality assurance mechanism. Since 2018, Ukraine also has also run an independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

The Law on Education has a chapter on the Qualifications System, describing the tasks of the National Agency for Qualifications (NQA). It coordinates the development of occupational standards and qualifications, manages the registers of standards and qualifications, supports widening of Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL), and accredits qualification centres. The

Statute of the National Agency for Qualifications (NQA) was adopted on 5 December 2018 with Resolution 1029. The National Qualifications Agency is a collegial body, of different ministries and social partners and was established in 2019. It cooperates closely with all relevant bodies dealing with aspects of the qualification system. The NQF register has been developed and was approved on 16 July 2021 but is not fully operational yet. Existing qualifications have been analysed and mapped.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is regulated by the Law on Professional Development of Employees, Law number 4312, stipulating that the State Employment Service can establish recognition centres for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Law on Employment, Law Number 5067-VI of 5 July 2012, confirmed the right of unemployed people to have validated their skills obtained through informal learning.

1524. https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/ukraine/docs/st06978_15_en.pdf

1525. Про внесення змін у додаток до п... | від 25.06.2020 № 519 (rada.gov.ua)

Order 256 of the Ministry of Social Policy, adopted in 2016, initiated the implementation of validation of non-formal learning for guards, cooks and welders. A national methodology for developing occupational standards was adopted by the Ministry of Social Policy on 22 January 2018, via the Ministerial Order on Approval of the Professional Standards Development Methodology Number 74, giving occupational standards a clear legal status.

Policy objectives

Education and training reforms

Ukraine has a large higher education sector. In 2019, 62% people aged 30-34 had completed tertiary education, well above the EU average of 40%. Participation in higher education remains high, although student numbers are dropping due to the demographic developments i.e., the population is ageing. One in three students is extramural, showing the role of higher education in adult learning.

Higher Education reforms have been shaped by the Bologna process, breaking the linkage between higher education and the Tariff Qualification System in 2014, and abolishing qualification types inherited from the Soviet System. Quality assurance should support better employment outcomes by focusing more on learning outcomes. Apart from improved external quality assurance through the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Ukraine received a $200m World Bank loan in 2021 to support processes at institutional level.

Current preuniversity education reforms address the content of education, preparing young people better for the twenty-first century through the introduction of decentralised competency-based general education, giving more emphasis to developing key competences and transversal skills, while also aligning the duration in secondary education to European practices. These changes (part of the New Ukrainian School concept) are also affecting secondary VET, which will span levels 3-5 of the NQF.

A Concept for Modernised VET has been developed. Modernised VET will be provided in a decentralised VET system that is competency-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 based on occupational standards.

Important reforms are underway in adult learning, linked with the legislation of professional

qualifications, the validation of non-formal and informal learning; independent assessment by Qualification Centres and the development of sectoral qualifications frameworks. Partial qualifications have been regulated in addition to full educational and professional qualifications. New institutional settings are created through the establishment of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NAQA), the National Agency for Qualifications (NQA), and Qualification Centres.

Aims of NQF

The objectives of the NQF have evolved over time. It started from the need for more relevant qualifications and quality assurance through European standards, also showing the desire for European integration and especially the link to the Bologna process. Through articulation with education reforms, the NQF is also becoming instrumental in supporting support wider reforms. The NQF facilitates higher education reform, the reform of general and vocational education, lifelong learning and a better coordination between education and labour market policies. The NQF supports competency-based education, 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 professional qualifications, the introduction of validation of non-formal learning and independent assessment of candidates are seen as the most important tools to ensure that the workforce acquires and keeps up to date with identified skill needs. This is important as there is still a strong mismatch between supply and demand.

Self-certification against the QF-EHEA has started and is supported by the EU4Skills project. It will be addressed together with the pilot on Comparison of the NQF with the EQF. The NQF is also an instrument for EU integration.

The Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union includes a number of elements that are relevant for implementing the qualifications reforms. The Agreement promotes convergence in the field of 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 the EU experience; and helping young people acquire knowledge, skills and competencies outside the educational 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 EU instruments.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

NQF scope and structure
Through the Law on Education, the NQF has clearly become an instrument for lifelong learning.

The original NQF Decree was 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 working group. The Annex explains what the NQF is, its purpose and key concepts, and the NQF descriptors. The NQF originally had ten levels, 0-9.

Following article 36 of the Law on Education an additional level was introduced. In 2020 these were then brought in line with the EQF, moving from 11 to 8 levels.

The revised NQF Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of 25 June 2020[1526] means that vocational education qualifications are limited to levels 2-5, with several types of qualifications existing at level 5 covering vocational and higher education. HE qualifications span levels 5 to 8. Professional qualifications determined by the classifier of occupations can cover the complete spectrum of the NQF.

The NQF has eight levels. There are four domain descriptors:
- Knowledge: has to be meaningful and focused on the field of specialisation, so that it can inform conscious, purposeful activities. Knowledge is divided into empirical knowledge (facts and ideas) and theoretical knowledge (conceptual, methodological);
- Skills: the ability to apply knowledge to perform tasks and solve problems. The skills/abilities are divided into cognitive skills (including logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical skills (including manual skill, the use of practical methods, materials and tools).
- Communication: interaction between persons in order to transmit information, coordinate actions, or undertake joint activities;
- Responsibility and autonomy: the ability of a person to apply knowledge and skills independently and responsibly;

Types of qualifications
Ukraine's legislation defines a qualification as a standardized set of acquired competencies (learning outcomes) recognised by an authorised entity and certified by a relevant document. Qualifications by content are classified into educational and professional; and by volume - into full and partial.

An educational qualification is a set of learning outcomes (educational requirements and competencies) established by an educational institution or other authorised subject of educational activity and certified by a relevant document. Educational qualifications are awarded, recognised and validated by educational institutions or other educational entities.

A professional qualification is a standardised set of acquired competencies (learning outcomes) recognized by a qualification centre, educational entity, other authorised entity and certified by a relevant document, which allows the person to perform a certain type of work or carry out professional activities. Professional qualifications are assigned, recognised and confirmed by qualification centres, educational institutions and other entities authorised to do so by law. Professional qualifications have principally a labour market function and are based on the Classifier of Occupations and, where available, occupational standards.

Vocational education qualifications and higher education qualifications can fall into either of the above two categories.

Both educational and professional qualifications are sets of competencies or learning outcomes. The national qualifications system provides coherence between educational and professional qualifications and their compliance with labour market needs and creates mechanisms for the recognition of qualifications acquired throughout life.

The qualification is considered complete if the person acquires a complete set of competencies defined by a standard. The qualification is considered partial if a person acquires part of the competencies defined by a standard. In principle for all qualifications, learning outcomes required can be achieved in formal, non-formal or informal settings.

A complete list of certificates for educational qualifications can be accessed through EDEBO[1527], the single state electronic database for education.

1526. Про внесення змін у додаток до п... | від 25.06.2020 № 519 (rada.gov.ua)

1527. Реєстри | ЄДИНА ДЕРЖАВНА ЕЛЕКТРОННА БАЗА з питань ОСВІТИ (edbo.gov.ua)

This includes, for general education, the certificate of basic secondary education for special needs students, the certificate for basic secondary education and the certificate for complete secondary education, covering levels 1, 2 and 3 of the NQF[1528].

VET qualifications correspond to NQF levels 2, 3, 4 or 5. They include the diploma of skilled worker and the certificate of workers assignment qualification - both span different levels 2, 3, 4, and, for some occupations, level 5. There is also the diploma for pre-higher education or professional junior bachelor (formerly junior specialist), at level 5.

Qualifications for higher education include junior bachelor (level 5), Bachelor (level 6), Master's degree (level 7) and Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Arts and Doctor of Science (level 8). Different types of professional qualifications have not yet been specified.

Quality assurance of qualifications

Quality assurance has been a main objective of the NQF. All qualifications should define minimal requirements from the learner/holder in terms of learning outcomes. Educational qualifications should promote competency-based education and include key competences. New education standards and curricula for general education, vocational education and higher education are prepared. The systematic use of occupational standards is a guarantee to make qualifications relevant for the labour market.

New approaches are developed for elaborating occupational standards, educational standards, curricula (educational programmes) and assessment standards. 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 modular approach, strengthening the relevance of standards, strengthening assessment processes and programme accreditation of providers.

The most important quality assurance principles are legislated in the Law on Higher Education (2014), VNFIL regulations (2016), the Law on Education (2017) and safeguarded by two new institutions, namely the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NAQA), and the National Agency for Qualifications (NQA), both operational

since 2019. The number of accredited study programmes of higher education is growing. There is no institutional accreditation, only programme accreditation. Programme accreditation is also foreseen in vocational education, by verifying that programmes are in line with the state educational standards.

The National Agency for Qualifications accredits qualification centres which deal with independent assessment of professional qualifications, including the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Independent assessment should ensure that individuals meet the learning outcomes in the standards. This can facilitate autonomy of providers for learning and set safeguards for assessment.

Independent assessment based on qualifications standards is in theory increasingly important within a decentralised education system where providers have more autonomy to adapt the provision to local and learner needs. In practice, it needs more attention for educational qualifications.

Use of learning outcomes and standards

Learning outcomes are used in all standards. The Ukrainian education system is competency-based. Under the concept of the New Ukrainian School11, a twelve year education system has been introduced, consisting of a general nine-years secondary education, followed by a profiled three year specialisation, bringing Ukrainian education closer to common practices in other industrialised countries.

Students should be trained to become responsible citizens, patriots, innovators, and critical thinkers. All secondary school graduates need to develop ten 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 for developing the key competences: reading abilities, oral and written expression, critical thinking, 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, the ability to work in teams.

1528. The Yerevan communique foresees that end of school certificates will be placed on level 4 of the EQF, which in analogy of the NQF would normally mean level 4 of the NQF. This is also foreseen in the Law on Education which introduced 12 year preuniversity education instead of eleven but at the moment this is not yet fully implemented.

In higher education, learning outcomes are used in all education standards and related programmes, but assessment has not been systematically addressed yet.

In VET, experience with learning outcomes-based curricula on an experimental basis goes back to 2006. Since then, hundreds of new standards have been introduced with aspects of a learning outcomes based approach, although only a limited number have a direct link to occupational standards. The new model of education standards for VET describes 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. After successful completion of each module, students will be able to get a partial qualification. These partial qualifications will also form a bridge to professional qualifications.

VET standards do not any longer have typical curricula for theoretical subjects and practical training; the list of educational subjects is determined by educational institutions together with employers; curricula for work-based learning are developed by the educational institution together with enterprises and agreed with the regional education authorities.

Exams in VET have not changed yet due to the delay in VET legislation and the COVID crisis.

Credit systems
In higher education ECTS is used. Apart from modules (units of learning outcomes) used in VET and higher education, there are partial qualifications for integrating different target groups into learning and the labour market. These include e.g., Ukrainian language proficiency tests. This modularised approach is opening the opportunities for a credit based approach, but this is not yet currently on the agenda.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF
Since the beginning many stakeholders have been involved in the development and implementation of the NQF and the qualification system. Currently developments include the Cabinet of Ministers, the Ministries of Education, Economic Development and Trade, Social Policy, Regional Development, Finance, Culture, and Agriculture and the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament), the National Academy

of Pedagogical Sciences, the Academy of Sciences, the Institute of 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, NGO's and other training providers.

Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders
The Ministry of Education is the main policy body in the area of qualifications. It has been collaborating closely with the Ministry of Social Policy and the Ministry of Economy and Trade. The Ministry of Social Policy has been in charge of developing and implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning, occupational standards, the Classifier of Professions, guidance and counselling, but many tasks have been taken over by the Ministry of Economy and Trade while others are transferred to the National Qualifications Agency. Article 38 of the Law on Education legislates the National Qualifications Agency as a collegial body, co-founded by government and social partners to strengthen coordination in the field of qualifications.

According to the law, NQA has 17 tasks. These include coordination of, and informing, stakeholders, supporting legislation, 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. The statute of the National Agency for Qualifications[1529] was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on 5 December 2018 and revised in 2019[1530].

NQA supports the introduction of the NQF in line with the Law on Education, carries out international cooperation in the field of qualifications, in particular in order to harmonize the NQF with relevant international instruments; and provides information support for the National Qualifications System and the National Qualifications Framework. The NQA is in charge of coordinating the creation of educational and professional standards, educational programmes, standards and procedures for assessing learning outcomes and qualifications.

1529. Деякі питання Національного аге... | від 05.12.2018 № 1029 (rada.gov.ua)
1530. Про внесення змін до Статуту Нац... | від 10.07.2019 № 693 (rada.gov.ua)

In accordance with paragraph 13 of the Statute of the NQA the agency has a board of 12 members, two each representing the Ministry of Education and Science Ukraine, the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, and the Ministry of Economy and Trade, while three each from the Joint representative body of employers' organisations and the Joint Representative Body of All-Ukrainian trade union associations. In essence, the NQA is an institution of social dialogue. The NQA board was approved by a decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in April 2019. The tenure of the board is three years, so that in 2022 a new board will be established. The NQA became fully operational in November 2019, when it was registered as a state organization in the Unified State Register of Legal Entities, natural persons-entrepreneurs and public formations. This allowed the Secretariat of the Agency to start its activities.

The key priorities for the first three years are:
- establishing communication and institutional ties with domestic and foreign stakeholders;
- developing the legal aspects and settings such as qualification (examination) centres;
- revising the process for developing occupational standards;
- launching the national register of qualifications, including its regulatory basis;
- identifying qualification needs in line with changing labour market demand;
- developing a new edition of the Classifier of Occupations.

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

VNFIL arrangements

Implementation of VNFIL began under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Policy and the State Employment Service. Three occupations - cook, guard and welder - were identified for implementation in three locations (Odessa, Rivne and Kiev), but so far only cooks have received certificates via validation – by the end of 2020, 470 people had been qualified[1531] across the three centres. Although this is not a very high number, validation has had a very positive impact on individual candidates, opening new career opportunities. The role of the NQA and the establishment of Qualification Centres should widen the practice of VNFIL further.

The law on professional development of employees (Law № 4312 of January 2012) introduced the establishment of recognition centres by the State Employment Service. In order to verify the employee's professional qualification, the recognition centres should work with training centres of the State Employment Service, VET institutions, enterprises, and other providers licensed to carry out educational activities for certain occupations. The certificate to be awarded could be a certificate for specific professional skills or for improvement. The procedure for evaluation was 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 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 the Resolution "On the Procedure for validation of blue-collar occupations, non-formal and informal learning outcomes" Number 340. This was followed in December 2013 by Ministry of Social Policy Order Number 875/1776 which sets criteria for (private) assessment centres and the ministerial order 886 which sets list of occupations for assessment. During 2013-2014 the first pilot in Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning for Cooks was undertaken.

The system became operational only in 2016 through Order Number 256 of 2016 of the Ministry of Social Policy. The Odessa and Rivne training centres of the State Employment Services and the Higher Commercial College of the National Trade and Economic University in Kiev acquired the status of assessment centres. The latter was replaced by Higher Vocational School n. 33, which has since seen the highest number of candidates. There is a need for more assessment centres, trained assessors, verifiers and standards, which measures together can facilitate assessment to widen these first pilots to a truly national system. There is also progress with the introduction of validation of nonformal and informal learning in higher education.

The latest Bologna Report[1532] mentions that there is no national validation system in HE in the country, however there are VNFIL procedures in operation at some higher education institutions for specific study programmes. Websites of different higher education institutions show that they include VNFIL in their activities, as higher education institutions are requested to have such procedures by the Quality Assurance Agency. A regulation on VNFIL for pre-

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higher and higher education in an advanced stage of preparation.

The focus on boosting validation practices is linked with the establishment of qualification centres, development of professional qualifications and assessment standards, and the training of assessors, which all depend on the National Qualifications Agency. The establishment of a network of qualification centres is foreseen in the Concept for the implementation of the state policy in vocational education, approved by the Ukrainian Government in 2020.

Based on professional qualifications, the NQA will authorise qualification centres to assess and recognise the learning outcomes of individuals (including those obtained through non-formal or informal education). The qualification centre can confirm partial or full recognition of professional qualifications. As a general rule qualification centres operate within a specific sector. Centres may be a legal entity or an accredited division of a legal entity. Some centres are already operating within large companies like Ukrzaliznytsia (Ukrainian State Railways) and the energy company DTEK, but these have not been authorised yet. A regulation of the Ministry of Education on Qualification Centres, Prepared by NQA, was registered in June 2021, opening the way to start the accreditation process.

NQF implementation and impact

Key achievements and main findings
In 2011 the NQF was adopted and in 2012 a first NQF implementation plan overseen by an interdepartmental committee. There has been progress in various areas of work during the first five years.

This started with testing new approaches and developing methodologies for standards, and development of a concept for the National Qualification System (which was not approved), the development of occupational standards by the employers in cooperation with other stakeholders and in developing the legislation for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the preparation of a new law on higher education. In 2014, the Association Agreement with the EU mentioned the need for developing a functioning NQF.

On 14 December 2016 the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (Governmental Order Number 1077) adopted the NQF implementation plan for 2016-2020. The plan is the result of constructive cooperation between stakeholders from the world

of work, from vocational and higher education under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Science, and with an active role of the Federation of Employers.

The plan includes seven areas:
1. Coordinate activities and provide legislative and regulatory support for the development of the National Qualifications System
2. Modernize the system for skills needs anticipation and occupational standards development
3. Develop qualifications of different types (educational standards and curricula based on learning outcomes) in line with the NQF descriptors and levels
4. Develop a system for the validation of learning outcomes based on professional qualifications
5. Improve processes for quality assurance of qualifications
6. Improve communication on the NQF implementation
7. Ensure international recognition of the NQF and national qualifications.

In 2017 a new interdepartmental working group was established to monitor NQF implementation. That same year the Law on Education brought the NQF back as a tool to support lifelong learning, with a stronger focus on competences, and on more relevant qualifications. It provided a much stronger legal framework for the NQF as a pillar for wider education and training reforms, moving towards a competency-based education system. In 2018 these have been succeeded by a regulation and national methodology for developing occupational standards. New educational standards formats, and methodologies have been developed and are implemented for higher education, general education and for vocational education.

In 2019, the EU4Skills project supported by the EU and some member states started its implementation including the development of 100 VET standards and curricula, piloting of qualification centres and VNFIL, self-certification of the NQF and the development of the National Agency for Qualifications.

Since 2019 the National Qualifications Agency and the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education have become operational, strengthening a systemic approach to the use of learning outcomes and the NQF. Recently, legislation has been adopted for the NQF register and for the accreditation of qualification centres.

In 2020, NQF levels were revised to bring them more in line with the EQF, although the new levels 68 are exclusively reserved to higher education.

Further, in late 2020 a national working group was established to prepare the self-certification of the with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process). Ukraine was also selected a first pilot for comparison of the EQF with qualifications framework outside the EQF countries, as provided for in the revised EQF Recommendation of 2017.

These two processes, self-certification against the QF-EHEA, and comparison of the NQF with the EQF, will be coordinated so that they can go forward at the same time, each gaining from synergies.

Qualifications registers and databases

A single national register of qualifications was adopted through a regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers on 16 June 2021. The Register will provide information about:

1. professional and educational qualifications, and qualification centres, providing open access within the registry;
2. occupational standards and standards under development, providing open access within the registry;
3. awarded professional qualifications and part-qualifications to individuals (credentials), with limited access to respect privacy regulations.

At the time of writing, the register[1533] contained 168 occupational standards[1534] but not yet any qualifications or qualification centres. Currently a new procedure for developing occupational standards under the responsibility of NQA is in consultation reviewing the procedure that was issued by the Ministry of Social Policy in 2017. With support of the ETF, a prototype of the register was developed that is compatible with the 2017 recommendation on the EQF. In 2020 ETF handed the ownership to NQA.

Career information and guidance

Career Hub[1535] is a new online platform for career guidance for professionals and for youth. It is an integrated website with links to career and learning opportunities, with continuous new information. There is not yet a link to occupational standards, the NQF register, the NQA, or to Europass, the European platform for managing career and learning opportunities.

Recognition of foreign qualifications

Academic recognition is well developed in Ukraine, which is a signatory to the Lisbon Convention. In 2011, the National Information Centre of Academic Mobility was established[1536]. The functions of the National Information Centre are now delegated to the State Enterprise Information and Image Centre[1537] of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The State Enterprise Information and Image Centre is part of the ENIC-NARIC network. Its tasks are to:

- ensure free access and provide real-time information exchange with similar bodies of countries signatories of the Lisbon Convention on specific issues of national systems;
- provide citizens and institutions with information and explanations on academic mobility and recognition of credentials
- verify the authenticity of credentials issued by education providers at home and abroad;
- organize equivalency evaluations of qualifications issued by education providers abroad;
- take part in the preparation of drafts of bilateral and/or multilateral inter-governmental qualification recognition agreements; (the Centre has actively contributed to the UNESCO Global Recognition
- Convention of 2019
- taking part in information and research programmes, workshops and other events held within the information network
- promote education and academic services of Ukrainian educational institutions abroad;
- take part in international exchange programmes for pupils, students, and postgraduates;
- provide organizational support for study, internship, or professional advancement of Ukrainian citizens abroad. Principles for automatic recognition of HE qualifications allow education institutions to take admission decisions without having to go through the Centre. Ukraine has adopted clear legislation and procedures for refugees and displaced persons with qualifications.

A Procedure for recognition in Ukraine of professional qualifications obtained in other countries[1538], was approved at a Government meeting on 2 June 2021. It states that persons who have obtained professional qualifications in other countries can have them confirmed in Ukraine by applying to the competent authority.

1533. Реєстр кваліфікацій (nqa.gov.ua)
1534. Відомості про професійні стандарти (nqa.gov.ua)
1535. Головна | Career Hub – платформа розвитку кар'єри

1536. Resolution No 924 of the Cabinet of Ministers, dated August 31, 2011
1537. Main (enic.in.ua)
1538. Головна | Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (kmu.gov.ua)

Referencing to regional framework/ other frameworks

Referencing to regional frameworks

Ukraine, though not part of the EQF process or a member of the EQF Advisory Group, seeks to align its NQF with the EQF. Its NQF level descriptors have been brought into line with the EQF recently. Further, the Association Agreement with the EU specifically refers to establishing an NQF to improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications and skills, drawing on EU experience.

However, Ukraine has been a member of the Bologna process since 2005 and established a committee for self-certification with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) in December 2020. This group and its work are supported by the EU4Skills project.

The 2017 EQF Recommendation also provides for the comparison of the EQF with third country qualifications frameworks. Ukraine has been selected as a pilot for comparison. The comparison process can be combined with Ukraine's self-certification process, ensuring that all types of qualification in the NQF can benefit from more transparency. This is especially relevant given the number of migrants to the EU who hold vocational qualifications.

International cooperation

The Bologna Process is one of the main drivers for the development of the NQF. The independent National Agency for Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education[1539] has started an ambitious accreditation programme. New processes for programme accreditation, new higher education standards and new curricula have been developed and introduced. All programmes and their components are now expressed in learning outcomes. In 2020 the agency joined the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education and became an affiliated member of ENQA, the European Network. The National Qualifications Agency is also looking for international partnerships.

International donor support

In the period before 2019, a number of education projects, limited in size and scope, were implemented. The Tempus and Erasmus Plus Programme for Higher Education have been a continuous source for cooperation in Higher Education. Additionally, the British Council has also

given support to the development of the NQF and higher education reforms.

In general education the Polish and Finnish governments have been providing bilateral support to implement the New Ukrainian School concept. In VET there has been a Twinning Project and some smaller bilateral initiatives, including cooperation to develop dual education. Estonia has implemented a project for the Volyn region, which provided school partnerships and curriculum development support and has been particularly important as a trailblazer for moving towards a competency based, decentralised VET system.

The ULEAD project from the EU has also been providing support for the decentralisation of VET. In order to assist the development and implementation of a competency-based education system and the NQF, the ETF provided bridging support which included principles for decentralisation, key competences, the NQF implementation plan, the establishment of the National Qualifications Agency and the development of new standards and modular curricula.

The EU4Skills programme supports the Modernisation of Vocational Education, and the implementation of the NQF. This includes support for the development of the National Agency for Qualifications, the development and implementation of standards and VET curricula for 100 profiles and widening the offer of VNFIL. It further supports the NQF's comparison with the EQF and strengthens systemic changes to vocational and professional qualifications in Ukraine.

A World Bank loan of $200m for the programme, "Ukraine: Improving Higher Education for Results"[1540] should further help boost the quality of the higher education sector, as well as its relevance to the labour market, including teaching and research facilities and digital learning infrastructure. Ukraine has been a very active participant in the Tempus and Erasmus+ programmes, which have mainly benefitted higher education institutions but are gradually opening up for cooperation in VET and lifelong learning.

Important lessons and future plans

Ten years after the adoption of the NQF, the NQF has become a policy instrument clearly moving education, training and lifelong learning policies towards an outcomes based, competency based

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1539. National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (naqa.gov.ua)

1540. Development Projects: Ukraine Improving Higher Education for Results Project - P171050 (worldbank.org)

system. It is embedded in key legislation and linked with reform initiatives in general education, VET and higher education and with important international cooperation initiatives and donor programmes.

Institutionally, the paradigm shift to an outcomes based qualification system is embedded in the

National Qualifications Agency, as a tripartite body, the independent National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Information and Image Centre for recognition, within the Ministry of Education, which are all operational.

New standards and curricula have been developed and a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning has been in operation since 2016. There has been a break with the Unified Tariff Qualification System and a point of no return has been reached.

Overcoming the legacy of the past is not easy, moving from a selective education system based on knowledge acquisition to a system emphasising the development of competences, away from academic subjects to integrated modules focused on competences of learners. The new changes have not yet been applied across the whole qualification system, and fully reached the end-users. Reforms will need to include more stakeholders and institutions to take effect. In particular teachers, university staff, trainers, assessors, methodologists, quality assurance experts and guidance counsellors, will need to be addressed. This will require more capacity building, experimentation and guidance, especially as the reforms coincide with more autonomy for providers. The NQF register will need to be populated with standards and qualifications. New qualifications can facilitate the move to modular curricula and new forms of learning in which the focus is on active learning. There is a particular need to develop professional qualifications to support adult learning and learning outside the classroom. The emphasis on learning outcomes does not only affect learning. Standards set the expectations in terms of expected learning outcomes. With more alternative pathways, summative assessment needs a rethink, to make sure it is independent, outcome based and modularised as well.

There is a need to carefully evaluate the use of professional and educational qualifications on lifelong learning opportunities and adult learning including pathways from professional to educational qualifications and vice versa and the possibility to use partial qualifications to accumulate learning experiences supporting horizontal or vertical progression. This is still a grey area. Validation

of nonformal and informal learning has been limited, but this experience has nevertheless been important. Qualification centres will need to be accredited to widen the scope and opportunities for validation and recognising adult learning. These Qualification Centres can serve the needs of enterprises, to certify their personnel, but special attention needs to be paid to people without qualifications. This implies a diversification of institutions that will become qualification centres.

There are new developments that are important for the coming years. These concern the internationalisation and digitalisation of the qualification system, and the role of key competences. Digitalisation and greening are gaining importance in addition to the other key competences that are central in the current reforms. Partial qualifications deserve more attention as they can be building blocks for lifelong learning and personalised pathways. In this sense there is a need to consider the position of micro-credentials in the NQF and the NQF register.

Career guidance and counselling and lifelong learning opportunities will need to be integrated with the new qualifications system. The interoperability of the database of qualifications with other databases in the country (including EDEBO) and international databases is important to take full advantage of the new systems. COVID has shown the importance of better online resources and more online provision that will need to be integrated. Moreover, international online provision is gaining importance both Ukrainian learners and Ukrainian providers.

The self-certification of the NQF to the QF-EHEA and the forthcoming comparison of Ukraine's NQF to the EQF offer an important opportunity to benchmark the NQF internationally.

National Qualifications Agency, https://nqa.gov.ua/

Table 92. Ukrainian Qualifications Framework

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	COMMUNICATION	RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTONOMY
1	Basic general knowledge, understanding of the simplest concepts about yourself and the environment, the basics of safe behaviour	basic skills needed to perform simple tasks	• integration into groups that make up the immediate social environment • appropriate response to simple written and oral messages	• work or study under direct supervision or supervision in a structured context • limited liability for their actions • formulation of elementary judgments
2	Basic empirical knowledge and understanding of the main (general) processes in the field of education and / or work	• use of relevant information to perform simple tasks and solve everyday problems in typical situations with the use of simple rules, instructions and tools for • evaluating the results of their own activities in accordance with established criteria, the use of reasoning to substantiate their own opinions and conclusions	• interaction in the team in order to perform the tasks of • producing detailed oral and written messages	• work and / or training under the guidance or supervision with a certain independence • individual responsibility for the results of tasks during training and / or work
3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts in the field of education and / or professional activity	• performing typical tasks and solving problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information for • evaluating the results of tasks in accordance with pre-known criteria	• ability to work effectively in a team of perception of criticism, • advice and instructions for the production of detailed oral and written messages, in particular in professional activities	• responsibility for performing tasks while working or studying • adapting their behaviour to external circumstances while performing tasks or solving problems
4	Empirical and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts and understanding of principles, methods, processes in the field of education and / or professional activity	• performing complex specialized tasks, finding or making decisions on specific problems in the field of professional activity or learning to • plan their own work and in a limited context organization, control, evaluation and adjustment of the work of others	• mentoring, transfer of experience in • producing complex detailed oral and written messages, in particular in professional activities or training	• self-organization according to rules that exist in work or study contexts and are usually predictable, but may • be subject to changes in • the supervision of the day-today work of others, limited responsibility for evaluating and improving the performance of their work or study
5	Comprehensive specialized empirical and	• a wide range of cognitive and practical skills needed to solve complex problems in	• interaction with colleagues, managers and clients in matters	• organization and supervision (management) in the context of professional activity or

Source: Ministry of Education, https://mon.gov.ua/ua

European Training Foundation (ETF), https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/trp/torino-process-2018-2020ukraine-national-report and ETF bridging support to Ukraine's vocational education and training system and qualifications system in 2016-2019 | Open Space (europa.eu)

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	COMMUNICATION	RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTONOMY
	Theoretical knowledge in the field of education and / or professional activity, awareness of the limits of this knowledge	• specialized areas of professional activity and / or learn to • find creative solutions or answers to clearly identified specific and abstract problems based on the identification and application of data • planning, analysis, monitoring and evaluation own work and the work of others in a specialized context	• related to understanding, skills and activities in the professional field and / or in the field of learning to • convey to a wide range of people (colleagues, managers, clients) their own understanding, knowledge, judgments, experience, in particular professional activity	• training in the conditions of unpredictable changes • improvement of results of own activity and work of others • ability to continue training with some degree of autonomy
6	Conceptual scientific and practical knowledge, critical understanding of theories, principles, methods and concepts in the field of professional activity and / or training	• in-depth cognitive and practical skills, mastery and innovation at the level required to solve complex specialized tasks and practical problems in the field of professional activity or training	• communication to specialists and nonspecialists of information, ideas, problems, solutions, own experience and argumentation • collection, interpretation and application of • communication data on professional issues, including in a foreign language, orally and in writing	• management of complex technical or professional activities or projects • ability to be responsible for making and making decisions in unpredictable working and / or educational contexts • forming judgments that take into account social, scientific and ethical aspects • organization and management of professional development of individuals and groups • ability to continue learning with considerable autonomy
7	• Specialized conceptual knowledge, which includes modern scientific achievements in the field of professional activity or field of knowledge and is the basis for original thinking and research, critical thinking of problems in the field and on the border of fields of knowledge	• specialized problem-solving skills required for research and / or innovation to develop new knowledge and procedures • ability to integrate knowledge and solve complex problems in broad or multidisciplinary contexts • ability to solve problems in new or unfamiliar environments in the presence of incomplete or limited information, taking into account aspects of social and ethical responsibility	• clear and unambiguous communication of own knowledge, conclusions and arguments to specialists and nonspecialists, in particular to students	• management jobs or training processes that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches • responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and / or performance evaluation teams and groups • the ability to continue their education with a high degree of autonomy

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	COMMUNICATION	RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTONOMY
8	• Conceptual and methodological knowledge in the field or on the border of fields of knowledge or professional activity	• specialized skills and techniques needed to solve significant problems in the field of professional activity, science and / or innovation, expansion and reassessment of existing knowledge and professional practice of • initiating, planning, implementing and adjusting a consistent process of thorough research with due academic integrity • critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas	• free communication on issues related to the field of scientific and expert knowledge, with colleagues, the general scientific community, society as a whole, • the use of academic Ukrainian and foreign languages in professional activities and research	• Demonstration of significant authority, innovation, high degree of independence, academic and professional integrity, constant commitment to the development of new ideas or processes in the advanced contexts of professional and scientific activities, the • ability to continuous selfdevelopment and selfimprovement

Appendix in the wording of the Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers № 509 of June 12 , 2019 , № 519 of June 25, 2020

Abbreviations

ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System	NQA	National Qualifications Agency
EDEBO	Single state electronic database for education	NQF	National Qualifications Framework
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	QF-EHEA	Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area
ETF	European Training Foundation	U-LEAD	multi-donor action of the EU and MS to strengthen local self-government.
EU4Skills	EU programme for Modernisation of VET and support for NQF	VET	Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework	VNFIL	Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning
NAQA	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education		

Prepared by
The European Training Foundation

Section II
Inventory of Regional Qualifications Frameworks

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AQRF	ASEAN qualifications reference framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CANTA	Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies
Caricom	Caribbean Community
CQF	Caricom qualifications framework
CVQ	Caribbean vocational qualification
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EQAP	educational quality and assessment programme
EQF	European qualifications framework
MRA	mutual recognition arrangement
NQF	national qualifications framework
PQAF	Pacific quality assurance framework
PQF	Pacific qualifications framework
PRQS	Pacific register of qualifications and standards
QA	quality assurance
QF-EHEA	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community qualifications framework
TCCA	Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation
TQF	transnational qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
VET	vocational education and training
VUSSC	Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

ASEAN QUALIFICATIONS REFERENCE FRAMEWORK (AQRF)

Member States

Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Introduction and context

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a political and economic organization of ten Southeast Asian countries, formed on 8 August 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Since then, its membership has expanded to include Brunei, Cambodia, Lao PDR, 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 ten 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 (AMS) also signed the ASEAN Economic Blueprint, which calls for multiple areas of economic integration, including an aspiration for the free flow of skilled labour, which is facilitated through harmonization and standardization 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 finalized between 2007 and 2009 (in architecture, surveying, medical practitioners, dental practitioners and accountancy), in tourism in 2012, and in 2014, the MRA in accountancy services was updated.

The Leaders at the 27th ASEAN Summit in November 2015 adopted the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, which comprised the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025, and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2025. The ASCC Blueprint 2025 called for Empowered People and Strengthened Institutions and Equitable Access for All. The AEC Blueprint 2025 aspires towards a region which will be "highly integrated and cohesive, competitive, innovative and dynamic, with enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation, and a more resilient, inclusive, and people-oriented, people-centred community, and integrated with the global economy." 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.

Typical of other global regions, ASEAN is characterized by varying levels of economic development as well as levels of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). Some AMS has established comprehensive NQFs, others have sectoral frameworks in place, and others have yet to develop or implement qualifications frameworks. Within this context, the AQRF aims to accommodate different types of NQFs that are at different stages of development, ranging from those that are initial conceptual proposals to those that are fully developed and functioning.

Policy objectives

The AQRF is a common reference framework that enables comparisons of educational qualifications across the ASEAN countries. It aims to:
- Support recognition of qualifications.
- Encourage the development of qualifications frameworks that can facilitate lifelong learning.
- Encourage the development of national approaches to validate learning gained outside formal education.
- Promote and encourage education and learner mobility.
- Promote worker mobility.
- Support a better understanding of qualifications systems.
- 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 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. The AQRF respects the Member States' specific structures and processes that are responsive to national priorities. The framework is underpinned by a set of agreed quality assurance principles and broad standards related to:
- The functions of the registering and accrediting agencies.
- Systems for the assessment of learning and the issuing of qualifications.
- Regulation of the issuance of certificates.

As such, these quality assurance processes build confidence and trust in national qualifications and 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. The AQRF includes a set of regional level descriptors and will, in the future, allow ASEAN countries to link NQF levels to the ASEAN framework.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The level descriptors of the AQRF aim to provide a reference point for the levels in NQFs and national qualifications systems. To facilitate the referencing process, the AQRF is based on broad level descriptors which include eight levels of complexity of learning outcomes. The level descriptors include the notion of competence, which is the ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes:
- Cognitive competence involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal, tacit knowledge gained experientially.
- Functional competence (skills or know-how) for those things that a person should be able to do when they work in a given area.
- Personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation.
- Ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values

It is important to understand that the level descriptors do not make explicit reference to personal competence or ethical competence. However, personal competence and ethical competence are valued by ASEAN Member States as they contribute to the capacity of people to know things, act skilfully, work effectively in different settings, and to show responsibility and accountability. Personal competence and ethical competence include attributes such as attentiveness, intercultural awareness, active tolerance and acceptance of diversity.

These attributes could be included in individual NQFs. The level descriptors include two domains: Knowledge and Skills, and Application and Responsibility.

The Knowledge and Skills domain includes the various kinds of knowledge such as facts and theories as well as the skills used, such as practical and cognitive skills. The Application and Responsibility domain defines the context in which the knowledge and skills are used in practice as well as the level of independence including the capacity to make decisions and the responsibility for oneself and others. The level descriptors assume that the learning outcomes are cumulative by level. In other words, one level assumes that the knowledge, skills and conditions at one level include those at the lower levels. In addition, the domains must be read together to give a true indication of level.

There is no specification for credit or amount of learning defined in the AQRF. However, such a measure could facilitate comparisons across AMS that is complementary with the goals of regional qualifications frameworks. Member States could develop a credit or amount of learning measure within their own NQF and utilise this measure for recognition purposes.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The governance and structure consist of national AQRF Committees and a regional AQRF Committee. The National AQRF Committee is responsible for the national referencing report and acts as the focal point for the AQRF in each AMS as well as the "middleman" between the national policy-making bodies and national qualifications agencies and the AQRF Committee. Meanwhile, the AQRF Committee is a high-level executive committee that engages with and makes informed decisions on the complex policy and technical issues arising from implementation and evolution of a regional qualifications framework. The Committee is able to draw on its membership for up-to-date information from each AMS and considers the referencing reports submitted by each National AQRF Committee. Its functions also include to periodically report to the three ASEAN Ministerial bodies (ASEAN Economic Ministers, ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting, ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting) through ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting (SEOM), ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education (SOM-ED) and Senior Labour Officials Meeting (SLOM) on progress and activities and on further strategic steps to improve regional and national consistency and relevance. An AQRF Secretariat based in the ASEAN Secretariat provides regional coordination and administrative support on matters concerning the AQRF.

The referencing process includes all education and training sectors (e.g., schools, higher education, vocational education and training and other adult learning) according to the AQRF principles. The engagement of a full range of sectors and corresponding educational sector groups has proven to be a key factor in making regional frameworks, such as the AQRF, a success.

It is important that there is an open consultation to enable interested persons to participate. Seminars and conferences, for instance, are designed to engage stakeholders in the referencing process and to enhance interaction between the different stakeholder groups.

The range of legitimate stakeholder groups include the following:
- A government ministry or agency in the capacity of leading and/or managing.
- Education experts (in various education and training sectors and levels — general education, vocational education and training (VET), higher education, further education and training, etc.), including:
  - curriculum and assessment experts
  - learning providers or institutions
  - teachers and trainers
  - learners.
- Social partners, including:
  - Employers
  - Trade unions
  - Professional bodies
  - Licencing bodies.
- Organizations awarding qualifications.
- Organizations responsible for qualifications recognition.
- A wider range of government bodies responsible for qualifications in their respective areas (e.g., ministries of youths, agriculture and social security).
- Non-governmental organizations, including volunteering organizations and charities that may be in charge of specific qualifications.
- Education and training funding agencies.
- Qualifications agencies.
- QA agencies and/or bodies with similar responsibilities.
- Research community, particularly international experts and technical consultants.

Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The basis of the AQRF is that it is comprehensive in its capacity to accommodate quality assured learning achievements (including qualifications) gained in the AMS. Therefore, one of the principles of the AQRF is that it should encourage the development of national approaches to validate learning gained outside formal education and training including learning gained in work and learning gained unintentionally in everyday life. These areas of learning are often referred to as non-formal and informal learning.

During the development process of the AQRF, all of the AMS made it clear that the validation of non-formal and informal learning within their country is a priority development neither in one education and training sector or across all sectors. In most countries, the validation of non-formal and informal learning was regarded as underdeveloped and a challenging innovation. While some countries have well established systems working in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education, and some countries have systems in place based on competency standards, other AMS are starting the development validation policy and practice. Some AMS have established assessment centres and other countries have firm plans to do so. The assessment centres work to validate learning based on, for example, educational and occupational standards.

The AMS have discussed and agreed on a set of principles that forms the basis of validation of

non-formal and informal learning that is linked to the AQRF. These principles underpin the AMS commitment to making the AQRF support work towards recognition of a wide range of learning from any setting for that learning: formal, non-formal, informal —— that is, the principle of broad recognition of learning. The AQRF could provide a focus for the exchange of effective arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

AQRF implementation and impact

The development of the AQRF aimed to support ASEAN Community building. The AQRF has contributed to the ASEAN Charter's objective to develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and life-long learning to empower the peoples of ASEAN and to strengthen the ASEAN Community in different ways. Under the AEC, together with and complementing the eight ASEAN MRAs and the ASEAN Agreement on Movement of Natural Persons (MNP), the AQRF has played a role in supporting and facilitating mobility of skilled labour within the region to achieve the objective to realise freer flow of skilled labour of the AEC Blueprint 2015.

Under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) pillar, the AQRF acted as one of the foundations 'to establish national skills frameworks as an incremental approach towards an ASEAN skills recognition framework' as set out in the ASCC Blueprint 2015. Subsequently the ASEAN Guiding

Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems was developed and made references to the AQRF. These initiatives are in addition to the biannual ASEAN Skills Competition to promote ASEAN's young talents to demonstrate excellence in vocational skills.

With the launch of the AEC and ASCC Blueprints 2025, AQRF will continue to play an important role in facilitating the seamless movement of skilled labour within ASEAN towards a highly integrated and cohesive economy, and human capacity development.

Referencing to the regional framework/ other frameworks

The components of the AQRF are used to establish a relationship between its levels and those of the Member States' NQFs or qualifications systems. This is referred to as 'referencing'. Referencing is a process that establishes the relationship between the eight-level AQRF and NQF or qualifications system of participating ASEAN Member States (AMS); and the number of levels an NQF may differ, and typically between 8 and 9 levels. AQRF would therefore improve the understanding of the qualification of each level of a NQF or qualifications system of the participating AMS. AQRF also works as an information tool to facilitate the recognition of qualifications but does not replace the decision-making process of the competent authorities in each AMS.

Figure 33. Referencing of AQRF to National Frameworks and Systems
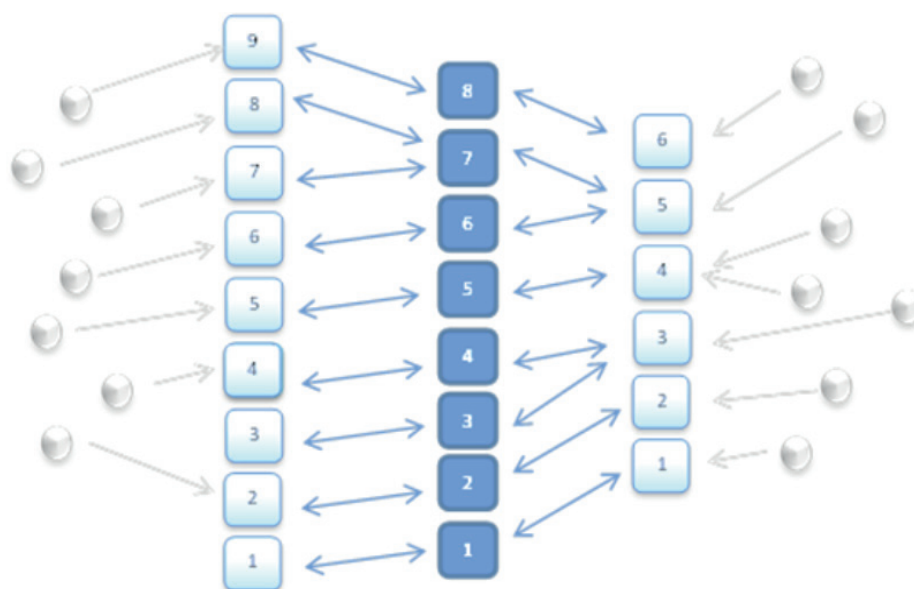
Source: ASEAN

In the long term, AQRF could potentially serve as a meta-framework to support the recognition of its levels against other Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) and interregional recognition. Interested AMS can choose to begin referencing according to their readiness. Recognizing the difference in development stages — with some AMS having established comprehensive NQF, others with sectoral frameworks, and some with none as yet — AQRF aimed to support and enhance AMS NQF or NQS by offering a mechanism to facilitate comparison, transparency and higher quality qualifications systems. AQRF is underpinned by a set of agreed quality assurance principles and standards, and requires participating AMS to describe their education and training quality assurance systems.

The AQRF is based on agreed understandings between AMS and invites voluntary engagement from each Member State. The AQRF by design aims to be a neutral influence on the NQFs of AMS. The aim is to make national qualifications systems explicit according to the AQRF and does not require changes to national qualifications systems. The AQRF respects each Member State's specific structures and processes, which are responsive to national priorities. The process for endorsing the AQRF shall be by mutual agreement of the AMS. Each AMS will determine when they will undertake the processes of referencing their qualifications framework, system or qualifications types and quality assurance systems against the AQRF.

AMS that have completed the referencing of their NQF to AQRF are: Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia.

Important lessons and future plans

Based on the referencing process so far, each AMS has their unique way of referencing to AQRF, while still complying with the referencing criteria and standards.

The AMS report will require a constant review on quality assurance system, validation of achievement and awarding qualification to suit the future discoveries on new forms of knowledge, learning and learners. There will be continuous effort to publish appropriate guides to balance between promoting and facilitating innovations and quality risk on the learners.

Following completion of the ASEAN Economic Cooperation Support Programme (AECSP) Project on Referencing NQF to the AQRF Phase IV Project in June 2019, the AQRFC aims to maintain the positive momentum gained to date to instil international trust and recognition in the AQRF, the referencing process and referencing reports, and importantly, AMS national qualifications frameworks, or national qualifications systems, and qualifications.

AQRF Phase V seeks to build within ASEAN the capacity and capabilities required for the future sustainability of the AQRF and the referencing process. In parallel, AQRF Phase V also seeks to continue to build the technical capability of AMS seeking to develop/implement NQFs by providing tailored, practical, and technical support. The main objective is to transform the AQRF into the first functional regional qualifications framework in Asia.

Infographic of the NQF/NQF overview table

Table 93. Level Descriptors of the AQRF

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DEMONSTRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THAT:	APPLICATION AND RESPONSIBILITY THE CONTEXTS IN WHICH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ARE DEMONSTRATED:
8	• Is at the most advanced and specialized level and at the frontier of a field • Involve independent and original thinking and research, resulting in the creation of new knowledge or practice	• Are highly specialized and complex involving the development and testing of new theories and new solutions to resolve complex, abstract issues • Require authoritative and expert judgment in management of research or an organization and significant responsibility for extending professional knowledge, practice and creation of new ideas and or processes.
7	• Is at the forefront of a field and show mastery of a body of knowledge • Involve critical and independent thinking as the basis for research to extend or redefine knowledge or practice	• Are complex and unpredictable and involve the development and testing of innovative solutions to resolve issues • Require expert judgment and significant responsibility for professional knowledge, practice and management

LEVEL	KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DEMONSTRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THAT:	APPLICATION AND RESPONSIBILITY THE CONTEXTS IN WHICH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ARE DEMONSTRATED:
6	• Is specialized technical and theoretical within a specific field • Involve critical and analytical thinking	• Are complex and changing • Require initiative and adaptability as well as strategies to improve activities and to solve complex and abstract issues
5	• Is detailed technical and theoretical knowledge of a general field • Involve analytical thinking	• Are often subject to change • Involve independent evaluation of activities to resolve complex and sometimes abstract issues
4	• Is technical and theoretical, with general coverage of a field • Involve adapting processes	• Are generally predictable but subject to change • Involve broad guidance requiring some self-direction and coordination to resolve unfamiliar issues
3	• Includes general principles and some conceptual aspects • Involve selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	• Are stable with some aspects subject to change • Involve general guidance and require judgment and planning to resolve some issues independently
2	• Is general and factual • Involve use of standard actions	• Involve structured processes • Involve supervision and some discretion for judgment on resolving familiar issues
1	• Is basic and general • Involve simple, straightforward and routine actions	• Involve structured routine processes • Involve close levels of support and supervision

Source: ASEAN

Abbreviations

AECSP–ASEAN–	Australia–New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA) Economic Cooperation Support Programme	AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
		MRA	Mutual Recognition Arrangement
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community	NQF	National Qualifications Framework
AMS	ASEAN Member States	RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations		

Main sources of information

https://asean.org/our-communities/economic-community/services/aqrf/#:~:text=The%20ASEAN%20Qualifications%20Reference%20Framework,Support%20recognition%20of%20qualifications

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Prepared by
UNESCO in consultation with national experts

THE TRANSNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH

Introduction and context

Facilitated by the Commonwealth of Learning, the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) was established in 2003 as a vehicle for expanding access to and strengthening post-secondary institutions in small states through open and distance learning. VUSSC works with small states to build capacity and expertise in online collaboration, eLearning, and ICT in general; and it facilitates the offering of educational programmes by small states for themselves and others. Conceptualised as a network rather than an institution, VUSSC comprises 32 small states[1] of the Commonwealth, all committed to the collaborative development of non-proprietary materials and courses that are openly licensed and therefore readily adaptable and shareable. As part of the course development process, it became necessary to create a credit- and course-sharing framework that would allow institutions to recognize qualifications from other institutions in VUSSC and beyond, and thereby enable the transfer of credits and qualified people between countries.

As a result, the transnational qualifications framework (TQF) was developed in 2010 to support the development, international recognition, comparability and understanding of courses offered within the VUSSC context. The TQF is a reference system that links national qualification systems and frameworks in different Small States and, as a consequence, it functions as a translation

device, making qualifications more readable, which in turn, helps learners and workers that move between countries or change jobs. Linking national qualification systems increases the transparency of the education and training systems of all the VUSSC countries, supports lifelong learning and promotes mobility.

Individuals, employers and other users of qualifications use the TQF to better understand and compare the qualification levels of different countries and the different education and training systems.

Rationale and function

The TQF is a ten-level framework that has two distinct functions: it serves a as a referencing tool, and as registration of VUSSC courses. An important thing to note is that it does not replace existing qualifications frameworks in the small states — it serves as a translation instrument between the national and regional systems of the diverse countries and associated regions that make up the small states of the Commonwealth. The intention behind the development of the TQF as a translation instrument was to provide a means whereby qualification frameworks can be compared and related, thus creating an impetus for the transfer of courses, qualifications and learners between countries.

The TQF registers qualifications that are associated with the VUSSC and in most in some cases these qualifications are also registered on the NQFs of member states. Some small states do not have NQFs and view the TQF as a mechanism to enhance the credibility of their qualifications.

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1.   Antigua & Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cyprus, Dominica, Eswatini, Fiji, The Gambia, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lesotho, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

To register qualifications, the TQF Management Committee (TQFMC) works through a national quality assurance agency (NQAA) and recognised accreditation authorities on issues of comparability of qualifications. This is an important and non-negotiable requirement for the registration of qualifications on the TQF. Course materials that are developed with VUSSC support are made available to training providers, but when these courses are to be offered, the quality assurance must be done by the relevant national QAA of the country in which the courses are offered. In summary, the TQF enables registration and referencing of qualifications that are already registered and quality assured by an NQAA in the country of origin; although providers of education and training in member states can approach the TQFMC for registration of their qualification, such direct approaches are discouraged.

The key mechanism of this ten-level framework is backed by quality assurance guidelines, qualifications guidelines, level descriptors, and recognition of prior learning. The TQF should benefit individuals by increasing access to, and participation in, lifelong learning, encompassing adult basic education and training, vocational education and training, and higher education. By establishing a common reference point, the TQF indicates how learning outcomes may be combined from different settings (for example, formal study or work, and from different countries).

Guidelines for different qualification types and credits have also been established; level descriptors in relation to the TQF refer to the statements describing the characteristics of the generic outcomes of each of the ten levels in the TQF. Characteristics consist of the knowledge, skills and attributes that learners should possess or be able to demonstrate on completion of a programme, course or module.

The TQF contributes to creating a workforce that is mobile and flexible and makes it easier for employers to interpret qualifications of applicants from other countries. It also supports labour market mobility (between and within countries), by simplifying comparisons between qualifications and enabling a better match between supply and demand for knowledge, skills and competences.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The translational function of the TQF occurs on three levels: registration of qualifications, quality assurance criteria, and Information Technology

(IT) systems that contain information. In the case of the registration of qualifications, the TQF translates the existing level and description of the qualification offered on a national or regional basis (and registered on the relevant national or regional qualifications framework), to the relevant TQF level and format. In the case where the qualification is not offered nationally or regionally, but only through the VUSSC, the qualification is registered only on the TQF. With respect to quality assurance criteria, the TQF translates the existing quality assurance criteria (implemented on a national or regional basis and prescribed within the relevant national or regional qualifications framework), to minimum transnational quality assurance criteria. In the case where the qualification is not offered nationally or regionally, or where no quality assurance is undertaken, the minimum transnational quality assurance criteria will apply. With respect to IT systems, the TQF translates the information of learners, qualifications and providers on a national or regional basis (located within the IT systems of the relevant national or regional qualifications framework), to the relevant TQF format and system.

As a translation mechanism, the TQF promotes the use of learning outcomes as a key feature of qualifications. A learning outcome is defined as a statement of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence (Cedefop, 2008), or as a set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, formal, non-formal or informal (European Commission, 2008). Learning outcomes not only indicate what a learner is expected to know and do but also give an indication of what is in a qualification. Learning outcomes inform curricula, teaching and learning as well as assessment, and are linked to professional competency requirements.

Reference relies extensively on the descriptors of levels of the complexity and quantum of learning. Level descriptors refer to the statements describing the characteristics of the generic outcomes of each of the ten levels in the TQF. These characteristics consist of the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes that participants should possess or be able to demonstrate on completion of a programme, course or module. Level descriptors take into account different types of learning at the same level, including knowledge and understanding, skills and wider personal and professional competencies; they are not intrinsically related to the period of study;

and are intended to integrate academic, technical-vocational education and training (TVET) and

professional aspects of learning and apply to all learning contexts (class work, practical work, work-based learning, etc.). The descriptors facilitate comparison of and links between qualifications frameworks or qualifications systems.

Credit transfer is an important goal of the TQF and credit transfer mechanisms play an important part in supporting and developing TQF. Also, credit transfer facilitates portability of awards. The credit, also referred to as a metric for the amount of learning, is defined by the TQF as a "currency," providing a measure of learning outcomes achieved in notional hours at a given level. One credit represents ten notional hours of learning for the TQF. Credits are awarded for learning that has been achieved and verified through reliable and valid assessment. Notional learning hours (NLH) are a token estimate of the time it takes for an average learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competence required by the qualification. It considers not only the guided

learning hours (GLH) but also the time spent by the learner in private study and practice of skills.

While credits are useful to facilitate comparisons across countries, the use of credits as a sole criterion is discouraged. Credits alone do not capture the social elements of qualifications and should be read in conjunction with other criteria for the purpose of referencing.

The core of the TQF is the ten referencing levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do. Levels of national qualifications are placed at one of the reference levels, ranging from basic (Level 1) to advanced (Level 10). This enables much easier comparison between national qualifications, and means that people do not have to repeat learning if they move to another country. The table below outlines the ten referencing levels and associated qualifications

Table 94. Architecture of the TQF

TQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPE	MINIMUM CREDITS
10	• Doctoral Degree	360
9	• Master's Degree	240
8	• Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma Bachelor Degree with Honours	120
7	• Bachelor Degree • Graduate Certificate and Diploma	360
6	• Advanced/Higher Diploma • Associate Degree/Foundation Degree	240
5	• Diploma	240
4	• Advanced Certificate	120
3	• Certificate III	40
2	• Certificate II	40
1	• Certificate I	40

Source: Referencing Tool: Transnational Qualifications Framework of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (col.org)

Stakeholder involvement

The 32 small states of the Commonwealth have automatic rights to ratify and use the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). This means their Ministries of Education, agencies and post-secondary institutions are key stakeholders. The Commonwealth of Learning co-ordinates the VUSSC initiative and assumes responsibility for the management and administration of the TQF.

The TQF Management Committee is a subcommittee of the VUSSC Management

Committee. It oversees promotes and facilitates the implementation of the TQF through the VUSSC at COL; and is responsible for developing maintaining, reviewing and revising the TQF periodically and ensuring its smooth implementation in the member states.

Members of the committee are selected to represent the four regions: Africa, Caribbean and Americas, Europe, and the Pacific. Members are selected for an initial period of three years based on nominations from representatives and senior officials of Ministries of Education and

Commonwealth of Learning (COL). The TQFMC elects its chair and vice-chair and the VUSSC Management Committee Chairman is an ex-officio member of the TQFMC

The responsibilities of the TQFMC are to:
- Oversee the development and implementation of the TQF, including the development of concepts, policies, and guidelines;
- Oversee the evaluation of programmes to be registered on the VUSSC TQF;
- Report on a regular basis (a minimum of annually), to Ministers of Small States of the Commonwealth through COL on all matters related to the TQF;
- Communicate and advocate the TQF within Small States of the Commonwealth;
- Recommend the appointment of external observers, technical experts and external evaluators to COL when required; and
- Develop and maintain appropriate strategic networks to enhance the objectives and performance of the TQF.

Referencing to regional and other frameworks

The TQF was developed for but not limited to the Small States. It has been referenced against all regional qualifications frameworks including the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). When senior officials met in Malaysia in March 2016, they approved the referencing of the TQF against National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks, which included the European Qualifications Framework. This means that a qualification emanating from any of the participating states can be recognized throughout the Commonwealth, provided it has met all the quality assurance criteria of the national, regional and transnational qualifications frameworks.

The table that follows illustrates equivalencies of qualifications originating from the Small States of the Commonwealth. The qualifications have been verified by representatives of countries that participate in VUSSC activities.

Table 95. Equivalencies of Qualifications

TQF	CARICOM QF	SADC QF	PQF	ASEAN QF	EQF
Level 10	**Level 10**	**Level 10**	**Level 10**	**Level 8**	**Level 8**
Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree
Level 9	**Level 9**	**Level 9**	**Level 9**	**Level 7**	**Level 7**
Master's Degree	Master's Degree	Master's Degree	Master's Degree	Master's Degree	• Masters • Vocational University (Fachhochschule) • Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate Certificate
Level 8	**Level 8**	**Level 8**	**Level 8**	**Level 6**	
• Postgraduate Diploma • Postgraduate Certificate	• Post Graduate Diploma • Postgraduate Certificate	• Bachelor Honours • Postgraduate Diploma • Postgraduate Certificate	• Bachelor Honours • Postgraduate Diploma • Postgraduate Certificate		
Level 7	**Level 7**	**Level 7**	**Level 7**	**Level 5**	**Level 6**
• Bachelor's Degree • Graduate Diploma • Graduate Certificate	• Bachelor's Degree	• Bachelor's Degree	• Bachelor's Degree • Graduate Diploma • Graduate Certificate		• Bachelor's Degree - Honours • Vocational University German State Certified Engineer • Business Manager and Designer (Fachhochschule) • Bachelor German Fachwirt • German Operative Professional

TQF	CARICOM QF	SADC QF	PQF	ASEAN QF	EQF
Level 6	**Level 6**	**Level 6**	**Level 6**		**Level 5**
• Advanced/ Higher Diploma • Associate Degree • Foundation Degree	• Associate Degree • Higher Diploma • Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) Diploma	• Advanced/ Higher Diploma • Higher Certificate	• Diploma		• Higher National Diploma
Level 5	**Level 5**	**Level 5**	**Level 5**	**Level 4**	**Level 4**
• Diploma	• Diploma • CAPE • Certificate	• Diploma Certificate	• Diploma		• Arbiter • Vocational School
Level 4	**Level 4**	**Level 4**	**Level 4**	**Level 3**	**Level 3**
Advanced Certificate	Advanced Certificate CSEC 1-3	A – levels Certificate	Certificate		GCES
Level 3	**Level 3**	**Level 3**	**Level 3**	**Level 2**	**Level 2**
Certificate III	Certificate III	O – level School leaving	Certificate		Lower Secondary School
Level 2	**Level 2**	**Level 2**	**Level 2**		
Certificate II	Certificate II	Certificate	Certificate		
Level 1	**Level 1**	**Level 1**	**Level 1**	**Level 1**	**Level 1**
Certificate I	Certificate I	Certificate	Certificate		

Source: Referencing Tool: Transnational Qualifications Framework of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (col.org)

Future plans

The transnational qualifications framework has great potential — however there are challenges related to relevance and uptake. A review of the TQF is currently underway and expected to be completed in early 2022. The first revision to the TQF took place in 2015-16 and since then, changes in economies and technology, combined with labour market demands, have led to changes in the way education and training is organized. Among these changes are labour market demand for skilled and competent workers, and the need for continuing education and training; the growing popularity of micro-credentials and open badges and the demand for a wide range of credentials; the rise of blockchain technology; and the disruption to higher education systems as a result of COVID-19 and with that, a shift to online and blended delivery modalities. The current framework will be revised to take account of these developments and issues.

The uptake of the TQF has not been fully realised. Although VUSSC courses have been registered on the TQF, and practitioners and academics working in the field of Qualifications Frameworks are familiar

with and often refer to the TQF, the framework is neither fully understood nor used widely.

Over table

The TQF consists of ten levels which are described by a set of descriptors. Each level of the TQF specifies a minimum number of credits to be achieved and the qualification types that are registered. It spans qualifications achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic, professional or vocational education as shown in the following table

Table 96. Overview of the TQF

LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS	MINIMUM CREDIT	QUALIFICATION TYPES
0 • 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 specialized skills and techniques to be able to conceptualize, 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 for the production or development of innovative ideas or processes in the context of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice.	**360**	Doctoral Degree
9 • Have a logical understanding of a body of highly specialized 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.	**240**	Master's Degree
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., referred research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).	**120**	Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma; Bachelor Degree with Honours
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 specialized 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.	**360**	Bachelor Degree; Graduate Certificate and Diploma

LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS		MINIMUM CREDIT	QUALIFICATION TYPES
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 critically evaluate 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.	240	Advanced/ Higher Diploma; Associate Degree/ Foundation Degree
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 critically evaluate 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 result 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.	240	Diploma
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 and 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.	120	Advanced Certificate
3	• Demonstrate knowledge of basic concepts and principles in a field of work or study. • Have command of analytical interpretation of information. • Express informed judgment. • Be able to display a range of known responses to familiar problems.	40	Certificate III
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.	40	Certificate II
1	• Demonstrate basic literacy and numeracy skills.	40	Certificate I

Source: Referencing Tool: Transnational Qualifications Framework of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (col.org)

Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	TQFMC	Transnational Qualifications Framework Management Committee
CARICOM	Caribbean Community	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
COL	Commonwealth of Learning	VUSSC	Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth
EQF	European Qualifications Framework		
NQF	National Qualifications Framework		
PQF	Pacific Qualifications Framework		
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework		
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community		
TQF	Transnational Qualifications Framework		

Main sources of information

Information has been sourced from the following websites:

Referencing Tool: Transnational Qualifications Framework of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (col.org)

Transnational qualifications framework for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (col.org)

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Prepared by

UNESCO in consultation with national experts

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (EQF)

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 and Sweden.

Not members of the EU

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine and Turkey.

Total: 41 countries

Background

The European qualifications framework (EQF) came into force in April 2008 (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2008) and was revised in 2017 (Council of the European Union, 2017). 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 work 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'. Each level is defined in terms of learning outcomes organised under three domains, knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy[1], aiming to capture the diversity of education and training systems across Europe. The EQF applies to all types and levels of education, training and qualifications, from general education, vocational education and training (VET), higher education as well as qualifications awarded through validation of non-formal and informal learning, and by the private sector or international organisations. 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 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.

Skills and qualifications remain at the core of EU policies, as reflected in the 2020 Skills agenda and the announcement of 2023 as the European Year of Skills by the President of the European Commission. Attention to skills also aims to support the green and digital transition in Europe. The EQF contributes to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, whose first principle emphasises that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning. The EQF is integrated in the Europass platform[2], 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. The inflow of Ukrainians in EU, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, further stressed the importance of transparency

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1. 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'.

2. 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

and understanding of skills and qualifications to support integration in education and training, the labour market and society. The 2017 revision of the EQF recommendation kicked off the process of exploring the development and application of criteria and procedures to enable the comparison of third countries national and regional qualifications frameworks with the EQF.

The European Commission is currently conducting an evaluation of the actions taken in response to the 2017 EQF recommendation, aiming to shed light on experience gained and reflect on a possible future need to revise the legal text supporting the EQF implementation.

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 41 countries currently cooperating 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, Slovakia Slovenia and Sweden[3]. 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 – focusing 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 – covering all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training (VET, general education, higher education)

as well as 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[4] have been set up to help ensure that NQFs are linked to the EQF in a coherent and transparent way.

By January 2023, 36 countries had formally referenced their national qualifications levels to the EQF: Albania, 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, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey[5, 6]. The EQF advisory group[7] is responsible for overall monitoring and coherence of the process.

The remaining countries are expected to follow, which means that the first stage of EQF referencing is nearly finished. EQF referencing reports are snapshots in time; as national qualification systems and frameworks evolve, they eventually become outdated, requiring updates according to national developments. Following the 2017 EQF recommendation, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia and the Netherlands presented updated reports.

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). EQF levels 5 to 8 are compatible with the 'cycles' of the Bologna process and the 'Dublin descriptors'.

A total of 33[8] countries have formally self-certified their higher education qualifications to the QF-EHEA.

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3.   More information on Cedefop's NQFs online tool

4.   Annex III, EQF recommendation, 2017.
5.   Referencing reports, see: https://europa.eu/europass/en/eqf-referencing-reports
6.   Before the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU, its qualifications frameworks were also referenced to the EQF.
7.   All 41 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.
8.   Albania, Austria, Belgium (Flemish community) Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden Switzerland and Turkey.

Countries are increasingly combining referencing to the EQF and self-certification to the QF-EHEA[9]. 24 countries (Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, 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 certificate and diploma supplements) have started to include EQF/NQF levels in 36 countries[10]: Albania, Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. 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 27 countries (though some only have NQF levels and are at initial stages): Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Turkey.

The future of the EQF

The EQF is at the core of EU transparency tools in education and training and relates to all other transparency and recognition tools created over recent decades. It is generally considered a success and an important instrument, as visible progress has been achieved in increasing transparency in national qualification systems and qualifications, and promoting mutual trust between European countries.

The revised 2017 EQF recommendation triggered a dialogue on how to further develop and deepen work on transparency, comparability and portability of people's qualifications and reflect on the evolving landscape of qualifications across Europe to ensure the relevance of qualifications frameworks. Increasing attention is given to raise awareness among EQF end users and improve access to information on qualifications and their learning outcomes.

Widening the scope of qualifications frameworks to include a wider range of qualifications, the use of learning outcomes to define and describe qualifications and the use of digital developments, including the development and interconnection of national qualifications databases and registers at European level are seen as key areas of work to strengthen the implementation of the EQF and deepen on transparency of qualifications and therefore reduce barriers to mobility for work and learning purposes. A key priority in the coming period is to define EQF's impact on increasing employability, mobility and social integration of workers and learners, and its contribution to the wider objectives of lifelong learning, flexible learning pathways and seamless transitions within and between education and training systems.

Cedefop, in cooperation with ETF, will continue to provide systematic analysis of NQF developments across Europe[11], directly supporting the EQF process and the development of operational and sustainable NQFs. Cedefop further carries out disciplinary research e.g. around the topic of learning outcomes and the role they play in qualifications frameworks and in education and training more generally to support the EQF process.

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9. Self-certification reports verify the compatibility of the national framework for higher education with the QFEHEA.
10. 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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11. More information on Cedefop's European inventory of NQFs

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Prepared by

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

SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (SADCQF)

Member States

Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (16).

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 people of Southern Africa, and support the socially disadvantaged through regional integration, that is built on democratic principles and equitable and sustainable development. The SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP 2020-2030) seeks to deepen Southern Africa regional integration and foster development in the six strategic priority areas. Its vision is to create a peaceful, inclusive, competitive, middle- to high-income industrialised region where all citizens enjoy sustainable economic well-being, justice, and freedom by the year 2050.

The SADC Protocol on Education and Training adopted in 1997 by Member States, seeks to promote a regionally integrated and harmonised educational system, especially with regard to issues pertaining to access, equity, relevance, and quality of education interventions. In 2015, SADC countries adopted the SADC Industrialisation Strategy 2015-2063 to facilitate greater impact of regional integration to focus on industrialization economies of the Region through enhancing factor accumulation (labour, capital and technology) to substantially raise total productivity. In 2020, SADC countries adopted the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP 2020–30); and the Labour Migration Action Plan (2020–25).

The SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) is considered an important mechanism to implement

the SADC Protocol on Education and Training and the SADC Industrialization Strategy and it contribute to the harmonization of the education training systems, and also facilitates the movement of labour in the region. The SADCQF, a comprehensive RQF for schooling, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education, was established in 2011 by the SADC Ministers of Education and Training and Science, Technology and Innovation.

Its purposes are to: 1. Provide a mechanism for comparability and recognition of qualifications in SADC. 2. Facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications in all member states. 3. Harmonise qualifications wherever possible. 4. Promote the transfer of credits within and among member states and even beyond. 5. Create SADC regional standards where appropriate. It is a 10-level RQF underpinned by learning outcomes and quality assurance (QA) principles that provides a regional reference for qualifications and QA mechanisms in SADC[1].

In 2016, Member States made the commitment to align their national qualifications framework and QA mechanisms to the SADCQF. The vision is that, in the SADC region, all new qualification certificates,

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1. The SADCQF booklet, available on: http://www.saqa. org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20booklet.pdf, contains the SADC level descriptors (pages 10-11) and QA guidelines (pages 13-14). The links below provide access to infographics on the SADCQF level descriptors and the QA guidelines: http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/ webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20Level%20descriptors. pdf; http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/ SADCQF%20QA%20Guidelines%20Poster.pdf.

diplomas and other qualification credentials issued by competent authorities will contain the relevant level on the SADCQF. 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 embedding mutual trust amongst SADC Members. Regional alignment would also enable institutions and individuals to compare their learning and competence levels and would reduce unnecessary duplication of learning and effort when moving through SADC for study or work purposes.

The SADCQF has recently acquired a stronger centrality in the region's development plans for the decade (2020–30).This new impetus to strengthen implementation of the SADCQF capitalises on the outcomes of the first phase of implementation (2017–21) and aims to incentivise development of NQFs aligned with SADCQF, and work in complementarity with other tools supporting recognition of qualifications across the region, including the SADC Credit Accumulation and Transfer System, approved during the Ministers of Education and Training and Science, Technology and Innovation in 2021, the SADC Recognition Manual, approved by the Ministers in 2022, Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and the SADCQF Quality Assurance Guidelines. This renewed attention to the SADCQF is consistent with the place of education, skills development, and people mobility in SADC strategies, listed above.

In 2020, SADC countries reaffirmed their intent to give a new impetus to promote and implement the SADCQF, by including relevant measures in two key strategic plans for the decade: the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020–30 and the SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020–25).

The RISDP 2020–30 has a comprehensive set of measures shaped for social and human capital development (Pillar 3). Enhanced implementation of SADCQF and skills development for regional industrialisation are part of these priorities, under the umbrella of 'access to quality and relevant education and skills development, including in science and technology, by SADC citizens' (Strategic objective 2).

In a similar vein, the Labour Migration Action Plan 2020–25 specifies actions to promote SADCQF in its third outcome:
• support Member States in the development of NQFs that are aligned to the SADCQF;

• support the development of sector-specific regional mutual recognition arrangements in line with the SADCQF;
• conduct awareness and capacity-building workshops, as appropriate, targeting labour and employers' representatives in the region to promote the SADCQF; and
• conduct skills audits to profile supply and demand for selected sectors.

The Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) was given the task of implementing the SADCQF. The TCCA, established in 2000, is a group of experts from the 16 SADC Member States and is supported by the SADC Secretariat. At a September 2016 meeting of the TCCA, 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[2] comprising six programmes in total. Initially comprising three programmes namely (1) development and alignment NQFs to SADCQF; (2) quality assurance and (3) verification was adopted. Later three more programmes relevant to regional development were added namely (4) Articulation, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) (5) Advocacy and communication, and (6) Governance.

Eight countries volunteered to pilot the alignment of their qualifications frameworks or education and training systems to that of the SADCQF. In order to provide support and centrally drive co-ordination of implementation, a TCCA Executive Committee (EXCO) was established based on the SADC Troika principles. To ensure the sustainability of the implementation of the SADCQF, a funding proposal for a SADCQF implementation unit was submitted to the SADC Secretariat. In the meantime, Member States are volunteering to support the SADC Secretariat with the implementation effort. Since the September 2016 meeting, considerable progress has been made as described next, although the Implementation Unit is yet to be set up.

Development and alignment of National Qualifications Frameworks/ Systems

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

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2. http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/ SADCQF%20Implementation%20Model.pdf.

obtained in SADC. Currently the SADCQF is a reference framework.

Implementation of the SADCQF presupposes engagement, capacity, and resources at both the national and regional levels. The national level has a particularly important role in alignment, from the decision to align, to organisation of the participative approach, and assuring quality and evidence-based report.

At the onset, eight SADC Member States were selected to pilot the alignment of their National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) or National Qualifications Systems (NQS) with the SADCQF. The pilot countries are Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia. An alignment plan and roadmap, as well as alignment timelines were developed to assist the eight pilot countries. Support was provided via alignment capacity building workshops hosted by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). To date, three Member States have aligned their NQFs to the SADCQF namely, Mauritius, Seychelles and South Africa.

Currently none of the countries that have finalised the alignment process is using or preparing the ground to use SADCQF levels on newly issued qualifications documents issued by the competent authorities and bodies.

Essential to the alignment process is the establishment of a National Alignment Committee (NAC) to spearhead and approve the process. The NAC typically comprises the following: 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 NAC that suits their particular needs and context.

The future plans of the TCCA are to assist pilot countries to complete their alignment reports and eventually roll out alignment to the other eight SADC countries. To guide and support implementation, SADCQF developed two information booklets[3], and three substantive manuals and Guidelines (RPL Guidelines, CATS Manual, Recognition Manual).

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3. https://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/
    SADCQF%20booklet.pdf
    https://www.sadc.int/files/6315/7009/6550/SADC_
    QUALIFICATION_FRAMEWORK.pdf

Quality assurance

The SADCQF encourages SADC countries to have good quality assurance (QA) mechanisms in place and links up with key regional QA bodies.

The future plans include the development of Regional Quality Assurance Rubrics which should guide the development and strengthen SADC Member States' QA mechanisms in terms of accreditation and certification and support their alignment with the SADC QA guidelines. Already progress has been made with 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 in SADC. To this end, opportunities for QA capacity building is consistently being sought, in particular opportunities to engage with the Addis Convention (Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States).

Verification

While the preceding programmes promote trust by ensuring that qualifications and quality assurance meet the regional standards, it is important that countries have mechanisms that can verify information about individual qualifications obtained in Member States. To ensure that credible, trustworthy information is shared across SADC, a regional Qualifications Verification Network (SADCQVN) was established. The SADCQVN was initiated to strengthen verification in SADC and is a member of the African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN), which shares the common goal of ensuring that African qualifications can be trusted. A SADCQVN booklet was produced which provides information on the right people to contact when verifying qualifications in SADC: http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/ SADCQVN%20Brochure.pdf. The SADCQVN booklet is consistently updated and shared across the region. The annual collation of statistical information on learner and worker mobility in SADC, as well as on misrepresented qualifications, is a key feature of the work of the SADCQVN.

To ensure that the SADCQVN 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.

Communication and advocacy

The TCCA has identified platforms to advocate for - and communicate about - the SADCQF. Already information about the SADCQF has been distributed at national, regional and international levels. A communication strategy, which includes promotional material on the SADCQF, was developed and approved. Social media sites (Twitter: https://twitter.com/sadcqf and Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/SadcQualificationsFramework/ were set up and used to disseminate information about the SADCQF.

The SADCQF has never been formally launched despite being approved in 2011. To ensure that the SADCQF is visible and that Member States commit to its implementation, a formal launch by the SADC Ministers of Education, and popularisation of the SADCQF by the TCCA, took place in the first half of 2017.

RPL, CAT and articulation

The SADC region has a set of RPL guidelines that were approved by SADC Ministers in June 2016 and adopted during TCCA meeting in September 2016. The link: http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADC%20RPL%20Guidelines.pdf will provide access to a copy of the SADC RPL guidelines. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has been closely involved in the production of the SADC RPL guidelines and has further indicated a readiness to assist with implementation across the region. SAQAN has been closely involved in the production of the draft regional CAT guidelines and is available to provide support to SADC. This programme will also focus on articulation namely pathways and progression opportunities within and between schooling, TVET and higher education.

Governance

The governing structures of the SADCQF are: the SADC Council of Ministers, the ministers responsible for Education and Training, the TCCA, the TCCA Executive Committee and an Implementation Unit.

As the Implementation Unit has not been put in place yet, its role is assured by an arrangement of shared responsibility between SADC Member States and the SADC Secretariat for the six implementation programmes of the SADCQF:

Programme 1: Alignment of NQFs to SADCQF – South Africa

Programme 2: Quality assurance – Botswana

Programme 3: Verification – Kingdom of Eswatini

Programme 4: Articulation, RPL and credit accumulation and transfer – Namibia

Programme 5: Advocacy and communication – Zambia; and

Programme 6: Governance – TCCA and SADC Secretariat.

Member States have also volunteered to augment the capacity of the SADC Secretariat by providing administrative support on a rotational basis, using their capacities (human, technical expertise, and funding).

Way Forward

The SADCQF is the most advanced RQF in Africa and benefits from the fact that the SADC's development strategy contains measures dedicated to strengthening and consolidating its implementation. The number of countries aligning to the SADCQF is expected to grow in the coming years, as a result of the new support measures and resources outlined above. It is envisaged that a fully operational SADCQF will promote lifelong learning by enabling easier movement of learners and workers regionally, continentally and internationally

In the context of the global challenges, particularly the twin digital and green transitions that SADC Member States are facing, the SADCQF is considering development work in the areas of digitalisation of the management of credentials and qualifications, guidelines on micro-credentials for the region and the development of common profiles of qualifications in the region.

The SADCQF is currently not referenced to any other RQFs but has benchmarked with the ASEAN QRF and the EQF in terms of the level descriptors, coordination and implementation mechanisms of these RQFs. The benchmarking was facilitated by a study that compared, among others, the SADCQF with three NQFs and with the ASEAN QRF and the EQF (SADC, 2017). Discussions are also underway on the possibility of referencing the SAQCQF with the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF).

Progress has been made in SADCQF communication and dissemination to stakeholders in the Member States. To this effect SADC has developed a series of manuals and guidelines covering the main policy and technical areas of the SADCQF, such as on RPL and Articulation Guidelines.

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Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualications Frameworks 2022

Volume II National and Regional case studies

This Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks is the result of long-standing collaborative work between the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL).

Volume II comprises 79 national qualifications framework country chapters, from all continents, and four regional qualifications frameworks. A cross-country analysis of national case studies is presented, examining the objectives, functions and characteristics of national qualifications frameworks and their contributions to wider educational and training systems.