

GLOBAL NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK INVENTORY: COUNTRY CASES FROM EU AND ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES

COUNTRY EXAMPLES FROM THE ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES,
PREPARED BY ETF, AND EUROPE 2020 COUNTRIES,
PREPARED BY CEDEFOP



INVENTORY OF RECENT NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENTS IN ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES



With thanks to the members of the ETF Community of Practice on qualifications and to the ETF country managers.

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* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
HE	Higher Education
LLL	Lifelong learning
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QF	Qualifications Framework
RVA	Recognition, validation, accreditation
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VNIFL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
UNESCO-TVET	UNESCO Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO-IIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning



WESTERN BALKANS & TURKEY



ALBANIA

Albania is a potential candidate country for entry to the European Union.

According to the 2011 census the population is 2.83 million, which represents a decrease of 8% over the last decade due to a falling birth rate and continuous large-scale emigration (500,000 people net between 2001 and 2011). The country is homogeneous in terms of its ethnic composition – minority groups make up less than 1.5% of the population. For the first time in history more people (54%) live in urban areas, with Tirana and Durres being the cities with the highest population growth and density.

During 2012 a number of economic indicators showed critical signs of decline e.g. consumption, imports, exports, remittances, and the number of active companies and employment. This followed a slowdown in economic growth over the previous two years. The IMF projected an economic growth rate of 0.5% for Albania in 2012, slightly lower than the regional level of 0.7%. Huge arrears in Government payments of construction and utility bills have increased public debt.

Key economic sectors include agro (food) processing; construction (in decline in recent years); textiles; hotel, catering and tourism; leather and shoes; transport and vehicle repair; energy production and distribution, mining and ICT. That is not to say that these sectors have a big employment potential.

The labour market is characterised by an expanded informal sector (only public administration, banking and insurance are considered 'formal sectors'); 95.7% small and micro businesses with a low employment potential; a low labour market participation rate (total 62.3%, female rate 59.2%); a low employment rate (53.5%, females 44.5%) with the majority of jobs being in agriculture (55%), low-skilled and precarious, but a contained unemployment rate (14.2%, female 15.9%, youth (15-24) 30.5%) as this rate does not consider people living in rural areas as they own a piece of land (all data from 2010). The share of long-term unemployment was 51.0% in 2012.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The VET sector is small compared to other countries in the region, only 20% of upper secondary students attend VET. At the same time, the sector is poorly connected to labour market needs. Skill needs analyses have been undertaken, but skills demand and supply remain largely out of tune. The network of VET providers and VET programmes offered require a major overhaul. Key sectors, such as the agro (food) sector, are currently not covered by VET offers. Often, businesses seek to fill the gap left by inadequate VET provision by offering their own training.

The NQF will in particular aim to:

- ensure education and training provision within the regions is in line with labour market and social demands
- engage social partners in the planning and delivery of VET and higher education
- support expansion and flexible provision of post-secondary/tertiary VET and adult learning offers, also at higher levels of qualifications.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the AQF is the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. The functions of the AQF are to act as a:

- translation device for comparing qualifications
- neutral reference point based on learning outcomes
- facilitator for credit transfer and quality assurance
- basis for sector qualification developments

The AQF is primarily seen as a tool to support quality assurance. In Albania all qualifications will be subject to a quality-checking process before being registered in the AQF. All assessment leading to the award of AQF qualifications will be subject to external quality assurance. All education and training institutions offering AQF qualifications will be subject to some form of accreditation to ensure that they meet minimum standards.

Furthermore, EU accession and convergence with EU directives and standards (EQF, ECVET/ECTS and EQARF) and with the Bologna process were strong driving forces behind the AQF's development.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The process of the development of the AQF started towards the end of 2006, when two Ministries (Education & Labour) established a Task Force, mandated to coordinate, organize and monitor the work on development of the AQF. During 2007 the Task Force prepared drafts of: a) respective AQF law; b) explanation report; c) Decision of the Council of Ministers; d) administrative structure and e) financial costs.

The Law on the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was adopted in March 2010 (Law nr. 10 247). The law also foresees the establishment of an institutional structure including:

- An AQF Council responsible for approving policies and regulations and for the planning of the implementation
- An AQF unit for the administrative and organisational tasks of the Council
- Implementing and quality assurance institutions for the regulation of the awarding of qualifications and for the evaluation of procedures against international standards.

The 2010 AQF law does not include social partners in the AQF Council, however, the 2011 VWT Law provides for their increased representation in the National VET Council. .

The EC CARDS VET 3 project, which finished in 2010, contributed to conceptual clarifications and legal provisions related to an Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF). The CARDS project developed an AQF Implementation Plan, which was approved, as well as recommendations and additional regulations for the AQF and subsystems. The next steps now include the forming of a steering group composed of a task force including employers' representatives, who would develop qualifications for all VET profiles specifying learning outcomes at different levels of competence. The Guide for Qualification and Curriculum Development compiled by the CARDS project, as well as the exemplar food processing and

mechanics qualifications, could be used to inform this process. A Handbook on Assessment and Certification was developed by CARDS and NAVETA and could inform the elaboration of tests and exams, including a 'Vocational Matura'.

NAVETA has defined a list of occupations based on ISCO 2008. Additionally, 140 occupational standards have been developed, by various actors, to inform vocational qualifications. NAVETA sets the criteria and provides guidance to developers.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The AQF is described in the law as a comprehensive 8-level structure that corresponds to the European Qualifications Framework and recognises three types of qualifications:

- General or non-vocational qualifications at secondary school level - AQF levels 1-4
- Higher qualifications offered at or in cooperation with universities – AQF levels 5-8
- Vocational qualifications offered at VET schools, training centres and in the workplace

The reference levels include three components:

- theoretical and factual knowledge
- cognitive and practical skills
- autonomy and responsibility.

Both MoES and the MoLSAEO share responsibilities for implementing the AQF. However, the newly-introduced curricula for VET and HE, despite many innovative elements, do not depart from the traditional input and subject-based approach and the conditions in most educational institutions are such that it is difficult to work towards the achievement of agreed learning outcomes and competence levels.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

There are limited pathways between VET and HE and the gap in programmes and approaches between VET and higher education are large. Post-secondary courses at AQF level 5 are hardly available. As long as the subsystems for VET and higher education continue to operate separately and are not able to communicate with the AQF the opportunities for progression will remain low.

No system for validation or recognition of non-formal and informal learning exists in the country.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

It is intended that the AQF be linked to the EQF, but no practical steps have been taken in this direction.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

NAVETA is a small agency with limited resources to drive the NQF development and implementation. The 2011 Law on VET refers to the AQF and associated system reform, including increased diversification of VET curricula and increased social partner engagement in the National VET Council. But implementation remains slow.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a potential candidate country for entry to the EU.

With a population of around 3.84 million inhabitants Bosnia and Herzegovina is an upper-middle-income market economy. Nearly half (48 %) of the population live in urban areas, while 13.4 % of the population is aged 15–24 years old. The literacy rate is quite high, at 97.8 % in 2009; and most of the population has primary or secondary school education (43.2 % and 48 %, respectively), while 8.8 % has higher education. The labour market in the country continues to be characterised by a low activity rate, high unemployment and long-term unemployment, especially among young people, including a high level of informality. Young people (15–24 years) have the lowest activity rate with only one third (31.4 %) participating in the labour market, whereby there are marked gender differences in this age group (for females 23.3 %, for males 38.8 %).

Bosnia and Herzegovina, like many developed and transition countries, is facing population growth stagnation, with estimated annual growth of -0.2 % in 2010. Demographic projections show, nevertheless, that the labour force will shrink considerably in the next 40 years, with significant ageing of the population. Bosnia and Herzegovina will be ageing, in fact, at the fastest rate in the Western Balkans region, with the dependency ratio rising to 55.1 % by 2050. Bosnia and Herzegovina is ranked 13th in the world for outbound migration, with an emigration rate of 25 % according to the UNDP Human Development Report 2009. Highly skilled workers, in particular, are keen to look for further and better work possibilities abroad, adding to the problem of brain drain; 20 % of Bosnia and Herzegovina people with tertiary education in the 25+ age group are estimated to currently live in OECD countries. The national labour market clearly needs more jobs and more attractive jobs in order to ensure sustainable social and economic development.

1. CHALLENGES THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

Career and development opportunities for people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are clearly worse than in most other European countries. The education attainment levels of the population are lagging behind those of the EU. And there are high levels of structural unemployment.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is also a complex country. Following the Dayton peace agreement in 1995 responsibilities for education and training policies have been delegated to the entity and in the case of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina even cantonal level. This has resulted in an organisational structure where there are 10 cantonal Ministries of Education in the Federation and a Federal Ministry to coordinate the work between them; one Ministry of Education for Brcko District; and one Ministry of Education in the Republika Srpska. The Ministry of Civil Affairs is a State institution coordinating and supporting international and European cooperation. This means that in total 14 institutions are involved in the shaping and coordination of education policies.

The complex institutional arrangements with state institutions which have very limited mandates makes the overall pace of reform slower than in other pre-accession countries. The EU has indicated that in order to meet EU accession requirements, Bosnia and Herzegovina has to create more effective and efficient institutions that take full responsibility for advancing the reform processes.

Green and White Papers were adopted by the education authorities in spring 2000 and autumn 2001 respectively. The VET Development Strategy 2007-13 was adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2007 and the global education strategy (2008-2015) was adopted in June 2008. To date, the education reform

process has largely focused on the adoption of appropriate legislation. The following laws have been adopted at state level: the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary education (2003), the Framework Law on Pre-primary Education, the Framework Law on Higher Education and the Law on the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education (all adopted in 2007), the Framework Law on VET (2008). The adoption of these framework documents at the entity and cantonal levels is a lengthy process.

The vocational training reform process initiated changes in almost all education functions, but its quality remains a challenge, particularly in terms of learning outcomes, the accreditation of training providers and the teaching and learning process. The reform process has continued to focus on bringing vocational training closer to the labour market needs. In this respect substantial support has been provided by the EU through institution-building, staff and curriculum development, and teacher training. However, social partners have only recently been involved in the reform process and they need to enhance their capacities if they are to play an equal role in the process. The process of developing the overarching Qualifications Framework started in 2008. Bosnia and Herzegovina already has a classification system of qualifications, the “nomenclatura,” which comprehensively reflects the world of education, but does not provide meaningful links to the world of work. The EU VET IV project and the national stakeholders with a coordinating role for the VET Department of the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education have made some progress in developing vocational qualifications and core curricula from occupational standards in the field of agriculture and food processing. The involvement of sector representatives remains weak and the development of occupational standards is carried out with the support of teachers from schools, who visit a large number of enterprises.

In higher education the reform process has been influenced by the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region. Higher education reform is supported by the EU and the Council of Europe. All state universities started to implement the first and the second cycle in 2006, according to the Bologna process and ECTS has been introduced by all new study programmes. Though the Framework Law on Higher Education was adopted in 2007, its full implementation is still pending due to the lack of enforcement mechanisms and the fact that many amendments incorporated in the final adopted version have made it difficult to implement, but at least all entity and cantonal legislation has finally been harmonized with the state-level Framework law.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Qualifications Framework should be a tool to bring more clarity to what qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina mean, and aims to clarify how these qualifications are related and linked. It will be an instrument to promote the modernisation of qualifications, quality assurance at all levels of education and improve links between education and employment.

It is intended to improve mobility, transparency, progression and quality assurance. The framework plays an important role in overcoming the fragmentation within Bosnia and Herzegovina and support integration with the European Union and the neighbouring countries.

The framework should also promote progression into higher education. A substantial number of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina work abroad and the framework should support their mobility. For that purpose, the framework will be closely aligned with the European Qualifications Framework. This is also the tool for linking the framework with the proposed NQFs in the neighbouring countries.

The Qualifications Framework is not just a technical tool, but should be linked with the reform and development of the education and training systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is why it has been integrated in two strategic documents of the Council of Ministers: the strategy for Vocational Education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2007-2013 and the Strategic Directions for the development of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina with its implementation plan for 2008-2015.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

Following several drafts prepared with local representatives in the framework of the VET reform III project, funded by the EU, a proposal for a Baseline Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina was developed by a working group of representatives from different entities under the coordination of the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 2010. The document conceptualises the background, purpose, and concepts of a Baseline Qualifications Framework, including the proposed levels of qualifications. The Council of Ministers adopted this Baseline of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina on Thursday 24 March 2011. This act by the Council of Ministers now has the force of law. The idea of a Baseline Qualifications Framework is to establish a clear basis from which continue further practical work, to develop more relevant qualifications for different purposes and different groups of learners. It provides a skeleton for building more integrated qualifications systems. Through different EU-funded projects, beginning with the VET IV project, which is supported by the European Union and developments in the country, this framework can now be given a really practical meaning for a growing group of beneficiaries among individuals, employers and training providers in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The institutional capacities for the effective implementation of the QF remain an important challenge. The Baseline of the Qualifications Framework stipulates that an Intersectoral Committee should be set up to establish a work plan for the implementation of the QF including appropriate methods and tools. Due to the absence of a government this group only met in early 2013. The Intersectoral Committee has 19 members representing all the different public organisations, and social partners, and is coordinated by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Decisions on the implementation are made by majority vote. The Intersectoral Committee is supported by the EU VET IV project, the EU projects on adult learning and higher education and ETF, and should build on the achievements of current VET and HE initiatives. In VET, curriculum reform started more than 10 years ago, and there is some positive experience with modular curricula based on learning outcomes. Recently these have been developed on the basis of occupational standards, bringing the VET offer closer to the labour market.

With the support of the EU and the Council of Europe, a good practice guide has been developed for curriculum development in HE, which has been tested for a number of profiles and could be used much more widely. The Rectors Conference could play an important intermediate role in promoting the cooperation between universities. The existing agencies for pre-primary, primary and secondary education and for higher education could play a technical role in the implementation of the qualifications framework. In order to ensure trust in the QF it is important to find commonly shared principles and coherent procedures and processes for the development of relevant qualifications and the awarding processes.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The framework will have 8 levels, which have been developed referring to the EQF levels, and based on learning outcomes. No sub-levels have been included but the framework is a meta-framework for Bosnia and Herzegovina and is therefore not excluding the use of sub-levels, given that both Montenegro and Croatia have defined sublevels in their frameworks. Learning outcomes have been introduced in new VET curricula since the late nineties, as well as in higher education, but one cannot speak of a system-wide and system-deep use of learning outcomes yet.

In 2010 the Council of Europe also made progress in cooperating with a number of universities in developing subject area descriptors for a few priority subjects, which set a clear frame for university degrees. The EU VET IV project which started in 2011 is planning to develop vocational qualifications on the basis of occupational standards which are a new development for VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in spite of more than ten years of VET curriculum reform. The VETIS Department has shown a good understanding of the opportunities that these occupational standards offer in terms of more relevant qualifications and

curricula.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

There is a keen interest among stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina in developing post-secondary vocational education, which will be subject to discussion in the Intersectoral Committee. Given the number of adults who have been displaced and the current numbers of migrant workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Recognition and Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning is also seen as an important opportunity of the new framework, but due to the lack of standards this has not yet been developed. Nevertheless GIZ has launched a project that supports formal, non-formal and informal adult education and is likely to pilot validation processes in this context.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORK

The higher education framework has been developed with the Council of Europe and was legislated in 2007. The law has introduced the main concepts, but lacks the secondary legislation to effectively implement it fully in line with Bologna requirements, hence referencing to the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area has not yet been possible. The Baseline of the Qualifications Framework has been influenced by the EQF both in format and in process. The fact that now a group of former Yugoslav countries is involved in the EQF implicitly brings the EQF somewhat closer. The EQF is mentioned in the text of the Baseline Qualifications Framework and there is the intention to reference the QF to the EQF once this is possible.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The Baseline Qualifications Frameworks is seen as an important development to support integration with the European Union and to support more relevant qualifications for citizens. The main focus in 2013 is on the work of the Intersectoral Committee to create a framework for implementation that can facilitate further support and can validate the results of practical work that has started at different levels.

Progress is difficult as agreement of many stakeholders and entities is often required, but it is possible to advance if focused on specific issues with achievable milestones such as the work with the Council of Europe on the subject area descriptors and the developments of the Baseline Qualifications Framework itself showed. This should result in the development of a more concrete, operational framework for implementation, including the certification of adult learning, post-secondary VET, widening the development of occupational standards and vocational qualifications in priority sectors, developing outcomes-based HE qualifications and curricula and putting in place the necessary steps to be able to self-certify against the Qualifications Framework of the European Area for Higher Education, and strengthening QA, clarify the roles and responsibilities of institutions and piloting the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the context of adult learning.

CROATIA

PREPARED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF CEDEFOP

Croatia is an acceding country to the European Union and is due to enter the EU on 1 July 2013.

The latest census, from 2011 recorded a population of 4.3 million. The population consists of Croats (90.4%), while minorities include Serbs (4.5%), and 21 other ethnicities (less than 1 % each). Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia in 1995 but is still an economy in transition. From the late 90s to 2008 Croatia enjoyed strong economic growth, averaging over 4% per year. Sectors such as retail, construction and tourism benefited most from the rapid rise in domestic and foreign demand over that period. This high-growth performance led to a rapid convergence with the EU in per capita income terms so that Croatia reached 63 % of the EU27 (average) GDP per capita by 2008. The global financial turmoil hit the Croatian economy at the end of 2008. After slowing down to 0.2 % in the last quarter of 2008, the economy contracted 5.8 % in 2009 - the biggest decline since the country's independence. The most recent quarterly data suggest that the economy weakened further during 2012.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The country is a participant in the same EU Education and Training 2020 process as the EU 27 Member States and so seeks to meet the same Strategic Objectives set by the EU framework. These objectives are supported by a series of reference levels of European average performance, or the five "European benchmarks," which set goals to be achieved by 2020.

Latest figures show that Croatia has a mixed record in its performance compared to the 5 EU benchmarks in education and training. It is performing well in reducing early school leaving: it has 4.1 % early school leavers against the EU benchmark of 10%; in other areas it is not yet on target. It records a figure of 24.5% who have attained tertiary education level against the EU target of 40 %; it has a 2.3 % participation rate in lifelong learning against the EU goal of 15%; and 57% of its 4-year olds participate in the education system against the EU benchmark of 95%. The fifth EU target concerns pupils' performances in reading, science and maths - Croatia is behind the targets in each of these sub-divisions.

While 72% of the upper secondary cohort enter VET, it remains, often, a second choice destination. The Universities are often resistant to curricula and qualifications reform which is based on outcomes lines and integration or linking between HE and VET is still developing. Older qualifications are often criticised as too narrow and lacking labour market relevance.

Successive Croatian governments have sought to address these issues. The respective line ministries have established a range of permanent agencies, such as the VET and Adult Agency and sectoral bodies bringing together stakeholders in education and industry to develop new curricula and qualifications.

Croatia has been moving to outcomes-led approaches in curricula and qualifications, respectively via development of the National Curriculum Framework and the Croatian NQF, known as the CROQF. Curricula are being developed on modular lines to allow for varying entry and exit points and flexible learning pathways. Both its CROQF Law and VET Act use definitions of qualifications which refer to achievement of competences and learning outcomes; the VET Act makes clear the distinction between a programme and a qualification and new qualifications must be unit-based.

Many VET qualifications remain rather narrow. The Ministries and sectors are seeking to encourage development of qualifications which are sufficiently broad to allow the qualified person to work in different enterprises and related occupations and to sustain flexibility throughout a career.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The CROQF was adopted by law in late 2012. The reform purpose of the CROQF is explicit in official documentation. The Croatian authorities intend that the CROQF should enhance the transparency of qualifications, support the shift to using learning outcomes in describing qualifications, promote lifelong learning for all, better integrate the different sectors of the education and training system, bring stakeholders together more effectively, link the education system more closely to the labour market and create a new system of quality assurance. The NQF should also promote recognition of qualifications - through linking to the EQF and the QF-EHEA, the CROQF should facilitate recognition of Croatian qualifications abroad and the recognition of foreign qualifications in Croatia.

Wider social and economic aims include promoting social inclusion and the development of a knowledge-based society.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The CROQF was adopted by law in late 2012. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (MoSES) is the National Coordination Body for the CROQF i.e. it is the legally-responsible body charged with its coordination. There is not, for the time being, a distinct, autonomous qualifications authority.

The Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (VET Agency for short) coordinates development of occupational standards and qualifications. It is primarily the Agency which initiates new qualifications by researching or identifying demand; it also develops VET curricula, standards and qualifications. Schools may also propose their own qualifications for development but must follow the Agency's methodology. The Agency uses a tool called Sector Profiles to identify labour market demands and assess the range of programmes in the VET sector to determine if labour market needs are being met or if new or revised programmes are required.

The Law on the CROQF specifies the roles in implementation of the Expert Group and the VET Sectoral Councils and the HE Sectoral Working Groups. The Expert Group is principally a technical advisory body advising the Ministry on the framework's implementation. The Councils and Working Groups are partnership advisory bodies which contribute to and comment on qualifications standards and occupational standards; they comprise representatives from education, the labour market, NGOs and trades unions. Their role is principally to ensure labour market demand and relevance in qualifications development.

The VET Sectoral Councils in the period 2010-2012 worked on qualifications at levels 2 - 4 (VET) while the Sectoral Working Groups dealt with levels 6 - 8 (higher education). The different bodies involved are making a major effort to align these arrangements in order to ensure pathways between these two sectors.

The VET Agency has produced 26 new qualifications since 2010.

In Higher Education, the Agency for Science and Higher Education acts as the agency for quality assurance for this sector.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The CROQF is a grid formed by 8 reference levels, plus 2 sub-levels (4.2 and 8.2) and 6 columns of descriptors. The 8 plus 2 levels express the complexity of the competences acquired while the descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge; three categories of skills - cognitive, practical and social; and autonomy and responsibility.

The 2 sub-levels are intended primarily to allow for inclusion in the CROQF of older qualifications. It is possible that these levels will be removed in future. Indeed, earlier drafts of the CROQF had up to 20 levels, largely due to stakeholder lobbying.

The reference level of a qualification is defined as the common level of all learning outcomes of the given qualification, determined by the level and volume of each unit of learning outcomes. Each qualification or unit of learning outcomes will be defined in terms of profile, volume and reference level. The profile describes the field of work or study; the volume the total amount of the acquired learning outcomes by credit points (ECTS for Higher Education, ECVET for VET, or HROO – Croatian Credit for General Education, for general education) and the reference level denotes the complexity of the acquired competences.

Qualifications placed at the sub-levels will vary in volume from each other. For example, to be placed at 4.1, a qualification will require a minimum of 180 credits (ECVET or HROO), of which a minimum of 120 must be at level 4. To be placed at 4.2, a qualification will require a minimum of 240 credits (ECVET or HROO), of which a minimum of 180 must be at level 4.

The eight levels read across directly to the 8 levels in the EQF, so that level 1 in the CROQF is linked to level 1 in the EQF, level 2 in the CROQF to level 2 in the EQF and so on. The sub-levels 4.2 and 8.2 are related to levels 4 and 8 of the EQF respectively.

All new qualifications must be based on outcomes and comprise units. Typically, a unit will have 5 to 10 outcomes.

The move to use learning outcomes is a key element in development of the CROQF and implies major changes to the curriculum and qualifications system. Units of learning outcomes contain assessment criteria. For 1, 2 and 3-year VET programmes the VET schools usually conduct the assessments, but with internal quality assurance. For 4 and 5-year VET programmes, there is both internal assessment by the school but students may also apply to take the State Matura, which is externally assessed. The National Centre for External Evaluation of Education sets national exams and the State Matura.

These changes are currently taking place in VET, HE and general education. In VET, standards and curricula are being reformed towards outcomes-based approaches. In Higher Education, Croatia joined the Bologna Process in 2001 and so has been reforming its HE system to meet the Bologna requirements, including the move to the cycle system, changes in curricula and a shift to using learning outcomes in qualifications.

Many qualifications will need to be written or re-written in terms of learning outcomes. This process is expected to be very intensive. However, it is not considered practical to revise all existing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes. Some older qualifications will be placed in the CROQF, their level determined through discussion with relevant stakeholders.

The CROQF is also supported by the new CROQF Register. There are five elements to the register, one each for:

- units of learning outcomes
- standards of occupations
- standards of qualifications
- assessment programmes
- qualifications-awarding programmes and institutions.

The Registers represent the formal link between the qualifications themselves and the CROQF – qualifications must first be included in the Register before being placed in the CROQF.

The registers are part of the developing quality assurance system. The quality assurance system includes accreditation of awarding institutions, programmes leading to the award of qualifications, validation of certification and so on. While some of these elements already exist and are defined in legislation, other elements such as the Registers are new or being developed.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The objectives of the Croatian NQF include the validation of non-formal and informal learning; the right to validation is linked to a national strategy to raise the formal qualifications in the population. However, in practice, validation is still rare in Croatia and remains mainly an aspiration of the CROQF. The Registers are, among other objectives, intended to support validation.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

In Higher Education, Croatia signed the Bologna Declaration in 2001 and is a full participant in the Bologna Process. Since then it has made significant reforms to its Higher Education system, following the principles and criteria of the Bologna process and the European Higher Education Area, including moving to the Bologna cycles and to using learning outcomes in qualifications. The reforms also encompass measures to facilitate recognition of qualifications in Higher Education. Croatia also established in 2005 a national ENRIC/NARIC office.

Croatia is currently referencing the CROQF to the EQF and is at the same time self-certifying against the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), within the Bologna Process. A provisional referencing report covering both processes was presented to the EQF Advisory Group in March 2012. Full referencing is expected in 2013. The Ministry leads both processes and will produce one report covering the referencing to the EQF and QF-EHEA.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

While the development of the framework itself is advanced, much work remains to be done in developing or redefining qualifications to allow them to be placed in the CROQF. The 2 sub-levels may be abolished in future. It will be interesting to observe how the CROQF is implemented by ministerial committee as opposed to autonomous agency.

Croatia needs to develop more provision in the post-secondary VET sector and so related qualifications.

It is worth underlining that Croatia's experiences as the first Western Balkan country which is expected to link its NQF to the EQF will influence other countries in the region in their possible future referencing approaches.

KOSOVO*

Kosovo is a potential candidate country for EU entry. In its Communication in October 2012, the Commission indicated that Kosovo was largely ready to open negotiations to establish a Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

Kosovo has a population of just under 1.8 million. The country has the youngest population in the Western Balkans and the population is still growing (at a consistent +0.6% per year). Kosovo is a multi-ethnic society with an Albanian majority and a diverse group of other minorities such as Serbs, Bosnians, Turks, RAE community (Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian), Gorani etc.

The largest general economic sector in Kosovo is services, which accounted for 68% of GDP in 2010, followed by industry (20% of GDP) and agriculture (12%).

Kosovo has the highest unemployment level in Europe, at 45.4%, with the most affected groups being women at 59.6% and young people at 73. However, better VET is not a cure-all for the jobs crisis in Kosovo: thousands of young people will continue to be unemployed as long as demand remains slack and economic growth remains sluggish. About 16.7% of the population is estimated to be extremely poor. Poverty is more prevalent in rural areas and among minority groups. Kosovo faces difficulties in ensuring availability of reliable data to measure and assess progress.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

Kosovo's NQF has to be placed within the context of the recent history of the country and its resulting economic, social and educational challenges. Specifically, the continuing political uncertainty, especially the poor relationship with Serbia, hinders the country's economic growth and social stability.

While the economy has grown in recent years, unemployment levels remain high, the economy is donor-dependent and 97 % of local businesses are classified as micro-enterprises (fewer than 10 employees). Remittances from Kosovars resident abroad, especially in Germany, Austria and Switzerland are also important. Several surveys of Kosovo's education and training system have emphasised the need to make it more relevant to the labour market and to develop the educational infrastructure. For example, teacher training provision is limited, and most VET instructors hold no teaching qualification; VET curricula are outdated, and opportunities for professional practice e.g. work placements, internships etc. are limited. Employers complain that the VET system inadequately equips its graduates for work, in particular VET graduates often lack technical skills.

Kosovo Governments have sought to address these issues, developing strategies for human resource development and educational reform. Its aims are set out in the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011-16 (KESP), the overarching national education and training strategy. Lifelong learning and inclusiveness are the key underpinning principles of the Plan, within which the Kosovo NQF is a key element. The Government, from 2011, established its own annual review of the national education system, adopting a sector-wide approach in its Joint Annual Review (JAR). In the VET sub-sector, ETF's Torino Process forms the reporting element.

Kosovo's education and training system reflects the country's very specific circumstances, for example, it is characterised by a large international donor community and strong external political and economic

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence-hereinafter 'Kosovo'.

influences from the USA and the EU. Arguably, the education and training system is overly-influenced by donors, who pull in different directions, offering money to Kosovo's VET sector but undermining efforts at coherent reform.

The NQF was developed by the Kosovo Government in cooperation with ETF projects in VET in Kosovo, and other EU support provided under various projects, including KOSVET II, KOSVET III and, finally KOSVET V, which concluded its work at the end of 2011.

The Kosovo NQF was established by law, possesses defined levels and descriptors and has been structured on the basis of principles agreed with stakeholders. It is overseen by a dedicated agency, the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), and is supported by other institutions with responsibility for different education sectors, e.g. HE or VET. A range of supporting manuals and handbooks has been produced to support further development and implementation.

Several VET qualifications have been placed in the NQF levels, mainly at levels 3 and 4. However most qualifications in the country are school-issued certificates rather than national VET qualifications.

Strategic challenges for the NQF are to contribute to achievement of the KESP, including to the overall improvement of quality of education and training provision; and supporting the move to an education training system with lifelong learning at its core.

Specific challenges for the NQA and NQF are promoting the development of more occupational standards and new qualifications; accrediting more providers; implementing RPL systems and linking to EU initiatives, especially the EQF.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Kosovo qualifications framework is central to the government's aim to improve the quality of the education and training system and to drive it towards EU standards. Successive Kosovo governments have made the NQF a priority policy.

The Kosovo NQF is explicitly intended as a reform instrument. Indeed, it goes beyond even other "reforming" NQFs in being perceived as a key tool in building and structuring the national education system. It will therefore not only relate or link the different sub-sectors of the national system, but initiate and stimulate curricular and qualifications re-design and promote institutional change.

It is essential to underline the EU influence on the NQF - Kosovo intends that its NQF be compatible with the EQF, an aim reflected in the structure and nature of the framework, which is largely influenced by the EQF. Clearly, the eventual aim of the Kosovo authorities is to link the Kosovo NQF to the EQF.

Formally, the 2008 Law on Qualifications provides the legal basis for the Kosovo NQF. The law sets out 9 main objectives for the NQF, including that it should: provide a basis for cooperation with the EQF; promote transparency of qualifications; ensure the relevance of qualifications to employment and learning; stimulate lifelong learning; increase access to certification; provide learning pathways; establish a system for the accumulation and transfer of credit; increase the quality and relevance of education and training by stimulating the development of qualifications, based on internationally comparable standards of knowledge, skills and competences and supported by rigorous quality assurance procedures; and improve employability and learning opportunities for individuals by providing a basis for recognition and certification.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The development of the NQF has been legally-based, with a series of laws on basic principles supported by associated Administrative Instructions (secondary legislation) on more detailed issues such as quality assurance measures.

The Law on Qualifications, passed in 2008, established the NQF. Related legal and regulatory measures are the Law on Primary and Secondary Education, the Law on Higher Education, the Law on Adult Education and Training and the Law on Vocational Education and Training.

The National Qualifications Authority, created in 2009, has overall responsibility for the NQF. It has a staff of 6 and a governing board of 13 members who are drawn from VET and HE, the trades unions, employers, chambers of commerce and voluntary bodies.

While the NQA leads and coordinates, it shares responsibility for development and implementation of the NQF with MEST, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (KAA) and the Council for VET (CVET).

In VET, the NQA has responsibility for registering in the framework the VET and adult qualifications developed by VET providers such as VET schools or special occupational schools or academies, such as the national Police College. It conducts quality assurance processes relevant to the validation, assessment and certification of these qualifications to ensure they are of sufficient standard to enter the NQF, and is responsible for the accreditation of the VET providers.

MEST oversees school 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 so accredits HEIs as providers. Universities generally develop their own qualifications, quality-assured by the KAA.

CVET is a tripartite (government, employers and trades unions) body designed to support the VET sector. It is intended to coordinate contributions from across the VET stakeholder community, including various ministries but in particular the social partners. Its remit includes engaging the social partners in coordinating the development of occupational standards, and initiatives to improve the quality of VET. CVET approves occupational standards submitted to it, e.g. from the Chambers of Commerce or donors and then passes these to NQA for verification.

Stakeholder involvement, outside the key public institutions, is developing but still quite limited. However, this situation is not unique to the NQF field or wider education and training; rather it reflects the position in society generally, where civic institutions are still developing.

A new Agency for VET and adult education is expected to be established during 2013. A draft law on VET contained provisions for the creation of this body. It is expected to control much of the VET sector – the relationship with the NQA, especially in quality assurance issues, will need to be clearly described to prevent confusion and overlap.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Kosovo NQF consists of 8 qualifications levels. It is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework so that its descriptors are intended to cater to all types of learning contexts and experiences: general education, higher education, vet; and formal, non-formal and informal.

The level descriptors are accordingly learning outcomes-based, divided by:

- knowledge – which may be theoretical or practical
- skills – which may be cognitive, practical or creative
- wider competences - specifically, autonomy and responsibility

The descriptors, as indeed the framework overall, are strongly influenced by the EQF and also draw on elements of some existing NQFs, such as the Scottish framework. They have been elaborated, though, for Kosovo's context.

There are 5 specified types of qualification recognized in the NQF: HE, general, combined VET/general, skills-based qualifications based on nationally approved standards and skills-based qualifications not based on standards which are nationally approved. Defined outcomes differ for each, according to purpose. For example, skills-based qualifications will be designed with practical outcomes or expertise in mind and based on national occupational standards, developed by CVET or adopted by CVET, and approved by the NQA.

Qualifications are for the most part being developed on unit or modular lines, in both VET and HE (general school, compulsory education does not, however, use a modular approach).

NQA is responsible for standard-setting for validation (approval) of qualifications and accreditation of providers (authorisation to develop, offer and assess for, qualifications). Most VET qualifications are developed by the providers, then submitted for approval to NQA.

The VET sector made significant progress in developing new qualifications during 2011 and 2012. Currently, 11 providers are accredited: the 7 Vocational Training Centres (VTCs), which are run by the Ministry of Labour and cater for adults; the national Police College; KEK, the national energy company, Don Bosco and QAKP, a mixed private-public VET school. 11 VET qualifications have now been developed, mainly at levels 3 and 4, in administration, IT, welding, public security, plumbing, and electrical installation and maintenance.

VET qualifications have to be based on occupational standards, of which 26 now exist. Most are developed by donors such as Swisscontact or Germany's GLZ, with input and coordination by the Kosovo Chambers of Commerce. The principal challenges for NQA are encouraging more standards and qualifications development and ensuring national dissemination of these so that a truly national VET system and national qualifications system are established.

Level 5, or post-secondary VET, provision remains very small in the country and for the time being no level 5 qualifications are available.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The NQF has been designed to enable and promote access, progression and transfer and to support the building of pathways between different sub-sectors of education and training, for example HE and VET. Additionally, the re-design of qualifications using learning outcomes and structuring of courses on modular lines in many cases should support progression and transfer – for example where units or modules are the same or similar between different courses or qualifications.

In practice, though, the direct linking of qualifications to particular types of programme in many cases is a barrier to flexible access to qualifications. Additionally, some institutions remain reluctant to be flexible

in offering learners access to programmes or qualifications. Within HE, for example, it can be difficult for students to transfer credit between universities or even across faculties at the same university. In some cases, providers are unwilling to accept the assessments of the learner's previous institution.

Existing programmes or courses are also in some cases inflexible, being mainly designed for younger people in full-time study. Similarly, assessment methods tend to be very traditional i.e. formal written examinations, rather than comprising a range of assessment approaches e.g. interview, oral exam, practical, etc. This can also have discrimination issue implications.

There is potentially great scope in Kosovo for validation of non-formal and informal learning or recognition of prior learning. The country's recent history, which involved the establishment of a parallel underground education system, has resulted in many adults possessing a range of useful skills which are unrecognised formally. Additionally, many Kosovars migrate abroad and then return to the country with skills which are often uncertificated.

The NQA and other actors in the national education and training system are alert to this potential. The NQF aims to support inclusiveness and the 2008 Law on National Qualifications explicitly provides for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. All new qualifications should also, by law, be attainable via RPL.

Some organisations in Kosovo do recognise prior learning and VET qualifications are awarded to RPL candidates. Voluntary bodies such as APPK also support adults through validation processes. However, in some cases it is reported that institutions and employers consider qualifications obtained through validation routes inferior to those acquired through the traditional, linear path.

The NQA has guidelines on RPL, which describe the conditions for recognising prior learning that will lead to award of NQF credits, or to advanced standing on a programme or course leading to an NQA-approved qualification. Indeed, one of the general criteria set by the NQA for assessment bodies is that they must ensure access and certification to candidates other than those following traditional courses and provide for validation of non-formal and informal learning. The NQA is also developing a communication strategy to promote the advantages of RPL and validation among stakeholders such as employers and awarding bodies.

It is planned that in 2013 an Administrative Instruction (the implementing regulations) on RPL will be adopted.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The Kosovo NQF has been heavily influenced in concept, structure and scope by the EQF. One of the objectives of the NQF, set out in the 2008 Law on Qualifications, is indeed to provide a basis for cooperation with the EQF. While the EQF Recommendation formally contains no provision to allow referencing to it from countries outside the EU, the Kosovo authorities are considering a technical exercise to establish a comparison of levels.

Although it is not yet a member of the Bologna Process, Kosovo aims to join the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and is currently conducting the technical measures, even if it remains politically excluded.

Kosovo obtained in 2012 observer status in the European Quality Assurance in VET Community of Practice (EQA-VET), which supports countries in implementing the European Quality Assurance Framework for

VET (EQARF). Its credit system is based on the European Credit System for VET (ECVET) and the NQA is leading activity in technical work which would be preparatory to any future relationship with the EU system.

The Kosovo NQF framework descriptors are accordingly intended to read across to the EQF levels and Bologna cycles.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The NQF has been a driver for development of new occupational standards and qualifications – the NQA has been proactive in encouraging these processes and has introduced quality assurance systems previously absent in the VET sector.

As a reform instrument, the NQF's impact is tied up with its relationship with other institutions and actors. A key challenge is engaging the full and active participation of the various departments, agencies, institutions and stakeholders necessary to ensure a sustained implementation for the long term. In 2012, progress was made in mobilising or reactivating the Council for VET. The shape and powers of the planned new VET Agency are not yet decided but it will need to develop a close relationship with NQA.

In qualifications, the priorities are to produce more, and higher quality, qualifications and establish a national system of VET qualifications.

THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a candidate country for entry into the EU. It is a landlocked country with 2.05 million inhabitants, two thirds of whom are Macedonian Slavs, a quarter Albanians and the rest other minorities. The population is aging.

Labour market indicators show improvements in the recent years, but the country continues to face serious challenges, which, combined with low job creation and skills mismatch call for better articulation of all relevant policies, as acknowledged by the new National Employment Strategy 2015. The participation rate (15-64 years) has slightly improved but remains low, below 56% in the last five years. The unemployment rate decreased from 36% in 2006 to 31.4% in 2011. However the share of long-term unemployed (over 12 months) continues to be very high and in 2011 reached 82.6%. Another major challenge is high youth unemployment, which stood at 53.7% in 2010. Issues with relevance of skills and qualifications of the labour force are one of the causes of this dire situation.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The country is a participant in the same EU Education and Training 2020 process as the EU 27 Member States and so seeks to meet the same Strategic Objectives set by the EU framework. These objectives are supported by a series of reference levels of European average performance, or the five “European benchmarks”, which set goals to be achieved by 2020.

Overall educational attainment of the working-age population and labour force improved in the 2004-2010 period as the share of the population with tertiary education increased. However, the total proportion of working-age population with higher educational attainment is still relatively low (10.3% in 2010) and there is still a significant weighting (11% in 2010) of people with the lowest educational levels (incomplete primary and no education at all). These low-skilled people are overly vulnerable to long-term unemployment.

There have been many legal and administrative measures to promote social inclusion but these have yet to resolve the real problems of poverty and social exclusion. There is evidence of increasing segregation along ethnic lines in education. Following the Ohrid framework agreement, the education system has been more decentralised, giving an important role to the municipalities. Education provision in minority languages, and in particular in Albanian, has been reinforced.

The country shows mixed performance as regards the seven ET 2020 benchmarks.

1. Participation in early childhood education: with 29.6% against the EU-27 average of 92.3%^[1], the country shows a very challenging situation.
2. The share of 15 years-olds with insufficient abilities in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%: without any participation in PISA after 2000, it is not possible to establish the actual country performance as regards this benchmark. In 2013, the Ministry of Education and Science and the OECD have advanced negotiations in preparation for the country's participation in PISA 2015.
3. Early school leaving^[2]: with a remarkable improvement of 10.8 percentage points between 2006 and 2012 (from 22.8 to 12.0%), the country performs better than the EU-27 average (12.9%). Unlike most EU countries, the female indicator is slightly worse than the male.

4. Share of the population aged 30-34 with higher education: progress has been impressive between 2006 and 2012. With an increase by 10.3 percentage points, the country reached 21% (against the EU-27 average of 35.5%, 2012), and placed itself in situation comparable with many lower performing EU countries[3]. In line with trends elsewhere the female indicator is higher.
5. Participation in adult learning - at only one third of the EU average (3.3% as against 9.3%) although the country did register an increase from 2.3% to 3.3 in participation in adult learning between 2005 and 2009 (outperforming many other Southeast European countries as well as Turkey[4]). Data for 2010, however, showed a slight decline again to 3.2%, with women rating higher than men, at 3.4% to 3.1% respectively.
6. At least 20% of higher education graduates and 6% of 18-24 years-olds with an initial VET qualification should have had a period of study abroad. The European Commission's Education and Training Monitor 2012 specifies that graduate data are not yet available for many countries and it is not possible to indicate the level at which the benchmark currently lies. Looking at enrolment data, the country performs relatively well, with 6.6% (2010) of all higher education students enrolled in another EU member state, EEA or candidate country[5].
7. The share of employed graduates (20-34 year-olds) having left education and training no more than three years before the reference year should be at least 82%. With its high unemployment rate and low employment rate, it is evident that the country has a long way to go to reach the benchmark. In 2011, the total country employment rate (population 20-64) was 48.4% (and only 38.8% for females), which compares low with the EU-27 average of 75.2% (and 62.3% females)[6].

In January 2013 the revamped Working Group in charge of developing the concept for the comprehensive National Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (designated the Macedonian Qualifications Framework, MQF) initiated a process of review of the new draft concept with the support of ETF. In March-April the revised draft concept will undergo national public consultation, and other international organisations will participate in the review process. Adoption of the MQF concept is planned in the second quarter of 2013, while work on the NQF legal act is underway. This process will complete the legal basis set in 2010, when the Higher Education Qualifications Framework was legislated.

The refreshed dynamism of the Working Group since mid-2012, under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Science, has resulted in a draft NQF concept with many positive features. The several issues requiring further reflection and improvement mirror the complexities linked with new paradigms. Moreover, the perspective of the labour market (sectors, employers) needs to be better represented in further work of the NQF Working Group, and in particular in the upcoming consultation process.

Right skills and qualifications for jobs and productivity

Despite the inherent high levels of unemployment, modern enterprises often experience difficulties in recruiting personnel with the right skills, identifying inadequate levels of transversal and "soft" skills among candidates as one of the key problems. Should this issue continue unaddressed, it will hamper the modernisation process and limit economic productivity.

Quality of education and training outcomes

Education and employment policies will face many challenges in the coming years as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia undergoes further economic restructuring and deals with the combined influences of an emerging services economy, new forms of work organisation in small and medium enterprises, an aging population, issues with the current skills mix of the working age population and ongoing social vulnerabilities.

The education reforms of 2007-2009 effectively extended the number of years of mandatory schooling, which includes upper-secondary education. This reform led to higher transition rates from lower to upper secondary education. However, enrolment rates in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education continued to fall in a way that challenged the effectiveness of social inclusion and quality of education policies. In spite of measures to improve quality of education, the country continues to perform very poorly in international students' assessment studies, e.g. in TIMSS 2011. A State Matura exam has been introduced, based on outcome statements for secondary education.

Effectiveness of learners' career choices

Responding to targeted public policies, participation in higher education has visibly increased. Enrolment of first year students in public universities grew by over 200% from 2000 to 2008 and by 40% between 2005/2006 and 2010/2011. Annual growth in tertiary education graduates was 8.9% in the 2000 to 2008 period, a figure substantially exceeding the EU-27 average of 4.5%.

However this rise is disproportionately high in humanities and social sciences, fields that capture almost three quarters of all graduates of first cycle (bachelor) degrees in the last decade. This pro-humanities tendency may even aggravate the existing jobs-skills mismatch. In contrast, OECD and EU-21 data for 2009 give the joint share of students enrolled in 'humanities, arts and education' and 'social sciences, business and law' as no higher than 53% in OECD countries (OECD, 2011). Moreover, higher vocational education remains an unattractive option, as demonstrated by variable student participation figures.

Labour market indicators are substantially better for those holding higher education qualifications (academic and vocational) than for those with medium-level qualifications (VET-4 and VET-3) or those with lower-level or no qualifications.

Bridging across the variety of forms and levels of education and training

Education policy recognises the importance of a lifelong learning approach in view of the country's socio-economic needs and the demographic challenges. In this context an adult learning law was adopted in 2008 and the Centre for Adult Education was established to address the training needs of an increasingly aging workforce. CAE has developed and is implementing a quality assurance approach for learning programmes for adults.

But in reality there is institutional fragmentation, combined with a degree of overlaps in responsibility for certain areas, notably, for secondary VET and adult education. It is intended that the comprehensive NQF play a bridging role in the system. Moreover, the new concept of the MQF has the potential to foster closer articulation of various departments and agencies (centres) currently in charge of fields that share many more similarities than differences (VET, adult education, higher education). If effectively put in place, the planned NQF agency (though its form and designation are yet to be) can represent the much-needed bridge in the system.

The new draft concept of the MQF explicitly includes qualifications acquired through formal and non-formal adult education pathways, alongside qualifications from formal education – from levels 1 to 8.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Four main objectives have been formulated in the new draft concept of the MQF (January 2013):

1. Making qualifications more explicit with clearly defined purposes
2. Facilitating recognition and mobility nationally and internationally

3. Facilitating the recognition and accreditation of non-formal education

4. Aligning and harmonising the quality of education and training programmes and providers

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was one of the first countries in the region, after Croatia and Turkey, to embrace the NQF concept. A first working group, established with ETF support, drafted the initial NQF concept in 2005. This was also the time that it developed its National Programme for the Development of Education 2005-2015, which attempted to bring coherence between the education reforms that were planned at the time. But following a series of political changes, the NQF work did not progress beyond the initial conceptual stages.

Later, a national commission was set up in 2008 and again one in 2009, this time as a component of the adult education project providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Education and Sciences on LLL. The task of the group was to develop the NQF concept, structure, criteria and quality assurance processes and develop the capacity of key agencies. The NQF should include all education and training areas and sectors, as its new draft concept from January 2013 demonstrates.

The refreshed working group of 2012 includes members from all relevant bodies, as well as some representatives of employers' organisations. The Ministry of Education and Science is represented by departments of higher education and of primary and secondary education. The Bureau for Development of Education, in charge of curriculum for secondary education has an important role, to ensure reformed curricula and programmes will be aligned with learning outcomes. The VET Centre and Centre of Adult Education provide important contributions in making the MQF responsive to qualifications for employment and social inclusion. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy as well as the State Employment Agency participate, but with a smaller representation. Employers' organisations and local authorities (which have been assigned an important role in governance of education and training) have limited representation.

As well as submitting the draft MQF concept (of January 2013) to public consultation, the authorities plan to invite relevant international organisations and experts to comment on the document.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

An important step was the adoption in 2010 of the National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, which forms an integral part of the comprehensive NQF for lifelong learning, and which reached a new stage of development in early 2013.

The shift in focus to learning outcomes from a content-based approach is seen as an essential stage in the development of the national qualifications framework, and plans are in place for complete revision of the qualifications and programmes in line with level descriptors. A national register of higher education qualifications is being prepared. With support of IPA Twinning project with Slovenia, new occupational standards, qualification standards and competence-based curricula for some 20 occupations (mainly for VET-3, which corresponds to MQF level 3) were elaborated in 2012. This set of qualifications and curricula are based on learning outcomes.

It can be expected that the country institutions and social partners (led by the VET Centre) could engage in revision of qualifications and curricula for a wider range of occupations in demand, following the new tested approach and methodology. Such an endeavour will depend on the leadership capacity of the VET Centre and demand from market players.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING.

The education system has a relatively high level of permeability as it shown by the fact that more than 70% of the graduates of the four-year VET programme progress to higher education. The large general education workload in the VET curriculum facilitates progression. Credits are also expected to play a large underpinning role in the NQF and should facilitate transfer and accumulation.

There is progress towards preparation of the grounds for VNFIL, with the more active work being done in reinforcing adult education and non-formal learning, in particular in establishing quality assurance for providers and programmes, combined with the new developments in designing learning outcomes-based qualification standards. The NQF concept includes all the basic concepts for assessment, but does not make a distinction between the providers and assessors of learning, which are supposed to be accredited training providers (institutions). For now public institutions are in charge of developing qualifications, although sectoral committees can develop occupational standards which are an input for qualifications. In spite of these developments, the formal route to qualifications remains the main option for learners and the central focus of policies.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

In early 2013 the country became a member of the EQF Advisory Group. It is currently preparing its roadmap towards EQF referencing, and plans to present the report in late 2013. Given the substantial workload and time needed until adoption of the NQF legal basis and of the referencing report, this target date could be revised.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

In 2012, inspired by the outcomes of the Bruges process (review of progress in VET), the activity of the Working Group in charge of preparing the comprehensive National Qualifications Framework (NQF) resumed its activity, resulting in a coherent and well-argued concept document. The draft NQF concept completed in January 2013, underwent a preliminary rapid review with ETF support in February. The Working Group needs to nurture this focus and dynamism towards completion of this phase of the MQF development and preparation for next steps towards implementation.

The draft NQF concept document positions the NQF as an important regulatory tool in the educational landscape of the country.

The document is thorough and:

1. identifies users and beneficiaries;
2. identifies the main qualifications that should be part of the framework;
3. encompasses all levels of education and training, formal and non-formal forms;
4. incorporates explicit elements of quality assurance of qualifications and programmes;
5. sets out roles for the sectoral committees, bodies in charge of qualifications and an overarching responsible institution.

On the other hand, the NQF concept will require further discussion of a number of issues, in particular:

6. The concept of quality assurance is largely limited to the perspective of institutional programme accreditation; further work on quality assurance of the NQF should embrace the qualifications inserted in the NQF; as well as the assessed competences of individuals receiving a qualification.

7. Clarification and coherent use of key concepts, e.g. skills, modules, credit, assessment, institutions accredited to educate, train and assess.
8. The set of descriptors for levels 8 to 5a differs from the set used for levels 1 to 5b: this divergence should be resolved to remove barriers to permeability.
9. VET is classified to a maximum level “5b”, which anticipates discontinuity and academic bias against the trend to open up all levels for vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications in most European countries.
10. There seems to be a strong focus on ensuring that qualifications are developed exclusively by existing public institutions and universities, although sectoral committees are increasingly engaged in doing much of the upstream work, including some anticipation of skills needs and development of profiles and occupational standards.

As indicated above, Macedonia recently joined the EQF Advisory Group and is preparing for EQF referencing. ETF and the European Commission have shared with the working group the most relevant information and lessons from the EQF referencing process so far. Despite its membership in the AG EQF, the country has not been able to participate in the main AG EQF meetings, nor in other relevant activities, such as peer learning activities and meetings of the EQF National Contact Points. The recent impetus may change this situation, however.

[1] European Commission, Education and Training Monitor 2012, SWD(2012) 373/2. Accessed: 18/03/2013, Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking_en.htm

[2] http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/europe_2020_indicators/headline_indicators

[3] http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=0&pcode=t2020_41&language=en

[4] European Commission. 2001 c, pg 35. Bulgaria: 1.4%; Croatia: 2.3%; Romania: 1.5%; Slovakia: 2.8%; Turkey: 2.3%. Data source: Eurostat (LFS database), May 2010. This indicator refers to persons aged 25 to 64 who stated that they received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator consists of the total population of the same age group, excluding those who did not answer to the question ‘participation to education and training’. Both the numerator and the denominator come from the EU LFS. The information collected relates to all education or training regardless of relevance to the respondent’s current or possible future job.

[5] European Commission, Education and Training Monitor 2012, SWD(2012) 373/2. Accessed: 18/03/2013, Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking_en.htm. Page 41.

[6] http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=0&pcode=t2020_10&language=en he issues at once.

MONTENEGRO

Montenegro is a candidate country of the European Union. It is a small, mountainous country, with a Mediterranean coastline. Its population is around 620,000. 52% of the population in Montenegro have completed secondary school, and 17% have completed upper secondary or higher education. 70% of the youth is attending two, three and four-year VET programmes. Montenegro is struggling with structural employment problems. Labour market participation is below 60% of the working age population and has declined over the past four years as a result of the crisis. Unemployment is just below 20%, and youth unemployment just below 40%. There are strong seasonal differences as tourism, agriculture and construction provide the biggest share of jobs between them. Labour market demands undergo changes much faster than educational cycles, and systems to anticipate the changing skill needs are underdeveloped.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The country is a participant in the same EU Education and Training 2020 process as the EU 27 Member States and so seeks to meet the same Strategic Objectives set by the EU framework. These objectives are supported by a series of reference levels of European average performance, or the five “European benchmarks”, which set goals to be achieved by 2020.

Latest figures show that against the EU 2020 benchmarks in education and training, Montenegro records an early school-leaving rate of 15.5% against the EU target of 10%: it has a participation rate of 0.1% in lifelong learning against the EU benchmark of 15%; in participation of 4-year olds in education, it records 30.9% against the EU benchmark of 95%; in performance against PISA targets in maths, science and reading, the country is significantly behind the EU benchmark of 15% of pupils with low achievement in each of these subdivisions, recording figures of 58%, 54% and 49% respectively.

The NQF is part of a wider set of economic, labour market and education policies to support human capital developments as a driving factor for the integration with the European Union. The NQF is a tool to promote a stronger involvement of social partners, to develop more relevant (vocational) qualifications, to improve progression in lifelong learning and mobility on the labour market, to support adult learning and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, to make the provision of vocational education and training more flexible, and to move from narrow outdated vocational specialisations, to opener and broader profiles, that are built around key competences including entrepreneurship. Currently there is special attention to qualifications in tourism and agriculture to strengthen and sustain economic development in these key sectors. The NQF is accompanied by wider education reforms, which include the introduction of an external VET matura, the diversification of pathways, the promotion of adult learning and better cooperation between providers, local communities and employers, etc.

The main challenges for Montenegro include:

- to better connect the world of education and the world of work
- to develop qualifications relevant in content and quality to the labour market
- to achieve a shift from input approaches to learning outcomes approaches with recognition of all types of learning.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Ministry of Education established an intersectoral working group in 2006, which developed a concept paper for a Montenegrin Qualifications Framework, encompassing all types and qualification levels for general, vocational and higher education, based on 8 levels. In October 2008 the Government of Montenegro adopted a strategy for the establishment of the NQF, and with the support of the EU (Instrument for Pre-Accession) preparatory measures were developed including a Law on the NQF, which was adopted in December 2010. The law stipulates that the framework has 8 levels, based on learning outcomes. Levels I, IV and VII have sub-levels. Qualifications are allocated credit values.

The main goals of establishing National Qualifications Framework are:

- making a link between various subsystems of education
- connecting education to the labour market, as well as cooperation between social partners in education and employment
- strengthening orientation towards learning outcomes
- to facilitate recognising a wider scope of learning outcomes (including non-formal and informal learning)
- to improve understanding, bring clarity to the qualifications system, and develop qualifications which meet labour market needs
- to enable comparability of qualifications.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

In accordance with the Law on the National Qualifications Framework, the Government of Montenegro appointed the Council for Qualifications (Official Gazette number 29/2011). The Council comprises representatives of the Ministry of Education, competent public administrations, universities, the Bureau for Employment of Montenegro, the Chamber of Commerce, business alliances, trades unions, the Centre for Vocational Education, the Bureau for Education and the Examination Centre.

The Council for Qualifications is responsible for improving the system of qualifications, approving and classifying qualifications in the Qualifications Framework. The Council makes decisions on classification of qualifications in the Qualification Framework, harmonization of existing qualifications for classification in the Qualifications Framework and proposes development and improvement of qualifications to a competent institution.

The Council forms sectoral commissions which, on the basis of comprehensive sectoral analyses, identify missing qualifications and their content and propose their development to the Council.

Sectoral commissions should:

- analyse range of provision, and suitability of, existing qualifications
- define needs for all types of qualifications according to the needs of labour market and society

- propose qualifications for a sector from the first to the eighth level of education
- propose priorities in development of new, and updating of existing, qualifications.

The Law on National Vocational Qualifications identifies 15 sectors. To September 2012, 10 sectoral commissions were established. The Law also regulates procedures regarding recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Efforts are being made to create conditions for application of solutions given in this law (see below).

Montenegro has one public and two private universities. Changes and amendments of the Law on Higher Education were adopted in Parliament on 27 July 2010. The major changes were: the formalisation of the three-cycle system; introduction of ECTS; introduction of Diploma Supplement; a Council of Higher Education; arrangements for Quality Assurance (internal and external).

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The National Qualifications Framework of Montenegro has an 8-level structure, influenced by the EQF. The levels cover all types of qualifications – general, vocational and higher.

- The first four levels of qualifications include qualifications acquired in the initial vocational/general education and training institutions (awarded after completion of elementary school and during the secondary school education)
- The fifth level of qualifications is the intermediate level between the levels of vocational qualifications and the levels of higher education qualifications (upper secondary education)
- The levels from 6 to 8 encompass qualifications acquired in the higher education institutions.

Only a small number of new, outcomes-based, qualifications are available, but the development of new qualifications is in progress. In early 2013, the website of the Montenegrin Qualifications Framework <http://www.cko.edu.me/> provided a list of ten qualifications which are placed in the framework. Populating the framework with outcomes-based qualifications will be one of the main priorities for the current period.

Although the principles of learning outcomes have been adopted, there is much work to do as well in higher education to define qualifications and curricula which are based on learning outcomes.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

There are legal conditions for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Law on National Vocational Qualifications describes procedures for recognition of non-formal and informal learning and how a national vocational qualification can be acquired in this way.

Assessment should be carried out by the Examination Centre for qualifications from level I-V. The Examination Centre is the national body responsible for national examinations. An individual can apply directly to the Examination Centre for validation of his/her skills; his/her provider institution may also apply on his/her behalf.

Examination catalogues are based on occupational standards. Qualifications acquired in this way can be taken into account during further education and in acquiring education level qualification. In addition to recognition of prior knowledge, the law enables pupils who left school early to acquire vocational qualification for the part of the programme that they have passed.

The following institutions are responsible for qualifications from level I-VIII:

- The Centre for Vocational Education for vocational qualifications from level I-V
- Universities and independent colleges offering higher education qualifications leading to diplomas and qualifications which lead to the award of certificates.

The website of the Montenegrin Qualifications Framework provides information on:

- Licensed institutions
- Licensed Examiners (only available to registered institutions)
- Dates of deadlines for testing (exam dates, etc.)
- Details of the complaints procedure

Preparations for this new system have advanced, but the system is still in an early phase. A number of examination catalogues have been developed, and assessors have been trained by the Examination Centre and certified by the Ministry of Education. We have no information yet about the number of candidates who have been assessed and how many have obtained any certificates.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The Montenegrin Qualifications Framework has 8 levels. Levels I, IV and VII have sub-levels. The Law on the NQF is addressing the integrated framework. It is therefore the expectation that the referencing to the EQF and the self-certification to the QF EHEA exercises will be combined in a single report. Montenegro will join the EQF Advisory Group in 2013.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Montenegro has created the legal and regulatory basis for its NQF and has started implementation. The qualifications framework now needs to be populated with qualifications based on learning outcomes. Sectoral Commissions are preparing profiles of the sectors. Several Sectoral Commissions have already defined sub-sectors, areas and sub-areas in the frameworks of sectoral qualifications (tourism, trade and hospitality; agriculture, food and veterinary; construction and spatial development; transport and communications; mining, metallurgy and chemical industry; engineering and manufacturing industry). Sectoral Commissions are currently busy in developing qualifications for vocational education and training. Their number is growing steadily. The universities are also working on their qualifications and curricula. The involvement of representatives of the world of work has increased at national and sectoral levels, but still needs strengthening in the implementation, in particular at the level of providers. The procedures for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning have also been clarified. It is important that all these processes advance so that individuals and enterprises can see the benefits of these developments.

The EU has been a strong incentive for the developments in the country. The participation in the EQF process creates new opportunities. The work on self-certification and referencing can also start.

SERBIA

Serbia is a candidate country for entry into the EU. It has a population of just over 7 million, and is experiencing population contraction.

The country's transition has brought slow structural changes in the Serbian economy whose GDP added-value share in agriculture (at 13%) and industry (28%) have remained almost constant in the last three years. The only growth sector is the services sector, whose GDP share represented 59% in 2010. The employment share by sectors saw a decrease in agriculture (to 18.5% in 2010) and in industry (to 27.3%) and an increase in the service sector (to 54.2%). The informal economy represents about one fifth of GDP.

The economic crisis has caused an economic slowdown and a slump in labour demand, characterized by increased inactivity (to 40.6% in 2011) and reduced employment rates (to 45.4%).

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The country is a participant in the same EU Education and Training 2020 process as the EU 27 Member States and so seeks to meet the same Strategic Objectives set by the EU framework. These objectives are supported by a series of reference levels of European average performance, or the five "European benchmarks", which set goals to be achieved by 2020.

Serbia's current performance against the EU 2020 benchmarks in education and training is mixed (data is not available for all indicators). It records an early school-leaving rate of 8.5% against the EU target of 10%; in participation in lifelong learning its figure is 4.3% against the EU target of 15%; 52% of its 4-year olds participate in education against the EU goal of 95%. Its percentages of low-achieving pupils in PISA assessments in reading, maths and science remain well behind the EU targets.

Composition by education of the population is that more than one third have primary or a lower education level (37.6%), almost half have secondary (48.4) and around 14% have achieved higher education.

2010 figures show that a high proportion of those students enrolled in upper secondary school and tertiary (ISCED 5) were in technical or vocational programmes, namely 76% at upper secondary school and 20% at tertiary ISCED 5.

However, the wider education and training system, including VET, still requires significant reform. The education and training system in Serbia needs to be more geared to the economic development needs of the country. Technical or occupation-specific skill gaps are also lacking in several dynamic sectors, in particular in enterprises which have introduced new technologies. The economy is characterised by high unemployment, a large non-formal sector and significant numbers of redundant workers as consequences of the transition process and the current economic crisis.

In order to prepare itself for accession, Serbia needs to strengthen the partnership between stakeholders in the country and develop an effective lifelong learning strategy, followed by concrete implementation and actions. There is a need to find agreement on how the education and training system could enhance its contribution to the main economic and social goals and what the priorities for development are. A partnership involving a range of different line ministries, social partners and the higher education sector should be established. There is agreement in the country to review the existing structures and pathways within the pre-university system as well as recognition of the necessity of expanding post-secondary VET provision.

A Serbian NQF is intended to provide a platform for such a partnership as a joint effort by the government and the economic and social world within a lifelong learning strategy.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Drawing on the Strategy for the Development of Vocational Education, Adult Education Development and Action Plans for their implementation, the law on the Foundations of the Education system (September 2009) stipulates that the National Qualifications Framework for the level of secondary vocational education, vocational training and other forms of vocational education will, among other things, be proposed to the Minister of Education by the Council for VET and adult education. Moreover, the recent Education Strategy 2020, adopted at the end of 2012, stresses the crucial need for the implementation of an NQF. According to the law and the strategy, the main objectives Serbia wants to achieve through an NQF are:

- a competence-based and learning outcomes-oriented education
- facilitation of the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences at all ages and educational levels
- a clear system of qualifications and profiles with transparent progression routes and a system of credit transfer
- ensuring that qualifications are aligned with the most up-to-date occupational standards
- engaging the social partners in defining occupational and qualifications standards
- ensuring the recognition of all learning outcomes through better connections between formal, non-formal and informal education
- ensuring the quality of education through clearly-defined educational standards
- ensuring the mobility of students and other learners through the compatibility of Serbian qualifications with the European Qualifications Framework

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

In Serbia, the development of an NQF has been discussed for many years now. No single body is yet in charge of implementing the NQF, instead several institutions are engaged variously in its policy, legal, design and technical dimensions.

Between 2003 and 2006 a bottom-up approach was used to define an NQF for all levels, involving and ensuring commitment from stakeholders. In 2005 a green paper on an NQF was developed. Further reference documents were developed with support of EU projects in 2006, including "An NQF for a European Serbia". In 2006 the Ministry of Education and Sports set up a commission to establish an NQF but due to frequent changes in government, the work was interrupted.

There was some progress in 2009 towards meeting reform challenges for reform. The education law mentioned above on the fundamentals of the education system and the 2020 education strategy refer explicitly to the NQF, occupational standards and learning outcomes for the first time, albeit in fairly general terms. It also introduces a council for VET and adult education as a new body. The task of technical development of the NQF is now formally assigned to the Serbian VET Centre.

Although the Ministry of Education has overall policy responsibility it has not undertaken any operational

functions apart from the preparation of the law. But it seems that the NQF is finally entering a more operational design stage. A number of regulations were approved in 2010 and a final draft for an NQF is planned to be presented for consultation in spring 2013.

The key body for guiding the overall development of the NQF, the Council for Vocational and Adult Education (CVAE) has been operational since June 2010, while the preparation of the NQF is assigned to the Institute for the Improvement of Education. In September 2010 the CVAE adopted a decision on developing an NQF for the secondary vocational education sector, vocational training and other forms of professional training and an Action Plan for development of NQF in 2011. A detailed Action Plan for the next 4 years is under development.

The Minister of Education and Science established an Inter-Sectoral Working Group for Development of the NQF in November 2010. Members of the WG are from the following institutions: the Institute for the Improvement of Education, the National Employment Service, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Economic and Regional Development, the Chambers of Commerce, the Union of Employers of Serbia, secondary vocational schools, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the Institute for Evaluation of Education Quality, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Higher Civil Engineering School. The chair of the WG is from the Institute for the Improvement of Education. The activities of this WG are supported by IPA 07 and IPA 08 projects[1].

The WG started work on 5 December 2011. There are 2 subgroups: one is tasked with the development of the framework i.e. the scope of the NQF, the number and description of levels, types of qualifications covered within the NQF, structure of qualifications and rules etc.; the second addresses institutions, revision and design of qualifications, curriculum development, standards for institutions offering the qualifications and monitoring approaches.

The involvement of sectors and employers has been limited to date, but the establishment of the VET Council chaired by the Chamber of Economics, and of the Sector Committees may change that. Sector Committees are being established as a tool for developing the NQF[2]. Their role is to establish the list of educational qualifications and profiles, to define the standards of knowledge, skills and competences for all existing and emerging qualifications and profiles and to chart clear progression routes with links to formal, non-formal and informal learning. In doing so, the sector committees will continue in a more systematic way the efforts initiated during past pilot VET projects, and will ensure that revised pilot profiles are mainstreamed throughout the system. The Sector Committees' research will be presented to the NQF Working Group.

The majority of Sector Committee members will be from industry, with some representation from education and the National Employment Service. It is expected that the presidents of the Councils will ensure synergy. Descriptors in education are very old, so the process is complicated. The sector committees will have to negotiate between the world of work and education. This approach was accepted by the VET and AE Council in order to engage the input of industry. Following endorsement by the Chamber of Commerce and the Institute for Improvement of Education, the work on establishing four sectoral committees (agro-food, agriculture, tourism and ICT) was accelerated and they became operational in 2012.

In parallel, the National Council will also need to develop a system of credit transfer and recognition of prior learning, to ensure easy access and progress throughout the education system.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

Several processes on the definition of levels, learning achievements standards, etc. have been followed or are in parallel and are not always coordinated.

The CVAE has started to draft a concept paper on NQF development, which will define the architecture of the whole education system (levels 1-8) based on a new National Occupational Classification (NOC) currently being drafted by the various Ministries directly involved in VET, employment and economic issues (the Republic Statistical Office, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Economy and Regional Development and the Ministry of Education) in line with the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO).

Level descriptors for 5 levels should soon be presented to the Working Group and the VET and AE Council and then disseminated through a consultation process across Serbia.

the first descriptors to be developed will be in tourism and catering and in civil engineering (supported by IPA 07) and in ICT & telecommunications and civil engineering (supported by IPA 08).

The revised NOC is considered as a prerequisite for further reforms in vocational education. Based on this new classification of occupational requirements, social partners in the sector committees (see below) will define standards of qualifications (knowledge, skills and competences) for all educational profiles, which will form the future NQF. This task implies the identification of profiles based on existing and predicted needs of the economy, and the revision of existing qualifications or the introduction of new ones. It will include the review and revision of all profiles at levels 3 and 4[3], and the development of craft vocations and specialist education programmes at level 5, as well as the development of qualifications for levels 1 and 2.

The establishment of an NQF is closely connected to the development of a quality assurance system to promote consistent standards throughout the education system and ensure compliance with the requirements of the NQF. Serbia has been putting in place elements of a quality assurance system through past CARDS and IPA projects, notably by defining normative standards for revised profiles and identifying basic criteria and indicators to measure quality in education, while laying down procedures for self-assessment and external monitoring/evaluation that any future quality assurance system will need to articulate. The Centre for Vocational Training and Adult Education will need support in developing and implementing the system.

Beside the NQF developments, the Ministry of education developed 56 curricula according to a new approach: competence-based and modular. Most of them were developed by EU support under CARDS. Revised curricula in VET, based on standards of occupation, are being introduced gradually in the education system. During 2010/2011 nine pilot profiles were introduced into the regular system. A further five profiles will be transferred into the system in the next school year.

In parallel, and separately, the National Council for Higher Education elaborated a proposal for an NQF for higher education in 2008. The NQF is seen as a tool for European integration. The vision of a framework covering all levels still exists.

The text of the National Qualification Framework of Serbia (NQFS) for higher education, which covers the qualifications in the higher education system of Serbia, was adopted by the National Council for Higher Education on 23 April 2010. NQFS defines the general learning outcomes, while the programme of study within the higher education system determines the knowledge, skills and competencies in the educational and scientific fields covered by the programme.

After the finalisation of NQFS, the need for amending legislation in the field of higher education will be discussed and if needed there will be preparations for the adoption of appropriate regulations. Until full adoption of the new framework, the current solution is applicable: qualifications and occupations are organized into a single system called the National Nomenclature of Occupations, where they are classified into one of eight levels depending on the category of job complexity.

The draft of the NQFS was issued by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) after the first round of consultations with stakeholders. It is based on, or takes account of, national legislation in Serbia, the QF-EHEA requirements, and the EQF. Key elements of the overarching framework are the three cycles established in the Bologna Process. Appropriate descriptors which are in line with three cycle system are being developed.

The draft of the NQFS also takes into account the Serbian legislation related to employment and to scientific research.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

As in many of the pre-accession countries, adult learning is particularly underdeveloped. The high unemployment rate is not an incentive for employers to invest in training and public resources for labour market training are scarce. Outside of the formal system there is a whole range of non-formal learning and training initiatives which are currently unrecognised. A law on adult education is under preparation. It seems likely that adult education will come under the NQF once the framework is established. Serbia's mid-term needs in the field of adult education and training, and closely linked to the future NQF are:

- to support all forms of education and training opportunities for adults (formal, non-formal and informal)
- to develop special curricula and learning materials adapted to the needs of adults
- to involve more actively the social partners in defining training contents and learning outcomes
- to establish links between formal and non-formal education through the NQF to ensure the recognition of all learning outcomes
- to support training providers in developing quality training programmes in line with market needs and NQF requirements.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Serbia participates in the Bologna Process and is developing its NQF in HE according to Bologna requirements.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The planned national framework should merge with the framework for higher education qualifications that has been developed within the Bologna process. The main problem in Serbia may be the lack of institutional ownership of the NQF so far. The Serbian NQF seems to be in a final phase of development for levels 1 to 5, but two questions still remain: first, the integration or otherwise of the higher education framework (6 to 8) and the VET framework (1 to 5); secondly, the governance, steering and administrative management of the NQF and which institution should be in charge of the implementation of the NQF.

[1] There are 2 IPA projects supporting development of the qualifications system and NQF in Serbia: IPA 07, Modernisation of VET in Serbia and IPA 08, Support for quality assurance within the national primary and secondary education examination system. Efforts are focused on keeping synergy between these two projects.

[2] They are composed of representatives from the VET sector and all other relevant stakeholders (employers, trade unions, economic chambers, professional associations, public institutions and governmental bodies).

[3] It is expected that this will lead to the reduction from the existing 347 educational profiles to 150, which would correspond to the state of economy and the education system – many of these profiles are redundant.

TURKEY

Turkey is a large middle income country with a growing population of currently 77 million inhabitants, with important regional and social disparities and a growing economy. Turkey is also a candidate country of the European Union and a participant in the EQF Advisory Group.

1. CHALLENGES OF THE EXISTING EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEMS

The country is a participant in the same EU Education and Training 2020 process as the EU 27 Member States and so seeks to meet the same Strategic Objectives set by the EU framework. These objectives are supported by a series of reference levels of European average performance, or the five “European benchmarks,” which set goals to be achieved by 2020.

Latest figures show that Turkey is lagging far behind in its performance compared to the 5 EU benchmarks in education and training, but is making rapid improvements. Early school leaving is as high as 41.9% against the EU benchmark of 10% but has improved from 46.9% in 2007. Moreover, these figures do not yet include the effect of extending compulsory education to twelve years of schooling. Also in other areas Turkey is behind EU targets but catching up. It records a figure of 16.3% who have attained tertiary education level against the EU target of 40 % (improved from 12.3% in 2007); it has a 2.9 % participation rate in lifelong learning against the EU goal of 15% (improved from 1.5% in 2007); and 16.5% of its 4 year olds participate in the education system against the EU benchmark of 95%. The fifth EU target concerns pupils’ performances in reading, science and maths - Turkey’s performance against PISA shows that the country needs to make further efforts to improve basic skills, but has seen clear improvements since 2003.

Although the Turkish economy suffered from an economic downturn in 2001, it is recovering well from the current global economic crises. Nevertheless employment levels remain structurally below the EU average (at 52.5% of the working age population), especially among women. At the same time growth sectors are increasingly in need of qualified labour to be more competitive internationally. The employment situation and the need for skilled labour have led to close cooperation between ISKUR the employment service and economic sectors since the early nineties in their wish to ensure more relevant adult qualifications. Since 1992 these have included a series of initiatives to develop occupational standards, but only since 2006 has this become a regulated system of national occupational standards and qualifications under the responsibility of the tripartite Vocational Qualifications Authority. This National Vocational Qualifications system is developing into a parallel system to the existing formal education system under the Ministry of National Education and the Council for Higher Education. The main challenge of the NQF is to link these qualifications systems.

The overall educational attainment levels of the working population are low compared to the EU25 or other candidate countries. Education reforms are progressing steadily, improving the participation rate in secondary education but many challenges remain.

The initial VET system has recently been brought under a single management within the Ministry of National Education but still bears the consequences of a system that was divided in different sub-systems. Initial and Continuing VET have been under reform with substantial EU support, introducing modular competence-based curricula in initial VET as well as developing the above-mentioned Vocational Qualifications Authority for CVET. Further reforms address strengthening the system of pre-service and in-service vocational education and training (IVET) teacher training. Schools are gradually gaining responsibilities. Graduates still receive school certificates rather than national VET qualifications.

Opportunities for progression to higher levels after secondary VET remain limited, making VET a less attractive alternative for families.

The growing young population puts not only pressure on the labour market but also on the higher education system. The HE sector is expanding with new state and foundation (NGO-based) universities being opened every year. A diversified HE sector is the result. In order to meet the requirements of the Bologna process there is a need for both quality improvement and quality assurance processes.

There are not enough places within the current HE system, and a strict selection is made through a national entrance exam. Many young people end up involuntarily in post-secondary education (MYOs). These MYOs are under reform to make them more labour market-oriented. All MYO graduates need to undertake internships and colleges can be closed down if they fail to find meaningful internships.

The government has taken many measures to increase the participation rates in education. In 2012, it extended compulsory education to a duration of 12 years, divided in 3 blocks of 4 years each, after which choices can be made for different pathways.

The concept paper for the Turkish Qualifications Framework for Lifelong learning contains 5 concrete challenges, to respond to the situation explained above.

1. There is a need to modernize the qualifications system in line with international standards and practices.
2. Participation and attainment rates have to be further increased, with more people obtaining qualifications of value for career development.
3. The qualifications system needs to capitalize on the education reforms that are on-going in order to produce appropriate qualifications and clear qualification types which are based on learning outcomes.
4. Qualifications need to respond to changes in the labour market.
5. There is a need to increase employment rates at the same time as the workforce is growing, by creating closer links between education and the labour market.

2. RATIONALE AND MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The development of a qualifications framework is closely linked with the long-term objective of developing an internationally competitive skilled workforce, supporting economic and employment growth, which are important in creating a stable future for Turkey's growing population and to facilitate European integration.

The following sub-objectives are identified: (a) to strengthen the relationship between education and training and the world of work; (b) to develop national standards based on learning outcomes; (c) to encourage quality assurance (d) to provide qualifications for progression and mobility and to facilitate national and international comparison (e) to ensure access to learning, development and recognition (f) to support lifelong learning.

The concept paper for the TQF identifies 4 objectives. The TQF will be:

1. A clear and consistent tool for describing and comparing qualifications.
2. An integrated framework for developing qualifications of all types

3. An instrument for reforming the Turkish Qualifications System and facilitates the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning.
4. A benchmark for the recognition of foreign qualifications

3. RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS, LEGISLATION AND THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS

Through Law 5544 adopted on 21 September 2006 the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) was established in early 2007 under the coordination of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security to develop a strategy for implementing the national vocational qualifications system with a link to the EQF. In the preparations of the law, a framework with a wider coverage was originally foreseen, including all national qualifications, but in the negotiations about the law stakeholders seemed hesitant to transfer too many responsibilities to the new tripartite body and refocused the discussions on a National Vocational Qualifications Systems based on occupational standards, with a strong role for sectors and reinforced quality assurance arrangements for assessment and certification. This system has been developing as a new parallel initiative focused on adults and is not integrated with initial vocational education, which remains under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education.

VQA is governed by an assembly with around 40 paying members, meeting annually, including different ministries, chambers, employers organisation and unions, including sectorally oriented bodies. The assembly elects the five-person executive board for a period of three years. The executive board meets monthly and the chair of the executive board is also the President and chief executive officer of the VQA secretariat. It is planned that this secretariat will grow into a 90-member strong organisation and has both important developmental and coordinating functions.

The VQA became operational in 2007 and has developed secondary legislation on occupational standards. The work on the development of procedures and supporting documents and guidelines started at the beginning of 2008. Secondary legislation for qualifications, assessment and certification was published in 2008. The period 2009 -2011 saw a surge in the establishment of occupational standards-setting bodies, which develop standards using the VQA methodology on a voluntary basis. VQA signs a protocol with them for the development of occupational standards. These standards are reviewed by Sectoral Committees before they are approved by the VQA board, they are then published in the Official Gazette. To date, 352 standards have been published. These standards inform national vocational qualifications that are also developed by sectors on a voluntary basis, pretty much following the same process as occupational standards, with the exception that they are not published in the Official Gazette. Their number has increased considerably during the past two years. 156 national vocational qualifications were approved by VQA in March 2013. However, only a number of them are currently in use for certifying workers in the sectors through the validation of non-formal and informal learning in authorized certification bodies or so-called VocTest centres. These sectoral bodies need to be formally accredited by the national norming organisation Türkak (on the basis of the ISO 17024 standard for personnel certification), and authorized by VQA before they can perform their assessment functions. So far, two bodies have been accredited and authorized and it is expected that their number will grow to around 15 during 2013. In a big country like Turkey many more VocTest Centres are needed.

The role of VQA has evolved further as VQA has become the Europass centre, and the EQF national coordination point of Turkey. VQA is also in charge of the implementation of Directive 36/2005 in Turkey on regulated professions, although the ENIC/NARIC centre for academic recognition is hosted by the Council of Higher Education.

Beyond the National Vocational Qualifications System which was legislated with law 5544 in 2006, Turkey is now moving towards an integrated Turkish Qualifications Framework.

The Ninth Development Plan 2007-2013 emphasized the need for a professional qualifications system. The Lifelong learning strategy paper and action plan that the Ministry of National Education published in July 2009 treated the "Vocational Competency System" (i.e. NVQS) as a specific part of the lifelong learning strategy which needed to be implemented under the coordination of VQA, but this strategic document was overtaken by developments in 2010, which have actually moved attention beyond the implementation of the National Vocational Qualifications System towards a more integrated comprehensive NQF. In the framework of a new "Action Plan for Strengthening the Relationship between Employment and Vocational Education (IMEIGEP)" , which is part of the employment strategy to 2030, adopted last autumn, VQA is supporting a national NQF committee in developing an NQF for LLL.

An NQF Committee was established in 2010 and is receiving technical support in the framework of the EU project to support VQA. Moreover, law 5544 was revised in 2011 (amended Decree Law 665/41) which mentioned an NQF in line with the EQF, including vocational, general, academic and other qualifications. The amended law nominated VQA as the responsible body for preparing, developing and updating the NQF. Moreover, the law stated that VQA would be responsible for quality-assuring all vocational qualifications. The NQF Committee was supported by a working group that started in October 2010, and was extended to include the social partners in 2011. Moreover, a larger group of interested parties was invited to join an NQF feedback forum to discuss proposals from the working group. Different concept papers were integrated in a draft report which was completed in June 2012 when it was disseminated for consultation. It is expected that the final document will be approved by the Government this spring.

Apart from VQA, the Ministry of National Education and universities coordinated by the Council for Higher Education will be awarding bodies under the TQF with considerable delegated responsibilities. Common QA guidelines for developing qualification types and qualifications, and for approving qualifications which will be included in the TQF register and for the assessment, certification and provision of qualifications are still to be agreed. With the support of the EU and the Council of Europe an independent QA Agency for Higher Education should be established, but no progress towards this objective has been made yet.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS

The development and implementation of an NQF for HE by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) has also progressed in the meantime along with the principles of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy. Initial work was started after Bergen Communiqué in 2005. To organise the process, a national committee was established by the CoHE on April 28, 2006. Since then there has been a great interest in continuing work for the development of the NQF by HE institutions as well as other stakeholders. At the initial stage of development, it was agreed that the Dublin descriptors would be integrally adopted for the HE levels. After the EQF consultation process with all relevant stakeholders (all universities, the National Ministry of Education, national student union, the business world including employers and employees, NGOs etc.) it was decided to adopt and adapt the level descriptors proposed in the EQF 2005 consultation document, to ensure a better link with the EQF. Since then, these have been the level descriptors for HE, which were officially adopted on 21/01/2010. In 2010 a new structure was proposed that had a wider understanding of competence than in the EQF definition. However, the NQF Committee changed these again into a structure that is closer to the EQF level descriptors, based on knowledge, skills and competences. The definition used for qualification has also come close to the EQF definition, as a qualification are the knowledge, skills and competences possessed by an individual and recognized by a competent authority.

5. USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The learning outcomes approach is seen as an essential part of the development of the NQF and is the stated intention of all current reforms in all subsystems of education and training supported by main stakeholders. The Ministry of National Education has launched a curriculum reform in secondary education (for both general and vocational and technical schools). Vocational qualifications will be learning outcomes-

based. In higher education, the implementation of the learning outcome approach is an essential part of the implementation of the NQF for higher education.

A format for national occupational standards (NOSs) was determined and describes labour market needs in terms of duties and tasks with corresponding performance criteria. Qualifications developed from occupational standards are also to be described in terms of learning outcomes and should be unit-based, describing learning outcomes and corresponding assessment criteria.

VQA will operate an RPL policy designed to widen access to up-to-date certification. VocTest Centres will be expected, as a condition of recognition, to operate an RPL policy. RPL by VocTest centres will be based on the assessment evidence brought forward by individuals to show that they can meet the requirements of units and/or outcomes.

Apart from the level descriptors, the TQF concept proposes to develop clear qualification type descriptors (19 types are identified in the Concept Paper), which are based on learning outcomes. Individual qualifications need to be in line with the level and qualification type descriptors.

6. REFERENCING TO EQF AND OTHER REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

A draft referencing report for relating the Turkish framework to the EQF is expected to be prepared in 2013/2014.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND WAY FORWARD.

The development of the TQF as an integrated structure is a huge step forward, from the National Vocational Qualifications System as a parallel structure focusing on the certification of adults. The responsibilities between VQA, MONE and CoHE are becoming clearer, but QA issues will be decisive on the ultimate division of responsibilities. Sectors have been actively involved in developing occupational standards and qualifications and are also volunteering to become authorized certification bodies, but there is a need to support and facilitate the establishment of these bodies, to allow the system to grow fast enough to meet the expectations. Training which can lead to qualifications is a next challenge. The role of the sectors in initial VET and post-secondary VET (MYOs) and possibly HE also has to be clarified. There is definitely an interest from the private sector in using the TQF to make qualifications more relevant. The coordination of the TQF will be shared between the stakeholders, in a very similar way as the executive board of VQA has been functioning. In this respect the VQA experience has greatly contributed to the developments so far, but it is expected that MoNE and the CoHE will start to play a more prominent role in the phase that will start now.

The allocation of responsibilities is still to be fine-tuned to the needs of the different subsystems and this could possibly delay the implementation.





SOUTHERN & EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

EGYPT

Egypt has the largest population of the Arab countries, with 82.5 million inhabitants. The population growth rate has been declining in recent years and the country is in the middle of a demographic transition. However, 32% of the population is under 15, so there is still huge pressure on education, health, infrastructure and other services, as well as in the labour market. The labour force has been growing at 1.9% a year since 2000 and stood at 26.1 million in 2010. Between 600,000 and 800,000 jobs need to be created on a yearly basis to allow newcomers to enter the labour market. This is reflected also in the high rate of migration (around 4.4% of the population works abroad) and this trend is increasing, not only in the direction of the Arab States, but also towards Europe.

Egypt has low activity and employment rates mainly due to low female participation in the labour market: ILO-KILM 2008 data records the activity rate as 47.3% , and 24.3% for females, and a 43.2% employment rate (19.3% for females). Economic growth between 2003 and 2008 increased the employment rate from 40.99% to 43.2%, and reduced the unemployment rate from 11.1% to 8.7% in 2008). However, the recent turmoil increased the unemployment rate to 11.9% in the first quarter of 2011 (CAPMAS) and female unemployment (19.3%) is much higher than male unemployment (5.6%). Agriculture is the biggest employer with 33.2%, followed by industry, construction and trade, each around 10%. [1] Most of the new jobs have been created by the private sector. The share of public employment decreased from 29% in 2005 to 21.6% in 2009. There are no clear data on the informal sector. The African Development Bank estimates that around 70-80% of companies work in the informal sector and with an increasing share of employment for women.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The key stakeholders share a strong consensus that a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) should be an important tool that helps to tackle Egypt's identified competitiveness, labour market and social challenges. The challenges that the education and training systems face in Egypt are well documented.

In recent years, a number of priorities for overcoming the challenges facing the Egyptian education and training systems have been identified; in the national competitiveness reports, the Torino Process, the TVET strategy developed by the TVET Reform Programme, shadowing the Bologna process in higher education, the OECD country review for higher education, and the bilateral negotiations between Egypt and other countries on labour market mobility.

Prior to the Egyptian revolution in January 2011, there was consensus among various stakeholders from the education and training systems that a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was crucial in overcoming the challenges facing education and training. There is clearly a need to develop and implement a clear framework for qualifications in Egypt based on modern, quality criteria.

Recently, following the revolution, the continued interest in an NQF has been reflected in two different initiatives; it is a component in a proposal to reactivate the Supreme Council for Human Resources Development (as presented by a committee formulated by a ministerial decree issued by the Minister of Manpower and Migration) and the second in a proposal by the Ministry of Education for the establishment of a National TVET Authority.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

From 2005 until 2008, a National Task Force prepared the concept paper for an Egyptian National Qualifications Framework. The National Task Force was hosted by the Minister of Manpower and Migration (also Chairman of the Supreme Council for Human Resources Development), and included formal

representation of the main stakeholders (governmental and non-governmental). In 2012, the Egyptian Prime Minister endorsed the concept paper and gave the mandate to NAQAAE (National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education, to commence with development of an NQF. It should be noted that no legislative mandate was issued, and no separate budgets were allocated.

The identified objectives to be achieved by the NQF are the following:

1. To clarify the relationship between different types of vocational and academic qualifications provided by different education systems, including general education, higher education and TVET. The NQF is based on learning outcomes, so it does not differentiate between public and private education or between the outcomes of formal and non-formal education
2. To describe qualifications on the basis of knowledge and skills acquired by graduates from different education and training pathways, so as to match qualifications to the needs of employment in internal and external labour markets and to the requirements of further learning. Particular attention is paid to the importance of transferable skills.
3. To open up better opportunities and pathways for people currently disadvantaged by educational dead ends or bottlenecks in educational streams. The NQF also provides for recognition of learning achieved outside formal education.
4. Benchmark Egyptian qualifications on the map of global qualifications.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

In mid-2007, a task force comprising representatives of key ministries and stakeholders was established, to work on the exploratory, conceptual and design phase of an Egyptian NQF. The task force comprised 11 members from the Executive Committee of the Supreme Council for Human Resource Development, supported by four external members representing stakeholders.

Further, in 2010, following the PM's transfer of the mandate for NQF development to NAQAAE, the task force ceased to meet. Instead, NAQAAE, taking a sectoral approach, commenced with the establishment of sectoral working groups.

At the technical level, representatives of Ministries, agencies, employers and trade unions formed a working group in the framework of a regional project (2005 – 2008). Later, representatives of the same institutions were nominated by the respective institutions at the request of the ETF to set up a National Task Force in charge of studying other countries' experiences on establishing an NQF body with suitable structure and linkages and to define its roles and responsibilities (the proposed structure of the Egyptian NQF is based on the proposal drafted by this task force).

At policy level, the process of establishing the NQF has been lead by the Ministry of Manpower and Migration; from the early stages, the Ministry engaged several public bodies (the Prime Minister's Office, other Ministries, and the Supreme Council for Human Resources Development) in the process of developing the NQF. The National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation for Education (NAQAAE) has been nominated as the implementing body for the NQF. The autonomous NQF entity has not yet been set up.

In January 2013, the government approved the establishment of the National TVET Authority. The NQF body will be working beside this authority.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The task force report proposes to establish the NQF for Egypt provisionally on eight levels. This is in line with Egyptian education, training and labour market structures. Based on the conclusions of the earlier work carried out with ETF support, the task force reached provisional agreement that the eight levels should be differentiated according to three broad descriptors. These are:

1. Knowledge: described on the basis of theoretical knowledge, concepts and/or facts.
2. Skills: described as cognitive skills (including logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical skills (including manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).
3. Competencies: described in terms of the extent of responsibility and autonomy.

In addition, the learning of large numbers of Egyptian citizens which takes place outside the formal fields of education and training, will be recognised via systems for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning.

The task force is recommending a matrix-type design for the description of levels and broadly-defined learning outcomes, similar to that of the European Qualifications Framework.

It should then be possible to place and link general, technical/vocational and higher education qualifications, using the levels of this matrix. Preliminary testing of linking Egyptian qualifications by level is planned. Development of the NQF will clarify the definition of the indicators, and thus make it possible to improve comparison between the levels and types of qualifications.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Both the establishment of progression pathways to avoid dead-ends and educational bottlenecks, as well as rules to accredit prior learning, are among the key objectives of the Egyptian NQF. Up to now, no detailed implementing rules have been defined.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

At regional level, Egypt is participating in a regional project on qualifications launched by the ETF in 2010; it aims to enhance regional and Euro-Mediterranean partnerships on issues related to qualifications. 7 countries are participating in this project - Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, France, Italy and Spain. The project is organised around three dimensions:

- Networking and sharing among the countries involved in the project on issues related to NQF design and implementation with a focus on governance and quality assurance.
- Increasing regional transparency and mutual understanding of qualifications in two economic sectors (tourism and construction).
- Integrating and cross-fertilising the developments in the regional sectoral component with national developments in the setting up and implementation of qualification frameworks.

The project has to date produced common profiles for occupations in the key sectors of construction and tourism. The participating countries are now seeking to build on the technical work by developing pilot profiles in related occupations and, further, developing the policy dimension.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The unstable political situation has frozen any additional NQF development. But recently, there have been signs of continued political interest in the NQF, reflected, first, by the Ministry of Higher Education in its Bologna Dimension (April 2011), second, in the proposal for reactivation of the SCHRd (early 2013) and, third, in the proposal for establishment of a National TVET authority (January 2013), which was approved by the Prime Minister. However, it is questionable whether NAQAEE will be confirmed as the implementing body, especially as the draft proposal to reactivate the SCHRd shows the NQF as separate from NAQAEE, which leaves the initiative without a champion once more.

JORDAN

The Hashemite Kingdom has a population of approximately 6.5 million. It has a high birth rate rate (2.2%), which creates significant demographic pressure - almost 35% of the population is under 15, which in turn requires significant public investment in education, health, employment, housing and infrastructure. Jordan is a country with high human development and an open economy, but it lacks natural resources. It has one of the highest fertility rates in the world - about 3.7% (4.2% in rural areas). It is estimated that 60,000 new entrants join the labour market on a yearly basis, posing a major challenge for the government and society at large as often they are equipped with relatively high but not always relevant qualifications. Participation of women in the labour force is one of the lowest worldwide (14.9%) despite a very visible increase in education attainment and success. The unemployment rate rose to 13% in 2011.

Job creation rates rose from 2.7% in 2006 to around 4.5% in the years immediately before the crisis, but of all the jobs created during the boom between 2000 and 2008, almost 42 percent were in the public sector. More than half of the jobs created in the private sector went to low-skilled foreign workers as these jobs are generally not attractive to a large segment of the Jordanian labour force. Migration has two significant features: (a) emigration of highly educated people and (b) immigration of people looking for low-skilled jobs.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

Jordan has an existing qualifications framework. It is composed of 5 levels which cater for, in ascending order: qualifications for semi-skilled workers, skilled workers, professionals, technicians and specialists. It was developed by the Arab Labour Organisation and is used mainly by the Vocational Training Corporation, the main public training provider in the country, for its diplomas (semi-skilled, skilled, and professional). The definition of the levels is quite broad and there are no defined criteria or procedure for assigning them. Given this partial development and its limited use by stakeholders and end-users, the framework is arguably not truly a national qualifications framework.

Therefore, the main challenges that a modern qualifications framework would address are the following:

- the rigidity of existing qualifications, which are unable to take account of the learning which takes place in people's community or personal lives and in particular at work.
- the insufficient attention paid to learning outcomes, employability, and labour market needs in the design of qualifications.
- weak and marginal participation of employers and social partners resulting in qualifications irrelevant to the labour market and the needs of learners; qualifications being too input- based.
- co-existence of several public training providers - without consistency between the learning outcomes on which each of these training providers develops its education and training activities.
- dead ends and limited training options: in particular, performance in the Tawjihi, the school leaving certificate, determines access to university and is considered by some stakeholders to be divisive and arbitrary as it almost automatically allocates students into more and less prestigious categories.
- international benchmarking: local qualifications are not yet well recognized internationally.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Employment and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (E-TVET) strategy developed by the E-TVET Council in 2008 specifies the following goals: establishment of a quality assurance (QA) system including a National Qualifications Framework (NQF); occupational classifications; licensing; certification; programme development; upgrading curriculum and training facility standards; and developing accreditation systems with particular regard to labour market relevance, equity and Lifelong learning (LLL).

More specifically, the E-TVET Council indicated in a more recent action plan that:

- a National Qualifications Framework will accommodate certificates/qualifications awarded by the various TVET providers starting with key industry sectors.
- it aims to establish a comprehensive system to accredit, monitor and evaluate the E-TVET delivery system according to national standards and within a National Qualifications Framework.
- programme-planning of TVET providers will increasingly be sector-based with progressive, articulated programmes offered through the various providers in the system.
- the social partners have a key role to play in leading, organizing and supporting a sectoral approach to identifying skill training needs and developing training responses which meet international standards, are accredited and are articulated within a National Qualifications framework.

The E-TVET Council must provide direction, mechanisms and systems that lead to the development of an integrated E-TVET system in which the various delivery agencies report against the same performance indicators and which contribute towards the development of a National Qualifications Framework.

For those purposes, a new institution was established to lead the development of the NQF, the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA). The Centre was first established within the Ministry of Labour in 2008. Its regulation, issued in April 2012, specifies its mandate and internal organisation. According to the regulation, CAQA will be in charge of:

1. Specifying and developing the general and special accreditation standards for VET providers and curricula.
2. Setting licensing standards for trainers and the teachers in the VET sector.
3. Preparing and developing occupational tests covering the basic work levels; professional worker, skilled worker and unskilled worker and any subsequent procedures relevant to conducting the tests.
4. Establishing a theoretical and practical examinations bank.
5. Issuing practice licenses and relevant documents.
6. Developing quality assurance standards for VET institutions.

However, the social partners are not represented on the Board of CAQA.

There is currently a moratorium on hiring of new staff in public administration, and this is impacting on the ability of the CAQA to fulfil its mandate.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

There is some history to NQF development in Jordan. Under an ETF-supported project, a technical team was set up in 2006, composed of representatives from the Ministry of Education (MoE), Balqa Applied University (BAU) representing community colleges, the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), Employers and Employees Associations and other donor projects, for example in the tourism industry. The team was led by the National Centre for Human Resources Development (NCHRD) and, based on a pilot in the tourism and water sectors, proposed in late 2008 a provisional qualifications framework of seven levels, with broad descriptors defined by the levels of knowledge, skills and competence.

A concept paper for a national qualifications framework for Jordan was drafted. The paper describes the technical process by which to populate the framework's different levels, the quality assurance principles and criteria for developers and implementers of qualifications, and the policy and leadership requirements to develop the NQF system.

This work was then taken over by the ETVET council as the then lead body for the development and implementation of the NQF. In 2009 - 2010, the government decided to expand the work done in the tourism and water sectors to eight new sectors including construction, retail and trade, printing and packaging, industrial materials and engineering, the automotive and mechanical industries and construction. National Sector Teams were set up, which will start revising occupations and develop occupational profiles using the model developed in the tourism and water sectors.

However, the development of an NQF was subsequently stopped due to political opposition and the unwillingness of stakeholders to give it priority.

More recently, a new EU project to support the E-TVET system in Jordan has started with some components linked to qualifications and a qualifications framework.

CAQA as the main actor in this field will benefit from this new project in developing occupational standards, setting up accreditation criteria and procedures, designing quality assurance procedures and initiating the development of a national qualifications framework.

The adopted approach is sectoral, focusing on six prioritised sub-sectors. It is foreseen that sector teams and technical sub-committees will be established, their capacities supported to support participation in needs analysis and development of occupational standards, assessment instruments and curricula. It is also planned that CAQA will work with training providers to develop pilot quality assurance and accreditation standards and systems.

The occupational standards developed within this project will guide the design of relevant qualifications as well as assessment tools. The standards will be developed using the DACUM (Designing a Curriculum) method. It is expected that the new qualifications designed will be outcomes-based.

As for designing and implementing a qualifications framework, and given previous experience, there is a real need in the country to discuss with the key stakeholders the level of consensus and political will to establish a NQF for Jordan, the type of qualifications framework (purpose and scope) to be developed, the underlying philosophy of the framework, governance of the framework and the need for an umbrella body with regulatory powers to implement it, the need for policy breadth to support the framework and its architecture, and its incremental implementation.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

As indicated above, the current framework comprises 5 levels. The more recent initiatives – the EU project and the ongoing Regional Project (see section 6 below for more information) - will likely result in an outcomes-based, levelled, framework, given their focus on occupational standards and profiles and use or reference to of the EQF descriptors. But these issues remain under development.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Progression in Jordanian education is quite limited and is determined by the grades that students receive during their educational career. The education system is composed of 3 main cycles: the first is a 10-year cycle and is compulsory. The second is the secondary education cycles and consists of two streams: comprehensive, which can be either academic or vocational, and at the end of which students usually receive the General Secondary Education Certificate; and applied Secondary Education, which aims to prepare students directly for the labour market. The third cycle is the post-secondary (higher education) composed of 2 streams: technical education (post-secondary VET) and university. At the end of each cycle, opting for one stream or another will be determined by the grades awarded; usually, a low grade would lead to vocational education with very little chance to move to another stream.

Currently, Jordan has no system for the recognition of skills and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Article 11 of the regulation under the E-TVET Council law nr 46 (2008), which determines the tasks and duties of the CAQA, describes as one of the duties of the centre conducting occupational tests for those involved in technical and vocational work and granting occupational licences. This opens up options to validate skills acquired in the workplace or through other forms of non-formal and informal learning.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Currently, there are no established regional qualifications frameworks in the Middle East / Arab region, but Jordan has adopted the Unified Arab Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ASCO), and the Job Description and Standards System which is compatible with the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), as a general framework for occupational classification and standards in Jordan.

Additionally, Jordan is involved in the ETF-coordinated project “Regional Qualifications in the Mediterranean”, which aims to develop mechanisms and tools supporting mutual understanding of national and sectoral qualifications implemented at regional level.

This regional project involves 7 countries, 4 ETF partner countries from the South-Mediterranean region: Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia; and 3 EU Member States: France, Italy and Spain.

The project comprises three dimensions:

- Networking and sharing among the countries involved in the project on issues related to NQF design and implementation with a focus on governance and quality assurance.
- Increasing regional transparency and mutual understanding of qualifications in two economic sectors (tourism and construction)
- Integrating and cross-fertilising the developments in the regional sectoral component with national developments in the setting up and implementation of qualifications frameworks

The project is developing qualifications in two economic sectors: construction and tourism. Two occupations were selected for each sector: bricklayer and site supervisor and waiter and hotel receptionist, respectively. For the purpose of making qualifications transparent and legible at regional level and in order to compare them, the participating countries agreed to describe them using common outcomes-based descriptors: knowledge, skills and competences. This exercise was quite challenging as the country does not distinguish between a qualification and a curricula.

The project has to date produced common profiles for occupations in the key sectors of construction and tourism. The participating countries are now seeking to build on the technical work by developing pilot profiles in related occupations and, further, developing the policy dimension.

In Jordan, CAQA has played the role of national coordinator for the project, and it is now planning to use the outcomes of the project and the results of the comparison with the other participating countries to review Jordanian qualifications.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

1. Full involvement of labour market representatives is critical in developing the occupational profiles on sectoral bases and within different skill levels i.e. semiskilled, skilled and craftsman. Their involvement will be challenging as they are not sitting on the Board of CAQA, the body in charge of developing these standards, but it is still possible to involve them in the sector teams in charge of developing occupational standards.
2. Revising the existing occupational profiles for various occupational sectors through reference to the Arab Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ASCO 2008), and through following the approved occupational profiles development procedure developed by CAQA to create the occupational standards.
3. Sustained political will to develop an NQF is needed.

LEBANON

Lebanon has a population of 4.2 million. The current political system was set up to recognise the plurality of different religious communities in the country. The balance of powers established to ensure stability in the country often delays and complicates the decision-making process and policy implementation. On the other hand, Lebanese society is highly flexible, dynamic and entrepreneurial.

The Education and Training System in Lebanon is amongst the best-performing in the MENA region due mainly to its diversified structure and the importance of the private sector. Education is traditionally highly valued. This, combined with wide accessibility, has resulted in high enrolment in elementary education for both girls and boys (99.2% in first grade). However, in the years since the 2006 civil war there has been a decline in the quality and effectiveness of the education system, which calls for urgent reforms.

The economy has been growing since 2000. GDP has grown since 2006, rising from 0.6% in 2006 to a peak increase of 9.3% in 2008, and 8.5% and 7% in 2009 and 2010, respectively. However, growth slowed significantly in both 2011 and 2012. In parallel, the GDP per capita has been growing at a quite quick pace, from 9,857 USD PPP in 2006 to 14,709 USD PPP in 2011. The GDP per capita is by far the highest among MENA countries non-oil exporters. The services and banking sector constitute more than 70% of the country's GDP; the industrial sector 20% and agriculture the remaining 10%. The trend shows a decrease in the relative size of agriculture and industry in favour of the service sector. Major sub-sectors are commerce, tourism and financial services. Other sub-sectors include health care and higher education. The industrial sector, privately owned, includes production of cement, furniture, paper, detergents, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, batteries, garments and processed foods.

Despite economic growth, the activity rate in Lebanon remains among the lowest in the Mediterranean, estimated at 48% in 2009. The unemployment rate was estimated at 6% in 2009 (10% for women and 5% for men). The informal sector is large and there is still a strong dependence on family and community connections, particularly in the search for jobs. A recent study carried out by the World Bank within the framework of the MILES project indicates that around 80% of interviewed workers found their jobs through personal contacts.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The main challenges the NQF should address have been classified in three main types: economic, educational and social.

The economic challenges cover globalisation and its impact on the national economy, the absence of regular monitoring of the labour market needs, the weak and unorganised associations dealing with labour market and finally the absence of structured links between the labour market and the education and training system.

As for the education system, the major challenges identified include: i) the weak articulation between the different components of the education system ii) the lack of recognition mechanisms of qualifications gained outside the formal system iii) the absence of pathways between the different education segments (general higher and vocational education) and difficult transition to the labour market.

With regard to the social dimension, it should be noted that there is a persistently low involvement of social partners in the design and implementation of VET policies, and limited opportunities for adult learning and for vulnerable groups. The current education and training strategy does not include a vision for Lifelong Learning.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Lebanese national qualifications framework (LNQF) should be able to classify all qualifications and certificates issued by the different sectors of the education and training system. In particular, the LQF should ensure:

- transparency and legibility of qualifications delivered in Lebanon and their relevance for the labour market;
- recognition of the qualifications based on well-defined competencies whether they have been acquired with the formal, non-formal and informal education
- mobility between the different sectors of the education system
- coherence with qualifications frameworks of other countries

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

In 2010, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education set up a working group composed of the major stakeholders representing the three main sectors of education (T-VET, general education and higher education). The first phase consisted of a mapping of the existing qualifications. This exercise revealed that the current hierarchy of qualifications is not based on clear criteria and that qualifications are barely understandable to users. It revealed as well the absence of a clear idea of the profile of the holder of a qualification and the limited possibilities for vertical and horizontal mobility.

As a follow-up to this first phase, the group worked on the identification of the processes which need to be set up in order to allow for the integration of all qualifications in a national qualifications framework. A first technical paper presenting a draft NQF matrix based on 8 levels was produced in 2011 and further defined in 2012. The final grid with 8 levels and descriptors was officially presented during a national conference in Beirut in November 2012.

A wider consultation on the Lebanese Qualifications Framework took place between October and November 2012. A report is being finalised.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The proposal drafted in the technical paper envisages a national qualifications framework for Lebanon built around the following components:

- a framework of 8 levels, each level described by knowledge, skills and competences
- a set of principles or guidelines for quality assurance for the institutions and authorities in charge of designing and delivering qualifications
- a set of methods and procedures to align qualifications to the LQF and register them in a national registry of qualifications.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The lack of educational pathways is one of the main problems identified within the working group. The support to both vertical and horizontal mobility is one of the main objectives of the LNQF. Given the initial stage of development of the framework, no implementation arrangements have been defined yet.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

No referencing to regional frameworks has been considered yet. The group has decided to use the Arab Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO), although for comparison rather than for referencing.

7. FUTURE PLANS

In 2013, the work on the NQF will include 3 main activities: i) the adoption of the NQF (through the drafting of a legal act); ii) the finalisation of the technical work which includes the completion of the mapping of occupations and of the referencing of selected qualifications to the framework; iii) the development of a model which will include all procedures, processes and communication mechanisms linked to the wider adoption of the NQF.

MOROCCO

With a population of 32.2 million inhabitants in 2011, Morocco continues to be characterized by a double transition process – demographic and economic. Demographic transition is determined by a high growth rate, which is now at a fairly stable level of 1 % per year (according to national statistics, the growth rate will increase until 2018, when it is expected to begin a slight decline). Overall, the population is predominantly urban (60%) and young (19.5% between 15 and 24 years). Despite an increase of 10.5 points in the space of ten years, the literacy rate is very low (56.1% in 2009, Unesco), with 40% of the population without any educational level (53 % of women) and only 6.25% with a higher level of education (Labour Force Survey, 2011). The dependency ratio has declined slightly in recent years, from 54% in 2006 to 49.71% in 2011. Morocco is also historically a country of emigration, with three million Moroccans (9.3% of the population) officially residing abroad and with nearly 10% of GDP generated by remittances.

Despite the welcome fall in unemployment levels (which fell from 13.4% in 2000 to 8.9% in 2011), the employment rate remains one of the lowest in the world (49.2% in 2011), mainly due to the large imbalance between active participation of women compared to men (respectively 25.5% and 74.3% in 2011), meaning that half of the working age population is excluded from the labour market and that three out of four women do not have a job (Labour Force Survey, 2011). At a general level, the participation rate also varies considerably between different regions, age and level of qualification: it is higher in rural areas (58.4%) than urban areas (43.6%) it is almost double for people between 35 and 44 years (62%) than for young people between 15 and 24 years (35%) and is highest among graduates of higher education (63.8% compared to 49.6% of non-degree holders) (Labour Force Survey, 2011).

The national economy is characterized by a low level of job creation, and many of the jobs which are created are low-skilled and low productivity. Additionally, there is a poor match between the demand and supply of skills, changing needs within sectors and contraction of other sectors e.g. in textiles, which has experienced significant job losses in recent years. School leavers and graduates are generally ill-equipped for the labour market. Transitions between school and employment are therefore difficult and the country has high levels of youth unemployment, including among the well-educated.

For graduates of vocational training, there is a lack of tools for anticipating skills needs, which would support vocational training in becoming more responsive to the needs of the labor market. There is also an absence of tools and methods to monitor and evaluate the quality of courses.

However, Initial vocational training (IVT) is in high demand as it recorded a growth rate of 8% per year in numbers trained between 2001 and 2011, with an increase of 13% for those trained in provider institutions under the umbrella of the Office of Vocational Training and Employment Promotion (OFPT). Since 2005, there has been an increase of 11 % per year for beneficiaries belonging to vulnerable categories. By contrast, between 2004 and 2009, there was a decrease of 7% per year in the numbers of those already in employment benefiting from training of one kind or another.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The vocational training system is struggling to meet demand for skills both established and evolving. The main problems are a policy focus on the primacy of numbers of students over quality of provision, an inadequate evaluation system and the absence of a genuine process of vocational guidance, in addition to a lack of financial resources and lack of effective management.

The system of basic education emphasizes intake of numbers of pupils or students while there is little attention to quality. This situation persists despite the reorganization of education to prepare students to

take the baccalaureate (general, VET or technical versions are offered) to be more adapted to the needs of the economy. In October 2012, the Ministry of Vocational Training set a goal of one million graduates of vocational training for the period 2012-2017. The Ministry estimates that the number of VET trainees in 2012-2013 is expected to increase by 19% over the previous year, with the creation of 29 new public training centres and 58 new private training centres.

Since the new Constitution of the Kingdom in 2011, vocational training is a constitutional right guaranteed to all citizens. Such an objective can be achieved only under several conditions, including if the process of training, qualification, accreditation of providers and evaluation of providers are based on quality standards predetermined and adopted by all stakeholders and social and economic partners of the vocational training system.

Currently, however, there is no such framework, so that, for example, accreditation of providers is largely a formality with little specification in the accreditation processes of what the provider is accredited to do. This situation is further complicated by the diversity of stakeholders and training providers, including their legal status, their differing administrative structures and the degree of autonomy they may exercise. Morocco thus faces the challenge of restructuring its vocational training system and, in particular, its qualification system in a very complex landscape.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Moroccan NQF was adopted by Ministers in February 2013. Its main objectives are to:

- develop a strategy for the qualifications system, designed and implemented to improve the match between training and employment
- contribute to the country's capacity to cope with the economic and social challenges of today and tomorrow
- place the individual at the centre of education and training by facilitating continuity and progression throughout his personal and professional life.
- allow a better matching between supply and training demand of the labour market
- facilitate geographical mobility and movement between the different sub-sectors of the education and training system
- ensure better horizontal and vertical mobility through the creation of pathways
- implement a system of quality assurance for qualifications offered to both youth and adults

Another important policy objective is to establish a relationship with the European Qualifications Framework as part of wider cooperation with the EU and in particular to facilitate workers' and students' mobility. More detail is provided in section 6.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

For the development of the National Qualifications Framework specific institutional arrangements have been in place since 2007, involving 3 Ministries (Employment and Vocational Training, Education, Higher education) and the Moroccan National Federation of Industries (CGEM). These are:

- a steering committee composed of the Secretaries-General of Higher Council for Education (CSE),

the Secretaries-General of the 3 Ministries and the president of the Vocational Training Committee of the CGEM

- a technical committee gathering the so called “focal points” representing the five organizations listed above
- ad-hoc technical work teams within each organization.

The work was carried out in four phases:

Awareness phase: 2007 and 2008

During this phase discussion was held on the role of qualifications and the added value of implementing an NQF in Morocco. These reflections took place within the national context, through discussions with various stakeholders and in international debates engaging other Mediterranean countries involved in the development of National Qualifications Frameworks.

Analytical and planning phase: 2009 to 2010

This phase led to the design of a multi-year work plan as part of a wider action plan for the establishment of an NQF in Morocco, the set-up of working groups through the identification of a “focal point” in each sub-system and the development of an analytical tool describing the state of play in the field of qualifications at national level (existing certifications, regulations, defining validation, quality assurance and so on).

Design phase: September 2011 to October 2012

In this phase four teams were established, representing the Ministries in charge of National Education, Higher Education and Vocational Training (Department of Vocational Training, Ministries in charge of Tourism, Agriculture, Fisheries and Maritime Craft) and CGEM. The teams worked together with CGEM on some sample qualifications, including the relevant occupational standards from the tourism and construction sectors and reached a consensus on a national grid of 8 levels and 6 descriptors (knowledge, skills, complexity, responsibility / autonomy, adaptability, communication).

Testing phase: October 2012 - ongoing

This phase was designed to test a referencing tool to be used within the different sub-sectors in allocating qualifications to the 8-level matrix of the NQF.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Moroccan NQF is composed of 8 levels. The level descriptors are learning outcomes-based, divided by:

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Complexity
- Autonomy/Responsibility
- Adaptability

- Communication skills.

The descriptors, as indeed the framework overall, are inspired by the EQF, by the Bologna structure for the higher education levels and, more generally, by lessons learned from different countries, particularly in Europe.

This Qualifications Framework was adopted by the three ministries at a conference in Rabat on 27 February 2013. The next stage is the drafting of the legal act. A specific methodology and tool have been developed to place existing qualifications in the framework. This referencing process is divided into three phases:

- Detailed analysis of the relevant qualification
- Comparing the results of the analysis with the NQF descriptors
- Determining the appropriate reference level

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Validation of experience and of occupational experience (VAE and VAEP) is considered an important issue and the working group plan to develop it in the near future. Two pilot initiatives, supported by the French GIP International, with the expertise of AFPA (Association Nationale Pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes) in the construction sector have been implemented in partnership with the construction federation.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Morocco signed an agreement, the “Statut Avance” with the EU on 13 October 2008. In education and training, the agreement provides for the strengthening of cooperation in qualifications, in particular to facilitate transparency and recognition. Point 3b covers the negotiation of mutual recognition of qualifications in order to facilitate the mobility of service providers and investors. In point 3d, both sides agree to a mutual recognition of “licences professionnelles” (vocational bachelor) in the transport trade, in particular sea and air transport.

In higher education, Morocco has not joined the Bologna process, but is using it as a reference to develop its higher education qualifications and their division by levels. Based on the National Charter of Education and Training, Morocco has launched a process for reforming higher education in line with the Bologna process. It has adopted the three-cycle structure and the establishment of a national evaluation and accreditation system and body as a requirement for the establishment of a comprehensive quality assurance system. The new strategy, developed during 2009-2012 emphasises the necessary diversification of learning pathways and the increase of enrolment in the technical and professional tracks.

Morocco is also one of the participating countries in the European Training Foundation-chaired regional project on qualifications. The project, which began in 2010, aims to enhance regional and Euro-Mediterranean partnerships on issues related to qualifications. 6 other countries are participating in this project - Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, France, Italy and Spain. The project is organised around three dimensions:

- Networking and sharing among the countries involved in the project on issues related to NQF design and implementation with a focus on governance and quality assurance.
- Increasing regional transparency and mutual understanding of qualifications in two economic sectors

(tourism and construction)

- Integrating and cross-fertilising the developments in the regional sectoral component with national developments in the setting-up and implementation of qualification frameworks.

The project has to date produced common profiles for occupations in the key sectors of construction and tourism. The participating countries are now seeking to build on the technical work by developing pilot profiles in related occupations and, further, developing the policy dimension.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The adoption of the reference structure of the Moroccan NQF (levels and descriptors) in February 2013 is a major step in the development of the framework. However, the issue of governance remains. On this last point, several assumptions and scenarios have been discussed in the steering committee and have been proposed to ministers. The probable governance structure could be based on a National Qualifications Commission which would be created and placed under the authority of the head of government. This commission, inter-ministerial and inter-institutional, would be dedicated to the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and maintenance of the national qualifications register. It would include representatives of the Ministries of vocational training, National Education, Higher Education, the CGEM and chambers. In the longer term, representatives of regional authorities, regional authorities and unions could be involved. It would have a dedicated technical secretariat and earmarked budgetary and human resources; and would base its work and decisions on production of a technical committee.

This hypothesis for the NQF governance is one of the outputs of the close cooperation between the three departments and the CGEM which enabled the design of the NQF levels structure. One of the remaining challenges will be the commitment of the Unions to the process.

The next steps in the development of the NQF will focus on the adoption of the system of governance and on the deployment of the framework, including the planned law, communication and information to users, procedures to reference qualifications to the NQF levels, articulation with the process of accreditation of providers and design of a national reference framework for assessment of learning outcomes.

PALESTINE

Palestine has a population of approximately 4.15 million. It has the highest population growth rate (2.7% in 2012) in the Mediterranean region. The share of the population under 14 year ranks among the highest not only in the region but also in the world, at 42.4% in 2012, thus putting enormous pressure on current social services (schools, health and housing) and future employment needs. Considering that the absorption capacity of the Palestinian labour market has not increased in the last ten years, this rapid population growth has led to high unemployment, which exceeded 22% from 2005 to 2010, and is now at 21%. Given the limited possibilities offered by the labour market, the main receiver of the new workforce has been the public sector. The public sector currently employs 22.8% (15.7% in the West Bank and 39.7% in the Gaza Strip) of the population. The expansion of employment in the public sector is mainly in the education and health sectors.

More than half of Palestinians live abroad. Palestinian emigrants are generally well qualified, 7.2% being university graduates. The need to look for job opportunities outside their own country is one of the reasons for the importance that students attach to attending and completing university.

The structure of the Palestinian economy is dominated by small and micro-enterprises. According to the definition used by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 90.5% of companies are micro (below 4 employees) and 8.38% are small (below 20 employees). The structure of the Palestinian labour market and the inability of the formal sector to absorb employees have led to an expansion of the informal sector.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The main challenges that the NQF should address are the fragmentation of the educational system governance, the lack of coordination among public and private providers and the limited relevance of existing qualifications to the labour market.

More precisely, the draft national consultation paper for the development of the NQF identifies the following problems and obstacles to be addressed:

- no clear identification of educational outcomes for individuals and employers (no clear signals)
- fragmented qualifications systems in all sectors (general education, higher education and vocational education and training, non-formal and informal learning)
- no unified governance of the education systems
- imbalance of academic and vocational programs (no balance in enrolment rates between academic, vocational education and vocational training streams) regarding the needs of the labour market
- no valuation and encouragement for LLL, adult education and continuing education (no recognition of non-formal and informal learning)
- no comprehensive and efficient accreditation system
- no links between educational systems and the Arab Occupational Classification (AOC)
- no facilitation of labour mobility by the existing education systems
- no articulation between and within the different education sub-systems.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The planned NQF should provide a strategic, comprehensive and integrated national framework for all learning achievement, on lifelong learning principles. Therefore, the NQF should encompass all qualifications within the Palestinian national education system across every field of education and should address the requirements of education systems/providers, individual learners and labour market systems/employers.

In more detail, the NQF aims at:

- supporting the formulation of learning outcomes in terms of qualifications according to Palestinian Occupational Classification (POC) standards subsequent to the adaptation from Arab Occupational Classification (AOC) standards
- improving understanding of qualifications and levels of qualifications and giving a clear picture of the relevance of educational outcomes to individuals and employers
- organizing and facilitating horizontal and vertical articulation in the education and training system by establishing credit transfer between qualifications
- facilitating access to education and training opportunities, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths to improve learner, labour and career mobility; making progression routes easier and creating bridges within educational systems
- ensuring that qualifications are relevant to perceived social and economic needs by linking the education system with the labour market through the adapted POC, and by increasing the value and enrolment rates in the vocational education streams
- enhancing the quality of education and training by ensuring that all education and training standards are defined by agreed learning outcomes and standards are applied consistently; and ensuring that education and training providers meet specified quality standards
- making it easier to match Palestinian NQF levels with those of other countries, thereby not only securing local recognition, but also regional and international recognition for national qualifications.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The NQF development is the result of a series of reforms taking place in the VET sector. It did not start as an individual project, but as part of the wider reforms to the institutional framework which binds together all the different processes (Palestinian Occupational Classification, curriculum development process etc.), developed in the framework of the TVET strategy. As for most of the ongoing reforms in the country, the consultation with stakeholders has been extensive. A wide range of actors (several Ministries in charge of TVET provision, social partners, public and private education providers, learners/students and their parents, employment offices, awarding bodies and quality assurance agencies etc.) have been actively involved, in the formulation of the first proposal for an NQF in Palestine. This consultation process took place in 2012 through a series of workshops with the different sectors of the education system and with the social partners.

The institutional setting created to coordinate the development of the NQF is structured as follows:

- a steering committee composed of the Ministers and Deputies of Education and Higher Education and Labour, which will be in charge of determining the strategic direction of the framework's development

and implementation, ensuring coordination of policies across governmental ministries. It will also take decisions on qualifications design and quality assurance and the corresponding regulations

- a management group of General Directors of all sectors and stakeholders, which will be in charge of following up the development and the implementation of the NQF, developing, implementing and reviewing NQF procedures, advising the Ministries on policy and resource implications and in cooperation with the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC), registering qualifications in the NQF, accrediting education and training providers and being responsible for assessment and certification.

The management group should be supported by a secretariat and an ad hoc editorial/technical team composed of representatives of all sectors.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The draft national consultation paper envisages an 8-level national qualifications framework for Palestine. These levels are referenced to the Arab Occupational Classification, existing general education and higher education levels and the TVET levels. Each level is described in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.

Learning outcomes are clearly foreseen by the system as a tool for the matching of educational provision to the framework and as a reference of relevance of learners to the labour market.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Improving horizontal and vertical progression routes and establishing effective mechanisms for recognition of prior learning are two of the main objectives of the developing NQF. Operational mechanisms will be developed following the national consultation process.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

No reference to existing regional frameworks has been considered for the moment. However, the readability of Palestinian qualifications among the neighbouring countries is one of the priorities identified in the national consultation paper. Specific attention to the issue of regional and international recognition will be given in the framework of the consultation process.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

A national consultation was conducted in 2012, and a final proposal for the NQF structure and governance is expected to be approved by the government in 2013.

TUNISIA

Tunisia's population is circa 10.7 million. The average annual population growth rate is around 1%. More than half of the Tunisian population is under the age of 29 years. In this category, half (or a quarter of the total population) is of working age (15-29). Such findings raise fundamental concerns about education (and training) and employment, as unemployment tends to increase faster than the population growth in this age group - the annual growth rate of the population 15 years and over is 1.97%, against an annual rise of 3.54% in unemployment of this cohort.

The active population reached 3.9 million in November 2011 against 3.35 million in May 2005. The participation rate stood at 47.8% in November 2011, with a wide gap between men (70.6%) and women (25.7%). In November 2011, the proportion of the working age population employed stood at 38.8%. The employment of women is much lower than that of men, since only 18.5% of women of working age are in employment, while this proportion rises to 59.7% for men. Over the period 2005-2010, the structure of employment in Tunisia remained relatively stable with agriculture occupying 17.7% of the labour force (15 years and over) - but representing only 8% of gross domestic product (GDP), industry 33% of the labour force (32.3% of GDP) and services 49.3% (58% of GDP).

1. CHALLENGES THAT NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The Tunisian Qualification Framework is called the "Classification nationale des qualifications (CNQ)" and builds on a number of reform processes introduced by the government, starting in 1996, after the signature of the free trade zone agreement between the EU and Tunisia. Two main reforms can be mentioned here. One is related to the upgrading of the national economy to meet the challenges of globalisation with a particular focus on the partnership agreement with the EU. The second, known as MANFORME (meaning up-grading of vocational training and employment), focussed more on VET/labour market reform, and was supported by the World Bank, the EU, and French, Canadian and German aid.

Officially, the CNQ was created by law in 2009, but the implementation of the CNQ remains embryonic. One of the main reasons is the reluctance of the social partners to take part in the process, as they argue that they are underrepresented in the commission set up to follow up the implementation (most of its members represent various ministries) and challenge the consultative role of this commission.

Broad ownership of and participation in the CNQ remains therefore a key challenge for the success of this reform.

2. THE TUNISIAN NQF HAS SEVERAL OBJECTIVES:

- to contribute to a better readability of competences
- to bridge the gap between the economy and training
- to provide common references to foster geographical, sectoral and professional mobility
- to take into account all modes of learning in a lifelong learning perspective
- to limit dead ends in learning routes.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

During the design phase, stakeholders were involved at 2 levels in a process steered by the former Ministry of Education and Vocational training[1]. It created two working groups:

- a technical team, comprised of managers from the DG in charge of Standards and Assessment (Direction Générale de la Normalisation et de l'Évaluation) and from the Training engineering and trainers' training centre (Centre National des Formateurs et de l'Ingénierie de Formation), coordinating various technical works,
- a National Technical Group, comprised of Representatives of the Ministry of Education and Training, the Prime Minister's Office, the social partners (employers and employees), the Building Federation and the Tourism Federation, ensured the steering of the whole process.

During a series of meetings during the design process, the administration achieved greater ownership of the qualifications reforms as well as other related issues such as quality assurance. The social partners have not been involved as much as they would have liked because meetings were often held internally in the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.

For these reasons and those mentioned above, the social partners are still reluctant to take an active role in the implementation. Moreover, after the revolution in January 2011 other employers' organisations and trades unions have emerged, so that the national authorities, who had been dealing for decades with one single organisation for each of the social partners, now deal with many diverse organisations.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS

The Tunisian NQF is designed as a classification of qualifications (hence the name CNQ), based on previous classifications of occupations, public services labour regulation and sectoral collective agreements. The CNQ has an overarching character covering general education, VET and higher education; it is a 7-level grid with six descriptors: Knowledge, Skills and Wider Competences (Complexity, Autonomy, Responsibility, Adaptability, Knowledge and Know-how). A decree was passed in 2009 specifying the NQF's detailed design including its governance. The national commission, under the Council for Human Resources Development, in charge of the implementation and monitoring of the NQF was established. Although this commission has met once, there is still a debate about its leadership, mandate, scope, structure and composition.

More recently, the sectoral federations took the lead in developing occupational standards (*repertoire des emplois et des competences*). These occupational standards will act as terms of reference for the training providers to develop qualifications and curricula. This new initiative, which is publicly funded, has covered 5 sectors so far.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Stakeholders have expressed interest in developing recognition or validation of prior learning (RPL/VPL) schemes. A pilot initiative, supported by the French AFPA, in the ready-made garment and automotive sectors was implemented. However, subsequent to this pilot, no decision has been taken to develop a national VPL/RPL system.

In addition, the Tunisian education and training system is hampered by a lack of pathways, for instance between vocational training and higher education. If this remains unchanged, this will make the progression within a future CNQ uneven and will impede building of pathways within the CNQ.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The Bologna process is a key influence towards the reform of higher education in Tunisia. A decree was issued in September 2012 setting up a national authority for evaluation, quality assurance, and accreditation under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education. This new authority will be composed

of 2 departments: one in charge of evaluation and accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and the second in charge of the curricula.

This would build on recent reforms in higher education which introduced quality assurance. The work on the NQF is partially mainstreamed in higher education through the development of a professional bachelor course and the design of the Diploma Supplement in partnership with employers' organisations.

A theoretical exercise of referencing to the European Qualifications Framework was made by the Ministry of Vocational Training but is not recognized yet at European level (the EQF Recommendation contains no provision for countries which are not participating in the EU's Education and Training 2020 process to reference to the EQF).

Tunisia is participating in a regional project on qualifications launched by the ETF in 2010, which aims to enhance regional and Euro-Mediterranean partnerships on issues related to qualifications. 6 other countries are participating in this project - Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, France, Italy and Spain. The project is organised around three dimensions:

- Networking and sharing among the countries involved in the project on issues related to NQF design and implementation with a focus on governance and quality assurance.
- Increasing regional transparency and mutual understanding of qualifications in two economic sectors (tourism and construction).
- Integrating and cross-fertilising the developments in the regional sectoral component with national developments in the setting up and implementation of qualification frameworks.

As part of the activities of the project, a technical team from Tunisia involving the major stakeholders was invited to present 4 qualifications (2 from each sector) using the EQF descriptors: knowledge, skills and competences. This was an opportunity for the Tunisians to use this new approach based on learning outcomes to describe qualifications. This experience will help them in implementing their CNQ, which is also outcomes-based.

The project has to date produced common profiles for occupations in the key sectors of construction and tourism. The participating countries are now seeking to build on the technical work by developing pilot profiles in related occupations and, further, developing the policy dimension.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Tunisia is probably the most advanced country in the region in developing a qualifications framework, mainly because of a certain tradition of connection between the labour market and the training system. But the fragmentation of the system has not yet been overcome and the world of education, training and higher education on the one hand, and the business world on the other, still operate in parallel and this will continue to be the case as long as the framework is not shared by all as a common language.

The 2011 revolution has put on hold current initiatives but it does not discard the issue of qualifications. The expectations of people in term of mobility will probably add to the pressure to align qualifications along common references at national level and at international level. The on-going discussions between Europe and Tunisia for a future Mobility Partnership, in which the skills dimension is granted important attention, will probably help renew the CNQ reform and give it a strong push into the buy-in and implementation phases.

(1) In a government reshuffle in January 2010, responsibility for vocational training passed to the Ministry of Employment, now the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training.



EASTERN EUROPE



ARMENIA

In 2011, Armenia's population was 3.2 million, with a composition of 51.5% female and 48.5% male. In 2011 almost 40% of the population was below 25 years of age. The long term projections (2050) identify a change in the structure of population, with a shrinkage in the working age group (25-64) by almost 8% and an increase in the retired element of the population by 8.5%. This will have an impact on the overall society in terms of dependency rates, workforce, available skills, social and health care services provision etc.

The main part of GDP is generated by the service sector (sharing 44.5% in 2010) with the highest share of employment (44% in 2010). Industry contributed with a share of 36% to the GDP in 2010 and with lower levels of employment (17.4% in 2010). This indicates the highest productivity among all sectors. Agriculture still plays a significant role, accounting for one fifth of added value to GDP and almost 40% of employment, showing the lowest productivity among economic sectors. In 2011, the urban and rural shares of population were 64% and 36% respectively, demonstrating a decreasing trend for urban and increasing for rural.

The rate of informal employment (self-employment and unregistered employment) is very high and comprises 59.2% of total working age population. In agriculture, 36.5% of the employed are informal or hidden employed and, in the non-agricultural sectors, they represent 19.1% of the total. The unemployment rate remains high and has been increasing in recent years (from 16.6% in 2008 to 18.4% in 2011). Youth (age between 15-24) unemployment is the highest, its rate is more than double national averages.

Emigration is still an important factor in the country, although it has declined in recent years. Some findings from the responses of potential migrants underlined that 36% of them (aged 18-50) are seriously thinking about leaving the country to find a job.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

A first concept paper on an NQF for VET was developed in 2008 by stakeholders from different government institutions. The NQF concept builds on recent VET reforms and focuses on the development of new qualifications, reference is made to the EQF, and a future link with general education and HE within an overarching framework is foreseen.

A working group has been set up by the Ministry of Education to develop a proposal on how to implement the NQF by mid-2013. This working group is mainly driven by the Ministry of Education and the focus is on higher education. An EU-funded Twinning Project should start in March 2013 for the implementation of an NQF for higher education.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Armenian qualifications framework (also called Republic of Armenia National Qualifications Framework, or RA QF) is being developed to serve individuals, employers and the Armenian government. It is intended to benefit individuals who want to access qualifications, for employers who want to have a better understanding of the skills a holder of a qualification really possesses and for government to support learning.

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

- to link different levels of qualification in a hierarchy from the lowest to the highest

- to link Armenian qualifications to those of other countries
- to enable learners to access qualification, transfer between qualifications and progress from one level to the next level.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

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

The Armenian Qualifications Framework was adopted by Decree (N° 332-N), on 31 March 2011, in accordance with Point 21 of Article N36 of the Education Law of the Republic of Armenia.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The national qualifications framework of the Republic of Armenia is a common reference system that describes and links qualifications of different levels, issued in Armenia in a hierarchy from the lowest to the highest, as well to make them comparable with the qualifications of those countries that operate an NQF.

It consists of 8 levels. Levels 1 to 4 will accommodate qualifications from general education and vocational education and training. Levels 6 to 8 will cover qualifications from higher education, while qualifications from both VET and higher education will be placed at level 5.

An 8-level framework has been chosen in order to facilitate alignment of existing qualifications and in referencing the Armenian qualifications framework to the EQF. The 3 categories of descriptors used are knowledge, skills and competences, again as in the EQF. The Ministry of Education and Science has overall responsibility for the qualifications framework.

In 2009, 56 educational standards were developed and are under the process of adoption by the Ministry of Justice (as normative acts/ legally binding documents). In VET approximately 2,000 teachers have been trained on changes in the curricula (there are about 4,000 teachers in total in VET colleges). 12 Multi-functional VET colleges (out of a total of 100) will be at the forefront of the reform. Ten of them are located in the regions and two in Yerevan.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

A draft of the National CVET Strategy had been prepared by the Department of Continuing and Supplementary Training of the Ministry of Education and it will be submitted to the Government for adoption in early 2013. The draft strategy includes Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning as a key priority.

However, no specific methodologies for the establishment of progression pathways and RPL methodologies have yet been formulated. The transfer between qualifications and progress from one level to the next one is however one of the key objectives of the RA NQF.

In agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science, in 2013 the ETF will develop a proposal for validation of non-formal and informal learning through the implementation of a pilot test in the hospitality/ tourism sector. This project also includes support to the Ministry in mapping and listing the occupations needed by the labour market in the above sectors, analysing how they are reflected by the qualifications offered by the VET system and proposing additions or amendments to the existing defined occupations and qualifications. Once tested, the methodology will be applicable to other sectors. Under the EU-funded

Mobility Partnership project managed by the French Office for Immigration and Integration, it is possible this methodology will be extended to the construction sector.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The RA National Qualifications Framework is not part of any regional framework, but the country is interested in using the EQF as a reference model. Armenia joined the Bologna process in 2005. The strong influence of policy developments in the European Union and the direct inspiration from the EQF are the main reasons why Armenia opted for an eight-level framework of qualifications.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The decree approving the Armenian NQF has set the timetable below with short to mid-term milestones:

- approval of operationalization guidelines between 2011 and early 2012
- submission of schedule of the measures ensuring the National Qualifications Framework's introduction and operationalization
- approval of the descriptors of RA education qualifications by profession and the level of education by 31 December 2013.

AZERBAIJAN

The population of Azerbaijan is approximately 9.3 million. The demographic structure shows that 23% of population is aged 0-14, 70% within the age bracket 15-64, while 7% are 65 and over.

The urban-rural divide is strong in Azerbaijan. Growth is not equally divided between rural and urban populations. 16.9% of the informally employed population are rural residents, whereas 83.1% are urban residents

The labour force has increased by 25% while the active population grew by 16%. In terms of employment, agriculture is still the leading sector, followed by services, construction and industry.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

Azerbaijan shares a collective heritage with other post-Soviet republics. In the Soviet Union there was a direct link between the education system and enterprises. Many higher education institutions and in particular the specialised “Institutes” produced engineers for the big state companies, the technicums trained technicians and PTUs (vocational schools) skilled workers. PTUs were often linked to a specific company, the base enterprise that provided opportunities for practical training and future employment. The State as the main employer and the manager of the education system would assign graduates to jobs. Occupations and qualifications for different levels of jobs were centrally regulated through tariff qualification guidelines, including a centrally-established list of occupations and a classifier of specialities. These tools determined both the conditions for education and employment. When Azerbaijan became independent these systems were inherited and have since been adapted and brought line with the international standardised classification system for occupations (ISCO) but have basically lost their labour market significance outside the public sector. These structures are seriously challenged by on-going reforms, international projects, the creation of occupational standards based on the ISCO-08 classification and last but not least the national qualifications framework (NQF).

With independence, traditional markets for big enterprises disappeared. Many people lost their seemingly secure jobs. The economic crisis was aggravated by the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia, which resulted in population displacement. The state had limited means to resolve these huge social problems and was unable to guarantee any jobs. A mass migration took place to the Baku metropolitan area and in particular abroad to Russia in search for work. Due to the uncertainties and the lack of clarity on how to deal with the unresolved post-conflict situation, privatisation was postponed and took many years divided in different stages. Privatisation of state companies and farmland started only after 1995 and lasted to well into the first decade of the 21st century.

A large informal sector of micro-enterprises emerged and with the collapse of the “job assignment” system most recruitment practices were based on informal channels. Many students who specialised were unable to find a job. Higher education graduates were often able to find a job in the public sector, but most college and initial VET students had to find a job in the private sector. Many became unemployed. The added value of specialising after general secondary education had become less obvious. Until recently only one in three secondary school students chose to specialise in initial VET, college or higher education. This has changed somewhat recently under the influence of education reforms and stronger economic demand for skilled labour.

Education reforms started in 1999, but it took ten years to produce a new law on education (2009). That law makes implicit reference to learning outcomes and lifelong learning. It also dedicates attention to adult learning. Reforms started mainly in primary and general secondary and higher education. A new outcomes-

based national curriculum was adopted in 2006 and revised and improved in 2010. It is being introduced year on year since 2007, and has not yet reached the stage where it is affecting Azerbaijan's weak performance in PISA. For higher education and colleges access is strictly regulated through centralised state exams. Bachelor and Master degree structures have been in place since the 1990s and all universities are subject to accreditation, but there is not yet an independent QA agency in place. ECTS is being introduced for colleges (offering sub-bachelor degrees) and universities (for bachelor and master degree programmes). VET reforms started more recently, with the State Programme for Technical and Vocational Education 2007-2012, aiming at optimisation of the school network and upgrading of schools, better links with business and the renewal of VET provision. A number of international projects have supported a number of pilots for developing competency-based curricula from occupational standards. Eleven such new VET qualifications and curricula exist at the time of writing, while 40 additional competency-based curricula are planned for 2013.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, completed in 2005, has accelerated economic development. Azerbaijan changed within a very short time-span into a middle-income economy. This has affected the population as a whole in different degrees. Poverty levels have dropped and Azerbaijan has quickly climbed the Human Development index. Since 2007, and recently reiterated through the Azerbaijan 2020 strategy, the focus has been increasingly on diversifying the economy beyond the energy sector. The oil sector does not generate a lot of jobs in Azerbaijan and for a more sustainable economy the development of other economic sectors is important. This also means that the number of qualified specialists at all level needs to be enhanced and Azerbaijan cannot afford to let more than half of its young people leave the education system without any specialisation. The development of occupational standards and the NQF are instruments to support the relevance and the quality assurance of qualifications.

With the support of the World Bank, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection has been developing occupational standards for seven priority sectors: Construction, Tourism, Energy, Processing industries, Agriculture, Transport, Trade and retail, which should inform training provision. Pilot work with sectoral bodies including lead enterprises, sectoral organisations (when existing), trade union and employers confederations and state institutions has been implemented to define 200 standards, of which to date 100 have been validated. The Ministry of Labour has proposed establishing a Work Force Development agency to continue this work after the World Bank project comes to an end in October 2013. The Workforce Development Agency's proposed mandate includes the identification of skill needs, the development of occupational standards, the development of training centres, the certification of individuals against occupational standards and the accreditation of training providers and assessment centres which use occupational standards. These functions are partially complementary, partially overlapping with the mandate of the Ministry of Education, which has expressed its concerns about the new decree to establish this new agency under the Ministry of Labour. At the time of writing, approval of the decree was expected to be delayed, with possible repercussions for the adoption of the NQF decree.

The Ministry of Education established an interdepartmental NQF Commission at the end of 2010, which developed a draft decree for a national qualifications framework, based on conceptual work with inputs from the World Bank, the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the Council of Europe. The proposal was discussed at an international seminar in 2012 and presented by the Minister of Education at an international Bologna meeting at the end of 2012, and is planned to be submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers during 2013. Roles and responsibilities for the main actors are described in the Draft Decree, but the institutional setting for the NQF is not fully clarified and will be one of the main challenges for implementation; in particular regarding the quality assurance around the approval of qualifications, and assessment and certification procedures. The Ministry of Education has established a QA department in charge of licensing providers and is planning the establishment of an independent QA for HE; the Workforce Development Agency under the Ministry of Labour would deal with the development of occupational standards and skills anticipation, but also aspires to regulate the certification. These two institutions would work together

with tripartite sectoral committees but the composition, mandate and status of these committees is not yet clear. The Centre for the Development of Vocational Education is currently developing educational standards (qualifications for initial VET), and curricula. According to the Law on Education, the Ministry of Education is responsible for all certification, but this is only partially practised.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

According to the draft decree the NQF has the following objectives:

- Improve the quality and transparency of qualifications.
- Provide points of reference for setting and assessing education and training standards associated with different types of qualifications.
- Take into account the demands of the society and labour market when defining qualifications, and hence improve national economic performance and facilitate communication and movement between education and training sectors and the labour market.
- Align national qualifications and qualifications levels with the QF-EHEA and the EQF.
- Support, widen access and promote lifelong learning of Azerbaijani citizens, and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- Facilitate the national and international mobility of learners and workers through increased recognition of the quality and comparability of Azerbaijani qualifications abroad and increase of competitiveness and mobility of people.
- Promote coherence of reforms in different sectors of education and training.

Improving the relevance of qualifications and strengthening the QA processes around the award processes of qualifications are central elements in strengthening the trust in qualifications among learners, providers, businesses and internationally.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The interdepartmental NQF committee existed exclusively of representatives from the public sector, including all the Heads of Department of the Ministry of Education, the Rectors Council, Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Scientific Research and Training Center for Labour and Social Problems, and the State Commission on Student Admission. The inclusion of students and of social partners was not considered appropriate as they lacked decision-making powers. The committee started its work in early 2011, and started from an in-depth analysis of the existing legislation and qualifications systems in the country. The developmental process has been an important awareness-raising and capacity-building exercise, in particular in the Ministry of Education. It has helped to understand to what extent learning outcomes have penetrated the system, and where new concepts of quality assurance, and assessment exist on which the system can build further.

The process partially coincided with Azerbaijan co-chair role in the Bologna process. Informal consultations did take place during the development phase with representatives from the wider academic community and with some business representatives. The Council of Europe has extensively commented on different versions of the decree developed with ETF support and an expert from the Estonian Qualifications Authority on behalf of the World Bank.

The NQF will be legislated in the form of a decree of the Cabinet of Ministers. The Draft Decree is comprehensive and contains general provisions, the objectives of the NQF, the NQF level descriptors, roles and responsibilities of institutions, quality assurance arrangements; and in an annex a table with the level descriptors, a detailed glossary, and a list of approximately twenty acts, decrees and regulations supporting the qualifications framework, which were analysed in the development process and will be affected by the NQF.

According to the draft decree the Ministry of Education is responsible for the development of educational standards, national curricula, assessment standards and accreditation standards; quality assurance of qualifications; and administration of the national register of qualifications.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection on the other hand would be responsible for the development and implementation of occupational standards, labour market analysis, and the development of the Employment Classification. The Higher Attestation Committee would remain responsible for external assessment of PhD and D.Sc. dissertations. Individual awards are produced by the Higher Attestation Committee on the basis of external validation of the assessment results. Public organisations, line ministries and for profit organisations could become competent bodies that can award national qualifications after accreditation by the Ministry of Education.

There is no reference in the decree to sectoral committees which have been piloted in the DIOS (Development of Improved Occupational Standards) project, but which are mentioned in the decree on the Workforce Development Agency. Apart from occupational standards, Sectoral Committees could oversee curriculum development and training based on occupational standards, and accreditation of providers & assessment centres. Line Ministries, State Committees, or State Agencies would identify members. Permanent members would come from the Ministry of Labour, the State Employment Services, the Ministry of Economic Development and the Confederation of Entrepreneurs and Confederation of Trade Unions, while representatives from leading companies, line ministries, professional associations and training providers would be temporary members.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The work on levels started originally from an analysis of the descriptors of qualifications (educational standards) in the country, but has been inspired as well by the Dublin descriptors for the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF- EHEA) and the EQF and the eight European key competences. The result in the end is a list of 8 levels with level descriptors which are more detailed than the EQF descriptors, addressing knowledge and understanding; skills; and autonomy and responsibility and which are calibrated and fine-tuned with the main qualifications types in the country.

In the background research the learning outcomes in existing qualifications and curricula were reviewed. The National Curriculum which describes primary and general secondary education is an example of good practice, with clear outcomes defined for different key stages. In initial VET there are outcomes- based qualifications based on occupational standards for eleven occupations, but 40 new qualifications are planned. Learning outcomes have also been used to define degree-type descriptors and some subject area benchmarks for sub-bachelor, bachelor and masters degrees, which are continuously reviewed. For adult learning a number of modules based on outcomes are available, but there are no educational standards yet, which address specifically the training of adults, other than for the qualifications available for initial vocational and higher education. The DIOS project of the Ministry of labour has developed 200 competency-based occupational standards, of which 100 have been validated. Moreover, for each standard so-called training standards have been developed, expressed in learning outcomes. The status of the training standards is still to be clarified, as there is no legal basis for such standards in Azerbaijan. The occupational and training standards could also be considered as a single standard, given that the training standards do not go beyond the learning outcomes and performance criteria.

The Institute of Educational Problems is monitoring the reform of the National Curriculum and is regularly publishing about the use of learning outcomes in general education, and the issues it raises. The Quality Assurance and Education Department of the Ministry of Education is defining learning outcomes to compare the performance of students across institutions within the self-assessment methodology that training providers have to use to obtain accreditation.

Beyond the national curriculum, there is a need to consolidate and formalise the different approaches in use.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The university entrance exam is centrally administered and compulsory for everybody who wants to enter a bachelor programme, including graduates from colleges, but there are plans to facilitate credit transfer from sub-bachelor to bachelor degrees.

Graduates from vocational lyceums receive two qualifications, the attestation of maturity (general secondary education diploma), and a diploma of specialisation. One in seven graduates actually enters higher education. Graduates from vocational schools only receive a diploma of specialisation. Currently it is difficult to identify level 3 and level 4 diplomas of specialisation, but this is foreseen once the NQF comes into force.

There are some alternative pathways to some qualifications (with special permission people can obtain a diploma through self-study (externat), and there are also programmes for additional degrees and for distance learning. A large number of private providers provide short courses which are not formally recognised.

There are no systems yet for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, but the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection is very interested in testing and developing validation based on the occupational and training standards produced by the DIOS project. The National Vocational Qualifications System in Turkey as managed by the Vocational Qualifications Authority is seen as an important source of inspiration.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

In the preparation of the NQF the self-certification criteria have been used to make a gap analysis of the requirements for self-certification. Azerbaijan is planning self-certification as soon as the NQF is approved. It is also aspiring to link the new framework with the EQF.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

2013 will hopefully see the approval of the NQF and an implementation plan. Moreover, the DIOS project will end and the Workforce Development Agency should come into existence. Self-certification to the QF EHEA can start. It will be important to nominate a special entity within or outside existing public institutions for coordinating the technical aspects implementation of the NQF. The NQF Committee could possibly become the future board of the NQF, but would need to be reinforced with representatives from line ministries, universities, students and social partners.

[1] The NQF is designed in accordance with Article 3 of the agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science and the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of 25 June 2007 and confirmed in 2008.

BELARUS

Belarus' population is just under 9.5 million and is predominantly (three-quarters) urban. Between 2000 and 2011 Belarus' GDP increased twofold. The principal contribution to GDP still comes from industry and trade, while the construction sector's role is diminishing due to the contraction in house-building.

The country's population has been subject to gradual decline for some years now. The working-age population makes up 60% of the total population and is in decline - the country is aging, putting pressure on younger generations.

The number of the economically active is estimated at 4.7 million. In 2011, employment levels reached almost 77%.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The Belarusian labour market is characterised by low levels of unemployment, and a decreasing labour force due partly to a demographic dip. The labour market in Belarus faces the challenges of an ageing population and labour shortages. The assignment of the labour force to certain jobs and the labour demand forecast based on vacancies continue from Soviet times. The practice of job placement of VET graduates in state enterprises also still exists.

However, with an emergent private sector and employment growth outside the public sector and state-owned enterprises, Belarus will face the need to find new solutions to cope with an increasing imbalance between supply and demand on the labour market. Moreover, the quality gap between supply and demand of specialists is increasing and has resulted in a mismatching of the skills held by the labour force with the requirements of modern employment in both the public and private sectors.

As in other countries of the region, students prefer higher education over vocational education and training. Vocational education is being reformed and the main priorities are to increase relevance to the labour market, revise curricula and teaching materials, renovate buildings and equipment, and upgrade teachers' and trainers' skills and increase their salaries to prevent shortages. The Ministry of Education is merging vocational institutions with higher education institutions to make VET more attractive, but employers and students remain sceptical about its quality.

The number of graduates from higher education is higher than the rate of job creation at higher skills levels in a context where there is no regular and systematic information provision on the skills needs of the labour market. However, employers require more and more workers possessing such competences as: initiative-taking, operational independence, as well as digital, entrepreneurship and other key competences.

So far, Belarus has maintained a traditional system based on classification of specialities and qualifications and the qualifications characteristics of workers and educational standards. But new elements have been introduced in the coordination councils of the Ministry of Education and its regional structures. These include efforts to improve the analysis of labour market needs, including the computerised management of job vacancies and schools' quality assurance through ISO certification.

The education system is beginning to gradually introduce competence-based approaches in selected curricula and the VET system plans to initiate – with European Training Foundation support - a discussion on quality assurance in VET. There is a growing understanding among the policy-makers and practitioners that the education system needs a major re-focusing on results, and that quality and relevance should

drive the VET modernisation agenda. Therefore, introducing the learning outcomes approach remains a major challenge for the system in the coming years.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Government declared its intention in 2012 to develop an NQF. The 2013 Action Plan of the Ministry of Labour includes in its proposals for the period 2011-2015:

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

The same Action Plan contains measures for the development of information and analytical materials on professions and qualifications structure, on anticipation of demand of the regional labour markets, and structure of vocational education supply, etc.

The National Research Institute of Labour under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus has prepared for approval a National Innovation Project on the Development of the NQF.

Also, in cooperation with the Institute of Labour, the European Training Foundation (ETF) is supporting in 2013 piloting of the establishment of the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), including the preparation of the main statutory documents and supervising the first phase of the establishment and operation of the SSCs.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

Stakeholder involvement in education policy development is rather weak, but social partnership in education and employment development is now stated as a key priority in strategic documents. The latest legislative initiatives such as the Code of Education (currently in the monitoring phase) indicate a new trend. The purpose of the Code is to create a unified national system of education and lay down the basis for on-going developments. Better information exchange and improvement of communication between the education community, stakeholders, non-governmental organisations and employers' bodies is an issue that needs to be addressed more urgently. Employers have difficulty indicating what they expect from VET. Labour market needs analysis is missing and there are no consolidated structures for dialogue between education and the labour market.

There is a growing awareness among Belarusian policymakers in education that the following issues need to be more in focus: better access for students and adults to all levels of education, comparability of qualifications and recognition of diplomas as well as diversity of curricula and enhancement of foreign language teaching. International cooperation is valued as a means of achieving these objectives.

Belarus has not yet adopted the necessary legal arrangements for NQF implementation. It has been relying so far on traditional instruments for regulating vocational qualifications, and applying an evolutionary approach towards the creation of a NQF.

Some practical steps towards introducing an NQF – within the context of reform of qualifications, standards, and wider VET reform - have been initiated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, in association with the Ministry of Education. In March 2010, under the mandate of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, an interagency working group was established comprising 17 government bodies, as well as experts and representatives of employers. With the establishment of this interagency working group, new momentum has been created for conducting the necessary research and preparation work before adopting the decisions at the state level. This group worked in 2011-2012 on a conceptual

terminological framework of the national qualifications system and produced draft recommendations on the following topics:

- the national qualifications framework development
- sectoral qualifications framework development
- occupational standards development
- the development of the national assessment and certification system for education outcomes.

In May 2011 the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MoLSP) prepared a Draft Action Plan for implementation of the proposals of the interagency workgroup for transition of the Republic of Belarus to a national qualifications system, taking into account the experience of the European Union. The MoLSP recommendations created the basis for the Action Plan for 2013 and the National Innovation Project of the Research Institute of Labour under the MoLSP (to start in mid-2013). ETF support to the establishment of the Sector Skills Councils in Belarus is closely connected with all this activity coordinated by the Ministry of Labour in cooperation with employers, and the first workshop took place in Minsk in November 2012.

ETF support in 2013 focuses on the introduction of SSCs and strengthening partnership and cooperation between stakeholders and the VET system. The initiative aims to design and pilot a model of Sector Skills Council jointly with the key stakeholders in at least one sector of the economy. It is expected that with ETF support, the review of existing tri-partite structures and the definition of the desired SSC functionality will be conducted, and the SSC concept (including a structure and a regulation) will be drafted - to be further reviewed and adopted by the Government. ETF will support the initial stage of the SSC functioning and monitor its activity. Later in 2013, the key stakeholders will evaluate the pilot jointly with ETF, disseminate the results and agree on a "road map" for an SSC system.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The NQF structure and descriptors will be reviewed in 2014 in the process of implementation of the Innovation Project prepared by the Institute of Labour. Some initial work will be kick-started under the SSC pilot activity supported by ETF in 2013.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is starting to attract interest among stakeholders in Belarus but there is currently no systemic provision for it. However, it is included within the Government's reform plans and will be subject to recommendations for the Government upon completion of the innovation project.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Belarus has not been able to fully participate in or benefit from international cooperation, which in many European countries has boosted major reform initiatives and mutual learning in education and training. It is the only country in Eastern Europe that is not part of the Bologna process. Requests by Belarus to enter the Bologna process have not been endorsed, and the country is making a special effort to join the Bologna club in the next round.

In 2012 the Republican Institute for Vocational Education (RIPO) lead the implementation of regional activities in its new capacity as the Reference Organisation for the CIS member states in vocational training, retraining and skills upgrading of staff in Technical and Vocational Education, and Secondary

Special Education. In this context, RIPO initiated in 2012 preparation steps for the establishment of the CIS Network College; it is also promoting a strong focus on quality in VET, its relevance to the needs of the labour market and the exchange of good practice among the CIS countries' experts, practitioners and policy-makers.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

In 2013 and the coming years Belarus plans to take practical steps for the adoption of the NQF and the improvement of the national qualifications system. It will pilot the introduction of the Sector Skills Councils based on the best international practice and by the end of the year will adopt the Government's decision on the pilot regulation on SSC and the selection of a number of pilot sectors for testing the new SSC model. Belarus will start the development of occupational standards for selected sectors of the economy and will launch preparatory work for demand anticipation as well as research on VNFIL and a certification system.

GEORGIA

Georgia's population is approximately 4.5 million. The division between the age groups is 40.7 % for 15-54 years group, 16.1 % for 0-14 years, and 17 % for 65 and older. The rural population is around 47 % of the total, an indicator that has been stable over the past years. Georgia is only moderately urbanised and about 65 % of the population is employed in rural areas.

The leading position in the economy is occupied by industry and trade, which share 17.3 % of 2011 GDP, followed by public administration (11.7%); transport and communication services (10.6 %); agriculture, forestry and fishing (9.3 %); while construction had a share of 6.2 %.

The Georgian labour market features a number of important issues, namely a high urban unemployment rate - 26.5 % in 2011; and significant self-employment, reaching 62% of total employment in 2011, concentrated mainly in the inefficient agriculture sector.

The unemployment rate increased by 6 percentage points between 2000 and 2010, from 10.3 % in 2000, to 16.3 in 2010, and remarkably has been highest among the population with higher education (above 20 %), youth (nearly 37 %) and the urban population (more than 27 %).

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

As is typical of a transition country, Georgia is currently carrying out a series of reforms aimed at supporting its education and training system in becoming more responsive to labour market needs and national skills requirements. While Georgia's economy has recorded impressive figures for growth since 2004, unemployment levels remain high and poverty is widespread.

In the context of education and training, the NQF, adopted in December 2010, is intended to act as a driver of system change, and is a key tool in reform of the VET system. The Georgian NQF, however, represents a compromise between existing education structures and the ongoing shift to outcomes-based approaches in development of curricula, standards and qualifications. There is considerable tension between the aims of the NQF and the existing legislative and institutional framework.

Its specific challenges include addressing the relevance of VET curricula, and ensuring these are aligned with occupational standards; identifying out of date qualifications or those without a demand on the labour market; the implementation of quality assurance measures for VET providers; and removing obstacles hindering access and progression between the various sub-sectors of the education and training system.

Access and permeability are especially difficult issues: there is insufficient permeability between the various sub-sectors of the education and training system, partly caused by existing legislation determining access to key cycles (notably tertiary) . The NQF has come up against these hurdles.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The NQF aims to fulfill important policy objectives, notably:

- support to quality assurance in education, as compliance with the NQF became one of the criteria for the accreditation of programmes in higher education, which started in 2011
- facilitating integration of learning outcomes concepts throughout the system to final beneficiaries through new generation training programmes and qualifications based on learning outcomes

- setting the fundamentals for establishment of mechanisms of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning
- providing a base for student and learner mobility
- promoting education received in Georgia and its compliance to international practice, and integration in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)
- informing users and the wider public, notably via the online registry of occupational standards (National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement or NCEQE, 2012).

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The process of development and adoption of the Georgian NQF was led by the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), the agency which assures the management and maintenance of the components of the NQF, including online publication of the legal basis and of the register of occupational standards for vocational qualifications. http://eqe.ge/eng/education/national_qualifications_framework

Key components of the NQF legal act are:

- Qualifications Framework (QF) for General Education
- QF for Vocational Education and Training: see newly published international booklet online [<http://eqe.ge/uploads/VocationalEducation/e-bookletonOSandQFENGforwebfinal.pdf>]
- QF for Higher (Academic) Education
- List of Qualifications
- Procedure of Amendment of the List of Qualifications with a new qualification.

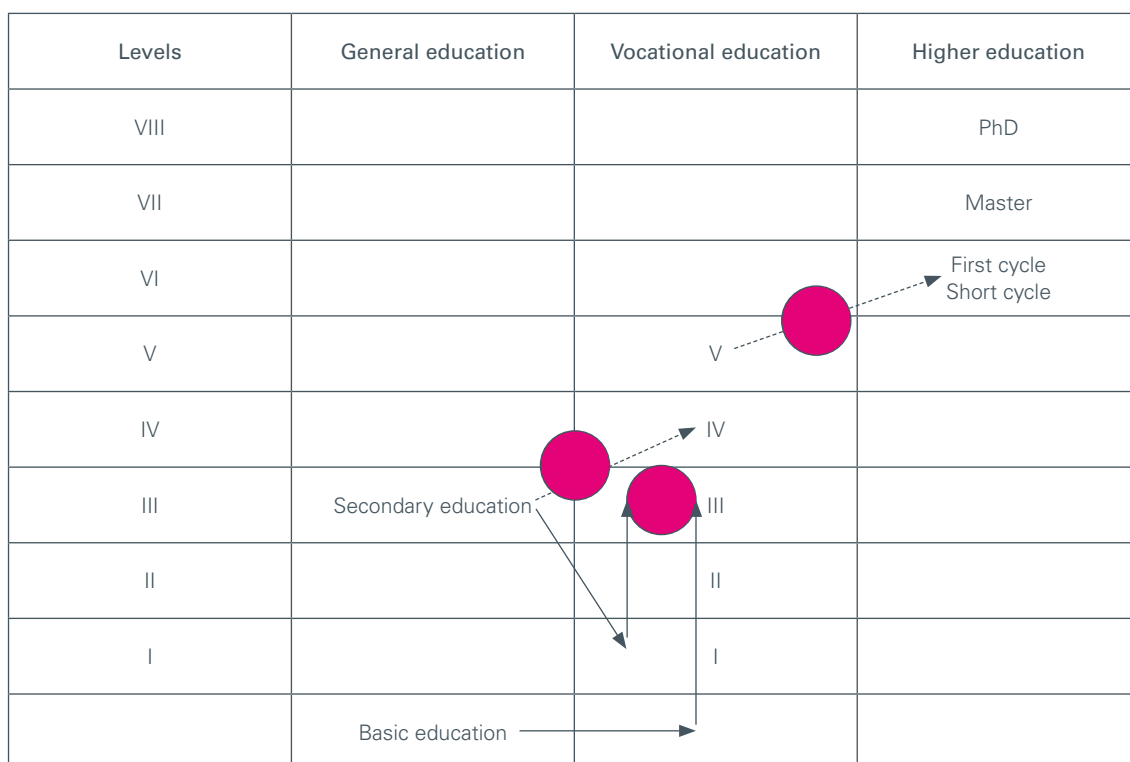
4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Georgian NQF, which was adopted by order of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) on 10 December 2010, represents a compromise between the existing education structure (cycles, and principles for progression), with a new model based on learning outcomes, which are defined with reference to the level descriptors included in the legal act of the NQF, notably in its three annexes describing the sub-frameworks: general, vocational and higher (academic).

The NQF systematises the existing qualifications in three sub-frameworks: general, vocational and higher, and is thus comprehensive. The vocational sub-framework contains 5 levels, and the higher 3 levels and so - implicitly - the NQF comprises 8 levels. However, the NQF legal act does not refer explicitly to 8 levels. The general education sub-framework is not explicitly related with the structure of 8 levels, although it is said that in practice the secondary education diploma corresponds to NQF level 3. Table 5 summarises the NQF architecture.

The NQF clearly specifies that enrolment in each cycle (level) of vocational education is conditional on “completion of the educational programme of the previous cycle or recognition of the knowledge, skills and values envisaged by the educational programme of the previous cycle” (Annex 2, Article 2, 5). Learning outcomes of each level cover the learning outcomes of the previous level, and are marked by higher level of professional knowledge, advanced skills and values.

The NQF and permeability issues



Source: NQF; VET Law; clarifications from NCEQE for this review.

Scheme: ETF

Legend: red circles represent points where permeability is limited by barriers. The table synthesises the linkages and key points where barriers to progression currently exist (represented by the circles).

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes approaches in the QF's reference level descriptors, the occupational standards and in VET programmes are being developed and implemented. Providers are required by quality assurance criteria (authorisation and accreditation) to align their VET programmes both with labour market demand (showing evidence that courses have demand) and with the relevant occupational standards. Learning outcomes are described against six criteria: knowledge and understanding, applying knowledge, making judgments, communication skills, learning skills and values. The six criteria are identical for all cycles of the education system and should be the basis for defining learning outcomes in occupational standards, and differentiating levels of qualification.

NCEQE is responsible for updating the list of qualifications placed in the NQF, in consultation with sector committees, social partners and other stakeholders. A first revision of the list of qualifications was completed in 2012.

Occupational standards

From the adoption of the NQF (December 2010) to June 2012, Georgia adopted 247 occupational standards (OS) for qualifications according to the 5-level vocational qualifications sub-framework. Most of the OSs were developed in 2011. Distributed in nine areas, and structured according to a common outline, all occupational standards are published in the online Registry managed by the relevant specialised agency, the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement.

In the definition given by NCEQE, “Occupational Standards define levels of vocational education, minimum credit value and mandatory competences in terms of knowledge, skills and values for each level. It also states additional requirements based on specifications of the profession. Occupational Standards stand as the key source for creation of vocational educational programmes. Occupational Standards are developed based on the Vocational Qualification Framework (VQF) with participation of professional associations and other interested stakeholders and approved by the LEPL- National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE).” [http://eqe.ge/eng/education/professional_education/occupational_standards_list]

Some of the important critical remarks on the first generation occupational standards (developed in 2011) have been taken into account in the design of the newest, improved the formulation of learning outcomes and relevance of qualification levels. Contribution to these developments in 2012 was based on critical feedback from employers and VET providers, and involvement of international experts.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING.

The amended VET Law (2010) acknowledges the possibility of recognition of non-formal and informal vocational learning (Art.10).

The adopted legal basis (order of MES, February 2011) concerns the conditions and procedure of recognition of informal (non-formal) professional education, and is a short regulatory document specifying authorized bodies, required documents, conditions for submission, decision-making and specific features of recognition for level III of VET. In 2012 NCEQE proposed a complementary document containing more detailed recommendations for educational institutions on implementation of validation of informal education. In the context of this renewed reflection, NCEQE carried out discussion meetings with VET institutions on conceptual issues, such as definition of the learning outcomes in self-assessment reports, grading system, condition for partial recognition, possibility of automatic recognition, along with questions of institutional and organisational nature (NCEQE, 2012e).

In 2012 MES expressed interest in receiving international assistance in defining an operational policy and regulatory basis, enabling practical application of recognition of non-formal learning. But the policy concept and needs requires clarification. It should be clear for policy and regulatory bodies that introduction of procedures and tools for validation of non-formal learning cannot solve the problems of permeability existing currently in the formal education system.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The NQF is inspired by the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (LLL), and is seen as an instrument for European integration.

Georgia joined the Bologna Process in 2005 and has reached step three, meaning it has formally adopted a National Qualifications Framework for higher education and started implementing it. In Georgia, compliance with the NQF became one of the criteria for the accreditation of higher education programmes, which started in 2011.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The practical implementation of the NQF reveals a number of important issues that require more policy debate and technical analysis in the country; some key issues are:

- Relevance for VET curricula of learning outcomes defined in occupational standards: many of the current generation of 247 occupational standards developed during 2011 and 2012 have characteristic weaknesses as regards the formulation of occupational profiles and learning outcomes, which are

considered too generic in many cases. In certain cases, the formulated outcomes are considered non-commensurate to the level of qualification (for ex: leather processing). This is one of the reasons why VET providers find it difficult to use the occupational standards to guide design of programmes / curriculum. Ministry of Education and Science and NCEQE are aware of this issue and from late 2011 have been seeking to tackle these weaknesses, with the support of ETF, EU and other donors.

- The current concept of the OS mixes aspects of occupational and educational standards. This leads to confusing understanding of levels of qualification vs. level of training, amongst other problems.
- Levels of vocational qualifications: many occupational standards and respective qualifications have all five possible levels of vocational qualification, although in many occupations the lower levels (I and II) offer limited or no value for the labour market given employers' skills requirements. Moreover, for providers, the organisation of training - by so many levels - to reach a qualification of level III suggests several inefficiencies, notably in involving employers in practical training and in students' assessment (by levels). VET colleges report that many students drop out after completion of level I or II, which they consider sufficient to immediately obtain employment. It is important to review, together with relevant industry representatives, the occupational standards and redefine what should be the lower and necessary levels of qualification for the occupations. GlZ came to similar conclusions in a recent analysis of skills mismatch in the tourism sector in Adjara (October 2012).
- Permeability: in Georgia, the NQF is less than two years old and its implementation remains a compromise with existing legislation on access to key cycles (notably tertiary). The vocational and higher sub-frameworks (of the NQF) largely run in parallel. Both within the overall NQF and within the vocational sub-framework permeability is not optimal, and poses several concrete difficulties.

Despite the ambition of the NQF's authors to minimise dead-ends, and strengthen learning outcomes as cornerstone for qualifications, the legislation poses barriers to portability of credits accumulated in vocational education of VET level I-III (pre-tertiary level) to VET level IV (tertiary); similarly, progression from VET level V to first cycle higher education does not take into consideration the credits accumulated in VET levels IV and V. In line with the legislation, the determining hurdle to progress from level III to level IV is successful passing of secondary school leaving exams, and of the general skills test (part of Unified National Exams for higher education), conditions that represent an obstacle for many graduates from VET III, in particular those who entered with basic education. Similarly, the requirement that access to VET level IV be based on successful achievement of the previous qualification level (level III) (if the relevant occupational standard contains levels below IV), creates a difficulty for learners coming from secondary general education, as they are required to start from lower VET levels.

Although the legislation allows the acquisition of a qualification of level III via a process of recognition of prior or non-formal and informal, learning, the practical mechanisms for implementation are not yet in place. There is anecdotal evidence that the above barriers in progression discourage learners and may contribute to inefficiencies, such as dropouts from key levels; notably from level IV to V, since progression to first cycle higher education is linked with a new barrier. From a learning outcomes perspective, VET level V and short cycle higher education are identical and logically should be at the same NQF level. In fact, the reference learning outcomes laid out in the NQF legal act for level V are fully identical to the learning outcomes of short-cycle higher education, but permeability is difficult.

Incomplete and inconsistent statistical data on VET (enrolments, graduations, and drop-out with social and other needed breakdown) make it difficult to assess the extent of the dead-end problem for learners in reality. It is important to collect and analyse data on VET students' completion, horizontal and vertical transitions, performance and drop-outs - at key points of the vocational qualifications framework (level III, levels IV and V).

Trust: in this phase of the VET reforms, the new paradigm of learning outcomes laid down in the NQF is yet to be reinforced and quality-assured; and more dialogue and exchange between the segments of the NQF is to be promoted, before trust settles in.

Current important initiatives addressing some of the above issues include:

- Revision and improvement of occupational standards is underway; newly-designed occupational standards take into consideration lessons from recent practice, and benefit of international expertise.
- Permeability: concrete examples of good practice in combining vocational programmes with general education were identified and discussed at meetings of the Thematic Working Group “Quality Management in VET”, in quarter I, 2012. However, beyond the legal and procedural aspects of these cases of good practise, it would be useful to know more on the curricular and pedagogic solutions they have developed and tested. In 2012 a working group of national officials and experts started analysis of the way forward to eliminate dead-ends.
- Updating the list of qualifications inserted in the NQF depends on consultation with stakeholders, but questions remain about the methodology underlying the list of qualifications

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The population of Moldova is approximately 3.6 million, with a rural population rate of 58.3%, and urban 41.7%. The economic activity rate of the urban population was higher at 48.0% compared to the rural population activity rate of 38.0%.

2011 statistics show that 15-24-year-olds accounted for 17.8% of the country's total population. The number of people aged 15 and over having attained a tertiary level of education was around 15% of the total publication. 12.9% attained secondary vocational level of education, and 18.2% attained secondary professional level of education.

The employment rate was 39.4% in 2011, 0.9 percentage points up compared to previous year. The analysis of employment by economic sector revealed that 27.5% of the total number of the people employed were engaged in agriculture, 46% were engaged in the service sector, 18.7% engaged in industry and construction, while 27.5% were engaged in the agricultural sector.

Small and medium enterprises (SME) are the main job generators and drivers for the country's economic growth. The share of SMEs is 97.7% of the total number of businesses. SMEs' share of GDP is 28.3%. SME employment reached 58.8% of the total number of working people.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The main challenges that should be addressed by the NQF can be summarised as follows:

- education and training needs to better respond to current labour market demands, through the development of relevant outcomes-based qualifications. The present education system has no national standards which are quality-assured and meet the needs of the labour market.
- the VET governance structure is characterised by the concentration of policy processes and implementation functions within the Ministry of Education. Intermediary bodies have been created over the years, but have only recently been strengthened. Additional further capacity-building is needed in order to operate effectively. There is scope for greater involvement of the labour market and social actors in governance within clearly defined roles.
- migration is a major concern in the country and the lack of transparency and transferability of skills is one among other factors preventing migrants' access to employment that matches their skills.
- finally, the legal framework for VET in the Republic of Moldova lacks the lifelong learning perspective that would allow for progression and continuity, different entry points, non-formal and informal routes, easy access and diversification of learning styles and approaches. The new VET Strategy 2013-2020 however envisages the creation of the Moldovan NQF.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

In Moldova two different processes can be distinguished. While discussion on the HE dimension of the national framework started in 2006, within the context of Moldova's Bologna commitments, the conceptualisation of a comprehensive NQF started relatively recently. The present developments towards an overarching NQF are very much driven by the wish to align to the EQF.

Between April 2008 and September 2009 a subdivision within the Ministry of Education worked on the National Qualifications Framework, concentrating principally on developing policies and strategies

for quality assurance in vocational and higher education. The establishment of the subdivision was strongly linked to the introduction of the Bologna process and primarily focussed on the higher education dimension of the NQF.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

In recent years various initiatives have been taken for updating occupational standards, educational standards and curricula with the support of the social partners. These have often been supported by donor organisations and have not always been linked to the national or ministerial-led development and implementation plan for the NQF. However, the approved VET Strategy 2013-2020 sets the NQF development among its targets.

In 2011 a procedure and format for the development of occupational standards was established with strong involvement of the social partners, and was approved by the Prime Minister. These standards will form the basis for the national qualifications.

During 2007-2008 the universities worked on rewriting their curricula in terms of learning outcomes, but the engagement of the economic sectors in this process was limited. In 2009, the NQF subdivision in the Ministry of Education developed a draft Concept for Development and Implementation of an NQF in Moldova, but this was not discussed for some time due to the delay in the approval of the new Educational Code. The document "An NQF for the Republic of Moldova in a lifelong learning perspective" was eventually approved and became the basis for developing methodological formats and procedures for implementing the NQF in higher education.

In 2012, the Ministry of Education established the National Working Group to develop the VET dimension of the NQF. The Working Group covers various occupational fields. During 2012 the working group met several times to analyse experience from EU countries, discuss terminology and definitions, and take stock of progress made. In 2013 the group started the elaboration of a concept specifically for the VET sector within the NQF.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

Eight levels have been identified for an overarching NQF. VET is sub-divided into secondary and post-secondary and the planned NQF levels will take this into account. Work on descriptors has yet to start, however the EQF descriptors will be used as a blueprint. For higher education, a 2-cycle system (equivalent to Bachelors and Masters courses) has been implemented and a third level covers the PhD. ECTS is being introduced via legislative amendments. Around 143 pilots of HE programmes are being developed and implemented by 93 specialised commissions for new learning outcomes based-education programmes. These commissions also involve to a certain extent the social partners. A Consultation Council has been established which is overseeing the quality of these pilots.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The limitations of the VET system are reflected in the labour market. Most of the professions coded in the national classifier equate to qualifications awarded on graduating from upper-secondary VET and to those awarded by the postsecondary colleges. There is little room for career progress from vocational and technical jobs, as jobs above the equivalent of EQF level 5 in the public and private sectors are reserved for managers and decision-makers who tend to be university graduates in fields not offered by post-secondary colleges.

VET has also lost out due to the effective absence of horizontal pathways between vocational and general secondary education and vertical openings towards higher education. The legitimate aim of

increasing the quality of secondary VET has led to the creation of many different types of school (such as business schools, vocational schools, vocational lyceums and vocational high schools) but has also raised uncertainty in the VET internal structure. Post-secondary VET colleges have also been disadvantaged following changes driven by the Bologna Process and the adaptation to ISCED and MoldCED.

Within the Labour Market Development component of the Moldovan Mobility Partnership programme a Concept was developed in 2011 for establishing a system and services for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in order to increase the transparency of skills of adult workers. The proposal is based on the use of occupational standards as a reference instrument for assessment and recognition of skills. The approval of a national VNFIL approach, aligned with the NQF development, is now backed by the VET Strategy 2012-2020. Moreover, the new Law on Professions (approval expected in 2013) will provide the legal basis for VNFIL.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

A strong motivation of the Republic of Moldova to develop an NQF is the link to the EQF and alignment with the Bologna process, in order to use the tools for quality standards of the EU and to improve mobility and skills validation of the many migrants of Moldova.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

As can be seen from the description of the process on designing the qualifications framework for higher education, this has already been a lengthy process where many actors are involved.

The current work led by the Ministry of Education will combine the Higher Education and VET framework into a comprehensive NQF. The EC has approved support to NQF development, quality assurance and management and improved VET governance, in the form of a technical assistance project that will start in the final quarter of 2013.

The next steps include the following:

- finalising the Concept of NQF for the VET sector on the part of the working group (second quarter of 2013).
- development of the Methodological framework for qualifications review and development: Methodology on Elaboration and Review of the Professional qualifications, Guide to Qualifications' Elaboration and Review According to the Methodology (last quarter of 2013).
- establishment of one new Sector Committee in 2013 and seven new ones in 2014 (four had already been established by early 2013).
- establishment of the Quality Agency, envisaged by the VET Strategy 2013-2020 (expected in 2014).

RUSSIA

Russia is struggling with an ageing and numerically declining population. The country has 143 million inhabitants, compared to 148 million in 1993. Its economically active population is 75 million. According to the Federal Migration Service, the country will lose 10 million people from the workforce by 2025 as a result of existing demographics. This decrease can be offset only through inward migration, which is already a vast phenomenon. Many of the migrants arrive from different parts of the former Soviet Union.

The unemployment rate in Russia was 7% in 2010. The rate of youth unemployment was much higher, as is the case in EU member states. Young graduates have problems finding jobs; the unemployment rate for 20–24-year-olds was 15%, and more than 32% for those under 20 years old.

In 2010, there were 2,027 initial vocational education and training institutions (IVET) with some 652,000 students and 153,000 staff. The number of public secondary vocational education and training institutions (SVET) was 2,665, with 1,984,000 students and 151,000 staff. Russia also has 260 private SVET institutions. At the same time, there were almost 6.5 million students in more than 1,000 universities and higher education institutions.

Between 2000 and 2010 the number of VET students decreased (by 41.4% in IVET and by 10% in SVET). As a result of the negative demographic trends, the coverage ratio of IVET has dropped by only 0.8% and in SVET it has increased by 4.5%. The number of higher education students has increased by almost 2 million during the decade, an illustration of the general trend in the education system. VET in Russia suffers from a lack of prestige and attractiveness, and this is a key problem. Most young people and their families in Russia prefer higher education to VET, which is often seen as the last resort.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The qualifications system in Russia, an inheritance of the planned economy and industrial society of the past, exists mainly as a classification system, with a formalised and inflexible structure. In the Soviet Union there was a direct link between the education system and enterprises. Many higher education institutions and in particular the specialised “Institutes” produced engineers for the big state companies, the technicums trained technicians and vocational schools (PTUs) skilled workers. PTUs were often linked to a specific company, the base enterprise that provided opportunities for practical training and future employment. The State, as the main employer and the manager of the education system, assigned graduates to jobs.

Occupations and qualifications for different levels of jobs were centrally regulated through tariff qualification guidelines, including a centrally-established list of occupations and a classifier of specialisms. These tools determined both the conditions for education and employment. For each occupation qualifications characteristics were defined, which described a mixture of desired behaviours, core tasks and to some extent skills and competences, but not learning outcomes in a modern sense. The term qualification was used to indicate competence rather than certificate. Different levels were defined for qualified workers, qualified technicians and engineers. The terms for assigning certain qualifications and their hierarchical structure were strictly defined and associated with the levels of formal education, and are not based on learning outcomes.

The outdated qualifications classification has failed to meet the requirements of the rapidly changed Russian economy. Furthermore, requirements for qualification levels have become obsolete. Professional characteristics and outdated qualification profiles are still the basis of most programmes provided by

vocational schools. Narrow specialisations are one of the problems in Russian VET. New jobs in the labour market requiring different or higher qualifications in new market segments (such as finance) often remain vacant because of the lack of school graduates who have the required knowledge and skills. The rigid dependence on awarding diplomas and qualifications on the basis of duration and type of programmes in formal education is paralleled by the absence of mechanisms and instruments to recognise prior learning from non-formal and informal settings.

Such mechanisms are now emerging, first of all at the company level. Large companies and employers organisations in Russia have been driving new approaches to the use of qualifications, based on occupational standards. This resulted in the establishment of NARK in 2007, the National Qualifications Development Agency (NARK) of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, which so far has developed only occupational standards. NARK is not in charge of the NQF.

On the other hand, a process of aligning Russian education and training mechanisms with European standards is underway, which aims at providing the workforce with broader mobility opportunities in the conditions of integrated national economies. Russia takes part in the Bologna Process and is taking steps to improve the quality of education at the institutional, national and European levels and to apply unified criteria and methodologies for developing, managing and assuring quality and relevance of higher education. At the same time Russia is interested in developing a common Eurasian space of education with other CIS countries.

The mismatch between education and labour market is visible also in higher education. In Russia 30% of university graduates do not have a full-time job. Highly-trained professionals are often overqualified for the jobs they have. Youth unemployment in general is a problem in Russia, as in the EU member states. In 2010 the unemployment rate for 20–24-year-olds was 15%, and more than 32% for those under 20 in 2010.

There are several parallel initiatives to develop an NQF in Russian Federation. There has been lack of coordination between federal, regional and project-based initiatives. In some cases private companies have developed occupational standards for themselves.

Already in February 2008 the Federal Institute for Education Development (FIRO) prepared the first draft NQF, covering 9 levels. The proposal was based on the eight levels of the EQF plus a level for postdoctoral qualification. The draft has not been adopted yet as it requires serious reworking given that it represents a classification of levels of education, but not qualifications based on learning outcomes as defined by employers.

Parallel work was initiated by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, which was in charge of the labour market and employment dossiers until 2012 (as of 2012 the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has been re-established and has taken over the dossiers). They developed 7 sectoral qualifications frameworks within the proposed 9-level NQF. The Ministry published in December 2011 temporary methodological recommendations for the elaboration of sectoral qualifications frameworks on the basis of the NQF of the Russian Federation.

Moscow City is considering preparation of a regional qualifications framework for the most important economic hub of the country. Several sectoral or regional qualifications frameworks are under development in the framework of the Tempus programme. For example Chelyabinsk region has developed its own outcomes-based qualifications framework, through the participation and direct involvement of 33 regional companies.

In order to bring coherence to the multiplication of NQF projects the Agency for Strategic Initiatives has developed a road map for the creation of a national system of competences and qualifications. The Agency for Strategic initiatives is a high level private-public partnership including leading business representatives and senior members of government. The objective of the roadmap is to set up an interface between citizens, business structures and public bodies responsible for education, to support the development and assessment of competences for a more competitive and productive workforce.

Occupational standards for 800 occupations are considered necessary as the basis for training, assessment and certification. 30% of all people working should be qualified for what they do (at present fewer than 10% are). Russia would need 25 million highly productive professionals to fill new jobs by 2020, including via carefully-controlled migration. The holistic road map includes career guidance to help citizens choose the needed specialisations, a large standards development programme, training, testing and research. The coming two years are intended to be a preparatory and initial phase of the work to create the infrastructure, so that implementation can start in 2015.

The idea of learning outcomes has been accepted widely in Russia. In 2007 work started on developing new standards for primary and secondary education. As of September 1, 2011, teachers have been instructing all first-grade children under the new standards. New educational standards in higher education have been in use since September 2010.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The National Qualifications Framework of the Russian Federation (NQF) is a tool for bringing the world of work and education closer together. The goal of developing the NQF is formulated in key national policy documents. It is a summary of the qualifications levels recognized at the federal level, and the main pathways for achieving them in Russia.

Stakeholders of the Russian NQF are federal and regional authorities, businesses and individuals. The sectoral QFs within the NQF and preparation of standards are organised on the base of professional communities.

The NQF is intended to:

- contribute to a common development strategy for the labour market and the education system, including the planning of different education pathways leading to obtaining specific skills (a qualification), increased skills levels and enhanced career development
- describe unified requirements for qualifications of employees and graduates
- develop procedures for assessing learning outcomes and for the certification of qualifications
- create sectoral qualifications systems.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The initiative for an NQF came from Russian employers. The employers' main purpose was to improve the quality and relevance of qualifications.

In 2007, the Russian Federal Ministry of Education and Science and the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs agreed on an Interaction Agreement (25 June 2007). According to this agreement, the Ministry of Education and Science would be responsible for organising the development of the NQF and the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs would take the lead in the development of occupational standards and the corresponding systems of sectoral (industrial) occupational qualifications, involving employers' associations from different sectors (industries) and professional communities.

At the same time, a National Qualifications Development Agency (NARK) was established in July 2007 on the initiative of the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. The Agency is in charge of coordinating the development of occupational standards and sector qualification frameworks, and provides methodological support and guidelines for the interested sectors of the economy to carry out these tasks. The Agency is also in charge of approving occupational standards and maintaining the Occupational Standards Register.

To date, approximately 70 professional standards have been developed and approved by Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs committees in information technology, aircraft engineering, hospitality and business administration. These professional standards were utilised for the development of the new Federal State Educational Standards. Another 100 professional standards are currently under development, covering sectors such as oil extraction, gas supply, nanotechnology industry, construction, machinery manufacturing, service market, nursing care and human resources management.

The Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs and the Ministry of Education and Science are also working together on an independent assessment system for VET quality, as well as effective methods for the assessment and certification of VET qualifications of graduates and other citizen groups that undertake various forms of vocational training.

Russia is developing an independent system of certification of graduates. The idea is to create an external independent quality assurance of vocational and higher education. This is possible only on the basis of graduates' certification results with the participation of regional employers.

This work is regulated by core documents jointly approved by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, the certification system is being developed in the absence of the relevant and coherent occupational standards, which may hinder its implementation.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

In February 2008 the Federal Institute for Education Development prepared a draft NQF covering 9 levels, based on the 8 levels of the EQF plus a level for postdoctoral qualification. The draft has not been adopted yet as it requires serious reworking given that it represents a classification of levels of education but not qualifications based on learning outcomes as defined by employers.

Similar to the European Qualifications Framework, the draft NQF includes descriptors of overall competences, skills and knowledge that are detailed through respective indicators of professional activity: the breadth of authority and responsibility, the complexity of the activity and knowledge-intensiveness of the activity.

In shifting to a learning outcomes approach Russia is facing success but also several challenges. One of these is the language issue. While learning outcomes approaches focus on what the individual needs to learn, rather than where that learning takes place or what processes are involved, this concept is difficult to translate into Russian whose relevant verbs generally imply learning is transmitted from teacher to learner.

Hence there are problems with perception of the concept of learning outcomes. The current phrase used is education outcomes, among the consequences of which is a reluctance to recognize the idea of informal and non-formal learning as a legitimate route to a qualification. This unwillingness extends to the new draft law on education, which does not provide for validation of non-formal or informal learning. However, the concept of learning outcomes is gradually gaining acceptance via the occupational standards that are largely based on the functional analysis method and contain descriptions of learning outcomes.

New VET and Higher education standards have been approved, which use the concept of competences (generic and subject-specific), but still speak about outcomes of education that are contingent on the completion of a certain curriculum.

The new VET standards are modular and modules are interdisciplinary. They recognize the need for extended work-based practical training and, in contrast to previous practice, under the old VET standards, they provide for learning to take place with the enterprise when the facilities or equipment of the VET school/college precludes the acquisition of certain competences (earlier the practical training was more rigidly regulated). They imply that: assessment should become more transparent and criteria-based and involve demonstration of acquired competences (learning outcomes); theory should integrate with practice; active, student-centred learning should replace the old paradigm; individual objective-setting should be promoted.

The new standards came into force only in September 2011; hence it is too early in the day to say how they will work. There are concerns that VET schools and colleges have not been prepared for the transition and they will stick to the old teacher-centred paradigm, rather than adapt to the new culture of learning; teacher upskilling is therefore needed.

VET schools which have participated in international projects are much better placed for the introduction of the new standards and learner-centred approaches as they have already been practicing them for a few years.

There is a long way to go to introduce in real terms the learning outcomes approach in Russia. But there is no way back, as industry is becoming more and more active in stating its requirements in terms of learning outcomes and in creating competition for the state system in terms of setting up corporate universities and other training schemes that are based on learning outcomes, workplace learning and use of active methods, including individualized programmes.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

NQF qualification levels	Ways of achieving the relevant qualification level
Level 1	Work experience, and/or short-term on-the-job training and/or a seminar with a minimum of elementary general qualification in place.
Level 2	Work experience, and/or vocational training (short-term courses in an educational institute or company) with a minimum of basic general qualification in place
Level 3	Work experience, and/or vocational training (courses of up to 1 year duration in a VET institute or company) with a minimum of secondary (full) general qualification or elementary VET qualification, without receiving the secondary (full) general education as part of the basic general.
Level 4	Elementary VET combined with or part of secondary (full) general education and work experience, or vocational training (courses of up to 1 year duration in a VET institute and further VET programmes) and work experience.
Level 5	Secondary VET combined with or part of secondary (full) general education or elementary VET and work experience.
Level 6	Bachelor degree (as a general rule). In some cases secondary VET combined with or part of secondary (full) general education and work experience.
Level 7	Master's degree (following completion of bachelor degree) and work experience. Specialisation (following completion of secondary (full) general education) and work experience or bachelor degree and further VET (MBA programmes etc) and work experience.
Level 8	Post-graduate education (programmes leading to a PhD) and/or work experience.
Level 9	Post-graduate education (including a PhD and work experience or the degree of Doctor of Sciences and work experience) and/or further VET or work experience and public and professional recognition at the industry level, across industries or at the international level.

In Russia it has long been possible to obtain diplomas out-of-school, but this is still closely linked to the curriculum and concluded with a regular exam. There is a widespread interest in the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Russia, which is particularly discussed by the university sector, because of the Bologna process and by the HR sector which has already started to develop systems for competence assessment for companies. Given the size of some Russian companies these can be quite sophisticated systems. NQF qualification levels Ways of achieving the relevant qualification level

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS SECTION HERE

Russia joined the Bologna process in 2003 and reforms in the Higher Education sector have been progressing since then. The pace of change is inevitably slow given the huge scale of the higher education sector in Russia (more than 1000 institutes), and the different regional interests (institutes from central and eastern regions tend to consider cooperation in Asia as the priority).

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

It is expected that with the new roadmap developed by the Agency for Strategic Initiatives formal steps to establish the NQF will soon be realized, as there now seems to be a coordinated approach to the framework. The draft NQF document currently has the status of a recommendations document approved by experts from the Federal Institute for Education Development (a branch of the Ministry of Education and Science) and the National Agency for Qualifications Development (attached to the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs).[1] In Russia, it is rather unusual to use documents which have not undergone an official procedure of approval. It should be mentioned that, in recent years, the government has implemented several measures to ensure that employer associations have more influence on companies and enterprises in their activities and specifically in their involvement in VET development. The present economic crisis offers companies an opportunity to anticipate economic growth and to invest in the education and training of personnel. The construction industry is especially affected by economic linkages. The NQF lays the basis for strengthened and closer cooperation between enterprises and the education sector in terms of further initiatives in VET policy development. The NQF is instrumental in developing a more qualified workforce.

UKRAINE

Ukraine has a population of 45.6 million. It includes significant numbers of Russians, plus many other defined nationalities. The population is both declining numerically - it has fallen from 52 million in 1991 at independence - and ageing rapidly - putting further pressure on the working-age element of the country. There is also significant premature death. Further, there is a net outflow of migrants to other ex-Soviet states.

Key economic sectors include processing industries, metallurgy, chemical industries, transport, agriculture, retail, telecommunications, construction and tourism.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

On 23 November 2011 the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted resolution N°1341 on the approval of the national qualifications framework. This meant that Ukraine became the third country in the European Neighbourhood (after Tunisia and Georgia) to legislate an NQF.

The resolution was the result of constructive cooperation between stakeholders under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, Science, Youth and Sports. But although a 10-level framework has been adopted, there are still many open questions on how it will be applied and what challenges the NQF should address. The choice is between an NQF as an additional classifier of qualifications, next to existing classification systems for occupations, specialisations, programmes and accredited providers, for which separate level systems exist, or an NQF that becomes a real tool for qualifications reforms, improving links between the labour market and the education and training systems and changing and where necessary replacing the classification systems that are already in place. For that reason the members of the NQF working group in Ukraine have been developing an NQF concept since the law on the NQF was approved. This concept paper is currently in an advanced draft stage and also includes an action plan. 2012 also saw progress in the development of new occupational standards and education standards which are based on learning outcomes and pay specific attention to the assessment of competences. These developments are starting to influence both the assessment in formal learning as well as the future assessment of informal and non-formal learning, for which another concept paper is in preparation.

Ukraine faces major socio-economic challenges and changes, not least the demographic challenges mentioned above. Big enterprises play an important role in the economy and in employment, next to a large number of small and medium enterprises. There are significant economic, social and cultural regional differences in the country, which still has a very sizeable industrial and mining sector. According to the Labour Force Survey the increasing demand for qualified labour is one of the main challenges which may negatively affect the economic outlook in the long-term. It is estimated that only 40% of the demand for highly-qualified professionals will be satisfied by 2015.

Participation in initial VET has dropped to a record low. The enrolment rate in VET is only 6.7%. VET institutions in Ukraine have acquired a reputation for enrolling less motivated students with lower educational attainments. Ukrainian families and young people aspire to higher education, which has made students opt for academic routes in upper secondary school and to continue on to studies in universities and higher education institutions. Moreover, the demographic dip and expansion of fee-based higher education programmes have enabled students to increasingly enrol in tertiary education. Even if some structural changes in the VET system were introduced in the late nineties, employers still complain about an outdated and largely obsolete VET system. Uncontrolled enrolment in HE has resulted in an enormous amount of lawyers, finance specialists and economists with higher education diplomas with limited

employment prospects relative to their qualifications. At the same time, employers cannot find enough specialists with intermediate professional skills.

The VET system in Ukraine does not facilitate lifelong learning. Besides its low social standing, one of the main reasons for the unpopularity of VET in Ukraine is the lack of pathways within the education and training system, which results in limited opportunities to move on to further education. According to employers, the education system of Ukraine has maintained its Soviet characteristics without any significant change. Further progress of vocational education and training in Ukraine will be seriously constrained without essential changes in policy, governance and system.

The NQF should be a tool for the reform of existing qualifications. Most vocational qualifications lack transparency and relevance. They are not yet based on occupational standards and with a few exceptions there are no learning outcomes identified to provide a common measure for learners to study, for providers to teach, and for employers to assess employability. Positive exceptions are the standards for welders, for care occupations and for assistant steelmaker converter. Ukrainian VET qualifications are not well recognised internationally. Although there is now an adopted NQF, there is no shared understanding yet of different levels. The vast majority of qualifications are still based on knowledge obtained and insufficient attention is paid to learning outcomes, employability and labour market needs. Qualifications do not take account of the vast amount of learning that takes place in people's communities and at work.

There are pilot projects to experiment with new approaches, but in order to understand the needs for qualifications there needs to be agreement on what is understood under the occupational profiles, the qualification profiles and specialisations. There are tensions between existing labour market mechanisms and classifiers of occupations and specialities and the realities in enterprises. The current terminology appears to be confusing. The new classifier of professions has as many as 8,725 entries divided into in professii, zanjattija and dolzhnosti, leaving still approximately 1,000 occupations. Professional characteristics have been identified for the occupations that are out of date. These numbers need to be reviewed in the light of a more manageable system which can be kept up to date with changing needs. The relationship between the classifiers and the newly adopted NQF needs clarification.

The NQF Resolution states that an interdepartmental working group on the development and implementation of the NQF shall prepare draft regulations for the implementation of the NQF. It is not yet clear to what extent the working group is ready and capable to challenge existing legislation.

A report prepared by ETF on the status quo of the qualifications systems in Ukraine has shown that the implications of the NQF on the classifier of professions need to be further analysed, taking into account the distinctive functions of the NQF and the classifier, but also the links that should exist between both. The NQF cannot just be an additional classification instrument. The implications of the NQF for the labour market need to be understood as well as its implications internationally. These messages have been taken on board in the draft NQF concept.

The NQF is also a tool to link the qualifications system to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area. As such it is closely linked with the Bologna Process and the reform of higher education in Ukraine. Ukraine has a very large higher education sector, in fact 80% of secondary school graduates are admitted to higher education. There are different types of institutions, including post-secondary education institutions offering programmes for so-called junior specialist degrees. Apart from the Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes, Ukraine has maintained its own higher education degrees for junior specialist (short cycle), specialist (at an equivalent level to the master programmes) and Doctor of Sciences degree (a requirement for full professorship). The first two are fairly narrow programmes of a vocational nature.

Ukraine has initiated legislation for higher education reform and is aiming at a major merger operation of the more than 900 higher education institutions (including technicums and colleges). The proposed law for higher education is provoking widespread criticism within the country. Quality assurance, autonomy and higher education qualifications are the centre of attention. One of the major stumbling-blocks seems to be the grip of the government on the higher education sector, the lack of autonomy of universities, and the absence of an independent Quality Assurance Agency. In accordance with the Bologna process, state certification of qualifications granted by higher education institutions should be removed in respect of those institutions which have been granted autonomy in this field. There is a need to develop subject benchmarks or other benchmark statements to ensure the comparability and relevance of higher education qualifications. The pilot experience with sectoral qualifications for HE in the ICT sector provides a possible example.

The adopted NQF shows that there are different objectives of the NQF for different stakeholders. There is a need to follow up the NQF proposal with additional legislation and strategy about how it should be implemented. A qualifications authority or agency having a sufficient technical competence to quality assure and steer the development processes and qualifications at the national level is a critical step for Ukraine to consider.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The NQF is intended to support reform of qualifications, including making them more relevant to labour market needs; to clarify the standing and relationship of qualifications compared to each other. It is also intended to link Ukraine's education and training system to the QF for the European Higher Education Area, i.e. the Bologna Framework.

The National Qualifications Framework is intended for use by executive agencies and organizations which implement public policy in the sphere of education, employment and social-labour relations, educational institutions, employers and other entities and individuals to develop, identify, correlate, recognize, plan and develop qualifications.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The Confederation of Employers has been actively promoting the idea of an NQF for several years and has looked for alliances with other stakeholders to develop legislation. However, legislative proposals developed on the initiative of employers have been rejected three times. The latest attempt is a draft law on a professional qualifications system (№ 9625) which addresses the need for qualifications for people who are already proficient in their field, rather than for labour market entrants. With the support of the Ministry of Education, this proposal has now passed first reading in the parliament, in spite of objections from various other ministries. The draft law empowers social partners to play a clearer role in the implementation of sectoral qualifications through the establishment of sectoral councils that could receive budget support and should be in charge of developing occupational standards. Earlier versions of the law included a qualification agency/authority but the body has been removed due to strong objections from some government agencies.

The decisive breakthrough for establishing the NQF was the fact that the government took the initiative through the Ministry of Education. An NQF Commission was established in December 2010, consisting of high level officials from different ministries and the social partners. A more operational working group developed technical proposals. This group initially comprised officials of the Ministry of Education, the National Academy of Pedagogical Science and other representatives from the education sector but was extended to involve employers in the spring of 2011. The ETF and the Council of Europe have jointly provided technical expertise to the national working group through a series of targeted seminars in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. These seminars were attended by a large group of representatives from education, the labour market and other stakeholders such as student associations.

While the NQF has been legislated, other laws which will affect its implementation are yet to be adopted or are under preparation. One important law adopted in January 2012 was the Law on Professional Development of Employees (Law № 4312), which stipulates that the State Employment Service will establish recognition centres for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Two other key laws are a new law on vocational education, which is still in an early phase of development, and a proposal for a law on higher education that is still being actively debated. Higher education institutions are classified in different groups in accordance with their different missions, with some of them only delivering post-secondary VET programmes or short-cycle degrees. Autonomy is a hot issue for HE. Currently, the Ministry of Education still has considerable leverage over HE institutions through state standards, but in the future higher education qualifications should be developed, delivered and awarded by higher education institutions themselves. In line with the Bologna process, higher education qualifications are institutional rather than national. Quality assurance principles are clearly defined by the European Standards and Guidelines, with the higher education institutions the prime actors for quality assurance and internal validation. It is therefore important to support the capacities of higher education institutions to develop relevant qualifications.

Employability is also a controversial area for higher education qualifications. From a European perspective subject area benchmarks are seen as useful instruments to guide the qualifications development processes in the higher education institutions, but there is also an on-going discussion in Ukraine on the use of occupational standards. Sector standards for HE have been prepared for the ICT sector. The future of the junior specialist and specialist degrees, which are specific to Ukraine, are also discussed. The Ukrainian view on the qualifications in the NQF is that all qualifications have both educational and professional purposes. However, in the lower level qualifications the educational purposes are predominant, while the higher level qualifications tend to be developed more and more towards professional purposes. The new law on professional development of employees (January 2012) aims to regulate continuing training for professional purposes. Although the law states that certification should be based on (existing) educational standards, the type of certification is still to be clarified further. The current education legislation particularly concentrates mainly on post-graduate level.

The institutional set-up for the new NQF is not complete yet. There is a proposal for sectoral councils but public funding seems to be a major stumbling block so far. In 2012 the first sectoral committee was, however, established. The role of universities in developing qualifications for HE based on subject area benchmarks is still to be clarified. The Scientific Research Institute of Labour under the Ministry of Social Policy in Lugansk has been leading the revision of the classifier of occupations which has an important function in the regulation of the labour market, including salaries and pensions. Following a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education, the Confederation of Employers and the System Capital Management Company, the Institute is coordinating pilot work on occupational standards which could possibly replace the outdated professional characteristics. The Ministry of Education is the leading political body for implementation, but the principles for the coordination are not yet determined, in spite of a functioning multi-stakeholder partnership around the NQF commission, and the work on qualifications. Implementation capacities in the Ministry of Education are very limited and the developments are expected to reach a stage soon where pilot initiatives and working groups may need to be carefully analysed and replaced by more permanent solutions and structures with professional staff to ensure system-wide application.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The 10-level framework presented by the Ministry of Education is seen as a framework for recognising LLL from the level of pre-school education up to Doctor of Sciences. Levels 0 and 9 have been preserved in spite of critical comments of the CoE and ETF. The NQF is starting more from an educational than an employment orientation, although the latter has been strengthened since the employers joined

the working group on the NQF in March 2011. The inclusion of Level 0 and Level 9 seem to be more ideological than practical. Level 9 is seen as essential for enhancing the scientific and research leadership in the country, building on a strong academic tradition that goes back to the Soviet period, and is seen as important to innovations and scientific discoveries. Level 0 is the first stage in the LLL system and should ensure basic values on which the education system is built. The descriptors for Knowledge, Skills, Communication and Authority & Responsibility are complemented by integrating professional competences, bringing the essence of the different categories together. Among the other essential social dimensions of the NQF are the need to enhance democratisation and social partnership in education.

Learning outcomes have been introduced on a pilot basis through occupational standards, and education standards for vocational and higher education. In higher education the sector standards for ICT have already been mentioned. ETF has supported the pilot development of occupational standards for the catering sector in cooperation with the Confederation of Employers and the Kozyrnaja karta catering group, using recent Russian experiences. Further work on occupational standards has now started with the cooperation between the Ministry of Education, the Confederation of Employers, the Research Institute of the Ministry of Social Protection in Lugansk and the Systems Capital Management Company. Moreover the Ministry of Education has also supported the development of a new generation of vocational education standards.

Within the vocational education sector “state educational standards of the new generation” are being developed including 28 state standards of the new generation by occupation that are approved; 13 broad-based occupations, covering more than one occupation for which draft standards exist; modular programmes for 22 occupations in the service sphere. 54 new standards are planned for 2012/2013. It is however, not clear how the new occupational standards will be linked to these new generation qualifications, for which several approaches seem to exist. There is clearly a need for consolidation and a plan to rationalise existing qualifications starting from those most in demand.

The State Employment Service has been working for several years with modular training programmes for job-seekers, using and adapting the ILO Modules of Employable Skills methodology. After assessment successful candidates receive a certificate of competence at the end of these courses. The status of these certificates of competence within the new NQF is not yet clear, but it seems logical that this type of qualifications can have an important function for recognising in-company training, validation of non-formal and informal learning and the training of job seekers. Linking occupational standards and the modular programmes developed by the State Employment Service seems feasible as the modules are starting from units of competence. ILO is starting work with the State Employment Service to support this. There is a lack of small, unit-based qualifications which could facilitate the recognition of prior learning.

One of the tasks ahead will be to establish an on-line web portal as a tool to inform learners and providers as well as employers about the framework and the qualifications that are part of it. There is a need to start to populate the NQF with existing qualifications and accredit them. This means that existing qualifications are benchmarked against level descriptors based on their learning outcomes in order to place them in the NQF.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The law on professional development of employees (Law 4312) adopted in January 2012 foresees the establishment of recognition centres by the State Employment Service. The articles are relatively brief and state that Recognition Centres for informal learning are to be established by the State Employment Service to confirm the informally obtained learning outcomes of employees. In order to verify the employee's professional qualification, the recognition centres should involve educational institutions of the State Employment Service and other vocational and technical educational institutions, enterprises,

organisations, institutions licensed to carry out educational activities for certain professions. The certificate to be awarded could be a certificate for specific professional skills or for improvement. The procedure for evaluation is determined by the central executive authority in the sphere of social policy in consultation with the central executive authority in the sphere of education, youth and sports.

These articles are now being analysed and operationalized. It will be important to establish which standards can actually be used for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, what procedures will be used, how will competent assessors be identified and trained, what are the competent bodies that can issue a certificate, what will be the link between assessment and possible further training for candidates who are not yet fully competent, how will candidates be informed about the possibility of validation of non-formal and informal learning, how will access be ensured, and how will they be prepared. The role of the State Employment Service and the recognition centres will need to be clarified. Given the current task of the State Employment Service it seems that the tasks are about organising the process, involving existing competent bodies. The absence of experience and appropriate standards are expected to delay the implementation, but a first step is now being made to introduce the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In terms of progression between levels of the NQF, there is a need for further analysis of existing pathways in order to open up the system. The current qualifications are mainly aimed at young people and partial recognition, and transfer is not facilitated. Access to qualifications is still very much determined by formal entry qualifications.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

One of the aims of the NQF is to connect Ukrainian qualifications internationally through the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna Framework) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF). This means that Ukraine will have to start preparing for the Bologna self-certification and subsequently EQF referencing. The criteria for both processes are similar and the preparations for the self-certification process will inform the referencing process at a later stage. In order to identify the actions which are necessary to meet the requirements for self-certification, a first step can be made through a critical self-assessment against the criteria.

In Ukraine the use of qualifications on the labour market and in the education system is more strictly regulated than in the European Union. Referencing to the transnational frameworks will not lead to automatic recognition of Ukrainian qualifications abroad. Ukraine is already a member of the ENIC/NARIC network for academic recognition and it is important to involve the recognition colleagues in the NQF developments to ensure that the NQF will become a structurally-used tool used for recognition.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

This country chapter clearly shows that there has been a lot of progress in the Ukraine during the last two years, starting with new legislation in 2011. Apart from the NQF resolution, the active involvement and constructive cooperation between different institutions and stakeholders is the main achievement so far. A platform has been established from which further work can progress.

The NQF developments have come into a new phase where the NQF will have to be operationalized. Beyond legislation it is important that more work takes place on the reform of qualifications, the number of pilot actions increase and that pilots are consolidated into mainstream developments. Moreover, a new situation is being created by the existence of the NQF, which requires clarification. The national working group has prepared an action plan for the implementation of the NQF and the plan has been approved by a joint decree of the Ministry of Social Policy and Ministry of Education. An NQF concept note is being developed that should give a more strategic direction to further work, including clarifying which qualifications will be part of the NQF and how they will be quality-assured.

Both the EU-ILO project on migration and skills and the EU-financed Twinning project on TVET are expected to bring additional support for the implementation process, while the ETF and the Council of Europe are continuing their expert support.

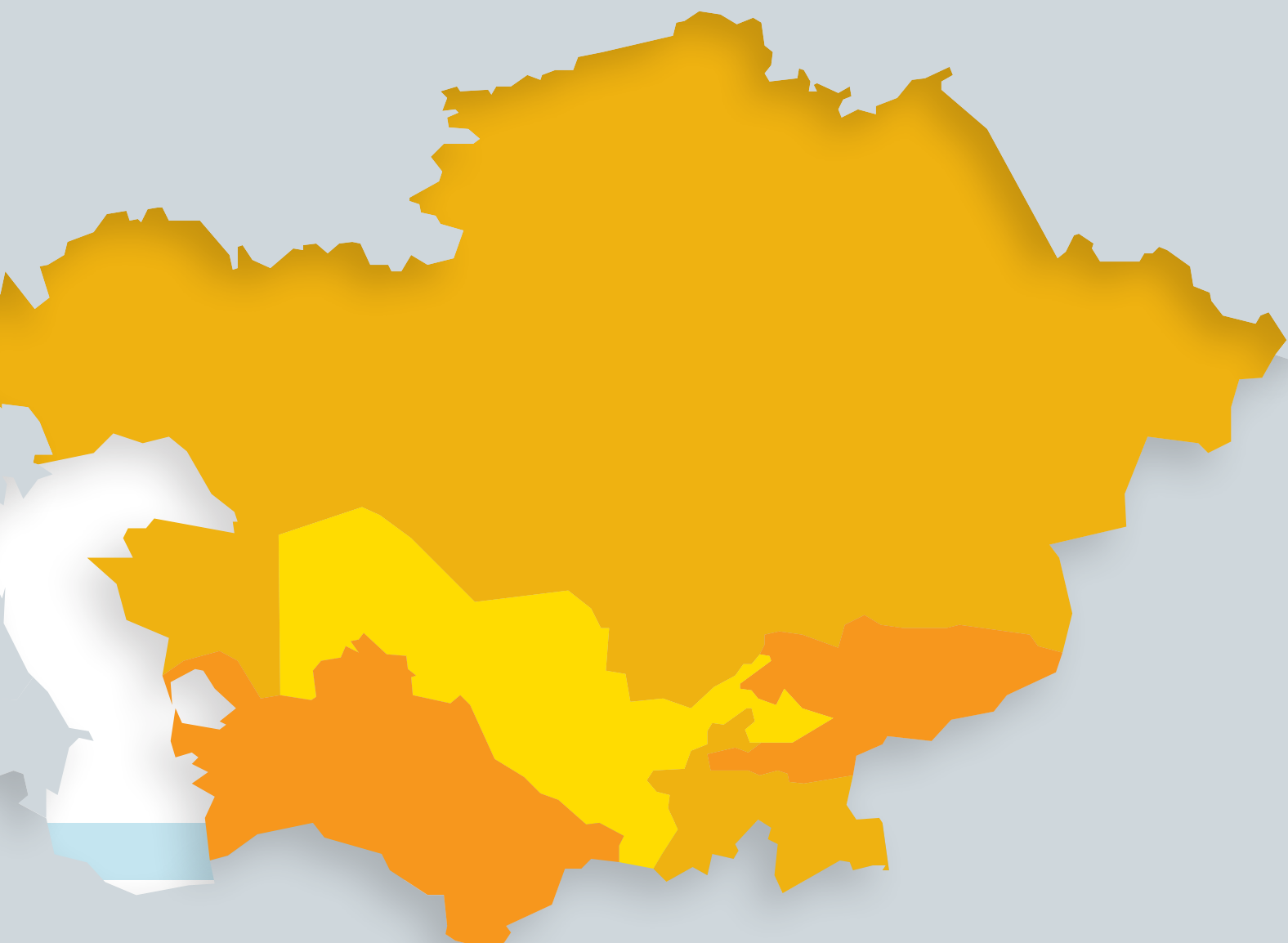
A principal issue linked to further progress in NQF implementation which needs to be resolved is the lack of technical leadership in skills development issues. Apart from a few pilots, the Ministry of Education alone cannot lead national skills development. If no further decisions are taken, the Ministry and social partners can, at their best, exercise the political leadership through the development of national policies and strategies and drafting regulatory documents and laws. However, none of them, jointly or separately, will be able to provide the national technical leadership in skills development issues which requires a constantly changing systemic technical competence in VET.

The broad technical competence required in Ukraine includes at least the following: the development of national qualifications and competency-based programmes, VET teacher and manager training, accreditation/evaluation of VET providers, skills assessment and certification.

The involvement of private initiatives and the donor-funded technical assistance can help but are not a solution to this problem in the long run and in the absence of a competent and responsible qualifications authority, the proposed changes and results might be misinterpreted and become unsustainable.



CENTRAL ASIA



KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan is a developing country with a population of approximately 5.5 million. About one third of its citizens are aged 15 to 29, and more than 600,000 Kyrgyz are outside the country. Agriculture and construction are key industries, while the service sector is expanding at the fastest rate. Remittances are an important source of revenue. The economy is unable to provide adequate work for many young people, so youth unemployment is high. The informal economy is extensive, in fact it is estimated that three-quarters of all employment is in the informal sector.

Politically, the country crossed a watershed in 2010 with the establishment of a parliamentary system of government; a new government and new president were elected.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The national Education Development Strategy 2012-20, known as EDS 2020, includes VET as a component. The Strategy's aims for VET include improving quality, boosting labour market relevance and increasing access. Currently participation in VET is low and even below the capacity of the system. Seven priority sectors (construction, mining, energy, tourism, textiles, and garment, land transport, and agriculture/agro-processing) have been identified - they collectively constitute 54% of gross domestic product and 63% of formal employment. However, many enterprises experience difficulties in finding skilled workers, underscoring the mismatch between the outputs of the education and training sector and labour market needs. This shortage of skilled labour hinders economic growth.

The qualifications system in Kyrgyzstan is currently input-based and local qualifications do not adequately capture graduates' knowledge or workers' competences. Another concern is external recognition of Kyrgyz qualifications. Because existing qualifications do not communicate the certificate-holder's skills clearly, citizens are at a disadvantage when seeking work outside the country. Inward investors similarly have difficulties in judging candidates' skills, a concern in a country which needs to attract foreign investment.

The country's existing classification systems for qualifications are not flexible enough to either accommodate new qualifications or to allow for adaptations to existing qualifications.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

There are several qualifications framework and qualifications reform initiatives going on in parallel.

Kyrgyzstan is in the early stages of developing an NQF, essentially the country has a pilot sectoral framework (in eco-tourism) developed within an EU project, which may provide a model for a future national framework.

Additionally, a draft decree on a 5-level Vocational Qualifications Framework was published in 2012. It states that the NVQF is a common reference system, which will link different levels of qualifications; it will also link professional qualifications in the Kyrgyz Republic to those of other countries which have a national qualifications framework. Further, it aims to enable learners and workers to access a qualification, transfer between qualifications, and progress from one level to the next level within the vocational qualifications framework; it will also help individuals to move between countries or change jobs in a spirit of trust, mobility and lifelong learning.

There are also steps towards a higher education qualifications framework compatible to the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF EHEA).

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The pilot sectoral framework is a collaborative effort, developed by EU experts and the eco-tourism industry acting together. It has developed occupational standards, qualifications, assessment methodologies, independent certification of candidates and the framework itself. The qualifications are modular in structure and outcomes-based. As an industry initiative, the project has sought to engage the social partners, and promote cooperation between industry, government and the education and training system. The project has been engaging with a range of Ministries, in particular, Youth, Education, Labour and Tourism.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The pilot sectoral framework developed has 8 outcomes-based levels; its descriptors draw both on the EQF and those used for the Bologna Framework in higher education (the Dublin Descriptors).

The project identified three distinct levels of competence in the industry, including at post-secondary or advanced VET; this is new in a country where the concept of VET has traditionally been exclusively initial training at secondary school. Another initiative is the Vocational Education and Skills Development Project, supported by the Asian Development Bank. It has developed a competency-based training methodology for 18 priority occupations, and seeks to improve the teaching and learning environment in 25 schools. The VESDP successfully introduced the full cycle of the competence-based training methodology. This project is now being extended into a second phase.

In Higher Education, a Tuning project has been implemented to develop a set of shared learning-outcomes descriptors for degrees in history, architecture, ICT, agriculture and construction.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The occupational standards developed with the support of the Asian Development Bank project have also been tested for the recognition of prior learning. The sectoral committee from light industry has started to assess the skills of seamstresses without any formal training.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The country is not linked to any regional framework or system, but the EQF and Bologna Framework in higher education have provided a technical model for the pilot NQF, influencing its level structure and descriptors. Additionally, the NVQF includes a table which compares the five NVQF levels to the first five levels of the EQF.

Although the Kyrgyzstan ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2004, it is outside the geographical scope of the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe and so is not eligible for the Bologna Process. It has, however, agreed a special support project with the Council of Europe to develop its higher education system in line with the Bologna requirements.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The Sectoral Framework will conduct further testing and development of the sectoral framework, including occupational standards and qualifications. The results of the project to date will be disseminated and used to inform any future national framework. It has also already influenced the Government's tourism development strategy, which encompasses the eco-tourism framework.

The NVQF and the QF for HE will still need to be formally adopted and it seems likely that these developments will come together at some stage.

TAJIKISTAN

The population of Tajikistan has been growing steadily in the last years, reaching circa 7.5 million in 2010, from 6.25 m in 2000. Its population is predominantly rural, with 73.7% living in the countryside. The country has a very young population with 60.5% below 25 years-old; 32.4% between 25 and 54; and 7.2% over 55. This data shows that there is a challenge in accommodating this large share of youth within the educational system as well as the local labour market. Youth unemployment (age 15-29) has been increasing in recent years: in 2009, the latest year for which figures are available, 15.4% of young people were out of work.

Unemployment is the result of a lack of jobs in the domestic labor market and limited business development, especially in rural and remote areas. Therefore, migration is officially recognised as a tool to maintain social equilibrium and to support skills development not provided by the VET system.

In addition to the migration factor, the increase of the working-age population has particularly affected the informal sector, which is mainly made up of household-based enterprises or corporate enterprises owned by households producing goods and services. In 2009 informal employment accounted for 51% of all employed people, excluding the agricultural sector.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The Tajik labour market lacks qualified people in most branches of industry, it is not sufficiently structured and 70% of employment is rural. The labour market is characterised by high unemployment and low salaries. Young people with traditional vocational qualifications, such as those provided by initial VET, experience considerable difficulties in finding employment in the country, and most of them become migrants. Estimates of the number of migrants vary from one eighth to one third of the workforce. On the other hand, every year many vacancies remain unfilled due to lack of relevant competencies.

There is a strong need to revitalise skills development and to improve transparency and efficiency through streamlining numerous specialisations into a manageable number of broad occupations or career paths. Additionally, the quality and relevance of programmes of studies needs to be improved in order to target gaps in the labour market, and to make vocational, professional and higher education institutions more accountable for quality results. Key elements of this process are the strengthening of quality assurance mechanisms and the recognition of qualifications at national level.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection is developing provision for adult learning and plans to establish a mechanism for qualifications recognition.

The basis of this idea is that many labour migrants, both external and internal, acquired different skills and qualifications in different fields. However, these qualifications are not recognised officially and their portability is not guaranteed. Therefore, the Ministry of Labour is now working on establishing this mechanism, which will be another support for labour migrants, and so increasing their income and living standards.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The implementation of an NQF in Tajikistan would contribute to consistency between the wider VET system and the current and future needs of the labour market.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

Discussion on NQF development and implementation started with the launching of an ETF project on an NQF in 2005. This project also contributed to raising awareness among the key ministries and sectoral

stakeholders (tourism and hotel business) in Tajikistan. As a result the following initiatives have been taken, driven by members of the working group of the ETF project:

1. The National Tourism Association was created.
2. The Association of Hotel Managers and Restaurateurs was created.
3. The National School of Tourism was created with employers' assistance.
4. A tripartite Agreement was signed by the Agency on Certification, Metrology and Standardization, the company "Tajikistan Hotel Complex" and the National Foundation "The Silk Road is the Road of Consolidation." The Agreement covers the issues of vocational education and training in the sphere of tourism and hotel services.
5. Academic cooperation with the Centre for Adult Education.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, which is responsible for Adult Training / Education in Tajikistan, intends to establish a Department / Unit of Qualification Recognition that will also be in charge of ensuring quality.

There is not yet a legal basis for the NQF in Tajikistan. Therefore, the Tajik working group on the ETF NQF project on the tourism sector developed a policy paper in order to lay a foundation for the prospective legal basis. However, the issues of qualifications, quality of curriculum and training programmes, meeting labour market needs, qualifications recognition, and quality assurance were raised in the following legal and strategic documents and institutional developments approved by the government:

- Concept of Reform of Initial vocational education and training
- National Action Plan for Reform of initial vocational education and training
- National Strategy of Education Development for 2006-2015
- Government decision on transforming the responsibilities for Tourism sector from Ministry of Economy to the Committee of Sport, Youth and Tourism.
- Creation of the National Centre for Adult Education

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

Tajikistan has not yet opened a discussion about the number of levels, descriptors and referencing of existing qualifications. Currently, the main document defining and systematizing the types of labour activities in Tajikistan is the National Classifier of Occupations (NCO) that was developed by the Scientific-Research Institute of Labour and social protection under the Ministry of Labour in 2005. The NCO consists of a classification of 10 homogeneous groups of workers and civil servants. The NCO provides general characteristics of professions and duties performed by employees of a certain group, but it does not provide a full and detailed description of functional duties, or the level of knowledge, skills and competence of an employee. This means that the classifier does not contain descriptions of qualifications requirements of an employee in a specific occupation.

The Tajik NQF working group supported through the ETF project worked on the conceptualisation of an NQF, but there are no formal steps yet. Progress on NQF developments has been reported to key ministries of education and labour. The Ministry of Labour has shared the report with the National Centre for Adult Learning. This Centre will be in charge of elaborating national occupational standards using the existing methodology from Russia (based on Functional Analysis). A GIZ (donor) project is supporting this process.

The Ministry of Education will approve occupational standards which will result in legally-binding documents registered by the Ministry of Justice. Four standards have been developed using the DACUM (developing a curriculum) methodology for the hospitality sector for which there also exist four-week training programmes that have been developed and approved by the hospitality sector. Some 25 profiles for tourism were developed with the assistance of COLO (the Dutch Centres of Expertise on vocational education, training and the labour market) in the ETF project. Three different methodologies for occupational analysis have been in use so far and the Tajik authorities still have to decide on the most appropriate one.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

There is no regulatory framework for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Ministry of Labour in 2010-2011, through the Centres of Adult Education, has been actively engaged in the certification of skills for unemployed people. However this has been done in an experimental way and it has not entailed the setting up of a legal framework.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

None.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The Ministry of Education, which is in charge of initial and secondary VET, is developing a National Strategy for Education 2010- 2020 (still at the stage of finalisation). Despite the fact that the need for a national qualifications system is recognised, there are no formal steps in this direction, mainly because of lack of strong competence in the field, within the ministry and the world of work. On the other hand, there is an increasing understanding of elements like educational standards, professional standards, competence, and of the importance of social dialogue and social partnership, reflected in the creation of various associations, which is a sign of the first stirrings of an emerging civil society.

UZBEKISTAN

The Uzbek economy is distinguished by a very young and rapidly growing population. The share of young people from 15 to 29 years of age reached 61.7% of the population in 2008. As a result of demographic trends, Uzbekistan is experiencing a rapid increase in the working age population, significantly increasing the number of the population overall.

In the labour market, in 2004-2009 the workforce grew by 23.9%, reaching 16 million people, while the employed population increased by 26.1% and totalled 11.3 million people in 2009. According to official data, 95 % of population of working age were employed in 2010. The highest employment rates have been registered in construction, the housing and communal sector, domestic services, trade and public catering, transport and communication.

Differences between rural and urban experiences are important in terms of ensuring that the benefits of vocational education are evenly distributed. The agricultural sector of the economy covers about 34% of employment, while over 60% of the population lives in the rural areas.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The Government acknowledges the need for VET reform. Its Welfare Improvement Strategy of Uzbekistan for 2008-2010 recognises that the quality of the workforce does not meet the occupation and qualification requirements of employers, and that changes need to be introduced in the training of workers at colleges (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2007). VET school curricula has weak relevance to labour market needs. Involvement of private sector businesses in curriculum development is still limited. Employers report that graduates lack practical skills and the capacity to work independently.

The VET system does not produce qualifications matching employer needs. The range of VET qualifications remains very narrow. Vocational colleges award diplomas titled “junior specialist” in the respective field. But the existing Classifier of profiles and occupations defines only one qualification level for occupations – “master” or “skilled worker”. This contradiction between the college awards and the only available qualification in the labour market suggests that the level demanded by the Classifier (and perhaps by employers) is too high for the level of competence the colleges can prepare its students for.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

NQF development in Uzbekistan is at a conceptual and discussion stage. The Law on Education (1997) and the National Programme for Personnel Training specifically mention the “National Qualification Framework”. The Government has initiated plans to develop an NQF as an element in contributing to identifying and responding to skills needs. But before new qualifications can be developed, processes need to be developed to identify the occupations needed by the labour market and the necessary skill levels.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

The NQF is a contributory discussion to policy-making between different stakeholders with an interest in skills development and in establishing a dialogue between the country and the wider world, particularly the EU, on vocational education. However, the range of stakeholders from civic society and their engagement in any dimension of education and training is very limited in a society so dominated by the state.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

No decisions have yet been made on the number of levels for any NQF. Currently, curricula and qualifications are drafted on an inputs basis. A traditional classifier of education fields and occupations is still used. However, in 2012, Uzbek stakeholders drafted a definition for the level of junior specialist

diploma awarded to students completing specialised secondary vocational education in learning outcomes terms as a technical exercise. This revealed that the specification of qualification (credential) levels in outcome terms is feasible within the context of the education system. So it is possible that an NQF could be developed on an outcomes basis.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NONFORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The existing VET structure is flat and so does not lend itself to inclusion in a multilevel qualifications framework. In particular, there is no provision for further professional education for “technician” level. Therefore there is no pathway to higher professional qualifications after professional college.

No system for validation or RPL exists in the country.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

A technical exercise to reference to the EQF is planned (see below).

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Further development regarding qualification frameworks will focus on two main actions.

Firstly, a technical exercise to reference, or compare, an Uzbek QF to the EQF is foreseen. This will facilitate discussion on the EQF as a reference for reflection on how Uzbekistan is developing compared to EU developments and approaches. The referencing exercise will support co-operation between the stakeholders, highlight technical issues and facilitate dialogue between national stakeholders and the EU, and international practice more generally.

Secondly, the work plan for an NQF will be updated to include an action plan for the development of agreed skill levels for occupations in the labour force. In 2012, the stakeholders identified three possible sectors – automotive, IT and tourism. The action plan development will be undertaken by the local stakeholders together, involving the Centre for Specialised Professional Secondary Education, the Department of Labour and Social Protection, the Chamber of Commerce and the Ministry of Industry. The development of such skill levels may take some time and should be led by the local stakeholders based on the existing system.

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CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

ANALYSIS AND OVERVIEW OF NQF DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES



For more information see Cedefop. Analysis and overview of NQF developments in European countries. Annual report 2012. Working paper 17, available on http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/6117_en.pdf

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AUSTRIA

INTRODUCTION

Austria has designed a comprehensive national qualifications framework, which will be implemented gradually, through a step-by-step approach. Currently, the NQF includes qualifications awarded in higher education, selected 'reference qualifications' from VET and a qualification from a prevocational programme. This selection of 'reference qualifications' serves an illustrative purpose and does not include any qualifications from general education. The decision on how to include qualifications such as the Reifeprüfung certificate from AHS schools (upper secondary school leaving certificate from general education) into the NQF still needs to be taken.

The NQF has been under development since January 2007. The first 'fact-finding phase' (February to October 2007) was supported by a broad consultation process. Its outcomes fed into a report (Konsolidierung der Stellungnahme zum Konsultationspapier), which identified a number of open questions¹ and was used by the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research to prepare a policy paper (October 2009²), outlining the strategy for implementing the NQF. With the adoption of the NQF position paper by the Council of Ministers in late 2009, the Austrian NQF was officially launched. A research-based approach and a broad range of stakeholders involved in the development are key characteristics of NQF development.

Another is that levels 6-8 are open to VET qualifications acquired outside the Bologna strand. A 'Y-structure' was adopted, allowing for two sets of descriptors (for higher education and VET) to coexist at these levels³. Dublin descriptors are used for qualifications related to Bologna cycles (BA, MA, Doctorate) and awarded by higher education institutions (i.e. universities, universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen) and university colleges for teacher education (Pädagogische Hochschulen). VET qualifications and qualifications from adult learning ('non-Bologna' strand) will be allocated based on NQF descriptors and additional criteria.

Responsibilities for design and award of qualifications are allocated to different stakeholders and providers. A step-by step implementation strategy was adopted to ensure a comprehensive NQF. The overall process was structured into three corridors: corridor one aims to assign qualifications from the formal education system, based on national legislation and awarded by the State; corridor two focuses on the assignment of qualifications from the non-formal sector (e.g. occupation-specific and company based CVET); and corridor three aims to develop approaches to validating learning outcomes acquired through informal learning. One of the main issues to be resolved within corridor one is inclusion of general education and the respective school leaving certificates in the NQF.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the NQF is to map all officially recognised national qualifications, present them in relation to each other, and to make implicit levels of the qualification system explicit, nationally as well as internationally. It will have no regulatory functions. The specific objectives of NQF are to:

- assist referencing of Austrian qualifications to the EQF and thus strengthen understanding of these qualifications internationally;

1 All documents are available on the Internet site of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture http://www.bmukk.gv.at/europa/eubildung/nqr/nqr_sn.xml [accessed 7.7.2012] or Federal Ministry of Science and Research <http://www.bmwf.gv.at/wissenschaft/national/nqr/> [accessed 7.7.2012].

2 Aufbau eines Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmens in Österreich – Schlussfolgerungen, Grundsatzentscheidungen und Maßnahmen nach Abschluss des NQR-Konsultationsverfahrens, prepared by the NQF project group of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research, 2009 [unpublished].

3 Aufbau eines Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmens in Österreich, p. 7 [unpublished].

- make qualifications easier to understand and compare for Austrian citizens;
- improve permeability between VET and higher education by developing new pathways and opening new progression possibilities;
- reinforce the use of learning outcomes in standard-setting, curricula and assessment;
- support lifelong learning and enable stronger links between adult learning and formal education and training;
- recognise a broader range of learning forms (including non-formal and informal learning).

The NQF plays an important part in implementing a strategy of lifelong learning (BMUKK, 2011)⁴ that includes and assigns to all contexts of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) the same value (European Commission et al., 2010, Austria)⁵. Some suggestions have been made on how to include non-formal qualifications in the NQF, for example by setting up 'bodies responsible for qualifications'⁶. This issue is still under discussion. Methodologies and responsibilities are being developed for linking validation and allocation of non-formal qualifications to the NQF. This marks an important stepping stone towards an inclusive NQF.

One of the objectives of the NQF is to strengthen the linkages between different subsystems by making apparent existing pathways/developing new pathways and opening up new progression possibilities: improved counselling is an important element of this. Austria has a relatively high share of people with migration background in the labour force and in education. Raising their education outcomes, qualifications levels and increasing equal opportunities remains one of the main policy challenges and is a focus of the current reforms (European Commission, 2011)⁷.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

From the beginning, the Austrian approach has been characterised by active stakeholder involvement, but also occasional conflicting views on the role of the NQF. Two ministries, the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research are in charge of the process. However, the General Directorate for Vocational Education and Training of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture is the driving force behind the process. It has initiated and is coordinating NQF development and implementation, cooperating with the Federal Ministry of Science and Research, which is in charge of higher education.

A national NQF steering group was set up in February 2007. This includes 23 members representing all the main stakeholders (all relevant ministries, social partners and Länder) responsible for qualifications design and award. The main task of this group is to coordinate the NQF implementation, referencing to the EQF, and ensure that the framework reflects the interests of stakeholders. One important topic of discussion was on opening up levels 6-8 of the NQF for non-traditional higher education qualification, with VET stakeholders on one side and higher education on the other. Consensus was achieved.

The Austrian NQF was formally launched through the adoption of the position paper by the Councils of Ministers in 2009. Three sets of criteria for linking qualifications to the NQF levels have been developed:

1. qualifications must meet existing formal requirements (for example related to assessment procedures and proof of qualification);

4 Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich. http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/20916/IIIarbeitspapier_ebook_gross.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

5 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Austria. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77444.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

6 Aufbau eines Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmens in Österreich, p. 11 [unpublished].

7 Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020): country analysis, p.4. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf [accessed 10.8.2012].

2. the assignment of a qualification to a level is made on the basis of the level descriptors;
3. a detailed description of the qualification, using an agreed template, has to be submitted (including qualitative and quantitative data about the qualification).

Based on this classification, a final decision is made on levelling⁸. Submission for registration is, however, voluntary. Allocation criteria and procedures were tested intensively in 2011 but those for allocation did not yield the expected results. A revised model is now being discussed which will clarify procedures, competent bodies and their responsibilities⁹.

Currently, the NCP's main role is to support the development and implementation of the NQF in Austria, develop an NQF information system, including NQF register, and become the main information desk for citizens and institutions. It is envisaged to create a legal basis for the NQF, which will clarify responsibilities and allocation procedures.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The NQF has eight levels. The decision on number of levels was based on the broad consultation process and a study, providing information on an existing implicit hierarchy in the national qualification system, using statistical educational research and statistical frameworks (EQF Ref, 2011, p. 46)¹⁰. Level descriptors are defined as knowledge, skills and competence. Reference qualifications are used to illustrate the level of learning outcomes.

Through the implementation of the NQF, Austria is strengthening the learning outcome approach across education and training: this is seen as central to the positioning of qualifications onto the NQF. Many qualifications are already learning outcome oriented, but the approach has not been applied consistently across all sectors and institutions. Several initiatives are supposed to strengthen learning outcomes orientation.

In 2005, the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture launched a project to develop educational standards for core subject areas in general education (Hubert et al., 2006)¹¹ and in VET¹². Educational standards for VET schools and colleges define 'content' (subject and knowledge areas and topics with specified goals), 'action' (cognitive achievements required in the particular subjects), and personal and social competences related to the specific field.

In March 2009, the General Directorate for VET of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture started a project (curriculum design – learning outcomes orientation) which aims to integrate educational standards in VET curricula. In addition, Austria is preparing a competence-oriented and standardised 'Reifeprüfung' to be administered in general and vocational upper secondary education.

In apprenticeship (dual system), a training regulation is issued for each profile by the Federal Ministry of Economics. It consists of the occupational competence profile (Berufsprofil) with related activities and work descriptions, and job profile (Berufsbild) with knowledge and skills to be acquired by apprentices.

8 Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Federal Ministry of Science and Research (2012). Austrian EQF referencing report Annex 4: manual for including formal qualifications in the national qualifications framework (NQF): criteria. January 2011.

9 Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Federal Ministry of Science and Research (2012). Austrian EQF referencing report – Supplementary information [unpublished] .

10 EQF referencing process and report, p. 46. http://www.eqf-ref.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=6 [accessed 5.12.2012].

11 Bildungsstandards in Deutschland, Österreich, England, Australien, Neuseeland und Südostasien (2006). http://www.edudoc.ch/static/web/arbeiten/harmos/lit_analyse_1.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012]. For development of educational standards in Austria you can also consult the website of the BIFIE <https://www.bifie.at/downloads> [accessed 5.12.2012].

12 <http://www.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/downloads.html> [accessed 5.12.2012].

In higher education a qualification profile, describing the expected learning outcomes (and definitions of learning outcomes) for each module, was introduced by the University Act (Universitätsgesetz) in 2002, but implementation differs across higher education institutions.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

Austria is preparing for participation in the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) by conducting studies and participating in international projects. The current strategy foresees using ECVET to support transnational mobility. It is not planned to link the NQF with the credit system (Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Federal Ministry of Science and Research, 2012)¹³. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) has been implemented in higher education.

Austria is also active in the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation. The Ministry of Education has introduced a comprehensive quality management system through the VET quality initiative (QIBB) in which nearly all Austrian VET schools and colleges participate (on a voluntary basis). This approach links results/standards with input/process dimensions. The initiative is in line with the main objectives, guiding principles and priorities of the EQAVET recommendation.

The NQF policy paper and the recently adopted strategy for lifelong learning (BMUKK, 2011)¹⁴ place high importance on general demand for integrating non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes in the NQF. Work to develop strategies and tools to include non-formally acquired qualifications and learning outcomes developed through informal learning is continuing. A working group is currently elaborating procedures for including learning outcomes acquired outside formal education. Proposals are already available, but no decisions have been taken yet. Social partners, who are also owners of the main adult training providers, play an important role.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Austria referenced its national qualifications levels to the EQF and self-certified to QF-EHEA in June 2012, preparing one comprehensive report.

Table 1 Level correspondence established between the Austrian qualifications framework and the EQF

NQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

First, one strength of Austrian NQF development is the involvement and engagement of a broad range of stakeholders, representing all subsystems of education and training as well as the social partners. This broad process has made it clear that stakeholders hold different and sometimes conflicting views on the role of the NQF.

Second, Austria sees the NQF as a translation device to make qualifications transparent and comparable as well as a tool to improve validation of non-formal learning. It will not have regulatory functions. Implementing the NQF is closely related to strengthening the learning outcomes orientation in education and training, e.g. by revising VET curricula. NQF levels will also be explicitly mentioned in curricula and training profiles.

¹³ Austrian EQF referencing report, p. 109. http://www.oead.at/fileadmin/III/dateien/lebenslanges_lernen_pdf_word_xls/nqr/EQR-Zuordnungsbericht/Austrian_EQF_Referencing_Report.pdf [accessed 26.11.2012].

¹⁴ Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich. http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/20916/IIIarbeitspapier_ebook_gross.pdf [accessed 26.11.2012].

Third, the NQF has been designed to be comprehensive. This is underlined by the following principles: the adopted Y-structure of the NQF; the working structure of three corridors (see above); the long-term inclusion of general education; and methodologies being developed for inclusion of non-formal and informal learning (Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Federal Ministry of Science and Research, 2012)¹⁵.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Austrian NCP was set up as an organisational entity at OeAD (Österreichischer Austauschdienst, Austrian agency for international cooperation in education and research). <http://www.oead.at/nqr> [accessed 12.3.2013].

¹⁵ Austrian EQF referencing report. Supplementary information [unpublished].

BELGIUM

Belgium is in the same situation as the UK in terms of developing and implementing more than one NQF. This reflects the federal structure of Belgium, giving the three communities a wide ranging autonomy in how to organise their education, training and qualifications systems. While the Flemish and the French-speaking communities have been working on national frameworks since 2005-06, the German-speaking community has only recently decided to start work in this area. The Flemish and the French-speaking communities have been following different pathways, reflecting the substantial institutional and political differences in education and training between the two. The 2011 version of this report questioned whether some form of link between the two frameworks could be envisaged, potentially providing added value to Belgian citizens for mobility within the country. This challenge has now, July 2012¹⁶, been addressed by the adoption of an amendment to the Belgian Federal Law on the general structure of the education system. This amendment states that the EQF levels will be used as a common reference for the three communities in Belgium. The linkages will be further enhanced by the adoption of broadly similar basic principles for the frameworks of Flanders and the French-speaking community. Differently from the UK, however, the three Belgian regions will reference separately to the EQF.

BELGIUM (FLANDERS)

INTRODUCTION

On 30 April 2009 the Flemish Parliament and government in Belgium adopted an act on the Qualification Structure (The Flemish government, 2009)¹⁷ (kwalificatiestructuur) introducing a comprehensive qualification framework. The framework, based on an eight-level structure described by the two main categories of knowledge/skills and context/autonomy/responsibility, was formally referenced to the EQF in June 2011. The Flemish qualifications framework (FQF) further distinguishes between 'educational and professional qualifications', stressing that, in principle, both categories can be placed at all eight levels of the framework.

While the FQF was seen as a precondition for carrying out the referencing to the EQF, it was launched as an instrument for improving the national qualifications system. It is an integrated framework for professional and educational qualifications at all levels, including traditional universities. The overall objective is to strengthen the transparency of qualifications and to clarify mutual relations – vertically and horizontally – between them. It is also to enhance communication on qualifications between education and the labour market and to strengthen permeability between the different learning systems.

The road from formal adoption to implementation has proved more time-consuming than originally predicted. These delays have partly been caused by the need for further legal instruments (implementation decrees), and partly by negotiations with the social partners on how to link and level professional qualifications to the framework. Significant progress has been made during 2011 and 2012, however, and the Flemish framework has now reached an early operational stage.

16 3 augustus 2012 – Wet tot wijziging van de gecoördineerde wetten van 31 december 1949 op het toekennen van de academische graden en het programma van de universitaire examens en van de wet van 7 juli 1970 betreffende de algemene structuur van het <hoger> <onderwijs>.ation [unpublished].

17 Flemish Act of 30 April 2009 on the qualifications structure. http://www.evcvlaanderen.be/files/DecreetVKS_ENG.pdf [accessed 26.11.2012].

The Flemish community of Belgium is responsible for education and training policy and legislation in the Flemish region and for Dutch-speaking education institutions within the Brussels-capital region. The Flemish qualification structure is a classification of Flemish qualifications using an eight-level qualification framework.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

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

The act underlines that the qualification structure (including the qualification framework) should act as a reference for quality assurance, for developing and renewing courses, for developing and aligning procedures for recognising acquired competences, and for comparison (nationally and at European levels) of qualifications. The quality assurance of pathways leading to recognised qualifications is being followed up through the establishment of the Flemish Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming, AKOV). This agency now covers all types and levels of qualification, except higher education qualifications at level 5 to level 8, and is crucial to the overall credibility and success of the overarching framework, domestically as well as at European level (in relation to the EQF). For qualifications at levels 5 to 8 a joint accreditation organisation has been set up together with the Netherlands (Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie, NVAO).

The act emphasises the role of the qualification structure and framework as a reference for validating non-formal and informal learning and as an orientation point for guidance and counselling.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The Flemish NQF process has involved a broad range of stakeholders at all stages, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Training. Other relevant ministries (Ministry of Labour and Social Economy and Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media) have also been involved. From the education and training side, participation by relevant sectors (general education, initial vocational education, continuing vocational education and training, higher education, including short cycle higher education) has been important. The link and overlap¹⁸ between professional and higher or general educational qualifications has been a challenge and the active involvement of stakeholders representing the different levels and types of qualifications has been important. A qualification framework for higher education linked to the Bologna process was developed and put in place (2008). The relationship between the two framework initiatives was discussed throughout the development process and the 2009 Act takes this into account in its terminology, framework descriptors and procedures.

The road from adoption to implementation and operational status has proved to be complex: there are two main reasons for this.

First, the transformation of the 2009 Law into practice required further legal steps and the introduction of a series of ‘implementation decrees’: A first decree covering professional qualifications at levels 4 and 5 was adopted in late autumn 2012 and gave the mandate to start linking these professional qualifications to the FQF. A second decree covering professional qualifications above level 5 is currently under preparation and is expected to be put in force in 2013, making it possible to include these qualifications in the framework. A third decree for educational qualifications levels 1 to 4 is also expected in 2013.

Second, clarification of the role of the social partners in relation to the linking of qualifications to the framework was needed and required substantial effort to be resolved. Flemish professional qualifications are developed within a tripartite system giving the social partners, in the context of the Social and Economic Committee (SERV), a decisive role. All professional qualifications build on competence standards defined and approved by the social partners. Professional qualification has to reflect these

¹⁸ This overlap results from the fact that professional qualifications are integrated in educational qualifications, outside higher education at levels 6-8. It is being acknowledged that further alignment between professional and educational qualifications is needed.

competences and no single qualification can be approved without the active input and approval of the social partners. The 2009 Law did not specify in detail how the social partners would contribute to the levelling of qualifications and so it was necessary to agree on how to approach this task. A general agreement – between the government and the SERV – on how to proceed was reached in January 2011. Based on this, the six first professional qualifications were included in the FQF in 2012. More than 50 will have been included by the end of 2012.

While time-consuming and challenging, continuing inclusion of professional qualifications into the FQF can be deemed a success as it demonstrates that stakeholders are fully involved and responsible for the implementation of the framework. The Flemish approach is also interesting as it demonstrates how competence standards developed for occupational purposes are being translated into professional qualifications. Whether it is possible to continue this process for professional qualifications above level 5 remains to be seen and will demonstrate whether the opening up – in principle – towards professional qualifications at levels 6 to 8 can be translated into practice.

LEVELS DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The term ‘competence’ plays a significant role in Flemish education, training and employment policies and is used as an overarching concept. Competence and learning outcomes are used as interchangeable terms in education and training.

THE DESCRIPTORS

The Flemish qualifications framework is based on an eight-level structure described by the categories of knowledge, skills, context, autonomy and responsibility¹⁹. Compared to the EQF, the FQF-descriptors are more detailed, in particular for lower levels. A main difference is that the FQF does not use ‘competence’ as a separate descriptor category but considers it as an overarching term and uses it interchangeably with learning outcomes. 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. This can be seen as a criticism of the EQF descriptors which contain contextual elements but fail to treat them explicitly.

The descriptors are used to describe two main categories of qualifications; professional and educational. A professional qualification is based on a set of competences allowing an individual to exercise a profession, and can be achieved both inside and outside education. An educational qualification is based on a set of competences an individual needs to participate in society, to start further education and/or to exercise professional activities. An educational qualification can only be acquired through education and in institutions recognised by the Flemish authorities. The distinction between professional and educational qualifications is applied for all eight levels of the framework; this offers the potential for high level qualifications in parallel to traditional academic institutions.

In referencing the FQF to the EQF in June 2011 it was concluded that, while the two frameworks have been designed for different purposes, and vary in detail and emphasis, they share the same basic principles. The referencing concludes that each level of the FQF contains at least a core that corresponds with the EQF level descriptor at the same level.

The approach adopted in 2009 reflects a development process which started in 2005. A first proposal contained a 10-level structure but – influenced by discussion on the EQF – was reduced to eight levels. The relationship between professional and higher education qualifications featured strongly in discussions. It was acknowledged that, while higher education institutes (universities and university colleges) have a ‘monopoly’ on the bachelor, master and doctorate titles, this does not rule out the parallel (at levels 6-8) placing of vocationally oriented qualifications. Several stakeholders (for example, representing adult education institutions providing higher VET courses for adults) asked explicitly for the placing of particular

¹⁹ See Annex 3.

VET qualifications at levels 5 or 6. The identification of this 'grey zone' between academically and vocationally-oriented higher education qualifications resulted in the adoption of a set of descriptors using the same general logic at all levels.

Representatives from higher education argued that the EHEA (Dublin) descriptors would be the best way of describing levels 6 to 8 and allow direct integration of the higher education framework into the new NQF. This was also linked to an argument that learning outcomes at levels 6 to 8 could best be focused on the category of 'knowledge'. This was not accepted by most stakeholders who recognised the need for broad descriptors covering more qualifications, educational as well as professional.

Another important discussion in the development phase was how to understand the lowest level of the framework. Should there, for example, be an access level leading to level 1? Social partners expressed the fear that introducing a 'lowest level' (level 1 or an access level below level 1) could have a negative, stigmatising effect. In the adopted proposal level 1 is defined as starting, not access level.

LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COMPETENCES

Progress on practical implementation of the principles of learning outcomes/competences varies, in particular when looking at teaching methodologies and assessment practices. The continuing VET sector is probably the most experienced in this field. A competence-based approach is well integrated, referring to professional requirements in the labour market. The use of competences in initial VET in recent years has been inspired by Dutch developments (in particular the MBO reform). Discussions between the Social and Economic Committee and the government in 2010 and 2011 on implementing the framework can be seen as part of this process; how can existing occupational competence standards be translated into learning outcomes based professional qualifications and then attributed a level in the FQF? Learning outcomes are also present in general education, for example by the setting of learning objectives in national core curricula. The 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 shift to learning outcomes can be observed in Flanders. The insistence on a learning outcomes approach in the Bologna process has partly influenced university practices.

LINKS TO OTHER TOOLS AND POLICIES

Validating non-formal and informal learning (European Commission, 2010, Belgium Flanders)²⁰ is identified as one of the objectives of the NQF, closely linked to the learning outcomes/competence perspective underpinning the framework. Some progress has already been made, involving various institutions covering different parts of the qualification framework. The process of recognising non-formal and informal learning has been in place in universities and colleges since 2005; it aims to recognise prior learning acquired in external institutions as well as through professional activities. A proof of competences is provided, granting access to further studies or contributing to the award of a degree. The number of individuals using the system is moderate; to date approximately 500 have applied to take part each year. A system of 'certificates of work experience' has been introduced and is coordinated by the Ministry of Work, using professional competence standards (approved by the social partners in the Social and Economic Committee) as reference. This allows people without any diploma to demonstrate their professional skills and competences with a certificate, granted by the Flemish government, as formal proof of professional competence. In the period 2004-10, 2039 certificates were granted. In adult education, education institutions can recognise prior learning as well, but the practice is not widespread. Compared to other countries, notably neighbours France and the Netherlands, the Flemish system has still some way to go for validation to become generally accessible and recognised as credible by the general public. In July 2012, a policy note was published on recognising prior learning; this was developed by the policy stakeholders of Education and Work. Strategic advisory bodies in education, higher education, work

²⁰ European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Belgium (Flanders). <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77449.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

and culture gave their advice on the policy note in October-November 2012. A legislative framework for recognition of prior learning is expected in June 2013.

An interesting development is the development and introduction of an integrated quality assurance system linked to the FQF²¹. In July 2012 the policy stakeholders of education and work outlined the main elements in an integrated quality assurance system for professional qualifications: what distinguishes this proposal from traditional quality assurance arrangements is its focus on qualifications. The suggestion is to introduce a quality assurance arrangement covering all pathways (trajecten) leading to a professional qualification. The quality approach is thus not limited to traditional education and training institutions, but will also cover validation of prior learning (or Erkennen van Verworven Competenties/recognition of prior learning). To accomplish this task, the proposal pays particular attention to the articulation of competence objectives ('...to be expressed in a clear and recognisable way...') and the assessment of these ('...clear and transparent assessment criteria known to the candidate; assessment oriented towards competences; the use of varied assessment methods aiming at validity and reliability...'). The proposal can also be seen as a way to open up the FQF to education and training outside the existing formal system. In November 2012 AKOV started to pilot the quality assurance system. It is expected that the pilot will be formalised in a legislative framework in June 2013.

There is currently no explicit link established between the FQF and ECVET.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Referencing to the EQF was completed in June 2011 (Agency for quality assurance in education and training, 2011)²², preparation having been carried out by AKOV, which is also the EQF national coordination point for Flanders. The decision of the Flemish government to reference to the EQF in mid-2011, pending the placing of professional qualifications to the FQF, was discussed by the EQF advisory group. The lack of clarity in professional qualifications made it difficult for other countries to judge how Flemish qualifications compared to their own. Flanders will present an updated referencing report in 2013 which will focus on recent developments in FQF implementation, with particular emphasis on the alignment method and the updated legislative framework in place. Given the developments reported above, this situation is now changing in a positive direction.

Table 2 *Level correspondence established between the Flemish qualifications framework (FQF) and the EQF*

FQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Although there is a long tradition in Flanders and Belgium of involving stakeholders and social partners in education and training policy and legislation, development and implementation of the FQF required extensive dialogue with all relevant stakeholders. Given progress made in the last year, this delay seems now to have been turned into strength. The acceptance and involvement of social partners in the implementation of the framework provides a good basis for future developments.

The FQF can be seen as the first of the new European NQFs – established in response to the EQF – now reaching early operational stage. While far from complete, the Flemish process illustrates the long-term character of NQF developments.

21 A conceptual note on how to take forward quality assurance for professional qualifications in the context of the FQF was finalised by AKOV in July 2012 (Een geïntegreerd systeem van externe kwaliteitszorg). This note outlines a pilot project to be started in November 2012 and completed in June 2013.

22 Flemish government. Referencing the Flemish qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework. Brussels, June 2011.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Flemish Act of 30 April 2009 on the qualifications structure. http://www.evcvlaanderen.be/files/DecreetVKS_ENG.pdf [accessed 6.12.2012].

The Flemish Agency for Quality Assurance acts as NCP.

BELGIUM (FRENCH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY)

INTRODUCTION

The French community of Belgium (the Walloon region and the French community of Brussels) has been working on a national qualifications framework linked to the EQF since 2006²³. The work on a qualifications framework for higher education, linked to the Bologna process, has been going on in parallel. Although the idea of an NQF (and its link to the EQF) received support, the question of how to integrate the qualifications framework for higher education within a comprehensive NQF has been much debated and has delayed the process.

The current proposal dates from 2010 when the three governments of the French community agreed on the principle of creating a qualifications framework with double entry, one for educational qualifications and one for the 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. A working group is responsible for preparing the ground work for a legal text and a draft referencing report. All major stakeholders agreed in mid-2011 on these main principles of the framework. The final elements of the framework are expected to be finalised by March 2013, paving the way for referencing to the EQF in the second semester of 2013.

A specific law on the NQF will be prepared and form the basis for future work. When this can be adopted has yet to be clarified.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The main reason for pursuing a comprehensive NQF is to increase overall transparency in the existing education and training system. The framework is not, at least at this stage, seen as an instrument for reform of existing institutions and structures. It is not perceived as having any regulatory role and will not directly influence decisions regarding recognition of individual certificates or diplomas. The framework can, however, support the development of other tools and instruments for transparency, notably validation of non-formal and informal learning. The framework is seen as an important instrument for strengthening the use of learning outcomes and for referencing to the EQF. At this stage of development it has been decided to include only those qualifications which are delivered by public providers. It is not clear whether the framework may be opened up later to private or non-formal providers, for example in the way proposed for Sweden and the Netherlands.

The French-speaking community of Belgium has been developing a qualifications framework for higher education since 2007. This work is still in progress and is expected to lead to self-certification to the EHEA by 2012-13.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The NQF initiative was taken by the governments of the French region in 2006 and can be divided into two distinct phases; the period before and after 2010. While the period before 2010 was characterised by high

²³ Education (compulsory, higher and for adults) is a competence of the French community of Belgium (for all people living in Wallonia – except the German-speaking community – and French-speaking people in Brussels); continuous vocational training is a competence of the Walloon Region and of the CoCoF (Commission communautaire française) in Brussels.

quality technical work, lack of clarity over the role of higher education in the comprehensive framework created tensions and caused delays. The process was revitalised after 2010 and a new steering group set up including stakeholders from general education (at all levels and of all types, including universities) and vocational/professional education and training (including social partners). A number of expert groups have been working on specific solutions and have addressed aspects such as the writing of level descriptors, positioning (levelling) of qualifications in the framework and linking the framework to quality assurance arrangements. The recommendations of these groups have been followed up by decisions at intergovernmental level. Final decisions are expected by March 2013.

The division of the framework into two main strands – educational and professional qualifications – has implications for stakeholders involvement. The service francophone des métiers et qualifications (SFMQ) will play a key role in defining and positioning professional qualifications at levels 1-4. The SFMQ is well placed to play this role as its overall task (set up in 2009) is to develop occupational profiles based on the inputs of the social partners and in collaboration with employment services. Its role is also to develop training profiles with reference to these occupational profiles, in close liaison with education and training providers. ARES, the Academy of Research and Higher education will be responsible for defining and positioning educational qualifications at levels 6-8. ARES and SFMQ will share responsibility for qualifications at level 5, reflecting the extensive 'mix' of professional and educational qualifications at this level.

Introducing the distinction between educational and professional qualifications has been instrumental in bringing the NQF process forward in the French-speaking part of Belgium. This distinction will make it possible to open up for professional qualifications at higher levels without questioning the autonomy of universities and their responsibility in relation to bachelor, master and doctorate awards. The procedures for this inclusion of higher level professional qualifications are still being discussed. Using one set of level descriptors for all levels and both types of qualifications (see below) has gradually won acceptance by the different stakeholders and will, in the longer term, make it possible to look more carefully into how these two strands can interact with each other.

LEVELS DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

An eight-level structure is foreseen, using two blocks of terms: knowledge/skills and context/ autonomy/ responsibility. The descriptors developed by the Flemish qualifications framework have been used as a basis but adjusted according to the conditions of the region.

In the French-speaking region of Belgium, learning outcomes are integral to a range of recent and continuing reforms (Cedefop, 2009c)²⁴ (). These outcomes, however, are described in various ways and the extent to which they influence education and training practice differs.

In compulsory education and training, learning outcomes are described in terms of *socles de compétences* and *compétences terminales*. For adult education (including higher education short cycles, bachelors and masters) the term used is *capacités terminales*.

In vocational education and training, work is continuing to define and describe qualifications in term of learning outcomes. Regional CVET providers are developing a common procedure (ReCAF, Reconnaissance des acquis de formation) of certification based on common standards and common standards for assessment, linked to the Consortium de validation des compétences (see below). The SFMQ (see above) is playing a particularly important role as regards learning outcomes, both for IVET (vocational compulsory education) and CVET (education for adults and public providers of vocational training in Wallonia and Brussels). The descriptions of qualifications are based on the job profiles (professional standards) defined by the social partners. Common training profiles are then defined by education and training providers. These profiles are declined in units of learning outcomes compatible with the ECVET specifications.

²⁴ The shift to learning outcomes: policies and practices in Europe. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/12900.aspx> [accessed 5.12.2012].

The insistence on a learning outcomes approach in the Bologna process has also influenced university practices. The autonomy of universities means that the decision to apply learning outcomes has to be made by the institution itself, resulting in varying approaches. For the Hautes Écoles (higher education institutions outside universities, delivering bachelors and masters) the definition of common competences profiles is in process.

LINKS TO OTHER TOOLS AND POLICIES

Much effort has been invested in developing a system for validating non-formal and informal learning in the French-speaking community of Belgium (European Commission et al., 2010)²⁵. These developments, involving various stakeholder groups, may prove beneficial for broader NQF development.

In the vocational training area the 'validation' process leads to the award of a titre de compétences, a legal document recognised by the Walloon region, the French community and the French community commission (COCOF). The reference used for validating skills is not the existing diploma or certificates, but competence standards for specific occupations. The consortium in charge of implementing the validation of skills policy has defined competences in terms of the set of measurable skills necessary to undertake certain tasks in a workplace situation²⁶, i.e. geared towards measuring skills of direct relevance to specific job profiles. The system previously consisted of job profiles developed by the French register of occupations in the labour market (ROME) and by the Commission Communautaire des Professions et des Qualifications²⁷ (CCPQ). The CCPQ has developed a set of qualification and training profiles, in consultation with sector representatives and the unions. These profiles specify the competences required for each occupational profile, together with associated indicators. In the future, standards developed by the SFMQ (see before) will be used.

Since 2006 a growing number of individuals have had their work experiences validated (more than 2 000 last year) for a titre de compétences. While this titre can form part of a qualification, it is supposed to carry an independent value in the labour market, making visible prior learning and achievement of the individual in question. Due to their recent introduction, these titles are still relatively new to employers: their future value will depend on the extent to which they are integrated into the NQF and how they are linked to (the better-known) certificates and diploma.

Since 1991, adults education has been organised in units and the possibility of validating non-formal and informal learning is included in the law. It is possible to access training without the required title, to be exempted for a unit or a part of unit, or to obtain a certificate or diploma with only the final test, called épreuve intégrée. Higher education institutions (both Hautes Écoles and universities) are developing procedures for recognising prior learning or experience for access to training, without the required title or benefit from dispenses of some ECTS (Valorisation des acquis).

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Referencing to the EQF is seen as an integral part of the overall work on the NQF. As the development of the framework itself has been considerably delayed, referencing to the EQF will probably not take place until late 2013.

A national coordination point for EQF referencing was established in September 2010. This NCP, under the responsibility of the SFMQ, will also be responsible for coordinating issues related to validating non-formal and informal learning.

25 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010, country report Belgium (Wallonia). <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77451.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

26 Consortium de validations des compétences.

27 The CCPQ, which developed principally standards for IVET, is now replaced by a wider institution, the SFMQ including IVET and CVET.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The experiences of the French-speaking region of Belgium show 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. Given a formal decision on the framework during 2013 (including a new Law on NQF), an early operational stage may be reached during 2014 and 2015.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The NCP was set up under the responsibility of the Service francophone des métiers et des qualifications (SFMQ).

<http://www.sfmq.cfwb.be/index.php?id=1435> [accessed 12.3.2013].

BELGIUM (GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY)

The German-speaking community of Belgium is currently developing its own qualifications framework. Being the smallest part of Belgium (geographically and in terms of population) the framework reflects the work done in the Flemish and French speaking parts of Belgium and is also inspired the DQR. The NQF for the German-speaking community will be adopted – through a parliamentary decree – in early 2013. It is foreseen that reference to NQF levels will be introduced into qualifications and certificates in 2013 and that a system for validating non-formal and informal learning will be introduced by 2014.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

A main objective for the framework is to strengthen international comparability. While subject to Federal laws on education applying in Belgium, the geographic location of the region means that citizens are likely to cross the border 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 will also promote equivalence between general and vocational education and training and the shift to learning outcomes is an important step in increasing transparency and strengthening permeability.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The framework has been developed over a relatively short period of time, involving all main education and training stakeholders in the region. This includes the social partners who normally play a key role in an education and training system inspired by the German system, both for general and vocational education and training. The framework will be implemented from 2013 onwards, starting with reference to NQF levels in certificates this year. It is envisaged that further development of procedures will take place during 2014.

LEVELS DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

An eight-level, learning outcomes based framework will be introduced. The framework builds on the concept of Handlungskompetenz (action competence) and distinguishes between subject/occupational specific and personal competences. Level descriptors will be based on the following categories:

Table 3 Level descriptors of the German-speaking community of Belgium, main categories

Handlungskompetenz (action competence)			
Subject/occupational oriented competence (Fachliche Kompetenz)		Personal competence (Personale Kompetenz)	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Autonomy

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. The framework distinguishes between general and vocational qualifications (reflecting the parallel distinction made in Flanders and the French-speaking part of Belgium). For general education it is worth noting that general upper secondary education (Abitur) is placed at level 4 while the three cycles of bachelor, master and doctor are placed at levels 6-8. 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 or level 6 for three years of training.

LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES AND TOOLS

A system for validating non-formal and informal learning is expected to be put in place by 2014. There are no existing plans for using ECVET or ECTS.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

It is not clear when a referencing to the EQF could take place.

BULGARIA

INTRODUCTION

The Bulgarian national qualifications framework for lifelong learning was adopted by the Council of Ministers decision No 96 of 2 February 2012. The Bulgarian government sees the NQF as a precondition for implementing the EQF and an important national priority²⁸.

The Bulgarian national qualifications framework is one single, comprehensive framework, which includes qualifications from all levels and subsystems of education and training (pre-primary, primary and secondary general education, VET and HE). It will provide a reference point for validating non-formal and informal learning.

Amendments to national legislation are foreseen in support of implementation of the framework.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of developing and introducing a comprehensive NQF compatible with the EQF and the QF-EHEA is to make the levels of the Bulgarian education system clearer and easier to understand by describing them in terms of learning outcomes. This will improve the extent to which target groups and stakeholders are informed about national qualifications. 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 NQF development are to:

- develop a device with a translation and bridging function;
- promote mobility within education and in the labour market;
- promote learning outcomes orientation of qualifications;
- support validation of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning;
- strengthen orientation towards a lifelong learning approach;
- strengthen cooperation between stakeholders.

Apart from offering transparency, the NQF is seen as an important tool supporting national reforms and needs, for example by setting up a system for validating non-formal learning, improving education quality, modernising curricula and strengthening provider accountability. The NQF aims to play an important role in supporting lifelong learning and in promoting the participation of adults in learning in Bulgaria.

Stakeholder involvement and framework implementation

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science coordinated and led the drafting the NQF and is now coordinating its implementation.

Between 2008-11, a working group developed proposals for level descriptors for VET and general education. Higher education levels had already been developed in 2007 by another working group. Both processes served as an important base for further developments.

In January 2011, a more coherent approach was requested and a new task force, responsible for drafting a comprehensive framework with a coherent set of levels and level descriptors was set up. This task force included all national stakeholders. A broad national consultation process was carried out in 2011. Finding an agreement on the level descriptors for higher education was particularly challenging. The result, based

²⁸ Programme for the European development of Bulgaria (2009-13). <http://www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/03.11.2009FINALednostranen%20pechat1.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

on closer comparison of the learning outcomes, merged four sublevels of master programme into one generic level.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

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

All levels are described in terms of knowledge (theoretical and factual), skills described as cognitive (use of logical and creative thinking) and practical (manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments), and competences. The descriptor distinguishes between personal and professional competences. They include autonomy and responsibility, but key competences such as learning competences, communicative and social competences are also emphasised.

The expected qualifications levels learning outcomes reflect both the legal acts governing different subsystems of education and training and state education requirements of the contents and expected learning outcomes in the national education system (general and vocational education and training) and in higher education.

It is expected that learning outcomes-based qualifications levels will strengthen the outcomes-dimension and give the learning outcomes a more prominent role in planning education provision. This is especially linked to the development of VET standards divided into units of learning outcomes. In 2011 a draft model of a new VET standard (the so-called State educational requirement for the acquisition of vocational qualification for profession) was elaborated in line with the principles and characteristics of EQF and ECVET. VET standards are seen as a prerequisite for setting up a validation system and updating VET curricula, two important policy priorities.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

Discussions on recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning have been intensified by the NQF development. Bulgaria is actively involved in ECVET and EQAVET implementation. Two main policy objectives are emphasised: to support transnational mobility and reform of the national VET system (e.g. improving the readability of qualification defined in units of learning outcomes) and improve transfer and recognition in further learning (e.g. in higher education).

Amendments to the VET Act are foreseen to create the necessary conditions for the implementation of all EU instruments (ECVET, EQF, EQARF and validation mechanisms) and to provide their synergy in reforming VET in Bulgaria²⁹. It will be closely interlinked with the upcoming Preschool and School Education Act, which will introduce a new structure to secondary school education.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Bulgaria aims to reference its NQF to the EQF and the QF-EHEA in early 2013. One joint report is being prepared.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The aims of the NQF are to increase transparency in education and training and to aid knowledge and skills transfer and so improve labour force mobility. Level descriptors defined in learning outcomes aim to provide a reference point and common language for diverse qualifications from different education subsystems. By referring to educational levels and state educational requirements, the NQF has been given a strong input orientation. It is expected, however, that learning outcomes-based level descriptors will play a very important role in supporting dialogue and discussion among stakeholders will strengthen the learning outcomes dimension in qualifications design. It will also address vertical and horizontal progression possibilities.

²⁹ See Cedefop (2012). Monitoring of ECVET [forthcoming].

The framework can play an important role, but only if it is a part of wider strategic policy resulting in necessary reforms and institutional regulations. The forthcoming Law on Pre-school and School Education, the Higher Education Act and amendments to the VET Act will feed into these developments.

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 (NCP). <http://www.mon.bg> [accessed 6.12.2012]. It plays an organisational, coordination and supportive role in the referencing process.

INTRODUCTION

Cyprus has developed a proposal for a comprehensive NQF which includes all levels and types of qualifications from all subsystems of education and training, from primary to higher education qualifications.

The system of vocational qualifications, being developed by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus, will be an integral, but distinct part of the proposed NQF. Common structures and elements, which will offer opportunities for combining and transferring credits, are being discussed.

A decision to create an NQF was taken by the Council of Ministers in 2008 (Decision No 67.445); a national committee for the development and establishment of the NQF was then set up. A first NQF draft, with detailed timetable for implementation, was presented in April 2010 and consultation with various stakeholders took place in spring 2011.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The main role of the NQF is to classify qualifications according to predefined levels of learning outcomes. The reform potential³⁰ of the NQF is being acknowledged by linking it to wider reforms and procedures for quality assurance, assessment and awarding of qualifications.

More specific objectives and targets to be realised through NQF development are to:

- support recognition and validation of qualifications;
- enable progression and mobility;
- promote lifelong learning through better understanding of learning opportunities, improved access to education and training, creation of incentives for participation, improved credit transfer possibilities between qualifications and recognition of prior learning;
- improve transparency, quality and relevance of qualifications;
- strengthen the link with the labour market.

In the analysis of the existing national qualification system³¹ it is emphasised that the NQF can contribute to these objectives if it is seen as one of several elements in a wider strategy. Only then will it be possible to initiate the necessary reforms and institutional regulations on quality assurance, assessment and awarding of qualifications. This strategy, however, must protect the quality and credibility of the system; this means making sure that all qualifications are the result of a formal assessment and validation procedure, safeguarding that an individual has achieved the necessary/required learning outcomes.

The objective is to develop an inclusive framework, open to qualifications awarded outside formal education. This will primarily be achieved by including the system of vocational qualifications – established by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus – into the framework. These qualifications refer to occupational standards and certify learning outcomes acquired at work or in simulation. This is important to increase the participation of adults in lifelong learning (currently at 7.7%, below the EU average of 9.1% in 2010 (European Commission, 2011))³².

30 Interim report of the national committee and working committee on the development and establishment of a national qualifications framework in Cyprus (CQF). November 2012, p 7 [unpublished].

31 Ibid., pp. 7-8.

32 Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020): country analysis, p.24. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

Inclusion of the vocational qualifications system in the NQF will bring comparability and better correlation of various qualifications, acquired in formal or non-formal learning, which will result in the upgrading of knowledge, skills and competences throughout lifelong learning. One important policy objective is also to reinforce vocational education and training at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The General Directorate for Vocational and Technical Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture has initiated and is coordinating the NQF developments.

The National Committee for the Development and Establishment of NQF consists of the Director General of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Director General of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, and the Director General of the Human Resources Development Authority or their representatives. Higher education representatives are involved but they maintain a degree of autonomy.

The NQF of Cyprus will be established at the Ministry of Education and Culture as an in-service department. The stakeholders responsible for accrediting qualifications will continue to work according to the existing legislative framework for their operation. However, new legislation on the operation of the NQF, which would clarify the cooperation among different stakeholders, is thought necessary. A new permanent body, the Council of the national qualifications framework of Cyprus, has been established³³. Its main tasks will be:

- consulting with stakeholders on NQF development and implementation;
- developing, implementing and reviewing NQF procedures;
- disseminating public information on the NQF;
- advising the Ministry of Education and Culture on policy and resource implications.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

An eight-level reference structure is proposed, reflecting the main characteristics of the national qualification system. The level descriptors are described in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Knowledge is defined by the type and complexity of knowledge involved and the ability to place one's knowledge in a context. Skills are expressed by type of skills involved; the complexity of problem-solving; and communication skills. Competence contains the following aspects: space of action, cooperation and responsibility, and learning skills. These were simultaneously formulated for all levels so that there would be clear progression from one level to the next.

The VET qualifications, developed under the responsibility of the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus will most probably be aligned from level 2 to 6 of the NQF. This is still being discussed.

The existing national qualifications system is mainly based on inputs such as quality of teachers and length of education and training programmes. However, emphasis is increasingly being put on learning outcomes and the need to revise curricula, learning programmes and assessment methodologies towards learning outcomes. A number of reforms are under way, exemplified by upgrading of curricula for pre-primary and upper secondary education, upgrading of vocational education and training through the introduction of post-secondary institutes for vocational education and training (launched in September 2012) and the introduction of new modern apprenticeship. Experiences gained in developing competence-based vocational qualifications will feed into the NQF developments. These are based on occupational standards and make it possible to award a qualification to a candidate irrespective of how and where they have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills and competences.

³³ Interim report of the national committee and working committee on the development and establishment of a national qualifications framework in Cyprus (CQF). November 2012, p 15 [unpublished].

In formal education, learning outcomes are mainly expressed as part of a subject and stage-based general education. In the curriculum, learning outcomes are described as the knowledge, skills and attitudes, and awareness learners are expected to achieve at the end of each stage. There are level descriptors indicating the standards a learner should achieve, when awarded certificates at different education levels.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

The current proposal emphasises that the NQF cannot operate in isolation but must form part of a wider strategy: 'This framework can play a very important role, but if it is not part of a wider strategic policy resulting in the necessary reforms and institutional regulations, it will not achieve its objectives'³⁴.

Discussions on recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning are an integral part of NQF development, with numerous public and private stakeholders participating. Competence-based vocational qualifications, which will constitute an integral part of the NQF, are already open for validation of non-formal learning. Through this the NQF aims to bridge the various qualifications acquired via formal, non-formal and informal learning and strengthen the links between initial and continuous vocational education and training.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The referencing of national qualifications to the EQF is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture, where the NCP has also been established. The referencing report is expected to be presented in early 2013.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The comprehensive and inclusive nature of the proposed framework will require cooperation among different stakeholders. The proposal to set up a council for the national qualifications framework is important in establishing a permanent platform for cooperation between all stakeholders: the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, the Human Resource Development Authority and representatives of employer and employee organisations and the academic community.

The early stages of NQF implementation will adopt a flexible approach, based on key principles to be applied across subsystems, but also accepting differences and different approaches and practices in different education and training subsystems, if necessary.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

National contact point has been established at the Ministry of Education and Culture. <http://www.moec.gov.cy> [accessed 16.12.2012].

³⁴ Ibid., p 7.

THE CZECH REPUBLIC

INTRODUCTION

The Czech Republic has yet to decide whether to develop a comprehensive NQF. However, partial frameworks for vocational qualifications and for tertiary education qualifications have been developed and are now operational. The proposed descriptors for primary and secondary education may also be seen as pointing in this direction; the question now being discussed is whether an overarching framework can help to coordinate and bridge these separate developments. The latest preliminary surveys among various stakeholders are supportive of developing a comprehensive NQF as a tool for communication, mutual cooperation and improving the quality of education and training in general³⁵.

Work on the framework for vocational qualifications started in 2005, based on the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results (2006)³⁶, which is also the legal framework for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Both processes are closely related. The core of the framework is the publicly accessible national register of qualifications (NSK).

A framework for tertiary qualifications has been designed under the Q-RAM project, initiated in 2009.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The interlinked development of a framework and a register for vocational qualifications has been a cornerstone in the national strategy for lifelong learning (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2007)³⁷. Aiming at improving access to lifelong learning and creating a more permeable education and training system, the main elements of this strategy, reflecting identified and agreed needs³⁸, are:

- creating a system to recognise and validate learning outcomes, irrespective of the way they were achieved;
- making the whole system more transparent and understandable for all stakeholders, e.g. learners and employers, employees, training providers;
- linking initial and continuing education;
- systematically involving all stakeholders in vocational education and training and in developing national qualifications;
- responding to European initiatives such as making qualifications more transparent and supporting the mobility of learners and workers;
- supporting disadvantaged groups and people with low qualification levels.

Another important issue is to open up different pathways to qualifications and to increase flexibility in the qualifications system. Complete vocational qualifications in the register for vocational qualifications are broadly comparable and compatible with qualifications acquired in initial VET, opening up both ways of acquiring qualifications (formal and non-formal learning). Also, one can acquire vocational (formerly called partial) qualifications listed in the register and build a complete qualification step-by-step. Exams can be

35 NCP survey, September 2012.

36 The Act No 179 of 30 March 2006 on verification and recognition of further education results and on the amendments of some other acts. <http://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/act-no-179-of-30-march-2006> [accessed 5.12.2012].

37 The strategy of lifelong learning in the Czech Republic. http://www.msmt.cz/uploads/Zalezitosti_EU/strategie_2007_EN_web_jednostrany.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

38 Despite apparent progress achieved in lifelong participation in recent years (to 7.5% in 2010) it is still below EU average (9.6%).

taken for all vocational qualifications of a given complete qualification but to achieve complete qualification (attaining a level of education) it is necessary to pass the final exam. This makes final exams based on qualification standards a bridge between the two systems. The focus is more on vocational (formerly called partial) qualifications, because these aid employment and can address relatively quickly shortages of certain qualifications in the labour market.

Developments in VET and higher education – to some extent pursued through projects – have not been coordinated or connected. This leaves a number of questions and challenges for the development of shared concepts and the design of a structure which could provide the basis for a future comprehensive national qualifications framework. This challenge is accentuated by the fact that the idea of a comprehensive framework is not yet well understood among the broader public³⁹.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The framework for vocational qualifications is fully operational. More than 60 000 applicants have been awarded qualification certificates (their competences validated)⁴⁰.

The Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results, which came into force in 2007, sets out the basic responsibilities, powers and rights of all stakeholders in developing and awarding vocational qualifications. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) coordinates the activities of the central administrative authorities (ministries) and approves, modifies and issues the list of vocational and complete vocational qualifications. It supports the activities of the National Qualifications Council. This in turn – including all stakeholders – acts as an advisory body to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) in the area of qualifications. Sector councils are in charge of developing qualification and assessment standards of the NSK up to level 7; most qualifications are, however, placed at levels 2 to 4. At higher levels they define only specialised supplemental qualifications, not those awarded by higher education institutions (bachelor, master and PhD degrees) (European Commission et al., 2010, Czech Republic, p. 3)⁴¹. Opening up higher levels (up to level 7) for qualifications awarded outside higher education institutions is seen as an important means of supporting lifelong learning.

The national coordination point has played an important role in referencing Czech qualifications to the EQF: it leads the discussion on establishing the comprehensive national qualifications framework and provides and disseminates information on European tools.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The framework and register for vocational qualifications consists of eight levels. Level descriptors reflect the complexity of work activities⁴². A national meeting identified a need for modification and broadening of NSK descriptors but a decision can be taken only after the results of the Q-RAM project are published, which will feed into these developments.

In the tertiary education system the framework will consist of two layers. The first layer will be generic descriptors for each level of qualifications, compatible with the overarching framework for EHEA and also with the EQF descriptors. These descriptors cover four levels, corresponding to levels 5 to 8 in the EQF, and cover short cycle (no qualifications at this level currently in the system), bachelor, master and doctoral degrees.

39 NCP survey, September 2012.

40 Ibid.

41 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010, country report: Czech Republic. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77454.pdf> [accessed 26.11.2012].

42 In the proposal on qualifications levels in the national qualifications systems, adopted by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in 2010, these levels were linked to levels of education and types of programmes. During the referencing process it was decided that all qualifications awarded in formal education will be referenced to the EQF levels by comparison of learning outcomes in national curricula and the EQF.

A set of level descriptors for primary and secondary education (EQF level 1 to 4) has also been drafted, based on core curricula. In this proposal, descriptors are grouped into three categories; knowledge, specific study and work skills, and transferable skills. Discussion on the need, scope and goals of the comprehensive qualifications framework between all education sectors continues⁴³. The learning outcomes approach is widely used in the Czech education system, although applied and interpreted slightly differently across levels and subsystems. Core curricula for primary and secondary education emphasise key competences and their practical use. Expected learning outcomes are defined in terms of activities, i.e. tasks students should be able to perform. The Education Act, which came into force in 2005, regulates curriculum reform at primary and secondary level, emphasising learning outcomes and strengthening social partner influence in VET. Key competences (e.g. ICT skills, learning to learn, problem-solving) have become very important. Modularisation of courses was introduced to improve transferability between various pathways in initial and continuous education, but it has not yet been implemented in most schools (Cedefop Refernet, Czech Republic, 2010)⁴⁴.

A competence-based and learning outcomes oriented approach is shared by VET and higher education and has broad political support. This is documented and confirmed by the curriculum reform of vocational education (including relevant methodologies) and by the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Results of Further Education. IVET framework curricula are increasingly being aligned with competences defined in the NSK. The majority of standards for levels 4 and higher, however, are still being drafted.

In the project Q-RAM (on the development of a qualifications framework for HE), the learning outcomes approach has been crucial in developing generic descriptors and subject-specific benchmarks and will be further promoted in specific study programmes. A pilot study tested the subject specific benchmarks within this project in 2011.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

Europass, ECVET and EQAVET are closely coordinated with the EQF implementation, because all these instruments are implemented and promoted within one institution. Policy objectives linked to the ECVET are to support domestic and international mobility and transparency of qualifications (connection of qualifications in NSK with the credit system ECVET is planned)⁴⁵. Pilot projects are underway.

The NQF and register of vocational qualifications and the system being developed for validating non-formal and informal learning are closely related. The legal framework for recognising non-formal and informal learning and the register of vocational qualifications is the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results. The act also establishes the NSK, which is based on the framework for vocational qualifications. Validation and recognition procedures are carried out according to the qualifications and assessment standards included in the national register of qualifications. Currently, only qualifications included in the NSK register can be acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The Czech Republic referenced its formal qualifications to EQF levels in December 2011. The qualifications referenced are those awarded in lower and upper secondary education, in higher education and in continuing education (under the Act 179/2006 on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results). Higher education qualifications are linked to the EQF, but not yet self-certified against the QF-EHEA. The Czech Republic intends to self-certify its higher education framework against the QF-EHEA at a later stage, following the completion of a project in 2012.

43 The Czech Republic has referenced its formal initial qualifications to the EQF based on the classification of educational qualification types (KKOV) and nationally approved curricula.

44 VET in Europe: country report Czech Republic. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/eu/pub/cedefop/vetreport/2010_CR_CZ.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

45 See Cedefop (2012). ECVET monitoring [forthcoming].

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

An important topic of discussion will be the development towards a more comprehensive overarching national qualifications framework with a coherent set of level descriptors, which will bring together subframeworks for vocational qualifications, for higher education and lower and upper secondary education. Explicit levels would make more transparent the links to the EQF levels. Discussions have started, but no decisions have been taken yet.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The National Institute for Education (NUV) is the EQF NCP, which manages the operational agenda and creates proposals of the NCP for referencing qualifications levels to the EQF. <http://www.nuov.cz> [accessed 6.12.2012].

A register of all approved qualification and assessment standards is available at <http://www.narodni-kvalifikace.cz/> [accessed 6.12.2012].

DENMARK

INTRODUCTION

Denmark has developed a comprehensive NQF covering all types and levels of qualification awarded and quality assured by public authorities. The work on the framework started in 2006 and builds directly on the qualification framework for higher education established in 2006-07. Implementation of the eight-level framework has been a gradual process, in effect starting in June 2009 when the proposal for the framework was adopted by the Minister for Education, the Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation, the Minister for Culture and the Minister for Economic and Business Affairs. The NQF was referenced to the EQF in May 2011. The framework has reached an early operational stage, supported by the EQF national coordination point established in 2010.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Danish NQF provides a comprehensive, systematic overview of public qualifications that can be acquired within the Danish system. The Danish evaluation institute specifies this as ‘...all qualifications that have been awarded pursuant to an act or executive order and that have been quality assured by a public authority in the Danish education system (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011, pp. 13-14)⁴⁶.

The framework supports the development of a transparent education, training and learning system without dead ends; it supports the progression of learners, irrespective of their prior learning, age or employment situation.

The Danish NQF draws a clear distinction between levels 1 to 5 and levels 6 to 8. The latter are identical with the levels descriptors in the Danish QF for higher education at bachelor, master and doctoral-level, and contain explicit references to research related outcomes. The difference is illustrated by the use of two different principles for referring qualifications to the framework. A qualification at levels 1 to 5 is referred according to a ‘best fit’ principle where the final decision is based on an overall judgement of knowledge, skills and competences. A principle of ‘full fit’ is used for levels 6 to 8, as is the case for the Danish QF for HE, implying that qualifications at this level have to be fully accredited as meeting the legal requirements set by national authorities and according to the QF for higher education for qualifications at these levels.

This distinction implies that all qualifications at levels 6 to 8 need to be defined and accredited according to the QF for HE. For the moment there are no publicly recognised qualifications in the Danish education system at level 6 to 8 that are not included in the higher education area (QF for HE), and a number of non-university qualifications have been, or are expected to be, accredited as bachelors and masters (for example related to arts, the armed services and police) and thus included in the qualifications framework for higher education.

The NQF adopted in 2009 is considered to be a first step in a long-term development process. A second stage, opening the framework up to qualifications and certificates in the private and non-formal sector, is envisaged. The work on this second stage will have to focus on the procedures for inclusion and, in particular, on how quality assurance and accreditation can be handled. This work was initially foreseen to have started in 2012 but has been delayed.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

A broad range of stakeholders has been involved throughout the development and implementation period. The social partners have been systematically consulted and involved throughout the process and their role is being described as constructive and as a precondition for the implementation of the framework. Some

46 Referencing the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework, pp. 13-14. http://www.iu.dk/dokumentation/kvalifikationsrammer/National_report_Referencing_DK_Qualifications_Framework_to_EQF.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

social partner representatives, notably employers, have questioned the direct added value for companies, pointing to the need to move into a second and more inclusive development stage.

While the Ministry of Education is in charge of the NQF project the Danish EQF national coordination point has taken on an active role in the day-to-day coordination of the framework and its implementation. The NCP is located in the Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalisation (which also hosts the DK national academic recognition centre, NARIC). A main task for the NCP is to coordinate stakeholders involved in the framework as well as disseminate information to a wider public. It is acknowledged that the NQF is not very visible to the general public at this stage, but that the inclusion of NQF/EQF levels into certificates and diplomas and the Europass documents could change this (work to include levels on certificates and diplomas is ongoing).

The NQF is visible through two advanced websites, offering comprehensive background information and regular updates on development and implementation: the NQF.DK, which provides information for an international target group, presenting the NQF and the qualifications it covers; and the UG.DK, addressed to a national target group, providing comprehensive information on qualifications, programmes, access, etc. The UG.DK also provides general information on the NQF and the qualifications levels, and explains the concept of learning outcomes-based levels and how these can be used by learners.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The eight-level structure adopted for the Danish NQF is defined by knowledge (Viden), skills (Færdigheder) and competences⁴⁷ (Kompetenser). Danish level descriptors have been based on a number of different sources, including existing descriptions of learning outcomes in curricula and programmes, the EQF descriptors, and the Bologna descriptors. They have been designed to be relevant to different types of qualification, theoretically as well as practically oriented. Knowledge (Viden) descriptors emphasise the following:

- 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 the knowledge and 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.

⁴⁷ Note that the Danish NQF, in contrast to the EQF, uses the plural 'competences'.

Table 4 *Level descriptor in the Danish NQF for lifelong learning*

Knowledge/Viden	Skills/Faerdigheder	Competence/Kompetenser
Type and complexity	Type	Space for action
	Problem solving	Cooperation and responsibility
Understanding	Communication	Learning

These descriptors are used to address both (full) and supplementary qualifications. 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.

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. VET has a strong tradition in defining qualifications in terms of competence, but higher education and the different parts of general education are also making progress. It is being admitted, however, that it will be necessary to deepen the understanding of the learning outcomes approach at all levels, for example by developing guidelines.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Referencing to the EQF is treated as an integral part of overall implementation of the NQF and was completed in May 2011 (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011)⁴⁸. The result shows a strong convergence between the Danish framework and the EQF but a linking of Danish level 1 to EQF level 2. Some concern has been raised during 2012 that the five Nordic countries seem to go for different solutions to referencing of primary and (lower) secondary, general qualifications to the EQF.

Table 5 *Level correspondence established between the Danish national qualifications framework (DK NQF) and the EQF*

DK NQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	2	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

A NCP has been established, the Danish Agency for International Education.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Denmark is now moving towards a fully operational national qualifications framework for lifelong learning. This success has largely been achieved by accepting that not all problems can be solved immediately and an NQF will also need to develop beyond 2012.

The potential inclusion of certificates and diplomas awarded outside the public domain is an issue which will have to be addressed in the coming period. This could strengthen the relevance of the framework for the labour market and the social partners.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A website for the Danish qualifications framework is available on <http://en.iu.dk/transparency/qualifications-frameworks> [accessed 6.12.2012].

The Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalisation acts as NCP. <http://en.fivu.dk/the-ministry/organisation/agencies/danish-agency-for-universities-and-internationalisation> [accessed 12.3.2013].

⁴⁸ Referencing the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework. http://www.iu.dk/dokumentation/kvalifikationsrammer/National_report_referencing_DK_Qualifications_Framework_to_EQF.pdf [accessed 15.12.2012].

ESTONIA

INTRODUCTION

Estonia is implementing a comprehensive national qualifications framework for lifelong learning, the Estonian qualifications framework (EstQF), including all state recognised qualifications⁴⁹. The overarching framework brings together subframeworks for higher education qualifications⁵⁰, VET qualifications⁵¹, general education⁵², and occupational qualifications⁵³.

The subframework for higher education, reflecting the principles of the European higher education area, was adopted in August 2007 and described by the standard of higher education. General descriptors follow the logic of Dublin descriptors, but are adjusted to national needs.

Qualifications at level 5 of the NQF are subject to intensive discussions. A new draft VET Law, which is planned to come into force in 2013, has been prepared. It foresees qualifications at level 5 (both in IVET and CVET). Developing qualifications at this level is seen as crucial to improving permeability between different subsystems (especially VET and HE).

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The ambition of the NQF in Estonia is twofold; to be a tool for transparency and communication and, at the same time, to be a tool for reforming lifelong learning.

More specifically, the policy objectives addressed by NQF are to:

- improve the link between education/training and labour market;
- increase educational offer and qualification system consistency;
- provide transparency for employers and individuals;
- increase understanding of Estonian qualifications in the country and abroad;
- introduce common quality assurance criteria;
- support validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- monitor the supply and demand for learning.

It is expected that implementation of an overarching NQF will increase the coherence of education and training and help to introduce coherent methods for standard-setting. Another important policy objective is to increase adult participation in lifelong learning from 11% in 2011 to 17% in 2020, set as a national target⁵⁴. Early school leaving and drop outs have decreased in last years to 10.8% in 2011, but are still high in the last years of basic education and highest in the first year of vocational education (21.1%). Further decreasing early school leaving (especially among boys) remains an important policy area and an objective for the coming year. A key priority is to improve the quality of education and especially the relevance of VET to the needs of the labour market.

49 According to law they have to be defined in learning outcomes qualifications standard (curriculum or professional standard). The awarding institutions (educational institution, professional associations) have to be accredited by state.

50 Referred to as standard of higher education.

51 Referred to as vocational education standard.

52 Referred to as national curriculum for basic schools and national curriculum for upper secondary schools.

53 Occupational qualification means a qualification associated with trade, occupation or profession resulting from work-based learning.

54 https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Education_in_Europe_2020_Strategy#Adult_participation_in_lifelong_learning [accessed 5.12.2012].

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The Estonian NQF has reached an early operational stage, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Estonian Qualifications Authority being the main bodies involved.

The Qualification Authority (Kutsekoda) was established in 2001 with the aim of developing the competence-based professional qualifications system, which was put in place in parallel to the existing formal education system under the Ministry of Education and Research.

The Qualifications Authority coordinates 16 professional councils and keeps a register of competence-based qualifications; it cooperates with other institutions, e.g. the National Examination and Qualifications Centre and the Quality Agency for Higher Education.

A permanent platform is to be set up – a steering group – including stakeholders from different subframeworks (e.g. general education, HE, VET, occupational qualifications) and labour market actors to oversee the implementation and evaluate the impact of the EstQF.

The Qualifications Authority acts as national coordination point. It participated in the development of the NQF and referencing of the NQF to the EQF. It disseminates information, and guides and advises various stakeholders in the application of the framework.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The NQF is based on eight levels. Level descriptors for lifelong learning are identical to EQF level descriptors. They are defined as knowledge (theoretical and factual), skills (cognitive skills – use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking – and practical skills, i.e. manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments) and scope of responsibility and autonomy⁵⁵. More detailed descriptors have been developed in four subframeworks for general education, initial vocational education, higher education and occupational qualifications.

Two types of qualification are included:

- formal educational qualifications, which are awarded after completion of educational programmes at all levels (general, vocational, higher);
- occupational qualifications⁵⁶, where individuals are issued a certificate of knowledge, skills and competences required for working in a specific occupation or profession.

Introducing a learning outcomes approach is an important part of the national reform programme for general education, VET and HE. Linked to this is an increased focus on recognition of prior learning.

The learning outcomes of different types of VET are described in the vocational education standard, which came into force in November 2009. Learning outcomes in vocational education correspond to levels 2 to 4 of the NQF and are described with reference to minimum level standards. The learning outcome approach describes professional knowledge and skills as well as transversal skills (communicative, social and self-awareness competence, independence and responsibility). All types of VET will be formally linked with NQF levels by the end of 2013. A new VET Law is expected in 2013, which also envisages level 5 VET qualifications.

Programmes in VET are modularised and outcomes-based. All programmes will be reassessed in the future, taking into consideration possible changes in the occupational (professional) standards, aiming at

⁵⁵ Professions Act (English version) is available on the website of the Estonian Qualifications Authority. <http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutsesysteem/oigusaktidkutseseadus> [accessed 5.12.2012].

⁵⁶ There are 620 occupational qualifications based on occupational standards, which can be placed on levels 2 to 8 of the NQF. They can be gained through formal education, adult education and in-service training. Information obtained from Referencing of Estonian qualifications and qualifications framework to the EQF, p. 9.

increased compatibility of educational and professional (occupational) qualifications. There will be step-by-step development in each sector. All initial VET study programmes will be learning outcomes based by 2014.

New learning programmes have been implemented in higher education institutions from September 2009. The Universities Act and Applied Higher Education Institutions Act now allow for accreditation of prior and experiential learning in higher education curricula (European Commission et al., 2010, Estonia, p. 1)⁵⁷.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

The Estonian lifelong learning strategy emphasises the principle that all strategic national, regional and local documents should support development of the lifelong learning system, including the recognition of prior learning and work experience. Increasingly, outcomes-based qualifications and programmes allow for recognition of non-formal and informal learning according to relevant regulation in different subsystems. ECTS, is used for higher education. In the VET system, a credit point system based on a study week is used, and transition to ECVET is planned (Aarna et al., 2012)⁵⁸.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Estonia referenced the Estonian qualifications framework to the EQF and self-certified the compatibility of the Estonian qualifications framework for higher education with the QF-EHEA in October 2011.

Table 6 Level correspondence established between the Estonian qualifications framework (EstQF) and the EQF

EstQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

One of the key objectives of the EstQF is to improve comparability between formal school leaving certificates and occupational (professional) qualifications. EstQF has contributed to this objective in recent years by building up a more coherent and responsive lifelong learning system. The process has been intense. Recently, 'a remarkable convergence of the formal educational system and professional qualification system has taken place'⁵⁹. EstQF regulates key quality criteria for qualifications to be included in the framework. They have to be defined in learning outcomes-based qualification standards (curriculum or professional standards), awarded by accredited institutions and be quality assured.

One of the key challenges is to consolidate the platform for cross-sectoral cooperation among stakeholders in implementation of the comprehensive NQF, including those from subsystems of education and training and the world of work.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Estonian Qualification Authority is designated as EQF national coordination point. <http://www.kutsekoda.ee> [accessed 6.12.2012].

Information on NQF development is available from <http://www.valew.eu/project-valew/project-partners/6-estonian-qualification-authority> [accessed 6.12.2012].

57 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Estonia. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77456.pdf> [accessed 26.11.2012]. Except for final thesis or examination, all other parts of higher education programmes can be proved through recognition of prior learning.

58 Referencing of the Estonian qualifications and qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework, p. 10. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/estonia_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

59 Referencing of the Estonian qualifications and qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/estonia_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

FINLAND

INTRODUCTION

The work on the Finnish national qualifications framework started in August 2008. A national committee comprising all main stakeholders presented a first proposal in June 2009. Following two public consultations in 2009 and 2010, the government presented a proposal to the Finnish Parliament autumn 2010. According to this, the Finnish NQF will cover officially recognised qualifications (general, vocational education and training and higher education) at all levels, and can be described as comprehensive. The framework is also intended to (gradually) open up towards competences acquired outside the existing formal qualifications system, for example linked to continuing training in the labour market.

Following the change of government in 2011, the original proposal was slightly revised and resubmitted to Parliament in May 2012 (Act on a National Framework for Exam-based and other Competences). In its proposal the government expects the act to be in force by 1 January 2013, though this presupposes it's passing by the Parliament before the end of 2012.

A qualifications framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna process, was developed in 2005 but has not been taken forward separately and will form an integrated part of the NQF. Finland has decided to carry out the referencing to the EQF and the self-certification to the European higher education area as one process.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The work on the Finnish NQF was directly triggered by the launch of the debate on the EQF in 2004-05. While Finnish stakeholders supported the idea of a European reference framework, they originally saw little added value from an NQF in Finland, pointing to the transparent character of the existing education and training system and what was seen as relatively limited further benefit of a framework. This scepticism has largely been replaced by agreement that the framework has a long-term role to play in helping to increase international transparency and to improve the effectiveness and clarity of the qualifications system.

Transparency and comparability of qualifications, at national and European level, are core objectives of the NQF. This is to be achieved by describing all existing qualifications in a coherent way and by using a consistent conceptual approach. This will illustrate the relationship between different qualifications and clarify how individuals can make progress within the system and how they can build pathways based on experience and/or on formal learning. Recognition of prior learning is emphasised as an important feature of the NQF and as a necessary element in a strategy for lifelong learning.

Several stakeholders are keen that the framework provides an opportunity to strengthen the overall consistency of the use of learning outcomes across education and different institutions. Explicit level descriptors may help to clarify what is expected from a qualification and can improve the overall quality of Finnish education and training.

As well as officially recognised qualifications (general, vocational education and training, and higher education) at all levels, the framework will also cover official qualifications awarded outside the remit of the Ministry of Education and Culture, for example related to the armed services, police, and prison and rescue services.

The framework introduces the concept of 'extensive competence modules' to be able to address acquired learning outcomes that are not part of the existing qualifications system. These competence modules cover a broad area and occur in many professions and at all levels. The government proposal distinguishes between two main areas where these 'modules' will be relevant:

- in regulated professions, where legal requirements for certifications beyond initial education and training exist. This is the case for professions in the health and social sectors but is also the case for teachers, diverse and various groups within the construction sector;
- in all areas where there is need for increased competences and specialisations beyond initial education and training. The NQF proposal refers to the need to improve the visibility and valuing of 'specialisations' beyond initial education and training. These specialisations form a significant part of the existing Finnish lifelong learning landscape (in vocational training, higher education and in liberal adult education).

By gradually including certificates and qualifications operating outside initial education and training, the hope is to improve their visibility and improve conditions for lifelong learning. The plan is that these 'extensive competence modules' will be covered only gradually by the framework and it remains to be seen how this will be dealt with in practice, not least with respect to quality assurance arrangements.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

Development of the Finnish NQF has involved a broad range of stakeholders. While initiated and coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the working group responsible for preparing the NQF proposal consisted of the following: The Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Defence Command Finland (Ministry of Defence), Finnish National Board of Education, Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland (AKAVA), Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK), Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK), Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK), the Association of Vocational Adult Education Centres (AKKL), Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (ARENE), Vocational Education Providers in Finland (KJY), Finnish Association of Principals, The Finnish Council of University Rectors, Finnish Adult Education Association, The National Union of University Students in Finland and the Union of Finnish Upper Secondary Students.

The range of stakeholders included in the working groups signals an inclusive approach seeking as strong ownership as possible from the start. This approach was further strengthened by carrying out wide-ranging consultation in autumn 2009. Of the approximately 90 proposals received, none questioned the idea of developing and implementing an NQF. A second consultation on the government proposal for national legislation was organised in summer 2010, after which changes were made to the level descriptors.

Higher education institutions have supported the development of the NQF and have contributed to the framework design. This seems to reflect the existing Finnish education and training system where interaction between general, vocational and higher education and training institutions seem to operate more smoothly than in many other countries. This may be explained by the role played by non-university higher education (promoting professional training at bachelor and master level) and by the increasingly important competence-based qualifications approach applied for vocational qualifications at levels corresponding to 4 and 5 of the EQF. This approach, gradually developed since the 1990s, is based on the principle that candidates without a formal training background can be assessed for a qualification. Finnish VET qualifications also give access to all forms of higher education. A qualifications framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna process, was developed from 2005 and is now an integrated part of the new comprehensive NQF.

The change of government in 2011, and the subsequent resubmission of the proposal to Parliament, was not accompanied by further consultations. The main changes to the proposal are linked to the levelling of particular qualifications, the original and somewhat controversial proposal to place some specialist vocational training qualifications, including one for riding teachers, at level 6 have been removed.

The delays experienced during 2011 and 2012 have partly reduced the overall attention to the framework and its potential role. Whether this will harm the implementation of the framework in the long term remains to be seen.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Broad acceptance of the competence-based approach underpins Finnish NQF developments and the relatively lack of conflict over linking general, vocational and higher education qualifications.

The government proposal now being discussed by Parliament introduces an eight-level framework reflecting (but slightly adjusting) the knowledge, skills and competence components introduced by the EQF. The descriptors have been inspired by the EQF but adopted to suit the national context; this is particularly so for competence, where additional aspects like entrepreneurship and languages have been added. This may help strengthen the dimensions of key-competences and lifelong learning. Including the aspect 'evaluation' specifies that individuals must be able to reflect on their knowledge, skills and competences and to judge how to improve them. The descriptors for levels 6 to 8 use the same basic approach but also largely reflect the descriptors of the earlier proposal for higher education qualifications framework. Table 7 shows the components used to define and describe levels in the Finnish NQF.

Table 7 Level descriptor in the Finnish NQF

Knowledge	Levels 1-8
Work method and application (skills)	
Responsibility, management and entrepreneurship	
Evaluation	
Key skills for lifelong learning	

The level descriptors in the government proposal do not distinguish explicitly between the different dimensions of learning outcomes (KSC), even if they have been identified in preparatory work. The aim was to create a holistic description for each level.

The background document for the government proposal illustrates the main principles for placing qualifications at particular levels, and how the learning outcomes approach has been applied. Qualifications of the same type have been placed at the same level. This applies also to vocational qualifications (levels 4 and 5). To ensure the clarity of the education and qualifications system, all qualifications of a certain type would normally be placed at the same level in the framework, but some exceptions have been identified. Individual VET qualifications may be placed at one level higher than the basic qualification if the requirement level clearly differs from other qualifications of the same type, as is the case, for example, for vocational qualifications in construction (speciality in production). This is important as it signals a willingness to use the learning outcomes approach actively and an acknowledgement that this may lead to different level placement within one group or qualifications.

While creating no controversy at national level, the placing of the basic education syllabus at level 3 of the NQF has triggered an intense discussion with the four other Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden). Denmark and Iceland, both considering their primary and (lower) secondary education to be at level 2, fear that the Finnish approach inflates this particular qualification and may create artificial barriers between the Nordic countries, obscuring existing and de facto similarities. The Swedish and Norwegian positions on levelling for primary and (lower) secondary education have been influenced by the Finnish proposal, and both may decide to go for level 3.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

The government proposal emphasises the role of the NQF in further promoting the use of learning outcomes for describing expectations to individuals and for improving the quality and consistency of the education and training provisions and institutions themselves. In this sense the NQF is seen as a tool for promoting lifelong and life-wide learning. While not explicitly addressing the link between the NQF and validation, the priority given to learning outcomes can be seen as a precondition for further developing arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

According to the European inventory on validation (European Commission et al., 2010, Finland)⁶⁰, validation is benefitting a growing number of adults, with the system of competence-based qualifications of particular importance. The number of beneficiaries has increased from around 5 000 adults in 1997 to over 65 000 in 2008. In recent years, the number of participants has increased at an annual rate of around 2% to 20%. Validation is also used in all other parts of education and training but statistics are generally more unreliable; in some cases, for example HE, it is not registered to what extent validation has played a role when acquiring a qualification.

So far, no common standards or requirement have been introduced for validation that would include all different levels of education (Cedefop, 2010b)⁶¹. The National Board of Education has drafted national qualification requirements for each competence-based qualification⁶². The documents specify areas of assessment and standards/criteria for passing/failing. Such requirements are legally binding and therefore guide validation work carried out at the provider level by the tripartite assessment teams. In terms of higher education, the laws and decrees regulate higher education and no standards exist as such. In 2009 the Finnish Council of University Rectors and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences also issued recommendations on validating informal and non-formal learning in Finnish higher education.

Finland has been actively involved in testing ECVET. Referred to as FINECVET, a national project piloting the ECVET system, these developments have so far been carried out separately from the development of the NQF and there is no indication in the government proposal on how to establish links to ECVET.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The Finnish national coordination point for EQF (which is the National Board of Education) was appointed in June 2008, before the work on the NQF started. Preparations for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF have been going on in parallel to the work on the NQF proposal itself. Due to the delays encountered during 2011 and 2012, EQF referencing has been repeatedly postponed and will take place – given a decision by the Parliament – in spring 2013.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

This Finnish NQF may become a tool for long-term development. The introduction of learning outcomes based levels is seen by stakeholders as an instrument for increasing qualifications consistency in Finland. While learning outcomes are used widely in almost all education and training sectors, their interpretation varies, thus risking inconsistencies between institutions and sectors. The NQF is seen as something more than just an instrument for transparency; this transparency should be used as a reference point for improving the overall quality and relevance of Finnish qualifications.

The success of the Finnish NQF will depend on the extent to which it becomes an instrument for gradual improvement of qualifications at all levels, including the local and institutional. Will it, for example, become a reference point for assessment and validation practitioners; will it become a reference point for curriculum development; and will it influence the overall debate on quality assurance in education and training?

The delays encountered during 2011 and 2012 may have resulted in a loss of momentum at national level. The moment a decision from the Parliament exists, it will be important to restart the dialogue between

60 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report Finland. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77460.pdf> [accessed 26.11.2012].

61 The development of national qualifications framework in Europe, August 2010. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/6108_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

62 The Finnish National Board of Education decides on the national core curriculum for each vocational qualification, determining the composition of studies and the objectives, core contents and assessment criteria of the study units. Preparation is carried out by tripartite expert groups and they are also discussed in education committees for each sector and qualification committees.

stakeholders and invite them to influence the creation of an operational NQF. Without such renewed involvement and engagement there is a risk that the relevance of the Finnish framework for long-term developments will be reduced.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Finnish Ministry of Education. <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/?lang=en> [accessed 6.12.2012].

Finnish National Board of Education acts as NCP. <http://www.oph.fi/qualificationsframework> [accessed 6.12.2012].

FRANCE

INTRODUCTION

The setting up, in 2002, of the National Committee for Professional Certification (CNCP) and the national register of vocational qualifications (RNCP) signals the establishment of the French national qualifications framework. Supported by the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning (validation des acquis de l'expérience), the French framework can be seen as belonging to the first generation of European qualifications frameworks. While more limited in scope than the new comprehensive NQFs now developing throughout Europe, in its focus on vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications, its regulatory role is strong and well established.

A number of stakeholders consider the existing five-level structure dating back to 1969 to be in need of replacement, possibly by an eight-level structure more closely aligned with the EQF. This discussion has now been going on for a number of years, notably since 2009 when a note on the issue was submitted to the office of the Prime Minister. Partly due to the change of government in 2012, this reform has been further delayed and it is, for the moment, unclear when a new structure could be put in place.

The framework was referenced to the EQF in October 2010, using the original five-level structure as reference point. A new referencing report will be submitted as soon as a revised structure is in place, possibly in the next one to two years.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The French NQF, as defined by the RNCP, covers all vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications, including all higher education qualifications with a vocational and professional orientation and purpose⁶³. The framework covers three main types of qualification:

- those awarded by French ministries (in cooperation with the social partners through a CPC);
- those awarded by training providers, chambers and ministries but where no CPC is in place;
- those set up and awarded by social partners under their own responsibility.

To be registered in the RNCP, a qualification should meet a number of requirements; aiming at national coherence and strengthening the overall quality and transparency of qualifications. All qualifications registered in the RNCP must be possible to acquire through validation of non-formal and informal learning. Registration signals that all stakeholders, as represented in the CNCP, underwrite the validity of a particular qualification. Registration is necessary for:

- receiving funding;
- financing validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- exercising certain professions and occupations;
- entering apprenticeship schemes.

The French NQF has more limited scope than the comprehensive NQFs now being developed throughout Europe. Its focus is strictly on vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications and it does not include certain qualifications from general education, notably primary and lower secondary education (>16) and general upper secondary qualifications (the General Baccalaureate).

⁶³ The RNCP currently covers more than 6 000 qualifications published (in the Official Journal) certificate (qualifications) 'fiches'; 1 260 of these are 'old' certificates not awarded any more. By October 2012, certificates in higher education grades are as follows: 870 masters have been published, 323 titres d'ingénieurs (grade of master), 160 licences generales (grade of bachelor), 1 523 licences professionnelles grade of professional bachelors), 1 280 level 5 EQF (including higher education short cycles), 117 brevet de technicien supérieur (BTS), (in 2011) 29 BTSA (same thing in the field of agriculture), (in 2011) 43 DUT (diplomes universitaires technologiques).

The French NQF is defined by its labour market focus. The framework responds to a situation where students increasingly find themselves without jobs after finishing education and training. Recent policy initiatives and reforms have emphasised the need to give higher priority to employability and having candidates better suited to the labour market. Universities have therefore been obliged to reformulate and clarify their qualifications also in terms of labour market relevance, in effect obliging them to use the same qualifications descriptors (skills, knowledge, competence) as other areas of education and training. This movement towards employability, and the obligations of universities to adapt, has been present in French policies since 2006.

This also means that, while the learning outcomes approach is now increasingly being implemented for the qualifications forming part of the responsibility of the CNCP, this principle is only to a very limited extent applied for general education at primary, lower and upper secondary level.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

Belonging to the first generation of European frameworks, the French NQF is fully implemented and operational. It is a regulatory framework playing a key role in the overall governance of education and training systems, in particular as regards vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications. While emphasising the importance of transparency (for example by integrating the Europass tools), the framework directly influences access and progression in the system as well as funding and quality assurance issues. The number of qualifications covered by the CNCP has been steadily increasing in recent years.. A significant part of this growth was caused by vocationally and professionally oriented higher education qualifications, notably at EQF levels 5 and 6.

The CNCP (which is also an EQF NCP) is a platform for cooperation between all ministries involved in design and award of qualifications (Ministries of Education, Higher Education, Labour, Social Affairs, Agriculture, Culture, Youth and Sports, Defence, Finance) and for the social partners and other relevant stakeholders (chambers, etc.) in coordinating the French qualifications system and framework. This broad involvement is seen as necessary (both for technical and administrative reasons) to capture the diversity of qualifications in France, but also for reasons of credibility and ownership. CNCP is also entitled to be informed about any vocational qualification created by social partners, even in cases where there is no intention to register them in the national register.

The role of the CNCP as the 'gatekeeper' of the French framework is important. No qualification can be included in the official register without the approval of the CNCP. The strength of the CNCP lies in its openness to public and private providers and awarding institutions. The procedures and criteria developed and applied by the CNCP for this purpose are of particular interest to those countries currently in the process of implementing new (and open) NQFs. Any institution (public or private) wanting to register a qualification must respond to the following main issues:

- legal basis of the body (or network of bodies) awarding the qualification;
- indication of procedures if the awarding institution discontinues its activity;
- description of tasks addressed by the qualification;
- link to ROME;
- the competences (learning outcomes) related to these tasks;
- competences (learning outcomes) to be assessed;
- mode of assessment;
- relationship to existing qualifications in France and abroad;
- composition of the assessment jury;
- link to validation.

The French experiences since 2002 illustrate the need for NQFs to evolve continuously to stay relevant. One of the issues currently being addressed is the question of opening up to the development of qualifications at what would correspond to EQF level 2. Until now there has been agreement between public authorities and social partners that vocationally and professionally oriented qualifications (falling within the mandate of the CNCP) should only be developed and awarded from level 3 and upwards. This position has been defended by the trade unions in particular, fearing that an opening up to vocational qualifications at lower levels could threaten existing labour market agreements. The current crisis in the economy, with increasing youth unemployment, may lead to reconsideration of this approach. Technical work continues, looking at possible competence requirements for level 2 qualifications, using the experience of neighbouring countries like Luxembourg and Germany as reference point. It is expected that progress will be made in 2013, reflecting the current urgency attributed to this question.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The original five-level structure introduced in 1969 was used as the basis for referencing the French framework to the EQF in 2010.

The French qualification system has developed considerably since these levels were agreed in 1969 so the development and introduction of a more detailed structure of level descriptors is seen as necessary. In 2011, the national council on statistics (CNIS) commented on the need for a new level structure (CNCP, 2010)⁶⁴ by stressing that it ‘...would like to see these reflections lead to a new classification of certifications that take into account changes in the structure of qualifications and the links set up within European higher education.’

Although it is likely that a seven or eight-level structure will be chosen (based on technical work carried out so far), it is now unclear when a new draft structure could be presented. A particular issue is how the new structure will link to occupational standards, notably the national ROME and the international ISCO. The discussion is also closely related to the question of whether qualifications corresponding to EQF levels 1 and 2 will play any role in the future. This latter question is linked to labour agreements and negotiations on minimum wages and is particularly complicated.

Table 8 Levels in the French national qualifications framework

Level	Level definition	Learning outcomes
V	Personnel holding jobs normally requiring a level of training equivalent to that of the vocational studies certificate (BEP) or the certificate of vocational ability (CAP), and by assimilation, the level 1 certificate of vocational training for adults (CFPA).	This level corresponds to full qualification for carrying out a specific activity with the ability to use the corresponding instruments and techniques. This activity mainly concerns execution work, which can be autonomous within the limits of the techniques involved.
IV	Personnel holding jobs at a supervisory highly skilled worker level and able to provide proof of a level of training equivalent to that of the vocational certificate (BP), technical certificate (BT), vocational baccalaureate or technological baccalaureate.	A level 4 qualification involves a higher level of theoretical knowledge than the previous level. This activity concerns mainly technical work that can be executed autonomously and/or involve supervisory and coordination responsibilities.

⁶⁴ Referencing of the national framework of French certification in the light of the European framework of certification for lifelong learning. <http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/uploads/file/Report-FR-NQF-EQF-VF.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

III	Personnel holding jobs normally requiring a level of training equivalent to that of a diploma from a University Institute of Technology (DUT) or a technology certificate (BTS) or a certificate corresponding to the end of the first higher education cycle.	A level 3 qualification corresponds to higher levels of knowledge and abilities, but without involving mastery of the fundamental scientific principles for the fields concerned. The knowledge and abilities required enable the person concerned to assume, autonomously or independently, responsibilities in design and/or supervision and/or management.
II	Personnel holding jobs normally requiring a level of training comparable to that of a bachelor or master's degree.	At this level, exercise of a salaried or independent vocational activity involves mastery of the fundamental scientific principles for the profession, generally leading to autonomy in exercising that activity.
I	Personnel holding jobs normally requiring a level of training above that of a master's degree.	As well as confirmed knowledge of the fundamental scientific principles for a vocational activity, a level 1 qualification requires mastery of design or research processes.

In contrast to the use (to now) of the 1969 level structure as a basis for the French framework, there is a common policy on learning outcomes (expressed as 'competence') covering the entire (vocationally and professionally oriented) education and training system. This approach is broadly accepted within initial vocational education and training and gradually so by institutions operating at higher levels of education and training. The approach was strengthened by the 2002 Law on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VAE) and its emphasis on learning outcomes as the basis for awarding any kind of certified qualification.

The learning outcomes approach has only been partially introduced in higher education. Traditionally, university qualifications have been input-based and very much focused on the knowledge and research aspect. The new law of August 2009 (Loi sur les responsabilités et libertés des universités) creates the obligation for universities to set new services dedicated to employability. This law requires universities to improve their learning outcomes descriptions, both for employers and students.

The learning outcomes descriptions form the basis on which higher education qualifications are approved by the CNCP, a process which has to be renewed every four years. The Ministry of Higher Education has now (September 2012) issued () detailed criteria for writing learning outcomes for bachelor level (licences) divided into the following main areas:

- common generic competence;
- pre-professional competences;
- transferable competences;
- specific competences related to broad, disciplinary subject areas.

There are also many interuniversity teams working on learning outcomes with the triple purpose of helping the implementation of the VAE, the registration of degrees in the RNCP, and employability of students. A systematic effort is now being made to support the introduction and use of a learning outcomes-based perspective, in particular addressing higher education. A nationwide process was initiated in 2009-10 and regional meetings have been/are being held explaining the rationale behind the learning outcomes approach.

65 Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche, 16 July 2012.

Initial vocational qualifications are defined according to the same logic as for higher education qualifications, in terms of skills, knowledge and competences. There are different forms of VET provision though, influencing the way learning outcomes are assessed, following four main approaches:

- qualifications based on training modules, the learning outcomes of each module being assessed separately;
- qualifications based on a two-block approach, theory and practical experience, the learning outcomes of the two blocks being assessed separately;
- qualifications linked to a single, coherent block of learning outcomes/competences requiring a holistic approach to assessment of learning outcomes;
- qualifications based on units of learning outcomes, which can be assessed separately, and capitalised independently of any kind of learning process.

All four operate using a learning outcomes/competence-based approach, though in different ways.

The emphasis given to transparency is demonstrated by the way the French NQF actively uses the Europass certificate supplement. This format is seen as important for transparency reasons and as relevant at all levels, including higher education. The supplement has been strengthened as regards competence/learning outcomes. The main focus is on the three descriptor elements – knowledge, skills and competences – but the link to quality assurance and to validation of non-formal and informal learning is also addressed by the framework.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is treated as an integrated part of the French NQF and any qualification approved by the CNCPE must be possible to acquire also on the basis of validation of experiences. The extensive use of validation, both for access and exemption, can be seen as an effort to build bridges between education and employment and as a key element in promoting lifelong and life-wide learning. The centrality of validation in the French approach explains the relatively low priority given to the use of credit systems in France, illustrated by the moderate implementation of ECTS and ECVET.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Work on referencing to the EQF has been going on since 2006 and a (preliminary) referencing report was presented to the EQF AG in October 2010. From the start the referencing process involved all ministries, social partners and other stakeholders (represented in the CNCPE). The referencing work was also supported by the EQF test and pilot projects, notably the Leonardo da Vinci Net-testing project. The result of the referencing can be seen in the following table:

Table 9 *Level correspondence established between the French qualifications framework and the EQF*

French 5-level structure	EQF
I – Doctorate grade	8
I – Master grade	7
II – Bachelor grade	6
III	5
IV	4
V	3
Not applicable	2
Not applicable	1

The referencing table shows the limitations of the five-level structure in terms of specificity and ability to reflect the diversity of qualifications covered by the French framework. This is exemplified by level 1 (highest) which covers both master and doctorate, and by level 5 (lowest) which covers all initial qualifications.

The (lack) of lower level vocational/professional qualifications has posed a particular challenge. Looking at the qualifications covered by the current level 5, it could be argued (from learning outcomes) that this broad category of qualifications covers both levels 2 and 3 of the EQF. A political decision has been made, however, to refer all these qualifications to level 3 of the EQF. Several of the countries represented in the EQF AG expressed some concern regarding this decision. Members of the advisory group argued that the non-existence of lower level qualifications in the French framework (in a worst case scenario) could prevent migrants holding qualifications at EQF level 1 or 2 from entering the French labour market, given that equivalents officially do not exist in the French system. Debate on this issue is now also evident at national level in France.

The timing for the presentation of an updated referencing report to the EQF AG is now uncertain and will depend on the revision of the level-structure and possibly on clarification of how to deal with the lower levels of vocational/professional qualifications.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The French NQF operates with less clear distinction between VET and higher education than many other European countries. This signals a wish to promote vocationally and professionally oriented qualifications at all levels. Since the 1970s, vocational courses and programmes have been an important and integrated part of traditional universities and professional bachelor and master degrees are common. Outside universities we find specialist technical and vocational schools offering courses and certificates at a high level. These schools are run by different ministries covering their respective subject areas (agriculture, health, etc.), or by chambers of commerce and industry. Ingénieurs from these institutions or students in business schools hold qualifications at a high level, equivalent to those from universities with a master degree. The Ministry of Higher Education delivers the bachelor and master degrees and recognises the diplomas. This has an integrating effect on the diplomas awarded by other ministries such as culture or industry.

In reality, the situation is less clear-cut. As the French qualifications framework is currently defined by those qualifications registered in the RNCP, important general education qualifications are left outside the framework. Compared to other European countries, addressing both professional and general qualifications, the integrating function and role of the French framework is lessened, in particular as a key-qualification like the general Baccalaureate is kept outside the framework.

The introduction of a new level structure to replace the 1969 structure could help to move the French NQF further forward and strengthen comparability to other European NQFs.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Information is available on the website of the National Committee for Professional Certification (CNCP). <http://www.cncp.gouv.fr> [accessed 6.12.2012].

GERMANY

INTRODUCTION

A final agreement on a comprehensive national qualification framework for lifelong learning based on learning outcomes (Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen, DQR) was adopted in March 2011 by the working group Arbeitskreis DQR [Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF); Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK), 2011]⁶⁶. In a high level meeting on 31 January 2012, stakeholders extended the agreement to align important qualifications from vocational education and training and higher education to the DQR levels. For the moment, qualifications from general education (for example the school leaving certificate, Abitur) are not included in the framework. The decision on this has been postponed and will be reviewed after a five-year period.

The DQR is the result of lengthy development work which started in 2006, when the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder [regions] agreed to work together on it in response to the emerging EQF. Following extensive preparatory work, a proposal for a German NQF was published in February 2009. This proposal provided the basis for extensive testing to be followed by full scale implementation. The piloting stage (May-October 2009) used qualifications from four selected sectors (IT, metal, health and trade) as 'testing ground' to link qualifications to DQR levels. A broad range of stakeholders, including experts from school-based and work-based VET, continuing education and training, general education, HE, trade unions and employers, collaborated in testing the proposal⁶⁷. Following the evaluation of the testing phase, amendments to the original proposal were introduced, for example to the level descriptors.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Germany has actively supported the EQF initiative from the start and the extensive effort put into developing the DQR reflects this. The EQF, with its insistence on the learning outcomes perspective, is seen as an opportunity to classify German qualifications adequately and to use it as a tool to improve opportunities for German citizens in the European labour market (Hanft, 2011, p. 50)⁶⁸.

The learning outcome approach is seen as a catalyst for strengthening the coherence of the whole education and training system, linking and integrating various subsystems and improving progression possibilities⁶⁹. The shift to learning outcomes is seen as a precondition for strengthening the overall permeability (Durchlässigkeit) of German education and training. Learners should be allowed to move between levels and institutions according to their actual knowledge, skills and competences, and be less restrained by formal, institutional barriers.

The DQR and the shift to learning outcomes have been seen by some stakeholders, notably the social partners, as an opportunity to focus on the parity of esteem between general and vocational education and training.

66 The German qualifications framework for lifelong learning adopted by the 'German qualifications framework working group'. http://empleo.ugr.es/unilo/documentos/dqr_document_en_110322.pdf [accessed 20.5.2012].

67 <http://www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de/SITEFORUM?t=/documentManager/sfdoc.file.content&e=UTF-8&i=1215181395066&l=1&pathID=1282918786834> [accessed 5.12.2012].

68 The changing relevance of the Beruf. In: Brockman, M. et al. Knowledge, skills and competence in the European labour market: what's in a vocational qualification?. '... the clear outcomes and competence orientation of the EQF is first and foremost seen as an opportunity to classify German qualifications more adequately than existing international classifications, such as ISCED-97 or the 2005 EU directive for recognition of qualifications based on types of certificates and time spent in education and training.'

69 One important principle of DQR is that each qualification level should always be accessible via various education pathways.

Another important issue is that providers of continuous training and those who provide training for groups at risk see opportunities to become part of the integrated system and offer better progression possibilities (Hanft, 2011, p 52)⁷⁰.

These considerations have been translated into a series of objectives, with the DQR expected to:

- increase transparency in German qualifications and aid recognition of German qualifications elsewhere in Europe;
- support the mobility of learners and employees between Germany and other European countries and within Germany;
- improve the visibility of the equivalence and differences between qualifications and promote permeability;
- promote reliability, transfer opportunities and quality assurance;
- increase the skills orientation of qualifications;
- reinforce the learning outcomes orientation of qualification processes;
- improve opportunities for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- foster and enhance access and participation in lifelong learning.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The development of the DQR is characterised by a bottom-up and consensus-seeking approach. A national steering group (Bund-Länder-Koordinierungsgruppe) was jointly established by the BMBF and the KMK at the beginning of 2007. This coordination group has appointed a working group (Arbeitskreis DQR) which comprises stakeholders from higher education, school education, VET, social partners, public institutions from education and the labour market as well as researchers and practitioners. Decisions are based on consensus and each of the members works closely with their respective constituent institutions and organisations.

At the beginning of 2012 an agreement was reached to assign qualifications from vocational education and training and higher education to the DQR levels⁷¹. Additionally, a working group has developed 11 recommendations for inclusion of non-formal and informal learning in the DQR. In November 2012, the working group Arbeitskreis published a position paper with a proposal to establish a working group, which will align 'examples' of qualifications from the non-formal sector to the DQR⁷².

A coordination point for the German qualifications framework has been set up in a joint initiative of the Federal government and the Länder. It has six members, including representatives from the BMBF and Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology and the KMK and the Conference of Ministers of Economics of the Länder. Its main role is to monitor the allocation of qualifications to ensure consistency of the overall DQR structure. The direct involvement of other ministries, social partners, representatives

70 The changing relevance of the Beruf. In: Brockman, M. et al. Knowledge, skills and competence in the European labour market: what's in a vocational qualification?

'One of the main concerns in the last 15 years in Germany is increased enrolment into the so-called 'transitional sector', where students stay for about 0.5-1.5 years; this includes different training schemes, which do not lead to full qualifications. 70-80% of students move into the dual system or full-time vocational schools afterwards.'

71 The relationship between initial vocational qualifications acquired in the dual system, secondary school leaving certificate giving access to universities (Abitur) and higher education qualifications has been at the heart of discussions for many months. Ultimately it was decided, that general education qualifications will be included after a five year implementation period.

72 See Empfehlungen der Arbeitsgruppe zur Einbeziehung nicht-formal und informal erworbenen Kompetenzen in den DQR. http://www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de/de/aktuelles/empfehlungen-der-experten-arbeitsgruppen-und-stell_h7i39o5t.html?s=7Li0EFHjokI9UoILT [accessed 12.12.2012].

of business organisations and interested associations is, when their field of responsibility is concerned, ensured by the Federal Government/Länder coordination point for the German qualifications framework.

The German Qualifications Framework Working Group (Arbeitskreis DQR) remains active as an advisory body and retains its former composition⁷³.

On behalf of the BMBF, a DQR Büro (DQR office) has been set up to provide technical and administrative support.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

An eight-level structure has been adopted to cover all main types of German qualification.

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 Handlungskompetenz. 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 (see below). Methodological competence is understood as a transversal competence and is not separately stated within the DQR matrix. The German DQR expresses only selected characteristics; the comprehensive and integrated notion of competence, underlying the DQR has a strong humanistic and educational dimension⁷⁴.

Descriptors are expressed as alternatives, e.g. 'field of study or work' and 'specialised field of study or field of occupational activity'. The table of level descriptors (DQR matrix) and a glossary are included in the DQR outline.

The broad and inclusive nature of level descriptors, using parallel formulations, makes it possible to open up all levels to different kinds of qualifications. That means that higher levels are not restricted to qualifications awarded within the Bologna process.

Table 10 Level descriptor in the German qualifications framework for lifelong learning

Level indicator ⁷⁵			
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, reflectiveness and learning competence

Each reference level maps comparable, rather than homogenous, qualifications. One of key principles of DQR is that 'alignment takes place in accordance with the principle that each qualification level should always be accessible via various educational pathways' (BMBF; KMK, 2011, p. 6)⁷⁶.

⁷³ Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder. German EQF referncing report. November 2012.

⁷⁴ Handlungskompetenz in vocational school curricula is not restricted to the world of work, but implies individual ability and readiness to act adequately socially and individually responsible.

⁷⁵ This is just the analytical differentiation; the interdependence between different aspects of competence is emphasised. See final outline, p. 5.

⁷⁶ The German qualifications framework for lifelong learning adopted by the 'German qualifications framework working group' (AK DQR), 22 March 2011. http://empleo.ugr.es/unilo/documentos/dqr_document_en_110322.pdf [accessed 5.5.2012].

Orientation to learning outcomes is increasingly becoming standard in education, vocational training and higher education (BMBF; KMK, 2012)⁷⁷.

In VET, continuous development of the concept of Handlungskompetenz (ability to act), introduced in 1990s, has gradually assumed a key role in a qualifications definition, with clear input requirements about place, duration and content of learning. Competence-based training regulations and framework curricula with 'learning field' have been developed.

Competence orientation is also characteristic of the reform process in general education and development of national Bildungsstandards. They currently exist for German and mathematics in primary education (Hauptschule); German, mathematics and first foreign language for the intermediate leaving certificate (Realschule); and German, mathematics and foreign language for the upper secondary school leaving certificate (Abitur)⁷⁸. In higher education, the modular structure and a learning outcome oriented description of the study modules are key prerequisites for the approval of a study course.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

The DQR, with its clear learning outcomes approach, also aims at improving opportunities for recognising informally acquired learning outcomes and strengthening lifelong learning. Promoting permeability across subsystems is also an explicit aim. Although the DQR does not have regulatory functions in this respect – being the province of other education policies – it will be an important tool to support it (Büchter et al., 2012)⁷⁹. Germany is active in ECVET implementation: it is currently testing an ECVET blueprint for mobility within EU projects and has piloted units and credits to improve progression within VET (e.g. between transition system and dual system or school-based VET and dual system or between VET and higher education⁸⁰).

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The joint steering committee set up by the Federal government and the Länder in 2007 is in charge of referencing, supported by the DQR office. The referencing report was presented in December 2012.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

First, the development of the DQR is embedded in the broader context of reforms to strengthen the outcomes-based orientation of German education and training. It is also linked to initiatives to support permeability within VET and between VET and HE, e.g. the ANKOM initiative⁸¹ involves stakeholders from VET and higher education to support recognition of learning outcomes.

Second, the development of the DQR is also characterised by a comprehensive vision and a coherent set of level descriptors, spanning all levels of education and training. This approach makes it possible to identify and better understand the similarities and differences between qualifications in different areas of education and training. A permeable system with better horizontal and vertical progression possibilities is at the heart of DQR developments, as is parity of esteem between VET and general education and efforts to include non-formal and informal learning.

Third, there are intense discussions about the influence the new paradigm may have on the Beruf as the main organising principle in German VET and on the labour market. It is feared that a learning outcome approach could split VET qualifications into different levels, leading to their fragmentation and individualisation. Other concerns are 'that NQF might undermine the value of qualifications by creating

77 German EQF referencing report, p. 96.

78 Ibid., p. 98.

79 Der Deutsche Qualifikationsrahmen (DQR) – Ein Konzept zur Erhöhung von Durchlässigkeit und Chancengleichheit im Bildungssystem?

80 For more information consult the DECVET website http://www.decvet.net/de/Projektpartner/site__185/ [accessed 5.12.2012].

81 For more information see <http://ankom.his.de> [accessed 5.12.2012].

confusion, mixing different spaces of recognition and blurring the distinction between different types of knowledge (Hanft, 2011, p. 66; Gehmlich, 2009, pp. 736-754)⁸².

Fourth, NQF development is also characterised by a strong and broad involvement of stakeholders from all subsystems of education and training (general education, school and work-based VET, HE), and from the labour market, ministries and Länder.

Fifth, stakeholders also agreed that alignment of the qualifications within German education to the reference levels of the DQR should not replace the existing system of access. Achieving the reference level of the DQR does not provide automatic entitlement to access the next level. The achievement of the reference level has also not been considered in conjunction with the implications for collective wage bargaining and the Law on Remuneration (BMBF; KMK, 2011, pp. 5-6). These are issues to be discussed in the coming years.

A 5-year implementation phase with scientific evaluation is planned.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Federal government/Länder coordination point assumes the functions of the EQF NCP. Information on the DQR development is available at <http://www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de> [accessed 7.12.2012].

⁸² The changing relevance of the Beruf. In: Brockman, M. et al. Knowledge, skills and competence in the European labour market: what's in a vocational qualification?

Kompetenz' and 'Beruf' in the context of the proposed German qualifications framework for lifelong learning. Journal of European industrial training, Vol. 33, No 8/9, pp. 736-754. <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?issn=0309-0590&volume=33&issue=8&articleid=1822051&show=html> [accessed 26.11.2012].

GREECE

INTRODUCTION

Greece is currently developing an NQF for lifelong learning (Hellenic qualifications framework, HQF), which aims to include all parts and levels of education, training and qualification and will accommodate non-formal learning.

The new Act on Lifelong Learning (Act 3879/10) was put in force in September 2010, introducing the development of the HQF and the concept of learning outcomes as essential elements of awards.

Preparatory actions have started. A new institution – National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (Eoppep) – was set up in December 2011 to develop and put the HQF into practice. Mapping of existing and older qualifications has started to prepare foundations for the NQF. This is supported by methodological instruments (e.g. methodological guides for referencing learning outcomes to HQF levels) available since February 2011. It contains information on the basic principles and methodology on how to express qualifications in terms of learning outcomes and referencing them to the HQF levels.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Apart from responding to the EQF initiative, the work on the NQF is directly linked to the country's efforts to develop a framework for further improving lifelong learning policies and practices, which will allow for recognition and certification of all kinds of education and training, including non-formal learning. Compared to other EU countries, the participation of adults in lifelong learning in Greece is among the lowest⁸³ and systematic and coherent policies have largely been lacking. Strengthening the learning outcomes dimension in all parts of education and training is considered a precondition for moving towards lifelong learning. This will not only provide the basis for a more transparent and open qualification system, it will also allow individuals to have their learning validated and recognised throughout their lives. The new Law on Lifelong Learning (Law 3879/10), adopted in September 2010 is an important milestone in these developments. There is also broad agreement among different stakeholders on the need to put a validation system in place but practical arrangements have not yet been made. Recognition of learning outcomes was largely dependent on attainment in formal education and training (European Commission et al., 2010, Greece, p. 5)⁸⁴ and the system was largely input based.

It is agreed that the NQF could help to address the following challenges and needs:

- to increase coherence and consistency of the national qualification system and reduce fragmentation of current subsystems;
- to improve access and progression possibilities, eliminate dead ends and foster lifelong learning opportunities;
- to develop coherent approaches and procedures to certification and quality assurance;
- to have a solid basis for developing recognition for non-formal and informal learning.

83 In 2010 only 3% of adults (25-64) participated in lifelong learning compared to European average of 9.1%. The national target is to reach 6% of adult participation in lifelong learning by 2013. European Commission (2011). Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), country analysis for Greece, p. 59. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf [accessed 10.5.2012].

84 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Greece. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77459.pdf> [accessed 26.11.2012].

The short-term objective is to develop coherent national certification procedures covering both IVET (there is an existing system) and CVET to support the consistency and portability of qualifications.

In the medium term the following objectives will be pursued:

- to improve the transparency and currency of qualifications through clear learning outcomes description;
- to develop procedures for validating non-formal and informal learning;
- to improve access, progression and recognition possibilities;
- to improve quality and portability of qualifications in general.

Long-term objectives will be developing coherent lifelong learning strategies and practices, improving the coherence of national reform policies, and using the NQF as a development instrument for change.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports is the main national body in charge of developing and implementing the HQF. Stakeholders from public institutions, social partners, representatives of universities and external experts are included. The Ministry of Labour has not been involved so far.

Eoppep was set up to put the HQF and procedures for validation of learning outcomes into practice and assure quality in lifelong learning.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

According to the Law on Lifelong Learning, the HQF will be a comprehensive framework covering all parts and levels of education and training. An eight-level structure has been proposed reflecting existing formal education and training systems in Greece. EQF level descriptors were taken as a starting point and further developed according to national needs. Levels are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Work on level descriptors for HQF and on a qualifications framework for higher education has been taking place separately, but the final objective is to have a comprehensive framework, covering all levels and types of qualifications.

Strengthening the learning outcomes approach is seen as an important dimension of current reforms in primary, secondary and tertiary education. A system for occupational standards is currently being developed, seen as a precondition for setting up a system for validating non-formal learning. Additionally, these profiles will be used to review curricula in both initial and continuous VET and for accreditation of training programmes. The new curricula currently being developed are based on the learning outcomes approach.

These developments are supported by the methodological guide for referencing the learning outcomes to the HQF levels and promoting common understanding of the basic terms. They will also render the procedures transparent and promote quality assurance, while assigning qualifications to the HQF levels. A common template for description of qualifications has been prepared.

Working groups have been formed under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports to draft the outcomes of qualifications provided in subsystems of formal education and to suggest their allocation to the eight levels of the HQF. This work continues on a technical level.

In general education, a framework for developing a 'new school' has been launched politically and renewal of curricula is planned.

Development works on the QF for higher education have started but level descriptors have not yet been prepared. It is expected that this work will reinforce the learning outcome approach in reorganisation of learning procedures and curricula to promote interdisciplinary and mobility in HE.

LINKS TO OTHER TOOLS AND POLICIES

The HQF aims to include non-formal qualifications, mainly awarded in adult and continuing vocational training, and to support the validation and recognition of individual learning outcomes. The new Lifelong Learning Act provides the basis for a more coherent and integrated approach as the coordination of all issues to lifelong learning (including adult learning and initial and continuing VET) is now under the Ministry of Education; previously this was under the remit of the Ministry of Employment (European Commission et al., 2010, Greece, p. 6)⁸⁵. Further work needs to be done to put the new legal framework into practice: a system for accrediting the bodies which will be responsible for certifying the qualifications awarded outside formal education is planned.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The referencing of the national qualifications system levels to the EQF is scheduled to take place in 2013.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in HQF development and implementation is seen as crucial, but also a challenge. All subsystems of formal education and training are included via the Ministry of Education, but there is a challenge to link two current development processes, one on NQF for lifelong learning and QF developments in HE. Also, the Ministry of Labour has not yet been involved.

Other challenges ahead include the referencing of the HQF of international sectoral qualifications, as well as of those qualifications acquired through programmes run by foreign universities, which cooperate with private institutions in Greece. There is a clear division between non-university, mostly private, institutions and the university sector, which is public and charges no fees in accordance with the Greek Constitution. Universities have the exclusive right to award traditional higher education qualifications (MA, BA and Doctorate). Referencing higher education qualifications awarded outside traditional universities, using learning outcomes-based level descriptors, is seen as a challenge.

Compared to many other EU countries, Greece has a weak tradition of using learning outcomes for defining and describing qualifications. The main challenges are seen in putting into effect the shift to learning outcomes and developing all necessary methodologies, procedures and standards. It is expected that the HQF will provoke reform of education and training and improve links to the labour market. It will bring to the attention of the general public issues of lifelong learning, validation, informal learning, and quality assurance.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The National Organisation for Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (Eoppep) is designated as the NCP.

<http://www.nqf.gov.gr/ΑρχικήΣελίδα/tabid/36/Default.aspx> [accessed 7.12.2012].

⁸⁵ European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Greece. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77459.pdf> [accessed 26.11.2012].

HUNGARY

INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive NQF for lifelong learning was adopted in July 2012 by government decree and published in the Hungarian Official Journal. It will embrace all national qualifications that can be acquired in general and higher education and those vocational qualifications registered in the national qualifications register. All subsystems are included in accordance with the broad (general) national level descriptors which will allow subsystems to adopt more specific descriptors. These developments are designed to support validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

The national register of VET qualifications and the current revision of professional and examination requirements in VET, as well as continuing fine-tuning in the cycle system and the focus of regulation towards outcomes in higher education in the Bologna process, contribute to the establishment of a single comprehensive NQF.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The development of an NQF will address the following issues:

- promote harmonisation of the different subsystems, helping the national qualification system to become more coherent, and supporting national policy coordination⁸⁶;
- improve transparency, transferability and comparability of national qualifications by showing the relationship between qualifications (there are many qualifications at levels 4, 5 and 6);
- support lifelong learning and enable stronger links between adult learning and formal education, awareness-raising related to different learning paths, in the long term: recognition of a broader range of learning forms (including non-formal and informal learning);
- reinforce the use of learning outcomes in standard-setting, curricula and assessment⁸⁷ and contribute to the establishment of a common approach for describing learning outcomes in different subsystems;
- through referencing the NQF to the EQF, make Hungarian qualifications easier to understand abroad and make them more comparable, and more transparent, enhancing mutual trust;
- improve the relevance of qualifications in the labour market;
- support the career orientation and counselling system.

The NQF could play an important role in supporting lifelong learning in Hungary. Adult participation, at 2.8% in 2010, is below the EU average (European Commission, 2011)⁸⁸.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

Overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the NQF is shared between the Ministry of Human Resources and the Ministry of National Economy.

The conceptualisation of an NQF started in early 2006 under the Ministry of Education and Culture (now part of the Ministry of Human Resources) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (whose

⁸⁶ The connections between the management of public education, higher education, vocational education and training and adult training have been weak to date and developments are separated from each other.

⁸⁷ The Hungarian education system has traditionally been characterised by a content-based approach to education and assessment with substantial differences between study fields and programmes.

⁸⁸ Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), country analysis, pp. 64-70. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wvp2_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012]

responsibilities are now transferred to the Ministry of National Economy). In June 2008 the government adopted a decision (No 2069/2008) on the development of an NQF for lifelong learning and on joining the EQF by 2013⁸⁹. During 2008-10 the NQF developments were taken forward as part of the social renewal operational programme of the new Hungary development plan (2007-13), mostly funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)⁹⁰. A new government decision (No 1004/2011) was adopted in January 2011, which further supports the establishment of a Hungarian qualifications framework to be referenced to the EQF. Based on this decision, the relevant ministries worked together to create – in their respective fields of competence – the necessary legal, financial and institutional conditions for implementing the NQF.

An intergovernment task force was set up in February 2011 to programme, harmonise and monitor all phases of NQF development and implementation. It is chaired by the Deputy State Secretary for Higher Education and Science. It comprises representatives from all the ministries, the National Council for Public Education, the National Labour Office, the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, the Higher Education Planning Council, representatives of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. As the technical work is carried out in three separate projects according to the subsystems of education (VET, HE, public education), cross-subsystem cooperation seems to be a challenge.

Administrative support to the task force is provided by the Educational Authority. The national coordination point has been established as a project unit within this institution with the main task of coordinating the stakeholders and preparing the referencing process.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

An eight-level structure has been adopted. Learning outcomes levels are defined in four categories: knowledge, skills/abilities, attitudes and autonomy/responsibility. The descriptors were based on analysis of existing approaches in the relevant subsystems. Further, subsector-specific developments are planned.

The focus on learning outcomes has strong support among different stakeholders and is the subject of research studies in different education and training subsystems. In recent years, a number of steps have been taken towards a learning outcomes and competence-based approach. As of 2007, a national core curriculum based on key competences has been put in place in school-based education and the national competence assessment has been introduced in public education. Since 2006 the final secondary school examination (maturity examination) has been reformed, enabling more accurate assessment of competences acquired by students. The new core curriculum and curriculum framework of 2012 reregulated the content requirements of public education to achieve unified learning outcomes and results. The new regulation enforced the knowledge elements so they are in balance with the competences.

In VET, the national qualifications register (NQR) was reformed and competence-based vocational qualifications referenced into a five-level structure were developed.

The shift to learning outcomes in post-secondary VET involved the introduction of competence profiles, which are used as the basis for qualifications and curricula design and are at the core of the competence-based examination system. Qualifications consist of core and optional modules. Advanced VET has been reorganised: it now belongs within the scope of HE. Learning outcomes descriptions were prepared in cooperation with providers in 2012 and higher education quality assurance measures apply.

In higher education learning outcomes have appeared in qualifications requirements through regulatory measures and acts. All first and second cycle higher education qualifications in Hungary are described

89 2069/2008 (VI. 6) Korm. határozata az Európai Képesítési Keretrendszerhez való csatlakozásról és az Országos Képesítési Keretrendszer létrehozásáról [government decision (No 2069/2008) on the development of an NQF for lifelong learning]. <http://www.okm.gov.hu/kozoktatasi/2069-2008-kormhat> [accessed 5.12.2012].

90 Social renewal operational programme 2007-13. <http://www.nfu.hu/?lang=en> [accessed 5.12.2012].

in terms of both inputs and outcomes criteria. However, student-centred learning, outcomes-based orientation and use of learning outcomes in designing programmes and learning units are still key challenges in HE.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The draft referencing report is expected to be prepared and presented to the EQF AG by 2013.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

One of the main roles of the NQF is to function as an interface between education and the labour market; therefore, it is crucial to get stakeholders on board. As NQF development is running within three separate projects, following three subsystems (VET, HE, public education), cross-subsystem cooperation is a challenge. There is some kind of coordination mechanism established through representation in the intergovernment task force⁹¹.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Educational Authority delegates the member of the EQF advisory group, and the role of EQF national coordination point is also carried out by this background institution.

⁹¹ NCP survey, September 2012.

ICELAND

INTRODUCTION

Iceland is currently developing a national framework (ISQF) covering all levels and types of qualification. The framework will consist of seven learning outcomes based levels. Work started in 2006 and has been closely linked to the reform of the entire Icelandic education training system. While there is currently no single act or decree introducing the ISQF, its role and mandate are explicitly stated through a series of acts and decrees introduced between 2006 and 2012. Starting with the Act on Higher Education and followed by acts on pre-school education, compulsory education, upper secondary education, teacher training and adult education, a sufficiently strong formal basis exists for the framework to be able to move into an early operational stage during 2013. The ISQF is characterised by a clear borderline between levels 1 to 4 and levels 5 to 7. The development of these two parts of the framework has, to some extent, taken place separately and responds to the EQF and Bologna processes respectively (with separate referencing to the EQF and self-certification to the QF-EHEA).

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE FRAMEWORK

The ISQF is defined as a lifelong learning framework and aims to encompass all levels and types of education and training offered in the country, including adult education. The framework starts with, and is anchored to, general reform of Icelandic education and training initiated by the Act on Higher Education, adopted in 2006. While this act referred to the Bologna process and the introduction of a three cycle approach for Icelandic higher education, the acts on upper secondary education in 2008 and on adult education in 2010 address the remaining parts of education and training and point towards a comprehensive national qualifications framework.

The Icelandic NQF – through its systematic application of learning outcomes – is seen as a tool for reviewing the overall functioning of education and training and supporting long-term reform. This is exemplified by the Act on Upper Secondary Education which provides for a new approach to design and construction of study programmes. Education providers will gradually (and to be fully implemented from 2015) enjoy more autonomy in writing curricula in general education and VET. They will do this using an approach combining learning outcomes, workload and credits.

So far, no separate legislative basis has been developed for the ISQF: this has been deemed unnecessary due to the integration of framework developments into the 2006-10 reform. While this provides a strong legislative basis for the different parts of the framework, moving towards a comprehensive framework may be hampered by the fact that levels 1 to 4 and 5 to 7 have been developed in separate and parallel processes.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT OF AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

A wide range of stakeholders from education and training, as well as the labour market, has been involved in developing the ISQF. Apart from the political debate surrounding the preparation and passing of the education and training acts (between 2006 and 2010), representative working groups have been active during all stages of the process. Development of framework structures has been combined with extensive efforts to introduce the learning outcomes perspective in curricula and in teaching and learning practices. The following main steps can be identified:

- the Ministry initiated the work on descriptors for lower ISQF levels in 2008 and 2009. Draft qualifications level descriptors were published and representatives of various academic and vocational study programmes, and students, were invited to discuss the proposal. All upper secondary schools in Iceland were invited to discuss the framework and its potential role and function. Between 2009 and 2012 the Ministry of Education (also acting as EQF NCP) has set up more than 20 working groups involving representatives of education and training and occupational sectors. These have played a key

role in developing level descriptors and in agreeing on how the different qualifications can best be articulated in terms of learning outcomes and subsequently levelled to the NQF and the EQF;

- active involvement of this broad group of practitioners has significantly contributed to the 'anchoring' of the NQF proposal not only in education and training but also among labour market stakeholders. The new general curriculum guides for pre-schools, compulsory schools and upper secondary (May 2011) can be seen as resulting from this work, as can the new descriptions (standards) for vocational qualifications currently being developed;
- the Icelandic higher education sector started work on linking to the QF-EHEA in 2007, preceding the work on the comprehensive NQF. It is agreed that the three cycles of the higher education framework will provide the three highest levels in the Icelandic NQF. Opening up of these levels to qualifications outside the university system has not yet been discussed;
- the higher education sector has only been partly involved in developing the NQF, the consequence being that the relationship between vocational and academic qualifications (and levels) has not been fully discussed and articulated. The framework has generally been received positively by the different stakeholders. This also applies to teachers and trainers who are actively involved in continuing reforms related to learning outcomes, curricula and key-competences.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Iceland has decided to introduce a seven-level framework based on knowledge, skills and competence-oriented descriptors. Compared to the EQF, competences are expressed in more detail and reflect the importance attributed to key competences. The development of level descriptors for the ISQF has formed an important part of this overall strategy to shift to learning outcomes. The NQF descriptors for level 1 to 4 were published in the national curriculum guide for upper secondary school in May 2011. The descriptors for three higher education levels were published in the form of a decree in 2011. Combined, these two-level approaches add up to a seven-level NQF.

The descriptors are increasingly being used to guide initiatives in different parts of education and training. This exemplified by the newly published national curriculum guide for primary schools. Some discussion has taken place on the role of the lower levels of the framework, whether it is sufficiently inclusive and whether it will serve individuals entering the system with few or no formal qualifications? Early proposals included entry levels; these were eventually not included in the proposal.

The shift to learning outcomes is seen as an important part of the reform of Icelandic education and training. A systematic use of learning outcomes, referring to a national set of descriptors, is seen as important for the future design of qualifications.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

The introduction of a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning is an integrated part of the effort to establish an NQF. The work on validation started in earnest in 2002 and the Ministry of Education has given the Education and Training Service Centre the role of developing a national strategy. This strategy will involve cooperation with lifelong learning centres, upper secondary schools, labour associations and other stakeholders linked to sectors.

The NQF will aid validation by offering increased transparency of qualifications and by introducing a more systematic approach to learning outcomes, thus clarifying the standards to be applied for validation. The existence of explicitly defined levels distinguishing knowledge, skills and competences will make it easier to integrate validation arrangements fully. The potential of assigning courses to levels should also lead to non-formal and informal learning. Validation is explicitly mentioned by the 2008 and 2010 Laws on Upper Secondary and Adult Education, with these arrangements as fully integrated parts of the formal system.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Preparations for referencing to the EQF have started; it is expected to be completed in 2013. During 2012 it has become clear that the five Nordic countries have different views on where to place primary and (lower) secondary education certificates in their frameworks. While Denmark and Iceland see EQF level 2 as the most appropriate location, Finland and Sweden favour level 3. As these countries have previously considered these qualifications as broadly similar, this has caused concern over the consistency of application of the learning outcomes principle.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The ISQF is well linked to overall reform of Icelandic education and training. This may be seen as a strength and has already made it possible for the framework to be used as a tool for supporting continuing reform. A main challenge in the next few years is to continue the process of dialogue and information and gradually increase understanding of the framework, its impact on quality assurance, and how it aids international comparison.

The relationship between levels 1 to 5 and 6 to 8 will require more attention in the coming period. The parallel development of these two segments of the framework will need to be better connected in the next period.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Information and documents covering the Icelandic developments can be found at <http://namskra.is/> [accessed 7.12.2012] and <http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/Acts> [accessed 7.12.2012].

IRELAND

INTRODUCTION

Ireland has implemented a comprehensive and learning outcomes based framework of qualifications (NFQ). The 10 levels of the framework capture all learning, from initial stages to the most advanced.

The majority of current and legacy national awards are now included in the NFQ, including those made by the State Examinations Commission, Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), Higher Education and Training Award Council (HETAC)⁹², the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The national objective of moving towards a 'lifelong learning society', in which learners can benefit from learning opportunities at various stages throughout their lives, was a key factor in the changes that have taken place in Ireland. This led to the need for a more flexible and integrated system of qualifications that could recognise all learning acquired by learners in Ireland. The policy goals of the Irish NFQ were to:

- create an open, learner-centred, coherent, transparent and widely understood system of qualifications in Ireland that is responsive to the needs of individual learners and to the social and economic needs of the country;
- ease access, transfer and progression opportunities for learners within and across the different levels and subsystems of education and training;
- increase mobility through understanding and recognition of Irish qualifications abroad and fully participate in the Bologna and Copenhagen processes.

It is important to note that NFQ is an inclusive framework, open to qualifications awarded outside the remit of national authorities. A number of awards made by professional and international awarding bodies are now included in the framework according to the policies and criteria published by the National Qualifications Authority (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland)⁹³.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

Development of the national framework of qualifications has been coordinated by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), which was established in 2001 by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. A new agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, was established on 6 November 2012 under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. The new Authority is being created by an amalgamation of four bodies that have both awarding and quality assurance responsibilities: the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). The new Authority will assume all the functions of the four legacy bodies while also having responsibility for new or newly-statutory responsibilities in particular areas⁹⁴. This is an important step in consolidating the governance structure for deepening the implementation of the comprehensive NFQ.

The NFQ has reached an advanced operational stage, in particular by promoting more consistent approaches to the use of learning outcomes across different subsystems, especially in the sectors led by

⁹² HETAC is the qualifications awarding body for higher education and training institutions outside the university sector.

⁹³ <http://www.nqai.ie/awardsframework.html> [accessed 5.12.2012].

⁹⁴ Based on the qualifications and quality assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012). <http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2012/a2812.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

FETAC and HETAC. In universities and the school sector, NQF implementation was by agreement and the impact has been more gradual and incremental.

The process was strongly supported by major stakeholders in the country. The NQF has become widely known and is used as a tool for supporting other reforms and policy development in education, training and qualification. The visibility and currency of the NQF inside and outside the education and training environment has increased (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2009a)⁹⁵.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The NQF uses learning outcomes based levels. Each level has a specified level descriptor and at each level there are one or more award types also expressed in terms of learning outcomes. For each award type there are a wide range of qualifications which have been developed by awarding bodies. The 10 levels of the framework capture all learning, from initial stages to the most advanced; qualifications achieved in schools, further education and training and higher education and training are included.

Each level of the NQF is based on nationally agreed standards of knowledge (breadth, kind), know-how and skills (range, selectivity) and competence. Competence is subdivided into context, role, learning to learn, insight. Knowledge, skills and competences are defined as expected learning outcomes to be achieved by the qualification holder.

Four classes of award-type have been determined: major, minor, special-purpose and supplemental. This is to ensure that the framework is capable of recognising all types and sizes of learning achieved by a learner.

The learning outcomes approach was central to the establishment of the NQF and associated legislation and system reforms. The outcomes are indicators of what a person knows, can do and understands, rather than time spent on a programme. The determinations for the NQF state that new framework awards are made using learning outcomes. The NQF is intended to act as a reference point for curriculum development leading to NQF recognised qualifications. The framework implementation and impact study (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2009a) concluded that a learning outcomes-based approach has been implemented in all subsystems, but is progressing at variable speeds and that the NQF had a stronger reform role in sectors led by FETAC and HETAC. NQF implementation was generally slower than expected: '(...) there may still be a gap between redesigned and rewritten programmes and actual delivery and perception of these on the ground'⁹⁶.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

The Qualifications Authority has put in place various supporting policies; e.g. on access, transfer and recognition. These policies relate to access to programmes of education and training, transfer between programmes and progression from one programme to another at a higher level of the NQF⁹⁷.

National principles and guidelines for recognition of prior learning were developed. However, the framework implementation and impact study (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2009a) identified obstacles and areas for improvement in the operation and application of recognition of prior learning. As an example, there appear to be inconsistencies in implementing policies or resistance to developing minor awards in some areas, e.g. in relation to crafts awards.

⁹⁵ Framework implementation and impact study: report of study team. <http://www.nqai.ie/documents/FIISreportFINALsept2009.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

The study emphasises the importance of further strengthening the visibility of the framework in relation to the labour market (assisting development of career pathways, certifying learning achievements acquired at work, guidance, etc.).

⁹⁶ Framework implementation and impact study: report of study team, p. 39. <http://www.nqai.ie/documents/FIISreportFINALsept2009.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

⁹⁷ Policies, actions and procedures for access, transfer and progression for learners. http://www.nqai.ie/publication_oct2003a.html [accessed 5.12.2012].

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The referencing of the Irish NQF to the EQF was completed in 2009. It built on the experiences and conclusions of the self-certification of the compatibility of the Irish NQF with the QF-EHEA, completed in 2006.

Table 11 Level correspondence established between the Irish national framework of qualifications (NQF) and the EQF

NQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
EQF	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	8

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Implementing the NQF relies on the broad partnership approach, step-by-step development, and strong support of different stakeholders. The deeper the implementation, the more need for support from different stakeholders.

An international team of experts who prepared the framework implementation and impact study report summarised some key features in developing NQFs⁹⁸:

- the implementation of an NQF requires time to develop understanding concepts and to promote cultural change;
- the importance of stakeholder involvement in all phases of development and implementation to ensure ownership;
- the NQF development is an iterative process, in which the existing education and training system and the framework are progressively aligned with each other;
- it is important to find balance between implementation within subsystems and cross-system developments;
- the need for a framework to be loose enough to accommodate different types of learning;
- qualifications frameworks may be more enablers than drivers of change; alignment with other supporting policies, institutional requirements is needed.

According to the study, awareness among the general public, following a marketing campaign was increased from 18% in 2006 to 32% in 2008.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The most important information is available on the website of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), which is also the national coordination point. <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/default.aspx> [accessed 18.9.2012].

⁹⁸ http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html, p. 50 [accessed 5.12 2012].

ITALY

INTRODUCTION

Italy has carried out technical work pointing towards a national qualifications framework⁹⁹. Political agreement is currently being sought on how to take this technical work forward¹⁰⁰, supported by the fact that, since 2003, reforms have been implemented in education and training (upper secondary general education and VET¹⁰¹ and higher education) pre-empting the principles of a learning outcomes based NQF. The responsibility for taking forward this initiative is shared between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Ministry of Education, University and Research; the process is supported by regions and social partners.

In spite of not having secured political support for an NQF, Italy has started to link its qualifications levels to the EQF. According to the EQF recommendation this is possible, and Italy refers to the learning outcomes descriptions and definitions already in place for most of its education and training system. The Italian qualifications framework for higher education is already in place.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Italy faces a challenge of integrating different levels of lifelong learning systems into a coherent national qualification system. 'The absence of an explicit and adequately regulated national qualifications' framework is regarded as a barrier for taking forward coherent lifelong learning policies and validation of non-formal and informal learning and making learning pathways for lifelong learning more visible' (European Commission et al., 2010)¹⁰². This is important to support participation of adults in lifelong learning, which was 6.2% in 2010, lower than the EU average of 9.1%. Also, labour market mobility between regions is hampered due to the fact that qualifications awarded in some regions are not always recognised in other regions (European Parliament; Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2012)¹⁰³.

The development of a 'national regulated system of qualifications' – in the direction of an NQF – would respond to several needs:

- it should make the integration of the different systems within the national context easier;
- it responds to the request of the EQF recommendation designed to ease dialogue between education systems and the labour market;
- it should make individual geographic and professional mobility easier, both at national and European levels;
- it should help individuals, along the course of their life, to capitalise on their non-formal and informal experiences. The system should promote social inclusion with reference to people who do not hold regular qualifications and competences needed in the labour market; the national system, based on the learning outcomes approach, and involving different stakeholders, is a precondition for validating non-formal and informal learning.

99 EQF NCP survey, September 2010.

100 See also the 'Linee Guida per la Formazione' [Training guidelines] of February 17, 2010 signed by the Ministry of Labour, Regions and Social Partners, aimed at relaunching the national qualifications framework as a fundamental basis for the effectiveness and interoperability of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, in compliance with European indications.

101 Regulation for upper secondary school reform was approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2010. The institutional consultation round and the relevant information on reform can be found on <http://nuovilicei.indire.it/> [accessed 5.12.2012].

102 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Italy. pp. 1-3. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77467.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

103 State of play of the European qualifications framework implementation, p.93. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/studiesdownload.html?languageDocument=EN&file=73578> [accessed 5.12.2012].

Evidence suggests that all the institutional, national and regional authorities (including the current government) are more explicitly aiming towards an NQF and a more clear commitment to EQF.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies are leading developments in EQF implementation, in agreement with the regions and autonomous provinces and the social partners as laid down in many agreements. At the technical level, the national institute for development of vocational training (ISFOL) set up the national methodologies and coordinates sectoral and professional expert groups involving social partners.

ISFOL is designated the NCP. Its main tasks include management of the EQF implementation process and preparing the technical referencing report, communication with stakeholders, and planning and implementation of the national qualifications database.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The NQF levels and level descriptors have not yet been defined, although there are components in place, e.g. QF for higher education (Quadro dei Titoli Italiani, n.d.)¹⁰⁴ and more recently at upper secondary level. Italy uses a learning outcomes approach and the EQF level descriptors as a basis for further developments.

Eight EQF levels and level descriptors have been used directly in the Italian referencing process to link all national qualifications from formal education and training to the EQF.

In the QF for higher education, Dublin descriptors are used nationally for three cycles agreed within the Bologna process. More specific descriptors are being defined for each programme by universities. Short cycle qualifications will be defined by subdescriptors taking into account differences in specific elements of qualifications (e.g. workload, length, access).

Italian education and training has introduced the learning outcomes approach at national and regional levels, with each subsystem having its own characteristics.

In February 2010, the reform regulation of the upper secondary education system was adopted¹⁰⁵. Three main secondary school pathways are introduced: general (lycées); technical and vocational education pathway, leading to five-year diplomas; and learning outcomes linked to the EQF.

In vocational training, where the regions have the main responsibility, according to the Italian constitutional reform (National Law No 3, October 2001, concerning modifications of V title of second part of Italian constitution) an update of the local qualification system adopting the learning outcomes approach has been launched. Curricula will be redesigned according to EQF indicators and descriptors. Three-year vocational qualifications and a four-year vocational diploma will be awarded. Implementation started in September 2010 and will continue up to 2013.

The higher (non-academic) professional education and training pathway (IFTS) used a national standard system based on competences since 2000. After the decree of 25 January 2008, the National Committee on IFTS agreed to update the standards to make them more coherent with the learning outcomes approach. There will be a regional supply of training courses in IFTS (one year) and a national supply of IFTS courses (two years): the one-year courses are already based on national standards of profiles and competence units of learning outcomes but they will be suited to local needs. The two-year courses will soon be based on learning outcomes standards.

¹⁰⁴ Italian qualifications framework for higher education. <http://www.quadrodeititoli.it/Index.aspx?IDL=2> [accessed 5.12.2012].

¹⁰⁵ Regulation for upper secondary school reform was approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2010. The institutional consultation round and the relevant information on reform can be found on <http://nuovilicei.indire.it/> [accessed 5.12.2012].

In academic education (universities) policy-makers strengthened the need to align diplomas and certificates to the commitments of the Bologna process. In particular, the national decree reforming the academic system (first cycle, three years) and Laurea Magistrale (second cycle, two years) states that the new programmes have to be based on learning outcomes compatible with Dublin descriptors.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The referencing report is scheduled to be presented in early 2013. Italy will reference its formal qualifications to the EQF without an NQF, adopting national methodology and criteria to present correlations between the national qualifications (and their learning outcomes) and the EQF levels.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLAN

Italy has been implementing reforms consistent with EQF principles and learning outcomes approach in various subsystems of education and training.

However, this process and linking implicit national levels to the EQF has been so far treated more as technical procedure (European Parliament; Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2012, p. 89)¹⁰⁶. Real discussions on national learning outcomes based qualifications levels, how qualifications from different subsystems (VET, HE, general education) are aligned to the explicit learning outcomes based levels, and how they relate to each other, seem to be pending. Clear political commitment seems to be lacking. The focus is now on implementing the national Law on Labour Market, setting important priorities in defining national qualifications standards based on learning outcomes, and developing national register of qualifications and a national public certification system.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

For policy-related information the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, for the technical level, ISFOL, acts as national coordination point. <http://www.isfol.it> [accessed 12.12.2012].

¹⁰⁶ European Parliament (2012). State of play of the European qualifications framework implementation. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/fr/studiesdownload.html?languageDocument=EN&file=73578> [accessed 11.12.2012].

INTRODUCTION

Latvia has introduced an eight-level classification. Nationally recognised educational programmes from formal education system (i.e. from primary, secondary and higher education) are referred to a Latvian qualifications framework level (LQF) and linked to the EQF level. Master of crafts, journeyman and qualifications acquired in non-formal and informal learning will be attributed levels in the second phase (2013-15) of NQF development and consequently referenced to the EQF.

The present developments build on reforms initiated in the 1990s and, in particular, the introduction of a five-level structure of professional qualifications in 1999 (through the Vocational Education Law).

In October 2010, amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers regulations on the classification of Latvian education were approved. A new column was added to the table included in these regulations, outlining Latvian education stages and the respective programmes, and referencing each education programme to the LQF/EQF level. Additionally, eight-level descriptors, based on learning outcomes and developed in line with the EQF descriptors, were outlined.

Further developments are planned within the ESF supported projects (see below). Two important laws (Vocational Education Law and Higher Education Law) are in preparation. Both laws will further support the implementation of an eight-level national qualifications framework.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The framework, based on learning outcomes, is seen as an import tool for describing the Latvian education system both for international and national stakeholders, and for ensuring greater lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals according to their needs. Adult participation in lifelong learning in Latvia remains limited, only 5% of adults (age 25-64) participated in lifelong learning compared to EU average of 9.1% (European Commission, 2011, p. 84)¹⁰⁷.

In this context, the development and implementation of a comprehensive LQF aims to:

- increase transparency and consistency of qualifications;
- develop a comprehensive NQF in line with the needs of lifelong learning;
- strengthen the link between the labour market and education;
- strengthen the cooperation of those involved in the design and award of qualifications;
- increase public understanding of national qualifications and ease their linking to the EQF.

The qualifications framework is based on the classification of education programmes in formal education and on current education provision. Implicit levels of education have been made explicit and linked to level descriptors, which describe expected levels of learning outcomes.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The Ministry of Education and Science has the leading role in developing and implementing the LQF. However, the ministry delegated responsibility for coordinating the referencing to the Academic Information Centre. In September 2009, a working group was set up to link Latvian qualifications to the EQF in accordance with the recommendation. The working group included representatives from

¹⁰⁷ Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020): country analysis. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

ministries, national agencies, employer organisations, trade unions, student organisations, and education quality agencies. This working group mostly acted as a consulting and supervisory group, reviewing and approving materials prepared by the experts. There was the overall support of key institutions.

Consultation on the referencing report was organised and results presented to national conferences and workshops. It was emphasised that there is a need to communicate the results of the referencing to the wider audience and to strengthen ownership of the framework and commitment to implement it. Currently, awareness of the LQF remains low among the general public.

The Academic Information Centre has been appointed as the NCP and played a key role in coordination of the referencing process, preparing and updating the referencing report, and communication and dissemination of information among all relevant stakeholders.

LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

An eight-level framework with level descriptors based on learning outcomes has been adopted. Level descriptors for each of these levels are defined as knowledge (knowledge and comprehension), skills (ability to apply knowledge, communication and general skills) and competence (analysis, synthesis and assessment). When developing the level descriptors, relevant state education standards, the EQF and Dublin level descriptors, and Bloom's taxonomy were used to provide evidence.

There is growing emphasis on learning outcomes in Latvia, although the term is not widely used and there is not yet a systematic approach. Skills and knowledge are commonly used terms.

Subject-based outcomes in general education have been defined in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The compulsory education content is stated in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations on the state standard in basic education and in basic education study subjects' standards (2006). The content of general secondary education is regulated by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations on the state general secondary education standard and standards of general secondary education study subjects (2008).

The content of vocational education is regulated by state vocational education standards, occupational standards and vocational education programmes. The state vocational education standards determine the strategic aims of educational programmes, compulsory education content, and assessment principles and procedures for the education obtained. The occupational standards stipulate the basic tasks and obligations for the respective professional activities, the basic requirements of professional qualification, and the general and professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences needed to fulfil them. Vocational education programmes include the objectives and content of vocational education, an implementation plan, previous education requirements, and the necessary personal, financial and material resources. Programmes are developed by education establishments in line with the state education and occupational standards.

The framework for higher education is founded on three Bologna cycles, based on learning outcomes. They are defined as results of study programmes expected from an average student in the programmes (Academic Information Centre; Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, 2011)¹⁰⁸. The content of professional higher education programmes is determined by the relevant occupational standards and state education standards, which are outlined in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations on the state first level professional higher education standard (2001). In July 2011, the Parliament (Saeima) adopted the Amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions which introduced the term learning outcomes.

108 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.nki-latvija.lv/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Latvian-education-system-referencing-to-EQF-Self-assessment-Report.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

NQF developments are closely related to opening up the qualification system to competences acquired outside the formal system.

The system on validating professional competence obtained outside formal education is new in Latvia and was legally introduced in February 2011. Regulations stipulate the procedure for how professional competence (except for regulated professions) that corresponds to the EQF level 3 to 4 can be assessed, validated and recognised. In June 2011, the first qualifications were awarded using this procedure. For levels 5 to 8, in January 2012 the Cabinet of Ministers 'Regulations on recognising the learning outcomes acquired in previous education and professional experience' were approved to determine the procedures for assessing and recognising learning outcomes (for higher education) obtained during previous education or professional experience, as well as criteria for recognition.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Latvia referenced its national qualifications levels to the EQF and self-certified to the QF-EHEA in October 2011.

Table 12 Level correspondence established between the Latvian qualifications framework (LQF) and the EQF

LQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The present referencing report is limited to formal qualifications; in a second phase, the exercise will be extended to include other qualifications accommodating the new legal regulations¹⁰⁹.

In the coming years several large projects with ESF support will support further development of the LQF. For example, the ESF project Development of sectoral qualification system and increasing efficiency and quality of vocational education (2010-13), aims to explore professions in 12 sectors by identifying relevant knowledge, skills and competences, and place these professions on the relevant LQF/EQF levels.

To promote the quality and efficiency of higher education, an ESF project for evaluating higher education programmes and developing recommendations has been launched within ESF activity. Improvement of study programme content in line with the needs of the national economy, implementation and development of academic personnel competence, and setting up a study field accreditation system are the main goals of this project.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Information on the referencing process and the self-assessment report is available on the website of the Latvian national coordination point (Academic Information Centre). <http://nki-latvija.lv> or <http://nqf-latvia.lv> [accessed 5.10.2012].

¹⁰⁹ NCP survey, September 2012.

LIECHTENSTEIN

INTRODUCTION

In February 2011, the government took the decision to develop an NQF for lifelong learning for Liechtenstein.

This decision was part of a process under way since Liechtenstein committed to the EQF in 2008. In December 2010, a proposal for a qualifications framework for higher education, in line with the QF-EHEA, was prepared (NQF.li-HE, 2011)¹¹⁰. It will constitute an integral part of the NQF for lifelong learning. It is expected that the NQF will be established by spring 2014.

Since May 2011, the coordination and planning process has been under the National Agency of International Education Affairs (AIBA) in Liechtenstein.

NQF developments are coordinated with NQF development in Switzerland and Austria due to close connections with the education and training systems of these neighbouring countries. Most Liechtenstein students (in VET or higher education) do their studies in Switzerland but some also continue in Austria. An alignment of Liechtenstein NQF developments with framework developments in these countries, and particularly Switzerland, is crucial.

POLICY OBJECTIVES

One of the first objectives is to map and describe national qualifications in the NQF and to reference it to the EQF. It is planned that all new certificates will have reference to NQF and EQF levels.

In the longer term, NQF is seen as a tool which will support lifelong learning through better understanding of qualifications and learning opportunities, improved access to and participation in education and training, and participation, valuing all learning outcomes, in formal, non-formal and informal settings.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

Work on the NQF was initiated by the government. On behalf of the Ministry of Education, an expert from AIBA has been appointed to provide technical and administrative support to the process.

A steering group has been set up with representatives from the Office for Vocational Training and Career Counselling, the Ministry of Education (section higher education), the University of Liechtenstein, Chamber of Industry and Trade and the Chamber of Commerce, who are informed about progress and have the authority for final decisions.

For a public involvement and information there will be an NQFL homepage established by spring 2013, where all relevant information and updates can be seen and followed.

Liechtenstein started the Bologna process several years ago and this is now an integral part of the University of Liechtenstein. NQF developments will build on the experience with the development of the QF for HE.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Liechtenstein will have an eight-level framework though descriptors have not yet been formulated. Learning outcomes already play an important role in higher education and in the school system in general. VET qualifications are also evaluated in learning outcomes.

¹¹⁰ Qualifikationsrahmen für den Hochschulbereich im Fürstentum Liechtenstein: NQF.li-HE, December 2011. http://www.llv.li/pdf-llv-sa-nationaler-qualifikationsrahmen_entwurf_2011_12.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The referencing report will be adopted by the government in spring 2013.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Ministry of Education. <http://www.4icu.org/institutions/177.htm> [accessed 24.8.2012].

National Agency of International Education Affairs (AIBA) in Liechtenstein.

LITHUANIA

INTRODUCTION

An eight-level Lithuanian qualifications framework (LTQF) was formally adopted through a government resolution 4 May 2010 (government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2010)¹¹¹. The LTQF is based on eight learning outcomes levels, and covers all officially recognised qualifications in primary and secondary general education, vocational education and training and higher education. The formal framework has been further strengthened through two amendments to the Law on Education (17 March and 24 August 2011) clarifying its role and function. A joint referencing/self-certification to the EQF and QF-EHEA was completed in late 2011, underlining the comprehensive character of the framework. The LTQF has now entered an early operational stage.

RATIONALE AND THE MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The development of the LTQF forms part of a decade-long effort to reform and modernise Lithuanian education and training. The national education strategy for the period 2003-12 stresses the need for flexible and open education structures, for better coordination between general and vocational education and training, and for stronger links to non-formal and informal learning¹¹². The LTQF emerged from this strategy and addresses five main objectives:

- the framework should play a role in better adapting qualifications to the needs of the labour market and society;
- it should help to improve the clarity of the design of qualifications to improve assessment and recognition;
- it should increase transparency of qualifications and assist individuals in using them;
- it should support national and international mobility;
- it should encourage lifelong learning and allow individuals to build on outcomes of non-formal and informal learning.

The Lithuanian NQF is based on complete (full) qualifications. However, and according to the 2011 referencing report to the EQF, the medium- and long-term strategy is to introduce units of qualifications defined as the combinations of the competences needed for executing certain tasks. It offers the potential for referencing the qualifications units to certain levels of the NQF, but such possibilities are not yet foreseen in legal documents.

The LTQF includes qualifications awarded by formal education and training. There are currently no plans to open the framework up to qualifications offered by the private or non-formal sector.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

Work on the NQF was initiated by the Labour Market Training Authority of Lithuania, which launched the ESF -funded project for the design of the NQF in 2006. Following extensive technical work, a National Authority of Qualifications was established in 2008 to coordinate NQF implementation. This authority was abolished in 2009, following the election of new Parliament late 2008; the Ministry of Education and Science then took over the main responsibility for NQF development in 2009 and has retained this role since. The Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC) has been appointed as the national

¹¹¹ Resolution on approving the description of the Lithuanian qualifications, 4 May 2010. http://www.kpmc.lt/LTKS_EKS/LTQF_official_translation.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

¹¹² Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 4 July. Provisions for the national education strategy 2003-12. http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Lithuania/Lithuania_National_Education_Strategies_Provisions_2003-2012.pdf [accessed 20.12.2012].

coordination point for EQF and will take on the day-to-day responsibility for promoting and implementing the LTQF.

The development of the LTQF since 2009 has been dominated by stakeholders from education and training. Both the vocational and higher education sectors have contributed actively and jointly to the process, paving the way for one comprehensive framework. The limited direct involvement of social partners in the process does not mean, however, that the link to the labour market has been overlooked. The framework has a clear labour market orientation, for example defining qualification 'as the ability and right to engage in a certain professional activity recognised under the procedure established by laws, legal acts adopted by the government or an institution authorised by the government' (Qualifications and VET Development Centre, 2012)¹¹³. This orientation is also reflected by the activity focused level descriptors (see below), referring back to the work on VET-standards developed since the late 1990s.

The influence of labour market stakeholders has been strengthened by the involvement of the Central Professional Committee in the referencing of the LTQF to the EQF. This is a tripartite committee, established under the Law on VET, signalling that an operational LTQF will require active involvement of stakeholders outside the education and training. This broadening of the LTQF base is also reflected by the fact that the Ministry of Economy (responsible for the human resource development strategy in Lithuania) was involved in the referencing of the LTQF to the EQF.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The eight levels of the LTQF combine the existing structure of the Lithuanian qualifications system with principles introduced by the EQF. The group of experts involved in designing the framework took as their starting point the two existing level arrangements, the five vocational education levels introduced in 1997 (and updated in 2001), and the three levels of higher education introduced in 1992. Combined with the priority attributed to the referencing to the EQF, it was decided that eight levels would be the optimal number for the LTQF. It is interesting to note that while qualifications equivalent to level 5 were awarded by vocational colleges until 2004, there are currently no qualifications being awarded at this level. It has been indicated that this may change in the future as the potential for developing advanced vocational education and training is of particular interest.

The level descriptors are defined according to two parameters: characteristics of activities and types of competences.

While the distinction between cognitive, functional and general competences broadly reflects the EQF distinction between knowledge, skills and competence, the criteria on activity can be seen as a further development and specification of the autonomy, responsibility and context aspects introduced – explicitly and implicitly – in the EQF descriptors. The combination of the two parameters results in a detailed description of each level. The slightly different descriptor logics of the LTQF and the EQF was not considered to create difficulties for the referencing, which was generally considered transparent by the EQF AG in 2011.

Table 13 *Level descriptor in the Lithuanian NQF*

	Parameters	
	Characteristics of activities	Types of competences
Criteria	complexity of activities	functional competences
	autonomy of activities	cognitive competences
	variability of activities	general competences

¹¹³ National report 2012: referencing the Lithuanian qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area. http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/documentation_en.htm [accessed 26.11.2012].

The learning outcomes (competence) approach is broadly accepted and implemented in Lithuanian vocational education and training. VET uses a learning outcomes (competences) based approach both for definition of standards and for their translation into curricula.

The university sector is still at an early stage in using learning outcomes for defining and describing degrees and qualifications. A national project for implementing the ECTS system has been launched recently; this may support the use of learning outcomes in defining higher education degrees and qualifications. In vocationally oriented higher education, standards are already defined and described in terms of competences.

The current learning outcomes situation reflects different traditions and approaches. While VET has made some progress in standards and curriculum design, the provision of training is mostly oriented to subject and time/duration; learners are only partly able to tailor their own learning programme or pathway.

The implementation of the LTQF is seen as part of a strategy to move towards a more consistent and comprehensive use of learning outcomes across education and training levels and types.

LINKS TO OTHER TOOLS AND POLICIES

There is currently no comprehensive strategy on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Lithuania. The LTQF is, however, seen as an instrument which can promote practices in this area and the existence of competence based standards in VET is seen as a positive factor. Recent legal reforms in education and training have also favoured validation and the report on EQF referencing states that political preconditions for recognition of prior learning now are in place. No plans currently exist for the introduction of ECVET in Lithuania though implementation of ECTS for higher education has started.

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. The report outlines a one-to-one relationship between LQF and EQF levels.

Table 14 Level correspondence established between the Lithuanian qualifications framework (LTQF) and the EQF

LTQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The LTQF has now moved into an early operational stage and its relevance to education and training and labour market stakeholders will have to be demonstrated in the coming years. It will be even more important to demonstrate the relevance of the framework to ordinary citizens and learners, a challenging task as the framework and its potential usefulness is relatively little known outside those committees and institutions that have developed it. In this sense Lithuania faces many of the same challenges as other emerging NQFs.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC) has been appointed as the EQF NCP.

More information to be found at <http://www.lnks.lt> [accessed 12.3.2013].

LUXEMBOURG

INTRODUCTION

Following an initiative of the Ministry of Education, a first outline of a comprehensive NQF was presented to the Council of Ministers in early 2009. While seen as broadly reflecting the existing qualifications system of Luxembourg, government approval was deemed necessary as it challenged some accepted features of the system, notably by placing vocational qualifications on par with general qualifications. Based on an initial governmental go-ahead, detailed work continued during 2010 and 2011, resulting in an eight-level Luxembourg qualifications framework (CLQ) covering all types and levels of qualifications. The framework is linked to adult education and to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

While the Law on VET adopted in autumn 2008 paves the way for the framework, in particular by stressing the need to promote a shift to learning outcomes, no separate legislative basis has been introduced for the CLQ. While some ambiguity remains as regards the formal/legal status of the framework, all other elements are in place, allowing the CLQ now to move into an early operational stage.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Development and implementation of the EQF is seen as an opportunity to make explicit the existing education and training levels and the relationships between them. This is important not only for the users of qualifications (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 thus help to improve overall consistency of education and training provisions. Increased transparency of qualifications is a key objective underpinning the Luxembourg national framework. The CLQ is seen as contributing to the overall modernisation of national education and training. One element in favour of the CLQ is the geographical 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 NQF as a way to aid comparison and recognition.

In a second stage, the CLQ will open up to qualifications awarded outside the existing, official system. This reflects the high number of citizens holding this kind of 'unofficial' and non-recognised certificates and diplomas. To accomplish this, specific approaches to accreditation and quality assurance of these new qualifications have to be put in place. The CLQ is thus very much in line with the open approach applied to the French framework and the objectives set by the Netherlands, Belgium-Flanders, Sweden and Finland.

While procedures for inclusion of these non-traditional qualifications will be necessary as a part of the new framework, the system for validating non-formal and informal learning can aid a more open and flexible approach. The validation system forms an integrated part of the framework as any qualification at any level can be achieved either through school or by having prior learning assessed and validated (the only exception for the moment being the Baccalaureate).

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The NQF process is being coordinated by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education.

Following the first discussions on the framework in the Council of Ministers, broad consultation was launched towards the end of 2010. Besides a general approval of the plans for the NQF, main comments have been on the legal status of the framework and on the issue of lifelong learning, including the link to non-formal and informal learning. A particular issue being considered is the specific character of the Luxembourgish labour market and the implications of this for qualifications. The high immigration rate and the large proportion of foreign workers makes it necessary to pay particular attention to the coherence of the frameworks with those of neighbouring countries.

The attitude of higher education towards the NQF was originally sceptical. Stakeholders from this sector argued that EQF levels 6 to 8 should be mainly based on the Dublin descriptors of the EHEA. Following discussions during 2009 and early 2010 a common set of descriptors have been accepted by all stakeholders. This also provided the basis for common referencing/self-certification to the EQF and QF-EHEA in 2012.

Level 5 is now seen as the bridging level between both subsectors: in this level we find both VET and higher education qualifications. This means that the Meister qualification (Master craftsman) has been placed at level 5, beside the higher technician certificate (BTS).

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Luxembourg has introduced an eight-level reference structure. While the number of levels corresponds with the EQF, the descriptors reflect the national tradition and context. At each level, descriptors are differentiated according to knowledge, skills and attitude (connaissances, aptitudes, attitudes). While the level of detail is higher, the relationship to the EQF can be clearly identified. This is, for example, the case for the third ('attitude') column which is based on the principles of responsibility, autonomy and context, as is the case with the EQF.

The decision to use these concepts reflects gradual development of a learning outcomes or competence-based approach in vocational education and training. During the 1970s and the 1980s this approach was influenced by German tradition. The experiences related to the development of professional standards played a particularly important role as education standards were directly deduced from these. In recent years these approaches have been further developed through extensive cooperation with a number of other European countries, notably those with a dual VET system (Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland). Links to France are also strong, partly influencing the way qualifications are designed and described.

The situation concerning use of learning outcomes (or 'competences') in Luxembourg education and training varies between subsystems. In initial vocational education, the 2008 law provided the basis for the introduction of a module-based system referring to learning outcomes. All qualifications have been described using learning outcomes and can be accessed via the register of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training¹¹⁴. For secondary education and training (both general and technical) progress is more mixed. Work continues on defining and describing the competence basis of these qualifications: information on this is available from the Ministry of Education¹¹⁵ and the longer term aim is that the use of learning outcomes should apply to the entire secondary education system. Higher education is organised in modules lasting one semester, each constituting assessable units allocated credit points (ECTS). These modules are only partly defined and described using learning outcomes.

LINKS TO OTHER TOOLS AND POLICIES

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has become more important in recent years in Luxembourg and is now becoming central in the definition of priority actions for education and training. The 2008 Law on VET, recently complemented by the Règlement grand-ducal du 11 janvier 2010, introduces the legal basis on which validation arrangements are being put into practice. These arrangements are an integrated part of the education and training system, forming an alternative pathway for acquiring a formal qualification. This principle applies to all qualifications at all levels, including university qualifications. The only exception is the general upper secondary school leaving certificate, which is not described through learning outcomes. Validation may take a number of forms, ranging from granting somebody access to education and training to granting somebody a full qualification on the basis of their prior learning.

¹¹⁴ <http://programmes.myschool.lu> [accessed 5.12.2012].

¹¹⁵ <http://www.men.public.lu/competences/index.html> [accessed 5.12.2012].

The adoption of the new Law on VET in 2008 allowed use of a modularised system. These modules can be assessed separately and can be seen as building blocks for ECVET. For the moment this link between the modularised and competence based approach and ECVET is not explicitly addressed by the CLQ; this may change in the future.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Luxembourg referenced its qualifications levels to the EQF and the QF-EHEA in June 2012 as illustrated below.

Table 15 Level correspondence established between the Luxembourg qualifications framework (CLQ) and the EQF

CLQ	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Ministère de l'Education nationale et de la Formation professionnelle acts as NCP. <http://www.men.public.lu/> [accessed 12.3.2013].

INTRODUCTION

Malta has been putting its comprehensive national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (Malta qualifications framework, MQF) in place since June 2007. It encompasses qualifications and awards at all levels, provided through formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Important developments took place in 2012 with amendments to the Education Act, which established the legal basis for the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE), replacing the Malta Qualifications Council and the National Commission for Higher Education. Three legal notices were published: on quality assurance and licensing of further and higher education institutions and programmes; on validation of informal and non-formal learning; and on strengthening the legal basis of the MQF for lifelong learning as a regulatory framework for classification of qualifications and awards¹¹⁶.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The MQF addresses the following issues:

- transparency and understanding of qualifications;
- valuing all formal, informal and non-formal learning;
- consistency and coherence in relating to different qualifications frameworks in European and international cooperation;
- parity of esteem of qualifications from different learning pathways, including vocational and professional degrees and academic study programmes;
- lifelong learning, access and progression, and mobility;
- the shift towards learning outcomes-based qualifications;
- a credit structure and units as building blocks of qualifications;
- the concept of mutual trust through quality assurance mechanisms that cut across all levels of the framework.

The MQF is seen as an important tool to put lifelong learning and adult learning opportunities into practice. Adult participation in lifelong learning is modest at 5.7% in 2010, below the EU average (9.1% in 2010). The other policy challenge is a high rate of early school leavers, which accounted for 36.9% in 2010 (European Commission, 2011, pp. 100-105)¹¹⁷.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

A wide range of stakeholders has been involved with the MQF. The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) initiated the work following Legal Notice 347 of 2005, in cooperation with all stakeholders including the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE).

Following amendments to the Education Act in 2012, the MQC and the National Commission for Higher Education have been merged into a new body – the National Commission for Further and Higher Education – which decides on the inclusion of qualifications in the framework. This new agency provides strategic policies for further and higher education, promotes and maintains the MQF, accredits and licenses all

¹¹⁶ See Legal Notice 294. Malta Ministry of Education and Labour. Education Act. <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=23719&l=1> [accessed 5.12.2012].

¹¹⁷ Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020): country analysis. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

further (post-secondary) and higher education institutions and programmes and assists training providers in designing qualifications, assessment and certification.

Qualifications included in the MQF should satisfy the following conditions:

- be issued by nationally accredited institutions;
- be based on learning outcomes;
- be internally and externally quality assured;
- be based on workload composed of identified credit value;
- be awarded on the successful completion of a formal assessment procedures¹¹⁸.

The MQF register of regulated qualifications was launched in September 2012 and is being steadily constructed¹¹⁹.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Maltese NQF has eight learning outcomes based qualification levels. Each level descriptor is defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. The descriptors highlight specific attributes such as communications skills, judgemental skills, and learning skills. The level descriptors reflect complexity, volume and the level of learning expected for the particular qualification.

Progression within the MQF is recorded in terms of:

- knowledge and understanding;
- applying knowledge and understanding;
- communication skills;
- judgemental skills;
- learning skills;
- autonomy and responsibility.

Strengthening the learning outcomes approach has become fundamental to reforms across education and training in Malta and has been applied across qualifications and levels in recent years. One of the tasks of the National Commission for Further and Higher Education is to introduce national standards of knowledge, skills and competences and to ensure that these are systematically implemented and used.

For general education, the national minimum curriculum defines learning outcomes as educational objectives that enable learners to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes. The school leaving certificate was redesigned following a series of consultation meetings between the Directorate of Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and the MQC to include informal and non-formal learning as well as the individual's personal qualities. Covering the first two levels of the MQF, this initiative is intended to instil a culture of acknowledging learning achievements irrespective of the context within which the learning process occurs, from the early stages of education.

The MQF is intended to ensure that the contents of VET curricula are led by key competences and learning outcomes based on feedback from industry. Development of occupational standards and sector skills units is work in progress.

¹¹⁸ See Legal Notice 294.

¹¹⁹ The register has been placed online at www.mqc.gov.mt [accessed 5.12.2012].

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

Improving lifelong learning policies and practices is the guiding principle underpinning development of the MQF.

Recognition of informal and non-formal learning (prior learning) is an important part of the MQF for lifelong learning. The MQC published a series of working documents entitled *Valuing all learning*, in 2008. Volume four of these documents acknowledges the country's legislative gap in validating non-formal and informal learning and states that legislation is the first step required to take forward validation in Malta. Following consultation with the general public, the legal framework for validation is now in place¹²⁰.

The MQF also accommodates credits as building blocks of qualifications. They are defined as workload for all learning activities leading to a qualification.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

In 2009, Malta was the first Member State to prepare a single, joint report which references the MQF simultaneously to both the EQF and the QF-EHEA (Malta Qualifications Council and Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, 2009)¹²¹. This approach has been set as an example followed by many other countries in their own referencing process. The establishment of the MQF and its subsequent referencing have led to substantial modernisation efforts. As a result, in May 2012 an updated version of the report was presented to the EQF AG.

Table 16 Level correspondence established between the Maltese qualifications framework (MQF) and the EQF

MQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE 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 of the referencing to the EQF and the QF-EHEA were interrelated processes that led to a bridging exercise between stakeholders from different subsystems of education and employment.

The referencing process stimulated further developments including, in 2010, the design of an awards policy through the setting up of a new national awards system, and introducing validation of informal and non-formal learning into compulsory secondary education¹²².

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The National Commission for Further and Higher Education is the designated national coordination point. <http://www.mqc.gov.mt> [accessed 7.10.2012].

¹²⁰ See Legal Notice 295. Validation of non-formal and informal learning. <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=23720&l=1> [accessed 5.12.2012].

¹²¹ Referencing of the Malta qualifications framework (MQF) to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF/EHEA). <http://www.mqc.gov.mt/referencingreport?l=1> [accessed 5.12.2012].

¹²² The new school leaving certificate gives, for the first time, value to all formal, non-formal and informal learning activities in accordance with the guidelines, prepared by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (Ministry of Education).

THE NETHERLANDS

INTRODUCTION

The Dutch government gave its support to setting up a comprehensive qualifications framework for the Netherlands (NLQF) in September 2011. This decision also approved the proposal for referencing the NLQF to the EQF, a procedure which was completed in October 2011. The NLQF builds on and integrates the qualifications framework for higher education which was self-certified to the European higher education area in 2009.

The eight-level framework addresses two main categories of qualification. First are those qualifications regulated by the three Ministries of Education, Economic Affairs and Health/Welfare; then there are those outside public regulation and developed by stakeholders (mainly) in the labour market. This strong emphasis on the double character of the national qualifications system – where private and public providers interact and supplement each other – is an important defining feature of the NLQF. A NLQF coordination point is now working in line with these principles and the framework can be considered as having reached an early operational stage.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The adoption of the framework has been rapid. Initial preparations started as late as January 2009 and it moved into an early operational phase in 2012. The NLQF is a systematic arrangement of all existing qualifications in the Netherlands, resting on two pillars. The first is qualifications regulated by the public sector (the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation, and the Ministry of Healthcare, Welfare and Sports). The second pillar is 'other qualifications', notably those awarded by the private sector outside the formal system and related to the labour market. These often have a strong 'qualifying' power in the labour market and their inclusion in the NLQF is expected to increase their visibility and further strengthen their value. The inclusion and classification of these qualifications will take place at the request of the bodies responsible for awarding the diplomas and certificates; this is generally also the body which provides the learning programme leading to the qualification. By bringing Ministry-regulated and other qualifications together in one framework, the NLQF will provide a substantially improved insight into the levels of qualifications offered and how these are related.

The NLQF addresses (Dutch Ministry of Education, 2012)¹²³ a wide group of potential beneficiaries and aims at:

- enabling people of all ages and in different situations to identify their level of education and training to find an appropriate education and training programme where they can use their abilities efficiently;
- enabling employers and individuals to understand the levels of existing national qualifications and international qualifications (through the EQF) and how they relate to each other;
- showing how the different qualifications contribute to improving workers' skills in the labour market.

The main objectives are:

- increase transparency within Dutch education;
- increase the understanding of qualifications within Europe;
- increase qualification level comparability;
- stimulate thinking in terms of learning outcomes as building blocks of qualifications;

¹²³ The referencing document of the Dutch national qualification framework to the European qualification framework.

- promote lifelong learning;
- increase the transparency of learning routes;
- increase the understanding of the level of qualifications by players in the labour market;
- aid communication between all stakeholders in education and employment.

In the Dutch EQF referencing report (op.cit. p.25) it is clearly stated that the NLQF has no role in reforming Dutch education and training, in regulating transfer and access, or in entitlements to qualifications and degrees. The framework is understood as a systematic arrangement of existing qualifications aiming at transparency and increased comparability. Whether the NQF will move from being a purely descriptive mechanism to an instrument supporting further development of Dutch education and training remains to be seen. Involving the private sector can be seen as moving beyond a purely descriptive role.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science coordinates the development and implementation of the NLQF. A project plan was developed during spring 2009 and resulted in the setting up of a steering group consisting of the three main ministries (see above). A small secretariat was set up in charge of daily running of the project and to coordinate the support of an expert group looking into the technical design of the framework (outlining level descriptors, testing their relevance, indicating how existing qualification levels can be referred to the new levels). A small expert group (The Leijnse committee) reviewed the technical proposal and made the recommendation on which further work has been based.

Different from many other countries, the project steering group consisted only of representatives of the three ministries; other stakeholders, for example social partners, were not directly involved. The expert group was four professors recruited for of their expertise in education and training matters, not for their ability to voice different interests and positions. While a consultation process has made it possible for all stakeholders to express their position on the developing framework, the original NLQF proposal was only weakly linked to stakeholders outside the main ministries involved in development. The future impact of the NLQF will therefore require that it is seen as relevant to a wider group of stakeholders. The priority now given to the 'opening up' of the NLQF towards the private sector may – if it is successful – contribute significantly to this. The criteria and procedures detailed below illustrate the main principles now developed for the inclusion of 'other qualifications' into the NLQF.

THE OPENING UP OF THE NLQF: CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES

The NLQF – represented by the national coordination point – will from now on actively promote the possibility to have a qualification included in, and levelled to, the framework. This is being presented as an opportunity for providers to achieve better overall visibility, to strengthen comparability with other qualifications at national and European level, to be able to apply the learning outcomes approach and to strengthen links to the labour market.

If a provider such as a private company, wants to submit a qualification for inclusion, an accreditation (or in Dutch 'validation') has to take place. Issues like legal status, property rights, the continuity of the organisation and the existence of quality assurance arrangements will be checked. A list of approved quality assurance systems is included in the guidance material now developed. If the provider does not use such systems, an on-site visit will be organised.

When an organisation has been accredited (for five years) it can submit qualifications for inclusion and levelling. The organisation will indicate the level it sees as most appropriate and this will provide the starting point for the assessment on which a final decision will be made. When asking for inclusion, the organisation will have to indicate the learning outcomes in accordance with the main elements of the NLQF level descriptors (see below), the workload (no qualifications of fewer than 400 hours nominal workload will be considered), the assessment approaches to be applied, and the link to relevant occupational profile.

While the NCP will be responsible for organising the process, committees of independent, external experts will assess the applications and give their advice to the Board of the NCP, which will eventually make the final decision on inclusion. The Board includes all the major stakeholders involved in the NLQF, including ministries and social partners.

Organisations will have to pay to use the system. Accreditation will vary between 1 000 and 7 500 Euro, depending on whether an approved quality assurance system is in place. Submitting one qualification for inclusion is set at 2 500 Euro.

The Ministry of Education has signalled that it will initiate revision of the existing legal texts underpinning Dutch education and training to make sure that the role of the NLQF is reflected. This revision will take time and may not be completed until 2015. This will not prevent the NQF carrying out its current work, but will ultimately strengthen the position of the framework.

The NLQF builds on the qualifications framework for higher education developed (from 2005) in the context of the Bologna process. This culminated in the national qualifications framework for higher education in the Netherlands, which was verified by an independent external committee of peers, February 2009. The NVAO, the accreditation organisation for the Netherlands and the Flemish community of Belgium, guarantees implementation through the accreditation process, which is obligatory across formally recognised higher education. In January 2010, brochures in English and Dutch were published for wider communication purposes. The brochure and the national qualifications framework verification documents are available at the website of the NVAO¹²⁴.

LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS

The NLQF operates with one entry level (lower than EQF 1) and eight qualifications levels. All levels are defined on the basis of learning outcomes. The diagram below shows how the Dutch qualifications are placed into the levels of the NLQF.

Table 17 Types of qualification placed into the levels of Dutch qualifications framework (NLQF)

NLQF	Adult education	Pre-vocational education	Upper secondary vocational education: dual system	General upper secondary education and academically oriented upper secondary	Higher education	'Other qualifications'
8						
7						
6						
5						
4+ 4						
3						
2						
1						
Entry level						

Source: Dutch Ministry of Education, 2012. The referencing document of the Dutch national qualification framework to the European qualification framework, p. 32.

The NLQF is seen as offering a new way of describing existing qualification levels. The following key-principles are emphasised:

¹²⁴ www.nvao.net [accessed 5.12.2012].

- levels do not refer to, and are not defined by, education sectors;
- NLQF levels are not referenced to degrees or titles (meaning, for example, that a qualification at level 6 does not automatically belong to higher education and the achievement of this qualification does not give automatic entitlement to a Bachelor degree);
- all NLQF levels are open to all qualifications of all education sectors.

These principles signal that the NLQF goes further than several other 'new' European NQFs. Not only is it a comprehensive framework with a broad scope, it also stresses the principle that all levels (including 8) are open to all qualifications. As the table below illustrates, however, it is yet to be seen whether this principle is also reflected in practice.

The learning outcomes approach used to describe the nine levels is based on the following elements.

Table 18 *Level descriptor in the Dutch national qualifications framework (NLQF)*

NLQF descriptors	
Context The context descriptions of the levels are used along with the described knowledge to determine the grade of difficulty of the skills.	
Knowledge Knowledge is the totality of facts, principles, theories and ways of working related to an occupation or a knowledge domain.	
Skills Cognitive abilities (logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical abilities (psychomotor skills in applying methods, materials, tools and instruments) applied within a given context	<i>Applying knowledge</i> Reproduce, analyse, integrate, evaluate, combine and apply knowledge in an occupation or a knowledge domain.
	<i>Problem-solving skills</i> Recognise or identify and solve problems.
	<i>Learning and development skills</i> Personal development, autonomously or under supervision
	<i>Information skills</i> Obtain, collect, process, combine, analyse and assess information.
	<i>Communication skills</i> Communicate based on conventions relevant to the context.
Responsibility and independence The proven ability to collaborate with others and to take responsibility for own work or study results or of others.	

The table demonstrates the influence of the EQF descriptors but differs in some important respects. As in several other countries, making context explicit has been seen as important. The subcategories introduced for skills can be seen as a way specifying the descriptors and making them more relevant to the Dutch context. They can also be seen as reflecting Dutch experiences in applying learning outcomes, for example in the VET (MBO) sector in recent years.

The learning outcomes, competence-oriented approach is broadly accepted and implemented in Dutch education and training. The Dutch referencing report to the EQF (2011) details a strong tradition of 'objectives-led' governance of education and training, an approach which has proved conducive for a competence-based approach. Vocational education and training is probably most advanced in competence orientation; following extensive reform, a new VET competence-based structure has been developed and implemented. The same tendencies can be observed in general and higher education, although somewhat less systematically. The introduction of the qualifications framework for higher education has contributed to the overall shift to learning outcomes, as has the involvement of single institutions in the so-called 'Tuning project'.

The strong position of the learning outcomes approach is reflected in the relatively widespread use of validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Netherlands (EVC). The NLQF will strengthen the role of validation and turn it into an integrated part of the qualifications system. The use of validation as an integrated part of the framework will help to connect with a wider range of learning activities and learning settings, for example in the private sector.

LINKS TO OTHER TOOLS AND POLICIES

Compared to other European countries, the Netherlands has a well-established system for validating non-formal and informal learning. Specific characteristics of the Dutch system are:

- validation always takes place according to a national standard and should be concluded through the award of a certificate of experience and/or qualification stating what the candidate knows, is able to do or understand;
- public and private education and training institutions can offer APL;
- validation is oriented to the labour market (career development) and to education and training (to shorten the education programme);
- everybody can follow an APL procedure, practices are not limited to particular education and training sectors or institutions.

The use of APL is financially supported by tax measures for employers and individuals. In 2009-10 the government took steps to strengthen the quality assurance dimension of validation: only those validation providers respecting the official 'quality code' will be able to offer validation deductible from taxes. The existing validation system very much rests on the learning outcomes and competence approach already adopted in Dutch education and training. The NLQF is expected to further strengthen this basis by providing a better overview over existing qualifications where validation is possible.

There is no link established between the NLQF and ECVET. This reflects that credit systems play a relatively limited role in the Netherlands and is mainly limited to the use of ECTS for higher education institutions. Current work on ECVET is defined as 'bottom up' and is exclusively linked to mobility projects.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The Netherlands referenced its NLQF to the EQF in October 2011.

The process drew attention to the referencing of the VWO (academically oriented secondary education) to level 5 of the EQF: most other European countries have decided to reference these school leaving certificates to level 4. This convergence reflects a broad agreement, supported by the Lisbon recognition convention, on the general levelling of this qualification, playing a key role in access to higher education. While countries agree that it is up to the Dutch government to decide on the levelling of this qualification, several countries have criticised the decision for not being sufficiently transparent and supported by documentation. Subsequently, VWO qualifications were linked to the NLQF/EQF level 4.

Table 19 Level correspondence established between the Dutch qualifications framework (NLQF) and the EQF

NLQF	Entry level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The Dutch NQF is now in an early operational stage and has started its work, notably by opening up to 'other qualifications' in the private sector. Future success will largely depend on whether the framework will be seen as relevant to stakeholders outside the limited circle of formal, public education and training. Stakeholders close to the process see the need to develop a comprehensive communication strategy in the coming period to ensure that as many of them as possible are involved in the further development and implementation of the framework. The responsible ministry must ensure that the role of the NLQF is clearly defined in planned revision of the existing legal basis.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

NCP is hosted by the (umbrella) organisation CINOP/Knowledge Center RPL, <http://www.ncpnlqf.nl/> [accessed 12.3.2013].

NORWAY

INTRODUCTION

Norwegian NQF developments were triggered by the 2008 EQF recommendation and its inclusion into the Treaty of the European Economic Area (EEA) in March 2009. Following extensive preparatory work involving main stakeholders, a comprehensive Norwegian national qualifications framework (Nasjonalt kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring, NKR) was adopted through government decision in December 2011¹²⁵. A specific decree on the role of the NKR within Norwegian education and training will be adopted in 2013, further strengthening the formal basis of the framework. The decree will also clarify the role of the NKR in relation to existing laws on general, vocational, higher and adult education and training.

The NKR consists of seven levels and covers general, vocational and higher education. It is envisaged that, in a second phase, it will be opened to the non-formal and private sector; the procedures and criteria for this have yet to be agreed. The NKR will enter an early operational stage spring 2013, coordinated by the Norwegian coordination point for EQF (hosted by NOKUT, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education).

Norway will present a joint referencing/self-certification report to the EQF/QF-EHEA late spring 2013.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The NKR aims at describing the existing national education and training system in a transparent way to make it more understandable, at both national and international level. This should increase mobility, contribute to more flexible learning pathways and promote lifelong learning. The NKR will:

- give a comprehensive and general description of what is expected from a learner after completing a qualification;
- provide an overview of the inner logic of the education and training systems and so support education and career guidance and counselling;
- provide a description which will make possible comparisons with qualifications in other countries;
- provide a better basis for dialogue with the labour market;
- offer the opportunity to develop new instruments for valuing competences acquired outside the formal system.

A more systematic use of learning outcomes is seen as a precondition for the NKR. Learning outcomes descriptors are supposed to clarify what is expected from any candidate who has successfully acquired a qualification of any type and at any particular level. This will help to clarify the similarities and differences between qualifications and the relationships between them.

The NKR is not seen as an instrument for reform. While it will describe Norwegian education and training, its intention is not to change it. The NKR is instead seen as:

- an instrument/tool that education and training can use for evaluation and further development;
- a platform for debate and dialogue.

The NKR will, for the moment, only cover qualifications awarded by publicly recognised and accredited education and training institutions. Certificates and diplomas awarded by others, for example in popular education and in enterprises, will not be directly included in the framework. Several stakeholders have

¹²⁵ <http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/KD/Vedlegg/Internasjonalt/UNESCO/NasjonaltKvalifikasjonsrammeverk200612.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

criticised the framework for being too narrowly defined and failing to support a broader strategy on competence development and lifelong learning. In response, the Ministry of Education states that potentially incorporating 'other qualifications' will be addressed in a second stage, building on research commissioned in Autumn 2012.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The first phase of NQF development in Norway, from 2006 to 2009, was fragmented, with a series of different initiatives (in higher education, vocational education and training and tertiary VET) in parallel with limited coordination. This changed in 2009 when the Ministry of Education, reflecting input from stakeholders, stated an intention to work towards a comprehensive framework for lifelong learning and to merge existing strands of work into a single approach. The result of this decision was the presentation of the NKR proposal in January 2011, immediately followed by extensive public consultation. This process, involving education and training stakeholders as well as those in the labour market, demonstrated a significantly increased appreciation of the framework's potential for future education, training and labour market policies. In Spring 2012, the proposal for an NQF decree led to another public consultation, demonstrating somewhat different expectations of the future role of the framework. The service employer organisation (in particular) criticised the framework for not being sufficiently accommodating of non-formal training and the private sector, and for being too narrowly oriented towards formal, public education and training. Others, for example the University of Oslo, questioned whether the proposal for a decree could interfere with the institutional autonomy fundamental to this sector?

The NQF for higher education was adopted in 2009 (although not self-certified to the QF-EHEA). The three highest levels of the proposed NKR are identical to the three cycles of the higher education framework, something which will be reflected in the joint referencing/self-certification to take place spring 2013.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The NKR adopted in December 2011 introduces a framework of seven levels, reflecting the structure of existing formal education and training in Norway¹²⁶. The table below shows this seven-level structure, as well as how main qualification types are expected to be placed (the table shows the situation in September/October 2012, before a final decision on the referencing to the EQF had been made):

Table 20 Qualifications from formal education placed into the Norwegian qualifications framework

There are no qualifications corresponding to EQF level 1; this level will not be considered part of the NKR which, for reasons of comparison, starts at level 2.			
Level 2	Completed primary and (lower) secondary education (10 years)		
Level 3	Basic competences acquired through upper secondary education		
Level 4	4A Completed general upper secondary education	4B Completed vocational upper secondary education	
Level 5	5.1 Post-secondary VET (Fagskole) 1	5.2 Post-secondary VET (Fagskole) 2	
Level 6	Partial Bachelor (short higher education)	Bachelor (Bologna 1st cycle)	
Level 7	Master		
Level 8	PhD		

¹²⁶ It should be noted that several of these qualifications can also be acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning. European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Norway. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77474.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

While in principle considering of learning outcomes, the splitting of levels 4 to 6 into parallel but distinct categories can be read as a wish to signal differences in institutional types as well as in the duration and workload of qualifications.

Levels are described through the concepts knowledge (kunnskap), skills (ferdighet) and general competence (generell kompetanse). This approach was already adopted for the higher education framework and seems to be broadly accepted among stakeholders. While the EQF influence is admitted, the main difference lies in the term 'general competence' which refers to the kind of transversal, overarching competences of the learning objectives adopted for upper secondary education (ability to apply knowledge and skills in different situations by demonstrating ability to cooperate, by showing responsibility and ability to reflect, and ability in critical thinking). Using the term 'competence' in isolation would, according to the proposal, lead to confusion.

The three descriptor elements are further specified in the following way:

Table 21 Level descriptors in the Norwegian qualifications framework

Knowledge	Skills	General competence
Types and complexity: is it theoretical or practical knowledge, within a subject or a profession; how complex and comprehensive	Types: is it cognitive, practical, creative or communicative	Challenges regarding change: in which areas of education and work; how predictable and changeable are situations
Understanding: ability to contextualise knowledge	Problem-solving: how complex are the tasks to be addressed at a particular level	Cooperation and responsibility: extent to which candidate takes responsibility for own and others' work
	Communication: with whom, at what level of complexity, by which means	Learning: extent to which candidate takes responsibility for own learning and competence development

The discussion on the referencing of the NKR to the EQF has drawn attention to some issues. First, discussion between the Nordic countries on the levelling of lower secondary education has caused concern. For the moment it is likely that Finland and Sweden will refer these qualifications to level EQF 3, while Denmark has already made its reference of these qualifications to EQF level 2. This would signal a difference in level of learning outcomes which is considered out of tune with realities. It is not currently clear how Norway will refer level 2 qualifications in NKR to the EQF. Second, the placing of 'basic competences' at level 3 draws attention to a qualification which so far has received little attention in Norway. High drop-out rates from upper secondary education, and in particular from the vocational strand, points to the potentially important role of recognising partial completion at this level. Third, placing two year post-secondary VET qualifications at level 5 and the two year higher education at level 6 has caused controversy. Some stakeholders see this as reflecting a traditional view on the difference between vocational and academic qualifications, not on a balanced comparison of learning outcomes.

There is broad consensus in Norway on the relevance of the learning outcomes approach. Kunnskapsløftet, a wide-ranging reform started in 2004 and implemented in 2006, has been of particular significance and implied a comprehensive redefinition and rewriting of curricula objectives at all levels of basic education and training (i.e. primary and secondary education and training, years 1-13). Finding its main expression in a national core-curriculum, addressing all levels of education and training, the learning outcomes approach has started to influence assessment and evaluation forms, in particular in VET. An important reason for using learning outcomes is to encourage the curriculum consistency at national level. While adaptation is possible at local level, national consistency is important for reasons of quality and also to support validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Adopting the qualifications framework for higher education has also triggered extensive revision of study programmes in higher education, aiming to introduce and apply the learning outcomes principle in all institutions and programmes. Post-secondary education and training (fagskole) have not so far applied the learning outcomes principle in the description of their programmes. The NKR developments are now directly influencing this and the proposal for learning outcomes descriptors for level 5 can be seen as an important starting point for this process. The priority given to validating non-formal and informal learning has also increased awareness of the potential of the learning outcomes approach. It is difficult to judge to what extent the learning outcomes perspective is influencing pedagogical approaches and learning methods.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (Dokumentasjon av Realkompetanse) has been on the Norwegian political agenda since the 1990s. All the most important acts on education and training, for primary, upper secondary and higher education and training, stipulate the right of individuals to have their 'real experiences' documented and validated. Existing curricula for lower and upper secondary education and study programmes in higher education are used as references for validation, so the shift towards learning outcomes will influence the way validation is carried out. The NKR proposal lists five areas where it will influence validation:

- introduction of learning outcomes as the underpinning principle for all qualifications;
- increased transparency of qualification levels;
- development of more fit-for-purpose methods, supporting more valid and reliable validation;
- more consistent conceptual basis;
- general shift of attention towards learning outcomes.

Credit transfer by the ECTS is already used to some extent in higher education. Though there is involvement in testing ECVET, the final position has yet to be clarified and there is no explicit link established between the NKR and this initiative.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Norway expects to finalise referencing to the EQF and self-certification to the QF-EHEA in late spring 2013.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) acts as EQF NCP.

<http://www.nokut.no/en/NOKUT-Knowledge/The-Norwegian-educational-system/The-Norwegian-qualifications-framework/> [accessed 12.12.2012].

<http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/tema/livslang-laring/nasjonalt-kvalifikasjonsrammeverk.html?id=601327> [accessed 12.12.2012].

POLAND

INTRODUCTION

The Polish qualifications framework (PQF) currently under development forms part of a broad reform of the qualifications system¹²⁷. Coordinated by the Intra-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning¹²⁸, the reform aims at promoting lifelong learning and putting in place education, training and learning solutions better able to respond to the needs of the labour market and society in general. The PQF and the new national register of qualifications stand out as the two key building blocks in this reform.

The new framework is expected to consist of eight learning outcome based levels applicable to all types of qualifications; it will include those obtained in general education, vocational education and training, and higher education. The framework – and the register – will be open to the private and non-formal sectors as long as the qualifications in question meet agreed quality criteria. The new PQF builds on, takes into account, and integrates the work on a qualification framework for higher education linked to the Bologna process.

A joint referencing to the EQF/self-certification to the QF-EHEA will be carried out in 2013, based on a mandate given by the interministerial taskforce for lifelong learning. The PQF has still some way to go before it reaches operational status; a number of amendments to existing laws will be required and take time.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

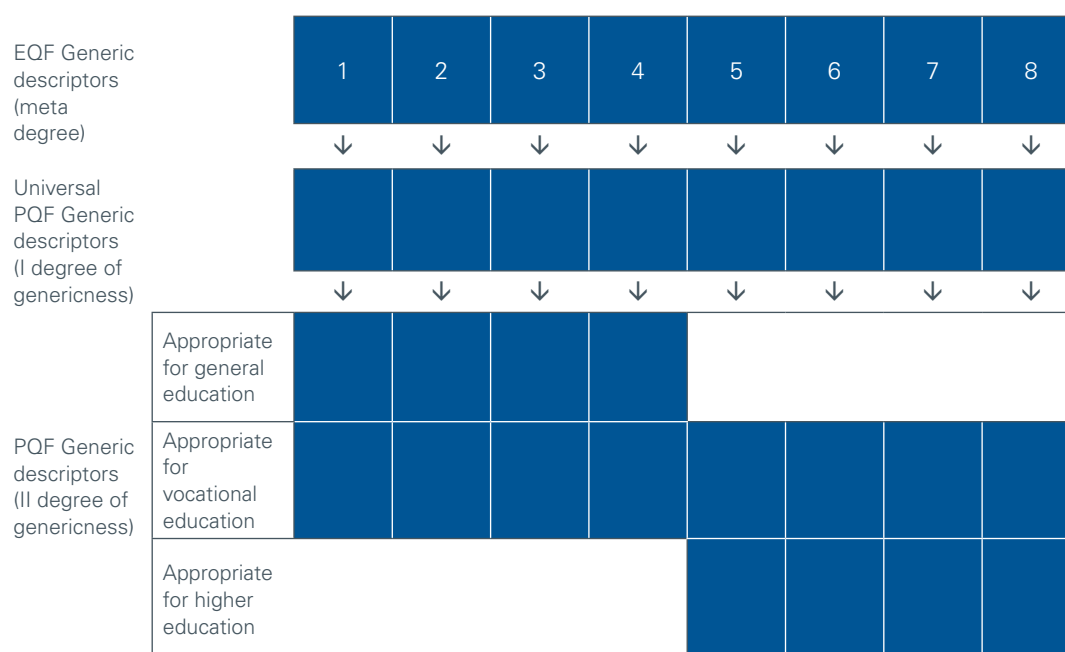
The work on the qualifications framework is an integrated part of a broad reform and modernisation of the Polish qualifications system, addressing all levels and all subsystems. An important part of this reform, initiated in 2010, is an overall shift to learning outcomes. This requires a redesign of all programmes, standards and curricula, in general, vocational and higher education and training. The role of the framework is to promote this shift and to ensure that is consistent. The framework is also seen as an important instrument for strengthening the transparency and overall consistency of education and training, which is considered by some to be fragmented and difficult to overview and navigate. It is also underlined that while participation in initial education is very high in Poland, participation in lifelong learning is low compared to other European countries (less than 5% of 25-64 year olds report having taken part in LLL, compared to the EU average of 9%).

The direction chosen for the PQF is interesting in a wider European setting. First, the framework is seen as a tool for reform and change; its role goes beyond merely describing existing qualifications. Second, the qualification framework is seen as one of several elements in a wider policy strategy. It is acknowledged that qualifications frameworks cannot operate in isolation; their impact depends on how they are integrated into a wider policy strategy. Third, while the framework introduces a coherent set of national levels and descriptors, it also identifies the need for additional learning outcomes descriptors to be used by subsystems and sectors and which will allow for a more detailed fit-for-purpose approach. This 'diversified' descriptor approach introduced by the PQF is (so far) unique and is outlined below:

127 By national qualifications system is understood the entirety of state activities related to the validation of learning outcomes to satisfy the needs of the labour market, civil society and personal development of learners.

128 Appointed by the Prime Minister and including Ministries of Education, Labour and Social Policy, Science and Research and Economy.

Figure 1 Three sets of level descriptors in Polish qualifications framework



Source: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych (IBE), 2011

The PQF thus includes three main sets of level descriptors, operating according to different degrees of generality. The universal PQF is the most generic (first degree). The second set of descriptors addresses the main subsystems of education and training (higher education, vocational education, general education). The last of these can be further developed through a third set of descriptors (not indicated above), for example oriented towards specific fields of higher education (subject areas) or for VET in different economic sectors.

While the coexistence of several qualifications subframeworks is common in most European countries, the PQF takes one step further and tries to express how these can be made explicit within an overarching conceptual (learning outcomes) approach. This means that when, for example, the financial sector wants to establish a specialised sectoral qualifications framework, it should use learning outcomes descriptors clearly connected to the level descriptors operating at other levels of generality (including EQF). Third, while moving beyond the general, national level descriptors, the PQF is better able to link to current reform of standards and curriculum development and eventually to learning and assessment.

The new qualifications register is presented as a separate initiative closely linked to the PQF. The register is intended to contain a list of all qualifications which can be obtained in Poland. At this stage four different categories of qualifications have been identified:

- qualifications awarded under the provision of laws regulating general education;
- qualifications awarded under the provisions of laws and regulations on higher education;
- other qualifications established by national bodies;
- qualifications established by foreign entities that are awarded in Poland.

The link to the PQF will be assured by attributing all registered qualifications a level in the national framework and the EQF. Qualifications so far not registered in Poland can be included based on assessment by experts. The procedures and criteria for this inclusion process have yet to be developed, but may point in the same direction as developments in, for example, the Netherlands and Sweden.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

In 2010 the prime Minister appointed two bodies to take responsibility for the overall reform of the Polish qualification system, including the development and implementation of the PQF and the national register of qualifications:

- an Intra-Ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning Strategy, including the PQF comprising all institutional stakeholders: Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Research and Higher Education, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health. This team is led by the Ministry of National Education;
- a subgroup of the taskforce, the PQF Steering Committee, comprising all key institutional stakeholders (Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Research and Higher Education, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health. In May 2011 the ministries of health, culture, and defence joined the committee). This committee is run by the Ministry of Research and Higher Education is supported by the Polish NCP as well as the Educational Research Institute. All projects supporting the development and implementation of the PQF are monitored and coordinated by the Steering Committee.

The authorities decided in 2009 that establishing the PQF will require additional administrative and research support. Two external institutions have been involved in the first stage of preparation (The Education Research Institute and the Cooperation Fund Foundation). In the second stage, the Education Research Institute has the main responsibility for coordinating the designing of the PQF, including relevant research, conceptual work and consultation. In addition to this the Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange has been appointed as national coordination point for the EQF.

Different from many other countries, the bodies referred to above do not directly include representatives of social partners or civil society. It is stated that representatives of these can contribute to the work in an advisory capacity but it is not clear what this means for the involvement and ownership of stakeholders outside public administration. Seen from the outside, and compared to other countries, Polish developments can be described as a combination of top-down and research driven. Whether this could have a negative impact on the implementation of the framework is difficult to judge; how to ensure broad commitment and ownership also outside the public sector is certainly an issue to keep in mind in the next couple of years. However, two broad consultations have been carried out since 2011 and a high number of meetings (200+) has been organised across the country addressing a wide range of stakeholders.

It is envisaged that it will be necessary to appoint/establish an institution responsible for running the PQF and other instruments emerging from the reform of the qualifications system. Such an institution would, for example, be responsible for maintaining the qualifications register, accrediting awarding bodies, and monitoring the use of validation. A decision on this issue has yet to be made.

LEVELS DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The PQF introduces descriptors for different purposes and at different levels of detail:

- Polish universal descriptors forming the basis for the comprehensive PQF;
- Polish descriptors for education and training subframeworks, for example for general, vocational and higher education;
- Polish descriptors for sector frameworks or for subject areas.

All of these refer back to the meta-level descriptors of the EQF and the idea is to introduce a consistent and interrelated set of descriptors meeting the needs of a diverse group of stakeholders and institutions. To what extent this approach will be able to promote communication between the different levels and subsystems can only be tested by an operational framework. The challenge is to avoid a fragmented

approach where sectors operate in isolation and – in a worst case scenario – increase rather than reduce obstacles between institutions and sectors.

Originally the PQF was envisaged as a seven-level framework, closely resembling existing qualifications and degrees in the Polish system; it was later decided to introduce a new level 5 in the framework. While still empty, this will allow for a more appropriate placing of ‘short cycle’ academic qualifications as well as advanced vocational qualifications, possibly including the Master Craftsman (Meister).

The Polish QF is now based on an eight-level framework described according to the following three key categories:

Table 22 Level descriptor in the Polish qualifications framework

Knowledge	Scope
	Depth of understanding
Skills	Problem-solving and applying knowledge in practice
	Learning
	Communication
Social competence	Identity
	Cooperation
	Responsibility

These descriptors (first generic degree) are based on an agreement between stakeholders in general, vocational and higher education and are the common reference point for developments at sector (second generic degree) and subsector (third generic degree) levels.

Progress has been made in defining level descriptors for the different education and training sectors. The basic distinction between knowledge, skills and social competences will be used at the subsector PQF at second generic degree, but will differ in terms of specificity. This is exemplified by the proposal for vocational education and training¹²⁹ where each of the three main dimensions (K, S and C) have to be specified according to:

- information,
- ideas,
- cooperation,
- tools and materials.

For general education, the same three dimensions, based on initial expert proposals, were grouped under the following titles:

- native and foreign languages,
- maths/sciences,
- natural/environmental sciences,
- social functions,
- identity.

¹²⁹ No official translation is available and the final version may contain slightly different terms.

Level descriptors for the third generic degree have yet to be developed. It is possible, however, to see the work of the Tuning-project as relevant for defining learning outcomes in particular subject-areas of higher education.

Progress can be observed in the overall shift to learning outcomes in Polish education and training. Core curricula formulated in terms of learning outcomes have recently been introduced for all the main parts of education and training. The core curriculum for general education has been being gradually implemented since the 2009/10 school year and will be fully implemented as of the 2014/15 school year. These learning outcomes also form the basis for assessment. The core curriculum for vocational education will be implemented from the 2012/13 school year, being finalised by 2015/16. Also in this case the core curriculum forms the basis for assessment criteria. As of the 2012/13 academic year, the NQF for higher education, generally defining learning outcomes in eight areas of learning, will apply. Curricula for specific fields addressed by higher education institutions at the first and second cycles will have to be described in the terms of learning outcomes as well as show how they can be assessed. For third cycle studies (doctoral), regulations from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education describe the expected learning outcomes.

LINKS TO OTHER TOOLS AND POLICIES

The work on reforming the national qualifications system includes a number of links to related policy areas. In addition to the development and introduction of the PQF and the qualifications register, validation of non-formal and informal learning, along with credit accumulation and transfer, are an important part of the strategy.

The introduction of validation has been seen as important for, and consistent with, the development of the PQF. This reflects the lack of such arrangements in the Polish system; the existing legal framework does not include the concept of validation and there are no central regulations addressing validation of learning outcomes achieved other than in formal education.

Introducing a system for credit transfer and accumulation is also seen as a priority. It is stated that this approach will reflect European initiatives, the ECTS for higher education and ECVET for the vocational field.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The PQF is expected to be referenced to the EQF in 2013. A joint self-certification to the QF-EHEA will take place at the same time.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The PQF developments are interesting in a broader international context as they represent an effort to combine the introduction of a comprehensive national framework with the parallel development of sector and subsector frameworks. While the coexistence of frameworks at different levels and for different purposes can be found in many countries, the Polish approach tries to introduce conceptual coherence, allowing for synergies between frameworks at different levels and in different sectors. Practical implementation of the PQF in the coming period should be followed closely as it may provide a model for other countries struggling to find ways to bridge and connect sectors and subsectors of education and training. Whether this complex model will work in practice, and how it can promote consistent use of learning outcomes across levels and subsystems and sectors, will have to be carefully monitored in the coming period. The progress made in introducing the learning outcomes approach in the different subsectors of education and training provides a good basis for future developments.

While providing a very interesting technical model, the translation of the current PQF proposal into a credible and politically agreed framework will require long-term effort. The forthcoming process of amending the existing legal basis will highlight this challenge. The future involvement of stakeholders outside education and training and research will be particularly important.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange acts as the NCP. <http://www.buwiwm.edu.pl/eng/index.htm> [accessed 12.3.2013].

PORTUGAL

INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive NQF (Quadro Nacional de Qualificações – QNQ) has been in place since October 2010 as a single reference for classifying all qualifications obtainable in Portuguese education and training. Established by the Decree Law No 396/2007 (Decreto-Lei No 396/2007), the framework (including eight levels and level descriptors of learning outcomes) was published in July 2009 (Portaria No 782/2009)¹³⁰ (). Higher education qualifications have been included in the more detailed framework of higher education qualifications (FHEQ-Portugal), which is part of the comprehensive NQF.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The NQF is seen as a tool for reforming Portuguese education and training. Initiated through the 2007 reform¹³¹, the development of the national qualification system and NQF forms part of a broader education and training programme, notably the ‘new opportunities’ initiative and the ‘agenda for the reform of vocational training’. These reforms aim to raise the low qualifications level of Portuguese population (youngsters and adults)¹³².

Three main goals are emphasised:

- to reinforce vocational/technical pathways as real options for young people (European Commission et al., 2010, Portugal, p.1)¹³³;
- to upgrade the education and qualification level of the adult population;
- to promote attainment of secondary education as a minimum level of qualification in Portugal¹³⁴.

For young people, the reform focuses on measures to prevent early school leaving and sets out to establish secondary level qualifications as a minimum requirement to be reached by everyone¹³⁵. For adults, the reform offers those with low qualifications a new opportunity, through formal education and training and validation, to complement and expand their level of knowledge, skills and competences. The validation arrangements are particularly important, offering opportunities in both general and professional fields.

From the public policy perspective, the development of an integrated national qualification system and framework was regarded as necessary and a further contribution to such an ambitious programme as the ‘new opportunity’. The comprehensive approach of the EQF was seen as an inspiration for initiating reforms and developing a national qualification system and a comprehensive national qualifications framework. This will integrate and coordinate qualifications obtained in different education and training subsystems (general education, professional education and training, etc.) within the scope of a single framework, allowing people to combine and transfer qualifications.

¹³⁰ <http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/boDocumentos/getDocumentos/163>. [accessed 5.12.2012].

¹³¹ Decree Law No 396/2007.

¹³² Despite fact that there have been attempts to invest in qualifications over the last two decades, the number of early school leavers (aged 18-24) is still among the highest in EU countries (28.7% in 2010) and the total population having at least upper secondary education was 31.9% in 2010 (Eurostat data).

¹³³ The National Qualifications Agency set the objective that 50% of those enrolled in upper secondary level should achieve a vocational qualification.

See European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Portugal. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77477.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

¹³⁴ Portugal has also raised the compulsory schooling age to 18 years.

¹³⁵ The National Agency for Qualifications has set an objective that 50% of the cohort at upper secondary level achieves a vocational qualification.

The reforms also aim to develop, integrate and further develop the system for valuing and recognising competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, in progress since 2001. However, there have been policy changes in the last year due to the austerity measures.

There is also new impetus to promoting the attractiveness of vocational training. All vocational education and training should serve to strengthen both the education levels and professional certification of the workforce.

In parallel, a framework for higher education was established and used as a tool to support reforms and developments¹³⁶. The main aims were to set up clear learning standards and identify progression routes through levels of learning (MCTES-Ministério da ciência, tecnologia e ensino superior, 2009)¹³⁷.

Apart from the NQF's national reform role, improving comparability and transparency of Portuguese qualifications and their understanding abroad by linking them to the EQF was also emphasised.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

Initial work on the NQF was carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, with the support of the Ministry of Education. In 2007, the Decree Law No 396/2007 was adopted as the legal basis for the development of the Portuguese qualifications system and framework. An agreement was signed between the government and the social partners on key elements: tools and regulatory systems to support development and the implementation of the national qualifications systems and framework. Three main steps were taken.

First, a new institutional model was developed to support setting up the national qualifications system and framework. A national Agency for Qualifications (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação, I.P – ANQ), under the responsibility of the, at the time, Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Education, was established in 2007 to coordinate the implementation of education and training policies for young people and to develop the system for recognition, validation and certification of competences. This has a key role to play in achieving the targets set out by new opportunities initiative and responsibility for managing the national network of the new opportunities centres. These centres provide access to recognition, validation and certification of competences, to vocational training, and to interrelationships between them in a lifelong learning perspective of each individual. The National Council for Vocational Training was set up as a tripartite body.

Second, a national qualifications catalogue was created in 2007 as a strategic management tool for non-higher national qualifications and a central reference tool for VET provision. For each qualification it defines an occupational profile, a training standard (that awards a double certification) and a recognition, validation and certification of competences standard; the catalogue is permanently updated by the National Agency for Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training, a process supported by 16 sector qualifications councils.

Third, the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning (RVCC) was further integrated into the NQF. The system for recognising non-formal and informal learning refers to the qualification standards in the national qualifications catalogue, both to 'school-based competences' (four, six, nine or 12 years of school) and 'professional competences'. The key competences standards for adult education and training for basic and secondary level are structured into key competence areas, covering the different contents of subjects at these specific educational levels.

The National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training is the main public body in charge of implementing the NQF. The agency's main responsibilities are for the education and double certified vocational training offer for adults and for young people, the national qualifications catalogue (with

¹³⁶ The current rate of tertiary attainment at 23% (2010) is still below the EU average (33.6%), but Portugal has made significant progress in recent years.

¹³⁷ FHEQ – Portugal: the framework for higher education qualifications in Portugal. http://www.mctes.pt/archive/doc/FHEQ_in_Portugal.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

the help of the Sector Qualifications Councils) and the system for recognition, validation and certification of competences. The agency also acts as NCP and played a key role in referencing national qualifications to the EQF. Another important role is to articulate and communicate with the General Directorate for Higher Education regarding levels 5 to 8 of the NQF.

The NQF has reached an early operational stage. All VET is already organised based on the NQF: the databases are organised considering the structure of the NQF and the access to the financial support also takes the framework into consideration. Further, most national qualifications indicate the corresponding NQF qualification level, thus becoming increasingly visible to individuals. Education and training stakeholders are involved in the implementation of the NQF. There is still need to disseminate the information to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, especially in the labour market, where the NQF is not yet known¹³⁸.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

An eight-level reference structure was adopted to cover all the qualifications awarded in the Portuguese system. National qualifications levels and level descriptors are the same as in the EQF in terms of categories and principles.

The level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge and skills; in the third column, the term attitude is used. The term competence was already defined and used as an overarching concept within the national qualification system as 'recognised capacity to mobilise knowledge, skills and attitudes in contexts of work, professional development, education and personal development'¹³⁹.

The learning outcome approach plays an important role in reforming Portuguese education and training. There is a diversity of approaches and concepts and the level of implementation varies across education subsystems. Fine-tuning learning outcomes in qualifications design with the NQF level descriptors is a challenging task and is work in progress (e.g. in upgrading not only the national qualifications catalogue but also for qualifications in general education).

In general education, the national curriculum for basic education (essential competences) that was in place until last year, was a national reference document for planning learning activities at both school and class levels. It included general and specific competences which learners are expected to develop in compulsory education. Currently the Ministry of Education has a set of 'curricular outcomes' for each specific subject in each year of basic education (considering the first, second and third cycle). In general upper secondary education there is a set of competences and general objectives, expressed in terms of knowledge, abilities/skills and attitudes/values, for each subject. The curricular outcomes for each specific subject of secondary education are being prepared.

In VET, reforms concentrate on the learning outcomes dimension of developing qualifications standards and curriculum development. The qualifications obtained in VET subsystems are organised by the standards included in the national qualifications catalogue.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

Several public policies and initiatives have been developed for validating non-formal and informal learning in Portugal. Since 2001, a comprehensive national RVCC system has been developed, which is nowadays integrated into the national qualification system and framework. It integrates two main processes:

- the education RVCC process, aiming to improve the education level of adults, who have no basic or secondary education certificates;

¹³⁸ NCP survey, September 2012.

¹³⁹ Defined by Decree Law No 782/2009 (Portaria No 782/2009) on national qualification system.

- the professional RVCC process, for adults who do not have vocational qualifications in their occupational areas (European Commission et al., 2010, Portugal, 2010)¹⁴⁰.

Adults can acquire basic or secondary level education certificate and vocational qualification; such certificates have the same value as those awarded in formal education and training. RVCC processes are based on national standards for education and training (e.g. key competences in adult education and training reference framework) and integrated in the national catalogue of qualifications, which is used as a reference for vocational qualifications.

Access to higher education is ensured for those over the age of 23 and the introduction of technical specialisation courses (placed at level 5) also improved progression possibilities to continue studies in higher education.

There are two other domains in which work has begun:

- the development of an overarching model for quality assessment for the national qualifications system, considering that currently there are different approaches, methodologies and tools, depending on the type of VET provider;
- the development of a credit system for training based on the national qualifications catalogue standards.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Portugal referenced its national qualifications levels to the EQF and self-certified to the QF-EHEA in June 2011.

Table 23 Level correspondence established between the Portuguese qualifications framework (QNQ) and the EQF

QNQ	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The decision has been taken to adopt the EQF levels and level descriptors in the NQF and to set up a comprehensive NQF. This makes it possible to:

- integrate levels of education and a five-level structure for vocational training;
- formalise the double certification at levels 2, 4 and 5.

Important work has been done by writing the NQF users' guide (National Agency for Qualifications, 2011)¹⁴¹ which provides specific criteria to place current, and guide inclusion of new, qualifications in the NQF. Further work on qualifications standards, based on explicit learning outcomes, will support the coherence and fine-tune the relationship between qualifications and qualifications levels. This work is still in progress. A clear institutional structure underpins the development.

There is a need to disseminate the outcomes of the referencing and self-certification process to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, especially improving acceptance and use of the NQF by the labour market. In this context the relationship between the tertiary framework and other parts of the NQF (levels 1 to 5) needs to be made explicit, especially for those level 5 programmes where different ministries are involved.

¹⁴⁰ European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Portugal. <http://libserver.cefdefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77477.pdf> [accessed 26.11.2012].

¹⁴¹ See Understanding NQF: users guide support, summarised in Appendix 3 of the referencing report.

A strategy is being prepared, in articulation with the General Directorate for Higher Education, for including the explicit reference to the EQF level in the national certificates, diplomas and Europass documents.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training is the national coordination point for the EQF in Portugal. Information is available on the ANQ website. <http://www.en.anqep.gov.pt> [accessed 10.10.2012].

ROMANIA

INTRODUCTION

Romania has developed a comprehensive learning outcomes-based national qualifications framework. This brings together nationally recognised qualifications from both initial and continuing VET, apprenticeship at the workplace, general and higher education, and helps integrate the validation of non-formal learning into the national qualification system. A draft government resolution on NQF was presented in November 2011. This is expected to be formally adopted in late 2012 or early 2013.

The framework builds on reform in vocational education and training and the development of competence-based qualifications since the 1990s. The National Council for Adult Training (CNFPA) was established as the National Authority for Qualifications with responsibility for coordinating the national register of (vocational) qualifications and for putting the validation system into practice (e.g. authorising validation centres, certifying individual assessors, issuing formal competence certificates).

The comprehensive framework builds on work carried out in higher education. This work has been steered by the Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education (ACPART) and been taken forward in a partnership between universities and representatives of the Social and Economic Environment. A qualifications framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna process and the EQF, has been in development since 2005. Self-certification has been completed¹⁴².

One of the main challenges in recent years was to link these two development processes, structures and stakeholders from VET, higher education and the labour market in a more comprehensive framework. An important step was taken in June 2011 when the National Council for Adult Training and the Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education were merged into one single body – the National Qualifications Authority – responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive NQF.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Apart from its transparency function, the comprehensive NQF is seen as a tool to support national reforms and modernisation of education and training. There is a reported lack of coherence in the qualification system and lack of progression possibilities between IVET, CVET and higher education systems. Several qualifications frameworks (notably for VET and higher education) exist and there is a lack of recognition for validation of non-formal and informal learning within formal education needed to support entry and mobility within the education system (European Commission et al., 2010, Romania, p. 2)¹⁴³. Adult participation in lifelong learning is low (1.3% in 2010) (European Commission, 2011)¹⁴⁴. Additionally, qualifications should respond better to labour market needs and there is a need for greater transparency of learning outcomes and labour force mobility. National qualifications also need to be understood abroad and linked to the EQF.

The development of a comprehensive national qualifications framework addresses the following policy objectives:

- integration and coordination of national qualification subsystems;
- improvement in transparency;
- making access to lifelong learning for all easier;

142 http://cnred.edu.ro/pdf/Self_certification_Report_RO_2011.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

143 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Romania. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77479.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

144 Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), country analysis for Romania, pp. 123-126. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

- assuring the progress;
- improving qualification quality in line with the needs of the labour market and broader society¹⁴⁵.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation initiated work on the comprehensive framework in cooperation with Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection. Other ministries are involved (health, culture, etc.) as well as social partners and stakeholders from education and training.

Building on developments in VET and the framework for HE, consolidating governance structures was considered an important step towards developing a more comprehensive framework. In June 2011, the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) was established, based on governmental decision No 556/2011. It aims to reorganise two institutions: the National Council for Adult Training, in charge of CVET qualifications, and the National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education, responsible for higher education qualifications.

This single legal entity – under the coordination of Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports – has the following competences:

- proposes elements of national policies and strategies, draft legislation on the national qualifications framework;
- develops, implements and updates the NQF and manages the national qualifications register;
- develops and updates the methodologies for NQF implementation;
- develops the instruments needed for monitoring, evaluation and control of the NQF;
- quality assures the implementation of the NQF;
- manages the national qualifications register.

A draft government resolution regarding the NQF has been prepared. It will provide the legal basis for NQF implementation and clarify stakeholder responsibilities.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

An eight-level reference structure was proposed in the draft government resolution. Level descriptors are defined as knowledge, abilities and transversal competences: eight generic level descriptors were identified within these three categories. Knowledge is subdivided into two strands: knowledge, understanding and usage of specific language, and explanation and interpretation. The concept of abilities includes application, transfer and problem-solving; critical and constructive reflection; and creativity and innovation. Transversal competences refer to autonomy and responsibility; social interaction; and personal and professional development. The matrix makes a distinction between levels 1 to 5 and levels 6 to 8, which refer to the NQF for higher education and qualifications included in this framework.

There is a commitment to strengthening the learning outcomes approach as a part of the national reform programme.

Learning outcomes are already embedded in competence-based VET reform and arrangements for validating non-formal learning. Many learning programmes developed in VET are based on competences. However, the evidence suggests that links between formal education and training and certification system are still not operational, and the two systems are not connected. Validation of non-formal learning is not recognised in the formal system (European Commission et al., 2010, Romania, p. 4).

¹⁴⁵ Government resolution regarding the national framework of qualifications, 2011 [draft unpublished].

Occupational standards are used in CVET, and are based on actual elements of competence that are to be proved in the workplace. Vocational training standards are newly established, approved by the Minister for Education and based on learning outcomes to be achieved by the holder of qualification.

Romania is revising methodological frameworks for qualifications development on the principle of the EQF. A new format for qualifications, using learning outcomes, was developed.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

The draft government resolution (article eight) refers to validation of qualifications obtained by non-formal and informal education to be included in the national qualifications framework, using level descriptors of the NQF.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The referencing report is expected to be submitted in early 2013.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

It is important to have good cooperation between different stakeholders and structures. Merging the National Council for Adult Training and the Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education into the single body – the National Qualifications Authority – responsible for the development and implementation of a comprehensive NQF is seen as an important step in supporting more coherent approaches.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The National Qualifications Authority is the EQF national coordination point. www.anc.gov.ro [accessed 12.3.2013].

SLOVAKIA

INTRODUCTION

In March 2011, set of level descriptors for a comprehensive NQF for lifelong learning was approved by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports. It will include qualifications from all subsystems of formal education and training (VET, general education and higher education). However, the government plans to review the NQF. The process will start in December 2012.

The work is based on the government decision on EQF implementation in Slovakia, adopted in February 2009¹⁴⁶. This was confirmed by the Act on Lifelong Learning, stipulating the legal background for development of a national qualification system and framework.

A national register of qualifications – the backbone of the national qualification system and the NQF – is being established with the aim of including all national full and partial qualifications with qualifications and assessment standards.

The development is complemented by adoption of the following acts: the Vocational Education and Training Act No 184/2009¹⁴⁷, the School Act No 245/2008¹⁴⁸, and the Lifelong Learning Act No 568/2009, adopted in December 2009¹⁴⁹. To apply the NQF as an integrated tool, changes in this legislation are planned. In November 2012, the amended Lifelong Learning Act introduced NQF into the education sector (Act No 315/2012). The review process for including formal qualifications from primary, secondary and tertiary education into the NQF will start in December 2012 closely linked to development of qualifications and assessment standards. There is a special challenge in including qualifications acquired outside formal education and training in a way that allows for recognition. This will follow in the second phase of the NQF implementation. Describing qualifications in learning outcomes and agreeing on standards for quality assurance are seen as preconditions for including qualifications acquired through non-formal education and training into the NQF.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Apart from its transparency function and ease of referencing to the EQF, a comprehensive NQF has the following specific objectives:

- link education and labour market needs better;
- improve the transparency and consistency of qualifications;
- support validation of non-formal and informal learning and enhance lifelong learning.

Adult participation in lifelong learning is below the EU average, at 2.8% in 2010 compared to the EU average of 9.1%. There are plans to review adult learning and continuing VET. Measures are planned to improve the match between labour market needs and skills supply (European Commission, 2011, pp. 128-131)¹⁵⁰. The NQF, with its clear learning outcomes orientation, aims to support these actions.

146 The decision is only available in Slovak: http://www.rokovanie.sk/File.aspx/ViewDocumentHtml/Uznesenie-5819?prefixFile=u_ [accessed 5.12.2012].

147 184/2009 Z.z. Zákon z 23 apríla 2009 o odbornom vzdelávaní a príprave a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov. http://www.tnuni.sk/fileadmin/dokumenty/univerzita/dolezite_dokumenty/Zakon_184_2009_o_odbornom_vzdelavani.pdf [accessed 14.12.2012].

148 245/2008 Z. z. ZÁKON z 22.mája 2008 o výchove a vzdelávaní (školský zákon) a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov [Education Act No 245/2008 Coll.]. http://www.uips.sk/sub/uips.sk/images/PKvs/z245_2008.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

149 568/2009 Z. z. ZÁKON z 1. decembra 2009 o celoživotnom vzdelávaní a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov [Lifelong Learning Act] http://www.istp.sk/downloads/Pravne_predpisy_2012/Zakon_568_2009.pdf [accessed 26.11.2012].

150 Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), country analysis. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012.]

The main pillars of the NQF are the national register of qualifications and national register of occupations. The aim of the NQF is to create a system environment that will support comparability of learning outcomes achieved by various forms of learning and to enable recognition of real knowledge and competences independently of the way they were acquired. Unified methodology for defining learning outcomes will be prepared and used for developing and renewing state educational programmes and study programmes for continuous training.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

Work on the NQF was initiated, and is coordinated, by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports. A steering group was established, chaired by the Director General for Adult Education and Youth Division. The members come from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Culture. Administrative and research support is provided by the Ministry of Education. State institutes (State Vocational Education Institute and the National Institute of Pedagogy) are responsible for formal education (including vocational education) and will be involved developing the NQF.

A ministerial working group was created to analyse existing qualifications and to do preparatory work with employers and employees.

Coordination between NQF and Bologna implementation had already been established through cooperation with the national team of Bologna experts and the higher education department at the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic.

A NQF review process is planned to start in December 2012 to link it closely to development of the national system of qualifications.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

An eight-level structure was approved to cover the main characteristics of the national qualification system and also be compatible with the EQF in terms of principles, categories and level descriptors. Level descriptors are defined as knowledge, skills and competence. However, they will be subject to further revisions with more focus on skills descriptor to be in line with other national documents and to allow for inclusion of non-formal qualifications.

The learning outcomes approach has been recognised as a part of the reform agenda and is being integrated in all new developments. The modernisation programme Slovakia 21 and the National Reform Programme 2008-10 (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2008)¹⁵¹ were adopted by the government of Slovakia to achieve better visibility of learning outcomes in the education system. The learning outcomes approach is described in action plans, e.g. related to:

- change in accreditation processes at higher education institutions, with the shift of emphasis to the output indicators instead of criteria focused on input;
- improved employability through increased interconnection between the content of education and the demands of the labour market.

In general education (primary/secondary) learning outcomes are being implemented in line with the School Act No 245/2008. At the moment there is a review of state education programmes for general and VET oriented secondary schools.

In VET, the learning outcomes approach is being reinforced through the new Vocational Education and Training Act No 184/2009 and curriculum reform. Renewed examination of educational programmes helps respond better to labour market needs as well as occupations.

¹⁵¹ National reform programme of the Slovak Republic for 2008–10. <http://www.finance.gov.sk/en/Default.aspx?CatID=450> [accessed 10.5.2012].

It is expected that work on the NQF will have an impact on the use of learning outcomes in higher education.

The Act on Lifelong Learning aims to contribute to unified accreditation and certification practices by recognising full and partial qualifications based on competence acquired regardless of the learning setting. Development of qualifications and assessment standards included in the national register of qualifications is a precondition for recognition of non-formal and informal learning; developments are at an early stage (European Commission et al., 2010, Slovakia, p.4)¹⁵².

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The referencing report is expected to be presented by second half of 2013.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

To establish a good partnership platform between all stakeholders, involving social partners, is one of the preconditions for developing an NQF.

As there are still discussions on purpose, role and added value of the national qualifications framework, more at political than technical level, progress so far has been slow. Initial expectations that NQF development will be classified as the highest priority have fallen, so it is difficult to operate within the planned deadlines.

The NQF review process is planned for late 2012 to link it to development of the national system of qualifications.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports – Adult Education and Youth Division. <http://www.minedu.sk> [accessed 17.12.2012].

www.nkr.sk [accessed 14.12.2012].

¹⁵² European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Slovakia. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77480.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

SLOVENIA

INTRODUCTION

Slovenia has reached an advanced stage of national qualifications framework development. A 10-level comprehensive Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF) was developed by the steering committee in April 2011 (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for vocational education and training, 2011)¹⁵³ and consulted on with stakeholders. Agreement was reached on bringing major national qualifications into NQF levels, including qualifications from formal education and training (in VET, HE, general education, adult education) and the system of national professional qualifications under the remit of the Ministry of Labour. It also proposes inclusion of additional or supplementary qualifications, which need to be further discussed and developed.

The development builds on a series of education and training reforms since the mid-1990s (in VET, higher education, general education and adult education) and introduction of certification and validation of non-formal learning in 2000.

In 2006, the Slovenian government adopted the decree on the introduction and use of the eight-level classifications system of education and training with two sublevels (Klasius)¹⁵⁴ (OG, No 46/2006), which, together with relevant sectoral legislation, provided the basis for building the national framework. This national standard is used to collect, process, analyse and demonstrate statistical and analytical data, which are important to illustrate social, economic and demographic developments in Slovenia.

Other elements underpinning the SQF are the national register of occupational standards and the register of assessment qualifications catalogues for professional qualifications. A platform for the SQF register, including all nationality-recognised qualifications, is now being developed¹⁵⁵. The SQF register describes the qualifications in accordance with the set of SQF and EQF parameters.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

All subsystems of education and training in Slovenia have been reformed since the mid-1990s. There is a general view that the system functions well in terms of permeability; there are almost no dead-ends at upper-secondary level and individuals can move vertically and horizontally without major obstacles. However, there is a need to strengthen cooperation and coordination between different education and training subsystems and to increase participation in lifelong learning. It is necessary to improve the link between education and certification and the responsiveness of qualifications to labour market and individual needs, and to have a reliable tool for assessing and recognising non-formal and informal knowledge and skills. Slovenia has achieved good results in recent years (e.g. the participation of adults aged 25-64 was 16.2% in 2010 and drop-out is one of the lowest in Europe). However, making vocational education and training more attractive remains a challenge (European Commission, 2011, pp. 133-137)¹⁵⁶.

152 Slovenian qualifications framework: proposal by the steering committee group on the preparation of the national qualifications framework. 2011. http://www.nok.si/en/files/nok/userfiles/datoteke/68_file_path.pdf [accessed 7.10.2011].

154 Uredba o uvedbi in uporabi standardne klasifikacije izobraževanja (Klasius) [Regulation on the introduction and use of the standard classification of education]. <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=73174> [accessed 15.12.2012].

155 <http://www.nok.si/en/qualifications-framework-register.aspx> [accessed 15.12.2012]. The whole register (including all qualifications) is still to be developed. Descriptions of individual qualifications will gradually be supplemented by professional fields by the end of 2013. Currently, descriptions of qualifications from the field of computing, hotel, restaurant and catering, and tourism are available.

156 Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020): country analysis. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

The main objective of the SQF is 'to integrate and harmonise Slovenian qualifications subsystems and enhance transparency, accessibility, progress and quality of qualifications being responsive to the needs of labour market and civil society' (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for vocational education and training, 2011)¹⁵⁷.

The following policy objectives are addressed in more detail:

- improving transnational understanding and comparability of Slovenian qualifications as well as the potential for transfer and recognition;
- supporting coherent approaches to lifelong learning by providing access, progression, recognition of learning, coherence and better use of qualifications;
- ensuring capacity to certify knowledge, skills and competence that have not yet been incorporated in formal education and training and provide better links and transferability between education and training and certification systems;
- improving efficiency in achieving qualifications focused on the needs of the labour market (e.g. requalification);
- providing individualised pathways mainly for adults and drop-outs.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The work was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Sport, in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, in 2005 through the EQF consultation process.

In January 2010, a national steering committee for referencing NQF levels to the EQF was nominated by the government. It is composed of representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sport (chair), the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, the Statistical office, the National Institute for VET and Social Partners. The group has prepared the proposal for the SQF, which was broadly debated in the national consultation processes.

NQF developments are at an advanced development stage. A Law on NQF – under preparation – will define responsibilities of various stakeholders.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The SQF has 10 levels. The descriptor for each level contains three categories of learning outcomes: 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 'capture' of the full diversity of learning outcomes and qualifications that, though acquired in different settings and for different purposes, are comparable in terms of learning outcomes.

The SQF is a framework of communication that also includes elements of reform. The starting points for the classification of qualifications in the SQF are the relevant sectoral legislation and the classification system of education and training (Klasius). The SQF aims to establish a flexible connection between the education and the qualification structures. It links two concepts: the concept of educational activities/programmes and the concept of learning outcomes.

For qualifications acquired after completion of nationally accredited programmes, additional input criteria are used: access requirements, typical length of the programme, and inputs in terms of volume of learning activities in VET and higher education defined also in credit points.

¹⁵⁷ Slovenian qualifications framework: proposal by the steering committee group on the preparation of the national qualifications framework. 2011.

There is a proposal to include three types of qualifications:

- those awarded after completion of education programmes at all levels (general, vocational or higher);
- national professional qualifications defined as work-related vocational or professional capacity to perform an occupation at a certain level of complexity; these can be achieved through recognition of non-formal and informal learning in line with national standards;
- inclusion of additional or supplementary qualifications acquired in further and supplementary training and not issued by the national authorities, widely debated in the national consultation process and strongly supported by stakeholders. It was decided to deal with this issue in the second stage of NQF implementation.

The learning outcomes approach, following reforms carried out since the 1990s, is already embedded in the Slovene education system and well accepted.

Education programmes have moved from a content-based to an objectives-based approach. 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.

In VET, the learning outcomes approach is seen as a very useful way of bringing vocational programmes and schools closer to 'real life' and the needs of the labour market. 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 was also introduced and is an important innovation in Slovenia, giving schools increased autonomy in curriculum planning, especially in taking into account the local environment and employers' needs when developing the curriculum.

Assessment in VET (at NQF levels 4 and 5) is in the form of project work, testing practical skills and underpinning knowledge; written tests are also used at level 5 to test theoretical professional knowledge and knowledge of general subjects (Slovenian language, foreign languages, mathematics), which are tested externally.

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 tested in the external Matura examination.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES

Europass, ECVET and EQAVET are closely coordinated with the NQF because all are implemented and promoted within the National Institute for Vocational education and training. The NQF includes the system of national professional qualifications, which are under the remit of the Ministry of Labour and are mainly achieved through validation of vocationally-related knowledge, skills and experiences acquired out of school (the National Professional Qualifications Act). The national professional qualifications and the validation of non-formal knowledge in Slovenia are based on assessment qualifications catalogues (catalogues of standards for professional knowledge and skills).

The NQF will also make a link to credit systems in place for higher education and VET. The same credit point convention is applied for both.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

One joint report to reference national qualifications levels to the EQF and QF-EHEA is expected to be presented at the beginning of 2013.

The national steering committee also decided that, in line with the second EQF milestone, the EQF number will be written on Europass supplements.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Developments in Slovenia are based on an incremental approach and reforms under way since the mid-90s and on a good situation in education, training and qualifications developments compared to EU benchmarks.

However, at the system level some drawbacks have been identified, e.g. better linking/bridging to formal education and training governed by the Ministry of Education and the certification system, steered by Ministry of Labour, to allow individuals to combine learning outcomes better from different settings; opening up the qualification system to additional/supplementary qualifications is planned. Quality assurance is regarded as essential and is being focused increasingly on outputs, e. g. quality indicators like the destination of graduates is being tested. One of the weakest points of the system is the communication between education and the labour market and the mismatch between skills and knowledge obtained in education and training and the needs of the labour market. The current second stage of the VET curriculum and qualifications reforms, based on learning outcomes, provides this sector with an opportunity to improve its attractiveness and strengthen links to the labour market.

Further planned developments will focus on strengthening cooperation between different stakeholders in developing and implementing effective lifelong learning.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training, where qualifications registers are accessible and the NQF proposal is published. <http://www.cpi.si> [accessed 7.10.2012].

SPAIN

INTRODUCTION

Spain is currently developing an NQF for lifelong learning (Marco Español de Cualificaciones, MECU), based on learning outcomes. It will link and coordinate different education and training subsystems. The framework will include qualifications obtained in compulsory education, in post-secondary and higher education and will integrate validation of non-formal and informal learning processes.

The draft Royal decree on the introduction of MECU has now been prepared following delay due to restructuring of the government. It defines levels and level descriptors as the basis for referencing the MECU to the EQF levels. It has been supervised and positively reported by the national advisory bodies¹⁵⁸. It is expected to be adopted in 2013.

The higher four levels of MECU will be linked to the qualifications framework for higher education (Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior, MECES), which has been put in place separately¹⁵⁹.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

One of the main objectives of developing a Spanish qualifications framework for lifelong learning compatible with the EQF and the QF-EHEA is to make Spanish qualifications easier to understand by describing them in terms of learning outcomes; it should also clarify relations between them. It is expected that this will improve the extent to which stakeholders are informed about national qualifications, raising trust and making mobility easier. The NQF aims to support lifelong learning, link IVET and CVET, and improve access and participation for everyone, including the disadvantaged. Through the NQF – it is expected – it will be easier to identify, validate and recognise all kinds of learning outcomes (including non-formal and informal learning), regardless of the way they were acquired. It will support better use of qualifications at national and European level.

Developments take into account experiences with the national catalogue of professional qualifications, established by the Law on Qualifications and Professional Training in 2002. Of special attention, and lively discussion, are levels 3 and 4 of the NQF, where formal vocational qualifications/titles, regulated by the Ministry of Education and professional qualifications/certificates under the remit of Ministry of Labour would be assigned. They are different in scope of learning they acquire, but can be linked to the same level of the catalogue.

Another important aim is to support transition and progression possibilities within the various subsystems of education and vocational training, e.g. the progression from short cycle to university programmes and opening up higher education for non-traditional learners, who might have no school leaving certificate. Another challenge is to put procedures in place for recognising non-formal learning and to reduce early school leaving (18-24 age group) (Cedefop ReferNet Spain, 2010, pp. 17-18; European Commission, 2011, pp. 138-143)¹⁶⁰.

The MECU should also have an important communication role for diverse stakeholders.

¹⁵⁸ Spanish qualifications framework. State-of-play. October 2012 [internal].

¹⁵⁹ <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2011/08/03/pdfs/BOE-A-2011-13317.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

¹⁶⁰ VET in Europe country report: Spain 2010. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77419.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), country analysis for Spain. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

The percentage of the population in this age group that has not finished the second phase of secondary education and is not in education or training rose to 30.8% in 2005, slightly decreased in 2006 to 30.6%, but in 2008 it increased to 31.9%; in 2010 it was 28.4%, twice the EU average.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The Ministry of Education, Directorate General for Vocational Training, is coordinating NQF development and implementation in cooperation with other ministries (e.g. employment and social security, industry, energy and tourism, health, social services and equality, economy and competitiveness). The development work includes a wide range of other stakeholders such as social partners (unions, Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations, Spanish Confederation of Small and Medium Enterprises), institutional coordination bodies (e.g. Sectoral Conference of Education, General Conference for University Policy), consultative bodies (State School Council, Vocational Training Council, Arts Education Council, University Council), agencies for evaluation and others (professional corporations and associations).

Cooperation with the Bologna process is ensured with members represented in both the Committee for MECU and in the group for MECES to achieve methodological and structural coherence, making possible the alignment of the two frameworks.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

An eight-level framework has been proposed to cover all main types of Spanish qualification. The four highest levels are compatible with the Spanish QF for higher education, which is based on the Dublin descriptors.

Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. They have been inspired by the 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 and including learning skills and attitudes.

Broad generic descriptors for the NQF will be supplemented with more detailed descriptors when necessary (e.g. for professional qualifications).

The learning outcomes approach is seen as an essential part of the development of the MECU and is supported by all stakeholders. It is work in progress. It is expected that the development of both MECU and MECES will further support the strengthening of learning outcomes at all education and qualification levels to make qualifications more readable and easier to compare.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport has established 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. 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 new VET qualifications are already defined in terms of learning outcomes. The professional modules contained in 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. These learning outcomes are closely related to work activities and required professional competences.

In higher education, new study programmes have to include expected outcomes and achievement of learning objectives set for the student. All study programmes have to be accredited according to national guidelines.

LINKS TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS AND TOOLS

The NQF aims to reinforce the link to validation of non-formal and informal learning. In July 2009, the new Royal decree for the recognition of professional competences (1224/2009) was adopted; this regulates the procedures for validating professional competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning and professional experience. The national catalogue of professional qualifications is used as a standard for validating non-formal learning as well as for official diplomas on vocational training.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The draft referencing report is expected to be prepared in early 2013. The self-certification report has been prepared. Spain has not yet decided whether there will be one joint report prepared to reference to the EQF and self-certify to the QH-EHEA.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Dialogue with stakeholders is a cornerstone of the process. It is a challenge to link the two NQF development processes and to strengthen cooperation between stakeholders from all subsystems. Reinforced cooperation with the Ministry of Employment and Social Security has been developed recently.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Ministry of Education is the main source of information on NQF development, (MECU and MECES), also for all formal qualifications, including VET diplomas. <http://www.educacion.es/portada.html> [accessed 14.12.2012].

The Directorate General for Vocational Training has been designated the national contact point.

The MECU website has been launched <http://www.educacion.gob.es/mecu> [accessed 14.12.2012].

SWEDEN

INTRODUCTION

A formal decision of the Swedish government adopting a comprehensive Swedish national qualification framework (SEQF) is expected during the first half of 2013, possibly in the form of a Förordning (decree). A report on the referencing of the SEQF to the EQF will be presented to the EQF Advisory Group in spring 2013. Formal adoption means that the SEQF now is moving into an early operational stage, building on the extensive work carried out since 2009. A decision has been made to carry out separate self-certification of the Swedish higher education system to the European higher education area.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The December 2009 decision to initiate work on a comprehensive NQF was primarily presented as a way to aid referencing to the EQF; the framework should make it easier for individuals and employers to compare Swedish qualifications with those in other EU Member States. While this objective still stands, later developments show that the NQF is now increasingly playing a role at national level, in particular by addressing the linkages between formal education and training and the learning taking place in non-formal and informal contexts. This 'opening up' of the framework is visible in the following areas:

Going beyond traditional education and training

The NQF proposal goes beyond existing practices by including qualifications offered by public bodies outside the education and training sector, for example police and customs services. While offering the obvious added value of transparency, the setting up of the NQF provides a new platform for systematic cooperation between all public bodies involved in education and training.

Going beyond the public system

The aim to develop an inclusive framework open to qualifications awarded outside the public system – in particular in the adult/popular education sector and in the labour market – is emphasised in the original 2009 proposal. This focus on the inclusive character of the framework responds to particular features of Swedish education and training. First, the role of adult and popular education is generally very strong, largely explaining why Sweden consistently scores high in all international comparisons on adult and lifelong learning. These courses are offered by a wide range of stakeholders and institutions, both public and private; their link to the ordinary public system is not always fully transparent and clear. An inclusive framework could increase overall transparency of Swedish qualifications and clarify options for progress and transfer. Second, a very important part of vocational education and training is carried out by enterprises and sectors. While upper secondary education (Gymnasieskolan) offers a full range of (three-year) vocational courses, acquiring a full qualification (enabling someone to practise a vocation), will sometimes require additional training and certification at work. This extensive system of labour market based education and training is diverse and in some cases difficult to overview. Linking this 'non-formal' sector to the NQF is seen as crucial for increasing overall transparency. A first outline on how to manage this 'opening up' of the framework was developed during 2011. This proposal suggests establishing a National Council for Qualifications to act as the 'gatekeeper' of the NQF. The Council – involving all relevant stakeholders – would make sure that qualifications aspiring to be included in the framework meet nationally established quality criteria and requirements. Separate work aiming at the development of quality criteria for inclusion was launched in 2012 and a final proposal was presented on 16 November. These criteria will specify how to apply the learning outcomes approach when describing and levelling qualifications, and indicate requirements on quality assurance and transparency to the awarding institution.

Opening up levels 6 to 8 to non-academic qualifications

The NQF proposal presented to the government in October 2010 states that all eight levels of the NQF – including levels 6 to 8 – should be open to all types of qualifications, academic and non-academic. Not only is this seen as being in line with the spirit of EQF, it also reflects the de facto existence of high level qualifications awarded outside universities and academic institutions. This proposal has been received differently by different stakeholders. In a consultation carried out in spring 2011 (200 stakeholders addressed, 60 responses received) reactions could be divided into two main groups. Most universities and academic institutions were in favour of restricting levels 6 to 8 to qualifications covered by the Bologna process. Most public authorities, social partners and regional bodies, however, were in favour of opening these levels to all types of qualifications. The main employer organisation (Svensk Näringsliv) states the overall legitimacy of the framework would suffer ('be lost') if levels 6 to 8 were to be reserved for the university sector. A report summarising the feedback from the consultation was presented to the government in June 2011 (Återrapportering av regeringsuppdrag, 2011)¹⁶¹ and recommends levels 6 to 8 to be kept open to all types of qualifications. The report acknowledges – in line with the comments from several universities – that an opening of levels 6 to 8 requires robust and visible quality assurance mechanisms making sure that the overall level of Swedish higher education is not negatively affected. The quality criteria currently being developed for inclusion of qualifications into the framework (see above, expected November 2012) will provide a basis for developing practical solutions. It will be up to the government to decide on a final solution, reflecting the divergent opinions expressed through the consultation.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The Ministry of Education and Research has overall responsibility for work on the NQF and referencing to the EQF. The national agency for higher vocational education (Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan, YH) has been given the mandate to coordinate the development of the framework and is also (as of 1st July 2009) functioning as the Swedish national coordination point for EQF. A number of expert and working groups were formally established following the December 2009 decision:

- a national advisory board has been chaired by YH and consists of representatives of the national agency for education (Skolverket), the national agency for higher education (Högskolverket), the employers federation, regional authorities, main trade union associations and the public employment services;
- a national reference group consisting of organisations and agencies forming part of public education and training, or closely associated to it. Participants in this group are, among others, the Swedish University Association, the Swedish Student Association and the Swedish Association for Popular Education (Folkbildning);
- a number of project groups have been working on particular aspects of the framework and its implementation. In 2011 and 2012, working groups were set up to consider how to open up the framework to external qualifications; how to use level 6 to 8 of the framework; and how to include public qualifications awarded outside the education sector;
- public consultations were carried out in both 2010 and 2011. Approximately 50 organisations and authorities responded to the outline of the framework submitted for consultation in June 2010. Most responses were positive and saw the proposal as a good basis for further development. Two saw no need for the framework. A slightly higher number of stakeholders responded to the 2011 consultation focusing on levels 6 to 8 of the framework (see above). A number of national conferences and events have also been organised.

¹⁶¹ Avseende en nationell referensram för kvalifikationer i Sverige. http://www.eqfinfo.se/Documents/EQF/%c3%85terrapportering/yh_aterrapportering_nqf_1105.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

Development of the SEQF since 2009 has involved a broad group of stakeholders, from education and training and the labour market. This reflects the objective of the Ministry to open up the framework to qualifications offered outside the public sector. The discussion on the opening up of levels 6 to 8 to non-academic qualifications has also contributed to raising interest in the proposal.

While still at a stage of development, interest in the framework is growing and some stakeholders have used it as a reference for their work. This is exemplified by the sports-sector (Svenska Riksidrottsförbundet) where the NQF is seen as an instrument for better structuring existing education and training offers. Another example is provided by the 26 institutions responsible for the qualifications of teachers and trainers in VET which have used the NQF as an instrument to identify available pathways into teacher-training and to indicate minimum requirements as regards prior learning and qualifications. A third example is provided by the construction sector, where the framework is being used to indicate alternative progression routes for those wanting to qualify as construction site managers. This approach shows that the traditional higher education pathway (civil engineer) is not the only possible alternative; several combinations of work experience and formal education (both upper secondary and post-secondary VET) are possible.

A first proposal for a qualifications framework for higher education (in relation to the EHEA) was presented in June 2007. While this work is integrated in the 2010 proposal for an NQF for lifelong learning, a decision has been made to carry out separate self-certification to EHEA.

This decision, and the reasons for it, is not discussed in the proposals on the Swedish NQF presented to the government in 2010 and 2011. While the character of levels 6 to 8 in the NQF is extensively discussed, future interaction between the Swedish qualifications framework for higher education and the NQF for lifelong learning is not addressed explicitly, apart from the general decision, in line with EQF, that academic qualifications will be placed automatically at levels 6 to 8. The consultation carried out in spring 2011 on the opening up of levels 6 to 8 show that there are differences in opinion between the (academic) higher education sector and others involved in developing the NQF. Universities seem to fear that the creation of a comprehensive NQF may come to threaten the overall quality and status of Swedish higher education. It may be assumed that these concerns have influenced the decision to go ahead with a separate self-certification of higher education.

A particular feature of the Swedish process is the central role attributed to YH, the national agency for higher vocational education, in coordinating the development of the NQF. The national agency was set up as late as 2009 with the responsibility of administering what is a new strand of Swedish higher education and training. Providing high level education and training directly relevant to the labour market, Yrkeshögskolan has attracted a lot of interest both among individuals and employers. Offering an alternative to the traditional university sector, for example by combining theoretically and practically oriented learning, the new institutions can be seen as complementing existing education and training provisions and qualifications.

This means that coordination of framework developments is carried out by an institution with a clear position on the role of non-academic qualifications at levels 6 to 8. This is a challenging position as the neutrality of the authority may be questioned.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The SEQF is based on an eight-level structure where each level is described through knowledge (kunskap), skills (färdigheter) and competence (kompetens). 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. The difference from the EQF can be seen with 'competence' which is defined as the ability to take responsibility, to decide and act independently and to cooperate; the EQF speaks about taking responsibility and acting independently.

The learning outcomes perspective is an important and mostly implemented feature of Swedish education and training. At political level the learning outcomes approach is closely linked to the 'objective-based governance' in use since the early 1990s. While the term learning outcomes is not commonly used (the term 'knowledge objectives' is used for compulsory education), the principles behind it are well known and accepted. The core curricula for compulsory education have recently been revised, further strengthening and refining the learning outcomes-based approach.

Universities follow national regulations on examinations, requiring the use of learning outcomes, though how these learning outcomes are translated by individual institution varies. These are autonomous institutions where national authorities have less direct influence. The Bologna process has been influential, as have a number of local initiatives.

A particular challenge faced is the extent to which the learning outcomes perspective is influencing assessment practices. Professionals may have problems seeing that assessment methods and criteria have to relate directly to the objectives expressed in the curricula. This is a continuing process illustrating the long-term challenge involved in the shift to learning outcomes.

LINKS TO OTHER TOOLS AND POLICIES

The development of the SEQF is seen as an opportunity to promote the work on validating non-formal and informal learning. While progress can be observed (European Commission et al., 2010, Sweden)¹⁶², not least reflecting the extensive use of learning outcomes, it is too early to speak of a fully integrated national system for validation. The challenge is being addressed in two main ways. First, the official aim is to include the learning taking place in non-formal settings (in enterprises, adult and popular education) in the new NQF. National quality criteria have to be developed for this purpose, making sure that the outcomes of education and training meet agreed quality standards. Second, the NQF is also expected to support validation of individual learning outcomes. The 2010 NQF proposal gives general support to strengthening validation arrangements in Sweden, aided by the NQF, but refers to separate development processes taking place in this area. A set of quality criteria for validation were published in 2012: while the formal status of these criteria and their subsequent implementation at national level is somewhat uncertain, this shows that progress is being made in this field.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

Referencing to the EQF will, given the adoption of the SEQF by the government in early 2013, take place spring 2013. Some concern is expressed as regard the placing of the final certificate from primary and (lower) secondary education. An original analysis (based exclusively on a technical analysis of learning outcomes) carried out by the National Agency for Education (Skolverket), placed primary and (lower) secondary education at EQF level 2. This was changed to level 3 in a report to the government, reflecting an analysis of primary and (lower) secondary education curricula. This change has been intensively discussed, including in the four other Nordic countries, indicating different interpretations of the application of the learning outcomes principle for referencing.

Upper secondary education (Gymnasieskolan), both general and vocationally oriented, is suggested to be placed at level 4. In line with the proposal to open levels 6 to 8 to all qualifications, academic and non-academic, one type of advanced vocational education (Kvalificerad yrkeshögskoleexamen) is placed at level 6.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Given that only three years will have passed since the formal go-ahead was given by the government to start development of the SEQF, the process has been rapid. Compared to other countries, Sweden has, from the start, emphasised the need to open up to non-formal education and training and make it possible to establish links to the diverse and extensive field of continuing and popular education and training run by

¹⁶² European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Sweden. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77476.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

the private sector and non-governmental organisations. The overall success of the framework will partly depend on the extent to which the framework is seen as relevant to stakeholders outside formal, initial education and training.

The Swedish NQF still has some way to go as a platform for cooperation. While the involvement of stakeholders has been systematic and extensive, the continued separate qualifications framework for higher education – and the separate self-certification of this to the QF-EHEA – points to the need for closer dialogue between the university sector and the remaining parts of education and training.

Dialogue between higher education and the remaining parts of education and training is important to address another important objective set for the SEQF, the opening up of levels 6 to 8 to all types of qualification, including those awarded outside the traditional University sector. While the social partner organisations express clear support for this (for example the Confederation of Swedish Employers), the attitude of higher education is more mixed and the final solution will depend on government decision. This decision will eventually influence the extent to which the SEQF is seen as relevant outside the existing, public system for initial education and training.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education is designated as NCP

<http://www.yhmyndigheten.se/hem/higher-vocational-education-hve/> [accessed 12.3.2013].

SWITZERLAND

INTRODUCTION

While Swiss education and training is generally considered to be of high quality, many of its qualifications are relatively unknown in other countries, potentially hindering Swiss citizens seeking employment abroad. Switzerland sees the link to European cooperation on qualifications frameworks, both the EQF and the 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 an NQF for higher education (nqf.ch-HS)¹⁶³ in line with the Bologna-process. In 2011 the proposal for an NQF for vocational and professional qualifications (NQR-CH¹⁶⁴) was launched for public consultation (15 February to 15 May 2012). This latter framework is explicitly oriented to the EQF and suggests the introduction of an eight-level structure defined through knowledge, skills and competence. Switzerland joined the EQF Advisory group in 2012 and will seek to reference its qualification levels to the EQF in the foreseeable future. Switzerland also sees referencing to the EQF as a part of aligning to the Copenhagen process on co-operation in VET. Due to reorganisation at federal level, it is possible that some form of linkage between the two framework initiatives will be created. Whether this will result in one comprehensive framework covering all levels and types is not clear. As the framework for higher education has not been self-certified to the QF-EHEA, it is still possible that Switzerland will go for a joint referencing/self-certification.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The proposal for the Swiss national qualifications framework for vocational and professional education and training (VET/PET) (Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen für Abschlüsse der Berufsbildung – NQR-CH-BB) was presented in February 2012. The framework consists of eight learning outcomes based levels described through knowledge, skills and competence, as in the EQF. While limited to vocationally and professionally-oriented qualifications, it could be argued that the current proposal is modelled as a comprehensive NQF for lifelong learning. It is clear, however, that moving in this direction will require a political decision. Whether such development is possible is not clear. The recent reorganisations at ministerial level, bringing the responsible departments closer together, could provide a closer link between the two initiatives. Even in a case where the two frameworks are taken forward separately there will be a need to clarify the relationship between professional qualifications at levels 5 to 8 of the NQR-CH-BB and the three levels (cycles) of higher education covered by the nqf.ch-HS.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The development of the NQR-CH-BB has been rapid and was initiated in 2009-10. During 2011 the responsible ministry¹⁶⁵ organised a series of roundtables where representatives of cantons, trade associations, and the social partners participated. Based on the oral and written comments received on the proposal during these gatherings, the documents forming the basis for the consultation spring 2012¹⁶⁶ were amended.

The proposal has received support from the stakeholders (cantons, trade associations and social partners), linked to two issues in particular. First, the NQF is seen as a precondition for increasing the visibility and value of Swiss qualifications abroad and supporting employment opportunities for Swiss citizens. Second,

163 Information on the NQF for higher education can be found at www.crus.ch/information-programme/qualifikationsrahmen-nqfch-hs.html [accessed 5.12.2012].

164 Following feedback received in the consultation process, the name of the NQR-CH has been changed to NQR-CH-BB, indicating that it is not an overarching framework but rather one for VET and PET (BB = Berufsbildung). The new name will be used in this publication.

165 Eidgenössisches Volkswirtschaftsdepartement (EVD).

166 Reactions to the consultation are available at <http://www.bbt.admin.ch/themen/01051/01071/01076/01312/index.html?lang=de> [accessed 5.12.2012].

the NQF builds directly on the shift to learning outcomes initiated by the 2004 reform of the federal act on vocational and professional education and training. This reform introduces a more outcomes-oriented approach to defining VET programmes and qualifications. A total of more than 600 different qualifications have been redefined in a dialogue between trade associations and public authorities, preparing the ground for the overarching learning outcomes approach now taken forward by the NQR-CH-BB. The NQF for higher education, in contrast, enjoys a weaker link to stakeholders outside the education sector itself. However, in their responses to the consultation, most participating stakeholders point to the problem caused by the limited scope (vocational and professional education and training) of the NQR-CH-BB as well as to the lack of clarity caused by the existence of two framework initiatives in Switzerland. A message from the stakeholders is to develop one, comprehensive framework covering all qualifications.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The shift to learning outcomes has been fundamental to reforming Swiss vocational and professional qualifications in recent years. This work has led to the gradual development of methods for writing learning outcomes¹⁶⁷. The use of learning outcomes for general and higher education is more limited but can be observed in these areas as well.

The level descriptors of the NQR-CH-BB build on the main categories of the EQF but also reflect extensive national experience in using learning outcomes for the description and definition of qualifications. While staying close to the knowledge and skills categories, the main elements of the descriptors are presented below:

Table 24 The main elements of the descriptors in Swiss NQF

Knowledge	Declarative knowledge	
	Understanding	
Skills	Procedural skills	
	Senso-motoric skills	
Competences	Vocational or professional competence	
	Personal competence	Self-competence
		Social competence
		Leadership competence

LINKS TO OTHER TOOLS AND POLICIES

The proposal for NQR-CH-BB is closely linked to the use of diploma and certificate supplements. These will be given to all candidates awarded a qualification and will indicate its profile as well as its level according to the NQR-CH (and in the future, the EQF). The Swiss version of the diploma and certificate supplement will not be identical to the ones currently used by European universities and will contain a more generic description of the qualification achieved, as much as possible in line with the Europass diploma and certificate supplement.

The Swiss system for validation of informal and non-formal learning has reached an advanced level of implementation. Through the so called Validation des acquis, individuals are offered a structured procedure where prior learning can be registered, where professional competences can be certified, and where a formal qualification is issued.

There is currently no plan to link a credit system to the proposed NQF.

¹⁶⁷ For information on the method for writing learning outcomes as well as for examples of profiles, consult <http://www.bbt.admin.ch/themen/hoehere/00160/index.html?lang=de> [accessed 5.12.2012].

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

There is currently no indication on when a referencing to the EQF can take place. This will depend on progress made on the NQR-CH as well on how its link to the nqf.ch-HS will be addressed.

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Swiss NQF developments are in a critical phase where the linkages between the two existing initiatives have to be clarified. The eight-level structure proposed by the NQR-CH provides, compared with other European countries, a very good technical basis for moving towards a comprehensive NQF. However, a technical basis is not sufficient. What is needed is a political mandate indicating in which direction developments should now go.

On a general level Switzerland is in a good position to introduce a learning outcomes based framework. Work during the last decade on the shift to learning outcomes and on validation provides a very good starting point for such a development.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET) participates in the NCP meetings as observer. <http://www.bbt.admin.ch/index.html?lang=en> [accessed 12.3.2013].

THE UNITED KINGDOM

A total of five different qualifications frameworks currently operate in the UK. In England and Northern Ireland we find the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) established in 2001, the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) established during the period 2006-08 and the NQF established in 2003. The Scottish qualifications framework has operated since 2001; in Wales the credit and qualifications framework of Wales (CQFW) has also been in place since 2001. This multitude of frameworks is partly explained by the gradual devolution of powers to the UK nations, in particular giving more autonomy to Scotland and Wales. The many frameworks also reflect the needs and interests of subsectors of education and training, explaining the existence of a separate framework for higher education qualifications in England and Northern-Ireland and the continued co-existence of the QCH and NQF. In contrast, Scotland and Wales have chosen to develop comprehensive frameworks covering all levels and types of qualifications. These developments show that frameworks have come to stay and can play an important role in promoting and modernising education, training and lifelong learning. They also show that frameworks develop and change continuously. This has been the case for England, where policy directions have changed frequently and to some extent, seen from the outside, reduced rather than improved the transparency of qualifications. From the perspective of the new and emerging frameworks introduced throughout Europe 'post EQF', the Scottish and Welsh frameworks are important learning cases. Both are comprehensive and have set themselves ambitious targets for lifelong learning. The relative complexity of the UK situation has led to the publishing of a brochure (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland et al., 2011)¹⁶⁸ explaining to users how the frameworks interact as well as how they link to the Irish framework.

ENGLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

INTRODUCTION

There is no single comprehensive national qualifications framework covering all levels and types of qualification in England and Northern Ireland. The QCF mainly addresses vocational and pre-vocational education and training areas but without including secondary education (school leaving certificates) and higher education. The latter qualifications are covered by the framework for higher education. The QCF was referenced to the EQF in 2009 and the FHEQ to the EHEA-framework in 2008. There is currently no formal link between these two frameworks but comparison is aided by use of parallel level approaches supporting transparency.

The QCF is a regulatory credit and qualifications framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is presented as covering all levels and types of qualification, although with the important exception of secondary and higher education qualifications. The QCF recognises skills and qualifications by awarding credit for qualifications and units. It is supposed to enable people to gain qualifications at their own pace along flexible routes. The QCF was formally adopted – after a two-year trial period – in autumn 2008. The OFQUAL is responsible for the daily running of the framework. In comparison the FHEQ is not a regulatory framework but introduces some common objectives (benchmarks) to be pursued voluntarily and provides a language of communication supporting transparency and the positioning of qualifications to each other.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The QCF is a 'mature' NQF which can be traced back to the framework for NVQs established in 1987. This framework – operating with five levels – was set up to deal with a diverse and intransparent national VET system. As stated by Lester (2011)¹⁶⁹, '... the NVQ-framework was developed to impose some order in this

168 See Qualifications can cross boundaries: a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland. http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Quals_cross_boundaries.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

169 The UK qualifications and credit framework; a critique. *Journal of vocational education and training*, Vol. 63, No 2, June 2011, pp. 205-216.

apparent chaos and classify qualifications according to their level and occupational sector' (Lester, 2001, p. 206). The NVQ framework was heavily criticised as being too rigid in its application and too narrow in its scope, mainly addressing work-based awards. In 2003 the NVQ-framework was replaced by the national qualifications framework for England, Northern-Ireland and Wales. This framework introduced an 'eight plus one' approach, combining eight ordinary qualifications levels with an entry level for basic skills. The main difference to the NVQ approach was a broadened scope, addressing both work and school based awards. The original idea was that the QCF would cover all publicly-funded qualifications, including general and vocational education but excluding degree-awarding institutions (higher education)¹⁷⁰. The QCF (tested between 2006-08) contains the same number of levels as the NQF (number of levels, coverage) but departs significantly by using (Lester, 201, p. 207)¹⁷¹ '... units rather than qualifications (...) as the primary currency, and all units would carry a credit rating based (as in higher education) on one credit equalling 10 notional hours of learning'.

Reflecting the above developments, the following four official aims have been identified for the QCF. It should:

- ensure a wider range of achievements can be recognised within a more inclusive framework;
- establish a framework that is more responsive to individual and employer needs;
- establish a simpler qualifications framework that is easier for all users to understand;
- reduce the burden of bureaucracy in the accreditation and assessment of qualifications.

The QCF also sets out a series of strategic benefits of implementing the new framework. These are:

- the framework is simple to understand, flexible to use, and easy to navigate;
- the framework is responsive so that employers and learning providers can customise programmes of learning/ training to meet particular needs;
- unit achievement is recognised and recorded;
- all learners have an individual learner achievement record;
- improved data quality in relation to qualifications and achievement for users, stakeholders and government;
- the introduction of the QCF reduces administrative bureaucracy and costs.

The QCF differs from most new NQFs now being developed throughout Europe in its:

- regulatory approach;
- integrating not only qualifications, but also units, placed on levels;
- integration of credits;
- the direct link to individual learners (the learner achievement record).

These features reflect that the framework is embedded in a wider political and institutional context and that it is recognised as a key instrument supporting national education and training policies. In this sense

170 By the end of 2010 all vocational qualifications were to be accredited to the QCF. At this point the QCF replaced the NQF for vocational qualifications. General educational qualifications – principally the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and the general certificate of education at advanced level (A levels) – will continue to be located in the NQF until a decision is made whether or not to move them into the QCF. The NQF uses the same system of levels (Entry 1-3).

171 The UK qualifications and credit framework: a critique. *Journal of vocational education and training*, Vol. 63, No 2, June 2011.

the framework can be described as ‘tight’ or ‘strong’, as it has been by some commentators (Tuck, 2007)¹⁷². But the framework also differs from most the new ‘EQF inspired’ frameworks by only covering a part of the qualification system. A nationwide qualifications framework, showing the relationship between all types and levels of qualifications, is still lacking in England and Northern Ireland.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Responsibilities for regulating the QCF in England, Wales and Northern Ireland lie with the following qualifications regulators:

- in England, the qualifications regulator for all external qualifications is the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator;
- in Northern Ireland, the qualifications regulator is the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, which regulates external qualifications other than NVQs.

A separate FHEQ has been established for England, Northern Ireland and Wales. This framework has five levels and is based on the concept that qualification is awarded for demonstrated achievement. These levels are comparable to levels 4 to 8 of the QCF, although a different approach (descriptors) is used to describe them. The five levels of the FHEQ are differentiated by a series of generic qualifications descriptors that summarise the knowledge, understanding and the types of abilities that holders are expected to have. The FHEQ is certified against the QF-EHEA (Bologna), but not against the EQF. The attitude of FEHQ in relation to the EQF is significantly different from that signalled by the QCF. A ‘scoping group’ was set up in 2008 to explore the relationship between FHEQ and the EQF, concluding that, while they support the lifelong learning goals of the EQF, the group was not aware of any additional benefits which might accrue to the higher education sector at present by referencing the FHEQ to it. The group recommends that the position can be reviewed again, taking into account development of the EQF and the Bologna process and a monitoring of levels of interest expressed by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The QCF comprises nine levels from entry level (subdivided into entry level 1 to 3) to achievement at level 8.

The level descriptors provide a general, shared understanding of learning and achievement at each of the nine levels. The level descriptors are designed to enable their use across a wide range of learning contexts and build on those developed through the Northern Ireland credit accumulation and transfer system (NICATS), the existing level descriptors of the NQF, and a range of level descriptors from frameworks in the UK and internationally. The five upper levels are intended to be consistent with the levels of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Level is an indication of the relative demand made on the learner, the complexity and/or depth of achievement, and the learner’s autonomy in demonstrating that achievement. The level descriptors are concerned with the outcomes of learning and not the process of learning or the method of assessment. The indicators for each level are grouped into three categories:

- knowledge and understanding,
- application and action,
- autonomy and accountability.

Apart from the levels, the QCF consists of a system of units and credits. One credit is based on 10 hours of learning, regardless of where and when the learning took place. The QCF also includes principles for

¹⁷² An introductory guide to national qualifications frameworks: conceptual and practical issues for policy-makers.

assembling qualifications from units, specifying which units must be achieved for each qualification. A set of principles for recognising prior certified and non-certified learning is also included.

The learning outcomes approach underpins the English and Northern Irish qualifications systems. Actively promoted since the 1980s, this perspective is broadly accepted and implemented.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The QCF was referenced to the EQF in February 2010 as a part of the overall UK referencing process. The following relationship was established.

The higher education framework (FHEQ) is not referenced to the EQF. While this option was discussed during the referencing process, agreement was not reached on this point. As the five upper levels of the QCF are consistent with the FHEQ, an implicit and indirect link is established. Preparations are under way for presenting an updated referencing report to the EQF AG (possibly) in 2013. Such a report would make it possible to revisit the linking of the FHEQ to the EQF.

Table 25 Level correspondence established between the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) and the EQF

QCF	Entry level 1	Entry level 2	Entry level 3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF			1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8

IMPORTANT LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The adoption and implementation of the QCF demonstrates the need to continue to develop national qualifications frameworks. Building on the experiences from two previous framework approaches (the NVQ and the NQF), the integration of credits clearly moves the framework to a new stage of development.

QCF experiences are important as they demonstrate the challenges involved in pursuing a learning outcomes (and credit) based approach to qualifications. The QCF demonstrates that it is possible to develop and also sustain a qualification framework over time, gradually refine its objectives and increase its impact. However, the QCF also demonstrates that national frameworks have to be fit for purpose and designed in accordance with the national context. The QCF is a reflection of the particular strengths and weaknesses of English and Northern Irish education and training; it can hardly be used as a blue-print at European level.

The limited coverage of the QCF – and the lack of formal linkages between the QCF and FHEQ – also demonstrates the difficulties involved in building a comprehensive framework with nationwide coverage. The fact that many European countries are now moving towards comprehensive frameworks indicates that the new generation of framework development in response to the EQF actually goes beyond the scope of pioneering frameworks like the English and Northern-Irish one.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) acts as EQF NCP. <http://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/office-of-qualifications-and-examinations-regulation-ofqual.html> [accessed 12.3.2013].

Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment Northern Ireland acts as the NCP for Northern Ireland, website to be added.

SCOTLAND

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish qualifications framework (SCQF) promotes lifelong learning in Scotland. The framework was originally implemented in 2001 but has since been gradually revised and refined. SCQF governance is organised as a company (see below), which is a unique solution in Europe, and a charity was set up in 2006. The framework covers all levels and types of qualifications but is not a regulatory framework. The SCQF assists in making clear the relationships between Scottish qualifications and those in the rest of the UK, Europe and beyond, thereby clarifying opportunities for international progression routes and credit transfer. The SCQF sees itself as an integrating framework, supporting everyone in Scotland, including learning providers and employers, by:

- helping people of all ages and circumstances to get access to appropriate education and training so they can meet their full potential;
- helping employers, learners and the general public to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how qualifications relate to each other and to other forms of learning, and how different types of qualification can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

Level descriptors and criteria for inclusion are common across all levels and types of qualification.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The objectives pursued by the SCQF are:

- to support lifelong learning;
- to clarify entry and exit points for qualifications and programmes of learning at whatever level;
- to show learners and others possible routes for progression and credit transfer;
- to show the general level and credit (size) of the different types of Scottish qualifications;
- to enable credit links to be made between qualifications or learning programmes to assist learners to build on previous successes.

It will do this by making the overall system of qualifications and relevant programmes of learning easier to understand and providing a national vocabulary for describing learning opportunities. The SCQF has a clear ambition to promote integration and progression across levels and types of qualification. While the existence of a common set of descriptors and criteria is seen as an important precondition, the development of a fully integrated framework is seen as a long term task. As one of the oldest comprehensive NQFs in Europe, the SCQF illustrates the potential of frameworks as instruments for development and, to some extent, reform. The SCQF has been described (by Raffe, 2009a, 2011b) as a 'communication framework' without strong regulatory or reform functions. Experiences may indicate that it is too simple to operate with the distinction 'communication' and 'reform' frameworks, the SCQF seems gradually and increasingly to operate from a middle position where it acts as a reference point for revision and renewal of curricula and education and training in general. This is closely related to the important role played by learning outcomes throughout the Scottish education and training landscape, supported and made possible by the NQF. As important is the role played by the SCQF as a platform for dialogue between stakeholders and its ability to initiate and sustain a 'common conversation'.

The SCQF is an 'open framework' in the sense that it explicitly addresses the private sector and employers, and encourages these to have their training provisions accredited and included under the framework. The benefits of such an inclusion are presented on the SCQF website¹⁷³ as follows:

- it gives your in house training national recognition and a comparison with nationally recognised qualifications;
- it helps employees to map their learning pathways and gain personal recognition for what they have achieved. It also allows them to progress into more advanced learning programmes whether in-house or via an external learning or training provider;
- it encourages employees to undertake learning, raises morale and increases company loyalty;
- it promotes skills development and helps support effective skills utilisation.

As in the case of Wales (see below) the unit-based approach used in Scotland aids inclusion of qualifications of differing character and size. Normal procedures applied for the framework as a whole can also be used for qualifications outside the traditional, public sector. It is interesting to note that a big proportion of the SCQF database contains what can be termed non-traditional qualifications (by the SCQF estimated to approximately 400 out of 1500), it is also interesting to note that a number of 'international qualifications', notably awarded by multinational ICT companies, are included in the SCQF.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

The framework is maintained by the Scottish credit and qualifications framework partnership which is a company limited by guarantee and also a Scottish charity. The partnership is made up of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Universities Scotland, Quality Assurance Agency, Association of Scotland's Colleges, and Scottish Ministers.

A high degree of ownership can be observed with the SCQF. This reflects how the framework established in 2001 brought together three previously developed frameworks covering different types and levels of qualifications, ranging from the qualifications of higher education institutions, Scottish vocational qualifications, and the national and higher national qualifications.

LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The SCQF has 12 levels ranging from access at SCQF level 1, up to Doctorate at level 12. The different levels indicate the level of difficulty of a particular qualification and increases in levels relate to factors such as:

- the complexity and depth of knowledge and understanding;
- links to associated academic, vocational or professional practice;
- the degree of integration, independence and creativity required;
- the range and sophistication of application/practice;
- the role(s) taken in relation to other learners/workers in carrying out tasks.

The Scottish level descriptors were revised in 2012. This does not represent a radical departure from the past approach but can be seen as part of continuous evolution of the framework based on experiences gained. The three access (entry) levels are seen as important in addressing the needs of individuals with particular learning needs and as an important part of an overall lifelong learning strategy. For some, the access level can function as a way back to formal education and training.

It is a requirement of the framework that all learning to be included in the framework is described in terms of learning outcomes. Closely linked to the learning outcomes approach is the use of recognition of prior learning. While involved in development of RPL since the 1990s, there is still debate on how to make

173 <http://www.scqf.org.uk/Employers/> [accessed 5.12.2012].

further progress in this field. A main distinction is between RPL as exclusively about recognition of prior formal learning and RPL as recognition of non-formal and informal or experiential learning. A toolkit has been developed for the last and more challenging form of recognition and will be used as a basis for future developments.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The SCQF was referenced to the EQF in February 2010 as a part of the overall UK referencing process and resulted in the following referencing:

Table 26 Level correspondence established between the Scottish qualifications framework (SCQF) and the EQF

SCQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
EQF			1	2	3	4	5		6		7	8

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Scottish credit and qualifications framework partnership acts as NCP for Scotland.

<http://www.scqf.org.uk/> [accessed 12.3.2013].

WALES

INTRODUCTION

The CQFW is a descriptive voluntary framework developed by bringing together a number of subframeworks already in existence in Wales: the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ); the NQF for regulated national courses; and the quality assured lifelong learning. It embraces both academic and vocational qualifications and can be described as comprehensive. The CQFW can be seen as a second generation framework emerging from the NQF for England, Northern Ireland and Wales. In certain areas, for example for general upper secondary qualifications (GCSEs) the Welsh framework overlaps with the frameworks of England and Northern Ireland. Recent developments, in 2012, where England will discontinue the GCSEs while Wales will retain them, may have consequences for the CQFW. Some stakeholders believe that the split on GCSEs will result in an even more independent CQFW, developing more according to the Scottish NQF model.

MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

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,
- regulated general and vocational qualifications.

This means that the CQFW enables any learning post-14 to be formally recognised but is not in itself a regulatory mechanism; any regulatory requirements are supplied through its relationship with regulating bodies. The framework is unit-based; it defines one credit as 10 hours of learning time and has nine levels (the lowest subdivided into three) with supporting levels descriptors.

The system for quality assured lifelong learning 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, making the Welsh framework one of the few European frameworks where validation and/or recognition of

prior learning is fully integrated. In the last few years much effort has been invested in putting this system into practice. While enjoying some success, the number of individuals actually using this opportunity has been relatively limited and there is currently a discussion on how to adjust the approach, for example by reducing the complexity of procedures.

The CQFW can be considered an 'open framework' in the sense that its unit-based approach at the outset is oriented towards a multitude of awarding bodies and education and training formats. This aids inclusion of units developed (for example) by the private sector and as part of continuing and enterprise-based education and training. This means that the procedures and quality criteria applied within the quality-assured lifelong learning (QALLL) can exemplify how an NQF can establish links beyond the traditional, formal education and training sector.

LEVELS DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

There are nine levels in the CQFW, entry plus eight levels. There are common level descriptors which apply to all types of learning programmes and qualifications.

All qualifications and learning programmes within the CQFW are based on learning outcomes and must have quality assured assessment of these outcomes. The CQFW uses two measures to describe qualifications:

- the level of the outcomes of learning;
- the volume of outcomes, described by the number of CQFW credit points.

REFERENCING TO THE EQF

The CQFW was referenced to the EQF as a part of the overall UK referencing process in February 2010.

Table 27 Level correspondence established between the CQFW and the EQF

CQFW	Entry level 1	Entry level 2	Entry level 3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF			1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8

As with England and Northern Ireland, no link was established between the FEHQ and EQF. This was based on the argument from the HE-sector that no additional benefit of such a link could be observed. This decision can be reviewed in the future, possibly in 2013, depending on the developments of the EQF and feedback from potential users of the frameworks.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Wales – Welsh assembly government acts as NCP.

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/qualificationsinwales/creditqualificationsframework/;jsessionid=C19211C601E5A0EFC47151D5B921CEE3?lang=en> [accessed 12.3.2013].

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

ACPART	National Agency for Qualifications in HE
AIBA	National Agency of International Education Affairs in Liechtenstein
AKOV	Flemish Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming)
ANQ	Agency for Qualifications (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação)
BMBF	Federal Ministry of Education and Research
BMUUK	Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CLQ	Luxembourg qualifications framework
CNCP	French National Committee for Professional Certification
CPC	consultative vocational committee
CQFW	credit and qualifications framework of Wales
CROQF	Croatian qualifications framework
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
DQR	German qualifications framework
DUT	University Institute of Technology
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EHEA	European higher education area
Eoppep	National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European Social Fund
EstQF	Estonian qualifications framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
FHEQ	framework for higher education qualifications
FQF	Flemish qualifications framework
GCSE	general certificate of secondary education
HE	higher education
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Award Council
HQF	Hellenic qualifications framework
HROO	Croatian credit system for general education
ISCO	international standard classification of occupations
ISFOL	National Institute for Development of Vocational Training
ISQF	Iceland qualifications framework
IUQB	Irish Universities Quality Board
IVET	initial vocational education and training
Klasius	regulation on the introduction and use of the standard classification of education
KMK	Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder
LLL	Lifelong learning
LQF	Latvian qualifications framework

LTQF	Lithuanian qualifications framework
MECES	Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior
MECU	Marco Español de Cualificaciones
MQC	Malta Qualifications Council
MQF	Malta qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NKR	Norwegian national qualifications framework (Nasjonalt kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring)
NLQF	qualifications framework for the Netherlands
NOKUT	Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
NQF	national qualifications framework
NSK	national register of qualifications
NUV	National Institute for Education
NVAO	Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie
NVQ	national vocational qualification
NVQS	national vocational qualifications system
OPET	Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology
PQF	Polish qualification framework
QALLL	quality-assured lifelong learning
QCF	qualifications and credit framework
QF	qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area
QNQ	Portuguese qualifications framework (Quadro Nacional de Qualificações)
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RNCP	national register of vocational qualifications
ROME	register of occupations in the French labour market
RVA	Recognition, validation, accreditation
RVCC	national system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences
SCQF	Scottish credit and qualifications framework
SEQF	Swedish national qualification framework
SERV	Social and Economic Committee
SFMQ	service francophone des métiers et qualifications
SQF	Slovenian qualifications framework
TVET	technical vocational education and training
UNESCO-TVET	UNESCO Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO-UIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
VET	vocational education and training
VNIFL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
VQA	Vocational Qualifications Authority
VWO	upper secondary pre-university education

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