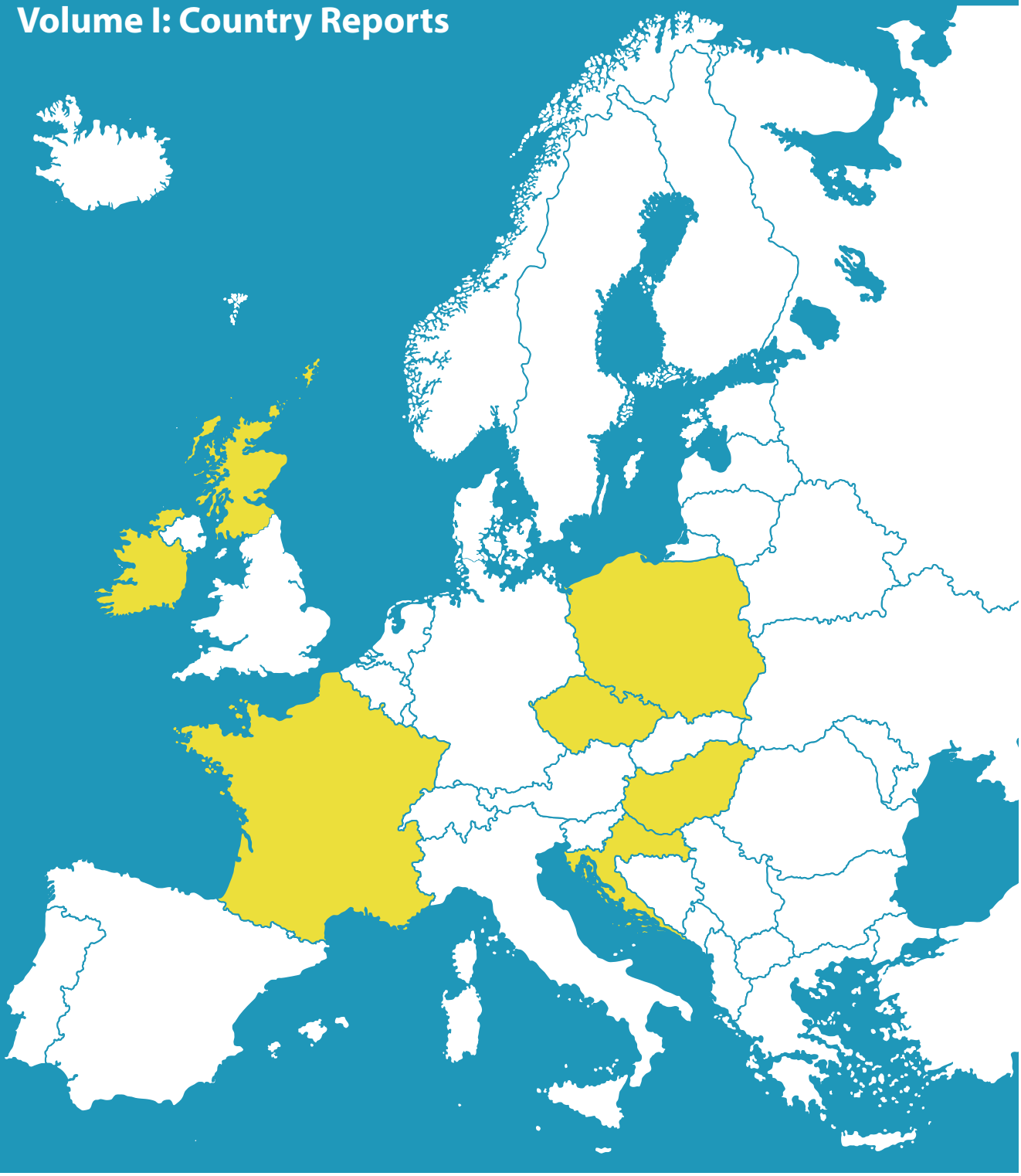
Including Non-formal Sector Qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks

– The Experiences and Solutions of Seven European Countries

Volume I: Country Reports



NQF-in Developing organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks

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Free copy

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Foreword

This publication was prepared as part of the NQF-in Project *Developing Organisational and Financial Models for Including Non-Formal Sector Qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks* financed by the European Union within the framework of the Erasmus+ Programme. It consists of two volumes: Volume I – Country Reports, Volume II – Annexes to the Country Reports, both published in electronic format.

The aim of the NQF-in Project is to provide evidence-based support to national governments, EU agencies and key stakeholders in developing policies for including qualifications in national qualifications frameworks, with a particular focus on qualifications awarded outside the formal education system (non-formal sector qualifications). This aim is achieved by conducting two sets of activities in the project: (1) providing systematised knowledge about the organisational and financial solutions applied in seven EU countries for including non-formal sector qualifications in their NQF-based systems, and (2) developing organisational and financial models for the inclusion of non-formal sector qualifications in NQF-based systems.

The NQF-in Project is part of the policy learning and policy transfer initiatives advocated in the EU, which focus on the exchange of ideas, policies and policy instruments among different national qualifications systems. The main rationale for this approach is the assumption that knowledge about policies in one national system may be used for the benefit of developing policies in another system (Dolowitz, Marsch 2000, Chakroun 2010).

Within the NQF-in Project, we collected the experiences of seven European countries that are at different stages of NQF implementation: France, Ireland and Scotland have many years of experience in operating a qualifications system based on a national qualifications framework; Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland are in various initial phases of this process. These experiences are presented in reports prepared by each NQF-in Project partner. An analysis of the national solutions presented here enabled the NQF-in Project to then develop organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in NQF-based systems.

Even though the experiences of each country are quite different, the reports refer to the same set of themes in a comparable way by using the same structure, as follows:

Chapter 1. Historical Context

Chapter 2. National Qualifications Framework – Basic Premises

Chapter 3. Institutional Setting

Chapter 4. Types and Legal Status of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Chapter 5. Procedures of the Inclusion of Qualifications in the NQF

Chapter 6. Quality Assurance of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Chapter 7. Costs of Including Qualifications in the NQF

Chapter 8. Current Debates on Further NQF Developments.

Each country report was reviewed internally and externally. Two project partners reviewed a third partner's report and prepared a written review. Additionally, all reports were read by Sheila Dunn of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership and Horacy Dębowski of the Educational Research Institute to ensure consistency and completeness. Next, the reports were reviewed by external reviewers from among the project's "silent" partners. We are most grateful to Christiane Eberhardt, Joseph Noesen, Eduard Staudecker and Milada Stalker for their valuable reflections provided in these reviews.

More information about the NQF-in Project, the report on the models and other publications can be found at the project's website www.nqf-in.eu.

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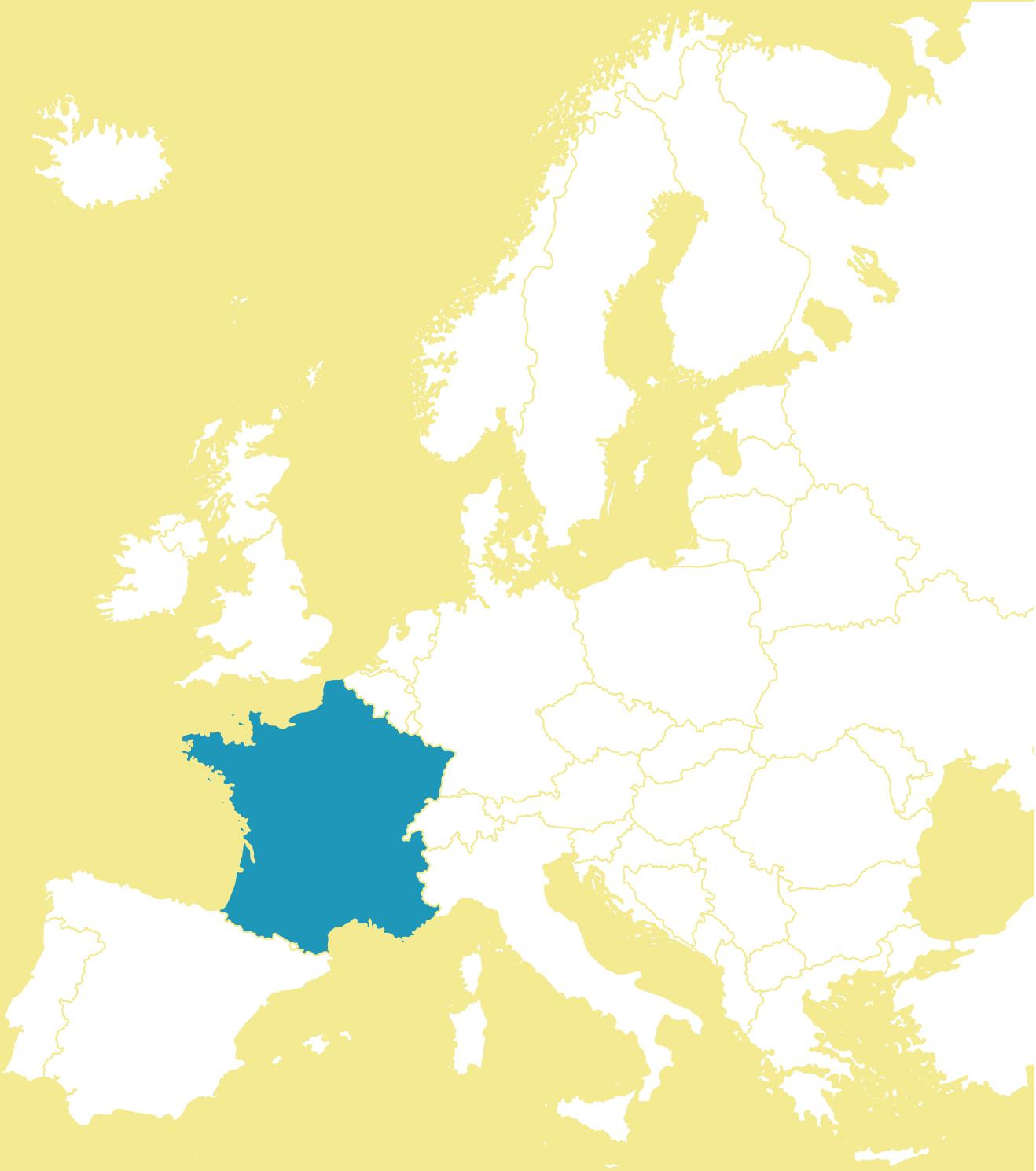
1. France



Introduction

This report is the end result of the many drafts produced by the Céreq project team in cooperation with the NQF-In partnership that aimed to reach a mutual understanding on the process of incorporation of qualifications into National Qualifications Frameworks.

As we will see in the following chapters, France benefits from a centralised and firmly established system of certification governance whose founding principles date back to the 1960s. To date at least, the multiple reforms and progressive opening the system up to market influence have not compromised the strong regulation by the French state, which maintains 'ownership' of qualifications and is the only entity responsible for quality assurance. Furthermore, state qualifications continue to play a crucial role in national labour markets and in regulation through social bargaining at industry level, with levels of education/training being linked in many cases to agreed wage rates.

As we know, the efficiency of a qualification system is based on trust among the different actors. Accreditation processes have to be recognised as fair, clear, and transparent by all parties involved. The system's credibility and legitimacy are very basic values that are hard to achieve and have to be preserved. Despite far-reaching changes in the economy and the labour market, the state is called on to ensure that the system can be adapted and modernised without the need for drastic transformations.

The inclusion of so-called "non-formal" qualifications is one of the challenges that the system is facing. The report will analyse the mechanisms and technical solutions put in place in order to cope with the diversification of qualifications and the way the system seeks to preserve its integrity.

As outlined in IO1 of the NQF-In Project, "formal qualification" is a tautological definition. Every qualification, even those awarded after a more "informal" training process (i.e. outside the traditional education and training system), is formal if it is included in the French national qualification registry. For this reason, this report places great emphasis on the accreditation and quality processes, listing a number of different types of qualification awarded in the country and the procedures for their inclusion in the framework.

What is more, the reported system descriptions achieve an unprecedented level of detail and accuracy. Additionally, information can be easily compared with other NQF-In 6 National reports (Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Poland and Scotland), which are similarly organised and structured.

In conclusion, the French NQF-In team is pleased to present this output produced under the supervision of the whole team and in consultation with external experts and stakeholders. We think it fulfils the aim of providing evidence-based support to national governments, EU agencies and key stakeholders in developing lifelong learning and VET policies.

Matteo Sgarzi
Head of Mission, International Relations
Céreq

Preparation of the report

The issue of certification is an important subject of study for Céreq. Those who have contributed to this report have been working on the topic for some time. The report draws on some of this knowledge. Their involvement in the advisory bodies referred to in this report assisted them in their research work. Firstly, it enabled them to observe sessions (involving the registration of qualifications in the framework or the drawing up of a new classification) and, secondly, it allowed them to meet the key stakeholders involved. In addition to these observations and meetings, they carried out collaborative work with the National Committee for Vocational Certification (CNCP) and a number of government departments.

This on-the-ground knowledge and understanding of the subject enabled them to identify and minimise the amount of research required. This mainly took the form of documentary research using legal sources (the authors are not legal experts) and targeted interviews.

These interviews included:

- three with rapporteurs from the CNCP
- two with employer representatives and representatives from different occupational sectors
- three with Ministry of Higher Education staff responsible for the accreditation of institutions or staff from the department of "training and employment"
- one with an official from the Ministry of Defence certification unit
- one with a representative from the consular chambers

Abbreviations and acronyms

BTS = Brevet de technicien supérieur (*Higher Technician's certificate)*

BTSA = Brevet de technicien supérieur agricole *(Higher Agricultural Technician certificate)*

CCI-France = Assemblée des chambres françaises de commerce et d'industrie *(Assembly of French Chambers of Commerce and Industry)*

CEFDG = Commission d'évaluation des formations et diplômes de gestion (Commission for the Evaluation of Management Training Programmes and Qualifications)

Centre-Inffo = Centre pour le développement de l'information sur la formation permanente *(Centre for the Development of Information on Continuing Training)*

CEREQ = Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications *(Centre for Research on Education, Training and Employment)*

CNCP = Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle (*National Committee for Vocational Certification)*

CNESER = Conseil National de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche (*National Council for Higher Education and Research*)

CNIS = Conseil National de l'Information Statistique *(National Council on Statistics)*

CPC = Commission Professionnelle Consultative (*Consultative occupational Committee)*

CPF = Compte personnel de formation *(personal training account)*

CPN = Commission Pédagogique Nationale *(National Pedagogical Commission)*

CPNE = Commission paritaire nationale pour l'emploi *(Joint National Employment Commission)*

CQP = Certificat de qualification professionnelle (industry/*sectoral qualification*)

CSFPM = Comité spécialisé de la formation professionnelle maritime *(Specialised Maritime Training Committee)*

CREFOP = Comité régional de l'emploi, de la formation et de l'orientation professionnelle (*Regional Committee for Employment, Vocational training and Guidance)*

CTH = Commission technique d'homologation (Technical Commission for the Accreditation of Technological Diplomas and Certificates)

CTI = Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur (*Engineering Degrees Committee*)

DAEU = diplôme d'accès aux études universitaires *(diploma granting access to higher education)*

DU = Diplôme d'Université *(university diploma)*

DUT= diplôme universitaire de technologie *(university technological diploma)*

HCEEE = Haut Comité Education-Emploi-Economie (High Committee for Education, Economic affairs and Employment)

HCERES = Haut Conseil de l'Evaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur *(High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education)*

HCPP = Haut conseil des professions paramédicales *(High Council for the Paramedical Professions)*

IUT = Instituts Universitaires de Technologie *(university technological institute)*

NSF = Nomenclature des Spécialités de Formation *(Classification of Training Specialisms)*

ONISEP = Office national d'information sur les enseignements et les professions *(National Office for Information on Education and Careers)*

RNCP = Répertoire National de la Certification Professionnelle (*National Register of Vocational Certification)*

VAE = Validation des acquis de l'Experience (*accreditation of prior and informal learning)*

Basic terms

In this report, we have used two concepts which are somewhat difficult to understand and translate. French makes a distinction between the concepts of *certification* and *qualification* so we will endeavour to explain how they differ.

Certification: in the context of education and training, the term *certification* in French refers to the process used to validate knowledge gained through training or experience. This knowledge is defined in reference frameworks designed to establish training targets and serve as a benchmark for assessing candidates.

The term *certification* is also used in the plural to denote the various products arising from this process. In this sense, the term *certifications is* akin to the English concept of qualifications.

Qualification: in France, this term relates to the occupational sphere. It refers to the recognition of a fixed set of tasks structured as a job by means of classification grids agreed at the industry level[1]. Since the 1950s, it has become widely accepted that some form of training is necessary before people can carry out these sets of tasks. So this has led to the gradual appearance within classification grids of a link between the hierarchical list of jobs or roles and qualifications.

Diplôme: this term is used for qualifications issued on behalf of the state, essentially by the Ministries of Education, Higher Education and Agriculture. We should be cautious about systematically translating it into English as 'diploma', which simply denotes a certificate awarded by an educational establishment to show that the recipient has successfully completed a course of study of some kind, often at a lower level than a full degree.

[1] A classification grid lists and ranks jobs or roles and sets out the corresponding minimum wage for each.

Higher technician's certificate *(brevet de technicien supérieur - BTS)*: diploma issued by the Ministries of Education or Agriculture, awarded on completion of two years of postbaccalauréat education The BTS is a level 5 qualification (EQF)

Industry/sectoral qualifications *(certificats de qualification professionnelle - CQP)*: qualifications awarded by specific occupational sectors or industries; not automatically recognised at national level.

University technological diploma/degree *(diplôme universitaire de technologie - DUT)*: diploma (or 2-year degree) awarded by the Ministry of Higher Education on completion of two years of post-baccalauréat education (in a university technological institute). DUTs have been classified as level 5 qualifications (EQF)

Vocational certificates *(titres professionels)*: qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Labour. Most of them are level 3 or 4 qualifications (EQF). Unlike CQPs, they are recognised at national level.

1.1. Historical Context

To understand the developments taking place at the present time, we need to view them in context through a brief overview of the history of *certification* in France. This will facilitate an understanding of today's situation.

The turn of the 1970s marked the heyday of the Ministry of National Education (MEN) *diplômes* – the only qualifications having national value and state recognition. The only other such qualifications existing at that time were those awarded by the Ministry of Agriculture, which were developed in 1960 along the same lines as those issued by the MEN, and engineering degrees. The expression "state education" has sometimes been used to describe the hegemony acquired by MEN *diplômes* (Chapoulie, 2010). This "state education" was put in place in the years following the Second World War in a context of strong economic growth marked by low unemployment. At the political level, this period was marked by a systematic public planning policy (Bel, 1987), which gradually matched the structure of *diplômes* to that of jobs. The development of a "classification of training levels" (1969) was an important part of this public planning policy (Affichard, 1983; Tanguy, 2002). Finally, the development of state education with an emphasis on initial education took place before the great wave of education democratisation (Duru-Bellat, 2006). Indeed, in 1970, less than 20% of any one age cohort obtained the *baccalauréat*, an eminently symbolic *diplôme* in a pupil's school career, which opened access to higher education.

Since the early 1970s, nationally recognised qualifications have diversified. What are now called "awarding ministries" were developed. There were two in 1970 (National Education and Agriculture) and the number has been increasing ever since and now includes the Ministries of Labour, Culture, Sports, Defence, Home Affairs, etc. This diversification then extended to training programmes and qualifications awarded by private providers and then to occupational sectors, which since 1986 have been able to draw up their own lists of qualifications, known as industry or sectoral qualifications (CQPs). The last stage in this process of gradual change was the creation in 2014 of what we call the "inventory" by the National Committee for Vocational Certification (*Commission nationale de la certification professionnelle*; hereinafter

CNCP). This inventory no longer lists *qualifications*, but only additional awards to *qualifications*. Thus, the training/qualifications offer that has considerably expanded since the 1970s calls into question the actions of the state, its internal re-composition and its transformation. Although state education appears to be eroding, it still retains a prominent place and role in the construction of the French qualification system, as will be shown below.

Two committees played an important role in this diversification: the Technical Commission for the Accreditation of Diplomas and Certificates (*Commission Technique d'Homologation;* hereinafter CTH) and then, since 2002, the CNCP. The first body will be discussed in this introductory section, as its history facilitates understanding of the changes presented below, namely the emergence of the logic of *certification* instead of that of training, strongly supported by public policies.

The CTH was set up in 1972. Its genesis is closely linked to the various policy documents on adult vocational training, in particular the founding **Act no. 71-575 of 16 July 1971 on the Organisation of Continuing Vocational Training within the Lifelong Learning Framework**. The CTH – mostly led by various state representatives – has the initial authority to determine state recognition of all training programmes (public or private) that do not fall under the control of the Ministry of National Education; this recognition is achieved through the allocation of a level. In short, the commission took over the 1969 classification based on the hierarchy of MEN *diplômes*. For its advocates the task of the CTH was to construct an alternative system; ultimately, however, it achieved legitimacy in the shadow of MEN *diplômes.* Nevertheless, a large number of training programmes for adults with varying degrees of connection to other ministries (Labour, Defence, Youth and Sport etc.) or public bodies were to gain the benefit of state recognition (Veneau, Maillard, 2007).

For nearly 20 years, the CTH based its activities on the principle of social justice, recognising qualifications intended for adults. At the turn of the 1990s, however, it was forced to put itself at the service of employment, which politicians had declared to be the highest "national priority". As a result, it was assumed that the rate of unemployment and, more specifically, that of young people, was no longer to be considered cyclical. At the same time, the objective of accreditation had changed. It was no longer a question of accrediting and recognising training programmes or, more precisely, the duration of training; the focus had now shifted to the "learning outcomes" of these programmes. This change of perspective was in accordance with the introduction of the notion of competence (which skills are to be assessed?) into the debates. The triptych of "evaluation, validation, certification (of skills)" became the new official doctrine, replacing the assessment of applications centred on the duration of training programmes, as had been the case until then, with the quality of the job position being added.

If these changes were introduced in the name of the fight against unemployment, and more specifically youth unemployment, the actual shape they took was also being influenced by certain "ideological" factors. As far as vocational training was concerned, the turning point of the 1990s was marked in France by the important debates on national vocational qualifications (NVQs), even though the idea of recognising partial qualifications was still very controversial.

The turn of the 1990s saw another change. The first years of accreditation (1970s) pertained mainly to qualifications issued by associations closely linked to ministries or state educational institutions. The second half of the 1980s saw the emergence of requests relating to accreditation from private providers. Public policies aimed at promoting youth employment, the new CTH doctrine, encouraged the submission of applications from private training bodies, including those which, through accreditation, were looking for a "labelling effect" in a period (the 1990s) when higher education was experiencing a strong increase in enrolments. Indeed, from the beginning of that decade, the share of applications for higher training (levels II or even I in the 1969 classification) had been steadily increasing among private bodies. Private providers would keep this feature unchanged even in the following CNCP years. From this point of view, it appears that there is a discrepancy

between the official discussions that legitimised the "necessary transformation of the CTH" and, in many cases, the meaning of the applications put forward by private organisations.

Even if, at the turn of the 1990s, the CTH doctrine changed, with a shift in focus and a change in its examination criteria, the actual accreditation practices were still strongly tied to examinations based on training programmes (instead of on learning outcomes). The replacement of this commission by the CNCP in 2002 and the consequent change in its membership were intended to bring the doctrine and criteria of the former CTH into practice.

Thus over the last forty years, the state has ended its monopoly on issuing nationally recognised qualifications, a monopoly symbolised by the expression "state education". There is no indication as to how far this diversification process will go, as evidenced by the recent creation of the "inventory". The state delegated to other entities a number of the tasks it had assumed; this was legitimised by employment objectives. However, as we will see, the state still retains important prerogatives and still exercises important control over what it delegates.

In conclusion, at the same time as the CNCP was created and with the subsequent introduction of the concept of "National Qualifications Framework", a number of principles, tools and practices were, if not firmly established, at least very present. A view of this past is necessary to understand the specificity of the French National Qualifications Framework, as well as the current issues at stake around it.

1.2. National Qualifications Framework – Basic Premises

Two actions helped to give the French national qualifications framework the form it has today: the creation of the 1969 classification of training levels and the introduction in 2002 of the National Register of Vocational Qualifications (henceforth RNCP). These two initiatives, which have enabled the state to acknowledge an ever more varied set of qualifications, will be examined in greater detail below. It should be noted that this recognition was achieved by putting these qualifications in a hierarchy, using the 1969 classification, for qualifications accredited by the CTH (as we saw above) and then within the RNCP.

Work on developing the classification had begun earlier and proceeded gradually through the various public planning policies adopted by successive French governments, although it was not formalised and adopted by the Ministry of National Education until 1969 (Tanguy, 2002).

The starting point for this classification was a desire, expressed by the Committee on School Equipment in the Manpower Commission at the time, to obtain indicators to measure, at a time of shortages of skilled workers, the shares of the population to be enrolled at different levels of qualification. The statistical tool to be built relied naturally on the hierarchy of *diplômes* that had more stable definitions (unlike jobs) and thereby facilitated statistical analysis. These various levels of *diplôme*s were transposed into training levels (linked to the length of training programmes) corresponding to jobs, which is what is observed in the nomenclature described in the box below: "*Personnel holding **jobs** normally requiring a level of **training** ...*".

The classification of training levels (1969)

This classification system, approved by the decision of the standing group on vocational training and social advancement on 21 March 1969, sets out a hierarchical list of *diplôme* levels:

Level VI: Personnel holding jobs which do not require any training courses above compulsory basic education

Level Va: Personnel holding jobs supposed to be held after one year of training leading normally to the vocational Education certificate

Level V: Personnel holding jobs normally requiring a level of training equivalent to that of the *brevet d'études professionnelles* (BEP - vocational studies certificate) or the *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (CAP - basic vocational certificate)

Level IV: Personnel holding jobs at a supervisory or highly skilled worker level and able to provide proof of a level of training equivalent to that of the *brevet professionnel* (BP - vocational certificate), *brevet de technicien* (BT- technical certificate), or the technological *baccalauréat*.

Level III: Personnel holding jobs normally requiring a level of training equivalent to that of a 2-year degree from a University Institute of Technology (DUT) or a *brevet de technicien supérieur* (BTS - Higher technician certificate) or a certificate corresponding to the end of the first higher education cycle.

Level II and I : Personnel holding jobs normally requiring a level of training comparable to or above that of a bachelor's degree or engineering school degree.

Therefore, at the time, at least for the experts involved in the above-mentioned committees, "competent" meant "educated" and "graduated". This notion was, however, subject to debate. Indeed, representatives of business and industry also believed that "competences" could be acquired in the course of the working life and by experience. However, this approach did not gain acceptance.

The classification has been enriched over the years by the new *diplôme* created[2] and is still used today to classify the qualifications registered in the RNCP. The second characteristic of the RNCP is that it widens the possibilities for registration to industry or sectoral qualifications (henceforth CQPs[3]) but also limits the possible registrations to vocational qualifications only[4]. The RNCP will be identified later (see next chapter) as the French National

[2] The vocational baccalaureate, introduced in 1985, was added to the classification and placed at level IV, the Masters at level II.

[3] The accreditation of industry/sectoral qualifications had previously given rise to much debate even though some had been registered.

[4] As we will see in Chapter 1.4, the general baccalaureate, although enjoying a level in the classification of training levels, is not registered in the RNCP.

Qualifications Framework, although the principles on which is based (the training duration) are very different from the principles underlying the EQF. The principles of the 1969 classification have indeed over time acquired stakeholder legitimation, which few people call into question. This explains the relatively long time (about 12 years) taken in France to revise this classification to make it more compatible with the EQF.

The RNCP was set up by Act No. 2002-73 of 17 January 2002 on Social Modernisation (Annex II, see chapter on the development of vocational training) alongside the implementation of the validation of experience procedures, which had been revamped and extended to include qualifications other than those awarded by the Ministry of Education. From that point on, through the accreditation of prior and informal learning, *"any working person is entitled to have their achievements, and particularly those of a vocational nature, validated for the purpose of earning* ***a diplôme, vocational certificate or industry/sectoral qualification which is included in a list compiled by the Joint National Employment Commission for a given occupational sector"*** **(Act No. 2002-73 of 17 January 2002, article 133).** To make this possible, all these qualifications are treated separately from the courses that might lead to them. Thus this legislation ratifies the separation which, as we mentioned above, has gradually developed between training courses and "certification"; certification now no longer validates only the "knowledge acquired" on completion of a training course but also that gained through work experience or voluntary work.

It may be questioned whether making VAE procedures mandatory for access to qualifications recorded in the RNCP is also not a way of reintroducing experience as one of the bases of *qualification*, as had been attempted by the representatives of companies in the late 1960s.

Articles R 335-12 to R 335-14 of the Education Code, set out the objectives and main features of the RNCP. So the RNCP must provide *"up-to-date information about diplômes, vocational certificates and industry/sectoral qualifications created by the national joint employment commissions in the various occupational sectors".* As specified in article R335-13, these vocational qualifications are listed in the register by level and by field of activity. The same article in the Education Code[5] also adds that these qualifications will be ranked in accordance with the "classification of training levels" until such time as a new classification system, which corresponds more closely to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), is adopted. However, this classification system is still at the discussion stage and is, therefore, very much a work in progress.

In the case of classification by field of activity, the Classification of Training Specialisms (*Nomenclature des spécialités de formation/NSF*) is used.

[5] See also Decree No. 2002-616 of 26 April 2002 relating to the national register of vocational qualifications, Art. 2

Classification of Training Specialisms (NSF)

The Classification of Training Specialisms (NSF - Format PDF) that is currently in use was drawn up at the National Council on Statistics (Conseil national de l'information statistique/CNIS -)[6] in 1994. It is designed to cover all forms of training (initial or continuing, secondary or higher, vocational or non-vocational).

It consists of four hierarchical levels of classification. The first of these is a central level (the specialisms group) which uses 3-digit codes. At the next level, 2-digit codes are used to group together these specialisms.

Single-digit codes are used at the next level to divide these groupings into four broad areas: academic, technical and vocational (production), technical and vocational (services) and personal development. The final level allows for finer distinctions to be drawn within each group of specialisms.

Article R 335-13 also states that, in the register, CQPs (industry/sectoral qualifications) are not assigned a level but are classified separately and only by field of activity. Finally, for every qualification listed in the register, an announcement is published in the *Journal Officiel* (French official gazette).

[6] With around forty members (representatives from the economic and social sectors: the three constitutional assemblies, trade-unions, professional organisations, consular chambers, local authorities, researchers, non--profit organisations, journalists, INSEE, the Banque de France and INED), the CNIS expresses an opinion on the annual programme of public statistical surveys.

1.3. Institutional Setting

The RNCP has been managed and updated since its establishment by a new commission: the CNCP.

At the same time, Act No. 2002-73 of 17 January 2002 on Social Modernisation (Annex II, see chapter on the development of vocational training) created the CNCP, which was initially placed under the authority of the prime minister and had the general remit of promoting this "certification" approach, in other words encouraging the drafting of course content for French qualifications (which it was also responsible for reviewing) in terms of learning outcomes. It was thought that the widespread use of this method of drafting qualifications would provide greater "*clarity with respect to the labour market",* something which was clearly necessary given the high rate of youth unemployment.

The commission now falls under the aegis of the ministry responsible for vocational training (the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue).

It does not constitute an identifiable administrative entity fully independent from the ministry on which it depends. It is dependent for its staff, resources and information system on employment public policies and a budget managed by the general secretariat of the social ministries.

Article R335-24 of the Education Code (Annex II) determines the current composition of this committee which, like many other advisory commissions in France, includes representatives of the government, employers and employees. It currently has 47 members:

- 16 ministerial representatives:
- 3 representatives of the regions, appointed by the Association des Régions de France
- 10 social partners: 5 representatives each from the largest employers' and employees' organisations at national level
- 3 representatives from the consular chambers: representatives from the permanent assemblies of the chambers of agriculture, trades and crafts and the assembly of the French chambers of commerce and industry (CCI-France)
- 15 qualified members who take part in the work of the CNCP but do not have voting rights: the general and assistant rapporteurs, managers (or presidents of national organisations working in the field of vocational training) from Céreq, Centre Inffo

(Centre for Information on Continuing Training), ONISEP (National Office for Information on Education and Careers) and the *Haut comité Education-economie-Emploi* (High Committee for Education, Economic Affairs and Employment, etc.) and 2 representatives from European trade-union confederations

Articles R 335-25 to R 335-28 of the Education Code set out the committee's operating and deliberation procedures. Article L 335-6 of the Education Code describes its role and duties:

- To set up and update a national register of vocational qualifications (RNCP). In so doing, it also guarantees the consistency and complementarity of qualifications listed in the register and ensures that they are upgraded and adapted in line with developments affecting qualifications;
- To make recommendations to those institutions that award qualifications and to ensure that people and businesses (those that will use the qualifications) have up-to-date and clear information.

To make this information available to the broadest public, since it is one of the missions entrusted to it, the RNCP is accessible and can be consulted at the following address: http://www.rncp.cncp.gouv.fr/. It is presented as a searchable database in various ways, by qualification title, field code, authority responsible for the qualification or acronym (example CAP).

The CNCP is not a political body, in that it is not the body responsible for deciding which qualifications are included in the register. It is the minister responsible for vocational training (the current Minister of Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue) who makes the decision on the committee's advice. So it is really more a technical body whose remit is to express opinions and make recommendations relating to the inclusion of qualifications in the register.

No French legislation has, so far at least, ever mentioned the existence of a national qualifications framework (NQF), the only reference being to a national **register** of vocational qualifications. To our knowledge, it was not until 2010, and the report on referencing the French national qualifications framework to the European Qualifications Framework, that the term "national framework" was used. This report states that *"it is the national register of vocational qualifications that constitutes the French national framework"* (p. 4). However, as we shall see later, some qualifications are included in the register but have no level (CQPs for example) whereas others are classified at a particular level but do not feature in the register (the general *baccalauréat*, for example). There is no debate around what is included in the register, but what is included in the framework is sometimes questioned and interpreted in a variety of ways. In any case, what is in the framework is still under discussion and is not always stated clearly or unanimously. Consequently, our interlocutors expressed very different opinions on the links between the "framework" and the "register"*:*

"When the European Qualifications Framework came out, the group which was set up at the CNCP said 'the register formalises the framework' but 'anything that is not listed in the register with a level cannot be included in the framework'... So, they (CQPs) are in the register, but they're not in the framework because they don't have a level". (rapporteur from the CNCP)

"The register is the national framework." (rapporteur at the CNCP)

"The whole register is in the framework with the exception of the general and technological bacs." (rapporteur at the CNCP)

The inclusion of certain qualifications in the framework is not cut and dried:

"Their (CQPs) inclusion in our framework is perfectly justified."

Or: *"There are some things which have been assigned a level by decree or by law and... are not in the register."*

The process of referencing to the European framework has also led to the resumption of work on a new classification system that is more closely linked to the European framework and which will be used to assign levels to the qualifications included. For the time being, referencing to EQF levels is not done by the use of level descriptors but with the help of a simple correspondence table.

Table linking the French classification of training level (1969) with the European Qualification Framework

Nomenclature 1969	Grille CEC
I - Grade de Doctorat	8
I - Grade de Master	7
II - Grade de Licence	6
III	5
IV	4
V	3
Sans objet	2
Sans objet	1

CEC (French) stands for EQF
"Nomenclature de 1969" can be translated as "Classification of training levels" (1969)
Doctorat = PhD
Licence=Bachelor's degree
Sans objet = None

This table assigns in a conventional way an EQF level to recognised French qualifications. This straightforward and quick correspondence of levels is made easier by the existence of the earlier Classification of Training Levels (1969).

The first two EQF levels gave rise to some difficulties; they are never assigned because no state recognised qualification exists in France with a level lower than EQF level 3. A new classification based on the EQF has been recently set up but its descriptors (such as competences, skills and knowledge) have not yet been used to assign a level to the qualifications registered in the RNCP.

1.4. Types and Legal Status of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Any legal entity that is registered as a training provider is entitled to apply for the inclusion of a qualification in the RNCP. The same applies to organisations that are based overseas but operate in France. This requirement alone, if not adhered to, may lead to legal proceedings.

However, not all qualifications can be included in the register. In fact, only so-called "vocational" qualifications can feature, which totally rules out general secondary education qualifications. Therefore, the general *baccalauréat*, which has a level (Level IV) in the 1969 classification, is not included. In contrast, all higher education qualifications are deemed to be vocational qualifications and may, therefore, be included. There has, however, been some debate as to how higher education qualifications of a more academic nature (the general bachelor's degree, for example) should be dealt with. Initially, it seemed that there would be no place for them in the RNCP. In fact, the CNCP had to reach an agreement with representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education, who did not want to see any distinction made between different higher education degrees.

This concept of "vocational qualification", therefore, calls for some explanation. In France, it has a very specific meaning. Any qualification that prepares people for a job is classed as vocational, but this too requires some clarification:

- For example, anything which cannot be described as "personal development" is considered "vocational". Therefore, all qualifications certifying purely leisure activities that cannot lead to an occupation will be excluded from the register.
- A "vocational qualification" is one that results from a *qualification* process and that therefore brings with it some kind of recognition in the labour market and, to some degree, ensures access to it. Those involved in the CNCP refer to this as a *qualification complète*. When they talk of "trades" or "full-time occupations", they set down a number of indicators by which they can be measured.

A whole concept of the qualification underlies its likelihood of being included in the RNCP. This is the notion of a *qualification* as a form of industry-level recognition. A whole concept of the labour market also has an influence. In fact, only a full-time occupation is classed as a professional activity in its own right. This being the case, we will take a look, at the end of this section, at qualifications that do not meet this criterion but have recently been identified and listed in a register other than the RNCP, although they do not have a level and therefore do not feature in the national framework (NQF).

It is no easy task to create a typology of qualifications in France. One might, in fact, expect to see different typologies that reflect different points of view. However, with regard to the matter in hand (inclusion in the national qualifications framework), the legislature made an initial distinction in Act No. 2002-73 of 17 January 2002, which pertains to Social Modernisation. The procedures for inclusion in the register of qualifications are broken down by qualification type.

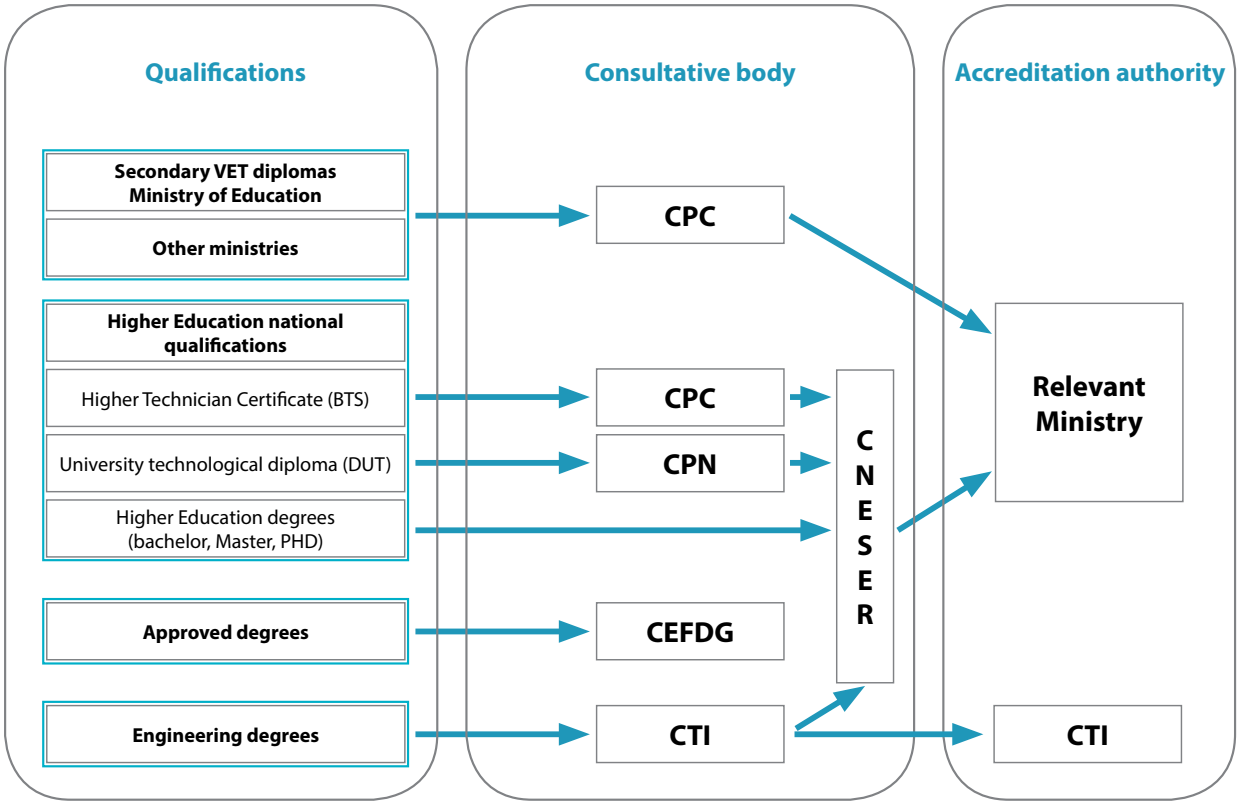
In fact, article R 335-16 refers to *"diplomas and degrees issued on behalf of the state which were created on the recommendation of advisory bodies in which organisations representing employers and employees are involved"*. The qualifications that belong to this category are important in the French system and they alone are eligible for automatic inclusion in the RNCP. Starting with these, we listed the different types of qualifications in the French certification system, from the most "formal" to the most "informal". Some qualifications, as we will show in the following chapters, lack one or more of the characteristic features of the category: some are awarded on behalf of the state but without any consultation with tripartite commissions, others are not awarded by the state and a final category is made up of private qualifications that are sometimes developed without consultation with the social partners.

Qualifications issued on behalf of the state on the recommendation of tripartite advisory bodies

The qualifications in this category are issued on behalf of the state; that is, they are "*created by decree and are organised in accordance with an order issued by the ministers concerned, following consultation with advisory bodies which include employer and employee representatives*" (Article L 335-6 of the Education Code). They are diverse in nature and can certify training programmes in the areas of initial or continuing training and secondary or higher education. The awarding bodies may also be private or public. Figure 1.1 shows the diversity of these qualifications. It shows subtypes, which are differentiated according to the type of advisory body that recommended its creation. However, it is the relevant ministry for the occupation targeted by the qualification, or an administrative body, that makes the decision as to whether the qualification should be created; hence it may be issued on behalf of the state.

Figure 1.1.

QUALIFICATIONS ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE STATE AND CREATED FOLLOWING CONSULTATION WITH CONSULTATIVE BODIES



Qualifications developed on the recommendation of Consultative occupational committees

This first group includes secondary and higher education qualifications7 and continuing training qualifications (issued by the Ministry of Labour) developed on the recommendation of **consultative occupational committees** (CPCs).

CPCs were introduced by Decree no. 72-607 of 4 July 19728 relating to consultative occupational committees and were set up by ministerial order. The Ministries of Education9, Agriculture10 and Labour11 were the first to set up advisory bodies. Then, after the introduction of the Social Modernisation Act of 17 January 2002, a second wave of ministerial CPCs was created: at the Ministry of Youth and Sport12, the Ministry of Social Affairs13 and finally, the Ministry of Culture14. Aside from the qualifications awarded on behalf of the ministries mentioned above, other public qualifications are developed (by other ministries) on the recommendation of advisory bodies that have the same status as CPCs although they are not recognised as such. This is the case with Ministry of Health qualifications, which are developed on the recommendation of the National Council for the Paramedical Professions (*Haut conseil des professions paramédicales*/HCPP), and some Ministry for Marine Affairs qualifications, which are developed following consultation with the Specialised Committee on Maritime Vocational Training (*Comité spécialisé de la formation professionnelle maritime*/CSFPM).

The members of the CPCs are appointed for a maximum term of five years. The remit of CPCs was originally couched in general terms, but this is no longer the case. They are now each defined by a legal instrument issued by the relevant ministry. They still share the same role of providing guidance and recommendations with regard to the creation, updating or withdrawal of qualifications and the drawing up of standardised learning outcomes for them.

The two main ministries (the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment) now have 14 and 7 CPCs respectively[15]. They usually consist of 4 colleges made

[7] These might be *brevets de technicien supérieur* (BTS) for the Ministry of Education, *brevets de technicien supérieur agricole* (BTSA - higher agricultural technician certificates), Ministry of Youth and Sport qualifications (state youth, popular education and sport diploma - DEJEPS, etc.) and Ministry of Labour qualifications ranked at level III (in the 1969 classification).

[8] Their direct precursors, the *Commissions nationales professionnelles consultatives* (CNPCs - national consultative occupational committees) were, however, set up much earlier, shortly after 1946.

[9] Order of 19 March 1973 relating to the creation of consultative occupational committees in the Ministry of Education.

[10] Order of 10 June 1985 relating to the creation and operation of the consultative occupational committee for agriculture and associated activities.

[11] Order of 2 July 1973 relating to the creation by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Population of consultative occupational committees for metallurgy, building and public works and administrative management.

[12] Order of 27 September 1999 relating to the creation and operation of the CPC for occupations related to sport and entertainment. 13 Order of 11 September 2002 relating to the creation of a CPC for social work and social intervention.Order of 19 June 2006 relating to the creation of a CPC for the performing arts.

[13] Order of 11 September 2002 relating to the creation of a CPC for social work and social intervention

[14] Order of 19 June 2006 relating to the creation of a CPC for the performing arts.

[15] In the case of the Ministry of Education, these include the CPCs for Metallurgy, Chemistry, Commerce and

up of representatives of employers, employees, local authorities and qualified professionals. The number of representatives in the different colleges is not always balanced but equal numbers are always maintained in the employer and employee colleges. By way of example, we will look at the Ministry of Education CPCs.

The Ministry of Education CPCs.

Their role is now defined by Decree no. 2007-924 of 15 May 2007 relating to consultative occupational committees and the inter-occupational consultative committee set up by the Ministry of Education.

The 14 CPCs set up by the Ministry of Education are tasked with providing guidance and suggestions on how to define vocational diplômes by drawing up their standards, on the need for vocational qualifications in view of the developments taking place in occupations and on the consistency of qualifications.

The composition of CPCs is, however, set out in article 1 of the Order of 15 May 2007 relating to consultative occupational committees. It is divided into 4 colleges: 10 employer representatives put forward by the largest employer organisations in the sector concerned, 10 employee representatives put forward by the main trade unions in the sector concerned, 10 local authority representatives, 10 qualified professionals (teacher and lecturer representatives, representatives of consular chambers and parents' associations, along with a technological education advisor.)

The ministries mentioned above, which specialise in the area of public qualifications, have the authority to decide whether the qualifications mentioned in this paragraph can be created or not. These might include, therefore, the Ministries of Education, Employment, Youth and Sport, Agriculture, Social Affairs, Culture, Health and the Ministry for Marine Affairs.

National higher education degrees

Also included in this first group are higher education degrees. They are the largest in number[16] and the most diverse in nature but, in all cases, it is the Ministry of Higher Education that has the authority to make decisions relating to their creation, upgrading or withdrawal[17]. In fact, in France, the state has a monopoly on the awarding of degrees and other higher education degrees. Although this monopoly has a long history[18], it nonetheless remains very important and is reaffirmed in Article L 613-1 of the Education Code, amended by Act no. 2013-660 of 22 July 2013 - Art 37. The same article stipulates that "national degrees issued by the

Distribution, etc.

[16] This will be covered in the next section, which deals with the procedure for inclusion in the register by entitlement.

[17] It should be noted that it is the same ministry that makes decisions regarding the creation, upgrading or withdrawal of the BTS qualifications mentioned above.

[18] We actually need to go back as far as the Act of 18 March 1880.

institutions are those which confer one of the degrees or other *university degrees that appear on the list created by decree and on the advice of the National Council for Higher Education and Research (Conseil national de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherché/CNESER)".* **The list of national higher education degrees** (other than in health-related subjects) is set out in Article D613-6, established by Decree no. 2013-756 of 19 August 2013:

1. *certificat de capacité en droit* (law qualification which grants access to higher education);
2. *diplôme d'accès aux études universitaires* (diploma granting access to higher education)
3. baccalauréat;
4. *brevet de technicien supérieur* (higher technician's certificate - BAC+2);
5. *diplôme universitaire de technologie* (2-year university technological degree)
6. *diplôme d'études universitaires scientifiques et techniques* (2-year university science and technology degree);
7. *diplôme d'études universitaires générales* (2-year general degree);
8. *diplôme national de technologie spécialisé* (3-year specialised technology degree);
9. *Licence* (bachelor's degree - BAC+3);
10. *diplôme national de guide interprète national* (tour guide diploma - BAC+3);
11. *maîtrise* (now year one of master's course - BAC+4);
12. master's (BAC+5);
13. *diplôme de recherche technologique* (technological research degree - BAC+6);
14. *doctorat* (PhD, BAC + 7);
15. *habilitation à diriger des recherches* (authorisation to supervise research).

Higher education institutions can also offer training leading to their own qualifications; these are not, however, national degrees (Article L613-2 of the Education Code, amended by Act no. 2013-660 of 22 July 2013 - art. 44). These include, for example, *diplômes d'universités* (DUs), which we will look at later, since they belong to another category.

Since the Act of 22 July 2013, the Ministry of Higher Education, on the recommendation of the CNESER (Article 613-1 of the Education Code), has granted higher education institutions (particularly universities) "accreditation"[19] to issue national degrees. The creation, upgrading or withdrawal of any national qualification is also subject to recommendation by the CNESER. The CNESER

[19] The accreditation procedure consists of the assessment of a dossier containing details of all the training provision offered by an institution. The institution prepares a comprehensive application providing details of its links with external agencies, course contents, etc. It also contains certain indicators, which might include the numbers of students who enter the workforce on completion of their course. The dossier is then submitted to the relevant department (the accreditation department) at the Ministry of Higher Education.

acts as an advisory body for the social partners, except in the case of the BTS[20] and DUT qualifications[21], which are developed, upgraded or withdrawn on the recommendation of other advisory bodies.

CNESER: composition and role

Set up in 1946 (Act No. 46-1084 of 18 May 1946 on higher councils and teaching and learning councils), its composition and representativeness were fixed by the Higher Education or Faure Act (no. 68-978 of 12 November 1968) and then the Jospin Act (no. 89-486 of 15 July 1982).

Chaired, depending on the subject concerned, by the Minister of Higher Education, the Minister for Research or their representatives, it has 100 members who are divided up as follows: 60 representatives from public higher education or research institutions (general staff, teaching staff and students) and 40 representatives from the main national interest groups (16 to 20 members representing employers and employees; 3 members each from the upper lower houses of the French parliament and the Conseil Economique et Social; 2 representatives from local government associations, 2 parent representatives and 2 representatives from student organisations (Articles D232-2 and D232-5 of the Education Code amended by Decree no. 2014-1421 of 28 November 2014 - art. 3 and 6

It is consulted on matters relating to higher education policy and qualifications (budgets, introducing a new qualification, setting up new institutions, etc.). It gives advice relating to the national training framework[22], the list of national degrees and accreditation procedures. It also has a disciplinary function[23] (Article L232-1 amended by Act no. 2016-925 of 7 July 2016 - art. 52).

The CNESER acts as an advisory body but its composition and remit are sometimes controversial. The CNESER's remit is wide-ranging and it never submits applications to create qualifications to intense scrutiny. Although it includes employer and employee representatives, these are vastly outnumbered by academics. So there is no comparison with the balanced compositions of CPCs, the national pedagogical commissions (*commissions pédagogiques nationales*/CPNs), which we shall be looking at next, or the Engineering Degrees Committee (Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur/CTI).

Diplômes universitaires de technologie (DUT) (*2-year university technological degrees*), which are short-cycle higher education degrees offered by **Instituts**

[20] As we mentioned earlier, these are also developed, upgraded or withdrawn with the recommendation of CPCs.

[21] We will refer to these later in this report.

[22] We will look at this system later in this report.

[23] Over teaching staff in higher education institutions.

universitaires de Technologie (IUT) (*university technological institutes*)**,** are awarded on completion of two years of education after the *baccalauréat* (particularly the general *baccalauréat*) and are available in 24 specialisms. They are included in the list of **national degrees** and their creation, upgrading or withdrawal is subject not only to the approval of the CNESER but also to that of the **national pedagogical commissions (CPN)**.

The remit and composition of CPNs

CPNs were created by the Order of 22 June 1967. Initially, there was one for each specialism. They were then set up by the Minister for Higher Education by the order of 4 June 1992 relating to the national consultative committee for IUTs and the national pedagogical commissions (chapter II). They provide suggestions relating to programmes leading to the award of 2-year technological degrees (DUT), assess the quality of training courses delivered in departments and express opinions on educational development projects.

They are made up of 25 members, who can serve for a term of 4 years (and who can be reappointed only once): 5 teacher-researchers or teachers (of whom at least 3 have been heads of department in the specialism concerned), 5 representatives from occupations associated with the specialism(s) who are appointed by the main organisations, 5 student representatives from the specialism(s) concerned and 5 qualified professionals who can demonstrate practical experience or interest in the specialism(s) (these quite often include teachers of the particular specialism(s)).

The number of CPNs (17 so far) is to be reduced in the future. They have, for some years, been involved in re-writing training programmes for these specialisms in terms of learning outcomes.

State-approved *diplômes*

State-approved *diplômes* are qualifications awarded by higher education institutions that are run privately or by chambers of commerce and industry (mainly business and management schools) and which, when set up, are granted a form of state recognition. Authorisation to award state-approved *diplômes* is granted by the Minister for Higher Education. It is valid for a period of 6 years and can be renewed with the approval of the CNESER[24] (Order of 8 March 2001 relating to qualifications awarded by higher education institutions run privately or by chambers of commerce and industry which are recognised by the state). The institutions that issue this type of qualification include institutions as different as the *Institut polytechnique Lassalle-Beauvais*, the *Ecole supérieure de journalisme de Lille* and the *Ecole de design Nantes Atlantique*.

Business and management schools can also be authorised to issue state-approved *diplômes* or even degrees (Master's degrees, for example) but, to do so, they require not only the approval of the CNESER but also that of another commission: the Commission for the Evaluation of Management Training Courses and Qualifications (*Commission d'évaluation des formations et diplômes de gestion*/CEFDG).

The CEFDG

Set up by decree in 2001[25], the Commission is responsible for "assessing the business and management courses delivered by higher education institutions run privately or by chambers of commerce and industry, as part of the procedures covering state recognition and the authorisation to award qualifications that are laid down in articles L443-2 and L641-5 of the Education Code" (Article 4 of this decree)[26].

It consists of 16 members appointed for a term of 4 years by the minister responsible for higher education and the minister for commerce and industry: 4 representatives from the business community, 4 academics working in the field of business and management, 4 representatives from schools and training courses run privately or by chambers of commerce and industry, and 4 qualified professionals (2 nominated by the minister for higher education and two nominated by the minister for commerce and industry).

The opinions delivered by the CEFDG will vary depending on whether they relate to the granting of state approval or a master's degree. Master's degrees are assessed more rigorously. However, in both cases, approval is granted for a period ranging from 1 to 6 years.

[24] This assessment covers entry requirements, the delivery of the course content and the criteria governing the award of the diploma.

[25] Act no. 2001-295 of 4 April 2001 relating to the creation of the Commission for the Evaluation of Management Training Programmes and Qualifications.

[26] So, unlike the Engineering Degrees Committee, which we will mention later, the CEFDG only assesses private institutions.

Engineering degrees

In France, this category consists of a number of different qualifications: engineering degrees awarded by a school of engineering (which may be state-owned or private), specialised engineering qualifications for those who already have an engineering degree and finally the state engineering degree *(titre d'ingénieur diplômé par l'Etat)*, to which students can gain access through VAE. For all these qualifications, it is the institutions that award them that are accredited, either by the administrative authority to which they report (following approval from the Engineering Degrees Committee (CTI), in the case of state institutions, and by the CTI itself for private ones).

The tri-partite consultative committee that considers applications for the recognition of an engineering degree is the CTI. This is an independent body with a fairly long history. Set up by the Act of 10 July 1934, it is responsible for authorizing private institutions to award engineering degrees. In 1984, its remit was extended to include assessing state educational institutions prior to the granting of authorisation. Since Act no. 2013-660 of 22 July 2013 relating to higher education, the decision handed down by the administrative authority under whose jurisdiction the institution falls has been known as "accreditation" (articles L642-1, L642-3 and L642-4 of the Education Code).

The Engineering degrees Committee

This committee has 32 members, who are split into three colleges. The first college consists of 16 members chosen from among higher education staff. The second is made up of 8 members from the largest employer organisations. The final college consists of 8 members chosen from associations and trade-unions representing engineers. Its members are appointed by Ministry of Education decree for a term of 4 years and they may serve for only two terms.

Upon request, the CTI assists the institutions which it is assessing by providing documentation[27] or making site visits. The period of validity of the authorisation can vary between 1 and 6 years, depending on the quality of the training. Its assessment criteria focus on governance and the standard of research undertaken and also put a strong emphasis on the description of the competences expected and the role of engineering professionals in the institution's bodies.

Finally, and significantly, the CTI is a full member of the European bodies responsible for quality assurance in higher education and the accreditation of the Grandes Ecoles d'Ingénieurs. It is a member of ENQA and ECA and was awarded the European EUR-ACE label in 2007. It is also a member of ENAEE. Finally, it has also been listed in EQAR since 2010[28].

[27] As is the case with the CNESER.

[28] Its status as an independent organisation means that it can hold European accreditations to which the CEFDG is not entitled.

The qualifications referred to above fall into the category of those eligible for inclusion by entitlement in the French national qualifications framework (see above). They are the most formal of all the qualifications in this system. Those that follow (points 2.2 to 2.5) may be included by request (except those in the Inventory) and might be described (in this case, including those in the Inventory) as non-formal education qualifications[29].

Qualifications issued on behalf of the state and without recommendation from tripartite advisory bodies

Some ministries award qualifications that are not developed through and following recommendation from advisory bodies. However, in the French system, as we have seen, it is not only the awarding authority that is important, but also the existence (or otherwise) of a consultative committee involving employer and employee representatives. For example, the Ministry of Defence offers 65 qualifications that were created without referral to a relevant body and which, as a result, do not fall into this category. These include the Ministry of Defence Expert in Management or Air Traffic Controller/Supervisor qualifications. This is also the case for some Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Ecology qualifications.

"Private" qualifications

The vocational qualifications[30] that do not fall into the above categories can also be very varied. The category of qualifications which we refer to as "private" is also very diverse. It also includes qualifications developed by public institutions (under the aegis of ministries) but in their own name (rather than on behalf of the state). These include all university qualifications (which are not national degrees and therefore do not belong to the category described in paragraph 2.1.2), and qualifications from public higher education institutions such as the *Conservatoire national des Métiers* (CNAM - National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts) or *instituts d'études politiques* (IEP – political studies institutes). This category also includes various qualifications developed by consular bodies such as chambers of agriculture, trades and crafts, commerce and industry, provided that the qualifications in question are not state approved[31]. CCI-France, in fact, awards qualifications in all specialisms and at all levels in the following areas:

- business, sales, hospitality, tourism, catering and international trade[32]
- fibre optics

[29] For more information on the typology of qualifications, please see "Methodology for preparing country reports" p. 16.

[30] Eligible for inclusion in the RNCP. As we shall see in the following paragraphs, other qualifications may now be listed, without being included in the RNCP.

[31] As is sometimes the case for qualifications from business and management schools that operate under the auspices of chambers of commerce and industry (see paragraph 2.3.1 above).

[32] Eight of which are now included in the RNCP.

- logistics
- secretarial and assistance work

Finally, there are qualifications awarded by private, profit or non-profit training providers.

Sectoral qualifications – a special case

Sector-specific or industry-level qualifications *(certificats de qualification professionnelle*/CQP) awarded by particular occupational sectors are unique among the qualifications recognised by the CNCP

- CQPs may or may not be included in the register. They may be included in the register on a voluntary basis and, in that respect, are akin to "private" qualifications.
- Above all, CQPs are qualifications which are included in the register but which are not classified by level. Thus according to the definition of the framework given above (p. 18), they may or may not be in the 'framework'.

Before examining these aspects of CQPs (particularly the second one), let us take a look at their recent history.

The origin and development of CQPs

The option enabling occupational sectors to draw up lists of *qualifications* to certify training delivered as part of block-release programmes (*qualification* contract, 1983 and 1984) dates back to legislation that was passed in 1986 and then confirmed in 1988. It came against a background of constantly rising youth unemployment and criticism of training provision for young people.

CQPs were set up under the auspices of the joint national employment committees (*commissions paritaires nationales de l'emploi*/CPNE) in the different occupational sectors and were awarded in their name. Introduced by a national agreement in 1969, CPNEs are joint bodies made up of employer representatives and representatives from trade-unions. They handle matters relating to employment and have gradually extended their area of competence to include training. The opportunity afforded to occupational sectors to create their own certificates to validate their training courses represented quite a departure. Like approved *diplômes*, these certificates broke the state monopoly on the issuing of nationally recognised qualifications. The state plays no part in the development and award of CQPS nor is it involved in recognising them. The Ministry of Education has a long-held opposition to them.

The certification procedures that appeared in 1987 (these were now real training and certification procedures rather than mere "lists of certificates") came into wider use during the 1990s and 2000s, reaching all the main occupational sectors (with the exception of banking). At the beginning of 2016, 124 occupational sectors had set up such schemes. They are influenced by the organisation and political

objectives of the industries concerned and this results, among other things, in a marked variation in the numbers of qualifications from one occupational sector to another (Veneau & al., 1999). So, there are more than 200 certificates for metallurgy (the automobile, aeronautics, electricity and steel industries) and just one for the fast food industry. At the beginning of 2016, there were a total of 1,124 CQPs. However, little is known about what these qualifications consist of, and still less about the people who study for them (are they unemployed young people and/or people already in work?). It seems that the number of people involved is quite low and that this varies, not only from one CQP to another but also within a single occupational sector.

The CQPs in the register…

The number of CQPs included in the register is quite small. There are 347 of them (300 of them active), which represents a third of all the qualifications included as of the beginning of 2016. However, the number of CQPs is slowly growing: in 2011, 35 applications for renewal or inclusion were recorded and the figure rose to 77 in 2015. The number of applications varies widely from one occupational sector to another. Some of them register all or almost all of their CQPs. So, all CQPs for the plastics and automotive repair industries, of which there are more than twenty, are included. The same goes for the cleaning industry.

Another interesting example is that the ceramics industry had not submitted any of its CQPs until this year. Since then, following a change of leadership and policy, it requested the registration of all its CQPs. This case illustrates a more general upward trend in CQP registrations.

In contrast, other industries do not yet have them included or have submitted only a small number. The construction and public works sector submitted applications for only 3 of the 27 CQPs developed in the sector. Between these two extremes, there are all manner of scenarios.

There is no real incentive to have CQPs included. It should also be remembered that there is no obligation to do so - applications are submitted to the CNCP on a voluntary basis. Nor does the very limited use of these qualifications by companies in the sectors concerned serve as an encouragement to submit applications. Finally, the low number of applications submitted by certain sectors sometimes also reflects a desire to assert a degree of independence vis-à-vis the state:

"Why should sectors seek state recognition for their qualifications?" (a representative of an employers' association).

… but without a level

The position allocated to CQPs in the register is clearly specified in the Social Modernisation Act of 2002. Paragraph II of article 134 draws a clear distinction between *diplômes* and other qualifications obtained through the education and training system, on the one hand, and CQPs, on the other. There has never been any

legislation to change this. The unique status of CQPs arose out of a compromise on the part of a government that did not wish totally to exclude sectoral qualifications from the register but still felt it necessary to highlight the fact that they are different from qualifications obtained through the education and training system.

Another contrast and another compromise, almost as evident, apply to the inclusion of CQPs in the register. Some occupational sectors argued that CQPs, like qualifications obtained in the state system, should be included in the register by entitlement. This demand was met by opposition from the government. This led to another "compromise": the inclusion of CQPs is subject to the "by request" procedure and they are, therefore, examined by the CNCP, but the application dossier required and the evaluation criteria for these qualifications are not as stringent as those for applications from private or public training providers.

The conditions that apply to the inclusion of CQPs and the procedure for obtaining state recognition for these certificates highlight the central role which the state still plays in the recognition of qualifications. The governmental seal still has a certain cachet and is a "privilege" for those qualifications entitled to use it.

Qualifications included in the inventory: a new kind of recognition?

Act No. 2009-1437 of 24 November 2009 relating to career guidance and lifelong vocational training requires the CNCP to identify *"qualifications and accreditations that correspond to the cross-cutting competences used in the workplace"* (article L 335-6 of the Education Code). What it is looking for exactly is any means of certifying vocational competences that is not linked to a *qualification* (i.e. to an occupation that is recognised in an industry-level agreement), is not included in the French classification of 1969 and usually involves short courses. However, Act No. 2014-288 of 5 March 2014 relating to vocational training, employment and social democracy introduced a new register, "the Inventory", to identify these types of qualifications.

The Inventory was created at the same time as the personal training account (*compte personnel de formation*/CPF). These accounts, for those in work and the unemployed, are topped up with 25 hours' training entitlement a year. People, particularly the unemployed, can use these hours to take courses that lead, among other things, to the qualifications listed in the Inventory. For a training provider, the inclusion of its qualification(s) in the Inventory makes it eligible for the CPF and hence for funding. On a broader level, the creation of an inventory echoes the idea that the possession of a qualification improves employment prospects; it is also consistent with policies designed to cut training costs. The qualifications in the Inventory are classified into three categories.

The categories for listing qualifications in the inventory

A. Qualifications and accreditations, resulting from a legal or regulatory obligation, that are required to work in a particular trade or profession in France (for example: electrician accreditations or CACES safe driving certificates for cargo handling, etc.)

B. Qualifications that relate to a specific field, are highly valued in a particular occupational environment and whose possession is recommended by a body representing the social partners (BULATS (Business Language Testing Service)[33], Microsoft Certification - Installation and configuration of Windows Server 2012 (70-410), qualification in copper welding as per standard NF EN ISO 9606-3,...).

C. Qualifications that apply to a homogeneous set of competences that may be required in one or more occupations and that help and encourage holders to enter the labour market and then hold down a job (TOSA office skills certificate, *certificat voltaire* (spelling skills), *certificat de compétences en entreprise* (CCE - "Managing a work team" business skills certificate), *maîtrise des compétences clés de la propreté* (MCCP - key skills for the cleaning industry...).

Taken from the Ministry of Labour Order of 31 December 2014, which defines the procedures for recording in the inventory those qualifications and authorisations mentioned in article L 335-6 of the Education Code

The CNCP's examination of applications for inclusion in lists B and C of the Inventory focuses on the qualification's standardised learning outcomes. It must be reiterated that no level is assigned to qualifications included in the Inventory. [33]

The CTH, and later the CNCP, have long been opposed to the accreditation or inclusion of anything that is not a *qualification,* on the grounds that partial *qualifications* cannot be recognised. In this respect, the creation of an inventory is a truly new development and so it is difficult to assess its full impact at the current time. We will return to this issue in our conclusion.

Legal status of qualifications included in the NQF

In the French system, all qualifications (formal or informal) belong to the *"organisations and bodies that created them"* (Art L 335-6 of the Education Code). A qualification is, therefore, considered *"an intangible asset"* (rapporteur from the CNCP). In other words, a qualification can remain "private", even though it is included in the RNCP. This has far-reaching consequences. If a training provider wishes to award a qualification that is included in the RNCP, it must have the consent of the body that created it (and, therefore, owns the qualification). It can only award the qualification in accordance with any restrictions imposed by the body. The body

[33] An example can be found in Annex 1.1.

that owns the qualification may, if it so chooses, offer this organisation the chance to enter into agreements or other contracts with it.

"From the moment it enters into an agreement, it must ensure that whatever is done by the provider, whatever is done in the organisation it has entered into an agreement with, fully complies with its own terms and conditions, and must provide the means to monitor this." (rapporteur from the CNCP)

When it receives an application for inclusion, the CNCP scrutinises any agreements which have been set up and entered into by a central body which owns the qualification in question and any other bodies which issue it[34]. To enable it to do this, it asks the applicant for detailed information on the organisations that award the qualification and also the contractual relationships that exist between them and the body that owns the qualification.

Where the shelf life of the qualification listed is concerned, the law provides that:

"These organisations or bodies must, for the whole period of validity of the listing, guarantee:

- *the transparency of information provided for the public about the qualification which they award*
- *the quality of the certification process*
- *the quality of the qualification awarded by each member of the network, in cases where they head a network of training providers that issue the same qualification"* Art L335-6 of the Education Code amended by Act No. 2014-288 of 5 March 2014 – art 34.

And so it is the organisation which owns the qualification which is ultimately responsible for the conditions of issue. A case in point is the Charter proposed by CCI-France for consular chambers joining its network and wishing to award its qualifications. It includes by-laws, a list of all members of the network and a model sponsorship agreement[35].

This article also indicates that bodies that have developed qualifications are at liberty to make public their contents and the procedures for awarding them. The standardised learning outcomes and evaluation procedures for qualifications issued on behalf of the state[36] are usually made public. The other certification bodies (particularly private ones) do not usually do this, nor are they under any obligation to do so.

If a training provider wishes to award a qualification that is included in the register and does not seek, or fails to obtain, the approval of the body that developed it,

[34] The same degree of precision is required in the application dossier (which must be compiled for inclusion by request) whether there is a network of joint certification bodies or not.

[35] For more information about this system, please see Chapter 1.5, which deals with quality assurance procedures.

[36] We are thinking primarily of the main ministries that create qualifications following recommendation from advisory bodies.

there is one option open to it: it can develop its own qualification and seek to have it included in the register.

It could be said, therefore, that the French system encourages the creation (or even the proliferation) of qualifications. In effect, creating a new qualification does not seem to be the simplest solution, given the requirements for inclusion by request (the creation of a certification mechanism, the production of data relating to the employment obtained by students from three year groups, for example). However, it often happens that standardised learning outcomes that have been made public, i.e. those for Ministry of Employment qualifications, are "copied" and used to improve an application for inclusion. There may be no real proliferation in the number of qualifications, but it certainly creates a great deal of overlap. Therefore, the CNCP regularly encourages the creation of bridges[37] between "neighbouring" qualifications. It also encourages applicants to get in touch with awarding bodies that have already had their qualifications listed in the register.

[37] This involves aligning similar sections of different qualifications.

1.5. Procedure for Including Qualifications in the NQF

There are two procedures for inclusion in the RNCP: inclusion by entitlement and inclusion by request. As we shall see later, the two methods of inclusion are not designed for the same types of qualifications. Inclusion by entitlement is almost automatic as it arises out of a kind of obligation. In contrast, as its name suggests, inclusion by request is optional. However, to ensure that the list of existing qualifications is as comprehensive and clear as it can be, the French government has introduced measures to encourage bodies to have their qualifications listed in the register. Inclusion affords the qualifications, and hence the organisations which apply for their inclusion, certain rights:

- to award the qualifications as part of apprenticeships
- to receive funding for some continuing training initiatives
- to receive funding to cover VAE leave
- to work in regulated professions.

Qualifications eligible for inclusion by entitlement are those that comply with article R 335-16, amended by Decree no. 2011-1111 of 16 September 2011- Art 2.

"Inclusion by entitlement in the national register of vocational qualifications applies to vocational qualifications issued on behalf of the state that were created on the recommendation of advisory bodies in which organisations representing employers and employees are involved".

Qualifications owned and issued by occupational sectors, by ministries that do not develop their qualifications with tripartite bodies (the Ministries of Defence, Ecology, Culture, etc.), by public institutions under government supervision that award their own qualifications (the various consular chambers, some public higher education institutions, etc.), and by private training providers are all included by request.

Qualifications included by entitlement vastly outnumber those included by request. Accounting for around 73% of the qualifications included in 2013 and 2014, the former now represent ¾ of all active qualifications in the register (Table 1.1). This statistic highlights once again the dominance of the state in matters relating to the awarding of qualifications in France.

Table 1.1. Number of active qualifications registered in the RNCP from 2013 to 2015

	Year	2013	2014	2015
Active qualifications included by entitlement	no.	5,088	5,735	7,423
	%	73.5*	73*	75*
Active qualifications included by request	no.	1,841	2,111	2,484
	%	26.5**	27**	25**
No. of active qualifications		6,929	7,846	9,907

Source: CNCP.

* The number of active qualifications included by entitlement expressed as a proportion of the total number of active qualifications

** The number of active qualifications included by request expressed as a proportion of the total number of active qualifications

Inclusion by request

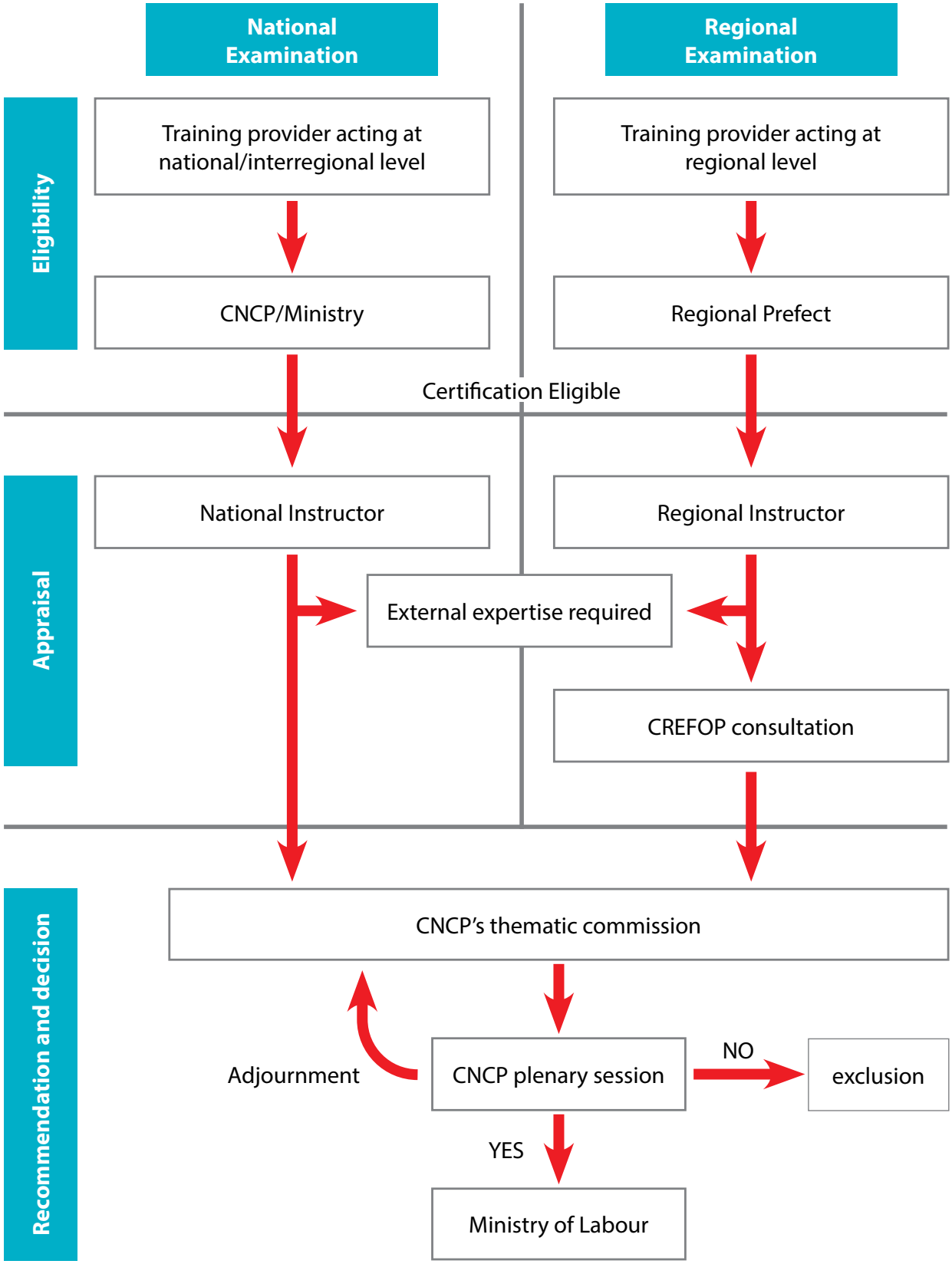
In these first two stages (*eligibility and appraisal*, see Figure 1.2), there are two separate appraisal procedures for inclusion by request: one for national qualifications and another for regional qualifications. The third stage (recommendation and decision), which is common to both, involves the examination of the various applications by the CNCP. This third phase is crucial as it culminates in the committee's recommendation. The final decision is made by the minister responsible for vocational training and an order is then published in the *Journal Officiel*. In our presentation we will focus on the distinction between these phases.

The distinction between national and regional appraisal, which involves different procedures and different types of participants, can be quite flexible. In practice, however, it is not always *straightforward:*

"Let's try again... fortunately the regulations are sufficiently ambiguous, they say, and I can quote "if the application in question comes from a regional organisation, then the application is passed to the regional "préfet". So that can then throw up a whole stream of regional v national questions. 'Do the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers institutions in my region operate at regional level or should it be the national institution that submits the application at national level?'" (rapporteur from the CNCP)

The rules may also be relaxed for reasons of efficiency or when insufficient numbers of appraisers are available. The two procedures are distinguished by one important feature, namely the recommendation made by the Regional Committee for Employment and Vocational Training and Guidance (*Comité régional de l'emploi, de la formation et de l'orientation professionnelle*/CREFOP) (see below), which forms only part of the regional appraisal procedure.

Figure 1.2. Procedure of inclusion upon request



Eligibility and appraisal

The national procedure

The national procedure applies to around 60% of inclusions by request. It is normally used for "national" qualifications. This term should be understood as requests from:

- ministries that have no CPCs
- occupational sectors
- training providers that operate in a number of regions
- public institutions that operate in their own right but are under the aegis of different ministries

The first stage, the eligibility phase, involves the submission of an application (see Annex 1) which must contain (article R335-17 of the Education Code):

- a description of the occupation to which the application applies
- a description of the learning outcomes that will be assessed
- the composition of the assessment/validation panel
- jobs held by former students from the last three year groups

During this phase, the application is checked by the authority tasked with assessing its eligibility.

"We simply check that the application is complete. When we receive the application, we look to see that they've provided information of some kind in the reference framework. If there's something there, that's fine as far as I'm concerned. As long as there's something in the VAE section, that's all right by me..." (rapporteur from the CNCP).

Finally, it should be noted that, where CQPs are concerned, there is no requirement to provide information relating to the destinations of former students. The CNCP does not consider this information relevant for this type of qualification since it is the employers themselves (employers' associations and/or companies) who create them.

Once eligibility has been established, the appraisal phase begins. This stage involves appraisers; there are currently 8 CNCP officials who perform this function. Expertise in a particular area may sometimes be sought, but this is actually quite rare. The work carried out by appraisers is not enshrined in law. Therefore, it tends to be somewhat vague. The ambiguity of the appraisers' remit is well known.

"We need some clarity where the role of appraisers is concerned, because they never know whether their remit is more to provide support and advice or simply to examine documentation." (rapporteur from the CNCP).

The appraiser should provide suggestions on how to improve the application. He/she points out anything that is not satisfactory:

"Afterwards, how the organisation concerned reacts is up to it alone and the appraiser has no further say in the matter...That's where the appraiser's involvement has to end." (rapporteur from the CNCP).

However, in practice, this cut-off point is not always clear. This throws up all manner of questions about what is meant by "support".

The regional procedure and the recommendation from CREFOP

This applies almost exclusively to private bodies that operate on a regional basis. In this case, the referral authority that assesses eligibility is the regional *préfet*. Civil servants from the decentralised departments of the Ministry of Education (inspectors) or the Ministry of Labour very often act as appraisers. What distinguishes the regional procedure is that it is CREFOP that makes the recommendation. This is the only case in which it does so. This recommendation is routinely borne in mind when the CNCP assesses applications in committee.

CREFOP

This committee is the regional counterpart of the National Council for Employment, Training and Vocational Guidance (Conseil national de l'emploi, de la formation et de l'orientation professionnelle/CNEFOP). These bodies were set up in 2014. It replaced other previous bodies and its area of competence was extended to include careers guidance. Like the CNEFOP, a CREFOP is a quadripartite body that includes representatives from regional authorities, the government, trade-unions and employers' organisations, together with representatives from regional consular chambers and public bodies that have an interest in employment, training and guidance issues. Its role involves carrying out diagnostic work and research, monitoring, and evaluating policies. It coordinates employment and training policies and ensures the consistency of training programmes in a particular region.

The CREFOP assess the suitability of the application within the regional context. It is called upon for its assumed knowledge of this context. The criteria it uses are not, therefore, those referred to in the CNCP. So its recommendation complements that delivered by the CNCP; it provides another angle on the application:

"The additional advantage of a CREFOP is that it has this regional perspective, so it can tell us whether or not there is a demonstrable need to create jobs" (rapporteur from the CNCP).

The examination of applications by the CNCP

We will look in turn at the examination procedure and the criteria used, before presenting a statistical overview of decisions made by the CNCP.

The examination procedure and tasks involved

Applications are examined first by a specialist committee and then at a plenary meeting. However, most of the work is done during the first examination. The second examination is only a cursory one. The recommendation of the specialist committee is borne in mind and, in all but exceptional cases, the plenary meeting

simply rubberstamps the work of the specialist committee. So we will focus on this committee.

The composition of the specialised committee is set out in article R 335-28 of the Education Code. It is made up of 23 members (47 for the CNCP): 10 representatives from ministries[38], 5 from trade unions and 5 from employers' organisations, along with 3 members of the CNCP. It includes no "qualified professionals" or representatives from consular chambers. The committee currently meets about 10 times a year.

The examination of an application begins with a presentation of the application (Annex 1), either by the appraisers (in the case of national applications) or by a rapporteur from the CNCP (for regional applications). The presentation includes explanations of how the contents of the application relate to the criteria or, where necessary, the background to the application. Members of the committee are often provided with contextual information. Most of the time is set aside for the discussion that follows the presentation; the members of the committee are expected to be familiar with the document, since they will have studied it beforehand. Questions, comments or opinions are again guided by the criteria. There may be consensus or disagreement. The examination concludes with a vote on the different methods of inclusion in the register. Obviously, the time required to examine an application will vary, depending on any issues that it might throw up, but it usually takes a quarter of an hour.

Examination criteria

The examination criteria used for applications to the CNCP are not laid down by law. Obviously, they are similar to the (legally defined) criteria used to assess the eligibility of applications (see above). The CNCP has also worded its criteria differently, although there are still 4 of them. We will focus on one criterion in particular, because it echoes what we observed in a specialist committee[39]. It is taken from the CNCP report on "referencing the French national qualification framework" (2010).

The four criteria are shown below, in full, and in the order in which they are stated:

- *"The existence and definition of the professional objective for which the qualification is designed". This criterion provides a means of determining the appropriateness of the qualification.*
- *Details of employment obtained by students from the last three year groups. This criterion provides a means of determining the effectiveness of the qualification in terms of helping students to find employment and the relevance of the level applied for.*
- *Certification mechanism. The standardised learning outcomes form part of a structure that prioritises the professional objective, a learning outcomes-based*

[38] Some of these are members by entitlement: The Ministries of Education, Labour, Higher Education, Agriculture, etc.

[39] We will also refer to the instructions on how to put together applications.

approach and a system that focuses on learning outcomes rather than on the training itself.

- *Accreditation of prior and informal learning (VAE). Particular attention is paid to the possibilities offered by VAE."*

When applications are examined, the fourth criterion ("a clear description of the specific eligibility criteria covering the candidate's application (nature and duration of the course leading to the qualification)", "description of the VAE procedure", etc.[40]) is not crucial because this section is compulsory and applicants, therefore, usually provide plenty of information. This is certainly not the case for the third criterion, which relates to the certification mechanism.

In its report to the prime minister (2015), in which it provides an overview of its activities, the CNCP notes:

"The most frequent recommendation made is that the quality of standards be improved: 44%".

The standardised learning outcomes created for Ministry of Education vocational *diplômes* in 1985 form part of a learning outcomes-based approach. During the 1990s and 2000s, following the introduction of policies designed to help young people into work and to improve efficiency, their use spread to include all diplomas, qualifications awarded by ministries and various different certificates. Their contents are highly standardised and codified. They begin with a list of the objectives (occupational tasks) to be achieved by candidates during the assessment process. Learning outcomes, defined in terms of the performance of a task ("being able to"), result from achievement of the objectives set (tasks to be accomplished). The course content has lost its pivotal position to "learning outcomes". These are assessed in highly standardised tests, are validated (or not) and are finally certified: hence the importance attached to the panels and assessment criteria during the examination of applications. And so the concept of *certification*, in the French sense, is bound up with the introduction of a learning outcomes based approach and the drawing-up of standards.

The importance of the "certification mechanism" criterion in the examination of applications - this was even more crucial in the early days of the CNCP - can be explained by the newness of the processes to which it refers. The French system, which for a very long time had focused on course content and the length of training courses, is now undergoing substantial changes. The attention paid by the committee to the different aspects of this criterion ensures that they are in line with the latest thinking.

The second criterion "definition of the occupational objective for which the qualification is designed" is closely related to the previous one. The first step in drawing up a standard involves defining an occupation or *qualification*. The learning outcomes are determined on the basis of the tasks associated with the occupation. Although this criterion is not normally the one that causes most problems - it does

[40] Extracts from sheet 9 of the application form.

not give rise to many recommendations - it frequently results in the assignment of a different level from the one originally applied for.

The level obtained is a significant financial issue for a private body and the assignment of a lower level than the one sought can be seen as a partial failure. It is undoubtedly "emerging occupations" that pose the greatest problems for the committee. For example:

"Not long ago, we had the "laughter doctor", a clown employed in a hospital - is that an occupation or not? Is there really any need for a certification procedure for 'hospital clown'? We have a clown classification that comes under the category of performing arts. But does working as a clown in a hospital qualify as a performing art? And then, the skill spectrum of a clown in a hospital is totally different from that of a performing arts clown in a circus: we're not dealing with Coco the Clown here. The work of a hospital clown involves a kind of mediation in a given context and that, for me, totally changes the nature of the occupation. But do we really need to issue a certificate for people - still I suppose there are now more and more clowns in hospitals - who are taken on to do the job in hospitals?" (rapporteur from the CNCP).

At the end of the debate, which was described by our interlocutor as *"passionate"*, the committee decided by 12 votes to 9 that it was indeed an occupation that could lead to a *qualification*. Obviously, the case mentioned is somewhat borderline[41], but it shows that this criterion is not always as straightforward as it might seem. It gives an idea of how certification can become a multi-faceted issue (involving, for example, financial or professional considerations). Finally, it highlights how difficult it is to make a clear distinction between what should be included in the register and what appears in the Inventory.

The final criterion focuses on the careers of those who gain the qualification. The tables that organisations have to fill in include: occupation, status, type of contract, gross annual salary "6 months after the qualification was awarded" and also "in the current post". And so, when the committee examines applications in session, the intention is to gain a fairly accurate idea of what qualification holders are actually doing and, should any doubts arise, these details (particularly employment status and salary) are compared using two "snapshots" taken at different times. The information provided by applicants is verified by appraisers in spot-checks and is very often included in their written reports or mentioned in the committee.

This criterion accounts for 21.6% of recommendations made but it is more important than this percentage suggests. For the rapporteur responsible for applications at the CNCP, this is now the "clincher":

The clincher is education-to-work transition. You can always say there's a tremendous need, but if this isn't backed up by evidence of people finding work... you can always create a wonderful system, but if people aren't finding jobs, then they've not finding jobs. On the other hand, when the number of people entering the workforce is good, we might decide that there's still room for improvement in the system, that there are things

[41] During the interview, our interlocutor mentioned other similar examples: "rope-access technician", "sophrologist", "personal trainer".

the organisation needs to address before it can meet the committee's requirements. So, in most cases, we would postpone our decision for an application which is good in terms of education-to-work transition but not up to scratch where standards are concerned, and tell them that we're delaying our decision for now. 'We can't approve your application because the VAE stage won't work. We'll delay our decision until you've got your system sorted out and then we'll approve it. When people aren't finding good jobs you can have all the systems you want, but if they're not finding good jobs, no amount of systems is going to change that. So, education-to-workplace transition is still very much the clincher. That's what will test the other criteria." (rapporteur from the CNCP)

The "education-to-work transition" criterion is also a crucial factor in the decision to reject an application or change a level, as the CNCP sometimes does.

The "education-to-work transition" and "certification mechanism" criteria were included in the CTH's application examination procedure at the same time in 1990-91. These two criteria both reflect a notion of "training" that focuses on results: results and effectiveness where those joining the labour market are concerned, and achievements or learning outcomes in the case of the "certification mechanism".

Statistical information relating to decisions

Firstly, we must stress that the majority of applications come from private institutions, most of which are non-profit organisations for which inclusion in the register and the "visibility" this brings are important (financial) considerations.

Table 1.2. Source of applications in 2015

	Public institutions/ ministries	Chambers of commerce and industry	Occupational sectors	Private institutions	Total
No.	49	44	77	295	467
%	10.5%	9.5%	16.6%	63.4%	100%

Source: CNCP

The majority (83.8%) of applications made by the different types of institutions were for higher education levels (levels III, II and I in the 1969 classification of training levels), with level II being the most frequent at 33.8%. This disproportionately high number of applications for HE levels reflects the share of these qualifications in the register as a whole. Along with these, the so-called "tertiary" specialisms account for almost 70% of total entries.

The table below shows the main decisions made by the CNCP over recent years: "approvals or rejections", "decision postponed" or "deferrals", the majority of which will be examined again when changes have been made and additional information supplied by the applicant.

Table 1.3. The CNCP's decisions between 2013 and 2015

No. of applications examined in a plenary meeting		**2013** 427	**2014** 489	**Years 2015** 465
– approvals	no.	340	367	373
	%	79.6%	75%	80.2%
– rejections	no.	35	61	46
	%	8.2%	12.5%	9.9%
– others (decision postponed)	no.	52	61	46
	%	12.2%	12.5%	9.9%

One fact emerges clearly: the vast majority of decisions are in favour of inclusion. Furthermore, when decisions are postponed – which is a more common scenario than a deferral – this is because additional information or improvements are required. When the applications are re-examined, they are generally approved, so it might be argued that the figure for approvals actually hovers around 90%. Ultimately, therefore, the rejection rate is fairly low; proportionately, this affects applications from private institutions slightly more often than it does other applications.

However, these raw figures need to be broken down. Forty-six per cent of applications received in 2015 were for the "renewal" of qualifications that were already listed. Inclusion in the register is typically granted for a maximum period of 5 years. This period can, however, be shorter. For example, in 2015, 40% of applications were granted inclusion for 3 years or less. So the CNCP frequently uses this option of reducing the period of inclusion as a means of sending out signals to those organisations, particularly private ones, which most often have their period of inclusion cut. Inclusion for a period of 3 years or less, rather than 5, serves as a "warning" for when an application for renewal is made. When renewal applications are examined, the period granted previously is almost always taken into account. Therefore, without going so far as rejecting an application for inclusion in the register, the CNCP has a number of means - changing the level requested, for example[42] – of expressing any reservations it might have about the application.

[42] In 2015, 5.4% of approvals involved a change of level. As a general rule, the level requested is revised downwards; in most cases, this decision is based on the information provided about the jobs and salaries of those who earn the qualifications.

The procedure for inclusion by entitlement

The qualifications involved

Qualifications included by entitlement account for almost 75% of all those included in the RNCP (see above) and almost half of these (except for BTS and engineering diplomas) are owned by the Ministry of Higher Education (Table 1.4.). This share actually increased from 42% to 48.5% between 2013 and 2015.

Table 1.4. Breakdown of qualifications (both active and inactive) included in the register between 2013 and 2015

		Year		
		2013	**2014**	**2015**
Qualifications included by request	no.	3,247	3,921	4,295
Qualifications included by entitlement	no.	5,794	6,288	8,295
– those issued by the Ministry for Higher Education	no. %	3,793 42%	4,208 41%	6,119 48.5%
– those issued by the Ministry of Education	no.	746	736	668
Engineering diplomas	no.	441	476	616
– those issued by the Ministry of Employment	no.	409	420	428
– those issued by the Ministry of Agriculture	no.	235	265	274
– those issued by the Ministry for Youth and Sport	no.	150	153	160
– those issued by the Ministry of Health	no.	8	16	16
– those issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs	no.	12	14	14
Total		**9,041**	**10,209**	**12,589**

Source: CNCP.

There is now some concern that the rise in the number of higher education qualifications in France could lead to confusion. In fact, it would appear that, where national higher degrees (bachelor's, vocational bachelor's and master's degrees) are concerned, universities are now tending to use different titles for courses with

sometimes quite similar content. Therefore, in 2014, a "national training courses framework" was set up (Order of 22 January 2014 establishing the national framework for training courses which lead to the award of national degrees: bachelor's, vocational bachelor's and master's degrees), in order, it is said, "*to guarantee clarity with respect to training provision for the sake of students, professional partners and the academic community" (*Art.3 of the same order). Higher education institutions are now able to offer training courses from a finite list compiled by the Ministry of Higher Education as part of a framework consisting of four broad areas:

- arts, literature and languages
- law, economics and management
- humanities and social sciences
- science, technology and health

Each area is then divided into "courses". The "course" is the benchmark level for defining course contents and organising their delivery. The new classification of courses is set down by ministerial order. There are 45 for the general bachelor's degree, 175 for the vocational bachelor's degree and 252 for the master's degree. As we saw earlier, institutions are accredited to issue these courses by the ministry, following recommendation from the CNESER. They are, however, free to organise the content of these courses as part of training pathways known as "typical routes". This legislation should lead to a reduction in the number of new degrees being created, as an institution can simply register a new course from a list of existing degrees. However, at present, the inclusion statistics show that the RNCP register still contains old fact sheets for universities whereas only fact sheets referring to "courses" should now be included. Work on assigning fact sheets to groups is still ongoing.

The statement of suitability

Qualifications awarded on behalf of the state and created following recommendation from advisory bodies are included by entitlement. However, the authorities (representing the state) responsible for these qualifications must produce a fact sheet that contains additional information. We will look at this in detail. When Act no. 2009-1437 of 24 November 2009- Art 22 relating to guidance and lifelong vocational training came into force, an additional stage was created prior to the production of the application form. The certification body must now apply to the CNCP for a statement of suitability to "create" a new qualification. This statement is, however, not required for state- approved diplomas and degrees, as these are already in existence when they receive state approval.

This additional stage was also designed to restrict the number of qualifications eligible for inclusion by entitlement which, as we have seen, accounted for the majority of qualifications included. In any event, it was intended to avoid duplication of qualifications and to improve consistency and clarity (Art L335-6: *"the CNCP ensures the consistency and complementarity of qualifications")*.

The CNCP must deliver its decision within a period of three months from the date when the application was submitted and, once this deadline has passed, the decision is deemed to be favourable. The decision is reached following examination of the fact sheets filled in by the applicants, who may be the relevant ministries or engineering degrees committees (for certain engineering degrees). There are two types of fact sheet (Annex 1.1): one for engineering degrees, the other for all other qualifications eligible for inclusion by entitlement.

Both documents include information about the qualification: title, awarding authority, objective and lists of occupations which it leads to. The fact sheet for engineering degrees is both more detailed and more comprehensive. It should include the learning outcomes targeted, the awarding school's local presence (how it contributes to development in the area), procedures for evaluating both the knowledge acquired by future engineers and the training delivered and, lastly, the quality assurance measures employed. These details also serve as criteria for the accreditation of engineering schools, in which the CTI has a small say.

The CNCP criteria for the statement of suitability are somewhat vague. There are areas of overlap with the information required in the RNCP document (see above). The details which are checked are: the employment prospects for holders of the proposed qualification, the status of the qualification within the existing provision[43]and, finally, the existence of VAE procedures through which people can gain the qualification.

What now becomes clear is that there is a significant difference between the number of applications (for the statement of suitability) and the number of degrees created or upgraded which, as shown above (Table 1.1), is rising. There are a number of reasons for this: the CNCP does not issue statements of suitability for upgrades to degrees, even if these are substantial. It actually seems to have a very narrow perception of what a "new qualification" is. And then, up to that point, the Directorate-General for Higher Education and School-to-Work Transition (*Direction générale de l'enseignement supérieur et de l'insertion professionnelle*/DGESIP) had not been routinely consulted by universities wishing to create qualifications.

The CNCP can deliver three types of decision: approval, rejection and qualified approval. The vast majority of opinions delivered since this procedure came into effect have been approvals (89%). The reasons for a rejection are not always taken on board by the authorities, which applied to create a qualification. In fact, this stage, as a rapporteur from the committee told us, is really *"just a formality"*. It does, however, give the CNCP the opportunity to make recommendations that might prove useful for the next stage.

The RNCP fact sheet

This document, which is also known as a "descriptive summary of the qualification" (Annex 1.1), is designed to appear in the RNCP. It should enable the reader to fully

[43] The CNCP then analyses similar qualifications and suggests possible 'bridges' (areas of correspondence between sections of qualifications) with the qualification in question.

understand the occupational objectives of the qualification. It is far more detailed than the application dossier that organisations applying for inclusion by request have to fill in, particularly with regard to the link between this qualification and the occupations targeted, the course content (standard), access arrangements, the procedures for awarding it and, finally, the career histories of qualification holders from the last three year groups.

This information is not required from representatives of the state who are applying to have their qualifications included. However, they are expected to provide it (or at least bear it in mind) when creating or upgrading qualifications. It is, in fact, the various consultative committees mentioned in Chapter 1.2 that are responsible for ensuring that the proposed qualifications meet the previously mentioned criteria. Some, however, do this more scrupulously than others (please see Chapter 1.5 for further details).

Unlike the procedure for inclusion by request, in the case of inclusion by entitlement, it is the representative of the state that created the qualification that sets its level. Under no circumstances it may be changed by the CNCP, as sometimes happens in the procedure for inclusion by request.

Finally, for qualifications included by entitlement, the period of inclusion in the register is decided by the ministry that awards them. For example, the period of inclusion for Ministry of Employment qualifications is five years, but for Ministry of Education qualifications there is no set period.

1.6. Quality Assurance of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Can we really speak of quality assurance in the French qualification system? What do we mean by "quality assurance"? Is it a process focused on the awarding of qualifications or on the development of the qualifications? We will consider these two aspects in turn, incorporating what we have already discussed.

Quality assurance and the awarding of qualifications

In France, it is the body that "owns" the qualification that is responsible for the quality of the procedure for awarding it (see above, Chapter 1.4). This might seem somewhat surprising. In the case of qualifications included by entitlement, the prestige in which the state (and, by extension, the school) is still held no doubt explains this rule. Thus it is the different ministries, and decentralised departments of these ministries acting on their behalf, which vouch for the quality of the procedures for awarding the qualifications they own.

- education authorities aided by inspection bodies, under the authority of the chief education officer (*recteur d'académie*), in the case of Ministry of Education qualifications,
- the regional employment services (*directions régionales du travail*), in the case of Ministry of Labour qualifications

Regardless of the ministries involved, the process is always the same; only the decentralised departments differ. In the case of higher education degrees (bachelor's, master's and doctorate), it is the institution where the qualification was developed (the principal of the IUT for DUTs, etc.). This "quality assurance" covers formal details relating to the recruitment of candidates, the conduct of examinations, etc.

The same procedure applies to inclusions by request. The organisations that own the qualifications are responsible for the quality of the procedures for awarding them. This also applies to networks. Network heads are, so to speak, answerable for all the members of the network. In some networks, this can result in a mentoring agreement between an existing member who has experience in awarding a particular qualification and a "new entrant"[44].

As we mentioned above (Chapter 1.4), it CNCP ensures that, when the application for the inclusion of a qualification is submitted, it contains all documents relating to the charters, conventions and regulations that apply to the network and define responsibilities within it, together with the conditions for awarding the qualifications in question. As it cannot check the compliance of activities undertaken, it requires certification bodies to make certain commitments[45].

[44] This is the case, for example, in the chambers of commerce and industry networks.

[45] The certification body could be a network head, in which case he/she is answerable for the whole network.

Only in this way can it act as a quality assurance body for qualifications that are not yet included in the register. So the procedure for inclusion in the register is akin to a quality assurance check. Prior to submission to the commission, the procedure depends on the works of national or regional instructors (some 15 individuals). They advise, instruct and offer expertise to applicants. In particular, they check that the application is complete and close to what is expected. This provision of assistance and their role in checking applications require frequent exchanges with applicants. In sum, these instructors ensure, as far as is possible, that the applications are of a certain quality when they are examined by the commission.

As far as the qualifications not included in the register are concerned, those included in the inventory for example, is the procedure for inclusion in the inventory, which again may serve as quality assurance. The criteria used for this registration are not far from those used for the register: learning outcomes descriptors, conditions of assessment and thus are the criteria for accrediting a certificate, for example. On the other hand, two criteria are specific. Certificates applying to the inventory must be endorsed and presented by a legal person (ministry, professional organization, industry joint commission, etc.) In addition, the application must contain recommendations from certificate users (mainly employers) highlighting its social and economic utility. Apart from the usual objective criteria for registration, the criteria of reputation or use in the professional environment are used here to serve as a form of quality assurance for certifications not intended to be included in the RNCP.

In both cases, there is no "external" checking procedure covering the award of diplomas, degrees or other qualifications. This principle is based on the firm assumption that all those concerned, including assessors, fully comply with expectations, standards and regulations. So it is a kind of "contractual" quality assurance based on *a priori* commitments.

Quality assurance and the development of qualifications

Where ensuring the quality of development processes is concerned, a distinction should be drawn between qualifications included by request and those included by entitlement. In the first case, the examination procedure, as far as the CNCP is concerned, is itself a "quality assurance" check for qualifications, as stated in the 2010 referencing report:

"Where vocational qualifications are concerned, the involvement of the CNCP, and hence the fact that the qualification is examined by a variety of stakeholders and in accordance with specific criteria and requirements, constitutes a quality assurance procedure."

Since it enjoys total freedom to make its own decisions and the power to vary periods of inclusion (see above), the CNCP is able to circumvent the problems inherent in the stark 'all or nothing' choice. It can require applicants to gradually move towards compliance with what is expected, and hence towards the level of quality defined by the CNCP.

"Sometimes you get better quality [than for applications for inclusion by entitlement] because we tell the organisations: 'hang on, that's no good. We gave you three years. It's not good enough. We'll include you for a year. If things haven't been sorted out within a year, then it's 'goodbye'!' And what do we tell the ministry? Nothing! It's up to them." (rapporteur from the CNCP)

As already mentioned, in the case of inclusion by entitlement, the CNCP's powers are very limited and are strictly controlled by legislation. In fact, as implied in the last part of the interview extract quoted above, it does little by way of quality assurance. It is, therefore, forced to leave it to processes over which it has no control and to their supposed quality:

"At the CNCP, we act within the powers set down for us in law. We're not going to displace the whole Ministry of Higher Education quality assurance procedure, for example." (rapporteur from the CNCP)

The scrutiny of diplomas and degrees (those which are eligible for inclusion by entitlement) by multipartite bodies in which potential users (e.g. employers' associations) are involved is intended to guarantee the relevance, legitimacy and, consequently, "quality" of what is developed. This quality is, of course, defined with regard to the occupation or, more specifically, the *set of tasks required in the occupation*[46]. This is a key feature of the French education and vocational training system. But what exactly is the point of having employer representatives in these bodies or involving them in the development of qualifications?

The status and role of professionals in CPCs is a frequent subject of discussion. Research into these committees, conducted at Céreq and elsewhere, tends to show that the planning and drafting of standardised learning outcomes is mainly done under the guidance of either inspection bodies (the Ministry of Education) or by system experts who have close links with those ministries that award qualifications (Ministry of Labour)[47]. Given this situation, the role of "professionals", a category which itself raises questions, seems difficult to pin down. On a broader level, a number of studies have highlighted the fact that when ministries (particularly the Ministry of Education) develop qualifications, they follow, first and foremost, their own internal logics, which are seldom discussed in CPCs. Not only do employer or employee representatives seem to have only a fairly limited influence in CPCs, but these bodies apparently do not play a crucial role, as most of the decisions are made elsewhere.

Similarly, we may wonder about the place of representatives from the professional community on CPNs as the qualification associated with these bodies (the DUT) is totally geared toward a kind of continued education which was developed without their agreement. We will not dwell on comments relating to the CNESER (see above) and on the largely symbolic role of employers' associations in this body. One comment will suffice:

[46] It should be noted that this is one of the main criteria for inclusion in the RNCP.

[47] In universities, there is currently only one "standard" for all degree courses. The design of course content for diplomas in the form of lists of "learning objectives" is still in its infancy in the case of national higher education degrees.

"At the CNESER, they seek the views of the social partners. That's ok. But there are just two of us in a group of fifty or more, so our opinion isn't all that important. In fact, it's not important at all, so it's just a big joke. It's all just a big joke. They don't seek the views of professionals at all for university degrees. It's worse now than it ever was. Before at the CNESER, we had tables that listed all the qualifications and we had access to all the documents. But now, with the new accreditation system, it's not organised by course, but by subject area broken down into courses." (employers' association representative at the CNESER)

We cannot, however, overlook the establishment, in 2013, of a High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (*Haut Conseil de l'Evaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur*/HCERES) to replace a previous agency set up in 2006. The role of this new agency includes the accreditation of higher education institutions. This *"independent administrative body"* has 30 members, most of whom are researchers and academics. Obviously, its evaluation role covers both research and teaching, but we will concentrate on the latter. The HCERES and the experts it appoints (more than 90% of whom are academics) use an approach that focuses on the training delivered rather than on the qualification: *"analysis focused on the quality and results of the training delivered"* (HCERES). Whereas the first term (training) is used throughout the model and the forms to be filled in, the second, on the other hand, does not appear: "purpose of the training programme", "objectives of the training programme", "positioning of the training programme", "structure of the training programme" being some of the evaluation criteria. The objective of the evaluation they carry out is far-reaching. Unlike the CNCP, it does not focus on a few criteria, such as "education-to-work transition". In any case, where this criterion is concerned, some institutions provide more information than others. In other words, and by way of conclusion, the evaluation method used by the HCERES favours the resources angle (human resources, teaching resources, materials, etc.) and plays down the results angle. In short, it distances itself from the very narrow definition of quality favoured by the CNCP. To a certain extent, the evaluation model adopted by the HCERES bears a certain resemblance to the one used by the CTI, particularly in terms of its global approach. However, unlike the CTI, the HCERES has only limited decision-making power. It has only a very indirect involvement in accreditation procedures.

1.7. Costs of Including Qualifications in the NQF

There is no application or inclusion fee. The CNCP's activities, like those of the ministry responsible for vocational training, are classed as public services and, in France, anything classed as a public service is free. Applications and inclusions do, however, involve a cost for the state. It is primarily the Ministry of Labour that covers costs, which it does out of its allocated budget. However, it should be noted that the CNCP currently employs 17 people. The number of applications for inclusion in the register now stands at just under 500 a year. Registrations are currently free of charge, and the current rise in the number of qualifications is leading to some operational difficulties, although free registration is not the only reason for these difficulties (cf Chapter 1.4. Legal Status of Qualifications Included in the NQF).

Applications do, however, involve a cost for the applicant, particularly where the certification mechanism and the monitoring of former students are concerned. There is no way of knowing how much this may be and, in any case, it is likely to vary considerably.

1.8. Current Debate on Further Developments

The French state system for the recognition of qualifications has experienced two major developments. First, the qualifications the state has recognized have diversified so much that, in the recent period, redundancies have emerged. Second, the object of this recognition is no longer training but what it leads to: qualification. Even if these developments have until now maintained the principle that recognition (by the state) must aim at a *qualification* (French, paragraph 1.2), the durability of this system is now being challenged. From this point of view, it seems important to point out two major issues of the current period. Will the French framework eventually give up its notion of *qualification*? Will professional organisations play a greater role in the regulation of the French qualification system?

Firstly, the creation of an Inventory (see Chapter 1.4, section on "Qualifications included in the inventory") is likely to modify the French conception of the *qualification*. Everything that the French state recognition system was opposed to - the fragmentation of the *qualification* - is now being considered. It is arguable whether this different treatment for qualifications in the register and those in the inventory is likely to last. In this case, the inventory could be seen as a public document where new qualifications are labelled and clearly differentiated. Conversely, this consideration of a new type of qualification will surely, in the long term, lead to changes in the criteria and procedures for inclusion in the French national framework, opening it up more to "private" qualifications, even though this might require a rethink of the main criteria, being a *qualification* for inclusion in the register.

The creation of the CPF (see Chapter 1.2) in 2014 follows a similar logic: qualifications included in the register can be broken down into blocks of learning outcomes that students work towards with the help of their CPF. Obviously, for the time being, these blocks have no independent existence, they simply provide a gradual way of gaining a qualification. Nevertheless, they open up the possibility that partial qualifications may be included at some stage.

Second, the diversification of recognised qualifications, which the state used to promote, today poses problems. As we saw previously, the legislation and regulations relating to the course content of qualifications and the procedure for accrediting them encourage overlaps between qualifications, and this undermines the register's objective of providing clarity. Furthermore, the CNCP lacks the regulatory powers (see Chapter 1.3) to reduce these overlaps.

A number of initiatives have been launched to address the problem: the creation of fact sheets in the register for courses forming part of bachelor's and master's degrees, proposals to set up bridges between qualifications, measures to encourage joint qualifications and the setting up of networks of certification bodies (Chapter 1.3). However, more is still needed. Additionally, the French government has charged educational inspectors with the task of "evaluating certification policy" and finding more lasting solutions to the problem of regulating qualifications. This task, therefore, focuses on systems for developing and recognising qualifications,

including CPCs and the CNCP. The work is being done in the context of the process of modernising public administration, one of the aims of which is to streamline resources. There are also plans to substantially reduce the number of consultative committees which facilitate this diversity. Finally, a draft bill published in 2018 provides for the establishment of a new committee. It also provides for a substantial change in the current regulations governing the registration of qualifications in the French national framework. In sum, French policy on qualifications is evolving. This report cannot cover all the changes that will take place in the coming years, and in that sense it is already out of date.

Greater involvement on the part of employers in the process of designing qualifications might improve governance and also reduce overlap between qualifications. Some of the major employers' associations support this idea. This involvement would draw on the expertise and resources of sectoral observatories.[48] In the first instance, it would involve identifying needs in terms of qualifications and possibly, at a later stage, drawing up vocational standards. There would no longer be just one central place where all these frameworks are drawn up and this would also streamline the operations of the CPCs in each ministry that currently develops them. This view is well received within the CNCP, as it transfers regulatory power to the "social partners" before applications for inclusion in the RNCP are made. Recent trials of "sectoral councils" in higher education (one is currently under way and two others are planned) are a response to this desire to increase the involvement of professionals, who are poorly represented in the CNESER. This call by certain employers' associations for a bigger role in the development of public qualifications is now looked on favourably by the government, particularly because it is itself implementing policies designed to streamline the number of qualifications available. Finally, the professionals' desire for more involvement contrasts with their attitude to an application procedure that they see as unfair. In their view, the procedure for inclusion by entitlement seems insufficiently stringent and provides only limited guarantees for the development and awarding of qualifications. For the qualifications that fall into this category, there is no requirement to demonstrate their quality, as is the case for applications for inclusion by request. The government is all the more receptive to these demands as it fears that it will have to recognise European qualifications (particularly sectoral ones) in the national framework and that they would then become benchmarks.

[48] Associated with a particular sector, the observatories (for these sectors) are tasked with compiling quantitative and qualitative data (job information sheets) relating mainly to employment and training, and making this data available to businesses in the sector.

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1.10. About the Authors

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Patrick Veneau is a sociologist and researcher in the Education, Training and Certification department. He is an expert in certification issues. He specialises in analysing the main types of certification in France: how they are made, their contents and their uses. Some years ago he researched the history and work of the Technical Commission for the Accreditation of Diplomas and Certificates (*Commission technique of homologation*), which is now called the National Committee for Vocational Certification (*Commission nationale de la Certification professionnelle*) which is the institution responsible for implementing the NQF in France.

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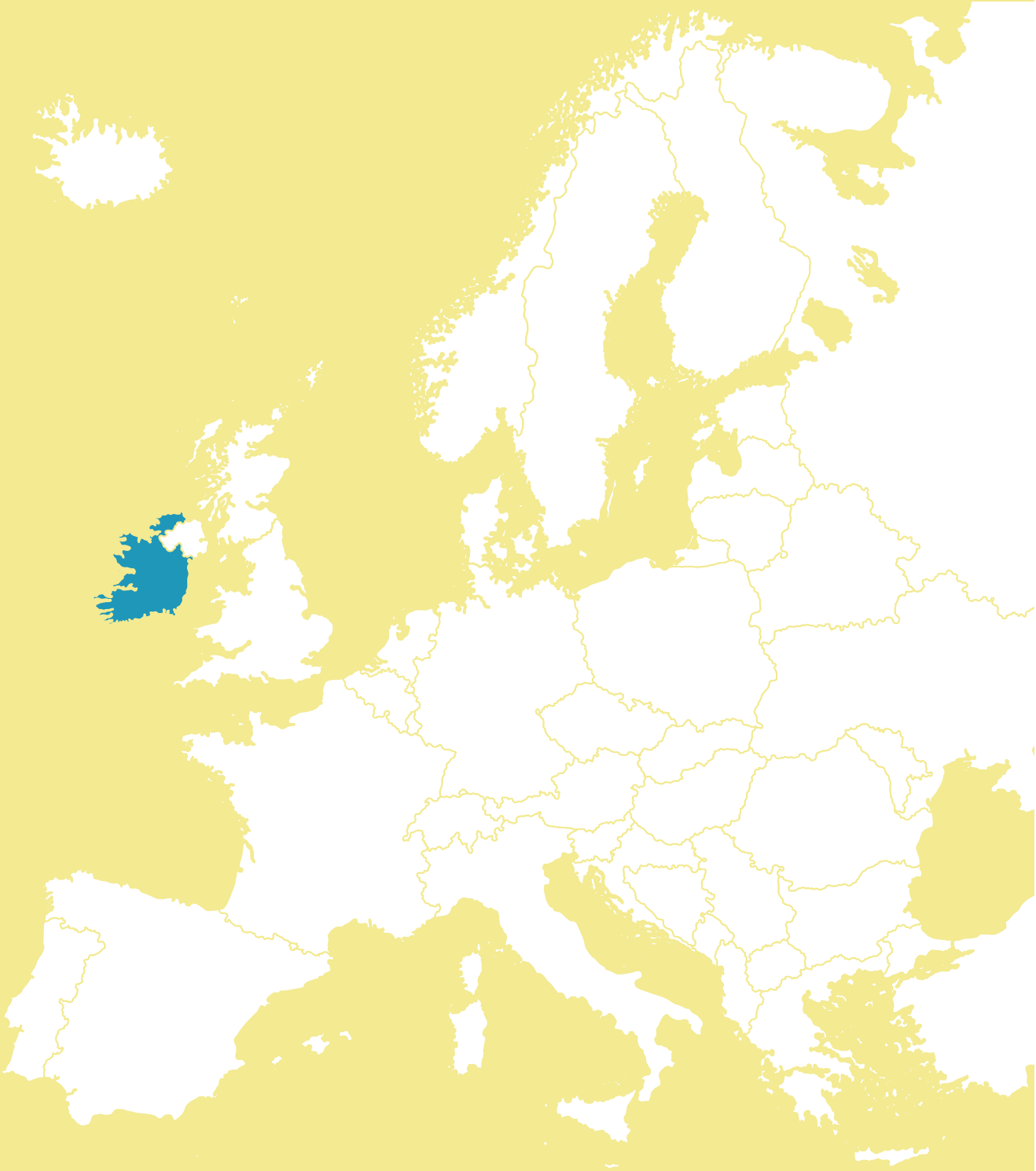
2. Ireland



Introduction

This Country Report for Ireland is one of seven country reports prepared as an intellectual output from the Erasmus+ project: **NQF-In** *'Developing organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in national qualifications frameworks'*. NQF-In is a policy learning initiative aimed at providing evidence-based support to national governments, EU agencies and key stakeholders to develop organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks based on practices in the ten countries involved, of which Ireland is a partner. The other partners are Poland (lead), France, Croatia, Hungary, Czech Republic and Scotland. Three 'silent' partners – Luxembourg, Germany and Holland – acted as peer-reviewers and analysts of the country reports.

With regard to standardising terminology for the project and for individual country reports, the term 'non-formal qualifications' is defined as education and training qualifications achieved outside of the state-supported system of schools, colleges, training centres and universities. For this country report for Ireland the term 'qualification' is regarded as similar to, or analogous with, the term 'award' as used in documentation related to the Irish framework: the term 'qualification' does not necessarily imply a licence to practice. To aid linguistic clarity in the report for Ireland, the combined term qualification/award is used throughout.

The definition of non-formal qualifications above should not be confused with, or elided with, definitions of non-formal learning, which in the Irish context, refers to purposeful and systematic learning which is not formally assessed, accredited or awarded credits in relation to awards on the national framework. In this report, non-formal qualifications/awards are regarded as being appropriately assessed and accredited.

In Ireland it is not usual to refer to a discrete 'non-formal sector' of education and training, as is the case in many other jurisdictions. Nor is it usual to refer to 'non-formal providers'. For the purpose of this country report the nomenclature of 'private providers, and community and voluntary sector' is taken to represent the sector of providers outside of state-supported provision. In this regard, the report uses the categories of providers already used to differentiate the state-supported providers from other '**independent/private providers coming to QQI on a voluntary basis',** as follows:

- Community/voluntary sector organisations
- Employers/work-based learning providers, including trade unions
- Hospital centres for nurse education
- Private providers – colleges
- Private providers – companies
- Private providers – individuals
- Public service agencies (other than BIM, Fáilte Ireland and Teagasc)

- Sectoral Representative Bodies
- Skillnets
- Training for people with disabilities
- Youth services.

It is also useful to note that the term 'vocational education and training' (VET) is not used in the Irish context in the ways that it is used in many other countries with regard to either denoting where a qualification is provided or where a qualification is placed on levels of a framework. In Ireland, the term 'further education' is a collective term that includes qualifications/awards achieved outside the formal school systems which are placed between Level 1 and Level 6 (Advanced Certificate) on the framework of ten levels. Qualifications/awards from 6 (Higher Certificate) to 10 (Doctorate) are normally defined as higher education awards, whether they are provided by state-funded providers or by private and/or voluntary providers.

The Irish qualifications framework is generally regarded as one of the first generation frameworks developed in the 1990s at the same time as frameworks in Australia, Scotland, France and New Zealand. The Irish framework was initiated under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 which established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the two awarding councils for qualifications/awards outside of the Dublin Institute of Technology and the universities: the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC). The design of the NFQ/NQF was based on groundwork prepared by TEASTAS and on influential reports related to adult education, lifelong learning and future skills needs. The Irish framework underwent compatibility assessment with The European Area for Higher Education (EAHE) in 2006, and with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL) in 2009. Articulation with the three frameworks of the constituent part of the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England) was agreed in 2004.

The framework underwent its first impact evaluation exercise in 2009 and is in the process of its second impact evaluation in 2016/17. Governance, remit and policy aspects of the framework were substantially changed under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012 which established the integrated agency Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI) as custodian/regulator of the framework, acting as both an integrated quality agency and an awarding body. Operational aspects of the framework are being adapted incrementally since the 2012 Act, and its proposed amendments, in tandem with extensive stakeholder consultation through a series of Green Papers and subsequent White Papers towards agreed policies.

For the purpose of coherent narrative in this report the years between the 1999 Act and the 2012 Act are referred to as 'the NQAI Phase'. The years since the 2012 Act are referred to as 'the QQI Phase'.

The NQF-IN project is timely for Ireland in that it provides an additional opportunity to explore the specific aspect of inclusion of non-formal qualifications/awards as an element of its impact evaluation exercise.

Acknowledgement

The authors of this report give due acknowledgement to John O'Connor, Head of Qualifications and Skills Policy, Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI), and his staff for pro-active support to the NQF-In Project since the start, for facilitating the survey among stakeholders in the 'non-formal' provider sector, and for hosting the round-table event for survey respondents to hear the outcomes and to comment upon them.

Delimitations of the Report

More than twenty-five years have passed since work began on the development and implementation of the Irish NQF, so the policy literature around it is indeed vast. In terms of this NQF-In Country Report, the focus is explicitly on how aspects of the NQF have impacted on the non-formal sector providers of education and training. Readers who desire wider information are advised to follow up the references within the report.

It should also be noted that this Report takes account only of policy documents available by the end of October 2017, with the exception of the QQI schedule of fees in Chapter 2.7.

Document analysis

All chapters of this Report, except the final chapter on current debates, were prepared on the basis of formal documentation and scholarly literature available in the public domain. Sources used in the Report are acknowledged either within the text or in the list of sources included as an Annex. Reliable live web links could not be established for all sources, particularly where archival materials were used. Readers are advised to seek current documentation through the QQI website http://www.qqi.ie.

QQI advice

Supportive advice and guidance was provided by QQI in identifying how the Country Report could be useful in further development of the framework at this time while the statutory requirement of the 2012 Act are being fully achieved and while the second impact evaluation exercise in on-going.

Survey among stakeholders

For the final chapter of the Report new research was conducted using a survey instrument in October and November 2016 and a round-table meeting of survey respondents, generously hosted by QQI on 5 December 2016.

The criteria for selection of the survey sample of education and training provider organisations regarded as 'usefully representative' of the non-formal, community

and voluntary sector, professional and regulated occupations, and the major economic sectors of ICT, pharma., agriculture and tourism, were as follows:

Criterion 1: Have been involved with the national framework for *circa* 10 years in both the NQAI phase up to 2012 and the QQI phase subsequent to the 2012 Act.

Criterion 2: Have a wide reach geographically

Criterion 3: Have a wide reach socially, professionally and/or economically.

It was considered that the criteria would identify 'non-formal' providers of education and training who had experienced engagement with the framework from its initial development up to contemporary times, and who could reflect critically on their own narratives and experiences. So it was reasonable to focus the survey questions on the experiences of organisations with regard to inclusion of qualifications/ awards in the framework only. It was anticipated that they could expertly identify trends from their experience both in any changing demands for their qualifications/ awards to be included in the framework, and also comment on the impact of new operational and cost aspects of inclusion in the framework since the 2012 Act.

The provider organisations selected for the survey, their profiles and size were as follows:

Table 2.1. Organisations selected for the survey

	Non-formal providers of education and training	Profile	Size
1	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)	Representative organisation for 55 trade unions	Largest all-Ireland civic society organization with *circa* 832,000 members
2	Defense Forces	National provider of military training and education	10,000 active members
3	Irish Nurses & Mid-Wives Association (INMO)	Professional organisation, trade union and training provider	All nurses and mid-wives
4	Credit Unions Ireland	Representative organisation and training organizer for credit union branches	434 branches
5	Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)	Representative organisation for all regional VET training providers	16 regions
6	Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)	Trade union and professional body for teachers in VET schools, ETBs, and HE level technology colleges	Nationwide
7	Get-reskilled – private training provider for the pharmaceutical manufacturing sector	Work-based training for pharma. industry 'inked' with higher education nationally and globally	Global

	Non-formal providers of education and training	Profile	Size
8	Dublin Institute of Technology(DIT)	HE provider with partnerships and 'linked' provision for industry, regulated occupations and professions	23,000 students, multiple linked partnerships with the non-formal sector
9	The Law Society	Education, representation and regulation for solicitors. Provider of specialist legal training for other sectors.	Nationwide
10	Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC)	Representative, lobbyist, policy making and training organization for employers and businesses	Nationwide
11	Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed (INOU)	Representative and campaigning body for unemployed workers, community groups and voluntary organisations	Nationwide branches, mostly urban
12	Macra na Feirme	Voluntary organisation for social and vocational development of young people in rural areas	Nationwide at local level
13	Longford Women's Link	Voluntary outreach centre for education and training in enterprise and regulated occupations using linked formal providers	Regional/rural
14	Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)	HE provider of formal training to community and voluntary groups	Regional
15	The Wheel	Central support and representative organisation for voluntary and community-based education (non-formal sector)	Nationwide service
16	ICT Skillnet	Network of HE and ICT industry for up-skilling and re-skilling	Nationwide
17	Global Knowledge: ICT training	Providers of global ICT qualifications (non-formal)	Dublin-based with international reach
18	Regional Skills Forum North-West	Consortium of employers, education and training providers, local authorities and government agencies for regional development.	Regional
19	Teagasc	The Agriculture and Food Development Authority for Green Cert., agri-training and research	Nationwide and with regional private colleges
20	Fáilte Ireland	Semi-state Tourism Development Authority	Previously a training provider
21	Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD)	Professional body and training provider for Human Resource management – own awards	National and UK

All organisations were contacted initially by phone or introductory email explaining the purpose to the survey and to gain their permission to send forward the survey questions to the appropriate party/parties. Respondents were assured that their individual responses would remain confidential and that data would be summarised generically in the report. Some respondents gave oral rather than written responses. Some indicated interest in the research and its outputs and willingness to attend the round-table event but not to complete a detailed written response. These positions were respected.

The eleven questions in the survey were finalised following consultation with QQI.

The survey questions were as follows:

Question 1

How much (in estimated %) of the training 'courses/events' provided by your 'organisation/sector' is currently included in the NFQ?

Question 2

Why are some types of training not included in the NFQ?

Question 3

Has your organisation/sector arrangements in place with other non-formal sectors or organisations to have training awards included in the NFQ? If so, explain how it works.

Question 4

Does your organisation/sector have 'links' with formal providers so that you have your awards included in the NFQ? If so, explain the advantages of this arrangement.

Question 5

Does your sector/organisation have arrangements with non-Irish qualifications providers/awarding bodies? If so, explain the advantage of such arrangements.

Question 6

What is the value of having your training awards included in the NFQ? Explain how it is a good return on the time and costs involved.

Question 7

Have you experienced either growing demand or falling demand for training awards that are included in the NFQ? Can you explain why?

Question 8

Have you evidence of any changing profiles of persons/organisations seeking formal, accredited awards rather than non-formal awards?

Question 9

Have you noticed any trends in the purposes and/or usefulness of including awards in the NFQ?

Question 10

Please comment on the costs of including training awards in the NFQ.

Question 11

Please comment on your experiences of the processes and procedures of including training awards in the NFQ.

Open comments:

Round-table event

Outcomes from the survey were presented to respondent and QQI staff at a round-table event on 5 December 2016.

The survey outcomes are provided in the final chapter of this Report:

Documents and literature consulted for this Country Report.

Below are five tables which categorise the main policy literature which informed this Report.

Table 2.2. Relevant NQAI-phase publications from the 1999 Act to the 2012 Act

Date of publication	Title
June 2005	NQAI *Principles and operational guidelines for recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training*
November 2006	*Verification of compatibility of the Irish NFQ to the QF of the EHEA*
June 2009	*Referencing of the Irish NFQ to the EQF-LLL*
November 2011	*Professional award-type descriptors (award class: professional) for the alignment of professional awards at NQF levels 7, 8 and 9*

Table 2.3. Relevant QQI-phase publications since the 2012 Act

Date of publication	Title
2013	Submissions on 3 white papers: Policy and criteria for provider access to initial validation of programmes leading to QQI awards Regulations for protection of enrolled learners; implementation of Part 6 of the 2012 Act Fees for QQI services
September 2013	Policy and criteria for provider access to initial validation of programmes leading to QQI awards
September 2013	QA guidelines and criteria for provider access to initial validation of programmes leading to QQI further education and training awards
September 2013	Fees for QQI services
June 2014	Re-engagement with QQI – policy and criteria for renewed access to QQI validation for voluntary providers of further education and training
July 2014	Report of the external reviewers of quality and qualifications Ireland (QQI)
December 2014	QQI policy on monitoring
December 2014	QQI policy for making awards
December 2014	Policy for determining award standards
Feb 2015	Quality assuring assessment guidelines for external authenticators - revised
April 2015	Provider access to initial validation of programmes leading to QQI awards: Application Guide
April 2015	Provider access to initial validation of programmes leading to QQI awards: application form for initial validation leading to QQI award
	QQI consultation document: Quality assurance guidelines and criteria for providers of further education and training: Vol. 1
2015	QQI restatement of 2003 policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation of learners for providers of further and higher education and training
2016	Annual report 2015
Feb 2016	Policies and criteria for the establishment of the NFQ originally published October 2003
May 2016	QQI corporate plan
April 2016	Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training
January 2016	Core statutory quality assurance (QA) guidelines - draft statutory guidelines developed for use by all providers
April 2016	Sector-specific quality assurance guidelines: Statutory guidelines developed by QQI for independent/private providers and voluntary bodies

Date of publication	Title
April 2016	Management framework agreement between the Department of Education and Skills & Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
May 2016	Feedback report following the consultation process on a series of draft quality assurance guides and white papers including: Policy on quality assurance guidelines April 2016 Core statutory quality assurance guidelines April 2016 Sector-specific quality assurance guidelines for independent/private providers April 2016
June 2016	Sector-specific guidelines developed by QQI for designated awarding bodies
July 2016	Sector-specific quality assurance (QA) guidelines: statutory guidelines developed by QQI for designated awarding bodies (universities, Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
2016	Protection of enrolled learners policy
July 2016	Topic-specific Quality Assurance guidelines White Paper

Table 2.4. Other policy documents consulted

Date of publication	Title
2014	Dublin Institute of Technology Quality Enhancement Handbook, Chapter 13: *Procedures for approval of linked and collaborative provision*
2005	White Paper *Charting our Education Future*
2009	Framework implementation an Impact Study: Report of Study Team
June 2014	ENQA external review of QQI - Report
	EQF-LL alignment report

Table 2.5 Other literature consulted

Date	Title and author
December 2010	Person, P. (2010). *European lifelong learning policy: short track studies of good practice: National Frameworks of Qualifications in Ireland*. Halmstad University, EACEA.
2009	Raffe, D. (2009). *National Qualifications Frameworks in Ireland and Scotland: a comparative analysis*. Paper presented at European conference on educational research, Vienna, September 2009.
2011	Mernagh, E. (2011). *The Irish national framework of qualifications: a blueprint for change*. Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies 4/2011.

Date	Title and author
2011	Duff, T. (2011). *Reflections on Ireland's education/training policy-making process leading to the national framework of qualifications.* European Journal of Qualifications, Issue 2, Spring 2011 and DIT Online Journal, Level3 Issue 9, June 2011.
May 2005	Murphy, A. (2005). *Lifelong learning: Romance, evidence, implementation?*. Keynote address to Institute of Technology Apprentice Committee Conference, Dublin, May 2005.
September 2003	Granville, G. (2003). *Stop making sense*: *Chaos and coherence in the framework of the Irish qualifications framework.* Journal of Education and Work, Volume 16, Number 3, September 2003.
June 2016000	Boland, T. (2016). *Reconceptualising higher education for lifelong learning.* EUCEN Conference, Dublin.
December 2016	Coles, M. (2016). *National Qualifications Frameworks: reflections and trajectories.* Paper commissioned by QQI in advance of the second impact assessment exercise.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CAO – Central Applications Office

CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel Development

DA – Delegated Authority

DAB – Designated Awarding Body

DES – Department of Education and Science

DIT – Dublin Institute of Technology

ECTS – European Credit Transfer System

ECVET –European credit system for vocational education and training

EGFSN – Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

ENQA – European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQAVET – European Association for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training

ETB – Education and Training Boards

ETBI – Education and Training Boards Ireland

EU – European Union

Fás – Foras Áiseanna Saothair - Vocational Training Authority (now re-organised as a new body – SOLAS)

FE – Further Education

FETAC – Further Education & Training Awards Council

Forfás – National Advisory Board for enterprise, trade, technology and investment in Ireland

HE – Higher Education

HEA – Higher Education Authority

HEI – Higher education institution

HETAC – Higher Education and Training Awards Council

IBEC – Irish Business and Employers Confederation

ICTU – Irish Congress of Trade Unions

INMO – Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation

INOU – Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed

IOT – Institute of Technology

IOTI – Institutes of Technology Ireland

IUQB – Irish Universities Quality Board

LMA – Labour Market Activation Measures

NCEA – National Council for Educational Awards

NCVA – National Council for Vocational Awards

NESC – National Economic and Social Council

NFQ – National Framework of Qualifications

NQAI – National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

QQI – Quality & Qualifications Ireland

QA – Quality Assurance

QualRec – Qualifications Recognition Service

RCSI – Royal College of Surgeons Ireland

RTC – Regional Technical College

SER – self-evaluation report

SOLAS – The Further Education and Training Authority

Teagasc – The Agriculture and Food Development Authority

TEASTAS – The body responsible for initial design and development of the NFQ before the establishment of the NQAI

TUI – Teachers' Union of Ireland

VEC – Vocational Education Committee

WIT – Waterford Institute of Technology

Basic terms

Definitions of the most important terms used in the Country Report

Access – refers to a learner's ability to avail of appropriate opportunities to enter and succeed in programmes leading to awards/qualifications, with recognition of learning already achieved.

Access, transfer and progression – mechanisms for non-standard entry to higher education, transfer into HE and progression towards an award/qualification.

Adult education – a term that refers both an ideology and to a sector of education provision.

Alignment with the NQF – aligned awards are awards from bodies other than the universities, the DIT and bodies with delegated authority which have been through a formal process of alignment with the level descriptors of the NQF. The alignment process is currently suspended pending its status with regard to the 2012 Act.

Approved provider – a provider which has achieved QQI quality assurance status.

Award/qualification – that which is conferred, granted or given by an awarding body and which records that a learner has acquired a standard to knowledge, skill or competence.

Awarding body – an organisation designated by law to make awards/grant qualifications.

Award type – refers to a class of named awards sharing common features and level. These include major, minor, supplemental and special purpose award types. Different award-types reflect different purposes or awards and allow for the recognition of all learning achievement.

CAO – Central Applications Office is the centralised service for processes applications for entry to initial higher education in universities, institutes of technology, colleges of education and some other higher education providers.

Community and Voluntary Sector (non-formal) Working Group – QQI established a joint working group with representatives of the community and voluntary sector. The working group has been established in order to enable QQI to improve and expand its current communications with organisations that form the

community and voluntary sector, and facilitate community and voluntary sector legacy providers in making an informed choice in relation to re-engagement.

Competence – acquired skills and knowledge that can be demonstrated and measured against standards.

Consortia of providers – individual providers who combine under mutually-agreed terms to engage with QQI as a combined provider with regard to quality assurance and validation of programmes.

Credit – a measure by which diverse learning achievements can be recognised; credits systems complement the NQF and the achievement of awards. Opportunities for credit accumulation enhance recognition of learning.

Delegated authority – powers to make awards.

Determining standards – the process by which the levels of knowledge, skills and competence are determined for assessment towards an award.

Designated awarding powers – providers of education and training which are not legally autonomous awarding bodies per se but who have ???

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) advises the government on current and future skills needs and on other labour market issues that impact on Ireland's enterprise and employment growth. The group brings together industry, academic and state agencies in identifying the overall skills requirements of the economy.

External authentication – the process of verifying assessment results by an outside expert individual or body .

ETB – Education and Training Board.

Fás/SOLAS – further education and training authority. Solas is the national agency responsible for funding, policy and co-ordinating training of further education programmes in Ireland. Solas and QQI are currently developing a memorandum of understanding to set out how they will co-operate into the future.

Fields of learning/sub-fields – ISCED F 2013 codes for fields of learning and training (international standard classification of education).

Classification of Fields of Learning for QQI/FETAC standards (replaced by ISEC F 2013)

FET – further education and training is education and training other than primary of port-primary or higher education and training

First provider – a person or body which organises or procures all or part of a programme, part of which is provided by another provider.

Formative assessment – assessment designed to identify learning progress and to provide feedback to learners

Green Paper – a discussion paper with outline proposals on a significant topic of particular importance to stakeholders which is designed as a consultation mechanism to attract critical and developmental back to inform a subsequent White Paper towards policy

HEA – The Higher Education Authority is the statutory planning and development body for higher education and research in Ireland. The HEA has wide advisory powers throughout the whole of the third level sector. In addition it is the funding authority for the universities, institute of technology and other designated higher education institutions. It is also the funding body for higher education. The HEA publishes extensive statistics on Higher Education and is the national contact point for Erasmus+ and other European funding programmes for Higher Education.

Higher education – the sector making awards form levels 6 to 10.

IEM – International Education Mark (IEM) for providers. This will be awarded to providers of education and training (including English language training) who have demonstrated compliance with a statutory code of practice in the provision of education and training to international students.

Inclusion in the NQF – Qualifications currently included in the NFQ are those made by national awarding bodies only. Graduates of qualifications included in the NFQ are deemed to have acquired the standard of knowledge, skill or competence associated with a level of that qualifications within the NFQ.

Initial engagement with QQI – the process by which new providers apply to QQI for quality assurance approval to apply for validation of programmes leading to QQI awards, and/or the process by which legacy providers which failed to re-engage with QQI can re-apply.

Intended learning outcomes – the learning outcomes of a programme that can be explicitly linked to NQF level descriptors.

Internal verification – the process by which a provider evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of its assessment practices.

Learning outcomes – what a learner is expected to have achieved in terms of knowledge, skills and competences as a result of a learning experience.

Learner – an individual engaged in a learning process.

Learner-centred – an approach to education and training which puts the needs of learners above the needs of the labour market.

Legacy awards – awards that existed before the 1999 Act.

Linked/Associated Provider – an 'associated provider' means a provider that enters into an arrangement with a listed awarding body under which arrangement the provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the listed awarding body which is included in the Framework.

Legacy providers – providers of education and training which had approval before the 2012 Act.

Legacy policies – policies which applied before the 2012 Act.

Legacy voluntary providers – providers who had a relationship as providers with either FETAC or HETAC before the 2012 Act.

Major award – this award type is the principal class of awards made at each level of the NQF. At most levels, such award-types capture a typical range of achievements at the level.

Minimum capacity – baseline capacity to provide quality assured awards.

Minimum learning outcomes – the standards to be achieved for successful achievement of an award.

Minor award – the award type provides recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes, but not the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award. This recognition will have relevance in its own right.

Monitor – a person who verifies that quality assurance procedures are being implemented as agreed. The monitor may be working on behalf of the provider (local monitoring) of QQI (national monitoring). National monitoring is the process which QQI will operate to ensure that providers' quality assurance systems are effective in maintaining and improving the quality of a validated programme.

Networks of providers – providers of education and training in a specific field who combine to engage with QQI to validate common programmes (e.g. Skillnets) who may have discrete quality assurance status with QQI.

Non-formal providers – the sector referred to as the private, community and voluntary sector providers.

Placement of awards – where awards are located on the levels of the NQF.

Professional bodies – organisations which regulate the education and training requirement of a profession.

Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) – the PAEC is part of the governance structures of QQI that have been agreed by its Board. This committee ensures programmes and awards (recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications) are appropriate and consistent. The committee consists of members of the QQI executive and is chaired by our CEO. The decisions and recommendations made by the committee are usually informed by external panels and the outcomes of QQI monitoring and review activities.

Programme – a learning experience designed and offered by a provider, within the stage, based on predetermined national standards and leading to a QQI award.

Programmatic review – cyclical review of a programme in relation to specific quality assurance criteria.

Progression – a learner's ability to move to another programme leading to an award at a higher level in the NQF, having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.

Provider – an individual, organisation or institution that provides education and training.

Provider quality assurance – the criteria which applies to providers of education and training to enable them to offer programmes leading to awards in the state which are included on the NQF.

Protection of enrolled learners – a policy and quality criterion for providers which provides security that enrolled learners will not be at risk of discontinuation of their course.

QualiFax – a database of qualifications maintained by QQI.

QualRec – a qualifications recognition service provided by QQI.

Recognition of prior learning – a process and system for using prior formal, non-formal and informal learning for access, transfer, progression, and achievement of an award.

Re-engagement with QQI – the process by which approved FETAC and HETAC providers apply for quality assurance approval to continue provision with QQI.

Regulated occupations – occupations regulated by law, statute, or other formal means.

RPL – recognition of prior learning for the purpose of initial access/entry to a programme leading to an award, advanced entry to a programme leading to an award, exemption from elements of a programme leading to an award, achievement of a full award.

Second provider – a person or body which provides all or part of a programme part or all of which is organised or procured by another provider.

Self-evaluation (A) – the process whereby a provider, with the involvement of learners and the external evaluator, evaluates the quality of its programme(s) and services. The findings of self-evaluation will be published in as standard format.

Self-evaluation (B) – the process whereby an applicant for RPL systematically considers his/her evidence of learning in relation to entry requirements for a programme or sets of learning outcomes within a programme.

Special purpose award – this award type is made for specific, relatively narrow purposes, often for certification of competence in specific occupational areas.

Standards – NQF standards are benchmarked statements about the learning achievements required to attain particular NQF levels. NQF award standard are QQI specifications of the knowledge, skill and competence to be achieved before an award is made. But standards vary in their specificity. This contrasts with standards

for particular awards which are always specific. Standards for particular awards are in effect determined when the relevant programme of education and training (i.e. the curriculum) is validated. NFQ standards are supported with guidelines to assist providers.

Supplemental award – this award type is for learning which is additional to a previous award. They could, for example, relate to updating and refreshing knowledge or skills, or to continuing professional development.

Summative assessment – assessment that contributes to the total marks for an award.

TEASTAS – the body which supported the development of the Irish NQF in the 1990s.

Transfer – refers to a learner's ability to move from one programme leading to an award to another programme at the same level of the framework having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.

Transition status – the status of QQI since the 2012 Act and until such time as policies and procedures have been for providers and programmes have achieved statutory approval

Validation – the process through which QQI evaluates a programme of education and training, to ensure that the proposed programme provides the learner with the opportunity to reach the standards of the award to which the programme is intended to lead.

VET/TVET – (technical) vocational education and training

White Paper – a draft policy paper which follows on from analysis of responses to a Green Paper and which forms the basis for a policy statement.

2.1. Historic Context

The importance of education and training in the state

The Irish NQF was launched in 2003, enabled by the 1999 legislation – The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act.

The shape and rationale for the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) were influenced over the previous decades by national economic development imperatives, by powerful international bodies such as the OECD, and by developments in education and training internationally, particularly in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Specifically, the OECD reports – *Training of Technicians in Ireland,* (1964), *Council on Manpower Policy as a means of promotion of economic development*, (1964) and *Investment in Education*, (1996) contributed to significant reform of education and training provision at a national level and to a particular underpinning ideology which informed the NQF.

Because of its island position on the western fringes of Europe, its open economy, limited natural resources and small population, successive Irish governments regarded education and training as central to economic development, competitiveness and social prosperity. Of particular significance in this regard was the *1958 Programme for Economic Expansion* which shifted economic planning from protectionism to economic modernisation by industrial development, unbanisation and enhanced infrastructure and the Apprenticeship Act 1959. Both aimed to decrease dependency on agriculturally-based employment and to move to a more mixed economy in a single generation relying to a large extent on skills training for manufacturing employment. In this regard employment in agriculture fell from 50% to 15% of the workforce between the 1960s and 1990s. Industrial production grew with membership of the EC/EU from 1980 and the population became increasingly urbanised. From the 1960s onward industrial policies focused on attracting inward investment through multinational companies relying on large local workforces and tied in to locally provided education and training.

Training for industrial development

A new training body, AnCo (*An Comhairle Oiliúna*) The Industrial Training Authority, was established in 1967 under the Industrial Training Act which compelled employers to adopt a more systematic training approach to the traditional time-served, craft model. AnCo was superseded in 1987 by Fás (The National Training Authority) under the 1987 Labour Services Act as the state provider and co-ordinator of training for employment under the direction of the Department of Employment and Labour. As unemployment levels grew to 17% of the labour force in the mid-1980s the provision of vocational education and training also grew, particularly for the unemployed. Apprenticeship numbers fluctuated with labour market needs.

VET training policies were greatly influenced by the employer bodies, by recommendations from Forfás Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, and by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). However, the same decades saw a major increase in participation in higher education, driven partly by the introduction of 'free fees' and accommodation grants and by the establishing of nine regional technical colleges to support regional development and industrialisation.

Government programmes for economic expansion with balanced regional growth, led to a 1967 proposal for the establishment of nine regional technical colleges (RTCs), outside the Dublin region, to spearhead economic development and industrial expansion in areas which were not already served by the five traditional universities – Trinity College Dublin and the three national University of Ireland colleges - in Dublin, Galway and Cork. The new regional colleges were to be progression routes from the vocational education system and from apprenticeship training to provide higher level technical qualifications. The new colleges were initially under similar management to the Vocational Education Committee schools with awarding powers regulated by the Department of Education up to Higher National Diploma level in the first instance.

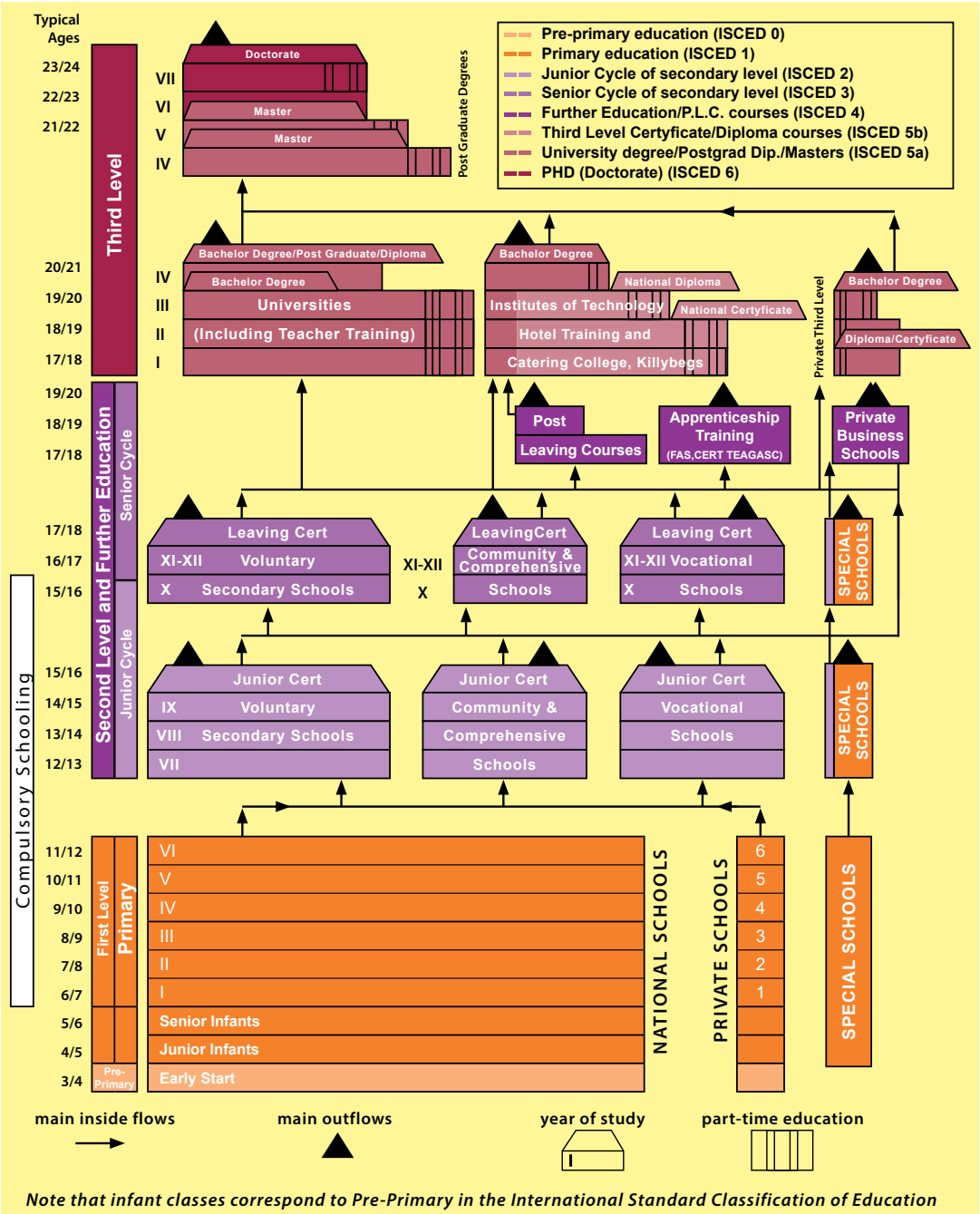
This regional technical college model reinforced the dual system of education in Ireland which clearly distinguished between private, faith-based, fee-paying secondary schools which had progression routes to professionally-oriented, fee-paying/free-fees university on the one hand, and the vocational schools and regional colleges which were largely state-funded, non-denominational and labour-market focused on the other hand This demarcation and differentiation persisted in both reality and in perception well into the 1990s leading to a very complex landscape of awards and qualifications, with few transfer or progression routes across the two systems. The introduction of income-based free fees and the expansion of numbers attending post-compulsory education led to a blurring of the functions and provision boundaries between the RTCs and the universities. These boundaries were further blurred when a common application system for entry to higher education (CAO) was introduced and Latin was dropped as a requirement for university entry. In addition, a new type of state-funded second level education – the community college – was introduced which catered for an expanding population of young people in urban areas and which facilitated the amalgamation of private secondary schools and vocation school in smaller towns and rural areas, and thereby cutting off the historic apprenticeship routes to employment from low-income families with few resources. The community colleges had less emphasis on vocational programmes leaving gaps in local provision for young people who choose to follow a trade or craft. This gap was filled to an extent by the reformed apprenticeship system which moved from a time-served model to six phases of training – three phases in Fás training centres/RTCs and three phases on-the-job with curricula dictated mostly by employer needs.

In 1992 the Dublin Institute of Technology Act facilitated the amalgamation of several long-standing colleges into the unitary Dublin Institute of Technology with autonomous award powers from Level 6 to Doctorate.

The vocational training landscape of the 1980s and 1990s was further complicated by non-national providers such as the UK City & Guilds and Royal Society of Arts, in addition to training provided by a range of both Irish and UK trade unions. A further complication was the establishing of national Institutes of Higher Education in Limerick city and north Dublin city which were to be advanced technical colleges, but which became the University of Limerick and Dublin City University respectively under the 1997 Universities Act with their own awarding powers under pressure from traditional vested interests.

By the late 1990s the education and training landscape was complex, with few coherent inter-relationships or mobility across systems, as illustrated in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1. A complex landscape of awarding bodies and award titles.



Source: Department of Education

Recession, emigration and mobility of qualifications

The decade from 1982-1992 was one of economic recession in Ireland. Unemployment in 1987 was 17% of the labour force and emigration of graduates, school leavers and unemployed young people posed a threat to the sustainability of civic society. During these years there were ten different Ministers for Education with little coherence of policy or long-term planning.

In 1992 the Industrial Policy Review Group (IPRG) Report urged a rethink of the dual system of vocational-university education towards a more utilitarian approach focusing on addressing skills deficits and towards partnership with industry. Their report argued that a direct industry-education interface is essential for successful economies. They urged a focus on graduate competences, job-readiness and on-the-job training elements. This view found its way into the 1992 Green Paper *Education for a Changing World* with its recommendations for lifelong learning and continuous up-skilling. Duff (2011) argues that the Green Paper further reinforced the binary divide between the traditional university model and the more utilitarian education and training model of the VECs and the RTCs. 1992 also say the agreement of the EU Maastricht Treaty and the Single European area with resulting free movement of services, people and capital facilitated by a more coherent system for portability and mutual recognition of qualifications across borders.

Additionally, the OECD considerably influenced the direction of Irish education and training reform through their thematic reports and country reviews, most of which were quantitative, statistically-based and benchmarked to international comparators. Comparative reports were heavily drawn upon by Ministers of Education from 1992 onwards leading to the introduction of changes in the domestic context, particularly with regard to the efficiency of the binary/dual education system to underpin sustainable economic development and human capital in an increasingly global market. Criticisms of binary systems and the complexity of training systems led industry to call for a unitary and coherent system of qualifications in New Zealand and Australia and in parts of the UK in the later 1980s. Legislative and systems reforms in these countries were closely watched in Ireland and much networking resulted. The momentum to drive major education and qualifications reform had begun, leading to the initial development work towards a unified, national qualifications framework.

TEASTAS and the foundations of the Irish NQF

The 1992 Government Green Paper *Education for a Changing World* signalled political intent to end the traditional binary divide in Irish education and to move towards a more unitary, quality controlled and integrated approach, under the assumption that more systematic human capital development with enable greater economic growth. An increased emphasis on skills and competences for a flexible labour force was also evident in the 1994 National Education Convention and in the National Development Plan 1994-1999. These ideas were also evident in the NESC report *A Strategy for Competitiveness, Growth and Employment* which expressed concern about the incoherence of the education system as a whole and the lack of a coherent education and training policy. Similar ideas were expressed in the 1995 White Paper *Charting our Education Future* which also suggested a more coherent approach to certification and qualifications outside the university system – essentially in the VET and the non-formal sector.

Collectively, these ideas led to the establishment of TEASTAS, a new Government authority to take responsibility for non-university third level programmes and for all further and continuing education programmes, and to combine the functions

of the existing National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) and the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA). In addition TEASTAS was to become the national authority ensuring international recognition for all qualifications under its remit.

TEASTAS could have worked towards removal of the binary divide between traditional universities and other providers of education and training, including non-formal providers. However, vested interests prevailed, and the 'different missions' of the two sectors were acknowledged and continued by the Department of Education. This meta-decision was evident in the architecture of the NQF which emerged in the years following.

TEASTAS was established on an interim basis in September 1995. Its main function was to achieve co-ordination of qualifications outside the university sector and to establish a qualifications framework. Concepts of lifelong learning moved to centre stage with technologies to support a qualifications framework discussed with stakeholders resulting in a clear decision to move to an integrated framework of qualifications by 1997, probably heavily influence by developments in progress towards the Bologna Declaration of 1999 to harmonise higher education architecture across member states of the Council of Europe. The technologies required would include a credit system, a shared system of mutual recognition of awards and a common approach to quality assurance.

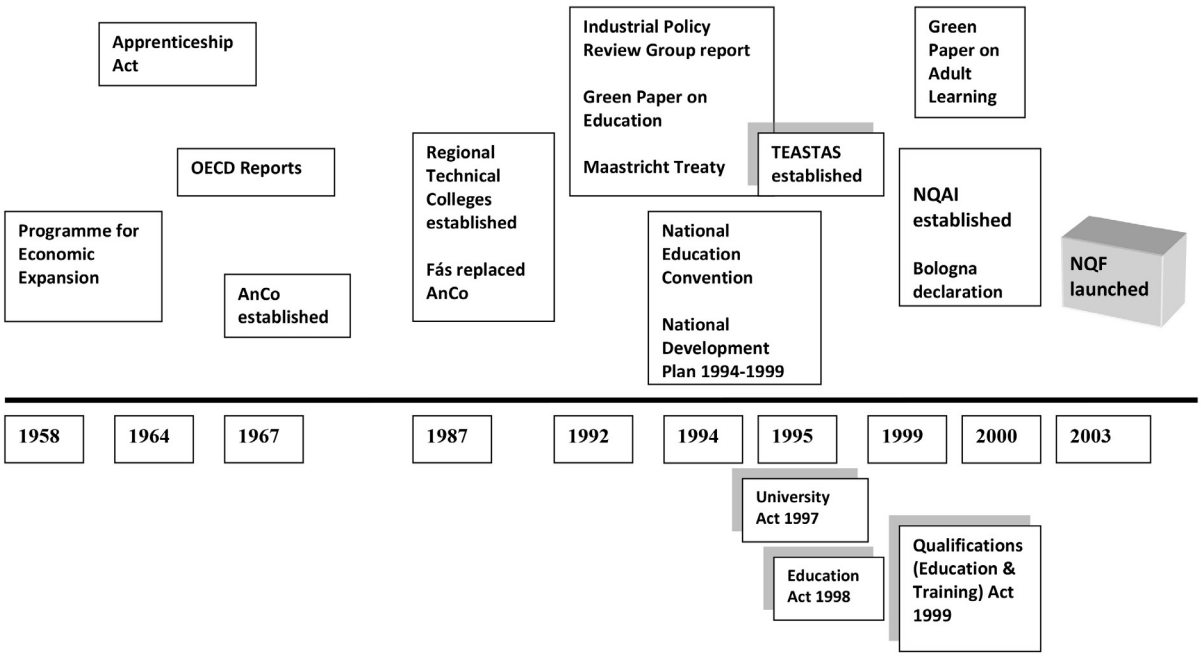
The work of TEASTAS led directly to the 1999 Qualification (Education and Training) Act which established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and started the development of the NQF which was formally launched in 2003.

The 1999 Act also enabled the setting up of two new awarding bodies – the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) to bring greater coherence and standardisation of VET awards and to HE awards outside the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

All non-formal awards to be recognised within the NQF were to come under the quality oversight of these two new bodies and to carry the logo of either FETAC or HETAC.

A summary timeline of key development, policies, reports and legislation leading to the Irish NQF is presented below in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2. Timeline



2.2. National Qualifications Framework – Basic Premises

The original goals of the NQF

The vision, principles and goals for the NFQ are set out in two particular NQAI documents:

i. *Towards a National framework of Qualifications – establishment of policies and* criteria, April 2002

ii. *Determinations for the outline national framework of qualifications*, October 2003

The framework was designed to be *'the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured ad related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards.'* Determinations for the outline national framework of qualifications, 2003 *page 7.*

The original goal for establishing the Irish NQF, FETAC and HETAC was that together they would bring greater coherence to qualifications awarded in Ireland and to encourage a greater focus on the diverse needs of learners. Prior to the 1999 Act there was little shared understanding of how the various awards in the state related to one another. The relationship between university awards and those awarded elsewhere in higher education as somewhat unclear, while in further education and training there were more than fifty awarding bodies in operation, including the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) and the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA).

The NQAI had three principal tasks:

i. to establish and maintain a national framework of qualifications

ii. to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression of learners

iii. to ensure the appropriate recognition of internal qualifications in Ireland and to promote the appropriate recognition of Irish awards abroad.

The NQAI had oversight responsibility for the functions, performance reviews and strategic plans of both FETAC and HETAC. NQAI also allocated the budgets of both awarding bodies.

FETAC was responsible for providing services to vocational colleges, adult and community education and training centres, private further education and training providers, Fás, Teagasc (Agriculture and Food Authority), Fáilte Ireland (National Tourism Authority) and Bórd Iascaigh Mhara (The Sea Fisheries Board), essentially all the non-formal training providers surveyed for this Country Report. Most of these bodies had used the NCVA and NCEA in the past.

HETAC was responsible for the non-formal providers at higher education level including private colleges and professional bodies.

Professional bodies

Certain professional bodies achieved statutory powers to make awards, including:

i. An Bórd Altranais (The Nursing Board)
ii. The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland
iii. The Opticians Board
iv. The Law Society of Ireland
v. The Council of the Honourable Society of Kings Inns
vi. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ireland
vii. The National Social Work Qualifications Board
viii. The Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland
ix. Ministry of Commerce, Marine and natural Resources
x. Department of Telecommunications Regulation
xi. The Irish Aviation Authority
xii. The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

Architecture of the NQF

The Irish NFQ is based on ten levels from Level1 – basic education to Level 10 Doctorate as set put in the 2002 NQAI paper: '*Towards a national framework of qualifications – establishment of policies and criteria*'.

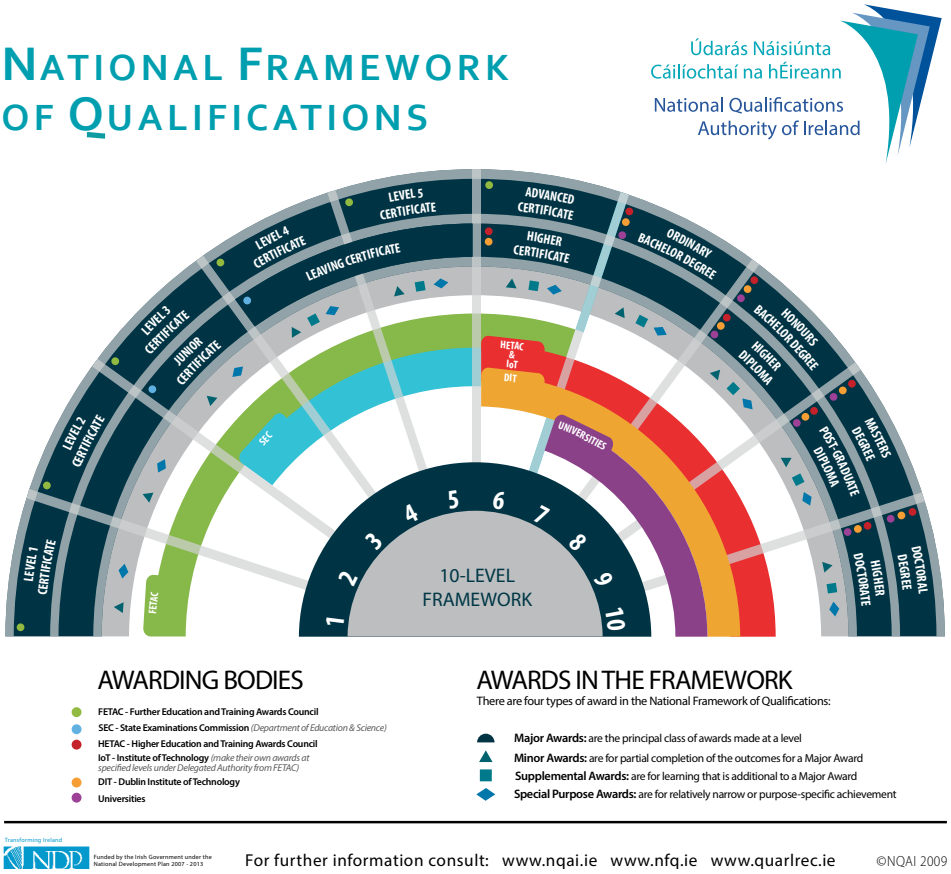
At each level there are award-types. Each award-type has its own descriptor. Award-types at each level have specific names.

There are four classes of award-types:

- Major award-types
- Minor award-types
- Special-purpose award-types
- Supplemental award-types.

Major award types are illustrated on the NFQ 'rainbow' (Figure 2.3 below) at the appropriate level and with awarding bodies for each award-type in the NQAI-phase.

Figure 2.3. Major award types



There are still fifteen award-title as follows:

Table 2.6. Award titles

NQF Level	Award title	Who can award it in the NQAI phase (in the QQI phase)
10	Doctorate	HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI)
9	Masters Postgraduate Diploma	HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI) HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI)
8	Honours Bachelor Degree Higher Diploma	HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI) HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI)
7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI)
6	Higher Certificate Advanced Certificate	HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI) FETAC (QQI)
5	Certificate	FETAC (QQI)
4/5	Certificate Leaving Certificate	FETAC (QQI) Department of Education and Science

NQF Level	Award title	Who can award it in the NQAI phase (in the QQI phase)
4	Certificate	FETAC (QQI
3	Certificate Junior Certificate	FETAC (QQI) Department of Education and Science
2	Certificate	FETAC (QQI)
1	Certificate	FETAC (QQI)

Level indicators and descriptors

Levels on the Irish NFQ are assigned descriptors in relation to strands and sub-strands using the following indicators:

- Knowledge – *breadth*
- Knowledge – *kind*
- Know-how and – *range*
- Know-how and – *selectivity*
- Competence – *context*
- Competence – role
- Competence – *learning to learn*
- Competence – *insight*

The specifics of each level are included in the Tables below.

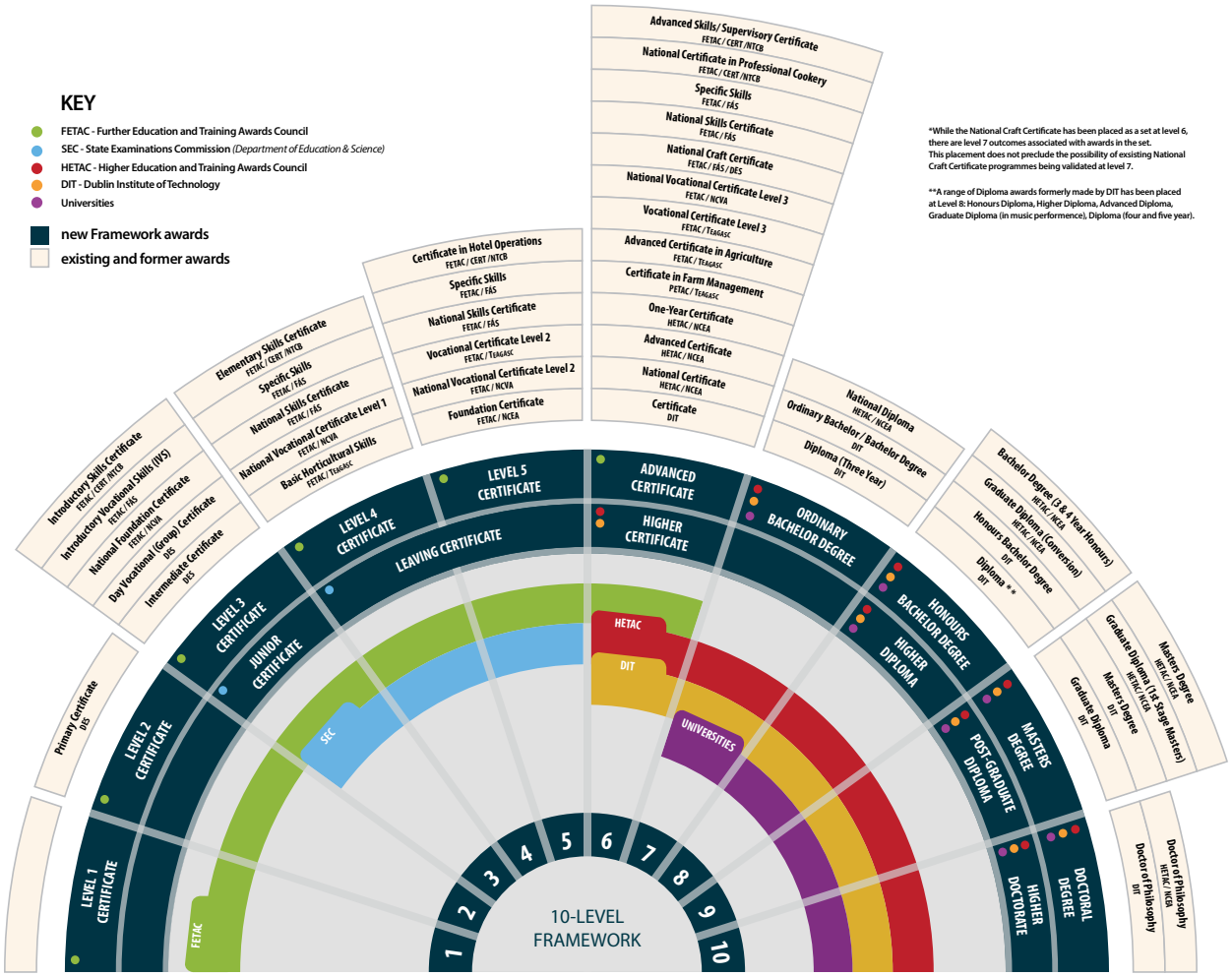
The outcomes at each level include those of all lower levels in the same sub-strand.

Placement of legacy awards

NQAI conducted considerable consultation among stakeholders regarding the appropriate placement of existing and legacy awards on the new NFQ (Figure 2.4 below).

It is clear that there is considerable bunching of existing legacy awards at Level 6 which is the interface between higher education qualifications/awards and awards provided elsewhere.

Figure 2.4. Legacy awards.



It is also obvious that there are two Level 6 awards (Advanced Certificate and Higher Certificate) which are difficult to separate in terms of level, but slightly different is relation to descriptors of sub-strand requirements. The descriptors for both level 6 awards are included below. From the perspective of this Country Report this distinction is important as it is the difference between a provider being regarded as a 'further education' provider or a 'higher 'education' provider at the same level, with all the associated quality assurance requirements that this distinction creates.

The competence sub-strands of 'context', 'role' and 'learning to learn' are more complex in level 6 Higher Certificate.

Likewise, the progression options are wider for the Higher Certificate.

Differentiation is also obvious in the sub-strand 'knowledge-kind' where more theory is expected as a learning outcomes at higher certificate level.

National Framework of Qualifications
Creatoibre Náisiúnta na gCáilíochtaí

AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTOR 'H'

Title	Advanced Certificate
Class of Award-type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award-type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	6
Volume	Large
Knowledge *- breadth*	Specialised knowledge of a broad area
Knowledge *-kind*	Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant depth in some areas
Know-how and skill *-range*	Demonstrate comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools
Know-how and skill *-selectivity*	Formulate responses to well-defined abstract problems
Competence *-context*	Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of functions in a wide variety of contexts
Competence *-role*	Exercise substantial personal autonomy and often take responsibility for the work of others and/or for the allocation of resources; form, and function within, multiple complex and heterogeneous groups
Competence *-learning to learn*	Learn to take responsibility for own learning within a managed environment
Competence *-insight*	Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others
Progression & transfer	Transfer to a programme leading to a Higher Certificate (award-type I). Progression to a programme leading to an Ordinary Bachelor Degree (award-type J) or to an Honours Bachelor Degree (award-type K).
Articulation	

National Framework of Qualifications
Creatoibre Náisiúnta na gCáiliochtaí

AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTOR 'I'

Title	Higher Certificate
Class of Award-type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award-type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	6
Volume	Large
Knowledge *- breadth*	Specialised knowledge of a broad area
Knowledge *-kind*	Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant underpinning theory
Know-how and skill *-range*	Demonstrate comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools
Know-how and skill *-selectivity*	Formulate responses to well-defined abstract problems
Competence *-context*	Act in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs; identify and apply skill and knowledge to a wide variety of contexts
Competence *-role*	Exercise substantial personal autonomy and often take responsibility for the work of others and/or for the allocation of resources; form, and function within, multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups
Competence *-learning to learn*	Take initiative to identify and address learning needs and interact effectively in a learning group
Competence *-insight*	Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others
Progression & transfer	Transfer to programme leading to an Advanced Certificate (award-type H) Progression to a programme leading to an Ordinary Bachelor Degree (award-type J) or to an Honours Bachelor Degree (award-type K).
Articulation	

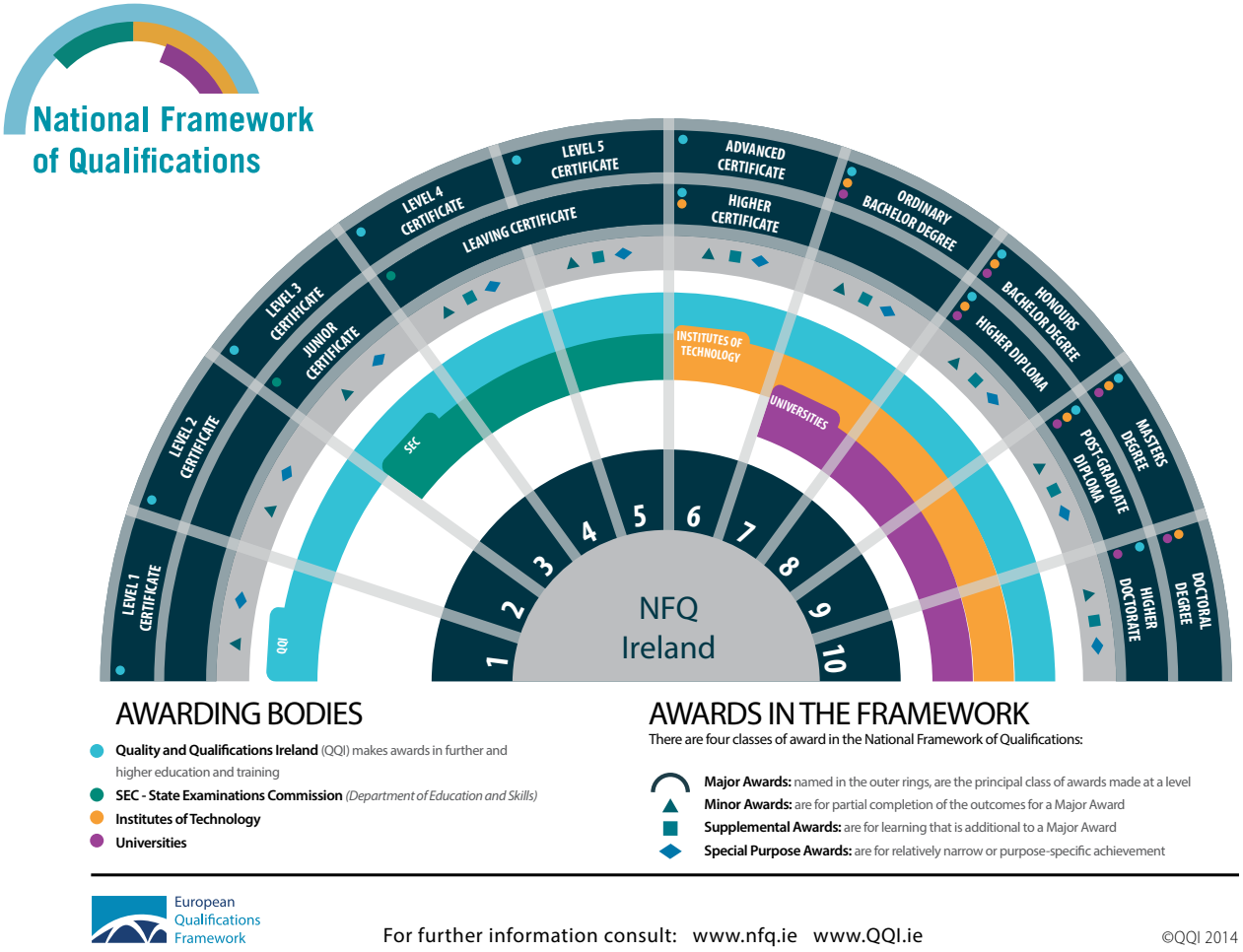
Award titles and providers in the QQI Phase since 2012

Since the re-structuring resulting from the QQI Act 2012 the rainbow diagram looks different from the perspective of inclusion of non-formal qualifications/ awards (Figure 2.5 below)

It is obvious from the diagram that both FETAC and HETAC have gone.

It is also obvious that QQI as a provider of award titles now has a continuous span from Level 1 to Level 10. How a clear distinction between the two Level 6 awards/qualifications are to be maintained operationally or educationally has yet to be fully worked out.

Figure 2.5. Award titles and providers as of 2012



AWARDING BODIES

- **Quality and Qualifications Ireland** (QQI) makes awards in further and higher education and training
- **SEC - State Examinations Commission** *(Department of Education and Skills)*
- **Institutes of Technology**
- **Universities**

AWARDS IN THE FRAMEWORK

There are four classes of award in the National Framework of Qualifications:

- **Major Awards:** named in the outer rings, are the principal class of awards made at a level
- **Minor Awards:** are for partial completion of the outcomes for a Major Award
- **Supplemental Awards:** are for learning that is additional to a Major Award
- **Special Purpose Awards:** are for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievement

European Qualifications Framework

For further information consult: www.nfq.ie www.QQI.ie

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Types of awards/qualifications: major minor, special-purpose, supplemental

The Irish NQF distinguishes among four award/qualifications types: major minor, special-purpose, supplemental.

These types both reflect practices that had developed before the 1999 Act and indicate that the framework was intended to accommodate qualifications/awards that reflect a lifelong learning paradigm where flexibility of access to accredited learning might be required. NQAI definition of minor, special purpose and supplemental awards/qualifications are as follows:

Box 2.1. Minor, special purpose and supplemental award-types

Summary of minor, special purpose and supplemental award-types

- **minor** award-types provide recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes, but not the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award. This recognition will have relevance in its own right
- **special-purpose** award-types are made for specific, relatively narrow, purposes — for example, the Safe Pass certification of competence in health and safety in the construction industry
- **supplemental** award-types are for learning which is additional to a previous award. They could, for example, relate to updating and refreshing knowledge or skills, or to continuing professional development

Source: NQAI

Award-type descriptors for minor, special purpose and supplemental awards reflect their definitions.

In relation to the relevance of these award-types or the non-formal sector and their access to inclusion in the NQF, it is reasonable to assert from document evidence that the non-formal sector prefers the flexibility of 'smaller' awards for coherent programme pathways across and up the NQF. Additionally, it is easier for formal providers to negotiate awards/qualifications with the non-formal sector providers if there is a direct relationship with their own major awards. This latter point is, however, a double-edged sword as it can diminish the options available to non-formal providers when formal providers integrate smaller award to suit their own learners in the first instance and eventually give less regard to the needs of the non-formal sector.

In terms of level descriptors for each of these three award-types, considerable flexibility is provided, as illustrated in the descriptors below.

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AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTOR 'MINOR AWARD-TYPE'

Class of Award	Minor award
Purpose	Multi-purpose award-type that recognises attainment of part of a major award and which has relevance in its own right.
Level	Generally, the same level as the major award to which it is linked
Volume	Variable - smaller than the major award of which it is a part
Comprehensiveness	Variable
Knowledge - breadth	Variable
Knowledge - kind	Variable
Know-how and skill - range	Variable
Know-how and skill - selectivity	Variable
Competence - context	Variable
Competence - role	Variable
Competence – learning to learn	Variable
Competence - insight	Variable
Progression & Transfer	Transfer to programmes leading to attainment of a part of one or more major awards Transfer to programmes leading to special purpose awards
Articulation	
Link to other Awards	Learning outcomes form part of those of a major award

QQI

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Quality and Qualifications Ireland

AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTOR 'SPECIAL PURPOSE AWARD-TYPE'

Class	Special Purpose
Purpose	To meet specific, relatively narrow focused legislative, regulatory, economic, social or personal learning requirements
Level	Any Level – best-fit
Volume	Variable - between small and medium
Comprehensiveness	Usually limited to a small number of sub-strands
Knowledge - breadth	Variable
Knowledge – kind	Variable
Know-how and skill – range	Variable
Know-how and skill - selectivity	Variable
Competence - context	Variable
Competence – role	Variable
Competence – learning to learn	Variable
Competence - insight	Variable
Progression & Transfer	Transfer to programmes leading to major or minor awards at the same level or above Transfer to programmes leading to supplemental awards at the same level Transfer/progression to programmes leading to related special purpose awards at the same level or above
Articulation	
Link to other Awards	Learning outcomes may form part of those of a major award, minor award or supplemental award

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Quality and Qualifications Ireland

AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTOR 'SUPPLEMENTAL AWARD-TYPE'

Class	Supplemental
Purpose	For learners who have already obtained a major or special purpose award. May be for refreshing/updating and continuous education and training with respect to an occupation/profession.
Level	Generally, the same level as the major or special purpose award to which it is linked
Volume	Variable - between small and medium
Comprehensiveness	Variable
Knowledge - breadth	Variable
Knowledge - kind	Variable
Know-how and skill - range	Variable
Know-how and skill - selectivity	Variable
Competence - context	Variable
Competence - role	Variable
Competence – learning to learn	Variable
Competence – insight	Variable
Progression & Transfer	Progression to programmes leading to major awards at the next level in a related field of learning
Articulation	From major or special purpose award at the same level
Link to other Awards	Learning outcomes are closely linked to those of a major award or of a special purpose award – they generally reflect a deepening of learning, up-dating or specialisation

The shift to learning outcomes

The NQF promoted a learning outcomes basis to qualifications/award design based upon the strands and sub-strands of the level descriptors. Considerable capacity-building was undertaken among providers to fulfil this requirement through internal quality assurance systems.

Credit systems

The NQF policy in relation to the use of credit systems was published in the 2004 document: *Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach to Credit in Higher Education and Training*.

Higher education broadly conforms to EHEA and Bologna process norms in relation to ECTS credits, semesters and academic years.

Further education has yet to achieve a uniform credit system.

Principles and operational guidelines for recognition of prior learning (RPL)

Throughout the 1990s there was considerable piloting of APEL/RPL models and much lobbying for a national approach.

NQAI responded by convening an RPL Working Group of stakeholders to draw up agreed *Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education*, in 2005.

Under those guideline, providers were to be responsible for the operation of RPL within their own spheres and to publish institutional policies for RPL.

It is normal practice for arrangements for RPL for access, transfer, progression, exemption from portions of a programme and for achievement of a full award/qualifications to be included in programme documents as a condition of approval.

No central RPL service is provided by QQI or any other agency.

Recognition of other qualifications

However, NQAI/QQI supports a qualification recognition service, QualRec and NARIC Ireland where holders of awards/qualifications achieved outside the state can have a statement of equivalence provided in relation to the Irish NFQ.

naric IRELAND

Foreign Qualifications Database

The Irish framework was also benchmarked to the EQF-LLL and to the EHEA Bologna framework as illustrated in the table below.

EQF Levels	*EHEA Framework (Bologna)*	*Irish NFQ Levels*	*Irish NFQ Major Award-types*
1		1	Level 1 Certificate
		2	Level 2 Certificate
2		3	Level 3 Certificate, Junior Certificate
3		4	Level 4 Certificate, Junior Certificate
4		5	Level 5 Certificate, Junior Certificate
5	Short Cycle within First Cycle	6	Advanced Certificate (FET award)* Higher Certificate (HET award)
6	First Cycle	7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree
		8	Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma
7	Second Cycle	9	Masters Degree, Post-Graduate Diploma
8	Third Cycle	10	Doctoral Degree, Higher Doctorate

Protection of enrolled learners and the IEM

QQI has responsibility to require providers to show that Irish providers of awards/qualifications have sufficient arrangements in place to ensure enrolled learners can complete their programme without risk of discontinuation of the programme.

To protect learners enrolled with non-Irish providers, QQI requires that such providers achieve the International Education Mark standards.

2.3. Institutional Setting

QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

The 2012 Act and formation of QQI

QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) is a state agency established by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 with a Board appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. QQI's functions include those previously carried out by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC); the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC); the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI).

QQI is answerable to the Department of Education and Skills which funds some of its running costs. It has input into policy development and provide the Department with feedback. QQI works with the Department in areas such as: Qualifications; Further Education and Training; Higher Education; Schools Inspection; Guidance; Statistics; International Relations; Teacher Education; Schools Curriculum and Examinations.

In the area of qualifications, QQI is responsible for maintaining the ten-level NFQ (National Framework of Qualifications). It is also an awarding body and sets standards for awards it makes in the NFQ.

QQI validates education and training programmes and makes extensive awards in the further education and training sector including in the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). These Boards were set up in 2014/15 to bring regional coherence to further education and training (Figure 2.6 below).

Figure 2.6. Education and Training Boards

QQI also makes awards in higher education mainly to learners in private providers. The universities and institutes of technology largely make their own awards empowered under separate legislation. QQI also provides advice on recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland and on the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad.

As a new function, QQI publishes a **directory of providers and awards** in the NFQ.

In the area of quality assurance, QQI is responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance in further and higher education and training providers in Ireland. This includes the universities, institutes of technology, Education and Training Boards and providers in the private further and higher education and training sectors availing of QQI awards. QQI publishes the outcomes of these external reviews on its website.

Another new function of QQI is to authorise the use of an International Education Mark (IEM) for providers. This will be awarded to providers of education and training (including English language training) who have demonstrated compliance with a statutory code of practice in the provision of education and training to international students.

QQI Governance

QQI is governed by a board of ten members including the Chief Executive. Board members are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. The Chief Executive is appointed by the Board with the consent of the Minister. Its independence is guaranteed by legislation: the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. Members of its Board include:

- At least one person with international experience related to the functions of the Board
- At least two learner representatives; one nominated by the Union of Students in Ireland.

All decisions on the validation or otherwise of programmes leading to QQI awards are made by the Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC).

QQI engages with further and higher education and training providers and institutions in the public and private sectors. It also administers the Acels recognition scheme for English language providers. In some cases QQI engages as the awarding body and the external quality assurance body. In other cases, it acts solely as the external quality assurance body.

QQI engages routinely with providers and institutions through its Quality Assurance and Qualifications sections, particularly in the course of:

- Awards standards development
- Programme validation and review
- Monitoring
- Certification
- Annual dialogue meetings
- Institutional review.

Joint QQI/Community and Voluntary Sector Working Group

Of direct relevance to this Country Report QQI is the fact that QQI has established a joint working group with representatives of the community and voluntary sector – the non-formal sector. The working group was established in order to enable QQI to improve and expand its current communications with organisations that form the community and voluntary sector, and facilitate community and voluntary sector legacy providers in making an informed choice in relation to re-engagement.

Re-engagement with providers of education and training awards

A major change in procedures following from the 2012 Act is that all existing non-formal providers must re-engage with QQI in order to continue to provide qualifications/awards that are included in the NQF.

The process of re-engagement and the criteria for approval are set out in the policy document: *Policy and criteria for renewed access to QQI validation for voluntary providers of further education and training*.

The process of re-engagement is further discussed in Chapter 5 of this Report.

Stakeholder consultations

Since 2012 QQI has undertaken extensive consultations through Green and White Papers regarding the changes required under the terms of the 2012 Act. Outcomes of these consultations are available on the QQI website.

Feedback to QQI in relation to aspects of framework development impacting on the non-formal sector are included in the final chapter of this Report.

A 'register' of qualifications/awards?

There is no specific register of qualifications in Ireland.

Qualifax is a guidance tool where data are populated based on material made available by education and training providers, but it is not a regulated list. Inclusion in Qualifax is not considered a legal status that implies rights or privileges.The QQI list of awards is the only register-type database of accredited qualifications and relates only to awards made by QQI.

Qualifax
THE NATIONAL LEARNERS' DATABASE

2.4. Types and Legal Status of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Major, minor, special purpose, and supplemental awards

All awards/qualifications approved through QQI quality assurance systems are listed in Qualifax. Each qualification/award does not have legal status per se unless it is regulated under separate legislation to the 2012 Act or is a result of a professional or regulatory directive.

For example, **The Green Cert**. (Level 6 special purpose award), which enable individual holders to be exempt from stamp duty when agricultural lands are being transferred within families is regulated by the Department of Agriculture.

Likewise, persons working in any capacity on a construction site is obliged to achieve A Safe Pass Health and Safety Awareness Training Programme certificate regulated by The Health and Safety Authority.

Qualifications/awards on the Irish NQF are not 'free' for use by providers other than those providers who have been quality assured as providers and who have achieved approval for each Qualifications/award through the validation process and who have paid the appropriate fees for these services.

All approved qualifications/ awards on the NQF are coded in relation to the provider which developed them. These codes are generally used for applications and monitoring purposes. So, it is not possible for a different provider to 'snatch' a qualification developed by another provider and to replicate it for themselves.

Provision of major state-funded awards in the state at higher education level is monitored by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in relation to supply and demand from learners and the labour market. Qualification/award titles are likewise monitored.

Professional and regulated occupational awards

Certain professional bodies have powers to award qualifications, as mentioned previously in Chapter 2.1:

- An Bórd Altranais (The Nursing Board)
- The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland
- The Opticians Board
- The Law Society of Ireland
- The Council of the Honourable Society of Kings Inns
- The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ireland
- The National Social Work Qualifications Board
- The Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland
- Ministry of Commerce, Marine and Natural Resources
- Department of Telecommunications Regulation
- The Irish Aviation Authority
- The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

QQI facilitates the development of standards for certain occupations against which qualifications/awards are developed. Recent examples of such standards are:

- Architecture Technician Award Standards
- Award standards Level 6 craft metal fabrication
- National Tourism Guide
- Lifeguard Qualification
- Coastal Guide Qualification

The status of alignment with the framework

In the QQI Phase certain professional bodies were facilitated in aligning their qualifications/awards with the levels of the NQF. Policy in this regard was set out in the document: Policies and criteria for recognising professional awards within the NQF, May 2014.

> Alignment is the name of a process for the recognition of professional awards within the Framework and this term will be used throughout the paper. Validation of a programme of education and training to enable a Framework award to be made is an alternative route to recognition of a professionaly relevant award within the Framework.
>
> This policy and these criteria are exclusively for the alignment of professional awards. The paper includes:
>
> - An outline of the alignment process
> - An outline of the criteria for alignment
> - The general conditions for alignment
>
> The policy will be supported by more detailed guidelines to be published by QQI.
>
> More general policy and criteria for the recognition within the Framework will be addresed by future development.
>
> Alignment is not directly relevant to directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications—its purpose is different. Alignment of professional awards with the NQF facilitates the recognition of the relationship between a professional award and other qualifications (of Irish or non-Irish awarding bodies) that are recognised within the Framework. Specifically, the alignment process here determines whether a professional award made by an eligible professional body can be recognised to be at a particural level in the NFQ1 where a professional Award-type Descriptor2 has been determined for this purpose.
>
> Alignment is not currently available at NQF level 10. At this level recognition within the Framework is only available through a programme validation process (executed by QQI [see Section 2.2] or a self-validating higher education and training provider whose awards are recognised within the NFQ) using the Framework's Doctoral award type.

However, facilitation of the alignment process is currently suspended.

2.5. Procedures for Inclusion of Qualifications in the NQF

The transition phase from NQAI to QQI

The transition phase for QQI following from the 2012 Act enables existing/legacy providers to re-engage with QQI on a temporary basis until such time as all new QQI policies and procedures have been developed, approved and operational. The transition status of all non-formal legacy providers is temporary and will expire on a specified date. This means that all awards approved from non-formal providers will run out of certification and no longer be available. It is essential, therefore, for legacy non-formal providers to 're-engage' with QQI and to be quality assured as a provider before they can have programmes approved for delivery and included in the NQF. Legacy providers have a 'one-off' opportunity to re-engage with QQI during this transition phase. The timescale for re-engagement will vary depending on agreements already in place for each non-formal provider.

Re-engaging with QQI for approval of quality assurance arrangements

Legacy non-formal providers who wish to continue as providers must have their quality assurance arrangements approved by QQI. The legacy provider should provide evidence of its competence and capacity to meet the quality assurance requirements and criteria of QQI as their awarding body.

QQI predict that not all legacy providers will meet the minimum capacity required and will cease to be recognised as a provider entitled to use the QQI award mark.

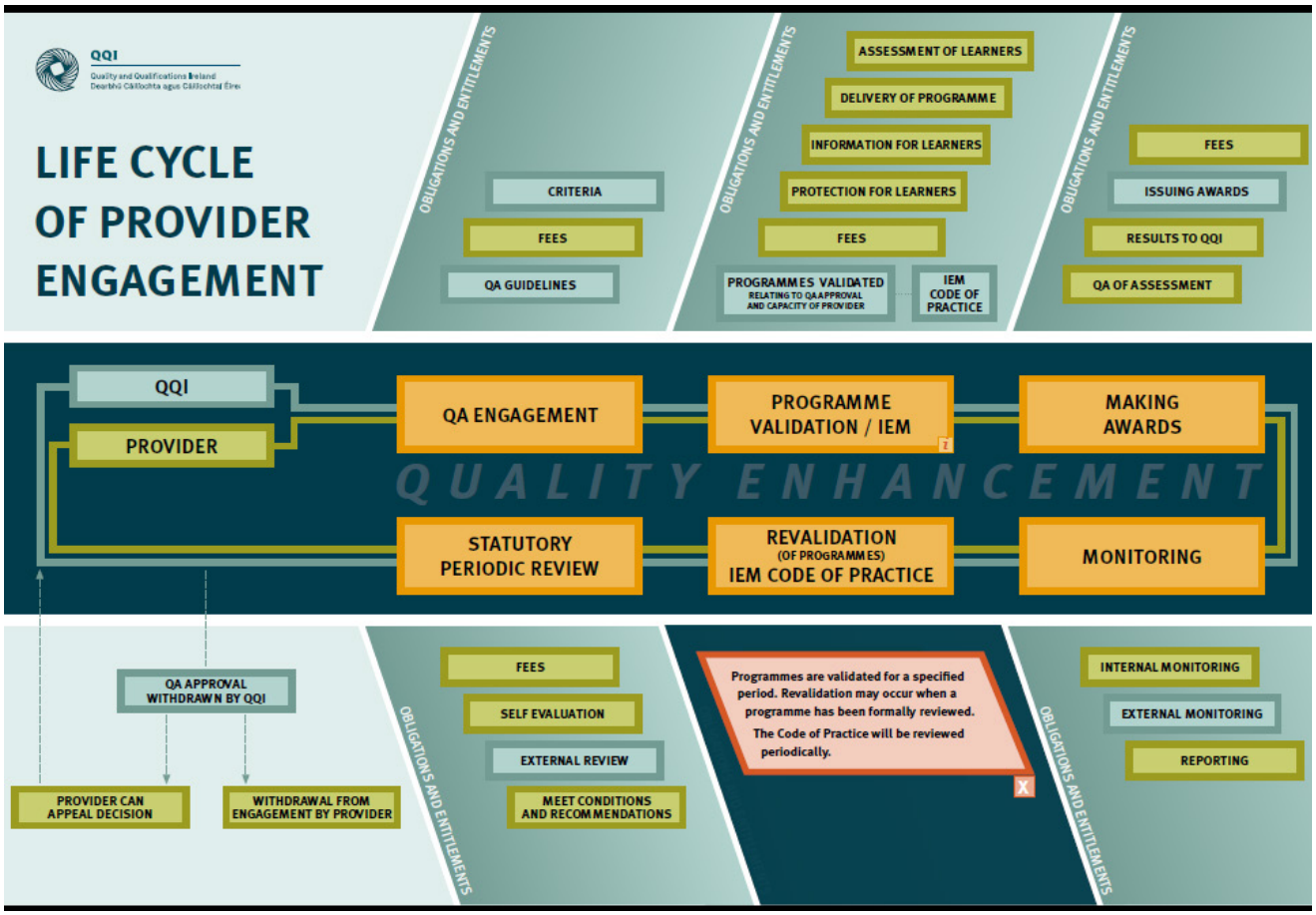
QQI also predict that small providers will need to combine in **consortia** or **networks** to achieve the scale to meet minimum capacity to meet QQI criteria.

Life-cycle of provider engagement with QQI

Non-formal providers which choose to re-engage as a QQI provider will have a series of inter-actions with QQI in what is called the life-cycle of provider engagement. The flow-chart below illustrates the six main phases of engagement, namely:

i. Applying to QQI
ii. Meeting quality assurance criteria
iii. Achieving validation of programmes
iv. Making awards
v. Monitoring
vi. Revalidation of programmes
vii. Statutory periodic review

Figure 2.7. QQI Lifecycle of provider engagement



Routes to including non-formal awards in the NQF

Non-formal providers can follow one of three routes to have their training and education programmes/qualifications placed into the NQF. The three routes are as follows:

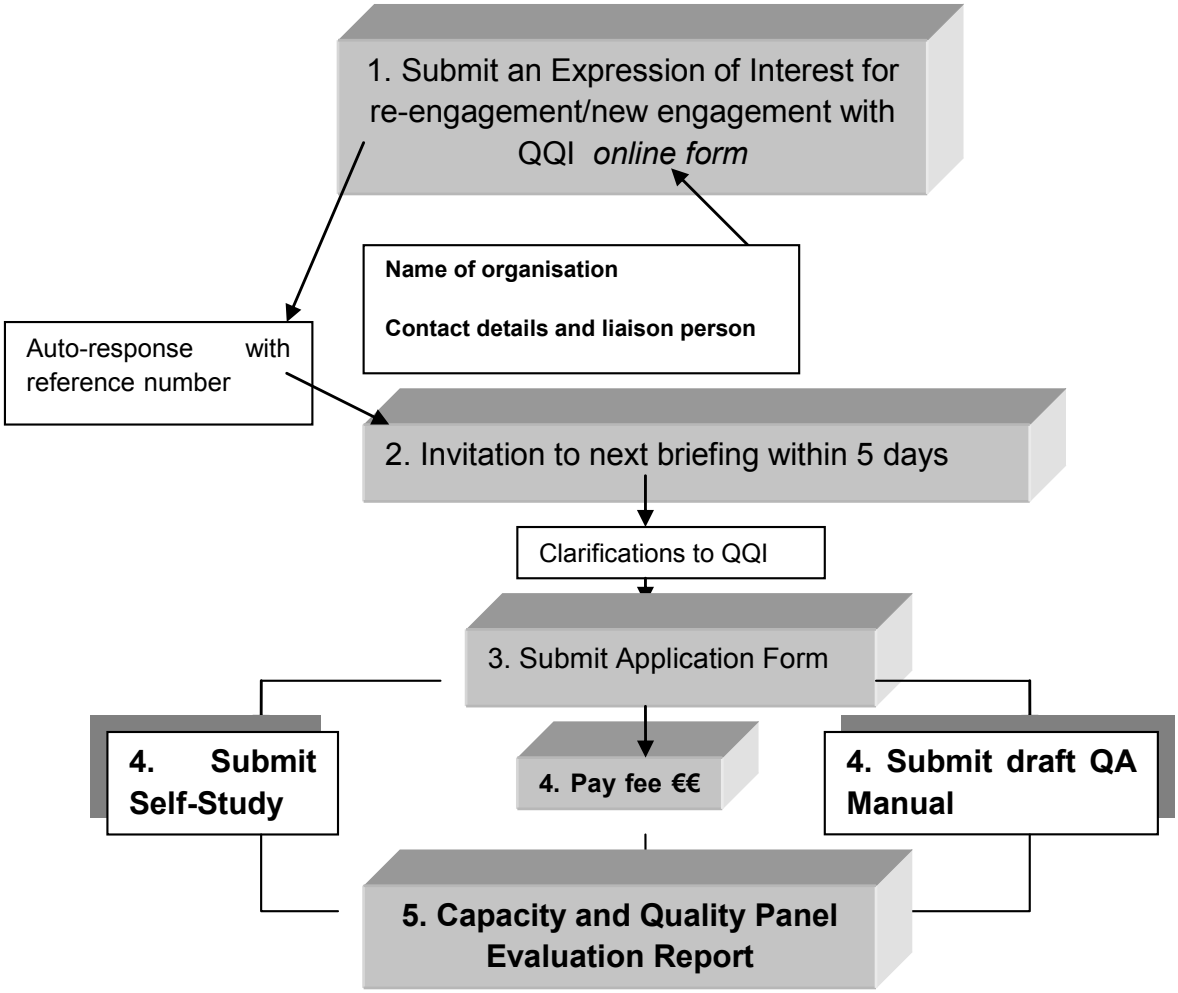
i. Re-engagement/renewed access as **an individual legacy/existing** provider of QQI

ii. Becoming a **'new' provider** of QQI as an individual provider or as a member of a consortium or network and setting aside their legacy status

iii. Becoming a **linked provider** of a Designated Awarding Body

Each of these three routes involves different processes and procedures, as detailed in Figure 2.8 below.

Figure 2.8. Steps in becoming a non-formal provider of qualifications.



1. Re-engagement/renewed access as an individual legacy/existing provider of QQI

The steps of re-engagement with QQI and to renew access to the NQF are as follows:

- **Step 1:** Apply to QQI indicating that the provider wishes to continue as a provider using the required application form for approval of the provider's quality assurance arrangements
- **Step 2:** Prepare full documentation within QQI deadline for re-engagement.
- **Step 3:** Pay the required fee
- **Step 4:** Submit the SELF-STUDY documentation required against QQI criteria and draft QA MANUAL of provider arrangements:
- **Step 5:** Respond to evaluators' report for either approval or rejection.

- (Submit an appeal and revised document in the event of a rejection. Wind down provision if the appeal is refused – or continue as a non-QQI provider)
- **Step 6:** Prepare programme documents for validation against QQI QA criteria and procedures outlines in your approved QA Manual.

2. Becoming a new provider of QQI as an individual provider or as a member of a consortium or network of providers

A new non-formal provider who wishes to have their awards included as QQI awards in the NQF are obliged to follow the steps set out in the QQI document: *Initial access to programme validation*.

Potential providers are obliged to self-assess their capacity to meet QQI criteria, capacity to develop their quality assurance system and capacity to design and develop their programmes.

The process to initial engagement leading to initial validation of programmes includes information on the roles and responsibilities of QQI and of an applicant and the timetables for completing the process.

3. Becoming a linked provider with an existing Designated Awarding Body

Linked provision is currently suspended. However, in previous years linked provision could work in two ways.

1) Linked provision can be established where a provider which is not a Designated Awarding Body enters into an arrangement under which the linked provider offers a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the requirements for an award of the Designated Awarding Body.

In this model of linked provision, the Designated Awarding Body, is always responsible for the quality assurance of the award/qualification delivered by the linked provider.

2) A training provider which is not a Designated Awarding Body can negotiate provision of a qualification/award with a provider which has designated awarding powers and which quality assures the process under its own QA arrangements and which teaches the programme, with or without the direct involvement of the 'commissioning' provider. In this model there may be a tendering process to select the linked provider with awarding powers.

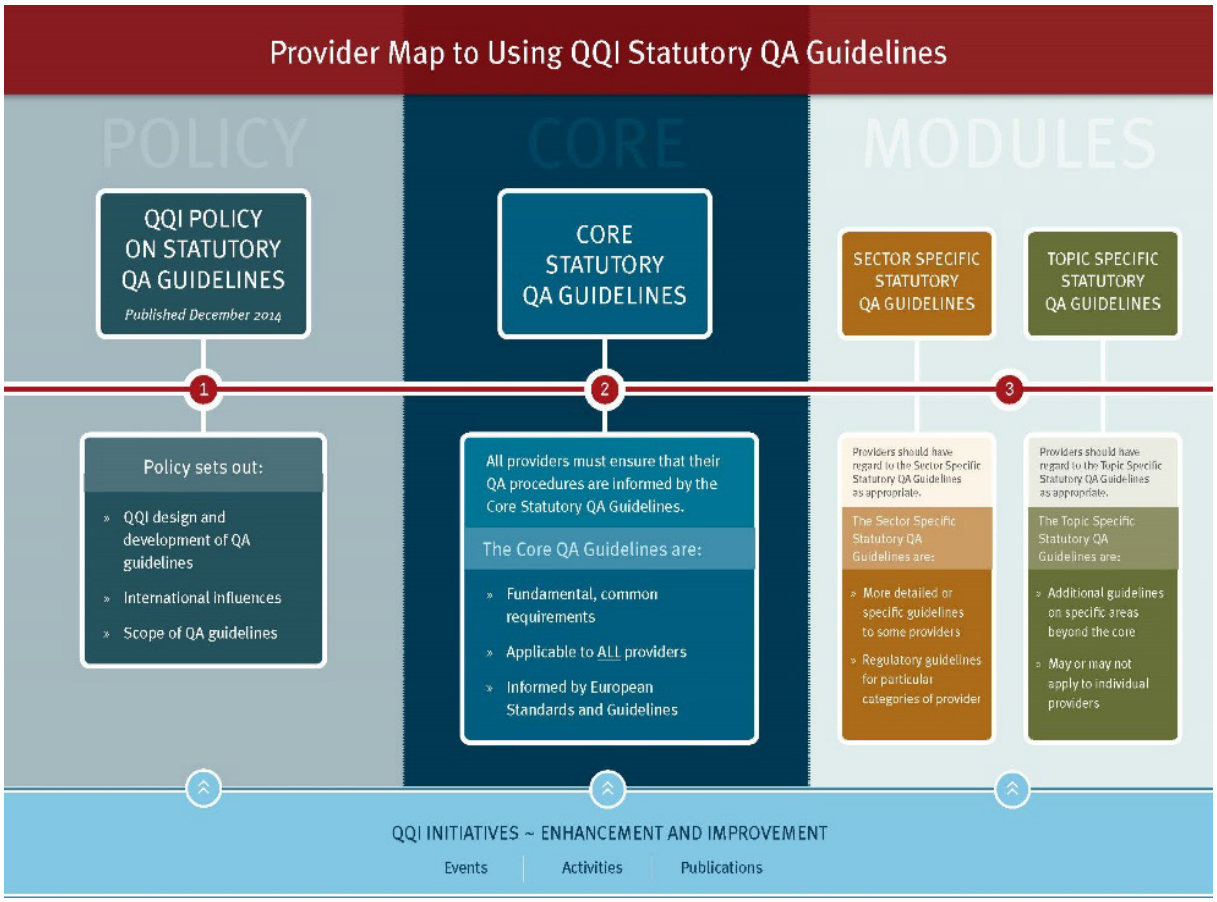
The former procedures for linked provision and the principles that guided them were outlined by The Irish Higher Education Quality Network's Guidelines for Collaborative and Transnational Provision.

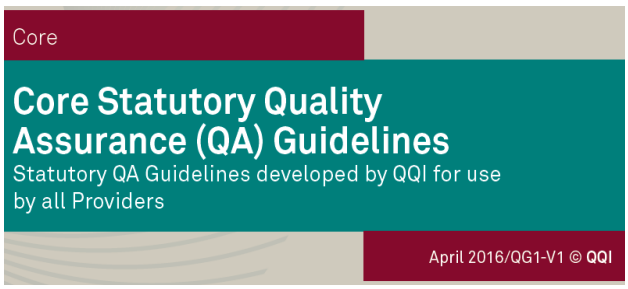
Core, sector-specific and topic specific Quality Assurance requirements

In 2016 QQI moved from the two sets of QA Guidelines for FETAC and HETAC which had been used since 2003. Under the 2012 Act QQI had become both an awarding body and a quality assurance body across the ten levels without a demarcation now between FE and HE.

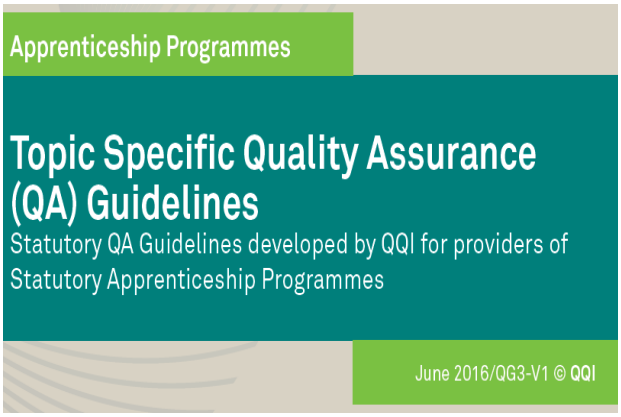
Feedback from stakeholders indicated strongly that a single, unitary set of QA guidelines across all ten levels would favour HE providers unfairly. Consequently, there are now four sets of QA guidelines: statutory QA guideline; core guidelines for all providers; sector-specific guidelines; topic-specific guideline.

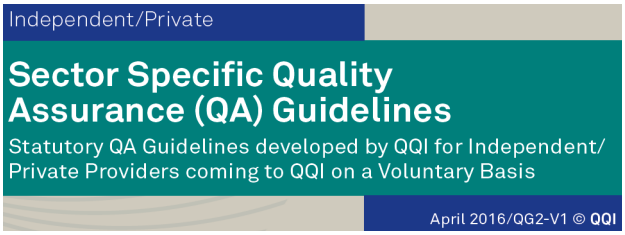
Figure 2.9. Map of QQI quality assurance guidelines





From the perspective of this Country Report the most significant QA guidelines are the sector-specific guidelines for the independent/private providers coming to QQI on a voluntary basis.





Those guidelines require non-formal providers to satisfy the QA criteria under eleven headings as illustrated in the QQI document below.

SECTION 2: THE CORE STATUTORY QUALITY ASSURANCE GUIDELINES

The main areas to be addressed in provider quality assurance procedures are as follows:

1) Governance and management of Quality
2) Documented approach to Quality Assurance
3) Programmes of Education and Training
4) Staff Recruitment, Management and Development
5) Teaching and Learning
6) Assessment of Learners
7) Supports for Learners
8) Information and Data Management
9) Public Information and Communication
10) Other parties involved in Education and Training
11) Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

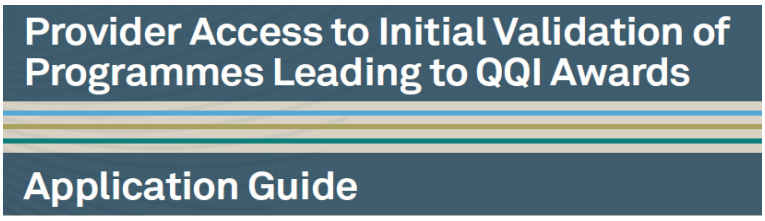
2.6. Quality Assurance of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Quality assurance through the validation process

Again, it is important to note that QA requirements are initially for approval of a provider's competence and capacity to meet those requirements. If a provider successfully proves that **competence** and **capacity**, then the provider is free to apply to apply for approval to offer programmes leading to qualifications/awards.

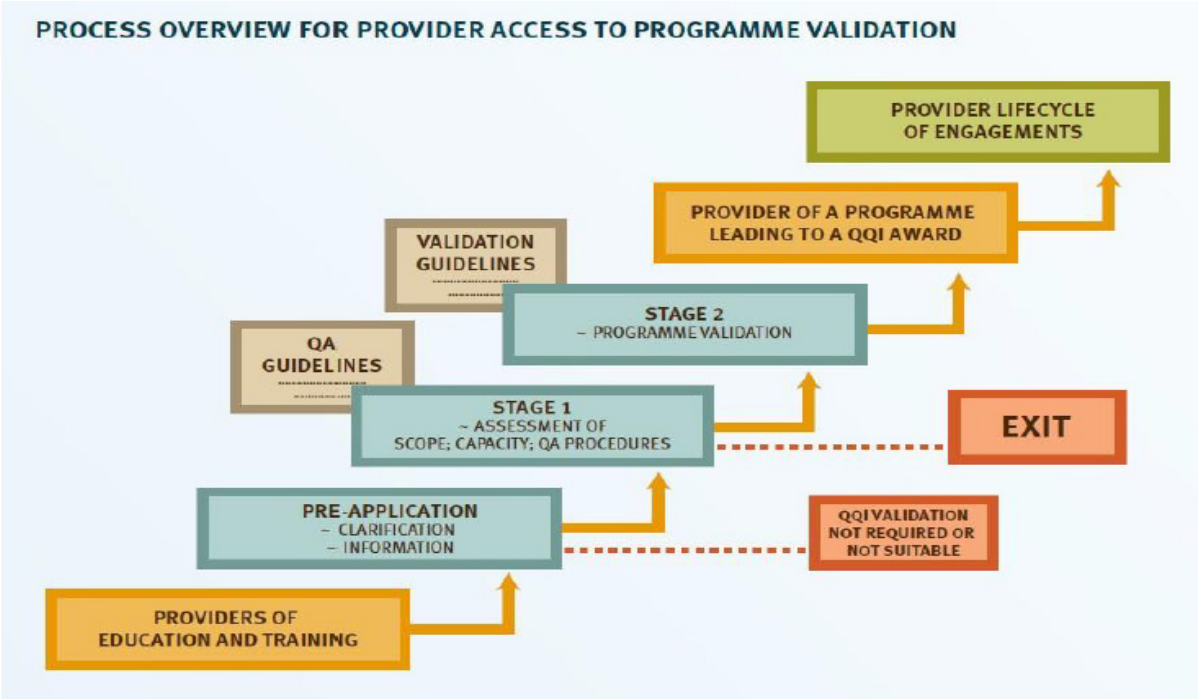
The process to achieving approval to offer qualifications/awards is called the **validation** process.

All providers of QQI qualifications/awards must apply for access/permission to provide such programmes. Guidance is available on the process and how to apply for permission to submit programmes for validation.



The steps in applying for 'provider access' to programme validation are outlined in the flow-chart below (Figure 2.10)

Figure 2.10. The process of achieving quality-assured status as a QQI provider and the process for achieving validation of programmes leading to QQI qualifications/awards are inter-twined in a system of lifecycle engagement.



The significant changes in the processes and procedures for both quality assurance and for validations of programmes leading to qualifications/awards since the 2012 Act and the formation of QQI have caused significant unease among QQI providers from the community and voluntary sector in particular.

Policies and procedures have been issued incrementally, sometimes after lengthy delays. New procedures require new resources and more time on the side of providers. They also cause delays in re-engagement and renewed approval of existing programmes.

These issues are evident in the feedback from non-formal stakeholders to Green and White Papers issued by QQI and in the responses to the survey questions for this Country Report which are commented upon in the final chapter under 'current debates'.

Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training

April 2016/QP.17-V1 © QQI

2.7. Costs of Including Non-formal Sector Qualifications in the NQF

Defining costs

In relation to costs, there are two main cost aspects to inclusion of qualifications/awards by the non-formal sector in the Irish NQF:

i. costs of fees to QQI,

ii. staff costs in relation to on-going life-cycle of engagement with QQI for provider quality assurance and for validation of programmes.

While the schedule of QQI fees are set at Ministerial level, provider staff costs vary depending on the size and extent of their training provision. In every case of approved provider status there will be a base-line of costs for maintenance of quality assurance records and for on-going compliance with QQI Providers who are in the process of re-engagement with QQI with regard to continuing as legacy providers, or who are engaging with QQI as a new provider, will accrue significant costs in staff time and resources. Staff time and resources are required to perform the **Self Study Report**, to draft a provider **QA Manual** and to organise the application process.

In addition, the self-study report must indicate how on-going staffing will be provided to meet QQI QA requirements until the subsequent cycle of review and re-validation of qualifications/awards.

A reasonable bench-mark of staff costs are civil service pay scales in 2016. In those pay scales a full-time QA Officer is likely to attract a minimum salary of €30,00 to €35,000 per year. A part-time QA Officer would cost at least €20,000 per annum. Additional costs of office space, IT equipment and materials need to be factored into the staff budget costs.

For providers working on a cost-recovery model income can be generated from learner fees to meet staff costs.

If provision is state-supported then costs to the provider are reduced.

However, for non-formal providers in the voluntary, non-profit sector, such staff costs are beyond reach. Such providers argue that providers in the non-formal sector which support civic society and are working as a 'public good' should be exempt from QQI fees at least, as was the case in the NQAI phase. The arguments here are more ideological and principles-based than financial. Much lobbying has been done in this regard.

The fees and costs issue have become a major deterrent for non-formal providers seeking to include their training in the NQF. The option of forming **consortia of providers** to share costs is not attracting the support of individual providers on a significant scale to date. As a result, some legacy providers are choosing to

withdraw from inclusion in the NQF, to inventing their own awards, or to seeking less costly international qualifications/award. These developments are commented upon in the final chapter on current debates.

QQI schedule of fees

The fee structure operated by QQI as of July 2018 is set out below using QQI sources only.

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Schedule of Fees

Determined by QQI, with the consent of the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform - Section 80 2012 Act

1 Fees for submission by providers of quality assurance procedures for approval

1A Fees for the submission of quality assurance procedures for approval (new providers (Section 80 (a)))

Fee	Applicability
€10,000	Fee for new providers of Higher Education and Training (HET) programmes.
€5,000	Fee for new providers of Further Education and Training (FET) programmes.

Note: *The applicable programme validation fee will also be payable. See part 2 overleaf.*

1B Fees for the submission, by Section 84 Providers, of quality assurance procedures for approval (Reengagement fee)

Higher Education & Training Providers

Fee	Applicability
€8,000	Major Awards
€5,000	Special Purpose Awards only

Further Education & Training Providers

Fee	Applicability
€4,000	Major Awards at levels 4, 5, 6
€2,500	Special Purpose Awards or Component Certificates only at levels 4, 5, 6
€2,000	Any Award at level 1, 2 or 3 but no higher

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2 Fees for programme validation - Higher education and training

2A Fees for an application for validation of a programme of higher education and training (Section 80 (e))

Standard Validation

Fee	Applicability[1]
€10,000	Fee for higher education and training programme with 60 credits or more
€5,000	Fee for higher education and training programme with less than 60 credits

2B Fee for validation of a programme of higher education and training where responsibility for arranging an independent evaluation report is devolved

The fee in respect of a application for validation of a programme of higher education and training in this case will be 50% of the standard validation fee (see 2A above).

2C Fee for validation of a programme of higher education and training leading to a Joint Award

The fee in respect of the validation of a higher education and training programme leading to a joint award will not be less than 50% of the standard validation fee (see 2A above). In some circumstances, it may equal or exceed the standard fee. This will depend on the circumstances and the complexity involved.

2D Fee for overseas validation of higher education programmes

All overseas validations will be charged the standard validation fee (see 2A above) plus travel and subsistence for panel members and members of the QQI executive, and other additional costs incurred.

[1] Please see Appendix 1 for the application of the validation fees to embedded programmes and the submission of one or more programmes in a single submission

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2E FEE FOR THE REVALIDATION[2] OF A HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMME (SECTION 80 (F))

Fee	Applicability (Note 1)
€1,500 minimum	A charge of €1,500 will apply to the first programme, with an additional fee of €10 per credit for each additional embedded programme, subject to a maximum of €1,500 per programme.

Note 1: This fee is for revalidation conducted following a programme review process managed by the provider in line with terms of reference agreed by QQI.
QQI may decide that a new validation is required on the expiry of the validation of a programme. If the revalidation is conducted by QQI (e.g. where terms of reference for the provider's programme review were not agreed by QQI), the standard validation fee will apply (see 2A above).

2F FEE FOR THE VALIDATION OF AN EMBEDDED PROGRAMME LEADING TO AN EXIT AWARD

A fee will not apply to the validation of an embedded programme leading to an exit award. The exit award fee concession is only available for major awards. An exit award is available in exceptional and limited circumstances when a learner is not in a position to complete the programme they enrolled on. An exit award programme should not be advertised.

Note that the standard fees apply to applications for the validation of any other kind of embedded programme.

2G FEE FOR THE EXTENSION OF VALIDATION FOR ONE YEAR

1) PROGRAMMES WITH 60 CREDITS OR MORE

These will be charged at the higher of one fifth of the standard validation fee (see 2A above) or a minimum of €3,000 if the extension is being sought for a single programme with 60 credits or more. Where the extension of validation request is not approved the fee will not be refunded.

2) PROGRAMMES WITH LESS THAN 60 CREDITS

These will be charged at the higher of one fifth of the standard validation fee (see 2A above) or a minimum of €1,000 if the extension is being sought for a single programme with less than 60 credits. Where the extension of validation request is not approved the fee will not be refunded.

[2] Revalidation is validation by QQI of a programme that has emerged or evolved from a programme that had been previously validated by QQI. Revalidation is also required for any programme that is to continue to enrol learners following expiry of the duration of enrolment.

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2H Withdrawal of an application for validation

Applications for the validation of programmes may be withdrawn prior to the start of the independent evaluation stage. A partial refund of fees (up to 50% of the fees received in respect of the application) may be made at this point. Once the independent evaluation stage has started, QQI will normally progress to a determination and publish the independent evaluation report.

3 Fees for programme validation - further education and training programmes (The fees for programme validation for further education and training are under review)

3A Fees for an application for validation of a further education programme (Section 80 (e))

Standard Validation

Fee	Applicability
€2,000	Fee for a further education and training programme with **50% or more** of the credit value of a major award
€1,000	Fee for a further education and training programme with **less than 50%** of the credit value of a major award

4 Fees for submission of quality assurance procedures for approval and programme validation – English language education

4A Fees for an application for validation of an English language programme (Section 80 (e))

Fee	Applicability
€5,000	International Foundation Year Award - Postgraduate

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€1,000	International Foundation Year Award - Undergraduate

4B FEES FOR SUBMISSION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES FOR APPROVAL IN RESPECT OF THE PROVISION OF THE CERTIFICATE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND AN APPLICATION FOR VALIDATION OF THE PROGRAMME

Fee	Applicability
€5,000	Approval of Quality Assurance Procedures for the provision of the Certificate in English Language Teaching (CELT)
€1,000	Validation of the Certificate in English Language Teaching (CELT)

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5 Fees for the making of awards

5a Fees for the making of awards by QQI (Section 80 (g))

Type of Award	Fee
Major Awards	
Level 1 - 3	**€50**
Level 4*	**€50**
Level 5* & 6*	**€80**
Component Awards	
Level 1 - 3	**€ 0**
Level 4*	**€20**
Level 5 & 6*	**€20**
Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards	
Level 1 - 3	**€ 0**
Level 4*	**€40**
Level 5 & 6*	**€40**
Higher Certificate	**€100**
Ordinary Bachelor Degree	**€150**
Honours Bachelor Degree	**€200**
Higher Diploma	**€200**
Post-graduate Diploma	**€200**
Masters' Degree	**€200**
Doctoral Degree	**€200**
Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards	**€ 50**

*****Waivers in respect of further education and training award (certification) fees are available to social welfare recipients and/or medical card holders. Providers should have a procedure to verify that a learner satisfies the exemption criteria and should retain this evidence. Waivers also apply to learners at certain centres, i.e. Youthreach and VTOS centres*

5b Fees for the making of Joint Awards (Section 80 (h))

Fees in respect of the making of joint awards will be not less than 50% of the fee for QQI awards. See Section 5a above. In some circumstances, the fee may equal that of a QQI award. The specific circumstances will be taken into consideration when determining an appropriate fee.

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Appendix 1

Application of the Schedule of Fees where a submission includes applications for the validation of multiple programmes in a similar field of learning

Programmes of Higher Education and Training

In the case of programmes of higher education and training the standard validation fee (see 2A above) will apply to the programme with the highest number of credits.

The fee for each additional programme included in the submission will be calculated based on €100 per credit, subject to a maximum of €10,000 in respect of each additional programme which has 60 credits or more, and €5,000 in respect of each additional programme with less than 60 credits.

Example A

2 Major Awards (1 add-on) and 5 Minor Awards

Award	Credits/Level	Fee €
Higher Certificate in Business	120 / L6	10,000
Bachelor of Business (Hons) with International Business	60 / L8	6,000
Certificate in Sales and Marketing	30 / L6	3,000
Certificate in Marketing Management	30 / L6	3,000
Certificate in Business and Entrepreneurship	20 / L6	2,000
Certificate in Business Communications	20 / L6	2,000
Certificate in Strategic Management	10 / L7	1,000
Total Fee		**27,000**

Example B

2 Major Awards

Award	Credits/Level	Fee €
Masters in Science in Technology and Business	90 / L9	10,000
Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Technology and Business	60 / L9	6,000
Total Fee		**16,000**

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Example C

1 Major Award and 1 Minor Award

Award	Credits/Level	Fee €
Bachelor of Arts in Animation	180 /L7	10,000
Certificate in Animation	60 /L6	6,000
Total Fee		**16,000**

Example D

2 Special Purpose Awards

Award	Credits/Level	Fee €
Certificate in Fund Accounting	30 /L9	5,000
Certificate in Risk and Financial Analysis	30 /L9	3,000
Total Fee		**8,000**

Example E

3 Major Awards ab-initio and 3 Minor Awards

Award	Credits/Level	Fee €
Bachelor of Science (Honours)	240 /L8	10,000
Bachelor of Science	180 /L7	10,000
Higher Certificate in Science	120 /L6	10,000
Diploma in Science	70 (L7)	7,000
Certificate in Science	30 (L6)	3,000
Certificate in Science Methods	30 (L6)	3,000
Total Fee		**43,000**

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Example F

3 Major Awards and, 3 Minor Awards

Award	Credits/Level	Fee €
Higher Certificate in Business	120 /L6	10,000
Bachelor of Business (Honours) add on	60/L8	6,000
Bachelor of Business add-on	60 /L7	6,000
Diploma in Business	70 /L7	7,000
Certificate in Business	30 /L6	3,000
Certificate in Business Accounts	30 /L6	3,000
Total Fee		**35,000**

Example G

A suite of four programmes submitted for revalidation

Award	Credits/Level	Fee €
Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Marketing	240 /L8	1,500
Bachelor of Business in Marketing	180 /L7	1,500
Higher Certificate in Business in Marketing	120 /L6	1,200
Certificate in Marketing	60 /L6	600
Total Fee		**4,800**

Example H

A suite of 6 programmes submitted for revalidation

Award	Credits/Level	Fee €
Certificate in Care Giving	20 /L6	1,500
Certificate in Golf and Sports Turf Management	15 /L6	150
Certificate in Care for the Elderly	15 /L6	150
Certificate in Facilitated Learning	10 /L6	100
Certificate in Supported Learning	10 /L6	100
Certificate in Managing Behaviour	10 /L6	100
Total Fee		**2,100**

2.8. Current Debates on Further Developments

Structure and content of this chapter

This chapter is structured into four parts which are somewhat discrete in their own rights but which are indicative of the range of tensions among stakeholders with regard to the direction the Irish NQF has taken to date and the likely future direction in the immediate term. The parts are as follows:

1) Feedback to QQI on future policies and procedures
2) Findings from the NQF-IN survey
3) Preparation for the second framework impact evaluation study
4) Looking forward in 2003 – predications and warnings

In order to draw upon qualitative and quantitative data for the first three parts of this chapter only documents available in the public domain or in responses and data from the survey among non-formal provider stakeholders conducted for this report are drawn upon. In the final part there is an attempt at a fifteen year meta-analysis regarding the overall performance of the Irish NQF using predictions and foresight warnings made by Granville in 2003.

As stressed in the first chapter, the Irish NQF is more than twenty years old when the development phase is added to the implementation phase. A qualifications framework, as with any organisational system, is subject to the tides of time. The frameworks design and ideology emerged from very specific adult education ideologies of the early and mid-1990s, pragmatic needs to education and training, form the need to re-skill and up-skill, from spaces left open to it by the confining legislation of the Universities Act 1997, and from meta-policy recommendations form the OECD and EU. The original framework reflected a particular 'learner-centred' ideology which pervaded policy and pedagogical literature at the time, giving the non-formal sector a place at the table in a more powerful way than heretofore. This 'place' reflected the model of partnership government that had maintained both industrial and civic peace during the recession years of the 1980s and 1990s. During the NQAI Phase of the NQF the non-formal sector built its capacity to influence policy within the guidelines and procedures for inclusion of qualifications/ awards in the framework through FETAC and HETAC. The sector also built its capacity to use the technologies of the NFQ – types of wards, credits, learning outcomes, RPL, arrangements for access, transfer and progression, to form efficient and effective linkages, collaborations and partnerships with the formal sector. The sector also learned to 'align' their own professional and occupational qualifications with the framework without being explicitly included within it. Fees for inclusion of qualifications/award in the framework through FETAC were nominal only.

So, from the perspective of this Country Report, there is logic in discussing only the debates about the changes since the 2012 Act which impacted on how the non-formal sector now engages with QQI in relation to inclusion in the framework.

As stated in Chapters 6 and 7, the 2012 Act and its consequences obliges private and voluntary providers (essentially the non-formal sector) to re-engage with the framework under radically different terms and conditions. It is those terms and conditions that are being debated currently and which are likely to be central to the outcomes of the second framework impact evaluation study which started in late 2016.

Feedback to QQI on future policies and procedures

Since 2014 QQI has conducted extensive stakeholder consultations on future policies through Green and White Papers. Of relevance to this Report are responses from non-formal sector with regard to the following White Papers:

- Re-engagement with legacy providers; overarching policies
- Policies and criteria for further education and training legacy voluntary providers continuing access to validation learning to QQI awards
- Policy and criteria for higher education and d training legacy voluntary providers continuing access to validation leading to QQI awards.

If the twenty-two feedback submission received, eighteen were from non-formal providers. The other four were from representative organisations of the formal sector. Only two of the non-formal providers were also respondents to the survey conducted for this Report.

So, what were the organisational and financial issues commented upon by the non-formal sector providers in their responses to the QQI policy papers from the perspective of organisational and financial aspects?

With regard to the current fees schedule the following points were raised by providers:

- Voluntary, non-profit providers should not have to pay fees to QQI on a common fees schedule since they were not obliged to pay such fees under in the NQAI phase.
- Where state funds are available to provider qualifications the rate of funding does not allow for the fees paid to QQI for re-engagement, for validation of programmes or for life-cycle engagement and QA provision.
- Fees for provision of programmes to marginalised groups should not become a sources of revenue for the state through QQI fees.
- The fee structure is discriminatory against non-profit providers who cannot enter into consortia.
- With regard to quality organistional aspects for assurance requirements, feedback contained the following common themes:
- Quality assurance models favour the formal higher education sector.

- Implying that only non-formal sector provider with good track records can re-engage with QQI suggests a lack of trust in the whole sector.
- A waiting time of up to two years from initial re-engagement to permission to provide qualifications is too-long.
- The criteria for meeting QQI standards are not fit-for-purpose for all types of non-formal providers.
- Not-for-profit non-formal providers do not have the infrastructure, capacities or resources to explore forming consortia of providers to have their qualifications/awards included in the NQF. Members of such consortia would not have autonomy as providers in their own right.
- The lead partner on a consortium would be responsible for the quality assurance of all partners: an unreasonable burden in expense and human resources.
- Being a member of a consortium would reduce the freedom to apply for state funding as a discrete provider.
- Ownership of consortium products would become an issue.
- The status of 'registered provider' needs to be restored, or at least re-defined in relation to the term 'recognised provider'.
- The growing perception that QQI favours HE providers is causing small VET level providers to leave the field of formal qualifications.
- Non-traditional adult learners will lose out in the new organisations, quality assurance and fees regimes.

'There is a growing perception that there is a bias towards the HE sector and that QQI are keen to significantly reduce the number of providers in the FE sector. This is a huge concern for voluntary and not-for-profit providers that often cater for learners in a specialised/niche area and it is crucial that these learners are protected. Commercial providers will not be interested in catering for this type of learner as it would not be financially viable. Timescales of re-engagement and agreeing QA procedures with legacy providers will have to be very clear, with plenty of notice given to allow providers sufficient time to manage and plan this process, e.g. if there will be fees for five yearly reviews of QA processes, again this will have to be very clear form the outset – e.g. options for staged payments should also be offered to smaller providers.' – Submission by Skillnet Network Managers – Certification group.

Findings from the NQF-IN survey

The criteria for selection of respondents to the NQF-In survey and the methodology were outlined in Preparation of the Report above and are not repeated here.

Data from the survey are presented below using the same headings as at the Round-table event:

Value of inclusion in the NQF

a. For organisations/companies with qualifications 'linked' to HE, 'value' includes credibility, an objective standard, national and international recognition, benchmarking, progression pathways, RPL, due 'respect' to learning systems that existed before the NQF.

b. For global sectors such as IT and HRM, the NQF is of less value than sectoral training qualifications

c. For some employers/organisations, short, specific, in-house training is more valued than formal NQF-related awards

d. Courses are easier to market to learners if they have an NQF level.

e. NQF awards have a degree of transparency.

f. NQF awards and progression opportunities give perceived parity of esteem between workers in public service and in the private sector.

g. Perception and reality of quality control.

QA requirements and procedures

a. Linked' award providers using the QA of their 'partner' organisation are 'untroubled' about QA requirements whether they are self-funded or assisted by state funding

b. Small organisations not 'linked' to a state-funded provider experience current QA requirements of re-engagement as bureaucratic, onerous, time-consuming, complex, frustrating, expensive and unwieldy.

Costs and return on investment

a. Organisations/companies with 'linked' provision pay for inclusion in the NQF as negotiated with the main provider.

b. Some organisations select their linked provider by tender.

c. Small organisations experience fees, staff costs, and time, as close to, or actually, unsustainable unless there is state aid.

d. Small organisations can offer NQF awards only through consortia or sectoral arrangements. Such arrangements can cause tensions when a particular organisational/sectoral ethos may be compromised.

e. Flexibility versus restrictiveness

f. In general, the time-delays, procedures and costs associated with including

small awards in the NQF are prohibitive.

g. The framework model of major awards is too-exclusive of 'combined' models using different types of awards to meet credit requirements.

h. Combining related minor awards from the same provider into major awards is useful for work-based learning.

Parallel systems

a. Organisations with well-established training awards may not benefit from inclusion in the NQF, particularly if they are in regulated professions of occupations with their own CPD pathways.

b. Global sector qualifications operate efficiently outwith NQFs or meta-frameworks.

c. Concern that QA requirements, costs, fees and inflexibility are driving some organisations to seek 'non-national' qualifications.

d. Small organisations with few resources may prefer an internal award system with internal credit systems for CPD.

e. 'Non-national' systems with a perceived 'favoured' status can compete unfavourably with local organisations.

Trends

a. Costs and new procedures are stretching the resources of smaller providers beyond sustainability, unless there are state 'schemes' to off-set costs.

b. Sectoral occupational regulation is increasing demand for obligatory qualifications and increasing 'linked' provision by outreach and mixed modalities.

c. Clearing house' models of provision are emerging to manage QA and costs, possibly with linked providers from the formal sector.

d. LMA/Springboard initiatives have changed how the framework operates among private and public providers. The impact of such initiatives on the non-formal sector and on perceptions of the value of such qualifications is not yet fully explored. But there may be a reason to ask why there is a perception that only upward progression in the NQF is assumed in such initiatives when lateral or downward mobility might be more appropriate for re-skilling.

e. Linking state-funding to framework awards has changed practices in several ways, some positive, some less so.

f. There is no clear evidence that commercial companies regard NQFs as vehicles for 'lifelong learning' or are interested in the concept. Pragmatism is the motivator for training opportunities.

g. Demand for particular courses may have no connection with its inclusion in the NQF – it may be totally related to labour market and employment trends and economic incentives.

h. Young learners are more keen to gain NQF awards than older learners.

i. Some sectors are considering whether inclusion in the NQF is worthwhile at all unless it is through flexible and responsive partnerships.

j. Changing state supports, such as the Back to Education Initiative, may confine learners to lower levels of the frameworks.

k. Limited support for part-time courses restricts access to an NQF award for newly-regulated occupations.

l. Some confusion between QA paperwork requirements and paperwork related to QQI as an institution.

m. Some contradiction between a state agency demanding CPD from a specific profession and the lack of appropriate benchmarks and awards to formalise it through another agency.

n. Large companies may recruit graduates and conduct in-house training thereafter – with or without NQF levels.

o. Expanding companies value NQF-related training for staff development and CPD.

p. Small companies seldom have the time of money to engage in NQF-related training, even of they perceive a value in it.

q. Large voluntary organisations with little funding may prefer peer-to-peer knowledge transfer models rather than expensive formal training, especially since the recession.

r. Perception that QQI is un-supportive of small providers and unwilling to consider the 'public good' factor in its fee model.

s. There is a perception that attaching state funding only to NQF awards greatly reduces opportunities for unemployed people to get vital training locally and in particular fields. It can also result in inappropriate placement of learners on the basis of available funding. This raises questions about the role of QQI and the NQF in such instances, regardless of Government policy.

t. The switch from FETAC/HETAC to QQI awards, and links to the EQF, is confusing for many and is prompting some sectors to look into international accreditation in the first instance and NQF recognition thereafter.

u. The timeframe for approval of new QQI awards – up to two years – is too-long for industry or sectoral training, regardless of the value of NQF standards.

v. QQI and the NQF have become too-totalising: it is not necessary for the NQF and QQI to be involved in all formal training. A different model is required.

w. Highly sought-after occupational awards from non-formal providers outwith the NQF may be 'sought' by a formal provider as a module/s within a larger award, with the successful learner achieving both the formal credits towards a formal award on the NQF and the occupational award.

x. Professions regulated under specific legislation may be obliged to engage with the NQF in particular ways only.

y. The status of 'aligned' with the Framework is currently unclear.

Preparation for the second framework impact evaluation study

The second framework impact evaluation study was started in late 2016 and is to be completed in late 2017. The final version of the Country Report will take account of the outcomes of that study.

To generate critical thinking, in November 2016 QQI published a paper they commissioned from Mike Coles, international framework expert and member of QQI Board, Mike Coles. Coles' think-piece, *National Qualifications Frameworks: reflections and trajectories*, is a meta-analysis of global trends and possible futures for qualifications frameworks generally.

The think-piece is intended to stimulate expansive thinking among stakeholders regarding what kind of framework options and priorities they might consider for the next phase of the Irish NFQ. In the paper Coles outlines the growth of up to 160 national, meta, professional and sectoral and regional frameworks. He notes the emergence of remote certification of learning across borders, and the emergence of 'badges of achievement', linking the growth in frameworks to free trade agreements and the mobility of workers.

With regard to future framework types, Coles imagines common future framework levels being acknowledged globally but not necessarily with totally similar national frameworks. He calls this model a likely Stage 5 NQF. Such frameworks are likely to have a common set of benchmarked levels but which are likely to be locally funded and locally quality assured. He predicts that NQFs will be less 'hard-nosed'. Coles also predicts that Stage 5 NQFs are likely to be more remote from national governments and be managed by agencies with more freedom to consult stakeholders with regard to future changes.

With regard to what frameworks have failed to achieve to date, Coles argues that they have not created 'the seamless whole for the education and training systems that many expected', and that they have not removed barriers to progression such as in the way credit is used differently across VET and HE.

Of particular relevance to this Report is the following claim:

'Most NQFs have failed to make improvements to qualifications that can accommodate learning from education and training that has taken place in the non-formal and private sectors.' (Page 21)

With regard to quality assurance of qualifications, Coles seems to recommend a separation of management of the architecture of an NQF from quality assurance of it:

"..it is possible to see these quality assurance processes and their governance as independent of the national frameworks. The role of the NQF cans be seen simply as establishing the levels and level descriptors which qualifications must meet. The way I which these qualifications are designed, assessed and certified are all independent of the NQF and can be quality assured independently of an NQF. (Page 24)

One of the key questions about frameworks raised by Coles, is whether a framework is primarily for **coherence** of qualifications/awards, or for **regulation** of those qualifications/awards. This point is also taken up in the Foreword to the Coles paper by John O'Connor, Head of Quality and Skills Policy, QQI, who also facilitated the NQF-In survey and round table event. O'Connor lists a number of ways the NQF is currently being used which were not necessarily foreseen when it was established under the 1999 Act. He argues that the main function if the NQF is not only in regard to making all awards more coherent in relation to each other, as follows:

'To-day, the NFQ is used in many different ways, such as to give value to and recognise learning achievements: to develop new qualifications; to offer advice and guidance about learning pathways; to report on qualifications attainment; to better match skills and jobs; to regulate access to occupations; to approve courses and qualifications for public funding; and to facilitate the international portability of qualifications'.

Significantly O'Connor also notes that the **regulatory** functions of the NQF has increased and that is now frequently used to 'confer an advantage or to ration access to a public benefit'. O'Connor warns that policy makers and practitioner must be alert to how the NQF is used and to the effects, opportunities and risks that such usages represent. These sentiments were also evident in the feedback submission to QQI White Papers above.

Looking forward in 2003 – predications and warnings

In the collective development of any new social or organisational system there will invariably be power struggles, ideological tensions, compromises and pragmatic solution. This was the case for the development of the Irish NQF. Power positions had already been achieved by the university sector under the 1997 Act which preserved their autonomy and allowed them to engage with the future NQF on a voluntary basis on their own terms and in their own time. The adult and community education sector and the VET sector had campaigned robustly for an inclusive framework and had expectations that it would evolve. The economic and labour market sector perspectives were well represented through national and international policy reports and their expectations for a 'Knowledge Society' based on credentials were well signalled.

The NQF that emerged in 2003 tried to 'make sense' of these competing expectations, although there was enthusiastic support generally for the consultative processes used by NQAI from the start. There was support for the technical 'tools' of levels, level descriptors, placement of awards, award titles, award types, credits, RPL, learning outcomes and progression pathways.

Few academics published critical work on the framework model and its potential weaknesses in the early years. One exception to this was Gary Granville, National College of Art and Design, who published an article in the Journal of Education and Work in 2003 *'Stop making sense': chaos and coherence in the formation of the Irish qualifications framework'*. In that article Granville asks if the design of the Irish NFQ was deliberately logical and coherent as a 'sense-making', inclusive mechanism as was originally intended and lobbied for by the VET and adult education sectors and

all their sub-cultures throughout the 1990s. Granville argues that the framework could never have been 'light touch' as was expected and that it would inevitably create new, hard boundaries between sectors instead of reducing them. Those boundaries would determine formally who was in the framework, where they were in it, and who was excluded. He predicted that the innovatory practices of the 1990s were most likely to come under threat in a framework that was dominated by school and university norms and qualifications types. He predicted that the school Leaving Certificate examination (Level 5) and the bachelor degree (Level 8) would become the portal qualifications that would dominate the framework and the status of all qualifications within it.

'The delicate structural relationships between courses and qualifications that emerged in the unplanned and chaotic manner over some 20 years may be irreparably damaged in the transfer into a new national system, if that process of transfer is not sensitively handled.'

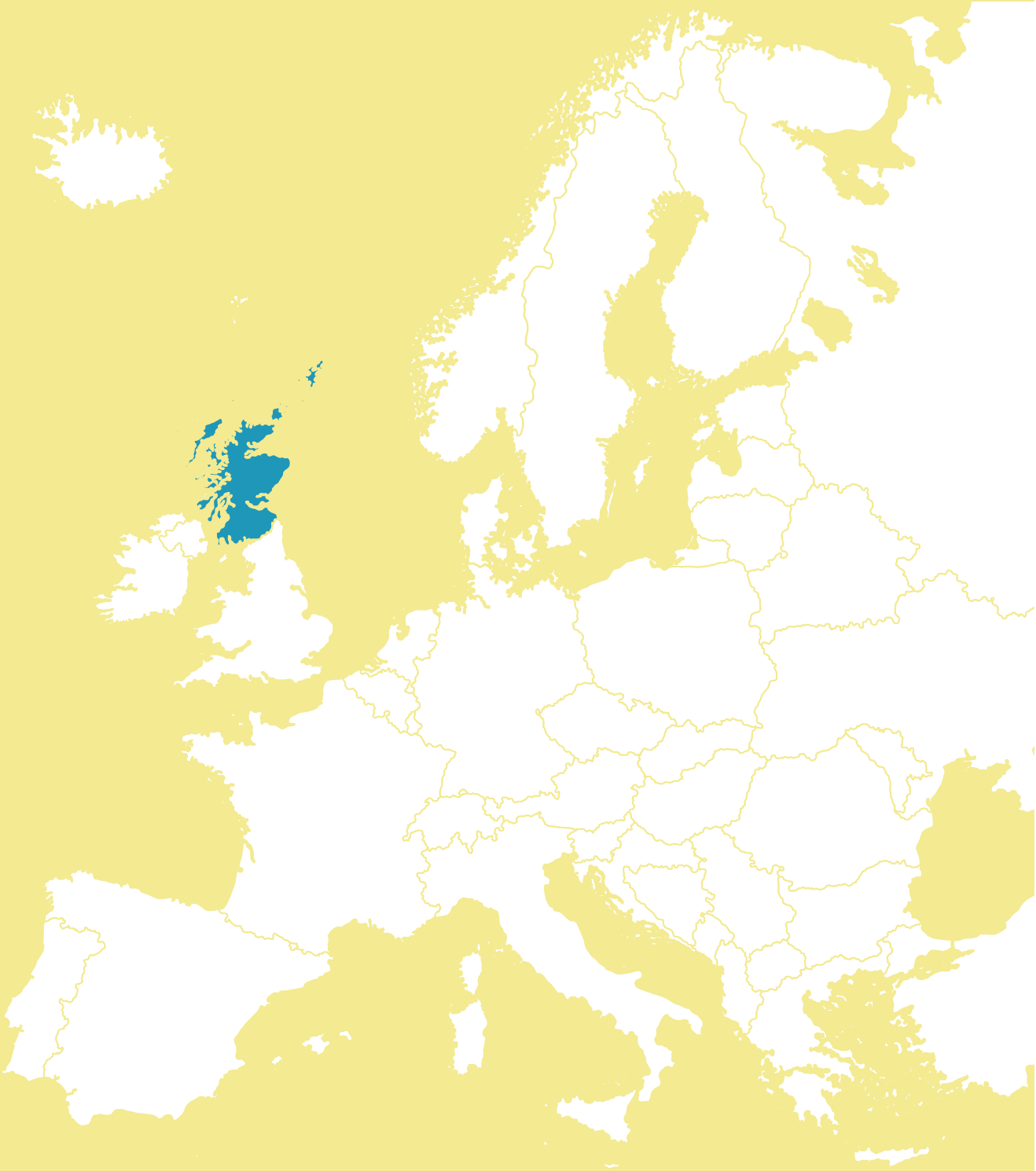
Granville further argues that the NQF became an exercise in bureaucratic sanity at the expense of innovative practice and visionary leadership. In his view the NQF consolidated the highly differentiated education and training systems that had existed for thirty years between the schools and universities on the one hand and the VET and non-formal sectors on the other hand. He also argues that the learning outcomes paradigm was highly challenged by the school and university systems as reductionist, utilitarian and functionalist, suitable for VET but not for them. These worldviews and positionalities were consolidated in the 1997 University Act and the 1998 Education Act before the NQF became active. It could be argued that the room for operational freedom for the NQF was already curtailed by those two acts before its own act in 1999 and that ground had already been staked out. Granville suggests that the NQF as an administrative instrument could hijack the educational system it was designed to serve, particularly with regard to the non-formal sector.

Writing in 2002/2003 Granville conceded that the Irish NQF was still in an early stage of incremental evolution, warning:

'…if it is too weak (it) will be a purely technical mechanism: if it is too-strong, it may overpower the nuanced set of varied learning experiences from which it has grown….The need remains for shade and ambiguity in the qualifications process to cater for those groups and individuals who remain on the margins'.

Given the data from the feedback submissions to QQI White Papers and the NQF-In survey it is difficult to escape a perception that in the QQI Phase since the 2012 Act much innovatory practices have been 'colonised' by the norms of higher education. It is not surprising that HE is comfortable with the framework as it is, and that non-formal providers 'linked' to HE are less uncomfortable than the non-formal sector generally. The sector least comfortable, ironically, is the community and adult educations sector which drove many of the innovations which led to the NQF in the 1990s. How this sector will continue to engage with the qualifications framework in the future is still difficult to predict.

3. Scotland



Introduction

This country report has been produced by members of the SCQFP Executive team.

Representatives from the following organisations were interviewed in the process of preparing this Scottish report:

- Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)
- Quality Assurance Agency, Scotland (QAA Scotland)
- Edinburgh Napier University
- Police College Scotland, Tulliallan
- College Development Network (CDN)
- Borders College, Scotland

In addition, questionnaires were issued to a range of organisations who have non-formal learning programmes included on the SCQF. These included a range of other Credit Rating Bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland (CIOBS), the Institute of Counselling (IOC) and several further education colleges. During the interviews, the detail of the credit rating processes and procedures for placing non-formal qualifications on the SCQF was discussed as well as the benefits and barriers perceived by each of the organisations. An inventory of key questions was developed internally in discussion with the SCQFP Executive Team to underpin all interviews and questionnaires. These are included at Annex 3.9.

Desk research was carried out to review and validate details from CRB websites and publications as well as to identify background information on individual organisations who own non formal learning programmes credit rated onto the SCQF. Other websites and publications were also consulted to obtain a detailed overview of the non-formal learning landscape in Scotland. Some quantitative data emerged during the desk research which has also been referred to within the report.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CLD	Community Learning and Development
CRB	Credit Rating Body
EQF	European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
NFIFL	Non-Formal and Informal Learning
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QAA	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (in the UK)
QAA Scotland	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SCQFP	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification

Basic terms

Non-formal sector qualifications: The NQF-IN project acknowledges that there are different approaches and terms used across Europe to define qualifications awarded outside the traditional school system (general compulsory education, public IVET and CVET schools, higher education institutions). Within the project, a decision was taken to use the term **"non-formal sector qualifications"** to indicate that we are analysing the inclusion of those qualifications awarded outside traditional school systems in the NQF, i.e. those awarded in the non-formal sector of the education system.

Formal and non-formal qualifications: It was decided to take the following approach regarding the naming of different types of qualifications in qualifications systems:

(a) Formal education qualifications: qualifications awarded in the formal, state supervised education system. Within this category we distinguish:

- formal general education qualifications (e.g. matura certificate),
- formal VET qualifications (e.g. VET diplomas),

- formal HE education qualifications (e.g. Master Degree).

(b) Non-formal education qualifications: qualifications awarded outside the formal, state supervised system. Within this category we distinguish:

- State regulated qualifications:
  - qualifications which are regulated by legal acts or directly by ministries or governmental agencies but are not qualifications awarded in the formal education (school) system.
- Non-state regulated qualifications:
  - private / market qualifications, e.g. qualifications awarded by private training providers or other private institutions, including international qualifications to serve a particular market such as business and commercial services,
  - qualifications awarded by non-profit organisations: communities, voluntary organisations, trade unions,
  - qualifications regulated by branches/sectors of the economy, i.e. qualifications awarded by the chamber of commerce or other sectoral organisations (if they are not regulated by legal acts).

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL): VNFIL refers to the process where an authorised body confirms that an individual has acquired learning outcomes in order to achieve a qualification,[1] whereas non-formal education sector qualifications refer to the types of qualifications which are awarded outside the formal education system.

Inclusion of qualifications on the SCQF: Inclusion is a process leading to the assignment of a level and credit value to a qualification in order to place it on the SCQF.

Terms specifically relating to the Scottish context

Articulation: refers to a student gaining entry into either the second or third year of a university degree course after completing a Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND) at a further education college.

Articulation Hubs: colleges and universities clustered around a lead university that had a high level of articulation activity.

Awarding Body: In this report, the term "awarding body" means any organisation or institution which awards qualifications. It includes Universities and other higher education institutions along with more commercial organisations such as City and Guilds. Some colleges also act as awarding bodies for some qualifications or learning programmes.

[1] Recommendation of the Council of European Union of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, pp. 1–5).

Credit Rating Body: An organisation that carries out credit rating for the SCQF. These are Scotland's colleges; Scottish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); SQA; and other organisations that have been approved by the SCQF Partnership

SCQF Credit Points: Credit Points allocated to a qualification or learning programme indicate the typical amount of time that it would take a learner to achieve the learning outcomes of the qualification or learning programme. Ten notional learning hours equates to one SCQF Credit Point.

Credit Rating: The process of allocating SCQF Level and Credit Points to qualifications and learning programmes, whether formal, non-formal or informal.

Credit Transfer: The transfer of SCQF Credit Points from one programme into another to minimise the duplication of learning

Further Education College: Colleges offering courses and qualifications in a wide range of vocational and academic subjects at many levels. Some specialise in particular industry sectors such as art and design, catering, engineering or finance. They often have links with companies, so that students studying vocational courses can combine classroom learning with work experience.

Learning Outcomes: Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

Learning programme: A process that an individual can undertake to achieve the learning outcomes that make up a qualification.

Learning Providers: Organisations across all education and training sectors that provide formal, non-formal or informal learning.

Apprenticeships: Unlike the systems in many other countries, apprenticeships extend beyond training for skilled craftsmen or women and can include graduate apprenticeships at the top levels of the SCQF – eg in areas like financial services and engineering.

Notional Learning Hours: The time required for a typical learner at a specified SCQF Level to achieve the learning outcomes. Includes all the learning activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes as well as the assessment.

Private training providers: Offer a wide range of work-based training for students seeking to build careers in specific industries. Private training providers work with colleges and employers to provide practical training and recognised qualifications in subjects such as engineering, construction, ICT and health and social care.

3.1. Historical Context

The SCQF was formally launched in 2001. It was originally developed between 1998 and 2001 by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Universities Scotland, with the support of the Education and Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Departments of the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access (SACCA). The timing of this work meant that it was possible to bring together existing systems of levels and credits which had been in operation for a number of years with the new framework of levels that had been implemented for National units, courses and group awards previously developed as part of a school reform of general and vocational qualifications between 1994 and 2000. These developments were also informed by the emerging national qualifications framework for higher education which was being developed by QAA at the time and also by information and definitions relating Scottish Vocational Qualifications and school qualifications around that time.

In essence the SCQF was constructed from existing definitions of qualifications and levels rather than creating new ones. The purpose was to make the Scottish system of qualifications and how they relate to each other easier to understand and use. It was also intended to address reforms of previous years so as to consolidate and improve on a quarter of a century of change across Scottish education where the formal qualifications in all education and training sectors were outcomes-based, made up of credit-bearing units, and subject to criterion referenced assessment. Unlike most other National Qualification Frameworks, the SCQF was intended to consolidate, rather than initiate, these reforms.

Since then the SCQF has developed to become the national language for describing the level and credit value of formal qualifications and non-formal learning programmes in Scotland. It is important to note that both the Framework and the SCQF Partnership were established on a voluntary basis and not by law, although the SCQF Partnership is a legal entity. This means that the Framework is voluntary and there is no requirement for any organisation to have their learning programmes included within the Framework. No one organisation 'owns' the Framework and the SCQF Partnership which manages the Framework is not a government department or agency. However, while the Scottish Government is content that the Framework is managed at arm's length, it contributes to the funding of the SCQF Partnership and builds the framework into its education and training plans and policies. It is also true to say that more recently some of the funding provided by the national skills agency, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has been linked more directly to ensuring that funding supports qualifications on the SCQF.

As a result the SCQF is an integrating framework constructed by bringing together existing hierarchical frameworks of general, academic, technical, vocational and professional qualifications rather than creating new levels and new categories of qualification. This meant that, in developing the SCQF, the levels were based on existing and well-known qualifications and the known and tested links between them.

The original frameworks embedded in the SCQF are for:

- National and Higher National Qualifications – the Units, Courses and Group Awards awarded by SQA under the overall direction of the Scottish Government
- the qualifications of universities and other higher education institutions in Scotland (these are now set out in The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland, published by QAA in 2014)
- Scottish Vocational Qualifications – workplace qualifications based on National Occupational Standards developed by government-sponsored Sector Skills Councils and accredited by SQA Accreditation

Each of these frameworks has its own types of qualification and its own quality assurance arrangements but all share the same levels, level descriptors and system of credit points. An explanation of the main types of formal qualification in each of these areas, is given in Chapter 3.4, Types and Legal Status of Qualifications included on the SCQF.

In 2006, it was decided that the Framework should be managed by a single organisation and the SCQF Partnership was formed with an Executive Team to take forward the work of the Framework. The status and role of the Partnership is described in Chapter 3.3, Institutional Setting.

3.2. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework – Basic Premises

Summary of the approach used to recognise non-formal and informal learning in Scotland

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is a lifelong learning Framework. It was created by bringing together the majority of Scotland's mainstream qualifications into a single unified Framework. This means that the SCQF includes general, vocational and academic qualifications and a wide range of non-formal learning programmes. The Framework includes regulated and non-regulated provision and all HE qualifications. The Framework has 12 levels and was referenced to the EQF in 2009 and is planned for updating in 2018. The level to level referencing is shown in Figure 3.2 on page 150.

The SCQF provides the structure to allocate levels and credit points to qualifications and learning programmes making them easier for learners, employers and the general public to understand. The process for allocating an SCQF Level and SCQF Credit Points to a programme of learning or qualification is known as credit rating after which they are included on the SCQF Database (registry). The organisations which have been given authority to carry out credit rating and therefore to place qualifications and learning programmes onto the SCQF are known as Credit Rating Bodies (CRBs). All CRBs are subject to external scrutiny and must have robust internal quality assurance systems. The process of credit rating is followed for all qualifications and learning programmes to be included in the Framework regardless of whether they are formal or non-formal or from different parts of the education system. This process also includes the use of a single set of level descriptors irrespective of the type of learning.

Credit Rating Bodies include all Further Education (FE) colleges in Scotland all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (the national awarding body in Scotland) and a number of other approved bodies detailed within this report. The SCQF is managed by the SCQF Partnership (SCQFP). The SCQF Partnership works to ensure the quality and integrity of the Framework. The Partnership also has a key role in promoting the use of the SCQF to a wide range of bodies across Scotland and beyond including schools, colleges, universities, employers, professional bodies and community organisations. The Partnership also actively promotes the value of credit rating for non-formal learning and works with a range of organisations to encourage the inclusion of non-formal learning programmes onto the Framework. At the time of writing there are more than 800 examples of non-formal learning programmes on the SCQF. Non-formal learning programmes have been placed on the Framework from levels 2 to 11 and range in size from 10 learning hours to over 1000 learning hours. The owners of these programmes include individual employers, trade associations, trade unions, professional bodies, youth organisations, community organisations and adult education organisations.

The main purpose of the SCQF is to make the Scottish system of qualifications, and the way in which they relate to each other, easier to understand and use. It is intended to:

- support lifelong learning;
- clarify entry and exit points for qualifications and credit-rated learning programmes at whatever level;
- show learners and others possible routes for progression and credit transfer;
- show the level and credit (size) of the different types of Scottish qualification;
- enable credit transfer to be made between qualifications and learning programmes so as to assist learners to build on previous successes.

The SCQF has 12 levels and as a result differs from many other national frameworks in other EU Member States. The Framework was referenced to the EQF as part of the referencing of all of the UK Frameworks. The level to level comparison with the EQF can be seen in Table 3.2.

There is a single set of level descriptors for the 12 levels which apply across all qualifications and learning programmes included in the Framework regardless of whether they are formal or non-formal. The level descriptors are fundamental to the SCQF and are integral to the credit rating process. The SCQF Level Descriptors describe in broad terms what learners should be able to do or demonstrate at a particular level. Within an integrated framework, these level descriptors provide a common vocabulary to assist with the comparison of qualifications and learning programmes

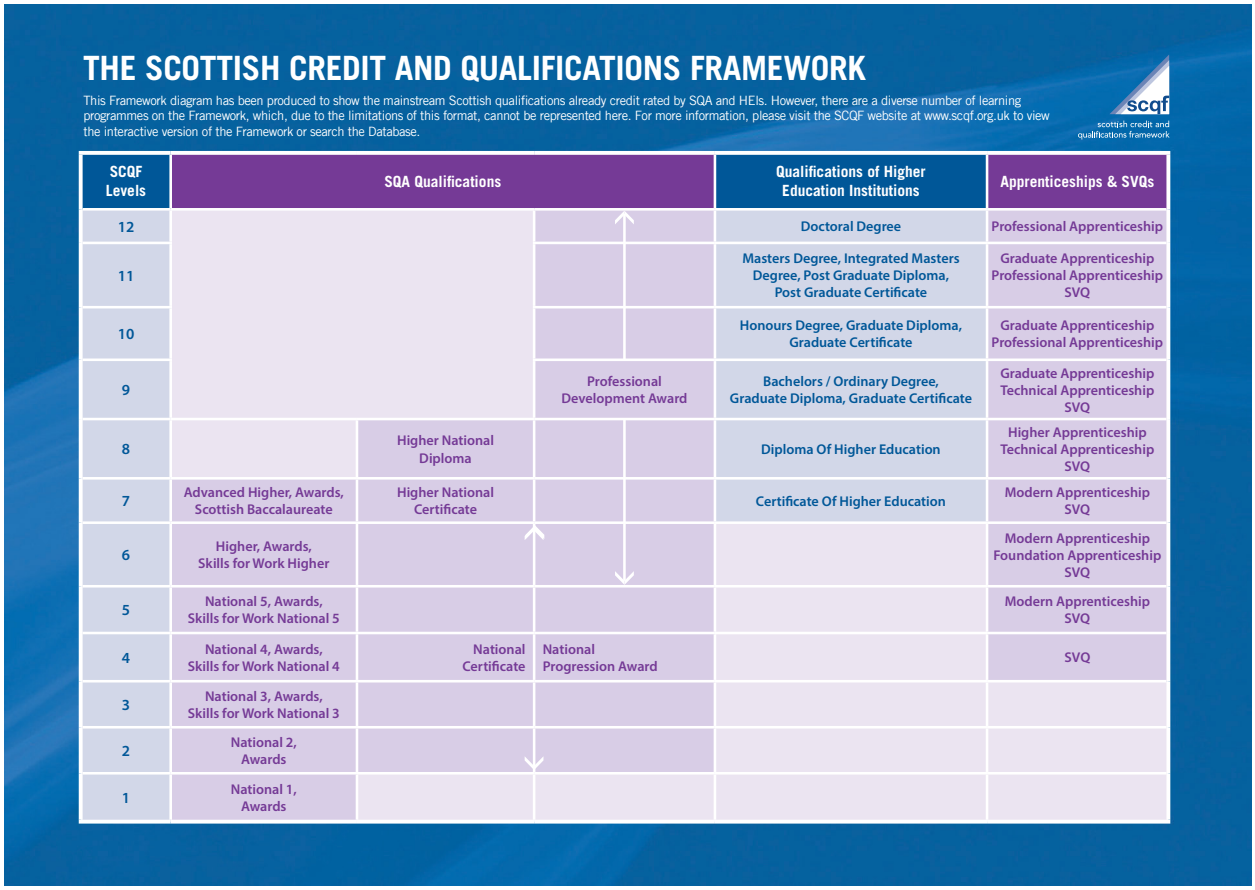
Each level descriptor has five characteristics which provide a reference point for determining the level of a qualification, learning programme, module and unit of learning or for the recognition of prior learning (RPL). They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements of required learning for individual qualifications.

The five characteristics are:

- Knowledge and understanding;
- Practice: Applied knowledge, skills and understanding;
- Generic cognitive skills;
- Communication, numeracy and ICT skills; and
- Autonomy, accountability and working with others.

The Framework diagram depicting formal qualifications in Scotland is shown in Figure 3.1. It is important to note that the Framework includes many other types of non-formal learning programmes which are not depicted by the Framework diagram but which will be explored within this report.

Figure 3.1. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework



THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

This Framework diagram has been produced to show the mainstream Scottish qualifications already credit rated by SQA and HEIs. However, there are a diverse number of learning programmes on the Framework, which, due to the limitations of this format, cannot be represented here. For more information, please visit the SCQF website at www.scqf.org.uk to view the interactive version of the Framework or search the Database.

scqf scottish credit and qualifications framework

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications			Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	Apprenticeships & SVQs
12				Doctoral Degree	Professional Apprenticeship
11				Masters Degree, Integrated Masters Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Post Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Professional Apprenticeship SVQ
10				Honours Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Professional Apprenticeship
9			Professional Development Award	Bachelors / Ordinary Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Technical Apprenticeship SVQ
8		Higher National Diploma		Diploma Of Higher Education	Higher Apprenticeship Technical Apprenticeship SVQ
7	Advanced Higher, Awards, Scottish Baccalaureate	Higher National Certificate		Certificate Of Higher Education	Modern Apprenticeship SVQ
6	Higher, Awards, Skills for Work Higher				Modern Apprenticeship Foundation Apprenticeship SVQ
5	National 5, Awards, Skills for Work National 5				Modern Apprenticeship SVQ
4	National 4, Awards, Skills for Work National 4	National Certificate	National Progression Award		SVQ
3	National 3, Awards, Skills for Work National 3				
2	National 2, Awards				
1	National 1, Awards				

The SCQF and the EQF

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) was formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council for European Union at the beginning of 2008. As a common reference framework the EQF supports lifelong learning and mobility as it facilitates the recognition of learning by acting as a translation device, aiding understanding of qualifications and education systems across member states.

The EQF has 8 levels, enabling national qualifications to be compared with each other and those of other countries.

The EQF helps to:

- promote lifelong learning
- make qualifications across Europe easier to understand
- clarify the training systems across Europe
- encourage the integration of the European labour market

The SCQF was referenced to the EQF in 2009 and the following table illustrates the comparable levels:

Figure 3.2. SCQF to EQF referencing

SCQF	EQF
12	8
11	7
10	6
9	
8	5
7	
6	4
5	3
4	2
3	1
2	Not referenced
1	

In Scotland work has been ongoing to implement and promote a better understanding of the EQF. Along with other National Co-ordination Points across the UK, activities have been carried out using European funding to:

- implement a comprehensive communications strategy;
- produce an EQF digest with a commentary on the UK referencing report in light of referencing reports from other countries;
- add EQF levels to all qualifications and learning programmes on the SCQF database;
- test linkages to the Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe Portal;
- work closely with sectors by providing support and information and promoting the recognition of prior learning in relation to the EQF; and
- facilitate technical exchanges between key EU Member States.

3.3. Institutional Setting

The SCQF Partnership

The SCQF is managed by the SCQF Partnership (Figure 3.3). The Partners are:

- College Development Network (CDN); CDN supports colleges in Scotland through training, events, specialist projects and network activity.
- the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAA Scotland); develops and operates quality assurance and enhancement arrangements that reflects the needs of higher education in Scotland
- Scottish Qualifications Authority; The national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment, and certification of qualifications other than degrees.
- Universities Scotland (US); US is the representative body of Scotland's 19 higher education institutions.

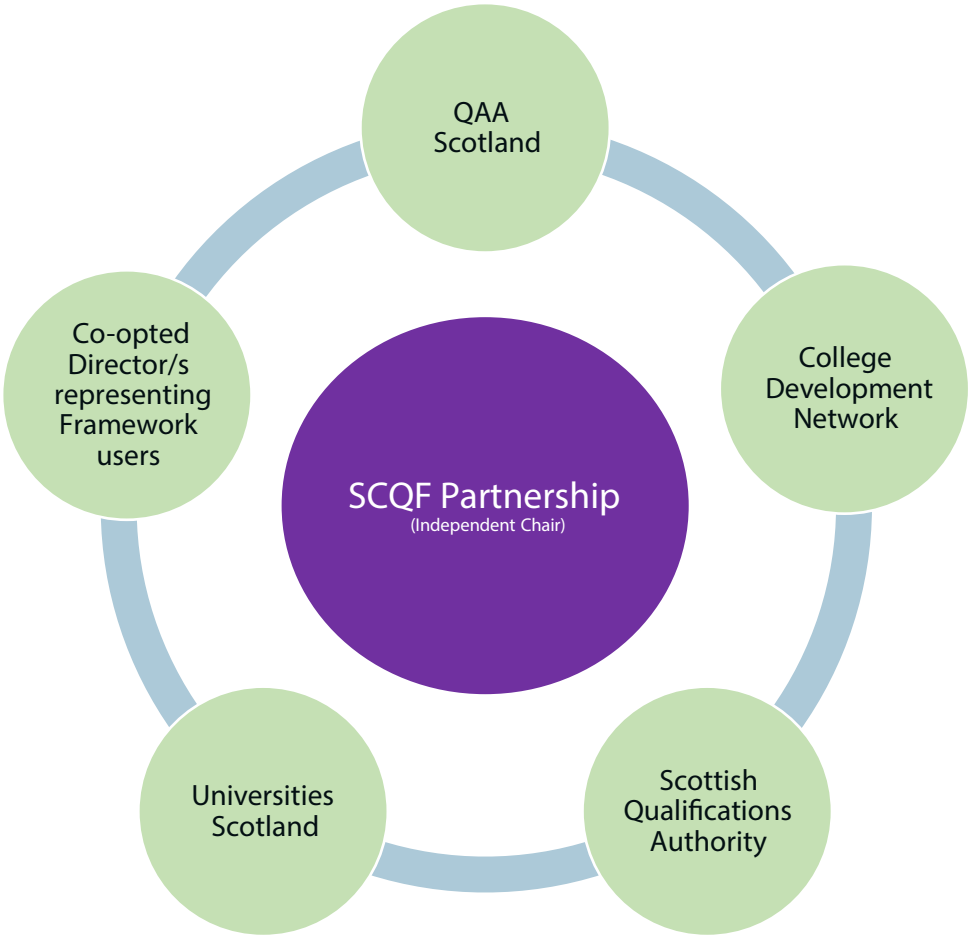
Each partner organisation is represented by a senior officer on the Board which oversees the work of the Partnership. The Board also has a chair who is independent of the interests of these bodies (Figure 3.3). The Board can also co-opt two additional members to represent users of the SCQF. At the time of writing, an additional member is co-opted representing employers, and the Chair of the Quality Committee is also a co-option. This partnership model is seen as having a number of advantages; the resources of the Partnership are limited and the partners, which share the common goal of wishing to see the Framework succeed, make many contributions in kind, using their resources to support the Framework and by undertaking activities which promote it.

The object of the SCQF Partnership is "to advance education through promoting and supporting the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework as a tool to support lifelong learning in Scotland". To meet its legal responsibilities the SCQF Partnership must

- promote wider adoption and use of the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework as a tool to support lifelong learning in Scotland
- maintain the quality and integrity of the Framework and ensure that there is a common understanding of credit values and levels among users
- ensure that the work of the Partnership is effective.

More detailed information about the SCQF Partnership, and the SCQF Partners and structures is given in Annex 3.1.

Figure 3.3. The SCQF Partnership



The SCQF Partnership Executive Team

The SCQF Partnership Executive Team has responsibility for all matters relating to the quality and integrity of the Framework. This work is overseen by the SCQF Quality Committee which in turn reports to the SCQF Board. The Quality Committee consists of members who are experienced in quality and education and the Chair of the Quality Committee is de facto also a member of the SCQF Board.

The Executive works closely with the organisations responsible for the inclusion of qualifications and learning programmes on the SCQF and supports employers, third sector organisations and others interested in having their programmes included on the SCQF (further explained below). The Executive Team also has a responsibility to promote the Framework and support stakeholders through a wide range of communications, resources, workshops and seminars and also engages with counterpart organisations in the UK, Europe and internationally to share experiences and best practice.

Credit Rating Bodies

The process of preparing a qualification or learning programme for inclusion on the SCQF, by allocating it to a level in the framework and giving it a value in SCQF credit points, is known as "credit rating" and the bodies which are authorised to carry out this process are called "Credit Rating Bodies" (CRBs). This process is a devolved system and it is important to note that it is the CRBs who make the final decision as to the level and credit of a qualification or learning programme and that the SCQF Partnership does not make or ratify these decisions. However, the SCQF Partnership has the responsibility of approving organisations to become Credit Rating Bodies against three main criteria. These are that the organisation must:

- be a body of good standing with a successful track record in the design and delivery of learning provision;
- have a documented quality assurance system for the design, validation and assessment of these qualifications and learning programmes and evidenced through both internal and external reviews, that this quality assurance system is valid and reliable;
- have the capacity and commitment to operate as an SCQF credit-rating body.

An elaboration of these criteria can be found in Annex 3.4. In order to become approved the CRBs must be able to demonstrate that they meet these criteria through a documented submission to the SCQFP Executive and an approval visit carried out by a team of reviewers which includes SCQFP Executive Officers, members of the SCQF Quality Committee and independent educational/quality experts. The SCQF Board gives final approval for all new CRBs. All CRBs are also subject to external reviews by outside agencies to ensure the quality of the credit rating process. This is expanded on in Chapter 3.6.

At the time of writing, there are 55 credit rating bodies. These include all universities and higher education institutions, all further education colleges, Scottish Qualifications Authority and a number of other organisations including some professional bodies and sectoral training bodies.

A list of current Credit Rating Bodies is given in Annex 3.2.

Once a Credit Rating Body has been approved they can credit rate any of their programmes that meet the criteria for inclusion on the SCQF. However, some Credit Rating Bodies are allowed to credit rate learning programmes owned by other organisations. Such credit rating for external partners or organisations is referred to as Third Party Credit Rating.

Any organisation can submit a qualification or learning programme to a CRB that is approved to offer Third Party credit rating. The growing number of programmes submitted by other organisations to CRBs for credit rating suggests that these organisations see the value of their programmes being included on the national framework. In 2016 the Partnership commissioned research into the experiences of the organisations using CRBs to credit rate their programmes.

Some of the benefits that these organisations identified are as follows:

- The qualification/learning programme is visible on the SCQF database;
- Relationships between qualifications can be clarified;
- Learners can make the most of credit transfer opportunities;
- Easier to identify progression routes between similar qualifications;
- Helps learners to plan progression routes;
- The organisation's learning provision will be nationally recognised;
- Credit rating allows organisations to use the SCQF logo.

The processes and procedures used by all CRBs for placing qualifications onto the SCQF are further explored in Chapter 3.5: Procedure for the inclusion of qualifications in the SCQF and Annex 3.3: SCQF Principles.

The SCQF Database

The SCQF Partnership maintains and manages a register of all credit rated qualifications and learning programmes known as the SCQF Database. This is accessible through the SCQF website and is open access.[2] CRBs upload any qualification or learning programmes that they credit rate directly to the database. Whilst the SCQF Partnership monitor entries it is the responsibility of the CRBs to ensure that the details are accurate. It should be noted that the SCQF database is not a register of all qualifications in Scotland as not all qualifications are on the SCQF (the SCQF is a voluntary Framework).

Information on the database includes:

- Title of qualification or learning programme
- SCQF level
- SCQF Credit Points
- Programme owner
- Credit Rating Body
- Target Audience
- Description
- Skills gained
- Subject area
- EQF level

Access is given to CRBs via a secure portal which also allows the CRB to store any associated documents such as credit rating paperwork in a non-public area.

[2] http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/search-database/

At present, the database does not contain all learning outcomes of all learning programmes as the volume of this information is felt to be unmanageable. However work has been undertaken to explore the feasibility of including a high level summary of learning outcomes of programmes with Credit Rating Bodies and new fields have been introduced recently which will include the information normally included in a high level learning outcome. This information will be added as programmes are reviewed and updated.

Previous development and ongoing development work with the database has been possible with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. This work is ongoing and will lead to providing users with links to the Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe Portal.

3.4. Types and Legal Status of Qualifications Included on the SCQF

The SCQF is a Lifelong Learning Framework and an inclusive framework. It includes formal and non formal qualifications and learning programmes. There are no restrictions to the levels non-formal programmes can be placed at so they can be placed at any appropriate level from 1-12 as long as they meet the level descriptor for that level and also meet the four criteria as described in the SCQF Handbook:

- based on learning outcomes
- at least 10 notional hours of learning
- subject to internal and external quality assurance
- formally assessed

In addition, there is no restriction as to the type of organisation which can apply to a CRB to get a programme credit rated. As a result, programmes owned by employers, trade unions, community groups, professional bodies and businesses to name but a few are all included.

Once a qualification or learning programme has been placed on the SCQF the ownership of that programme remains with the organisation who originally owned it. It does not become a national qualification nor does it mean that the organisation must open up their qualification to the public or allow other organisations to deliver it. For example, an employer can get its in-house employee training credit rated and placed on to the Framework, the employer still owns its training programme and can still only offer this exclusively to its own employees if it chooses to do so.

As stated previously all formal qualifications in the formal school, college and university system are included on the SCQF as well as a wide range of other qualifications and learning programmes. At the time of writing there are around 11,500 programmes included on the SCQF. Over 800 of these are considered to be non-formal.

Figure 3.4 shows some examples of non-formal learning programmes that learners may possibly take at college, university, in the workplace or in the local community that have been credit rated and placed onto the Framework.

Figure 3.4. Examples of non-formal learning on the SCQF

SCQF Level	Qualification Owner	Qualification Name	Credit Points
11	Historic Environment Scotland	Building Conservation in Context	34
11	Human Development Scotland	Being human in practice: constructing identity	20
10	Skills for Care & Development	Professional Apprenticeship in Care Services Leadership and Management	94
9	Scottish National Blood Transfusion	Acute Transfusion Reactions	2
8	Institute of Counselling	Certificate in Spiritual and Holistic Care	20
7	The Boys' Brigade	King George VI Leadership Programme	13
6	ASDAN	Certificate in Personal Effectiveness	15
5	The Duke of Edinburgh's Award	Duke of Edinburgh Leadership Programme	5
5	Outward Bound Trust	Adventure & Challenge Award (5 day)	5
4	Sports Leaders UK	Sports Leadership	7
4-7	Youth Scotland	Youth Achievement Awards Bronze - Platinum	7-16[3]
3	Youth Scotland	Dynamic Youth Awards One – Five Star Awards	1-31
1	Borders College	Ready for Retail	35

This list shows examples of non-formal learning which have been credit rated from level 1 upwards on the Framework through to the higher levels of the Framework with qualifications such as the Building Conservation in Context qualification at level 11 owned by Historic Environment Scotland. This means that this non-formal learning programme is considered to be on the same level as a Masters programme but not that it is considered to be a Masters programme or equivalent to a Masters programme. It can be seen from Figure 3.4 that it is different in terms of the number of credit points (34 credit points compared to a minimum of 180 credit points for a Masters Programme). This indicates the size of the programme and would be indicated on any certificate issued. This programme may also be different in terms of size and structure. At the time of writing there are more than 1300 programmes credit rated at SCQF level 11 which are not Masters Programmes.

Credit points are allocated exclusively on the volume of learning and are determined by the amount of notional learning hours that are required to achieve the learning outcomes.

[3] Dynamic Youth Awards from one to five stars offer a progression route to Youth Achievement Awards at Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum levels. Each set of awards contains increasing amounts of notional learning hence the range in the amount of credit points allocated to these qualifications

Formal qualifications on the SCQF

The inclusion of formal school qualifications on the SCQF

The main educational contexts for learning leading to qualifications in the SCQF are shown in Figure 3.5 below. This shows the school system, and, in broad terms, the main forms of education and training available to young people on completion of compulsory education.

Figure 3.5. Learning contexts leading to qualifications in the SCQF

<table>
<tr><th>Ages</th><th colspan="5"></th></tr>
<tr><td>17+</td><td rowspan="2">Secondary School Senior Phase – years S5 & S6. Mainly qualifications at SCQF levels 5-7.</td><td rowspan="2">Scottish Colleges Qualifications at SCQF levels 1-12.</td><td>Universities and specific higher education institutions Qualifications at SCQF levels 7-12.</td><td rowspan="2">Communities Qualifications at all SCQF levels.</td><td rowspan="2">Workplaces Qualifications at SCQF levels 3-12.</td></tr>
<tr><td>16+</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>16</td><td colspan="5">Secondary School Beginning of the Senior Phase – year S4 (Compulsory) Qualifications at SCQF levels 1-5.</td></tr>
<tr><td>13-15</td><td colspan="5">Secondary School – years S1-S3 (Compulsory) – broad general education Experiences and outcomes – no national qualifications.</td></tr>
<tr><td>5-12</td><td colspan="5">Primary school – years P1-P7 (national learning outcomes).</td></tr>
<tr><td>3-4</td><td colspan="5">Pre-school (national learning outcomes).</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 3.5 shows the types of formal qualifications which are included in the Framework. Below is a brief description of each type of qualification and where it is placed. Most of these qualifications will be made up of units which will also be allocated a level and number of credit points. Units are normally considered as building blocks of qualifications and learning programmes.

Qualifications of SQA Awarding Body[4]

SQA Awarding Body is responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of formal school and college qualifications other than degrees. It is the national examining body for school qualifications in Scotland.

[4] Several qualifications listed in this section can be defined as non-formal or informal as per the NQF-IN project definition (Foreword, Page 3).

National Courses

National Courses are the main qualification offered in schools in Scotland. National Courses are also offered in colleges.

These qualifications, known as National Courses, Highers and Advanced Highers are subject-based, or topic-based and are made up of units of outcomes. There are also Scottish Baccalaureates (a group award) which consist of Advanced Highers, Highers and an interdisciplinary project at SCQF level 7. These qualifications and units are recorded on the SQA's Scottish Qualifications Certificate which also denotes the SCQF level and credit value of each module or unit achieved. Awards are made on the basis of combinations of assessment, including externally verified ongoing assessment by teachers and national examinations held annually. The outcomes required by specific national qualifications are kept under review by the SQA, which is responsible for maintaining the currency of the qualifications. It does this on the basis of an annual review, with revisions where necessary. During 2017 Scottish Government has asked that SQA removes the requirement for unit assessment for some National Courses in order to reduce teacher workload. This work is still underway.

In the fourth year of secondary school – the final compulsory year – young people enter a senior phase which can continue for up to three years at school or in college, taking Highers in 5th year at age 16/17. In the senior phase, they will take national qualifications in a wide range of general and vocational subjects at SCQF levels 1-7 and may also take other qualifications offered by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) or other awarding bodies to reflect their wider achievements. Recently the Scottish Government has introduced Foundation Apprenticeships which sit at SCQF level 6. These are in specific subject areas and include work placement and are an attempt to widen the offer at this phase of school to include more vocationally relevant qualifications.

Wider Achievement Awards

SQA has also developed a range of very flexible Wider Achievement Awards which are shorter than National Courses and recognise success across different levels of difficulty, meaning they are suitable for learners of all abilities. Some are endorsed by other professional bodies or government agencies. They include Personal Achievement Awards (SCQF Levels 1 and 2), Employability Awards (SCQF Levels 3 and 4), Leadership Awards (SCQF Levels 5 and 6), Volunteering Skills Awards (SCQF Levels 3, 4 and 5), Modern Languages for Life and Work Awards (SCQF Levels 3 and 4), Internet Safety (SCQF Level 4).

National Certificates (NCs)

NCs are available at SCQF levels 2-6. They are aimed at 16-18 year olds or adults following full-time courses and are mainly offered in vocational colleges. They are designed to prepare people for employment, career development or progression

to a higher level qualification. NCs may relate to a subject (e.g. Celtic Studies) or an occupational area (e.g. Electrical Engineering).

National Progression Awards (NPAs)

NPAs are available at SCQF levels 2-6. They are designed to assess a defined set of skills and knowledge in specialist vocational areas and they link to National Occupational Standards, which are the basis of SVQs, and are used in more traditional areas such as Construction and Childcare, and in newer areas such as Digital Literacy and Social Software. They are mainly used by colleges for short study programmes, such as return-to-work courses or part-time learning for those already in work (e.g. the NPA Enterprise and Employability).

Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Diplomas (HNDs)

HNCs are available at SCQF level 7 and HNDs at SCQF level 8. Many HNCs form the first year of a HND. They focus on different occupational areas and prepare people with the knowledge and skills to work in these areas. They cover subject areas from more traditional areas (accounting, business administration, childcare, computing, engineering, hospitality) to newer areas (creative industries, paralegal, sports and leisure). They are aligned to National Occupational Standards, or other professional body standards. Many HNCs and HNDs give entry to degree courses with credit transfer or exemptions of one or two years.

Professional Development Awards (PDAs)

PDAs are available at SCQF levels 6-11. In principle there could also be PDAs at SCQF level 12 although there are none currently. They are aligned to National Occupational Standards or other professional body standards and are designed to assess and certificate progression in a defined set of specialist occupational skills and are intended for individuals already in a career or vocation who wish to extend or broaden their knowledge and skills.

Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland

The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions is an outcomes-based structure based on a consistent qualification nomenclature, qualification descriptors, and credits. Undergraduate qualifications offered in Scottish Universities are mainly modular, with each module being allocated a level on the SCQF and credit-rated. Qualifications in this section range from SCQF level 7 to SCQF level 12

The Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) and the Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)

CertHEs and DipHEs may be awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas or for studies focused on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus.

Ordinary degrees

Some Scottish bachelor's (non-honours) degrees will be highly focused while others will develop greater breadth of outcomes. Many degrees that have a specific vocational focus carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body. It is awarded as either a Bachelor of Science (BSc), or a Bachelor of Arts (BA). The Scottish bachelor's (non-honours) degree is a recognised 'normal' entry requirement to a number of professions across the UK.

Honours degrees

The Scottish honours degree (bachelor's degree with honours) will demonstrate a balance of breadth and depth that will be clear from particular definitive records. It is awarded mainly as either a Bachelor of Science (BSc Hons), or a Bachelor of Arts (BA Hons). Many honours degrees will have a specific vocational focus, and in some cases will carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body. The term "MA" will also be used here for an undergraduate degree awarded by the Ancient Universities in Scotland.

Master's degrees

In the majority of cases, the master's degree reflects a specialised knowledge and understanding of particular areas, applications or levels of expertise in particular subject or professional areas. In some professional areas, master's degrees are linked to structures of continuing professional development.

Doctoral degrees

Doctoral degrees reflect specialised, advanced knowledge, understanding and practice at the frontiers of the subject or professional area. The PhD is normally awarded following successful completion of a thesis which requires the equivalent of a minimum of three years' full-time research and study to complete. Professional doctorates also require the equivalent of three years' full -time research and study to complete and will frequently involve work-based, as well as institution-based, research and study.

Workbased qualifications

SQA Accreditation approves qualifications which assess knowledge, understanding and occupational competence in the workplace. This will include regulated

qualifications and other competence based qualifications, some of which are included in Scottish Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. It also accredits qualifications which assess expertise in areas which are not necessarily work related. These include exam-based qualifications such as music and dance performance. It is not compulsory for these qualifications to be credit rated for the SCQF. However most of these accredited qualifications have been credit rated and are at various levels on the SCQF.

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)

Scottish Vocational Qualifications are available at SCQF levels 4-11. The size and level of SVQs varies according to the number of units which have to be achieved in each qualification. They are primarily designed as outcomes of non-formal learning although in some cases elements of the SVQ can be achieved in simulated environments. SVQs are the basis of Scottish Modern Apprenticeships. There are SVQs in most areas of the economy/labour market. SVQs are approved for use by SQA Accreditation and then awarding bodies seek accreditation to award the units and/or the full qualifications. All SVQs must be SCQF credit rated by SQA Accreditation.

Other workbased qualifications

Modern Apprenticeships, with a focus on occupational competences, were introduced in the UK in the 1990s. They share some characteristics with more traditional apprenticeships in other countries, but are also distinctive in a number of ways. A Modern Apprentice must be employed, receiving a wage and also learning on the job. The standards to be achieved are set out in an approved Modern Apprenticeship Framework which will include at its core either an SVQ or another work-based qualification relevant to that sector. The Modern Apprenticeship Group, an independent group which draws its authority from the Scottish Government, is responsible for the approval and de-approval of all Scottish Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. The frameworks are developed by Sector Skills Councils. All Frameworks are allocated a level and a credit value on the SCQF. During 2016-17 Scottish Government also worked with the national skills body – Skills Development Scotland to introduce Higher Apprenticeships at SCQF level 8 and Graduate Apprenticeships at SCQF levels 9, 10 and 11. Although these are delivered primarily through higher education institutions they all contain work based skills and competences.

Recently the Scottish Government has introduced Foundation Apprenticeships which sit at SCQF level 6. These are in specific subject areas and include work placement and are an attempt to widen the offer at the senior phase of school to include more vocationally relevant qualifications.

Non-formal qualifications and learning programmes on the SCQF

More than 800 additional qualifications have been added to the SCQF database by CRBs alongside the formal qualifications and programmes outlined in the previous sections. These qualifications may be programmes of colleges, universities and other higher education institutions, or they may be programmes owned by other CRBs. They may also be programmes owned by other bodies who have submitted them to a CRB for credit rating. The owners of these programmes include government agencies, professional organisations, individual employers and training companies, trade unions, youth organisations, community organisations, adult education organisations and charities. The qualifications range from SCQF level 1 to SCQF level 11 and from 1 SCQF credit point to over 100 SCQF credit points.

Examples of organisations which own non-mainstream qualifications and programmes include:

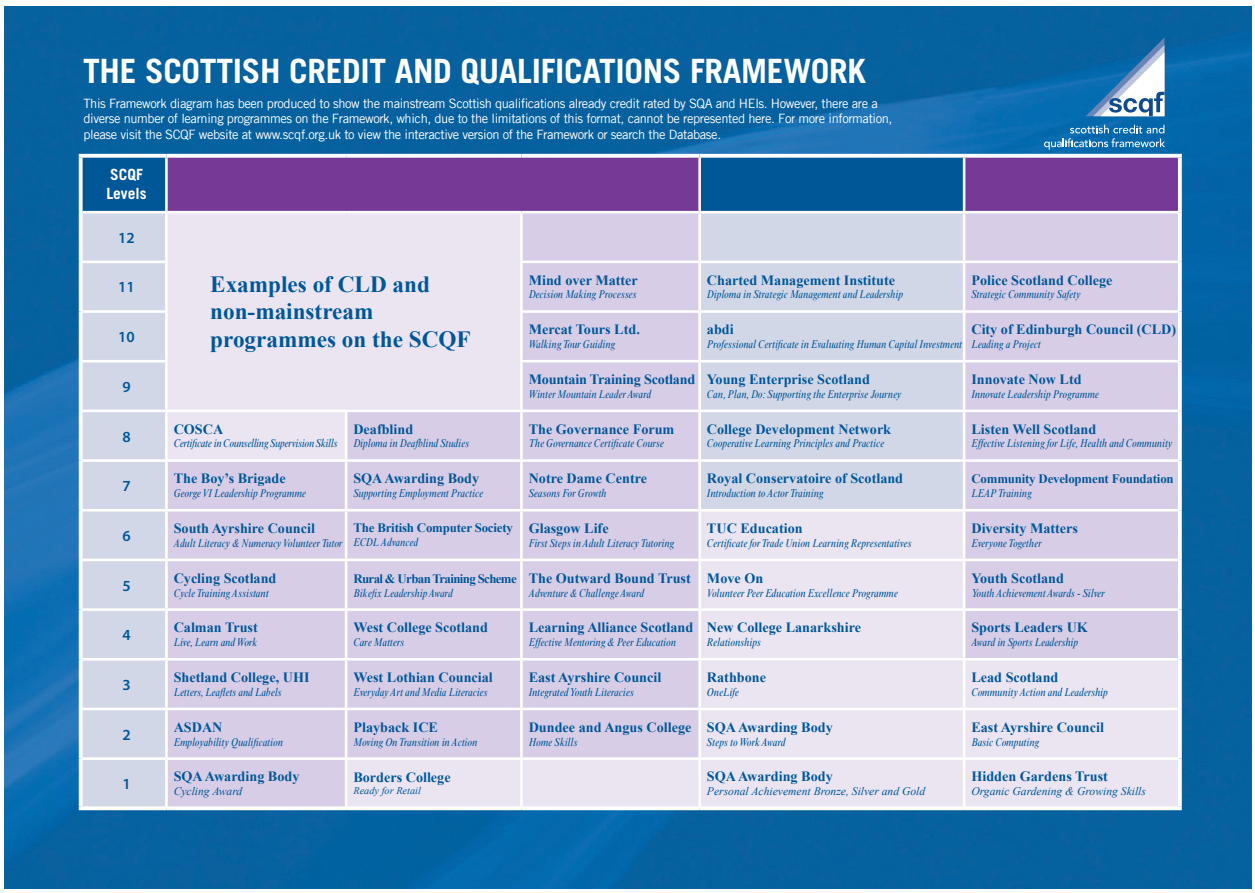
SCQF Level	Qualification Owner	Qualification Name	Credit Points
3	Ayrshire College	Access to Painting & Decorating	8
4	Dumfries & Galloway College	E portfolio Award	9
5	Trade Union Congress(TUC) Education	Certificate for Health and Safety Representatives Stage 1	15
8	City of Glasgow College	Certificate in Prosecution Practice	16
9	Fife College	Certificate & Diploma in Physical Theatre Practice	120

Examples of SCQFP approved credit-rating bodies own qualifications include:

SCQF Level	Qualification Owner	Qualification Name	Credit Points
11	Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland	Chartered Accountancy qualification	480
10	Scottish Police College	Police Driving instructors	40
10	Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland	Chartered Banker Diploma	125
8	Institute of Counselling	Certificate in Youth Counselling	20
7	Scottish Prison Service College	Control & Restraint Foundation Programme	6
5	City & Guilds	Diploma in Bricklaying	49

Figure 3.6 provides a version of the SCQF diagram depicting a range of examples of non-formal learning programmes that have been credit rated and placed on the Framework.

Figure 3.6. Examples of Community Learning and Development and non-formal programmes on the SCQF



THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

This Framework diagram has been produced to show the mainstream Scottish qualifications already credit rated by SQA and HEIs. However, there are a diverse number of learning programmes on the Framework, which, due to the limitations of this format, cannot be represented here. For more information, please visit the SCQF website at www.scqf.org.uk to view the interactive version of the Framework or search the Database.

scqf scottish credit and qualifications framework

SCQF Levels					
12	Examples of CLD and non-mainstream programmes on the SCQF				
11			Mind over Matter *Decision Making Processes*	Charted Management Institute *Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership*	Police Scotland College *Strategic Community Safety*
10			Mercat Tours Ltd. *Walking Tour Guiding*	abdi *Professional Certificate in Evaluating Human Capital Investment*	City of Edinburgh Council (CLD) *Leading a Project*
9			Mountain Training Scotland *Winter Mountain Leader Award*	Young Enterprise Scotland *Can, Plan, Do: Supporting the Enterprise Journey*	Innovate Now Ltd *Innovate Leadership Programme*
8	COSCA *Certificate in Counselling Supervision Skills*	Deafblind *Diploma in Deafblind Studies*	The Governance Forum *The Governance Certificate Course*	College Development Network *Cooperative Learning Principles and Practice*	Listen Well Scotland *Effective Listening for Life, Health and Community*
7	The Boy's Brigade *George VI Leadership Programme*	SQA Awarding Body *Supporting Employment Practice*	Notre Dame Centre *Seasons For Growth*	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland *Introduction to Actor Training*	Community Development Foundation *LEAP Training*
6	South Ayrshire Council *Adult Literacy & Numeracy Volunteer Tutor*	The British Computer Society *ECDL Advanced*	Glasgow Life *First Steps in Adult Literacy Tutoring*	TUC Education *Certificate for Trade Union Learning Representatives*	Diversity Matters *Everyone Together*
5	Cycling Scotland *Cycle Training Assistant*	Rural & Urban Training Scheme *Bikefix Leadership Award*	The Outward Bound Trust *Adventure & Challenge Award*	Move On *Volunteer Peer Education Excellence Programme*	Youth Scotland *Youth Achievement Awards - Silver*
4	Calman Trust *Live, Learn and Work*	West College Scotland *Care Matters*	Learning Alliance Scotland *Effective Mentoring & Peer Education*	New College Lanarkshire *Relationships*	Sports Leaders UK *Award in Sports Leadership*
3	Shetland College, UHI *Letters, Leaflets and Labels*	West Lothian Council *Everyday Art and Media Literacies*	East Ayrshire Council *Integrated Youth Literacies*	Rathbone *OneLife*	Lead Scotland *Community Action and Leadership*
2	ASDAN *Employability Qualification*	Playback ICE *Moving On Transition in Action*	Dundee and Angus College *Home Skills*	SQA Awarding Body *Steps to Work Award*	East Ayrshire Council *Basic Computing*
1	SQA Awarding Body *Cycling Award*	Borders College *Ready for Retail*		SQA Awarding Body *Personal Achievement Bronze, Silver and Gold*	Hidden Gardens Trust *Organic Gardening & Growing Skills*

Legal status of qualifications included on the SCQF

Overview

The Scotland Act 1998 gives the Scottish Parliament legislative control over all education matters, but much of the structure of Scottish education is set by the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. These Acts and other more recent acts are supplemented by regulations issued by the Scottish Government which have the force of law and by guidance issued by Education Scotland, which sets de facto norms and standards for the quality of teaching and learning.

Despite this legislative control very few qualifications in Scotland have a statutory or legal status. A number of qualifications are recognised by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, but not all of these bodies are themselves recognised in law. For most occupations there is no specific qualification required and it is open to employers to recruit staff on the basis of the qualification(s) they choose to recognise. The exceptions are in areas like teaching, social services, medicine and health care, but there are also specific requirements relating to health and safety in

some industries and food hygiene in others. There are also recognition schemes in some areas, such as construction, plumbing, gas fitting, and electrical work.

Ownership of non-formal qualifications on the framework remains with the original owner of the qualification or learning programme. The qualification or learning programme does not become a 'public' qualification and the owner of the programme has no obligation to allow other organisations to deliver the qualifications or programmes. Those that do are required to have the necessary quality assurance in place to monitor this delivery. However these quality assurance systems will differ from sector to sector and organisation to organisation.

Considering the situation below in context of the SCQF:

Qualification X was included in the SCQF upon request of a branch/sectoral organisation A operating in region Y. After a year, another branch/sectoral institution B would like to become an awarding body for qualification X, is it possible for this institution to become an awarding body? If yes, under which conditions? Who makes the relevant decisions?

The decision as to whether institution B is allowed to become an awarding body for qualification X remains entirely in the remit of organisation A. If organisation A decides that institution B can award qualification X they must have the necessary quality assurance in place to monitor this and institution B would normally have to go through an approval process before being allowed to award the qualification.

It is possible to have very similar qualifications in the SCQF for example all universities will offer very similar degree programmes but they may differ slightly in terms of subject content. However each degree programme is entered onto the SCQF database individually but are identifiable by the programme owner. CRBs are required to ensure that if they are credit rating a programme that the programme has not already been credit rated and included into the Framework.

The sub sections that follow provide more detail on the legislative and statutory aspects that govern each sector and the subsequent Case Studies provide an example of ownership of qualifications and learning programmes that have gone through the credit rating process.

Higher Education

Higher education is provided in sixteen universities and three other higher education institutions in Scotland. Universities are independent, self-governing bodies. They decide the degrees they offer; the conditions on which they will be awarded and the admissions arrangements. Degrees and other higher education qualifications are legally owned by the awarding institution. Universities and the other higher education institutions are all public bodies funded by the Scottish Government through the SFC on the basis of Outcome Agreements. There are no private universities and only a small number of private higher education institutions in Scotland.

Further Education

Scottish colleges are self-governing organisations in the public sector. The Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 brought about significant changes to college governance and established a new legal framework for a regional structure of colleges. There are now 27 colleges arranged within 13 regions. Colleges are managed by autonomous boards of governors and the Chairs of College Regional Boards are appointed through the public appointments process. Although they receive substantial public funds, Scottish colleges also generate their own income. Each institution is responsible for all aspects of administrative control, subject to legislative requirements and any conditions attached to the grant of public money. These conditions will reflect important aspects of government policy, including the nature of the courses which can be funded publicly.

Community Learning and Development (CLD)

The legal basis for CLD is established in the *Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013*. **This places legal requirements on every local authority in Scotland for the delivery of** CLD. Policy on CLD is set out in a number of areas, such as youth work, community regeneration, employability, tackling poverty, early years provision, the skills strategy, a greener Scotland and the SCQF.

CLD is delivered by Partnerships brought together by the thirty-two elected local councils with the aims of improving life chances for people of all ages, through learning, personal development and active citizenship and creating stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities. The Scottish Government has promoted the use of the SCQF as a tool that can be used in planning and designing learning and training programmes and processes, in supporting learning progression and transition, in career development, and more generally in helping people to recognise and value their learning.[5]

Partnerships plans involve all kinds of organisations – from the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. This means that schools, colleges, universities and other higher education institutions are part of CLD and many of the qualifications and learning programmes used in CLD are on the SCQF. This includes qualifications and learning programmes developed specifically to support CLD. For example, a recent area of action in CLD has been on continual professional development for the CLD workforce and a number of new qualifications have been developed to support this and these have been credit rated and placed on the SCQF, as have awards for youth achievement and adult achievement and for community capacity-building. Examples of these qualifications are shown in Figure 3.4.

One notable approach in this sector is the Awards Network[6], a forum of twenty one, mainly third sector providers of non-formal learning awards in Scotland. One of the

[5] For example, in the publication Worth Doing: Using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework in Community Learning and Development.

[6] http://www.awardsnetwork.org/

aims of the Network is to develop a Scottish framework for valuing, recognising and accrediting young people's achievements through non-formal education. They recognise young people's contributions in a variety of settings including youth work, volunteering, active citizenship, and formal education. Some youth awards have been credit rated onto the SCQF, while others have their own long-standing internal processes for validation and accreditation.

Work Based Learning

The main qualification for work based learning in the SCQF is the Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ). These qualifications are based on occupational standards developed by government-approved Sector Skills Councils, employer-led organisations that cover specific industry sectors in the United Kingdom. SVQs are often a requirement of registration or practice in a number of sectors, including workers in social services, health care and early years education, and construction workers, plumbers and electricians.

Modern Apprenticeships, with a focus on occupational competences, were introduced in the UK in the 1990s. They share some characteristics with more traditional apprenticeships in other countries, but are also distinctive in a number of ways. A Modern Apprentice must be employed, receiving a wage and also learning on the job. The standards which must be achieved are set out in an approved Modern Apprenticeship Framework. The Modern Apprenticeship Group, an independent group which draws its authority from the Scottish Government, is responsible for the approval and de-approval of all Scottish Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. The frameworks are developed by the Sector Skills Councils. As each framework is introduced or reviewed by the submitting body any mandatory component which is not already on the SCQF will be credit rated and placed on the Framework.

In addition however there are a number of work based programmes on the SCQF which belong to individual employers or professional bodies and which will be assessed in the workplace. These include, for example, programmes from Microsoft and Oracle and also programmes from the fire service, police service and the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service.

As well as Modern Apprenticeships at SCQF levels 5, 6 and 7, there are Technical Apprenticeships at SCQF levels 8 and 9, Graduate Apprenticeships at SCQF levels 9, 10 and 11 and Professional Apprenticeships at SCQF levels 10, 11 and (in principle) 12.[7] There are over 70 Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks available at present and these include craftsman qualifications in construction, manufacturing, engineering, etc but also qualifications in computing and informatics, the creative industries, business and management, financial services, and life sciences.

[7] There is also a "Foundation Apprenticeship" scheme for 15 and 16 year-olds, which combines college and/or workplace experience with school as a preparation for entry into a Modern Apprenticeship with exemptions.

Learner mobility

The assessment and certification of non-formal (and informal) learning has been fundamental to education and training reforms in Scotland since the mid-1980s and the principle that there should be certification of achieved learning outcomes regardless of the place, pace or mode of learning has been a core value of the SCQF from its inception. This in-built flexibility of the SCQF makes the validation of non-formal and informal learning less of an issue than it may be in more regulatory frameworks.

There are many routes and pathways to progress in education and training in Scotland and the SCQF reflects this by promoting a parity of esteem across all qualifications whether they are academic or vocational, formal or non-formal, allowing individual learners to move vertically, horizontally and diagonally around the Framework.

Scotland has a long established approach to recognising non-formal learning using agreed systems of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer. The SCQF is designed to allow greater flexibility for learners to progress through their learning journey irrespective of the nature of the learning they undertake and the sector(s) in which they undertake that learning.

The SCQF Partnership has produced tailored guidance for learners, education providers and employers on the use of RPL and the SCQF level descriptors in supporting the transition from non-formal to formal learning. For a learner seeking to make the transition from non-formal learning to formal learning, the guidance shows how the SCQF and RPL can be used to guide learners to alternative pathways using different routes to gain access to formal qualifications in another sector and also how to gain credit towards these formal qualifications using their previously gained non-formal qualifications. However, the Partnership recognises that there is still a significant amount of progress to be made in this area to ensure that all learners get recognition for learning they have already undertaken and that learners are not required to repeat learning already achieved.

In the 2014-15 Programme for Government the Scottish Government set out its ambition that every child, irrespective of socioeconomic background, should have an equal chance to access higher education. In order to identify the steps needed to achieve this ambition, a Commission on Widening Access was set up to advise government. The Commission's final report was published in 2016 and contained 34 recommendations. The report identified that there was significant variance in the level of credit awarded for prior learning between institutions and that more selective institutions tended generally to award less credit than other parts of the sector. The Commission undertook to understand why this variance existed and whether there were legitimate reasons for this. As a result, the final report included a recommendation that '*The Scottish Funding Council, working with HEIs and Colleges, should explore more efficient, flexible and learner centred models of articulation which provide learners with the choice of a broader range of institutions and courses.' (Recommendation 10)*

In addition, at the time of writing, the Scottish Government is now undertaking "The 15-24 Learner Journey Review". This is a programme of work led by the Scottish Government in partnership with key stakeholders in Scotland to review the effectiveness and efficiency of the Learner Journey for all 15 to 24 year olds. The main drivers for the review are learner personalisation and choice, and system efficiency. The review aims to consider the 15-24 Learner Journey from the senior phase in school leading to employment, including the stages of further and higher education in college, higher education in university, vocational training and apprenticeships.

The Scottish Government's vision is for a learning system which enables efficient and effective learning journeys through:

- informed decision making by the learner;
- the quality, value and reach of the provision on offer to learners;
- straightforward, seamless efficient connections between different parts of the system, including recognition of prior learning;
- equality of access to these opportunities, including suitable learner funding.

Intended key outcomes from the review include:

- Improving the design, alignment and coherence of the 15-24 learning journey;
- Improving the ease with which all young people move through their learning, regardless of where they are studying;
- Evaluating the opportunities and Learner Journey choices in and across schools, colleges and community / third sector based learning to identify and consider any unnecessary duplication of learning;
- Establishing options for removing unnecessary repetition and maximising progression through levels of study in or between school, community, college, training and university.

The SCQF Partnership has been involved in the review, providing information and guidance to stakeholders to ensure that the key messages of the SCQF remain central to this work and can influence positive change in the system going forward.

Case Study 1: **Borders College and IKEA**

Borders College works with organisations that support people with disabilities by developing courses for their service users within the Scottish Borders and Edinburgh areas. Using the SVQ as a model of delivery, the college developed units at basic levels that could be delivered in non-college environments, for example in supported workplaces, training establishments and other community based settings. The units were written by Borders College staff with input from staff from partner organisations and this subsequently became known as the „Skills Accreditation Programme"

In 2012-13, with funding from the Scottish Funding Council, the SCQFP established a project to support colleges that wanted to credit rate their non-recognised qualifications and put them onto the Framework. Borders College chose to credit rate the 'Ready for Retail' programme in order to enhance its value, to improve learners' employability and to enable employers to measure the programme against other nationally recognised awards.

Borders College developed the programme with assistance from staff working in the Edinburgh branch of IKEA. They set about developing units that would fit around work tasks that were being carried out, providing structure to the learning that was taking place. IKEA staff members and some of the partner organisations were trained to help with the delivery and assessment of the Award.

The units for the Ready for Retail Award were validated through Borders College internal approval system. The application included general information about the award and structure, justification for developing the new provision, delivery methods, entry requirements, access routes and progression routes. Borders College, as an approved Credit Rating Body, has rigorous and robust quality assurance systems for levelling and credit rating learning programmes onto the SCQF.

Ready for Retail is now available at two levels depending on the level of support received by the candidate – SCQF level 1 or SCQF level 2 with 35 credit points awarded to those who complete the full award.

The Programme Manager at the college welcomed the opportunity to credit rate the award and said that the SCQF credit rating of the programme added value and would help improve the employment prospects of the candidates

Case Study 2: **Scottish Police College Tulliallan**

Scottish Police College - Tulliallan acts as one of Police Scotland's key training venues. All of the courses and programmes delivered there are subject to the Police Scotland National Framework for Quality Assurance in Training and Education. Many are also credit rated on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

Up until 2011 the Probationer Training Programme (PTB) was accredited through Stirling University but once CRB status was achieved by Scottish Police College – Tulliallan, the programme was credit rated by the Police Training College Tulliallan team.

The Programme was credit rated at SCQF Level 7 with 170 credit points. Initially new recruits spend time at the College learning what is expected of them in terms of the skills, attitudes and behaviours required of a successful police officer before being allowed to undertake supervised work-based training. Additional study and assessments continue for the duration of the training period until candidates are confirmed to the rank of Police Constable.

Being awarded Credit Rating Body status by the SCQF Partnership and then successfully credit rating the Probationer Training Programme did realise a number of benefits for Scottish Police College Tulliallan. The previously existing programmes were much improved in terms of format and structure because of the thoroughness of the process. The Quality Assurance processes had to improve and this had a knock on effect on all other training programmes.

As each cohort has gone through the programme it has become clear that other opportunities have opened up for learners to use the 170 credit points at SCQF Level 7. The credits awarded for successful completion have been used by serving officers to move on to full degrees and beyond − therefore new training and possible education pathways have been created for serving police officers.

Since credit rating the Ready for Retail award featured in Case Study 1, Borders College has gone on to credit rate a number of similar non-formal programmes including a 'Tenancy Award' which helps individuals who are being supported in a tenancy for the first time to understand their rights, responsibilities and other aspects of living in rented accommodation.

Another programme has also been developed in partnership with social work departments which the college has ownership of for 'Health Champions' coming from local communities to support their own community. Programmes have also been developed for organisations such as Scottish Rugby Union and the college has also provided Third Party credit rating for the College Development Network.

Speaking about the non-formal programmes they have credit rated, the college Vice-Principal said that there had been a very limited range of vocational qualifications at lower levels which added to the barriers for someone with a disability trying to gain employment. He went on to explain that the main driver for developing and credit rating such programmes was that a local need had been identified; the college had recognised a gap in the market but they also wanted to be able to reach a specific client group and be able to open up the Framework to another audience. In doing so he said that the college had faced barriers in the process as some organisations found the cost of credit rating prohibitive but some other applications had failed because organisations underestimated the rigour of the process or the size of the task of having a programme of learning credit rated. The Vice-Principal added that the role of the SCQF Partnership was critical in terms of support, advice and guidance. He said that the vision from the beginning of the project had been broad enough to allow the college to pursue the aim of targeting programmes at the lower end of the Framework and this had been achieved.

Scottish Police College - Tulliallan (Case Study 2) is one of the CRBs that have been subject to the SCQF Partnership monitoring and review process. The Quality Assurance Manager at Police Scotland College explained that as a result of the SCQFP monitoring and review process much of the documentation used in the credit rating process had been refined, making the process less bureaucratic.

It was also explained that programmes such as the Police Youth Volunteering Programme had specifically been developed with credit rating in mind but unlike some other CRBs Scottish Police College does not actively pursue programmes of learning for credit rating for commercial purposes. The critical factors were more about what the Police Service as an organisation needed and the international recognition of Scottish Police College qualifications awarded through SCQF CRB status. He added that SCQF credit rated programmes were more appealing to international justice sector organisations and police organisations. In conclusion, it was stated that Scottish Police College continuing to be one of only a few SCQFP Approved Credit Rating Bodies meant that the profile of police training within the Scottish education system could continue to be used as an exemplar to other educational bodies and organisations beyond their own sector.

Annex 3.8 contains further case study examples illustrating different approaches to including non-formal VET qualifications on the SCQF

3.5. Procedure for the Inclusion of Qualifications in the SCQF

Introduction

As mentioned previously, all formal and non-formal learning is placed onto the SCQF through the process of credit rating. The process of credit rating is a devolved process carried out by approved bodies known as Credit Rating Bodies. The SCQF Partnership manages the SCQF but does not act as a Credit Rating Body nor does it 'approve' or ratify the credit rating decisions of CRBs.

There is no single mandatory national process for organisations to carry out the credit rating function, CRBs are expected to establish their own credit rating processes in accordance with the 25 SCQF principles, which are set out in the SCQF Handbook[8] and in line with their own robust quality assurance systems. Processes for credit rating should be explicit, reliable, valid and subject to external review.

There is no different process of inclusion for any particular types of qualifications or learning programmes. However in some cases the qualifications will be designed to a particular level and would not be accepted at another level so for example a Higher qualification is required to be at level 6 and a Honours Degree must be at level 10. The rules and regulations for these are laid down by each relevant educational sector and quality assured. In other cases credit rating may take place after a programme is designed.

There is no obligation for any qualifications and learning programmes to be included on the SCQF as inclusion is voluntary. However, the SCQFP has agreed that all formal qualifications as shown in the SCQF diagram will be credit rated. Therefore a new National 5, Higher or Honours Degree, for example, will always be credit rated and placed onto the Framework.

The credit rating process

Credit rating is a process of professional judgement leading to a formal statement on the volume of SCQF credit points and allocation of an SCQF level for a qualification/ learning programme.

Professional judgement is carried out by those qualified through experience and knowledge of the discipline, field of study, profession, trade or area of study.

The focus of credit rating is on learning outcomes and on the arrangements for assessing those learning outcomes.

For any qualification or learning programme to be credit rated, the CRB must ensure that the programme meets the following 4 criteria:

[8] http://scqf.org.uk/media/1125/scqf_handbook_web_final_2015.pdf

- written in learning outcomes;
- worth at least 1 SCQF credit point;
- formally assessed; and
- quality assured, including external quality assurance.

Each CRB will design their credit rating system to meet the 25 SCQF principles but also to fit in with their own internal design, development, approval and review processes thus resulting in different systems in different Credit Rating Bodies. It should be noted however that all processes must incorporate the use of the SCQF Level Descriptors[9]. In addition the SCQF Handbook states that the process should also involve the use of other reference points such as relevant qualification or learning programme descriptors, higher education subject benchmark information, awarding body specifications and other appropriate sources of information and guidance.

There are external quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that the systems designed by CRBs are in line with the SCQF principles and operating effectively. These arrangements are outlined in Chapter 3.6.

A flowchart is provided as guidance to CRBs outlining the possible stages of a credit rating process. This is shown on the next page. However each CRB can design and develop a credit rating process which links with their own internal structures and processes (see Annex 3.7).

It is normally expected that the credit rating process will consist of three stages after a submission for credit rating is received:

- Initial credit rating decision
- Vetting of the credit rating decision
- Ratification of the credit rating by senior personnel in the CRB

Some of these stages may be carried out by individuals or panels/committees.

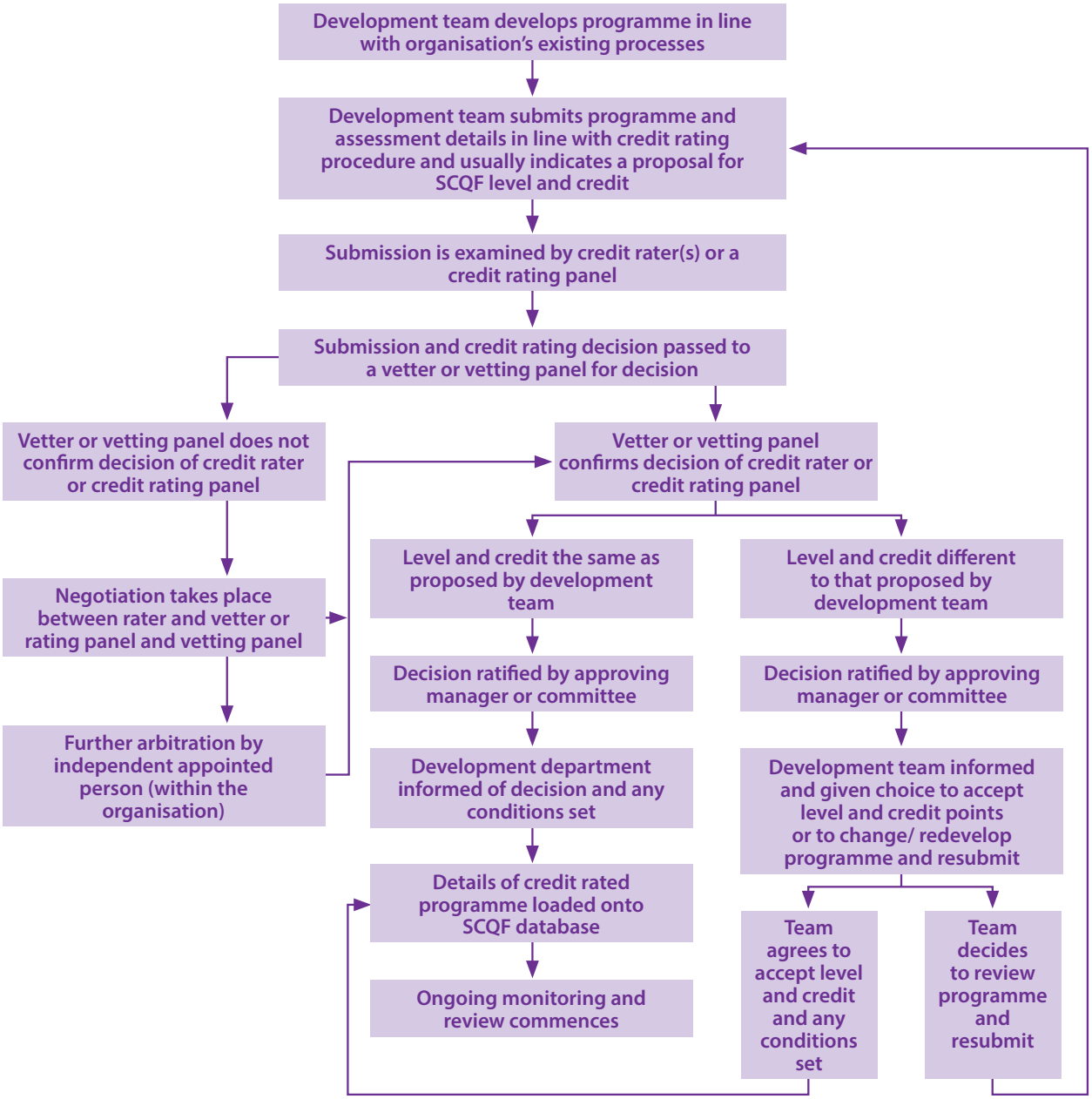
A submission for credit rating is likely to include the following information:

- Aims and rationale of the programme
- Learning outcomes
- Assessment of learning outcomes
- Delivery details
- Entry requirements
- Breakdown of learning hours
- Criteria for pass/fail
- Quality assurance arrangements

[9] http://scqf.org.uk/media/1123/scqf-level-descriptors-web-aug-2015.pdf

Figure 3.7. Credit Rating Process

FLOWCHART - CREDIT RATING PROCESS



Certification of credit rated qualifications/learning programmes

Certificates issued to learners must include the following information:

- the title of the qualification or learning programme;
- the total number of SCQF credit points awarded on completion;
- the SCQF level;
- the SCQF logo;
- the name of the Credit Rating Body.

Where a Credit Rating Body is not able to show all of this information on the certificate, it must be produced and issued to the learner in another format (e.g. a transcript). The word "level" must only be used in relation to the SCQF level. The one exception to this is where the relevant EQF level is shown in addition to the SCQF Level.

This will be the same for both formal and non-formal learning programmes.

Annex 3.6 contains an example of a certificate for non-formal learning.

Refusal to credit rate and barriers to credit rating

A request to credit rate a programme/qualification may be refused on the grounds that the qualification/programme does not meet the 4 SCQF criteria or that the organisation asking for the programme/qualification to be credit rated does not own the programme.

It should be noted that as the SCQF already includes qualifications of all types, including non-formal qualifications there is little evidence to suggest that any types of qualifications offer particular difficulties for credit-rating. Although it is important to note that credit rating at level 1 of the SCQF where learners may require support to achieve competence is a particularly skilled activity carried out by experienced staff working with learners at that level. Level 1 of the SCQF is not referenced to the EQF as it is regarded as being below EQF level 1.

Credit rating paperwork

Each CRB will develop its own set of paperwork for credit rating including submission forms, forms to record discussions and decisions about level and credit points and forms to record the vetting and ratification of decisions. CRB's will design these to meet the needs of their own internal systems but also to meet the requirements of the principles contained in the SCQF Handbook.

It is important that all CRBs record their credit rating processes and decisions so that the integrity of the Framework can be maintained. These records may be examined during their external scrutiny processes by the relevant Quality Assurance Body.

Annex 3.7 contains a full set of guidance notes from an SCQF Partnership Approved CRB including flowcharts of processes, examples of submission forms and related documentation all associated with the credit rating process.

Third party credit rating

Building on the processes described above, if a CRB is credit rating a programme owned by another organisation at their request, this is known as third party credit rating. As the CRB may not be familiar with the organisation's processes as they would when credit rating their own programmes, the CRB will need to examine the same list of information as detailed above but may also need to examine the organisational systems in place for:

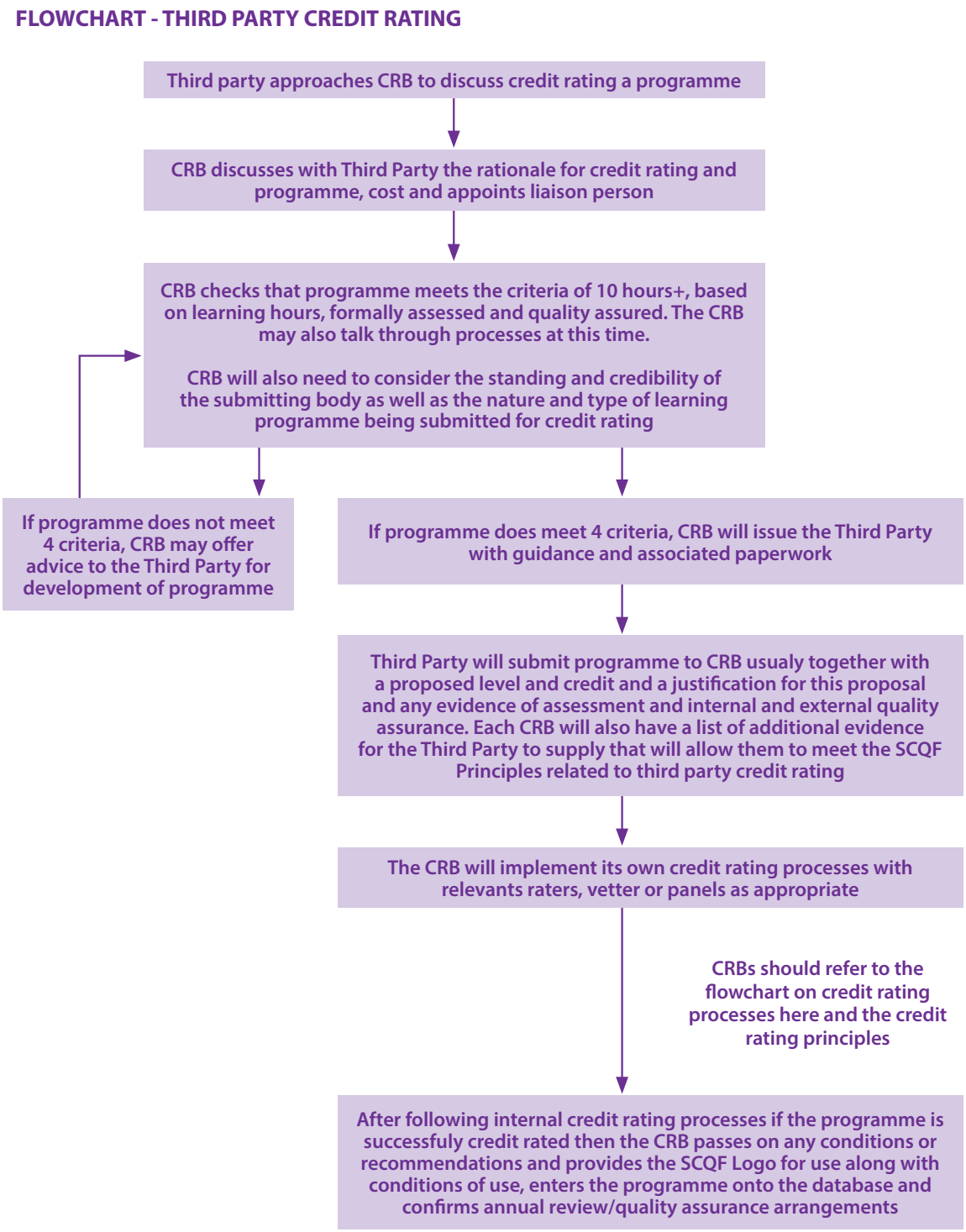
- the design, development, approval and validation of learning programmes
- plagiarism and cheating
- appeals
- staff development

They will also want to look at the stability of the organisation, their track record in providing learning and training and the facilities and support in place for learners.

The CRB will also have systems in place for informing the other organisation of requirements of a submission including the evidence to be presented, the outcomes of the credit rating process, and for the ongoing monitoring of the third party and credit rated programme including certification.

Figure 3.8 outlines the key stages of this process followed by an illustrative example for clarification.

Figure 3.8. Flowchart for third party credit rating



Illustrative Example: **Third Party Credit Rating**

*This case study describes a fictitious situation. It does not refer to a real qualification which is in existence but is used to illustrate the process of what is referred to as **'third party'** credit rating in Scotland which is a well-established process. The sections below outline the process that an organisation would go through to place a qualification onto the SCQF if they were not authorised as an SCQF Credit Rating Body.*

A small training organisation provides training and awards the qualification 'Introduction to Car Mechanics'. This organisation is a private company and not part of the mainstream education sector (state) – they are not subject to any quality assurance review by any government body. The organisation wishes to have this qualification credit rated and placed onto the SCQF.

The organisation contacts the SCQF Partnership for advice on getting 'Introduction to Car Mechanics' credit rated and attends a free workshop for third party organisations on credit rating. The training organisation approaches a Credit Rating Body and discusses the suitability of 'Introduction to Car Mechanics' against the 4 key SCQF criteria.

The Credit Rating Body discusses details of costs and the process of credit rating with the organisation.

The organisation indicates to the CRB that they wish to submit 'Introduction to Car Mechanics' for credit rating. The CRB provides the organisation with the necessary paperwork and details of the information that they will need to submit. The organisation completes the paperwork, makes the submission (including their estimation of the level and credit) and pays the required fee.

The third party organisation may be asked by the Credit Rating Body to indicate an estimated SCQF level and number of credit points for the qualification 'An introduction to Car Mechanics' within their submission for credit rating. However, it is the sole responsibility of the Credit Rating Body to decide on the level and number of credit points. If this decision differs from the estimation received from the third party then there may be some discussion about the necessary changes to the qualification to bring it to the desired level or the third party may decide to accept the CRBs credit rating decision. If there is no resolution then the CRB is under no obligation to credit rate the qualification and it will not be placed onto the SCQF. All CRBs will decide on levels using the SCQF Level Descriptors (2015). This single set of descriptors is used irrespective of the sector, subject or level of the qualification and irrespective of the type of organisation or institution owning the programme or carrying out the credit rating.

The CRB receives the submission and reviews the submission using their internal credit rating process involving their subject experts on the vetting and approval panels. The CRB informs the organisation of the outcome of the credit rating process. This will be the level and the number of credit points allocated to 'Introduction to Car Mechanics' and the rationale for this decision. This outcome matches the estimation of the third party organisation.

The Credit Rating Body then enters 'Introduction to Car Mechanics' onto the SCQF database together with details of the period of credit rating and the date of review. The CRB issues the organisation with guidance as to the use of the SCQF logo on certificates. The organisation is now able to issue certificates with the SCQF logo and details of the level and credit points for learners who successfully complete 'Introduction to Car Mechanics'. They also now include the SCQF logo, level and credit points in their marketing material for this qualification.

The CRB will now start the monitoring and review process. The organisation is told that they must inform the CRB if any changes are made to 'Introduction to Car Mechanics' and must participate in annual monitoring. The CRB requests that an annual report is sent to them by the organisation each year which includes details of the internal and external review of the qualification and any actions taken

3.6. Quality Assurance of Non-formal Sector Qualifications

Introduction

The SCQF Handbook (SCQF Partnership: 2015) sets out 25 principles – see Annex 3.3. Principle 1, which underpins all of the other principles, states that the SCQF Partnership and the Credit Rating Bodies share responsibility for ensuring the quality and integrity of the SCQF. This principle underlines the duties that fall on the Credit Rating Bodies, but does not detract from the lead responsibility of the Partnership.

The Handbook states that "Safeguarding the integrity and reputation of the Framework is paramount and quality assurance systems must be strong and rigorous enough so as not to compromise this integrity."[10] These systems must combine internal quality systems with external scrutiny. Robust quality assurance is essential to create trust in the SCQF among users – learners and providers. The method of application of these principles varies from sector to sector but all Credit Rating Bodies are required to operate quality assurance systems that include robust checks carried out by an independent body or someone who is not employed by, or part of, the institution or organisation. Providing clear evidence on this is a crucial part of the process of being approved to become a Credit Rating Body as outlined on page 156 and Annex 3.4.

Quality of the process of inclusion in the SCQF

Each Credit Rating Body must have a quality assurance system in place to safeguard standards, protect the integrity of the programmes and ensure consistent assessment.

Credit Rating Bodies have to demonstrate that their own internal quality assurance meets the principles set out by SCQF Handbook.

As the system of credit rating is a devolved one it is important that there is a quality assurance system to monitor this process (see the diagram on the next page). This is carried out by a number of agencies.

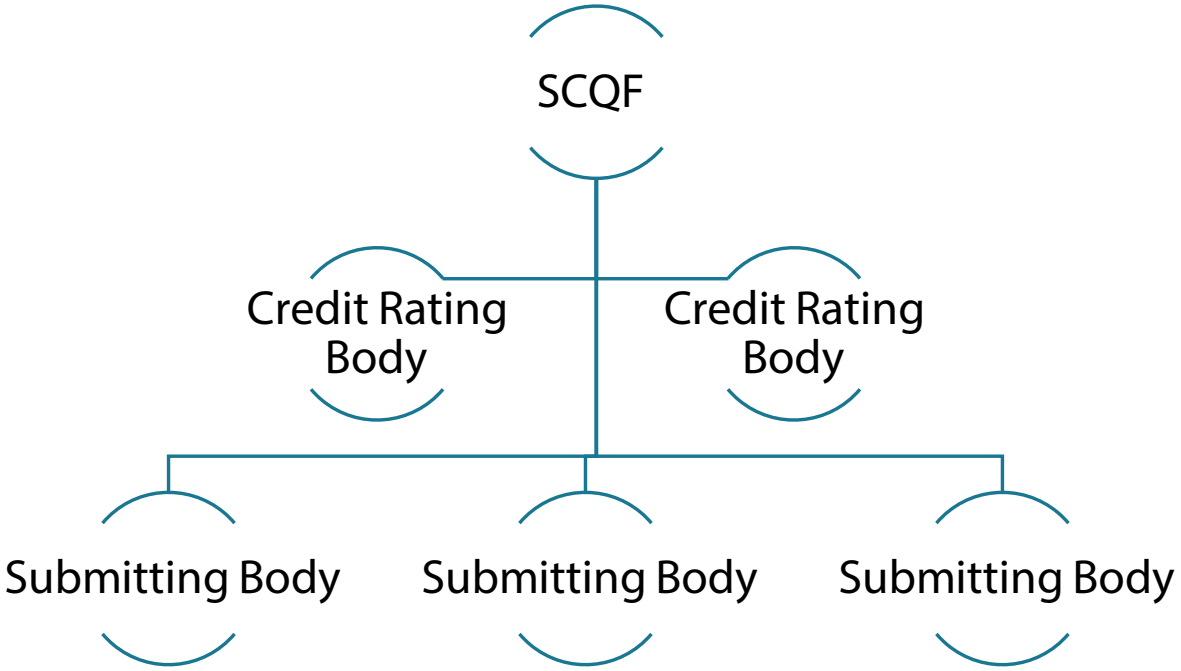
- SCQFP in partnership with Education Scotland for further education colleges
- QAA Scotland for Higher Education Institutions and Universities
- SCQFP for other Approved CRBs
- Scottish Government and an independent auditor in the case of SQA

[10] SCQF Handbook, p 33.

All of these quality assurance arrangements include regular evaluation of the organisations, their learning programmes and their quality assurance systems.

Self-assessment by organisations is integral to the monitoring processes carried out by Education Scotland, QAA Scotland and the SCQF Partnership.

Figure 3.9. Quality assurance and credit rating



All of these external monitoring bodies are themselves subject to review of different kinds; QAA Scotland and Education Scotland, for example, carry out their work on the basis of renewable service level agreements with the Scottish Funding Council, which is an executive public body of the Scottish Government with a statutory duty to ensure that the quality of further and higher education in colleges and universities is assessed and enhanced; and QAA is subject to periodic review as a full member the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). SQA is also subject to a formal review by external auditors.

Quality assurance within the higher education and further education sectors

Scottish universities

Higher education provision is developed within the parameters of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, The Quality Code was developed by the higher education sector and is published and maintained by QAA: it sets out a series of expectations on which all higher education providers are agreed and is subject to revision as required: it covers academic standards, the quality of provision and support for students, and communication about provision. Higher education

institutions are encouraged to create their own quality codes, building on the national expectations. The main aim of the UK Quality Code is to ensure that higher education provision and outcomes are comparable and consistent at a threshold level across the UK. Scottish Universities validate their own qualifications making use of the UK Quality Code, including subject benchmarks, and the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland, embedded within the SCQF. Universities are responsible for the quality of a range of processes: including programme design and maintenance, credit rating of their own provision, credit rating of the provision of other organisations (if they choose to offer that service), assessment of learners, and making awards to successful learners. They do this through internal evaluation processes, in which individuals external to the institution often have a formal role – especially external examiners and professional bodies. In addition QAA Scotland carries out regular reviews of aspects of the work of these institutions and these reviews are published. The approach, which is called "Enhancement-led Institutional Review", aligns with the European Standards and Guidelines and there are international reviewers on all teams. Particular features of Scotland's quality assurance mechanisms are a strong element of student participation in the review process and a national programme of enhancement, aimed at developing and sharing good practice.

Scottish colleges

Most of the qualifications offered by Scottish colleges are validated by SQA or other awarding bodies and these awarding bodies operate quality assurance based on approval, audit and external verification. Colleges also have their own quality systems and carry out continuous self-assessment as part of a national programme of enhancement. External reviews of quality are carried out by Education Scotland on behalf of the SFC, the body which allocates public funds to colleges and universities. Additional quality assurance processes may be operated by bodies such as Skills Development Scotland for vocational education and training schemes such as Modern Apprenticeships. Quality assurance mechanisms in Scottish colleges include an active element of student participation and feedback.

Other credit rating bodies

Other Credit Rating Bodies will design their own internal quality assurance systems covering the design, approval, delivery, monitoring and review of their learning programmes. In reality many of these are very similar in some aspects to those systems in existence in colleges and universities. These Credit Rating Bodies are subject to review and monitoring carried out by the SCQF Partnership involving self-assessment, annual monitoring and a 4-yearly periodic review. In addition, these CRBs must also arrange for an independent external review of their credit rating processes.

3.7. Costs of Including Non-formal Sector Qualifications in the NQF

Including non-formal qualifications and learning programmes on the SCQF through the credit rating process already described can be carried out by CRBs themselves to place their own provision on the Framework or by carrying out credit rating for other organisations. Providing a service for other organisations may be carried out on a commercial basis. Not all CRBs offer a service for credit rating to other organisations and some may offer the service as part of a partnership on a non-commercial basis.

There is no nationally set charge for credit rating and the cost will be agreed between the CRB and the submitting organisation. Costs can currently vary, on average, between £4,000 and £7,000 (€4600 and €8000) and will depend on the size and complexity of the learning programme/qualification and the amount of support needed by the organisation. In all cases the submitting body will pay for the services of the CRB however, any costing model would take account of the following important considerations:

- Time required for release of staff in the required subject area and their availability
- Time required for liaison with submitting body
- Time required for release of panel members
- Size of programme being submitted
- State of readiness of the programme

This state of readiness of the programme can have a significant impact on the time taken to carry out the credit rating process and this can ultimately affect the cost. The SCQF Partnership runs free workshops for organisations wishing to have a programme credit rated to guide them through the process.

Based on the above, organisations can sometimes negotiate the cost with the Credit Rating Body. The organisation may also be able to source some funding from another agency or organisation to cover this cost.

The CRB may also charge for the mandatory ongoing monitoring and quality assurance.

SCQFP has also worked with a range of organisations to explore options for learning to be credit rated onto the Framework and this is set out in its Strategic and Operational Plans. In the past number of years SCQFP has been:

- supporting organisations in the Community Learning and Development sector, and in further and Higher Education to have non formal programmes credit rated onto the SCQF; and

- running free workshops called "Would You Credit It" specifically for those in the non- formal sectors to find out what they might need to do to have something credit rated – explaining learning outcomes, assessment and quality assurance.

One CRB interviewed as part of this project which had credit rated and placed upwards of 50 non-formal learning programmes onto the SCQF said that cost was not always an issue for submitting bodies. The institution operates a successful commercial credit rating service and they indicated that rather than the cost being a barrier, submitting bodies often see credit rating of their programmes as a quality enhancement process that they wish to integrate into their existing systems. Additionally there has been some anecdotal evidence to suggest that some submitting bodies were of the opinion that a learning programme from a third party would not have the same prestige as a university qualification unless it had gone through the credit rating process and therefore the cost was incidental. The institution also stated that submitting bodies were aware of the many benefits of having their programmes credit rated and placed on the SCQF and so credit rating was perceived as value for money. At the same time the institution viewed commercial credit rating as a way of building partnerships, either collaborative, commercial or otherwise.

However, there is also anecdotal evidence that smaller organisations may see the cost of credit rating as a barrier. This is especially the case for charitable organisations and community groups. However many of these seek partnerships with their local college or university who may be willing to credit rate a programme as part of a partnership.

3.8. Current Debate on Further Developments

Overview

Since the SCQF was launched in 2001 the Scottish Government and its agencies have worked to ensure that SCQF levels and credit values are part of everyday work and communication in schools and colleges and with learners and (for younger learners) their parents. The SCQF Partnership has also commissioned several important pieces of research with learners and stakeholders over that period looking at impact and levels of understanding of the Framework across all learning sectors.

Since 2010 a systematic programme of research has been carried out among learners, institutions and employers to gauge levels of understanding and use of the Framework. An emerging trend in this research has been that learners themselves are often using the SCQF to take more control of their own planning and progression, realising that the Framework is as amenable to recognising non formal learning as it is to recognising formal qualifications gained in schools or other formal institutions.

HEIs and Colleges have also continued to use the SCQF to inform the design and development of their curriculum portfolio and to ensure that there is a balance of provision at different SCQF levels. Colleges in particular have made use of the SCQF to inform the development of new regional curriculum portfolios, to embed new National Qualifications and to ensure a balance of provision at different SCQF levels with examples of non-formal learning in evidence. Both sectors look set to continue to credit rate their non formal qualifications and learning programmes and provision offered by third parties when there is a need or demand.

In the context of this report, one recommendation that emerged from research carried out in 2014 suggested that guidance could be strengthened to promote credit rating of non-formal learning and to further direct and encourage HEIs and colleges to reference and comply with the SCQF Credit Rating Guidelines when credit rating such learning programmes. The SCQFP has since produced updated guidance and resources for the HEI and college sectors and the increasing number of non-formal learning programmes and qualifications on the SCQF database demonstrates that institutions are increasingly aware of this guidance and are acting on it.

Scottish Government priorities

The Scottish Government's strategies to widen access and participation for young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and to develop Scotland's young workforce have encouraged sectors to work more extensively with each other and with schools, Local Authorities and employers, and the SCQF can be seen as integral to this process. This work is enabling better integration of Scotland's

education system and is developing both academic and vocational education and training opportunities that support youth employability and offer young people alternative progression pathways and development choices across and upwards through different SCQF levels. The SCQF is essential for informing the design, development and communication of curriculum and alternative progression pathways between different parts of Scotland's education system. In this way it will continue to provide partners with a framework and common vocabulary, assisting in the identification of gaps in provision, informing credit rating and levelling decisions and supporting the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning.

These activities complement the current Government focus on education including Developing the Young Workforce[11], Curriculum for Excellence[12], Post 16 Education Reform[13] and raising educational attainment[14]. As well as initiatives such as 'How Good is our School' and 'Closing the Gap'. Ministers have placed the focus very firmly on education and particularly education of young people and there seems to be a clear vision that learning in many different contexts and settings should be recognised for the benefit of society as a whole. The Scottish Government is, at the time of writing, carrying out the "15-24 Learner Journey review" which is a programme of work led by the Scottish Government in partnership with others, to review the effectiveness and efficiency of the 15-24 Learner Journey for all 15 to 24 year olds in Scotland. In 2017 a Commissioner for Fair Access to Higher Education in Scotland was also appointed. This postholder will be an advocate for disadvantaged learners, working across the education system to provide strategic leadership and drive change across the system.

The SCQF Partnership will continue to give considerable thought to exactly what offers it can make which can help deliver on the pledges of Government in relation to excellence and equity in education.

The Partnership aims to continue to champion the use of the SCQF to support curriculum development, progression planning, supporting attainment and achievement and as a means of keeping learners at the forefront of our messages. For the next few years education and supporting learners to achieve their full potential will continue to be a top priority for Scottish Government and SCQFP plans to play an effective and efficient part in this.

The SCQFP Strategic Plan

In developing the SCQFP strategic plan, the Partnership, along with others, is fully contributing to supporting the Government agenda to deliver economic recovery. The need to support economic growth and ensure that skills are utilised fully in workforce development are very clear. The SCQFP strategic plan also acknowledges

[11] http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/developingtheyoungworkforce

[12] http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence

[13] http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/post16reform

[14] http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/Raisingeducationalattainment

that the principles which underpin the SCQF will be fundamental to the success of Developing Scotland's Young Workforce. The Partnership recognises fully that the next few years will continue to see many changes in the education and training landscape both structural and contextual. The Strategic Plan has been developed to capitalise fully on the SCQFP's excellent partnership arrangements whilst still recognising that we will need to be flexible in order to respond to changing priorities for partners. The Partnership will continue to consult with key stakeholders on how best to support them and enhance education, learning, skills and training for individuals and employers.

The vision is to ensure that the Framework provides a range of tools and solutions to support both learners and employers through extremely challenging times ahead. The Partnership will seek to add value to the strategy outlined in Developing the Young Workforce as well as those strategies and initiatives which are more closely linked to supporting the economic recovery agenda. To this end, the SCQF Partnership's Key Objectives for 2015-18 are to:

- Maintain the reputation of the SCQF as a quality framework by monitoring, supporting and enhancing the work of Credit Rating Bodies
- Create greater demand for learning to be recognised on the SCQF from learners and employers
- Provide support and guidance on the inclusion of informal and non formal learning on the Framework along with advice on the use of Recognition of Prior Learning
- Market and promote the use of the Framework and associated tools and guidance
- Cultivate new collaborative relationships with key stakeholders to further embed the SCQF across all sectors
- Promote the SCQF as a tool to support learner transitions
- Promote the experience of developing and maintaining the SCQF to an international audience

Other initiatives and future plans

The SCQF Executive Team will continue to work with Skills Development Scotland (SDS), the national skills agency, SQA, Universities and relevant skills bodies to promote the use of the SCQF in non-formal/workbased qualifications/programmes and increase awareness levels of the SCQF with employers. To support this, the SCQF will:

- Continue to explore with skills bodies the value of creating contextualised framework diagrams to highlight the comparability of academic qualifications with sectoral qualifications.

- Continue to work with Colleges and Universities to develop and promote pathways for non-formal/workbased qualifications into academic qualifications.
- Continuing to work with partners to promote the value of credit rating for sector wide CPD provision.

There is an acknowledgement that further work is needed across all sectors to ensure that messages about non-formal qualifications on the SCQF are signposted and communicated consistently and that any non-formal provision that is publicised as being SCQF credit rated has followed SCQF credit rating guidelines. The SCQF Executive Team aims to continue to provide enhanced guidance to HEI and College Marketing and Quality Assurance Teams as well as to employers and practitioners in the CLD sector and to parents of learners to ensure that these key messages continue to be delivered and understood.

In keeping with the theme of this report, the SCQF Partnership will also continue to embody a fully collaborative approach by bringing together employers, colleges, universities, providers of learning and public agencies in order to maintain and promote a Framework that helps to promote opportunity and reduce inequality by recognising all kinds of learning.

Particularly in 2018, the SCQF Partnership Executive Team will also lead on a key project looking at the inclusion of non-formal learning programmes into the SCQF to assist with the transition/employment of Armed Forces Veterans.

The SCQF Partnership also intends to update its report of the referencing of the SCQF to the EQF by the end of 2018.

3.9. Literature

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Education Scotland: www.educationscotland.gov.uk

The Higher Education Academy: www.heacademy.ac.uk

QAA Scotland: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/scotland

Scotland's Colleges: www.scotlandscolleges.ac.uk

Scottish Funding Council: www.sfc.ac.uk

SCQF: www.scqf.org.uk

SQA: www.sqa.org.uk/sqa

SQA Accreditation: http://accreditation.sqa.org.uk/accreditation/home

Universities Scotland: www.universities-scotland.ac.uk

3.10. About the Authors

Anthony O'Reilly is a member of the Executive Team within SCQFP. His role has included leading on and participating in projects promoting the use of the Framework as well as activities which build and maintain relationships with UK, European and International partners. Anthony has also worked on a number of research projects evaluating the use and impact of the SCQF in Higher and Further Education, among training providers, schools, learners and employers. Anthony has been involved in a number of groups concerned with the implementation of UK and European VET initiatives such as ECVET, EQAVET, ESCO and Europass.

Anthony has worked with the national skills agency as an Enterprise in Education Adviser, working with schools, colleges and employers across a range of sectors. He led on the development of a Supported Employment initiative in the Glasgow region to enable people with learning difficulties to enter mainstream employment. He implemented and managed a union upskilling initiative in the south west of Ireland; training and coaching a network of Union Learning Representatives and marketing the project to business and enterprise as well as education providers. This led to his involvement in a number of European projects where Anthony worked with partners involved in Recognition of Prior Learning, Learning Mentors programmes, European Qualifications Framework (EQF) projects and a European VET network.

Anthony has been involved in the design, delivery and assessment of a range of training and educational resources in the UK and Ireland and has been involved in the field of education, training and qualifications for over 20 years in a range of posts. More recently he has worked on a number of European projects based on implementing National Qualifications Frameworks and promoting the benefits and synergies of the various European VET initiatives as part of his role within the Executive Team at the SCQFP. He has participated in a number of Transversal and Erasmus+ projects both as a participant and an organiser with partners from Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Macedonia, Malta and others.

Anthony graduated with a BA in Business Organisation and Management and holds a postgraduate certificate in Management Studies.

Sheila Dunn is currently Head of Quality and International Development at the SCQF Partnership which she joined in May 2012. She has responsibility for the quality and integrity of the framework including direct support for new and existing Credit Rating Bodies and is also involved in activities relating to the SCQF and its relationship to other frameworks in the UK, Europe and beyond. She has participated in a number of European Funded Projects during her time with the Partnership and most recently was an International Expert on an E-Twinning Project in the FYR Macedonia along with partners from Poland and Croatia.

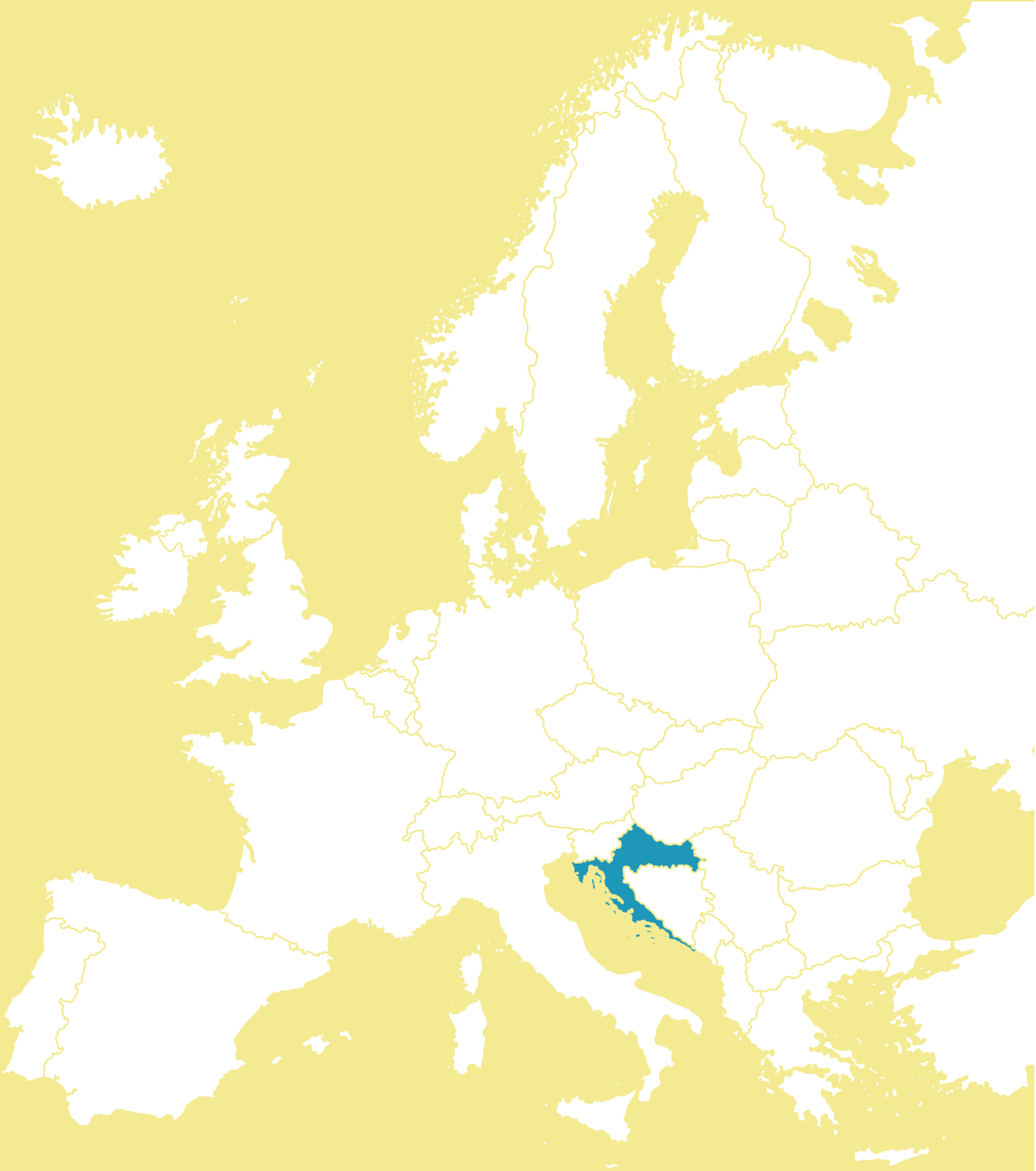
Sheila has worked in education in Scotland for over 20 years starting her career as a Research Fellow working in Higher Education researching Quality Systems in Education. She then moved to take up a role as Quality Manager at a vocational education college responsible for setting up and monitoring quality systems

and then as a Development Officer with The Quality Assurance Agency, Scotland managing and facilitating reviews of learning and teaching in Higher Education Institutions across Scotland.

Prior to joining the SCQF Partnership, Sheila was Head of Learner Enhancement at Kilmarnock College in Ayrshire, Scotland, a vocational education college. During this time she was responsible for the strategic leadership of a range of services including Quality Enhancement, Learner Resources, Learner Services and Marketing ensuring that the College met the needs of all learners during their learning journey. Sheila also managed the College's credit rating of non-formal learning for inclusion within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

Sheila graduated with a BA (Hons) in Business Studies and holds a Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Studies in Education.

4. Croatia



Introduction

This report is the result of the work carried out by the University of Split project team in cooperation with partners from the NQF-in international project: *Developing Organisational and Financial Models for Including Non-Formal Sector Qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks*. The aim of the Report is to create a mutual understanding of the process of validation of non-formal and informal learning, certification of such achieved qualifications, and their linkage to the National Qualifications Framework in Croatia.

This report was prepared by experts from the University of Split, who are experienced in the development and implementation of the qualifications framework, Bologna process and different forms of learning, including non-formal and informal.

Development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework in Croatia is a response to the need for a national framework of qualifications, encompassing all qualifications from all education and training sub-sectors into a single comprehensive qualifications framework. After the first initiative of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia in 2006, the Croatian Government established the National Committee for Development and Implementation of the NQF, gathering all relevant stakeholders and an Expert Team to assist the Government Committee in this endeavour. The development of the NQF was based on consultations with all relevant stakeholders.

In 2011, groups of experts and stakeholders gathered together with the objective to adopt the Law on the Croatian Qualifications Framework.

The CROQF has been referenced and self-certified to the EQF and QF-EHEA in 2012, and has been implemented, in general, through the development of occupational standards, qualifications standards and implementation of learning outcomes.

Croatia has started to develop a system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning through the development and implementation of the NQF. The NQF Act envisages adoption of regulations for all elements of the validation process. After the discussions with relevant stakeholders, the Rulebook is envisaged to be adopted in 2018. The validation of non-formal and informal learning in Croatia is based on qualifications standards that clearly outline the learning outcomes and conditions under which they can be acquired. The idea is that the validation process in Croatia is not just the certification of public documents for learning outcomes, acquired in a formal way of learning, but rather an instrument providing additional motivation for lifelong learning, by means of all forms of learning. The structuring of the validation system and its implementation are extremely slow processes. Education and training institutions, from schools to universities, are already preparing and creating mechanisms for the validation process. Institutions, intending to participate in the validation process, must have competent professionals in the field of validation for all four phases, either as employees or as external consultants.

Preparation of the report

In the preparation of this report, various available resources relating to the development of the education and qualifications system in Croatia, including outcomes from relevant projects were used. The resources refer to legal documents, reports of related projects and research publications and the EQF National Referencing Report.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CROQF	Croatian Qualifications Framework
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EQF	European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning
ESCO	European Classification of Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
ETTA	Education and Teacher Training Agency
EU	European Union
IT	Information Technology
NCEEE	National Centre for the External Evaluation of Education
NCP	National Coordination Point
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OS	Occupational standard
QF-EHEA	Qualifications Framework for European Higher Education Area
QS	Qualifications standard
LOU	Learning outcomes unit
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Basic terms

Qualification – refers to a set of integrated learning outcomes units of a given level, volume, profile, type and quality. It shall be proved by a certificate, diploma or other public document, issued by an accredited legal entity.

Full qualification – refers to a qualification complying by itself to conditions for access to the labour market and/or further education, respectively.

Partial qualification – refers to a qualification that does not comply by itself to conditions for access to the labour market and/or further education, respectively. It complies to conditions only if accompanied by a respective full

qualification, or by one or various respective partial qualifications, according to a full qualifications standard.

Competences – refers to knowledge and skills, as well as relevant autonomy and responsibility.

Learning outcomes – refers to competences acquired by an individual through learning and proved after a learning process.

Learning outcomes unit – refers to the integral unit of interconnected learning outcomes of a respective level, volume and profile.

Key competences for lifelong learning – refers to competences of a respective level required by an individual to be included into the community life. These are fundamental for acquiring competences in the course of life for all personal, social and professional needs, and include communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence, basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning how to learn, social and civic competence, initiative and entrepreneurship, as well as cultural awareness and expression.

Qualifications standard – refers to a content and structure of a given qualification. It includes all the data required for setting its level, volume and profile, as well as data required for assuring and promoting high quality of a qualifications standard.

Occupational standard – refers to a list of all tasks performed by an individual engaged in a given occupation, as well as a list of competences required for their successful implementation.

Formal learning – refers to an organised activity by an accredited legal entity or an individual, carried out according to accredited programmes, aimed at acquiring and upgrading competences for personal, social and professional needs. It shall be proven by a certificate, diploma or other public document issued by an authorised legal entity.

Non-formal learning – refers to an organised learning activity aimed at acquiring and upgrading competences for personal, social and professional needs. It is not proved by a public document.

Informal learning – refers to an unorganised activity for acquiring competences from daily experience, and other influences and resources from one's environment, referring to personal, social and professional needs.

Lifelong learning – refers to all forms of learning during one's lifetime, aimed at acquiring and upgrading competences referring to personal, social and professional needs.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning – refers to the assessment of acquired competences, including issuing the certificate by an accredited entity, according to previously defined criteria and standards.

4.1. Historical Context

General aspects

Although the idea was conceived earlier, the development of the comprehensive Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) officially commenced in March 2006 when the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports formed the Committee for the Introduction of the CROQF, chaired by the Minister.

Following consultations with relevant stakeholders, the Ministry sent the Baseline of the Croatian Qualifications Framework to the Government for adoption at the beginning of 2007. Proposed work on the development and the implementation of the CROQF continued and in July 2007, the Government adopted the Baseline of the CROQF. In September 2007, the National Committee for Development of the CROQF was established, and a set of documents were developed within the process. National Committee for the Implementation of the CROQF, afterwards promoted in National Council for Development of Human Potentials, was established in May 2010 (www.kvalifikacije.hr).

The first phase of the development of the CROQF has been denoted as:

- Orientation - stating that Croatia is committed to the development of the CROQF in the given period.

So far, the following phases of the development and implementation of the CROQF have been implemented:

- development of conceptual understanding,
- design of key elements of the CROQF,
- testing the implementation of the CROQF,
- implementation,
- review of progress and further development and implementation of the CROQF.

The last two phases of this process, following the initial implementation, include – *implementation* and *review of progress* – and should be constant phases of coordination and further development of the CROQF at the institutional level. To maximize efficiency, these phases overlap in practice.

The fundamental documents arising during the development and implementation of the CROQF are:

- *Baseline of the CROQF*[1] (including appendices[2]) – the document defining the main aims of the CROQF, the guiding principles for its development, and the

[1] The Baseline of the Croatian Qualifications Framework, The Croatian Government, July 2007, Zagreb, available at: www.kvalifikacije.hr

[2] See www.kvalifikacije.hr

key elements of the CROQF design including the Outline of the CROQF by reference levels;

- *Action Plan 2008-2012*[3] – a multi-annual and annual action plan for the development and implementation of the CROQF by 2012;
- *CROQF Concepts*[4] – vital concepts for understanding the CROQF development process, qualification's elements and their basic properties;
- *Sector Councils (SC)* – working groups for the validation of occupational standards and qualifications standards; 25 sectoral, one interdisciplinary and one for horizontal harmonisation of all qualifications;
- *CROQF – Introduction to qualifications*[5] – a theoretical basis of the CROQF for experts, providing fundamental information, guidelines and explanations necessary for understanding of key concepts – qualification and learning outcomes units/modules and their characteristics;
- *Law on the CROQF*[6] – drafted in January 2011, reviewed in July 2011, and adopted in 2013, including bylaws;
- A set of standards and guidelines for the institutional implementation of the CROQF (www.kvalifikacije.hr);
- Examples of occupational standards and qualifications standards.

Currently, bylaw for the Validation of non-formal and informal learning is in the final phase of its development. There are some deep discussions on the fundamental profiles of qualifications in the higher education sector (academic and professional), as well on the levels and sub-levels of qualifications.

The Croatian Qualifications Framework is a platform for coordination and integration of key stakeholders in the qualifications system of Croatia, paying attention to the needs of the labour market, individuals and society. The CROQF introduces a set of criteria for transparency, access, progression, award (including assessment and recognition) and reliability of qualifications.

The CROQF has been developed for:

1. Efficient communication between stakeholders;
2. Reflection and classification of the present system, including the description of "old" qualifications and facilitating the recognition of foreign qualifications;
3. Motivating authorities dealing with the national qualifications systems, influencing modernisation, improving effectiveness of education and training, promoting the full use of learning outcomes, application of comprehensive quality assurance systems, and development of the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

[3] Action Plan, available at: www.kvalifikacije.hr

[4] CROQF Concepts, available at: www.kvalifikacije.hr

[5] CROQF – Introduction to Qualifications (Croatian and English)

[6] (Draft) Law on the CROQF, available at: www.kvalifikacije.hr

Reforms include implementation of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and procedures, transparent validation, registration of providers and awarding bodies. It also relates to the development and implementation of a system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as well as full implementation of a quality assurance system, including the reaccreditation processes.

The principles guiding further the implementation and development of the CROQF are:

- Respect for the Croatian educational tradition and transition of the existing educational system to the more flexible one;
- Stimulation of lifelong learning and professional mobility for development and competitiveness of individuals and society;
- Development of existing qualifications and introduction of new qualifications, based on well-defined learning outcomes and interests of the labour market, individuals and society;
- Transparency of qualifications, equal access to education, multi-directional progression and mobility, reliable awards, recognition and quality of qualifications;
- Improvement of the process of European integration while respecting guidelines of the EQF and the QF-EHEA, European Union directives and international regulations on creation of the competitive economy and social inclusion;
- Consideration of other countries experiences in their national qualifications frameworks development;
- Partnership between state institutions, employers, unions, educators and trainers, labour market institutions, civil society organisations, students and other stakeholders.

The general aim of the CROQF is the development of a knowledge-based society and social inclusion, the growth of a competitive economy and harmonised social development, the maintenance of democratic citizenship by promoting and facilitating lifelong learning, and the general mobility of citizens during their acquisition of qualifications and employment.

The specific aims of the CROQF are:

- Understanding different types and classes of "old", existing and new qualifications and their interrelations;
- Cooperation enhancement among various stakeholders;
- Lifelong access to the education for all individuals;
- Provision of a clear outline of educational achievements for employers and other individuals;
- Creation of a common quality assurance system for existing and new qualifications;

- Sustainable employability;
- Set up of the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- Simple and fair recognition of foreign qualifications in Croatia and Croatian qualifications abroad;
- Promotion of lifelong learning in Croatia.

Regarding non-formal and informal learning, the validation and inclusion in the Framework, the Croatian Qualifications Framework has defined basic theoretical elements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning already in the first phase of development. Still, before full implementation, there is a clear need for a set of examples, practical guidelines and detailed procedures, including testing.

It is expected that after implementation of the validation system for non-formal and informal learning, all main stakeholders in the Croatian Qualifications Framework – policy makers, quality assurance bodies, education institutions, employers and employees will benefit greatly. Education institutions can easily improve access to non-traditional learners and efficiency in the formal education. The labour market can become more flexible and innovative. Validation and recognition can be used to address needs in different economic sectors, at the same time helping individuals to develop their potential as well as for socially excluded persons to reintegrate into the labour market and society.

Legal and strategic framework of the NQF

Through the participative development process, started in May 2006, the Republic of Croatia developed key legal documents relating to the Qualifications framework, as follows:

- Act on the Croatian Qualifications Framework (adopted in February 2013) defining:
  - Better labour market and educational system coherence through the introduction of Sector Skills Councils, qualifications standards and occupational standards;
  - Introduction of partial qualifications for all levels (at least 10 ECTS);
  - Key elements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, with regulations under development;
  - Introduction of a National Council for the Development of Human Potential aimed at generating policies to foster the educational system in becoming a basis for developing more competitive human resources and to propose the distribution of available national funds in respect to development priorities;
  - Regulations on the CROQF register, introduced in May 2014, defining all standards, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the CROQF Register;

- Accreditation procedures for occupational standards, qualifications standards, and related programmes, that will be accepted and introduced to the CROQF;
- Mandatory elements and submission forms for qualifications standards (QS), occupational standards (OS) and learning outcomes units (LOU's);
- Quality Assurance principles for qualifications standards inclusion, occupational standards and learning outcomes units in the CROQF Register.

National Council for Development of Human Potential has been already formed and the Sector Skills Councils have been currently formed for all sectors.

In order for the full implementation of the CROQF, all Sector Skills Councils should be formed and operative. Rules, in respect to program accreditation and quality assurance, should be implemented in the existing laws on different educational levels in order to amend the positions of agencies acting in education. There are 4 agencies with demarcation linked to the level and type of education, while only one agency is responsible for higher education. The IT support system for the Register of the CROQF has been developed and will be operational soon.

When the implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is analysed in its wider environment, the CROQF should be considered as its primary enabler. Still, the VNFIL in Croatia could be implemented in a formal sense only when legislation on the VNFIL is introduced by the Ministry, which is expected to be adopted in 2018.

Other fostering elements supporting the VNFIL development in Croatia should also be considered, on top of the aforementioned formal prerequisites. A recent development relevant for Croatian Higher Education (HE) and VNFIL implementation is the Strategy of Education, Science and Technology. In a nutshell, the Strategy sets a roadmap for the development of higher education and science, as well as other areas and supports the financing of projects in HE from EU structural funds.

The Strategy strongly supports the development of new study programmes in accordance with the CROQF, and introduces validation of non-formal and informal learning as one of the strategic objectives in both higher and adult education.

4.2. National Qualifications Framework – Basic Premises

Occupational standards

Key documents, introduced through laws on the Croatian Qualifications Framework, define the development, review and registration of occupational and qualifications standards, including their learning outcomes units. The occupational standard is defined by the Law on the CROQF as: "a list of all tasks performed by an individual engaged in a given occupation, as well as a list of competences required for their successful implementation".

Employers and their representatives usually develop occupational standards, which should be expressed by using appropriate terms, i.e. key functions within the occupation and competences or required learning outcomes. These required learning outcomes should be written in a clear way, representing their complexity and context.

The occupational standard is used primarily as a document with a list of knowledge and skills that an individual should acquire in order to be able to work within the specific occupation. Employees often, in the same occupation (e.g. a lawyer), do slightly different jobs, depending on the employer for whom they work. For this reason, the descriptions of occupational standards have been produced through surveys and interviews with a number of different employers, possibly from a number of different areas, from different economic sectors and different sizes.

In the bylaw on the CROQF Register, it states that the Register contains lists of competences required for an occupation, grouped appropriately. In the CROQF, the occupation standard has the following elements:

- Code of the occupation
- Title of the occupation
- Classification in the National classification of occupations
- Links to the European classification, if relevant
- Description of competences
- Name of the Sector council and a link to the document with the evaluation of the standard
- List of key tasks within the occupation
- List of grouped competences
- Working conditions
- Date until the standard is valid
- Some other key information on the evaluation of the standard.

Competences within occupational standards are grouped into well-defined units, also registered for easy use within other occupational standards, if relevant.

A detailed description of the procedures used in designing occupational standards is presented further in this document. This is a very important part in the development of qualifications standards, in cases when these qualifications are being developed mainly for labour market needs.

Qualifications standards

A qualifications standard is defined by the Law on the CROQF as "the content and structure of a given qualification. It includes all the data required for setting its level, volume and profile, as well as the data required for assuring and promoting the high-quality of the qualifications standard".

Qualifications standards serve to define the key learning outcomes an individual is expected to achieve, after the certification of the qualification. Qualifications standards also define other key characteristics of a qualification, such as the level, volume, profile, type, class of the qualification, and other key elements relevant for quality assurance mechanisms. There are two key parts of quality assurance. One relates to the standards and criteria, which should be fulfilled by institutions intending to deliver the qualification. The second part relates to the quality of an individual's achievement of the learning outcomes.

The Qualifications Framework in Croatia defines three key groups of purposes for qualifications:

1. Qualifications primarily focused on the needs of the labour market (to be employed)
2. Qualifications primarily focused on further education (according to entry requirements)
3. Qualifications of any other purposes for individuals and society.

The basic idea of the National Qualifications Framework in Croatia is the transparent expression of learning outcomes within important qualifications as well as the quality assurance of these qualifications. This idea will affect study programmes because not only will their content and compliance with learning outcomes in the qualification be scrutinized, but also the requirements of quality assurance relating to the level of the qualification.

By using the Croatian Qualifications Framework, the qualifications system has an additional element, which refers to qualifications mostly required by the labour market to more clearly define occupational standards and required competences. This mechanism includes linking the competences in the occupational standards to the appropriate level of qualifications. This approach is used to illustrate the link between occupations and qualifications with the indicated use of qualifications standards and occupational standards by using the concept of learning outcomes.

Although occupational standards and qualifications standards are new documents formally non-existent in Croatia before the development of the CROQF, it was clear in practice that there are differences between occupations and qualifications.

Prior to the development of the CROQF, some educational institutions surveyed employers to seek the required competences in order to develop learning outcomes and study programmes. Still, since Croatia as a society had not developed detailed descriptions of the occupational standards and qualifications standards, two significant problems occurred:

1. Employers and potential employees in general did not have publicly available lists of competences required for certain occupations.

2. Study programmes were often developed without real research on required competences and even when such a step was included, qualifications of the same name contained different learning outcomes and even sometimes there were some qualifications, which had almost the same set of key learning outcomes but a different title of the qualification. Such practices made it difficult to use and understand these qualifications fully for any stakeholder: employees, employers, educational institutions, quality assurance agencies, students, parents, funding bodies, etc.

Learning outcomes units

Qualifications are built from the list of expected learning outcomes grouped within logical and coherent groups. Such groups are called learning outcomes units and they should be developed as logically connected, coherent groups of learning outcomes placed in the CROQF register.

A typical learning outcomes unit contains a set of learning outcomes formed within a narrow field that should have at least 1 credit, for example, ECTS, ECVET. It is possible to have larger learning outcomes units. The idea behind this recommendation is that qualifications should be built by reusing, when possible, already existing units, instead of developing new units with elements overlapping with existing units.

According to the legislation, a learning outcomes unit consists of the following components:

- Code of the learning outcomes unit
- Code(s) of the qualifications standard which the unit belongs to
- Title of the learning outcomes unit
- Level of the unit in the CROQF
- Volume (in credit points)
- List of learning outcomes
- Requirements for achievement
- Criteria for the achievement of the listed learning outcomes
- Criteria for the assessment of the listed learning outcomes
- Procedures for the assessment of the learning outcomes and examples.

According to the Law on the CROQF, a minimal volume of a single learning outcomes unit should be one credit point.

During the accreditation process, according to the CROQF legislation, the institutions proposing new qualifications standards should contact other providers and partners to ask about their interest in the same qualification. If the institution has not followed this rule, the Ministry should contact all interested providers in order to obtain their comments. The idea behind the request to contact other potential providers is to ensure that the key elements of the qualification are provided within the qualifications standards.

Basic characteristics of qualifications

There are several key characteristics of qualifications and other groups of learning outcomes: workload, level, profile and quality in the CROQF.

The workload/volume of a learning outcome is described as the effort an average learner would need to acquire a given competence. It is agreed that for qualifications in higher education, the relevant time unit (1 ECTS) needed for the acquisition of certain learning outcomes, which includes organised classes, independent learning and assessment, is a minimum of 25 hours (60-minute hours). Since an individual student may in practice take either more or less time for the acquisition of these learning outcomes, the term "average successful student" was introduced. In other words, the time that an average student takes is estimated, taking into account only those students that have successfully acquired the given learning outcomes.

In vocational education and training, another credit system unit is introduced: 1 ECVET, which also represents a minimum of 25 hours for the acquisition of certain learning outcomes. Along the same lines, a credit system for learning outcomes acquired through general education (i.e. primary and secondary school general education) has also been introduced (Croatian Credit for General Education (CROGE), or *Hrvatski bod općeg obrazovanja,* in Croatian (HROO)).

For original research activities within PhD studies, the use is recommended of "a year of research" as a measure for an average full-time PhD student, although the volume of the taught part of the PhD programme can be described using ECTS credits.

The profile of both, unit and qualification, is described by learning outcomes and expressed by the appropriate title named by sectoral working groups. In order for the names of the qualifications to be transparent, their title reflects all of the profile dimensions of the qualification, as well as its level.

Reference levels express the complexity and scope of acquired learning outcomes. In the CROQF there are 8 levels for learning outcomes units (1 through 8) and an additional 2 sublevels for qualifications (at levels 4 and 8).

Levels and sublevels have been set out for the classification of qualifications, full and partial, resulting in a total of 10 qualification reference levels and sublevels.

The reference level of a qualification is defined as the common level of all learning outcomes of a given qualification.

4.3. Institutional Setting

National Coordination Point

According to the legislation on the CROQF, the main institutions and bodies for the implementation of the CROQF are:

- the ministry responsible for education,
- the ministry responsible for labour,
- the National Council for the Development of Human Potential,
- sector councils (25+1),
- quality assurance agencies,
- providers.

The National Coordination Point (NCP) for the CROQF is the ministry responsible for education. Its tasks are the coordination, implementation and further development of the CROQF, and it is also the NCP for the EQF and QF-EHEA.

The tasks of the NCP include:

1. Referencing levels of qualifications within NQFs to the EQF levels;
2. Ensuring that a transparent methodology is used in the referencing process;
3. Providing access to information and guidance to stakeholders about how other NQFs relate to the EQF;
4. Promoting the participation of all stakeholders, including higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts in the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level.

Sector Councils ensure the harmonisation of the Croatian qualifications system with labour market needs and key standards for the quality of qualifications. The operation of the sector councils is coordinated by the ministry responsible for education. The work of sector councils includes cooperation with sectoral ministries, bodies of government administration and agencies, other stakeholders responsible and accredited to perform tasks relating to the labour market – professional chambers, including the Croatian Employers' Association, the Croatian Chamber of Economy, the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts, etc., as well as those relating to education – the ministry responsible for education, science and scientific research institutions engaged in formal education, national councils, agencies, national centres, etc. The work of sector councils also includes non-governmental associations, trade unions, stakeholders representing legal entities or individuals with an interest in respective qualifications.

Sector councils play an important role in bringing together all relevant stakeholders from each respective sector, namely representatives of education, the labour market, NGOs, employers, unions and society in general. They insure the development of the Standards of Occupations and the Standards of Qualifications as the basis for

referencing national qualifications to the CROQF and, indirectly, to the EQF. The Standards of Occupations and the Standards of Qualifications, as approved by the relevant bodies, form the essential part of the CROQF Register.

Governing bodies for primary education

The Ministry of Science and Education is the policy body responsible for planning, funding and monitoring the primary education system. The Ministry is responsible for administrative and other activities relating to primary education, securing finances and other resources for its work.

Public schools are entirely financed by the state budget while private schools are co-financed by the State Budget in accordance with the criteria prescribed by the minister of education and the results of external evaluation. Private schools providing alternative education programmes are co-financed up to 80% by the state budget.

Governing bodies for secondary education

The Ministry of Science and Education is the policy level body responsible for planning, funding and monitoring the secondary education system. The Ministry is responsible for administrative and other activities relating to secondary education, securing finances and other resources for its work.

The Education and Teacher Training Agency (ETTA) is a public institution responsible for the provision of professional and advisory support in the area of general education in Croatia.

The Agency for Vocational Education and Training is a public institution founded in 2005 by the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, responsible for the planning, development, organisation, monitoring and evaluation of school and non-school systems in the area of VET. The Agency's work is governed by a steering committee in accordance with the Vocational Educational and Training Act. This Agency merged with the Agency for Adult Education into one agency in February 2010, as the result of adopting the Act on the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education.

The National Centre for the External Evaluation of Education (NCEEE) – The Law on the National Centre for the External Evaluation of Education entered into force in January 2005, thereby entrusting the NCEEE with the preparation of National Exams and the *State Matura* as a permanent system of external evaluation of work and achievement in secondary education. The *State Matura* is administered at the completion of secondary education. The *State Matura* examination is organised centrally and administered to all candidates at the same time. The primary condition for the administration of the *State Matura* and of other external and parallel exams is to ensure a fair, valid, and reliable evaluation of students' achievements and competences. The *State Matura* should stimulate important

developmental processes that may significantly improve the quality of Croatian education. Pursuant to the Primary and Secondary School Education Act (OG 87/08, 86/09; 92/10; 105/10, 90/11, 5/12, 16/12), secondary education for gymnasium programmes is completed passing the *State Matura* exam. According to the Act, students who spent four years at vocational and art schools also have the option of taking the *State Matura* exam, as do adult learners. Provisions for taking the *State Matura* exam apply to pupils who had enrolled in the first year of a Gymnasium or a four-year vocational or art school in the 2006/2007 school year.

Governing bodies for higher education

The Ministry of Science and Education is the national authority responsible for the planning, funding and monitoring of the entire education system. The Ministry provides administrative and other activities relating to: the higher education system, securing financing and other resources for work, all issues relating to student welfare, and the legal supervision of higher education institutions.

The National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technology Developments is an expert and advisory body of the Croatian Parliament responsible for the strategic development and quality assurance of higher education in the Republic of Croatia.

The Rectors' Conference includes all public university rectors who make decisions on common interest issues for the development of the universities.

The Council of Polytechnics and Colleges includes all deans of polytechnics and colleges. The Council decides on common interest issues for the development of polytechnics and colleges.

The Agency for Science and Higher Education is an independent national body responsible for the assessment of scientific activities and quality assurance in higher education, recognition of diplomas and qualifications through the ENIC/NARIC, and since 2009, for collecting information on Croatian higher education and science, providing support for the implementation of the State Matura (*Državna matura*) – national exams for graduates from secondary schools, and the administration of centralised applications and admissions to higher education.

The Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes, as well as the National Agency for Lifelong Learning Programme and the Youth in Action Programme provide support for ECTS coordinators at higher education institutions.

Involvement of stakeholders

Involvement of relevant stakeholders, including international and national experts, has been the strategic basis for the successful development and implementation of the CROQF. National stakeholders and experts provide all key expertise, economic and institutional settings, while international experts provide additional experience

on best international practices and lessons learnt.

From the very beginning of the development of the CROQF, all relevant stakeholders have been involved, from governmental institutions, unions, providers and students to private businesses.

CROQF Register

The Register of the National Qualifications Framework in Croatia contains all endorsed occupational standards, qualifications standards and their learning outcomes units. It contains also study programmes based on registered qualifications standards and all education institutions who provide these programmes.

The qualifications standards are also a basis for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The ministry responsible for labour endorses occupational standards after validation by sector skill councils, while the ministry responsible for education endorses qualifications standards after validation by the same skill councils.

4.4. Types and Legal Status of Qualifications Included in the NQF

The Croatian education system includes the following education sub-systems: preschool, primary, secondary and higher education, including primary and secondary education and training for adults. Attention is also given to the principle of lifelong learning, with the aim of including adults and the unemployed in flexible educational and training programmes to qualify them for participation in the labour market.

As shown in Figure 4.1, the existing education and training system in Croatia consists of:

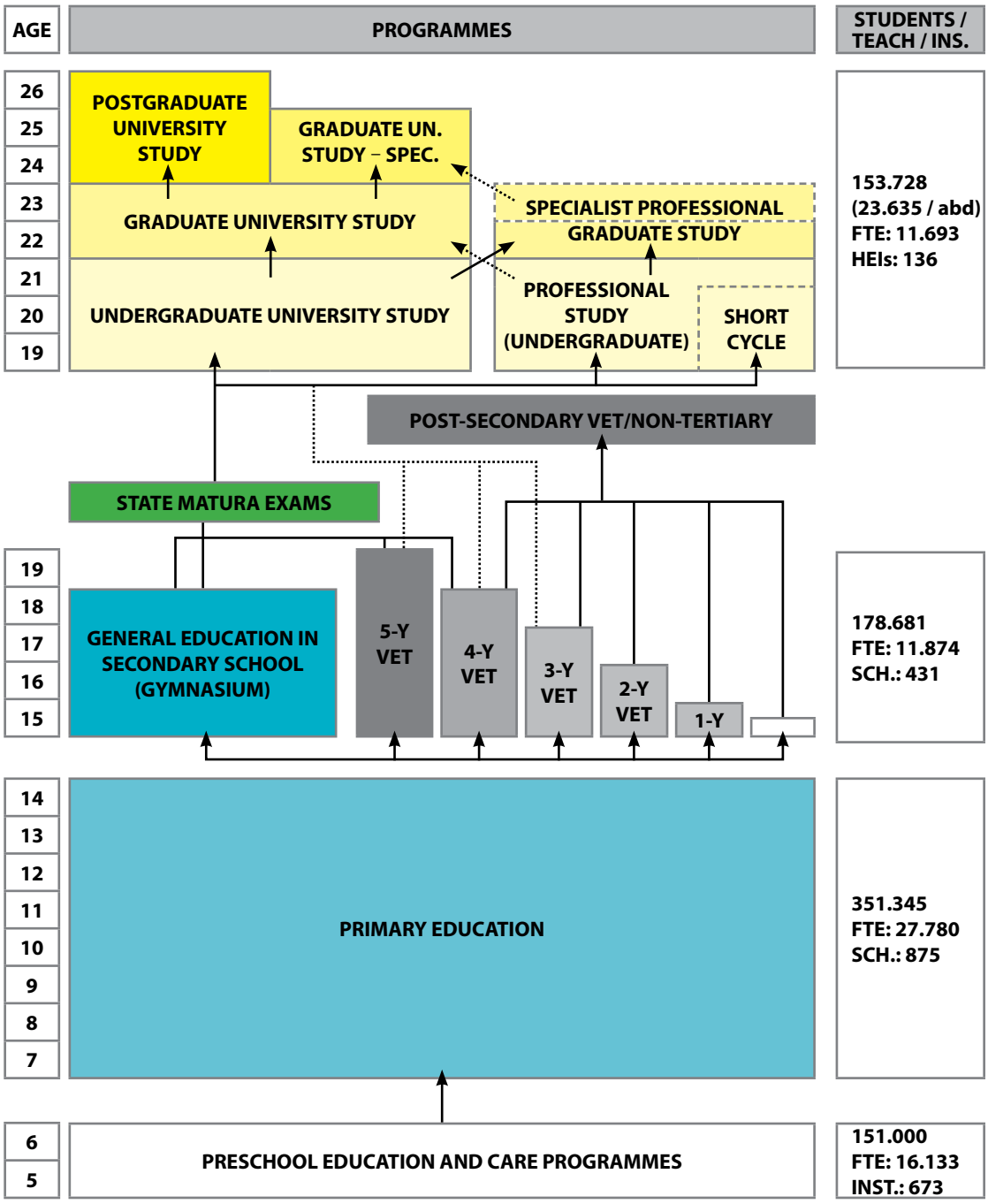
- Preschool education;
- Primary education;
- Secondary education, with:
  - General education in secondary schools (Gymnasium);
  - Education in art schools;
  - Vocational education and training through:
    - Special or adjusted programmes;
    - 1-year programmes;
    - 2-year programmes;
    - 3-year programmes;
    - 4-year programmes, including 5-year programmes for regulated occupations in the health sector;
- Postsecondary (non-higher education) professional education and training programmes;
- Higher education, with the following structure:
  - University study:
    - Undergraduate university study programmes;
    - Graduate university study programmes;
    - Graduate university study programmes – specialist;
    - Postgraduate university study programmes;
  - Professional study:
    - "Short cycle" professional study programmes;
    - Undergraduate professional study programmes;
    - Specialist professional graduate study programmes.

Besides the usual initial education, as indicated above, there are also primary and secondary education and organised training for adults.

There are various types and classes of qualifications in the CROQF. Any legal entity registered as an education and training provider is entitled to apply for the inclusion of their programmes in the CROQF register. All education/study programmes for the achievement of qualifications have to be evaluated by quality assurance bodies according to the respective qualifications standards and their learning outcomes units. The Law on the CROQF defines three types of programmes in the CROQF:

- Programmes for the achievement of qualifications,
- Programmes for the achievement and assessment of learning outcomes,
- Programmes for the assessment of learning outcomes.

Figure 4.1. Education and training system in Croatia



Source: Ministry of Science and Education, EQF Referencing.

The programmes for the assessment of learning outcomes are the basis for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Furthermore, the legislation defines the process for the accreditation of programmes.

As a principle, all types and classes of qualifications at all levels, following the process of accreditation, can be registered in the CROQF register. Some of these qualifications, including their learning outcomes units, can be achieved by non-

formal and informal learning, and the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Such a possibility is not open to all kinds of qualifications and all learning outcomes units, within all profiles and levels. The possibility to achieve such qualifications by the validation of non-formal and informal learning is defined by the respective qualifications standards and their learning outcomes units.

Programmes can be registered only after the evaluation by quality assurance bodies, internal and/or external, according to qualifications standards (for example, quality assurance agencies, internal quality units, etc.).

4.5. Procedures of the Inclusion of Qualifications in the NQF

All qualifications proposed for the inclusion in the CROQF should be analysed in terms of their learning outcomes, as they present the key elements in the CROQF.

The procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework are described in the Law on the CROQF. All the existing qualifications and newly formed ones should pass through the procedures for inclusion in the Register of the CROQF.

The CROQF introduces a new Register, with the following structure:

- Learning outcomes units;
- Standards of occupations;
- Standards of qualifications;
- Programmes for the unit's validation (including assessment providers);
- Education/study programmes (including awarding institutions).

The Register is the basis for:

- A common and robust quality assurance system;
- Non-formal and informal learning validation, of equal value to formal learning;
- Transparency, access and progression (including mobility).

Occupational standard development process

As already described previously in this report, occupational standards provide a task description within an occupation, as well as a description of the learning outcomes required for performing these tasks. They are defined within the legislation on the CROQF Register in several articles. More precisely, Article 2, Paragraph 2 states:

Occupational Standards' sub-register contains occupational standards and sets of competences required for each particular occupation.

The abovementioned implies that, beside the lists of jobs and required competences, the competences have to be additionally classified in units of competences.

Furthermore, while developing the application form for the occupational standard sub-register entry, the legislation on the Register in Article 13 defines the necessary elements of occupational standard as defined further.

The second part of the application form for occupational standards and their competences units contains sections where an applicant provides the following data:

- Description of the occupation or sets of competences that will be registered;
- Estimated qualification level according to the CROQF;
- List of key tasks for one or more jobs that define the occupation and related competences lists for each job;
- Set of competences and related competences lists required for working in one or more jobs;
- Working conditions;
- Suggestion of the deadline for proposing the qualifications standard and learning outcomes units based on the occupational standard.

This implies, considering the occupational standard, that the following need to be defined:

A) Description of the occupation;

B) Key tasks list and the list of related competences to perform these tasks;

C) Set of competences and related competences' lists;

D) Occupation-related working conditions.

The aforementioned is clearly visible in the specified submission form for the occupational standard proposal, requiring *inter alia*:

B. OCCUPATIONAL STANDARD PROPOSAL	
Description of the occupation or set (one or more) of competences that will be regulated by the standard	
Estimated qualification level according the CROQF that will be created based on the standard	

B. OCCUPATIONAL STANDARD PROPOSAL		
List of key tasks of the job and related competences' list necessary for working in one or more jobs	Key task 1	Competence no. Competence no. Competence no. …
	Key task 2	Competence no. Competence no. Competence no. …
	Key task 3 …	Competence no. Competence no. Competence no. …
List of sets of competences with related competences	Set of competences 1 name	Competence no. Competence no. Competence no. …
	Set of competences 2 name	Competence no. Competence no. Competence no. …
Working conditions		

With all the above-mentioned occupational standard elements, additional data are needed to justify the entry of the occupational standard into the CROQF Register in this template.

This justification and proof with answers to the set of questions are introduced because the occupational standard entry procedure is very complex and expensive for the state, whereas for the applicant, it is free. This way the State protects itself from unjustified and unnecessary demands, which would lead to needless procedures in the Ministry of Labour as well as the sector councils and Ministry of Education.

Additional data, justifying the grounds of the demand, are requested according to the legislation (Paragraph 1, Article 12 of the bylaw) as follows:

(1) The applicant proves the grounds for the new occupational standard, i.e. the competences units, by giving an explanation on **strategic**, **sectoral** and **analytic** grounds of the demand, according to the Methodology under Paragraph 3 of this Article.

Three types of the above-mentioned basis are defined as follows:

- The applicant proves strategic grounds of demand by referring to the relevant sectoral strategies and other important strategic documents;
- Sectoral grounds are explained using the sector profile where the proposed occupation or standard belongs and, exceptionally, by other relevant documents.
- Analytic ground is expressed by analysis of the current and existing education offers and labour market demand.

Further in this part of the report, the method of occupational standard development is described using the above-mentioned Methodology of the Ministry of Labour and the method for preparing proof of grounds for the demand.

The methodology for individual needs research, on which the occupational standard is based, contains a questionnaire regarding the required competences for the occupation.

The questionnaire is conducted through an on-line survey, sent to employers, with obligatory direct communication and support when filling it in. The aim of the survey itself is to get the answers from employers to all questions necessary for inputs to part B of the submission form for the occupational standard, whereas part A, which refers to the grounds, is filled in using the publicly available strategy and other documents.

Filling in the first part (A) of the submission form for the occupational standard provides key references to the strategic and other documents used as the basis for explaining the grounds for the demands. The only exception in this process is the analytic ground, which shoud be either read from the sector profile, or use publicly available data from the Croatian Employment service "On line statistics", from a portal such as moj-posao.net or other sources. The sector profile is available from a document developed by the Ministry of Labour, where all conditions within the sector are described.

Data from private employment portals are not publicly available and they can normally be used for a certain fee. For the majority of occupations, the data from "On line statistics" will be sufficient since the Croatian Employment Service monitors the demand for most jobs. For some jobs in some sectors, where recruitment is mostly done through private portals, not through a public employment service, Croatian Employment Service statistics are irrelevant and insufficient for actually proving long-term past trends.

As mentioned in the legislation, answers referring to the analytic grounds should be given regarding the following issues:

- analysis of the current and existing supply for these and similar occupations in the labour market,
- analysis of the current and existing demand for these and similar occupations in the labour market,
- 5-year projection of supply for these and similar occupations in the labour market,
- 5-year projection of demand for these and similar occupations in the labour market.

The easiest way to find the answers is to read the sector profile for the occupations for which the occupational standard is being proposed, but if such a document is not available, the analysis needs to be done using publicly available data.

The main tool for information on the aforementioned supply and demand can be found at the Croatian Employment Service's on-line statistics, available at http://statistika.hzz.hr/.

Part B of the submission form can be filled in based on an analysis of answers provided by the on-line survey. After the finished survey, more data on the survey's organisation and use of the official survey's infrastructure can be given by the Ministry of labour and pension system. Results are provided to the occupational standard developer in the form of raw table data.

In order to have adequate data for the analysis, it is useful to rename some components of the survey for a better understanding of the answers. According to the experience of developing numerous occupational standards, using official survey results, it is recommended that additional columns be added in order to provide a better organisation of the results. Titles of the already existing columns B and C should be: "key jobs/activities", and "required competences".

For better analysis, the following elements could be prepared for the occupation:

a) job analysis, planning and organisation,

b) preparation of workplace / business,

c) operational tasks,

d) administrative tasks,

e) commercial tasks,

f) communication and cooperation with stakeholders,

g) quality assurance,

h) health and environmental protection.

During this process, competences provided in the column "Competences" is reorganised in order to be:

1. clearly defined and stated singly without repeating,
2. detached from the competences, which are irrelevant for the occupation,
3. expressed in short and concise sentences for easy grouping later on.

Before completing the analysis of the list of competences and filling in the occupational standard form, two more steps are recommended.

The first step is to supplement the answers provided by the employers from the survey with additional data from other sources, such as:

- technology outlooks and global development guidelines relevant for the sector,
- focus groups with key experts in the sector,
- focus groups with employers discussing the provided results.

Desk research and stakeholders involvement in the consultations on the stated process result in a collection of the required competences and key jobs relevant for certain occupations, which will be further developed and enlarged with additional statements.

In order to fill in the submission form, each competence statement should be added to the corresponding group formed using an intuitive name and should include competences from the same logical competences units.

Qualifications standard development process

The qualifications standard, in accordance with the CROQF legislation (Article 16), contains a set of elements for the submission form:

(1) The second part of the form of HKO_SK contains sections where an applicant provides information on the following elements of the qualifications standard proposal:

1. Name of the qualification for which standard is proposed;
2. Name of the sector council to which the proposal is submitted;
3. CROQF level of the qualification for which standard is proposed;
4. Minimum qualification volume expressed in credit points (ECTS, ECVET and/or HROO), or in years of studies for level 8;
5. Qualification class code (full or partial);
6. List of learning outcomes units by the category code of “compulsory” or “optional”;
7. Requirements for qualification acquisition access;
8. Deadline for the standard’s review.

(2) The third part of the qualifications standard form contains sections where an applicant provides information on the following elements of the proposed learning outcomes units:

1. Name of the learning outcomes unit;
2. Level of the learning outcomes unit according to the CROQF;
3. Volume of the learning outcomes unit;
4. List of learning outcomes;
5. Requirements for the acquisition access to the learning outcomes unit;
6. Material and staff requirements necessary for the learning outcomes unit's acquisition;
7. Material and staff requirements necessary for the learning outcomes unit's validation;
8. Validation procedure and examples of all learning outcomes under the proposed learning outcomes unit.

(3) The Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Article 28 in the CROQF legislation define the elements of the qualifications standards, as follows:

1. Qualifications standard's code;
2. Qualification's name;
3. Level code of the qualification in the CROQF;
4. Level code of the qualification in the EQF;
5. Minimum qualification's volume expressed in credit points (ECTS, ECVET, HROO, or years of studies for CROQF level 8)
6. Qualification class code – full or partial qualification;
7. List of learning outcomes units by the category code of "compulsory" or "optional" learning outcomes;
8. Requirements for access to qualification acquisition;
9. Justification for the introduction and qualification's roles, link to further education, link to the occupational standard, needs of an individual and society;
10. Deadline for enrolment in the program for qualification acquisition;
11. Link to the document confirming the establishment of the competent sector council, which conducted the validation;
12. Link to the sector council expert's opinion on the register entry;
13. Link to the decision on the register entry;
14. Qualifications standard applicant;
15. Entry date into the Qualifications standard sub-register;

16. Link to the adequate programmes and list of the competent legal entities for awarding an obtained qualification certificate.

(4) Learning outcomes unit contains the following elements:

1. Learning outcomes unit's code;
2. Qualifications standard code that the learning outcome belongs to;
3. Name of the learning outcomes unit;
4. Level of the learning outcomes unit in the CROQF;
5. Volume of the learning outcomes unit;
6. List of learning outcomes;
7. Requirements for acquisition access to the learning outcomes unit;
8. Material and staff requirements for the learning outcomes unit's acquisition;
9. Material and staff requirements for the learning outcomes unit's validation;
10. Validation procedure and examples of all learning outcomes under the proposed learning outcomes unit.

The qualifications standard contains the list of the learning outcomes units, as follows:

Learning outcomes units list – EXISTING in the CROQF Register	Compulsory	Optional
Learning outcomes units list – NEW	Compulsory	Optional

Each learning outcomes unit in the list has to be precisely described by the learning outcomes defining the unit, as well as the quality assurance requirements for its acquisition, implementation of education, and assessment procedures to conduct the exam:

Learning outcomes unit's proposal name	
Level of the learning outcome unit in the CROQF	
Volume proposal	
Learning outcomes' list	
Requirements for acquisition access to the learning outcomes unit	
Material and staff requirements necessary for the learning outcomes unit's acquisition	
Material and staff requirements necessary for the learning outcomes unit's validation	
Validation procedure and examples of all learning outcomes under the proposed learning outcomes unit	

The quality assurance requirements which must be fulfilled for the qualification or learning outcomes unit's acquisition and/or validation, normally refer to two groups of requirements:

A) Quality of input parameters, requirements to be satisfied by the institution that provides a qualification. These requirements are mentioned at the learning outcomes unit's level and refer to the material and staff requirements for acquisition and, separately, the learning outcomes unit's validation.

B) Quality of learning outcomes indicating reliability and credibility of the statement on the public hearing or other documents. There are two quality dimensions – personal and institutional:

   – personal quality of learning outcomes describes the reliability of the presented learning outcomes at a certain level, volume and profile, as individual ownership and is expressed in grades, whereas

   – institutional quality includes the reliability of a particular institution in charge of acquisition and formal validation of the learning outcomes including issuance of a specific public document. This part is self-understandable as a system requirement.

If the qualifications standard is created for qualifications whose primary aim is relevance to the labour market, the basis is represented by one or more approved occupational standards. One needs to know that the qualifications standard does not need to be completely harmonised with the occupational standard (one or few). Generally speaking, it can be broader than the occupational standard and also narrower in some segments.

It is possible that within one occupational standard there could be some sets of required competences for which the appropriate learning outcomes units in the qualifications standard do not exist. This is especially the case with competences, which even employers themselves consider as gained not during education, but rather by experience in the labour market.

In normal cases, the following may happen in the relevant qualifications standard in relationship to a set of required competences in the occupational standard:

- There are no relevant learning outcomes units in the qualifications standard. This case is possible, for example, when there is a whole unit that is not possible to achieve during education.
- There is one relevant learning outcomes unit in the qualifications standard. In this case, learning outcomes units do not have to correspond to all required competences within the set for the occupational standard, but they have to be guided by the mentioned competences.
- Several learning outcomes units. In this case, a set of competences, for example "computer network design", represents, in fact, learning outcomes units: "basics of design in IT", "creation of network solutions according to user demands", "recording of network systems", etc.

It can be expected that a number of learning outcomes units may not be linked directly to a set of competences in the occupational standard, but exist within the qualifications standard. Here we come to specific knowledge and skills that might not be directly visible in the labour market, but are indispensable in order to achieve some clearly expressed competences.

It is important to prove that the example in the table of learning outcomes:

- Covers all stated learning outcomes;
- Really proves achievement of written learning outcomes in the list, by content and the level of complexity.

Once the entire table for all learning outcomes is completed, one should verify if the total number of points corresponds to the one required by the given qualification level (e.g. 180 ECTS). Moreover, while creating each learning outcome unit, the existence of such a unit in the register should be verified, and if the unit does exist, nothing needs to be written, but it is enough to make a reference to the unit.

It is important to stress that the link of all qualifications standards to occupational standards is not obligatory. There could be qualifications standards without any links to occupational standards. This should be the case for those qualifications that are less relevant for the labour market.

Education/study programme development process

Education/study program development process has several stages. There are three different types of education/study programmes that could be registered in the Croatian Qualifications Framework, but all should follow certain common development standards and guidelines.

They should be linked to:

- the learning outcomes concept,
- a transparent assessment system with assessment examples,
- use credit points,
- the proper structure of the contents of learning outcomes at certain levels of the Qualifications Framework,
- formal prerequisites that are in relation with the qualifications standards and quality assurance mechanisms for a corresponding educational level.

Educational/study programmes for qualifications awarding, programmes for achieving and assessing learning outcomes units or programmes for the validation of learning outcomes units should all be structured similarly as other programmes, with key differences in:

- Volume – in theory, programmes for assessing learning outcomes units could be linked to just one unit, with just one credit point. There could be programmes

for partial qualification that could cover a minimum of 10 credit points, up to full qualification programmes with i.e. 180 credit points.

- Elements defining the teaching process – in programmes designed just for validation, there might be no teaching at all but just assessment – the validation of non-formal and informal learning programmes belongs to this group. On the other hand, programmes designed for qualifications awarding typically do have a teaching element intertwined with assessment elements because these processes are often parallel.

When developing study/education programmes, key elements should be additionally taken into account, in accordance with CROQF legislation and already existing recommendations in higher education, or set by the additional legislation in the education sector defining that area, as follows:

A) According to Article 5, point 6 of the CROQF Act, 1 ECTS point is defined as follows:

One ECTS should include 25 to 30 hours of study work in each session lasting 60 minutes, as required for respective learning outcomes acquiring. When calculating students' workload, all elements of the teaching and learning process should be taken into consideration, with the understanding that direct lectures, commonly organised in 45-minute classes, should be "recalculated" to a 60-minute denominator for ECTS points. It would be thus recommended that using a student survey or other relevant tool, the number of hours, each consisting of 60 minutes, are counted first and in order to calculate ECTS the number should be divided by 25 or 30.

B) According to an Article 7, point 2, the structure of a full qualification, regarding the level of learning outcomes, is strictly defined. For example, in higher education, 4 levels and 2 sublevels of full qualifications are relevant and are defined as follows:

- ***Level 5*** *– a total workload for acquiring a qualification should be a minimum of 120 ECVET or ECTS credits, with at least 60 ECVET or ECTS credits at level 6 or a higher level of learning outcomes units, respectively. Entry requirement: previously acquired Level 4.1. or higher qualification.*
- ***Level 6*** *– a total workload for acquiring a qualification should be a minimum of 180 ECTS credits, with at least 120 ECTS credits at level 6 or a higher level of learning outcomes units. Entry requirement: previously acquired Level 4.2. or higher qualification in addition to completing the obligatory courses of the State Matura (National Secondary School Leaving Exam in Croatia).*
- ***Level 7*** *– a total workload for acquiring a qualification should be a minimum of 60 ECTS credits at Level 7 or higher level of learning outcomes units. A total workload for the Level 7 qualification, in addition to a previous Level 6 qualification that is a precondition for access, should be at least 300 ECTS credits. A minimum of 180 ECTS credits should refer to Level 6 or a higher level of learning outcomes units, respectively, and at least 60 ECTS credits should refer to Level 7 or a higher level of learning outcomes units, respectively. Entry requirement: previously acquired Level 4.2. or higher qualification in addition*

to passing the obligatory courses of the State Matura or a previously acquired Level 6 or higher qualification.

- ***Level 8.1*** *– acquiring a qualification should include at least one year of scientific or artistic research in full-time mode, resulting in at least one original published article with a relevant international peer review. Entry requirement: previously acquired Level 7 qualification.*
- ***Level 8.2*** *- acquiring a qualification should include at least three years of scientific or artistic research in full-time mode, resulting in original articles with a relevant international peer review. Entry requirement: previously acquired Level 7 qualification.*

It is important to note that qualifications at level 6, for example, do not have to have all 180 ECTS points at that same level. It can, for example, have a minimum of 120 points at that level, and another 60 points can be gathered at a lower level (e.g. 5 or part thereof, even 4).

This is especially important when descibing outcomes by using action verbs, since it is more correct to place single units at level 5 or even 4, if we know that we cannot achieve the higher one or higher one is not needed, and prepare validation examples accordingly, rather than to try to place all units at level 6, even though we know that for some of them that level is unreachable or unnecessary.

During the initial accreditation of higher educational qualifications, a review of the learning outcomes levels, and often their quality as well, has not been strongly insisted upon, but it differs regarding the knowledge and quality of reviewers appointed by the Agency for Science and Higher Education Accreditation Council. Through implementation of the CROQF, new qualifications further accredited as a part of the CROQF register, should pass a new, more coherent procedure in which the quality and level of learning outcomes are of utmost importance, both during initial accreditation as well as in reaccreditation of the study programmes. The validation of new study programmes will be based on registered qualifications standards. Only those study programmes will be registered in the CROQF Register.

This area is still not fully defined due to required changes in the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the lack of newly developed accreditation guidelines and procedures. This area will be developed and in place so the designers of the new CROQF qualifications should pay close attention to the new stated requirements.

Requirements for access to a single learning outcomes unit can be taken from the qualifications standard level, already defined legal provisions, or it is possible to state that one cannot access the acquisition of the unit "Advanced statistical analysis", if he/she has not acquired the unit "Basics of statistical analysis", for example. All study programmes for achievement of a qualification with those units should implement those conditions.

The qualifications standard is the key document within the qualification system and its creation is more complex than creating an occupational standard. Creation of a study programme with the existence of the qualifications standard is simplified,

as defined learning outcomes and validation examples within the qualifications standards can be used as they are written for all courses developed in accordance with described learning outcomes units. These are almost all courses, except those additionally relating to the qualifications standard, described and relating to the credit points group named "Undefined units of a certain level" as the example of qualifications standards.

C) According to Article 7, point 3, the structure of partial qualifications in terms of their learning outcomes level is also strictly defined. For example, in higher education, only 3 levels of partial qualifications are relevant and defined as follows:

- The CROQF should have six levels of partial qualifications as follows: 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7. A precondition for acquiring partial qualifications should be a minimum of 10 HROO, ECVET or ECTS credits, respectively, with a minimum of 50% at the level of a respective partial qualification.

It is possible to have partial qualifications in higher education that has not existed prior to the CROQF. They should have 10 or more credits while at least half of the points for a certain partial qualification should be at the same qualification level or higher. The remaining half of the credits could be at a lower level.

4.6. Quality Assurance of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Quality assurance referes to the system and procedures certain institution use to maintain and continually improve the agreed standards of its products and services.

Quality assurance can refer to any sector and any level of complexity. Within a qualifications system, it is the process of ensuring that education, assessment, and certification of qualifications enable the achievement of excellence as required by a set of standards.

Quality is one of the basic integral properties/characteristics of a qualification and units/modules, reflecting the reliability and cogency of all the other characteristics of a qualification and units/modules.

Qualifications standards ensure the transparency of relevant qualifications, which denotes the visibility and clarity of qualification content as a baseline for quality. The content of both qualifications standards and learning outcomes within study programmes has to be comprehensible and understandable to the wider public, rather than only to experts.

Quality assurance is the focus of the CROQF and includes the quality assurance of:

- Involvement of stakeholders and international and national experts;
- Fit to purpose like labour market needs, and other purposes of qualifications, by standards of occupation and qualifications, validation, and registration;
- Study programme;
- Assessment criteria and procedures;
- Awarding criteria and procedures.

Only the new study programmes in higher education, validated according to their respective qualifications standards, will be registered in the CROQF Register. This is a strategic part of the development of the quality assurance system in higher education.

Involvement of relevant stakeholders and experts

Involvement of relevant stakeholders, including international and national experts, has been the strategic basis for the successful development and implementation of the CROQF. National stakeholders and experts provide local insight into education, economic and institutional settings, while international experts lend their experiences with the best international practices and lessons learnt. From the beginning of the development of the CROQF, all relevant stakeholders have been involved, from governmental institutions, unions, providers, students to the private business sector. They participate in the development and validation of everything: occupational standards, qualifications standards and programmes.

Fit for purpose

In the Croatian Qualifications Framework, quality of fit to purpose – labour market needs, and other purposes – focuses on:

- Development of unit/module-based occupational standards;
- Design of unit/module-based qualifications awards – qualifications standards.

New occupational standards should reflect short- and long-term forecasts and current labour market needs. Participation of all of society and an extensive analysis of the current situation as well as future trends of the labour market are required for such a comprehensive and systematic approach to occupational standards development. Units/modules link qualifications awards and qualifications standards to occupations.

It is important to understand that not all qualifications, study programmes, have their purpose in the labour market. Thus their qualifications standards are not based on any occupational standards.

Study programmes

Development of curricula/programmes is based on qualifications standards and/or other similar documents, as the result of a clear overview of the needs for specific qualifications. These needs in general refer to labour market needs and other needs for employment or the continuing education of individuals and society.

The quality assurance of education is, in the first place, carried out through the regular validation of education institutions and accreditation/reaccreditation. The validation process includes the evaluation of the quality of study programmes for the qualifications an institution wishes to provide. The evaluation of study programmes establishes the quality of education, methods and instruments, activities and resources that an institution has in place to guide and support learners towards the achievement of qualifications awards.

Educational quality is key task of the quality assurance of the formal education system, and within the CROQF there are no additional requirements. The CROQF also intends to integrate the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the focus of quality assurance within the CROQF is not on the education and learning itself, but on the learning outcomes achieved, indicating a shift in focus to the quality assurance of assessment and certification.

Assessment criteria and procedures

Quality assurance of assessment in the CROQF refers to the process of ensuring that assessments are:

- Fair,
- Valid,

- Reliable.

Fairness refers to assessments ensuring that a learner is neither hindered nor advantaged. Validity refers to assessments ensuring that they measure what they presume to measure. Reliability refers to assessments ensuring that decisions are consistent and not influenced by irrelevant issues and circumstances.

Appropriate assessment criteria and procedures, including methods and instruments, and appropriate profiles for assessors and institutions are determined during the development of learning outcomes units/modules. This includes:

- Appropriateness of assessment criteria and procedures;
- Profile of assessors and competent institutions;
- Assessment materials developed for the national database, if needed.

Analyses of learners' results per institution, which is a part of the quality assurance system in the CROQF, will assist in identifying weaknesses of institutional provisions and provide a basis for audits. They should also assist in determining the quality of the assessments and the quality of the qualifications awards. These analyses become the cornerstone of the entire quality system, where the inclusion of employers and other stakeholders is crucial.

Awarding criteria and procedures

The quality assurance of awards is mainly administrative. It ensures that the award is based on a fair, valid and reliable assessment. Efficient and accurate recording, archiving, and reporting systems about the learning outcomes achieved through assessments should be in place.

Awarding criteria and procedures, including appropriate profiles for competent awarding institutions/bodies are determined during the design of qualifications.

The CROQF Register

The CROQF introduces a new Register with 5 related databases:

- Learning outcomes units/modules;
- Standards of occupations;
- Standards of qualifications;
- Short assessment programs, including assessment providers;
- Study programmes, including awarding institutions.

The CROQF Register is the basis for:

- A common, robust quality assurance system;
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning, with equal value to formal learning;

- Transparency, access and progression, including mobility.

The CROQF Register represents the formal link between qualifications and the quality assurance system of the CROQF. It is envisaged that the Register encompasses all types of qualifications even those gained outside of formal education system, therefore good quality assurance system is the basis for the recognition of prior learning no matter how and where the learning has taken place.

The quality assurance in the VNFIL

For qualifications that are possible to achieve by the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the quality assurance mechanisms for the evaluation of programmes, including the quality assurance of learning outcomes assessment and the certification process, is equal to the quality assurance mechanisms for any other qualification achieved within formal education.

The validation providers of non-formal and informal learning are responsible not only for meeting the requirements set by legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, but also for developing their own internal quality assurance systems and procedures in order to quality assure the validation of the non-formal and informal learning process in line with formally introduced obligations and expectations, as well as in line with the guidelines developed by Agency for Science and Higher Education.

Croatia still does not have any of the formally developed and presented documents in the area of the validation of non-formal and informal learning quality assurance, therefore institutions can be provided with only general elements.

Principles concerning the quality assurance of the validation of non-formal and informal learning procedures are:

- Q1 – Validation should be quality assured by an internal QA system but providers should also be externally assessed through periodic external evaluations organised by a QA agency.
- Q2 – Transparent quality assurance measures in line with existing quality assurance frameworks should be in place to support reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools.
- Q3 – Validation of non-formal and informal learning should be provided only by providers accredited for validation, not automatically by educational providers accredited to provide corresponding formal programmes.

In order to be capable to apply and become a provider of non-formal and informal learning validation, a higher education institution should already have in place a documented and accredited internal quality assurance system that is valid and reliable.

In the process of acquiring accreditation, in order to become a provider for non-formal and informal learning validation, the agency for quality assurance should issue positive accreditation only for the learning outcomes units that the provider

has requested accreditation for within the proposed programme, if all of the following three sets of criteria have been met:

1. The provider has already accredited programmes in the CROQF covering all learning outcomes units for which they requested to become a provider for non-formal and informal learning validation.
2. The provider has provided a valid programme for the non-formal and informal learning validation for learning outcomes units they would like to validate, which has been positively accredited by an external quality assurance agency. An accredited programme could be used here if it was initially prepared also for the validation process of the VNFIL.
3. The provider has proved that they have the minimal conditions as listed:
   - Have in place and formally approved a non-formal and informal learning validation policy and other strategic documents promoting the further development and institution-wide acceptance of the provision for non-formal and informal learning validation.
   - Set up a robust quality assurance system for non-formal and informal learning validation and demonstrate that separate processes creating the quality assurance system are:
     - operated by individuals who are experienced in the relevant process, have subject expertise where this is required and are certified staff for the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
     - supported by appropriate management structures and have a trained and formally appointed coordinator for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.
   - Demonstrate that their internal quality assurance policy and quality assurance documents propose regular reviews and strives to improve and enhance its quality assurance system by:
     - carrying out internal reviews on all aspects of the quality assurance system for the non-formal and informal learning validation;
     - taking action on the outcome of such internal reviews.
   - Ensure that its quality assurance system for the non-formal and informal learning validation will be subject to regular external reviews and provide evidence in their non-formal and informal learning validation policy and regulatory document of:
     - willingness to use the national non-formal and informal learning validation ICT system, to document all relevant non-formal and informal learning validation activities;
     - willingness to use the national survey system for non-formal and informal learning validation and to use its results for the further development of the non-formal and informal learning validation processes and their quality;

  - willingness to maintain contact with its non-formal and informal learning validation alumni in order to use information provided by them to further develop non-formal and informal learning validation provision and its quality;
- Ensure that its quality assurance system for non-formal and informal learning validation will promote equality and opportunity to use the non-formal and informal learning validation provision for each candidate irrespective of the group or groups to which they belong: sex, gender, nationality, disability, specific cultural background, location or age.
- Ensure that the assessment process is transparent, documented, valid and reliable, using learning outcomes set within the CROQF learning outcomes units and accredited programme for the validation of non-formal and informal learning as a reference for the required knowledge, skills and attitudes, maintaining and protecting academic rigor and thus the reliability of the national qualifications system.

Institutions interested in becoming validation providers are strongly suggested to incorporate quality assurance for non-formal and informal learning validation to its integral quality assurance system, which is already in operation and certified by national agencies.

4.7. Costs of Including Qualifications in the NQF

For any qualifications in the CROQF there are no application or inclusion fees.

Costs relate to the development and evaluation of standards and programmes; the major part of the costs are borne by applicants and their partners.

For the non-formal and informal learning validation within the CROQF there are some principles covering the costs of qualifications inclusion – among others, the principles concerning individual users of non-formal learning validation. Validation could be fee based and its price should be lower than the price of corresponding formal educational modules required to reach the same unit or qualification for which the validation is organised. If fee based, the validation cost should cover all the expenses of the validation process.

When defining non-formal and informal learning validation costs, as per that principle, it should include:

- staff preparation,
- certification and workload to provide support in informing,
- orientation,
- admission,
- assessment.

On top of these costs, part of the overall organisational costs of running the institution, running costs of used resources, marketing and advertising costs and cost of assessment materials should be added.

Validation could be fee based, but the price should be significantly lower than the price of corresponding formal educational modules, still covering all validation costs.

Costs for any steps of the validation process will be free for various vulnerable groups.

4.8. Current debates on further NQF developments

Further development of the Croatian Qualifications Framework includes the finalisation of the legislative and institutional framework for the further development and implementation of non-formal and informal learning validation.

A draft proposal of the legislation on validation is envisaged to be adopted by the end of 2018. Implementation of the legislation will further regulate the inclusion of qualifications in the Framework.

The IT tool for the CROQF Register, including learning outcomes units, occupational standards, qualifications standards, curricula/programmes and accredited institutions for assessment and certification, will be developed as a comprehensive tool, bringing together relevant data on competences required by the labour market and the relevant qualifications awarded by accredited educational institutions.

Finally, activities envisaged include a comprehensive information and promotion campaign of the CROQF, including education and training activities as well as further promotion of the CROQF at the national and international levels, most notably among the stakeholders in the education and the economy sectors.

Further development of the CROQF will be envisaged in synergy with various EU initiatives, most particularly the EQF/Ploteus portal, European Classification of Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO).

4.9. Literature

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4.10. About the Authors

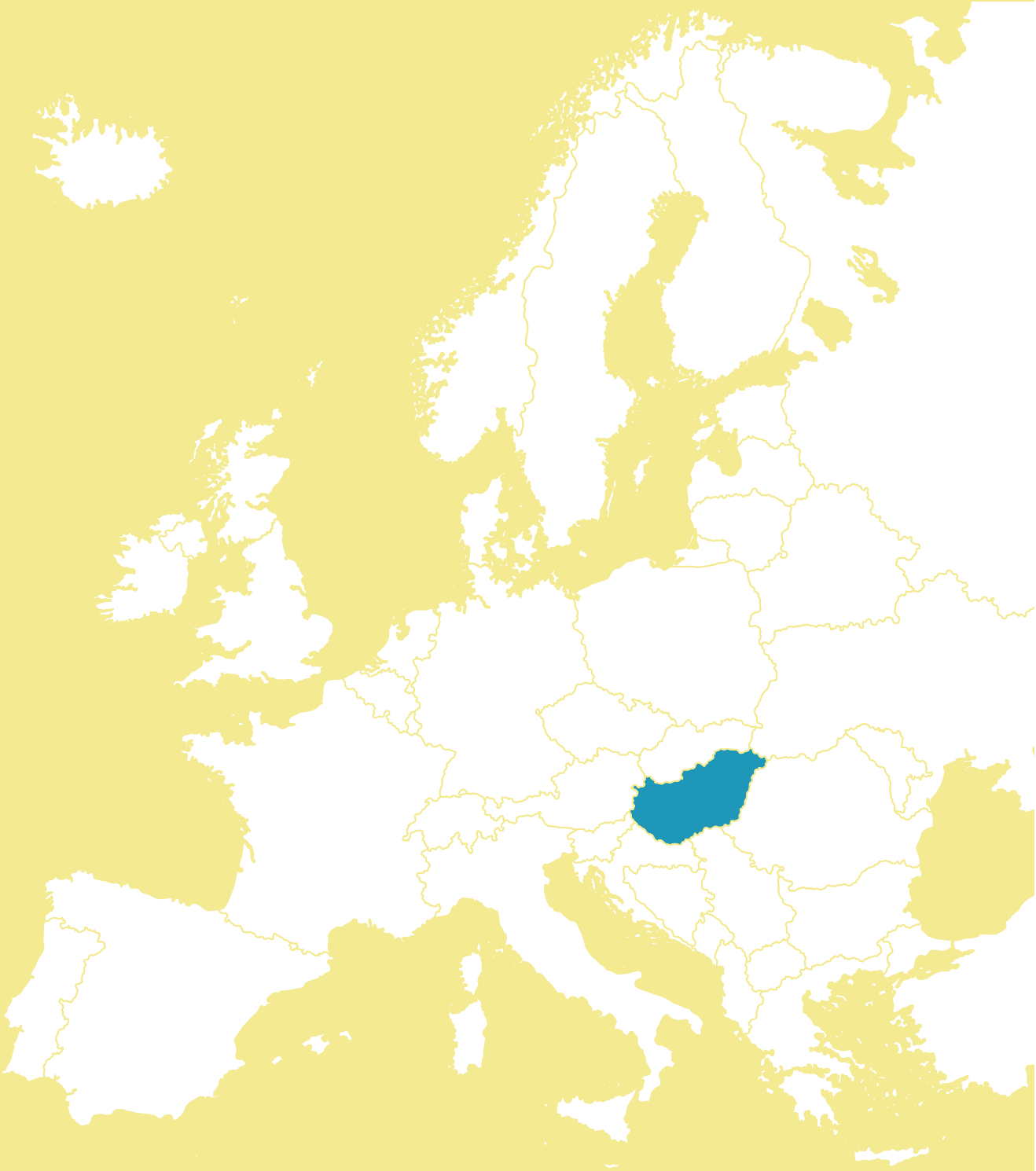
Prof. Dr. Mile Dželalija is a Professor of Physics at the University of Split. As a leader or key expert he has been participating in various international projects on the modernisation of national qualifications systems, quality assurance, development of curricula and technology transfer to the labour market in many countries. At the University of Split, within the Centre of Excellence for Science and Technology Integration of the Mediterranean Region, he is currently leading the component relating to education, which follows the EU strategic framework in Education and Training, ET2020, establishing programmes for entrepreneurship in science and technology, ensuring their excellence, and transferring to other education institutions in Croatia and other countries. His fields of expertise and practical experience in the education sector range from teaching, lifelong learning, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, validation of non-formal and informal learning, up to the transfer of innovation and development of related innovative entrepreneurship. He is a member of various national and international bodies, such as the EQF Advisory Group of the European Commission (2006-2008 preparation of the EQF; 2008-present), ESCO Cross-sectoral Reference Group (2013-2016), member of the National Correspondents for QF-EHEA (2006-present), management and advisory boards in Croatia and other countries. During the last 15 years, he has been deeply involved in the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks: EQF (2006-present), QF-EHEA (2006-present), NQF in Croatia (2006-present) and NQFs in many other countries (2007-present). Since 2004, he has given over 500 presentations and workshops on the modernisation of education at various national and international events.

Prof. Dr. Snježana Knezić, C.E., is a professor of civil engineering studies of the University of Split. As an expert she has been participating in international projects on the modernisation of qualifications systems, quality assurance and the development of curricula. Her fields of expertise and practical experience in the education sector are: teaching, lifelong learning, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, validation of non-formal and informal learning, collaboration with engineering community, and transfer of research and innovation through participation in EU framework programmes' projects. She has an active role in Croatian Chamber of Civil Engineers for issues relating to the professional recognition of foreign qualifications and recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning for the purpose of professional certification for the Project Manager licence. She was the Head of the Office for academic recognition of foreign HE qualification at the University and she also was a member of the National Council for foreign HE qualification recognition. She has been engaged as a member of the Expert Team for CROQF Development and co-author of the Referencing Report on the EQF/QF-EHEA. She was engaged in the TAIEX mission in Serbia as an expert to support the introduction of the qualifications' recognition process.

Dr. Ivana Carev is a postdoc in Chemistry at the University of Split. As an expert in the education sector, she has been participating in various international EU funded projects on the development of curricula, validation and recognition of non-formal and informal ways of learning, service learning, development of soft

skills for students of the natural sciences, quality assurance in higher education area, lectures and workshops on the lifelong learning of teachers of the natural sciences. Within the Centre of Excellence for Science and Technology Integration of the Mediterranean Region, at the University of Split, she is part of the working group of the component on education.

6. Hungary



Introduction

The development of Hungarian Qualifications Framework (HuQF) and its referencing to the EQF was accomplished in spring 2015. During the development of the HuQF educational attainment levels in general education, state recognised qualifications listed in the National Vocational Qualifications Register (NVQR) and qualifications obtainable in higher education were linked. During the political reconciliations with the experts following the first phase of development it was stated that the next steps of work with the framework should aim at implementation, as well as the qualifications of formal (e.g. postgraduate specialisation trainings) and the certificates of non-formal (adult training) sectors, which have not been linked to the framework yet.

The above intents were determinant in joining the NQF-in Project. As presently there is no mature system for linking non-formal certificates (explicit policy, order of procedure, methodology, etc.), therefore the implementation of the project and the knowledge accumulated during the preparation of the Country Report can contribute to the experts' discussion, which is very important from the aspect of operating the HuQF, as well as establishing and fine-tuning a system for linking non-formal certificates.

Preparation of the report

The development of the Hungarian Qualifications Framework is still in progress, and its implementation is in the initial phase. Due to this, during the preparation of the country report we could not rely on the description of an operating system. Therefore, we linked the preparation of the country study to a research, in which we intended to reveal the functioning of and interests in the adult training market from the aspect of the further development and operation of the HuQF.

In Hungary no regulation for the procedure of linking the qualifications obtainable in formal training has been prepared yet, and legal obligation for linking covers only a certain group of non-formal certificates. In 2016 135 (from 154) vocational program requirements were linked to the HuQF levels have been accomplished with involvement of experts.

The aim of the research linked to the preparation of the Country Report is to map the market of the trainings provided outside the school system, where certificates obtainable are non-state recognised qualifications, and provided in a so called non-formal learning setting, and to examine what certifying documents are used, what their status and labour market value are, and how the stakeholders are interested in linking certificates obtained in non-formal training to the HuQF.

The research basically relied on semi-structured deep interviews. The subjects in the investigation with interviews are stakeholders participating or interested in the operation of the training market, training provider companies, managers

and competent employees of training provider companies, HR staffs, managers and experts responsible for training and competence development of medium sized and big companies, as well as experts and representatives of professional interests in the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (HCCI) having an insight into the whole training market. Among the certificates and certifying documents obtainable in the Hungarian training market, the present research mainly focusses on the certificates being relevant form a labour market aspect, and it only tangentially mentions the certificates obtainable in free time programmes or programmes for elderly people. While making the interviews, we endeavoured to include interview subjects and companies from several counties in addition to Budapest. Also, due to the variety of the training market, stakeholders from several sectors were asked in different topics, according to preliminarily determined focus points. Certificates issued in the fields of IT, sport, and health was a priority group.

The research was supplemented by a pilot linking of 13 selected certificates to the levels of the HuQF. The aim of test linking was to identify the questions to be answered that can emerge in linking non-formal certificates.

When preparing the Country Report, we relied on studies in the topic of adult training, and on secondary analysis of the regulatory and institutional environment of adult training with a focus on the Country Report. For the preparation of the Country Report, a background study was prepared on the characteristics and legal regulation of Hungarian adult training.

Abbreviations and acronyms

Table 6.1. A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in the country report.

Abbreviation in English	Term in English	Term in Hungarian	Abbreviation in Hungarian
ATEC	Adult Training Expert Committee	Felnőttképzési Szakértői Bizottság	FSZB
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training	Szakmai továbbképzés	SZT
EA	Educational Authority	Oktatási Hivatal	OH
EOR	Educational and Outcome Requirements	*Képzési és Kimeneti Követelmények*	KKK
HCCI	Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Magyar Kereskedelmi és Iparkamara	MKIK
HCSO	Hungarian Central Statistical Office	Központi Statisztikai Hivatal	KSH
HDEC	Hungarian Development and Educational Committee	Magyar Fejlesztési és Képzési Bizottság	MFKB

Abbreviation in English	Term in English	Term in Hungarian	Abbreviation in Hungarian
HuQF	Hungarian Qualifications Framework	Magyar Képesítési Keretrendszer	MKKR
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education	Nemzetközi egységes oktatási osztályozási rendszer	
IVET	Initial vocational education and training	Nappali iskolarendszerű szakképzés	
LLL	Lifelong Learning	Élethosszig tartó tanulás	
LPR	Language Programme Requirement	Nyelvi programkövetelmény	NYPK
NOVETAL	National Office for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning	Nemzeti Szakképzési és Felnőttképzési Hivatal	NSZFH
NQC	National Qualification Committee	Nemzeti Képesítési Bizottság	NKB
NVATC	National Vocational and Adult Training Council	Nemzeti Szakképzési és Felnőttképzési Tanács	NSZFT
NVQR	National Vocational Qualifications Register	Országos Képzési Jegyzék	OKJ
SROP	Social Renewal Operational Programme	Társadalmi Megújulás Operatív Program	TÁMOP
VET	Vocational Education and Training	Szakképzés	
VER	Vocational Examination Requirements	Szakmai vizsgakövetelmények	SZVK
VPR	Vocational Programme Requirement	Szakmai programkövetelmény	SZPK

Basic terms

As the most important terms characterizing the Hungarian system can be interpreted in their relation to one another, the related terms are described together.[1]

[1] In Hungary, there is no clear, definite and fully accepted system of concepts in the field of adult education and training. The different documents do not always use the terms in the same meaning. Adult education and adult training are considerably structured and they can be grouped from several (legal, institutional, financing) aspects.

Qualification and Certification

Based on current legal regulations, the types of documents issued may be the following:

- Vocational Qualifications recognized by the State;
- Certificates issued in the non-formal sector (which, in Hungarian meaning, certifies the learning outcomes based on some sort of assessment, examination;
- Certification of Attendance, proving one's participation in the training.

The use of the latter two is not always consistent.

Formal training – Non-formal training

In Hungary, formal training includes programmes organised within the school system (primary, secondary level and higher education), as well as VET programmes providing state recognised NVQR qualifications. It also includes the trainings provided outside the school system that allow obtaining qualifications included in the National Vocational Qualifications Register (NVQR). All other trainings outside the school system shall be considered as non-formal trainings. However, the above two concepts are mainly used among experts, and they are not typically used in everyday life.

Training provided within the school system – Training provided outside the school system

The above concepts refer to each other. Training provided within the school system means general education being compulsory until 16 years of age, secondary level education including IVET and higher education.

A basic concept of the adult training act(s) is the training provided outside the school system, which means trainings, continuing trainings (mainly aiming at a profession) for adults who have completed their compulsory school attendance. (Adult Training Act does not cover the whole field of adult training, i.e. it relates to a certain segment of trainings provided outside the school system.)

Adult education – Adult training

The above two concepts, in the most general meaning refer to the training of persons who have come of age, however, it is used in a more restricted interpretation by some documents.

Adult education belongs to the group of second-chance type programmes. Typically, it is organised in the form of evening and correspondence (rarely e-learning) courses, mainly in schools, and regarding the content and the obtainable qualifications it has the same status as full-time education provided in the age of compulsory school attendance.

Adult training happens outside the school system. Regarding its aim, it can be general, language or vocational. Its typical feature is that participants of the training do not have a learner or student status with the training institute, and the relationship between the training participant and training provider is regulated by an adult training agreement (with a content as stipulated by law). A person may participate in adult training if the person has completed his or her compulsory school attendance (although any person even of an age of compulsory school attendance may participate in non-supported adult training programmes available in the training market).

Adult training services

Based on the regulations of the Adult Training Act, these are services related to adult training to tailor trainings to individual needs, to improve training efficiency, or to help employment. Its forms include assessment of prior learning, consultation on career orientation and career guidance, surveying training needs and consultation on training, consultation on employment and teaching job searching techniques.

Trainings regulated by the Adult Training Act

Only those training programmes are regulated by the effective Adult Training Act (2013) that are financed by a state source or EU projects, or that the state is responsible for.

The above programmes are divided into 4 groups by the law:

- type A training programmes providing state recognised vocational qualifications (included in the National Vocational Qualifications Register, NVQR)
- type B trainings that are the so-called "other vocational trainings" or those registered by the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (HCCI), whose vocational programme requirements (VPRs) have to be accepted in a special procedure
- type C trainings cover foreign language courses (based on language programme requirements)
- type D trainings are the so called "other supported trainings" (e.g. catch-up programmes, general competence development trainings, supported workplace trainings). These trainings are not based on any programme requirements.

As stated by the act, training providers are entitled to organise training programmes belonging to the above types, or to provide services related to adult training activity (e.g. assessment of learning outcomes acquired in prior learning) if they are included in the register of institutions providing adult training.[2]

[2] By doing so the legal regulation "monopolized" the expression adult training activity for the activities regulated by the Adult Training Act. However, the question remains: what term should/might be used for the activities happening outside the scope of the Act, having a completely identical content, and being highly appraised by

Partial qualification – Full qualification – Add-on

These are the three formal (state-recognized) VET qualifications related to one another, obtainable in the vocational education and training system and listed in the NVQR.

Partial (NVQR) qualification

It is constituted by some modules of a qualification stated by the vocational examination requirements (VERs), and its holder is entitled for filling at least one scope of work.

Full (NVQR) qualification

It is a qualification included in the National Vocational Qualifications Register (NVQR). The basic data of the training (type, level, field of study of the qualification, inclusion in the trade group, required completed school education, etc.) are determined by the Register, whereas the detailed requirements and description are included in the decree for the vocational examination requirements related to the concerned qualification (issued by the Minister being responsible for the concerned qualification).

Add-on (NVQR) qualification

It is a training to supplement an already obtained NVQR qualification. Its holder is qualified for filling an additional scope of work. The vocational examination requirements include the qualification modules which the training content is added on, and they also determine the modules it is constituted by. For example, the qualification of a geriatric and chronic patient nurse or infant and child nurse can be added on the qualification of a nurse.

Vocational Examination Requirements (VERs) – Vocational Programme Requirements (VPRs) – Language Programme Requirements (LPRs) (in adult training)

Vocational examination requirements are central training documents issued by the Minister responsible for a qualification in a legal regulation. The publication of the decree on the VER is a criterion for starting the training provision, and organising the vocational examination. These decrees include the maximum training period required for obtaining a qualification (the number of VET grades, the number of training hours), the ratio of theoretical and practical training periods, in vocational secondary schools the number of VET grades, the period of initial vocational education and training, and the possibility of organising a level examination assessing the success of practical training.

the labour market, performed by non-registered busines enterprises providing training as a service in the free adult training market. Presently this can be named only in a very complicated way (adult training activity not regulated by the Adult Training Act).

Based on the Adult Training Act of 2013, vocational programme requirements describe the training requirements of non-formal trainings (the so called type B or other vocational trainings), which are non-state recognised, however, supported by the state and therefore subjected to authorisation and registration (their function is similar to the role of VERs to provide a foundation of qualifications).

In the case of supported language trainings, organising the training is subjected to authorisation, and it shall be based on the authorised language programme requirements. (LPRs) are recorded (and published on the Internet) by the National Office for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning (NOVETAL).[3]

Authority regulated training

It is a training whose content and aim are regulated by the law, and which aims at obtaining a qualification not included in the NVQR. In the lack of authority regulated training a given work activity specified by the law cannot be performed. or the activity can be performed. After the accomplishment of an authority regulated training, the activity can be performed according to higher requirements compared to the professional level before the training. (Section 16 of Adult Training Act).

Higher vocational education and training

It is a training form built on the secondary school leaving examination, whose aim is to obtain a higher level qualification. This type of VET is provided in higher education institutions. These trainings usually last for 2 years, and include the subjects to convey higher level of knowledge related to the concerned qualification; however, they mainly focus on conveying vocational knowledge and skills. Credit points obtained in higher vocational education and training can be recognised later – in further studies – in the credit points of the higher education bachelor programme (BSc) so the period of the bachelor programme can be shortened. These programmes are linked to level 5 of the Hungarian Qualifications Framework.

This training type is not identical to post-secondary non-tertiary trainings, which are VET programmes built on the secondary school leaving examination, provide an (ISCED 454 level) qualification included in the NVQR, and not organised in higher education institutions.

[3] https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=538

6.1. Historical Context

In Hungary, by tradition the education and training sub-sectors are highly separated. They have their own legal regulation systems determining input, process and output regulations, their separated institutional settings and policy making and implementation structures. The sub-sectors of the education and training system are over-regulated in several aspects and there are no real intersectoral policy or administrative instruments that seem to be have influence.

In Hungary, before the dicussion started at European level to elaborate the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Counci lof 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, there was no definite government intention to develop a comprehensive qualification framework covering different subsectors of education and training. The government policy in this field mainly followed the international discourse.

The development of the HuQF can be divided into three periods. The first period of development (2006-2008) was characterised by international events and their impacts on Hungarian thinking. The extensive knowledge gathering and consultations resulted in a Hungarian position paper, discovering the benefits of a qualifications framework and learning outcomes approach. Then following up the European recommendation on EQF, the Hungarian Government decided to join the European EQF community and to create an NQF.

The second period covered (2009-2011) a Social Renewal Operational Programme (SROP) project with support of the European Social Fund, which aim was to develop the grid itself, in consultation with the social stakeholders. This work resulted in the acceptance of the grid.

In the third period of development (2012-2014), three SROP projects were launched, with the more detailed tasks of:

- widening further the social consultation (than in the second phase);
- familiarizing even more people with the learning outcomes approach,
- linking qualifications to HuQF levels;
- channelling back the results of referencing framework levels and linking qualifications.

The development of the Hungarian Qualifications Framework has been carried out by three Social Renewal Operational Programme (SROP) projects: one responsible for general, one for higher, one for vocational and adult education. Therefore, the structure of responsibilities and the process of consultations had to be established in a way that information sharing, harmonisation of working methods and the methodology of linking between projects are ensured. In this phase of development only those qualifications recognized (and regulated) by the state are linked to QF levels.

The system of general education in Hungary is strongly dominated by a curriculum-content based control. Within this, various approaches of the education policy had an impact on curriculum-content developments, which resulted in the inclusion of competence-based approach. The description of the learning-teaching process, the determination of the sequence of curriculum contents, as well as the wording of educational aims and tasks became a central element of state core curricula. Process control focussing on competence development is even more typical of the National Core Curricula of 2003 and 2006. The latest National Core Curriculum published in 2012 determines common cultural contents. Learning outcomes, i.e. requirements or conditions for progression as defined by general education were worded at the level of framework curricula and secondary school leaving examination requirements, published by the minister responsible for education in the regulatory documents. Secondary school leaving examination requirements are learning outcome-oriented. Learning outcomes, important from the aspect of linking to the levels of the Hungarian Qualifications Framework, can be found in these documents now as well.

In the VET system *input, process and outcome regulatory elements* are also present. The main regulatory documents of the qualifications that as included in the NVQR are the Act on VET and its government decrees and ministerial decrees. The decrees on the vocational (professional) and examination requirements for the qualifications include the requirements of the complex vocational examination, whereas the detailed vocational standards can be found in the modules of vocational requirements published in the relevant government decree. The vocational requirements set for the solution of the tasks to be carried out during the practice of a profession. They also include the levels, contents, and quality of the competences required for the employment and during the work (job requirements). In 2004, the development of the NVQR – supported by ESF – was based on analysis of job profiles. According to the next developmental phase in 2011, the profiles became competence-based, i.e. in addition to the vocational task profile the requirements in the system of social, methodological and personal competences were also descibed. The competence underlying the NVQR is activity-oriented, and it considers competence to be an acting potential. The dimensions of the competence model of the NVQR: the vocational, personal, and methodological competences, i.e. its feature profile contents are important units of the acting competence; however, these units do not have the task to specifically reflect to a vocational function or role, but they contribute to the successful acting in the work context together so they serve the definition of the training objective to a greater extent. The occupational feature profile used for the competence description is not integrally related to the specific tasks, and they are not their pre-requisites. The relations among the individual categories of the two types of description mean the real difference between the systems of the HuQF and the National Vocational Qualifications Register. In the HuQF the relations among the learning outcome-related statements at the same level are very close, they connote and supplement one another, and they are also coherent. In the NVQR these relations are co-ordinative and taxonomic.

In higher education, the compliance with the qualification framework across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA QF) started 10 years ago. The regulation incorporated the use of the Dublin descriptors already in 2005, and it started shifting the regulatory input and content elements being previously typical in the regulation of qualifications towards the outcome by reducing and extending the input and content elements and by introducing the outcome elements. The regulation of the qualification and the training programmes leading thereto are separated in the Hungarian regulation. The National Higher Education Act determines the main features of the qualifications (type, levels, typical programme period, and number of credits) and the ministerial decree prescribes the education and outcomes requirements of higher education courses.

Qualifications systems of education and training sub-sectors are highly regulated and fragmented. Their own structure, characteristics, standards and quality assurance systems have been developed different times and reflected to sectoral demands. The development of a comprehensive qualifications framework started with the outside pressure of conformity with EQF processes and not from national policy intentions. Education and training sub-sectors keep their regulatory and institutional authorities over their qualifications. The sub-sectoral qualifications' systems were pulled under the umbrella of the HuQF comprehensive framework but the division between them remained strong.

6.2. National Qualifications Framework – Basic Premises

The sub-sectors' qualifications systems are fragmented, they have their own structure, policy and management processes, quality assurance and evaluation systems and no links between them can be identified. Legal regulations determine the entrance criteria – level and type of educational attainment and/or qualification – to a qualification and the preconditions to make transitions possible between qualifications' sub-systems. The National Vocational Qualification Register and the higher education qualfications system can be percieved as sectoral framework with levels and descriptors but for the general education the solely outcome requirements for secondary school leaving examination with the National Core Curriculum, which defines learning outcomes to some extent, cannot be interpreted as any kind of framework.

The Hungarian Qualifications Framework was developed as a communicative framework; the work mostly followed the EU trends and requirements. The HuQF can be characterized as a competence-framework: it has eight levels and four descriptor categories: knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility and attitude.[4] The development of levels and descriptors was mostly carried out by pedagogical experts; therefore, the pedagogical aspect is more emphasized than the labour market ones.

State recognised vocational qualifications, higher education qualifications and primary and secondary educational attainment were linked to the HuQF as a part of the previously mentioned ESF project to support the implementation of the development process. Following linking, so far no regulation for the maintenance and operation of the HuQF has been adopted to provide the regulatory, institutional and financial background of the function of HuQF legitimated by the government.

Sectoral separation is strong regarding the qualification systems and their regulations, there is no uniform methodology for linking to the HuQF, and the authorities responsible for the qualifications perform their linking in their own institution system, in compliance with their order of procedure, regulation standards, quality assurance framework, only relying on the compulsory consultation within the state administrative conciliation procedure.

The HuQF is mainly a metaframe due to its abstraction level and the general nature of descriptors, which could only help the inclusion of the qualifications issued in the different education and training sectors into the uniform frame with different guidelines and sectoral, sub-sectoral descriptions that could also improve the transparency and understandability of the relations among the qualifications.

The impact of HuQF on the whole system is visible at a governmental decision making and experts' level: as seen above, the new approach did have an impact on the education and training system and due to the lack of regulation for the introduction of the framework, the effect of the HuQF on the outcome regulations

[4] For more details, please, refer to the Hungarian Referencing Report: https://www.oktatas.hu/pub_bin/dload/kepesitesek/referencing_report_HuQF_EQF.pdf

and their standards is insignificant. The spread of new idea of the framework is rather slow, end-users are not aware of its use yet.

6.3. Institutional Setting

Governance and management of qualifications

The management of the Hungarian educational and qualifications system belongs to the **Ministry for National Economy** (vocational and adult education) and the **Ministry of Human Capacities** (general and higher education). However, depending on the economic subsector, the responsibility concerning vocational qualifications may be shared between Ministry for National Economy and other ministries (for example the Ministry of Agriculture in case of agricultural qualifications). The traditional division between educational subsectors is visible in the institutional and management system.

From the point of view of non-formal sectoral qualifications, the Ministry for National Economy and its background institutions' responsibilities are more important; therefore, these are more detailed in this chapter.

In details, the **Minister for National Economy** has the following functions:

- to establish and operate the National Qualifications Committee;
- to oversee the Vocational and Adult Training Directorate of the National Labour Office;
- to compile the national module map and provide for publication;
- to set up the development and training committees of the capital and the counties, respectively, and provide for the conditions of their operation together with the economic chamber;
- to commission the drawing up of the mandatory vocational training framework curricula by vocational qualification in vocational school and by sector in secondary vocational school,
- to provide legal regulation and management of the adult training system,
- to make decisions of the second degree related to the authorisation and control of adult training activity, and
- to elaborate training and support programmes for the adult training and labour market.

National Vocational and Adult Training Council (NVATC) helps the Minister responsible for VET and adult training perform the minister's tasks related to VET and adult training. NVATC is operated as a national body to prepare decisions, to make proposals, and to give opinions in the professional field.

In the new regulation system of adult training, the most important institution to perform the operative tasks in the adult training authority's activity is **National Office of Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning (NOVETAL)**, controlled by Ministry for National Economy (before 15 December 2014, the former National Labour Office).

NOVETAL is involved in planning, implementing and monitoring the Ministry of National Economy's VET policy and regularly make reports on the results. Within the number of tasks delegated to the agency NOVETAL manages over 360 VET schools, thus reaching directly about a 16 000 teachers and 200 000 young people since 1 July 2015. NOVETAL operates various expert committees on VET and AL. These committees, existing communication channels and professional cooperation projects ensure that all relevant stakeholders, policy makers, and social partners can be reached when updating and disseminating information and data on VET.

NOVETAL provides for:

- the tasks related to the authorisation, control and sanctioning of the activity performed by adult training institutions,
- the registration of (authorised) adult training institutions,
- the task related to the registration of LPRs (in adult training),
- the tasks related to the authorisation, control and sanctioning of adult training expert activity, and the maintenance of the list of adult training experts.
- processing and publishing the adult training data of the National Statistical Data Collection Programme.

The above tasks are related to adult training, however, it has several other tasks related to VET, and one of the most important ones among these is that since 1 July 2015 it has performed maintainer's tasks of the VET institutions put into the maintenance of the Ministry of National Economy.

The work of NOVETAL related to the tasks of authorisation and control of adult training institutions' activities, registration of LPRs, and adult training experts' activities is helped by an **Adult Training Expert Committee (ATEC)**, consisting of six adult training experts.[5]

NOVETAL collects and publishes validated data on vocational qualifications, which are available on the public website of the Agency. NVQR, issued in a government decree (reviewed and updated regularly), contains basic data on state recognised qualifications. Vocational examination requirements are issued in ministerial decrees and contain detailed information on regulations and requirements of each vocational qualification. The so-called "National Module Map" is based on a government decree and it contains detailed description of knowledge, skills and competences of qualifications by modules.

NVQR[6] was first published in 1994. It has been thoroughly revised and substantially renewed in 2004-06 and the last version was published in 2016 with 760 (full, partial and add-on) qualifications belonging to 22 trade groups. The 150/2012 government decree defines the procedure of modifying NVQR. Anyone can recommend the deletion, modification, or the introduction of a vocational qualification. The

[5] The list of members is available on the NOVETAL website: https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=500

[6] https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=532

proposal must provide detailed justification for the recommended modification, and be supported by:

- a detailed discussion on whether the proposed modification is well-founded which
- should also cover all alternatives assessed in the process of reaching that conclusion,
- the estimated number of expected training participants per year,
- a list the training providers willing to provide practical and theoretical training, and
- a forecast of the national employment service on the number of jobs that can be taken with the qualification proposed.

Vocational examination requirements[7] of the NVQR qualifications are published in decrees by the ministries responsible for vocational qualifications. The VERs include competences and expected learning outcomes relevant to the world of work for each module.

The National Module Map[8] includes a list and descriptions of the modules of the qualifications in the effective National Vocational Qualifications Register, as well as it shows how qualifications are linked to one another. It helps in getting information on the modules of vocational requirements related to the qualifications.

Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, HCCI, defined as a public body and so also having administrative power got an important role in the operation of the regulation system of 2013 for adult training. The Chamber, being a professional organisation and generally representing the interests of the participants of economy, has proper information on and insight into the needs of economy; therefore, it is able to present the contentual and structural needs related to the business/economic trainings. It also plays an important role in taking economic needs into account when determining the supports for trainings.

Accordingly, in the issues related to vocational trainings, the Adult Training Act vests material power, in certain cases exclusive decision-making competences in the Chamber, which thus can properly represent the interests of economy in adult training. This is the reason why the new Act on Adult Training also amended Act CXXI of 1999 on economic chambers, whose new Point e) of Section 9 says:

"Economic Chambers shall provide for their tasks as stated by the law on VET and its executive order, and the law on adult training and its executive order, as well as they shall organise and provide master craftsman trainings and master craftsman examinations in relation to the development of economy, and in cooperation with the national organisations for the representation of economic interests."

[7] https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=501

[8] https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=531 or http://site.nive.hu/orszagosmodulterkep/

Based on the Adult Training Act, HCCI shall:

- operate a committee with five members to make decisions on the registration of adult training vocational programme requirements, on the amendment of the registration, as well as on the deletion from the registration, where three adult training programme experts are delegated by the Chamber, one member by the National Chamber of Agriculture, and one member by the Minister corresponding to the trade group in the NVQR of the VER proposal, and being responsible for the majority of qualifications in the trade group (the members of the committee delegated by the Chamber and the National Chamber of Agriculture and the President are assigned and released by the Minister),
- register adult training vocational programme requirements for other vocational trainings[9] (type B programmes) by involving the National Chamber of Agriculture, and exercises the related titles,
- link adult training vocational programme requirements to the trade groups according to the NVQR in the procedure for the registration of adult training vocational programme requirements, as well as determine and link the vocational programme requirements according to the levels of the Hungarian Qualifications Framework related to the European Qualifications Framework,
- provide for the tasks related to the authorisation of adult training programme expert activity,
- provide an electronic registration of persons entitled to carry out adult training programme expert activity, holding a permit,
- participate through the adult training programme experts in the control of adult training institutions (e.g. observing legal regulations, meeting data supply requirements, revealing adult training activity carried out illegally, i.e. without a permit), as it is set forth by the law that the authority shall carry out its control activity by involving adult training experts and adult training programme experts, in the case of trainings included in the NVQR in cooperation with the relevant authority, with the regional chamber being competent according to the place of practical training participating in the control procedure for the practical part of the training, as similarly to the professional and agricultural chambers operated in the sector, it is mainly the Chamber that can properly evaluate the professional contents of the concerned trainings. In addition to the above, the Chamber shall be also responsible for the revision of accredited programmes, with the request that it should also revise other vocational training programmes until 31 March 2014, included in the register of accredited adult training programmes on 31 August 2013.

While the vocational examination requirements (VERs) of NVQR qualifications are issued by the Minister responsible for the concerned qualification, vocational programme requirements (VPRs) are approved and included in the register by the

[9] A training aiming at obtaining a non-state recognised vocational qualification (excluded from NVQR), which is not an authority regulated training.

HCCI Programme Committee.[10] The aim of vocational programme requirement is to ensure other vocational trainings outside the NVQR to be implemented according to a unified system of requirements as well.

In order to provide for its tasks related to adult training activity, HCCI is financed from the state budget of the training fund part of the National Employment Fund[11] based on an agreement concluded with NOVETAL.

In addition to the above, the following organisations also play a role:

- The **National Qualification Committee (NQC)**[12] is a body to make professional proposals and opinions for the continuous development and modernization of the content structure of VET.
- The **National Economic and Social Council of Hungary**[13] is the widest-ranging forum of representatives of Hungarian society; it holds consultations, delivers opinions, makes proposals, discusses national strategies and cross-sectoral issues affecting the development of the economy and society.
- **County Committee for Development and Training**, which makes proposals for decisions on the professional structure by academic years and counties (also for adult training outside the school system).[14]

National Vocational and Adult Training Council (NVATC), which is a national body to prepare decisions, to make proposals, and to give opinions in the professional field. The list of NVATC members is available on the website of the Ministry for National Economy.[15]

[10] The list of members of the HCCI Programme Committee is available on the HCCI website: http://www.mkik.hu/hu/magyar-kereskedelmi-es-iparkamara/program-bizottsag-osszetetele-10964

[11] Legal regulation: no. 16/2016. (V. 27.) NGM Decree of the Minister for National Economy on the detailed rules of supports grantable from the training fund part of National Employment Fund for certain VET and adult training purposes.

[12] https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=457

[13] http://www.ngtt.hu

[14] The proposals made for supportable qualifications obtainable in a training provided outside the school system based on the Adult Training Act are available on the website of NOVETAL for a period of one year starting from 1 June 2016: http://www.nive.hu/mfkb2016/index.php?DO=59&tip=

[15] http://ngmszakmaiteruletek.kormany.hu/download/f/1f/a0000/NSZFT%20tagok.pdf

Qualifications Databases

The operation of databases belongs to the scope of two Ministries in Hungary. The Educational Authority, background institution of the Ministry of Human Capacities, operates the Higher Education Information System and the General Education Information System. The data related to VET and adult learning belong to NOVETAL, background institution of the Ministry for National Economy.

Higher Education Information System

Since 2006, based on the Act on Higher Education (previously Act 139 of 2005, and presently Act 204 of 2011) there is a higher information education system collecting data on higher education. Higher Education Information System consists of an institutional database and a personal database. The institutional database is a public register for higher education programmes and institutions, containing all necessary information on higher education qualifications that are required by the EQF platform.

Its two main sub-systems are:

- higher education institutional register, including the data in the deed of foundation and operating permit of higher education institutions,
- higher education personal register, including the data of students and employees in higher education.

Data on vocational and adult education and training

The National Office of Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning, NOVETAL collects information on vocational and adult education and training; data and information are published on NOVETAL's website:

- Examination reporting: before the start of complex examinations, it collects the data on the training, the number of examinees, and the place of examination.
- Record of registry sheets: after the end of examinations, it collects data on the training, the examination, and the examinees (success, statistical data, clauses, places).
- Record of examinations: statistical data collected on modular examinations.

The record of vocational programme requirements of adult training is maintained by HCCI.[16] It is of no importance which training provider originally submitted the VPR proposal, after its acceptance the document becomes public and commonly owned and anyone wishing to start the concerned training has to comply with the requirements of the VPR. HCCI is also responsible for the record of adult training providers holding an official permit.

[16] http://szpk.mkik.hu/_frontend/index.php?module=programkovetelmeny&sub=modul&mid=13

In addition to the above, the role of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) and the system of the National Statistical Data Collection Programme should be mentioned.

Based on Section 21 (4), the adult training institutions shall supply data for statistical purposes according to the National Statistical Data Collection Programme. A part of this programme, OSAP1665 collects statistical data on the training and training participants after the end of training. Data collection happens in a yearly cycle; data collection of the previous year is closed every year. The OSAP 1665 data supply is obligatory for not only adult training institutions subjected to the adult training act: all training institutions shall supply data to the National Statistical Data Collection Programme on their implemented trainings. Data supply is for statistical purposes, its reason is on the one hand that statistical data supply based on the previous adult training act should be continued for the continuous use of data, on the other hand that the linking of the data supply system to the statistical data supply systems of the EU should be provided.

Data supply happens through the online system operated by the NOVETAL.[17]

Online data supply has to be provided within 10 days from the examination following the training or from the end of the training. In the case of authority regulated trainings and trainings with a training time of less than 25 hours, data for the adult training institution, the implemented training, and training participants have to be reported within 10 days following the end of the concerned year. The order of data supply for 2014 changed compared to the previous years as contrary to the group data supply until that time; from 2014, regarding the training, participants' personal data have to be provided in the data supply. Online data query is available.[18]

Governance and management of qualifications framework

The Hungarian Qualifications Framework development belongs to two ministries and their background institutions: Ministry of Human Capacities is responsible for general and higher education (its background institution is the Educational Authority (EA) and the Ministry for National Economy (its background institution is the National Office for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning (NOVETAL) together with the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (HCCI).

Educational Authority operates as a governmental agency, under the control of the Minister of Human Capacities. It performs organisation and coordination of surveying, measuring, evaluation and quality assurance tasks regarding all levels of education excluding VET and adult training. As a national authority it can conduct proceedings for infringement of regulations and also may impose fine. The task of developing and implementing the National Qualifications Framework has been

[17] https://osap.nive.hu

[18] https://statisztika.nive.hu/

delegated to the Educational Authority; therefore, the EQF National Coordination Point is located here. As mentioned in other sections, the responsibility for general and higher education register is in the Authority, too.

So far, four government decisions dealt with the establishment of the Hungarian Qualifications Framework:

- Government Decision no. 2069/2008. (VI. 6.)
- Government Decision no. 1004/2011. (I.14.)
- Government Decision no. 1229/2012. (VII. 6.)
- Government Decision no. 1791/2013. (XI. 7.)

These measures gave instructions on the establishment of the Interministerial Task Force, involving all relevant ministries, sectoral bodies, councils and many other stakeholders, the tasks related to the introduction of the HuQF, launch of the SROP projects, the establishment and introduction of the HuQF as well as accepted the principles of the qualifications framework and assigned the decision makers responsible for the process. There is an intention to further operate this Task Force in case new linking results or process are to be introduced.

The first phase of the development and the projects are over (see detailed description in the Referencing and Self-certification Report of the Hungarian Qualifications Framework to the EQF and to the QF-EHEA[19]), having linked most formal qualifications. The two ministries (Ministry of Human Capacities and the Ministry for National Economy) still have shared responsibility related to the linking, but there is no one single process related to the maintenance of the framework: the quality assurance of both the framework and the linking process are the responsibility of the relevant sector. Linking GE and HE qualifications belong to the Ministry of Human Capacities, while linking VET qualifications is the responsibility of the Ministry for National Economy. The type "B" adult training courses are to be linked by the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

There are three registers operating "behind the HuQF":

1. one for the vocational education and training (NVQR),
2. one for adult training,
3. and one for the higher education.

The Ministry for National Economy is responsible for issuing the NVQR (the last one, including HuQF levels, entered in force from 4 March 2016, downloadable online[20]). HCCI is responsible for the adult training register, including qualifications type A, certificates type B, C and D.

[19] http://www.oktatas.hu/pub_bin/dload/kepesitesek/referencing_report_HuQF_EQF.pdf

[20] https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=297

Ministry of Human Capacities is responsible for the register of qualifications obtainable in higher education (including higher vocational education, Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes).

The list of HE qualifications in force from 2017 is downloadable online.[21]

Training providers

According to the conceptual separation stipulated at a legal level, **adult education** is an educational and training activity provided within the school system, whereas **adult training** is one happening outside it. A distinction should be made between **training service and training activity** as well. The forms of **adult training activity-related service** as defined by the Act of 2011 are in particular: assesment of prior learning, consultation on career orientation and career guidance, surveying training needs and consultation on training, as well as consultation on employment and teaching job searching techniques. According to the law, **adult training-related service** is a service to promote tailoring trainings to individual needs, to improve training efficiency, or to help employment. Within **adult training activity,** 4 training types are distinguished by the law, as well as the name adult training institution is related only to organisations subjected to the law, and holding a permit. Training providers holding a permit are named as adult training institutions by the law. It is not obvious how all other participants should be named. Therefore, fine-tuning of the terminology also for use in public discourse is definitely a current task.

There may be **several types of institutions** carrying out non-formal sectoral trainings, both under and out of the effect of the legal regulations: vocational centres and state-owned schools involved in trainings leading to NVQR qualifications both in and out of the school system; higher education institutions; private trainers providing NVQR qualifications out of the school system; state-owned companies offering (private) in-company qualifications (e.g. the Hungarian Post); state-owned training providers offering private trainings; private companies offering in-company trainings, either leading to documented, internationally accepted qualification or non-documented company-specific paper; and private trainers providing private (market) qualifications.

NOVETAL organized **vocational centres** at the county level as well as in the capital. This governance model should provide greater autonomy at the regional level to ensure participation. The centres provide space and infrastructure for adult learning and VET for adults (CVET, continuing vocational education and training), contributing to the policy aim to extend participation in lifelong learning in Hungary. In the 2016/17 school year, vocational secondary schools providing a Secondary School Leaving Certificate (like the general upper secondary schools) are to be modified into vocational grammar schools. In these new types of institutions, VET students will obtain the Certificate of Secondary School Leaving Examination (maturity exam), and beyond that, with one extra year of schooling, a VET Technician Qualification as well. The present VET schools were modified into

[21] http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1500139.KOR

vocational secondary schools. These students will have the possibility, having completed their three-year VET studies, to continue their studies for an extra two years in general subjects and pass the Secondary School Leaving Examination.

Higher education institutions are eligible to provide non-formal training, but in this case they have to come under the regulation of the adult training act and fulfil the requirements. A part of higher education institutions (summarizing analyses or statistical data are not available) also organise so called paid courses, which prepare participants for either the entrance examination, i.e. for the own training of the institution or they make certain elements of formal training available for those who cannot or would not like to complete the whole training. In the latter case certificates, certifying documents are issued in many times, which can be included in the non-formal category within the NQF-IN project. Their market values can vary individually although in a competence portfolio, a professional CV they may have high value, or the series of courses can constitute a complete set of knowledge.

According to the legal change in 2013, accreditation is replaced by authorisation, and professional responsibility is taken by the organiser of the training. While earlier accreditation was *institution*-based (institutional accreditation was a criterion for using support sources), now the required official permit is training *programme*-based (i.e. not only the institutions but also the training programmes to be started have to be authorised).

At the end of June 2016 the register of the authority included 1474 institutions holding an official licence, which is approximately identical to the number of institutions having accreditation in August 2013. The **adult training institutional system** remained unchanged, and according to the register of authorised adult training institutions and National Statistical Data Collection Programme data, the most companies being present in the adult training market (70%) are still profit-oriented. The ratio of budget institutions was decreased to 10% as a result of establishing vocational centres, at the same time, their adult training volume increased. Non-profit organisations still represent approximately 20%.

In the **training sector outside the school system** the state is present to a considerable extent. Türr István Training and Research Institute alone, based on the information from the website of the Institute, organises about 5000 trainings for more than 80 thousand participants.

In-company trainings can be considered a closed training segment. Depending on whether the courses are provided by the own permanent employees, managers or adult trainers of the company, or they are "purchased" by the company as external service, these are called external or internal training.

In the **adult training market** outside the regulation, in free market training, training as a service is not considered otherwise than any other service. It is difficult to classify market-based adult trainers: some of them especially provide trainings, others start providing trainings for selling a product. Based on the information collected so far, it is not clear yet how the operators of closed training markets (e.g. in-company internal trainings) are interested in the standardized documentation of their activities, and in linking the certificates issued by them to the qualifications framework.

Training programmes are distinguished by international special literature, Hungarian regulation, and the data collection system slightly differently, however, in most cases according to the aim and content of training, as well as the status of the training organisation. Differences are shown by the following table.

Table 6.2. Typology of qualifications according to types of institutes and ownership

	State-owned institution	Private institution
State-owned Qualification / certificate	■ NVQR qualifications (out of the school system) in vocational centres or other state-owned vocational schools ■ Type B qualifications in vocational centres or other state-owned vocational schools ■ Authority regulated trainings ■ Compulsory in-service training systems determined by legal regulation by sectors, e.g. health care worker, accountant, teacher trainings.	■ NVQR qualifications (out of the school system) in private schools ■ Type B qualifications in vocational centres or other state-owned vocational schools
Not-state-owned Qualification / certificate	■ Qualification accredited by an international organization at a state-supported organization (e.g. LEN accredited waterpolo coach training at the Hungarian Swimming Association) ■ In-company trainings developed by a state-owned institution (e.g. Hungarian Post)	■ Qualification accredited by an international organization at a private training institution (e.g. a fitness qualification accredited by the European Health and Fitness Association) ■ Further trainings developed by a Hungarian private trainer (e.g. sport nutritionist, spine concept) ■ International qualifications (or those which have an ownership abroad and one private institution obtains monopoly to carry out trainings) – e.g. in sport: Microsoft, Cisco, Oracle industrial standards, TRX, kangoo etc. ■ Qualification accepted, owned, issued or licensed by a private organisation (e.g. consultant or project manager training,) ■ Qualification accepted, owned, issued or licensed by an international organisation (e.g. international sport association)

6.4. Types and Legal Status of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Due to the present development phase of the system of Hungarian Qualifications Framework, a part of the questions in this chapter can be only answered conditionally, and regarding the procedure, experts' recommendations, as well as open questions, dilemmas requiring consideration and decision can be worded.

Due to the characteristics of the Hungarian system, even the expression "included" itself has to be made more precise as the interpretation is closely related to the issue of the registration and development of the framework at a national level.

Presently the independent, publicly available NQF meta-database is still under development (it is expected to operate by 2017). By mapping the sectoral management of the Hungarian education and training information system, there are 3 registers "behind" the HuQF (see more in Chapter 6.3). Presently there is no steering body assigned to provide the continuous development of HuQF, bearing full responsibility. So far the assigned organisational unit of Educational Authority was responsible for coordinating the developments related to the framework.

There is no legal regulation to define the group and nature of qualifications and certifying documents that can be linked. At the same time, there is no effective regulation, either, to limit qualifications and certifying documents that can be linked.

The status and type of the documents certifying the obtainable competence are determined by the state and type of training. Without understanding the training programme types, the options and problems of integration into the framework are hardly understandable. Therefore, we prepared an overview table for a better understanding of the types of the Hungarian qualifications affected by the linking. This explains which competence development trainings are available in the adult training sector.

Types of qualifications

The key categories to create the types are the following (see Figure 6.1).

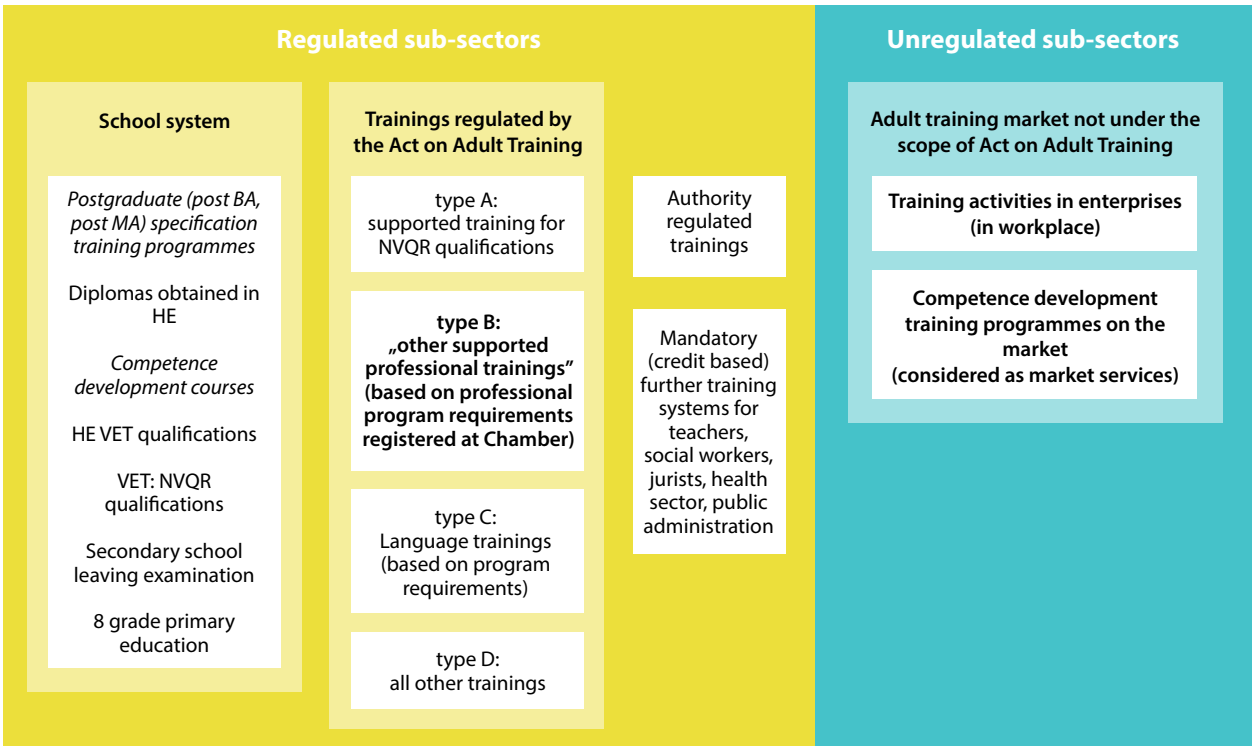
1. **Special** training forms **determined by legal regulation for the training** (the regulation has various nature and source)
   - Education and training within the school system (regulated in the laws by sectors, general education, VET within the school system, higher education). The forms of the issuable certificates (school certificates ualification, degree) are also regulated by the laws. A part of higher education institutions organise courses that do not lead to a degree, and can be included among non-formal qualifications.
   - Certain activities regulated by the Adult Training Act. The law lists 4 training forms. Type A training aims at obtaining a qualification that can be also

obtained in VET within the school system, is state recognised, and included in the NVQR. Type B qualifications are non-state recognised, not included in the NVQR, and can be identified as non-formal programmes, whose vocational programme requirements are authorised by the Chamber within the frame of a special procedure, and based on this, at the end of the training a certifying document is issued. Type C foreign language trainings, which can be also provided based on authorised language programme requirements (LPRs). The so called type D "other trainings", which are not vocational but e.g. catch-up or competence development authorised trainings (no programme requirements belong to them).

- 1/a. Authority regulated and compulsory in-service training systems of particular professions belong to the activities that are **regulated but not subjected to the Adult Training Act.**
- The so called authority regulated trainings mean a separate group (these fall within the competence of various ministries, and are regulated separately, by the legal regulations issued by the competent ministry).
- The compulsory in-service training systems of certain professions, which oblige the participants to collect a given number of credits or points, obtainable through the participation in recommended programmes, in periods of 4-5-7 years. The compulsory in-service training system of teachers, as well as the compulsory in-service training for civil servants, health employees, legal experts and accountants mean such separated systems as well (in every case a separate legal regulation arranges for registration, the group of institutions to participate in the training, and the programmes).

2. **Non-regulated adult trainings** operating as a so called "free market" service, which usually include non-supported workplace trainings, or – in a more restricted definition – in-company trainings.

Figure 6.1. Education and training system and the sub-sectors of adult training



(In Figure 6.1 in the box about the School system, non-formal trainings are written in italic. Institutions belonging to the school system also provide non-formal training programs. Higher Education Institutions organize competence development courses without state-recognized certificate. Such trainings, e.g. for companies, may be organized also by vocational training providers.)

Hungary presently does not have an established, regulated, procedure for linking formal qualifications and documents (certificates) obtainable in the non-formal sector to the HuQF. Development work so far mainly happened within the frame of sectoral projects (SROPs) co-financed by the European Social Fund. Linking formal qualifications was done by experts working in the projects.

Linking so far aimed at the completed levels of education and qualifications obtainable in the training provided within the school system. Presently, the experts in the field focus on the methodology of linking, and the related issues. The most important obstacle that emerged during the development of the framework was that the existing qualifications were not described in the form of learning outcomes. The most energy has been invested so far in rewording the texts of qualifications, and making this approach considered new in the Hungarian training system understandable and applicable for all stakeholders. Within the frame of the development projects so called test-linking happened, which raised several problems and questions regarding the quality and coherence of the descriptions of the qualifications.

In linking carried out within the development projects, three methodological steps followed one another. First, the internal hierarchy of the typical outcomes of each

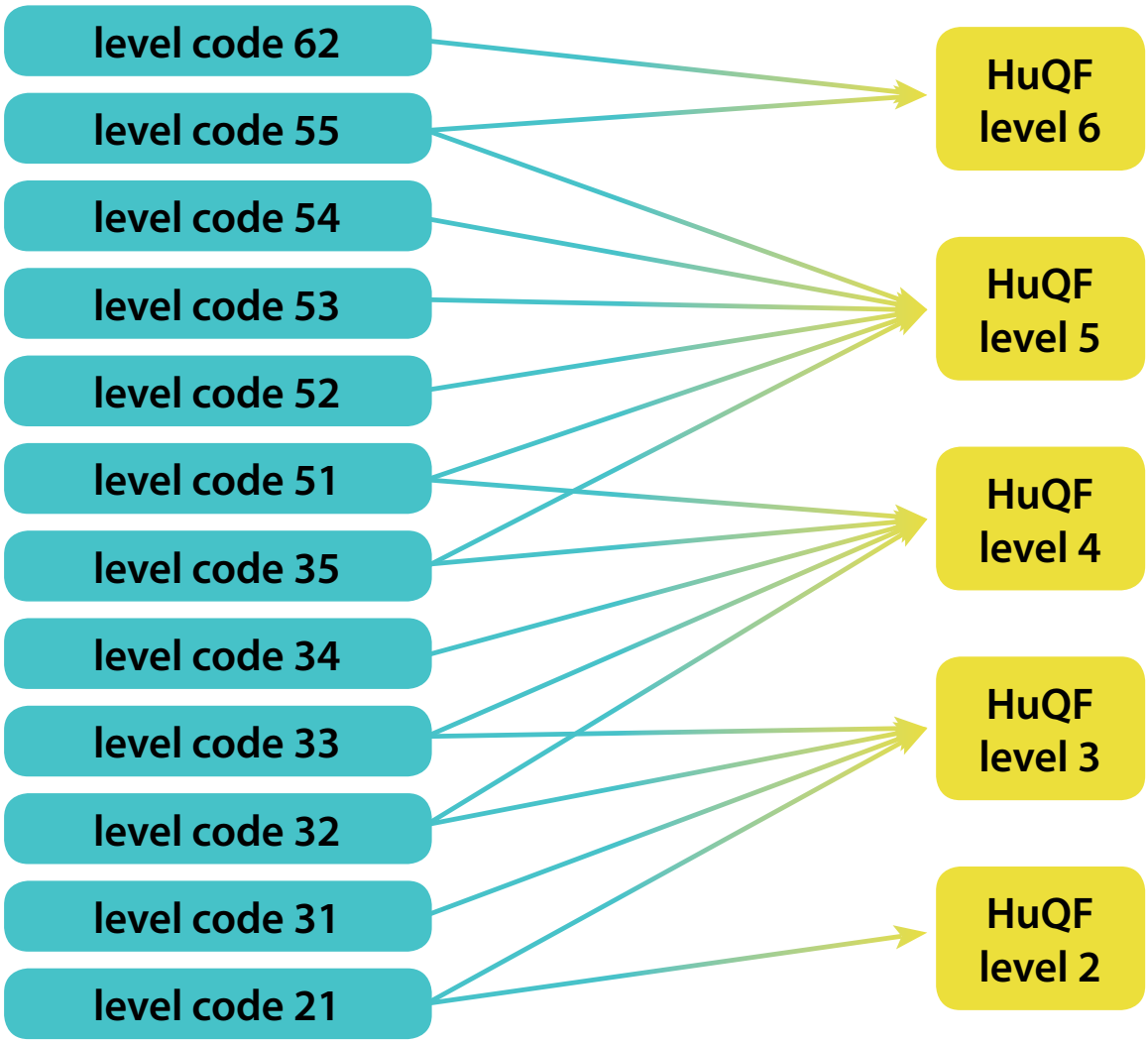
sector (general education, VET, higher education) was compared to the 8 levels of the Qualifications Framework, and preliminary levels were identified for certain qualification groups. Following this, each qualification was linked according to the principles and methodological guidelines established for the sector in the concerned development project. Where contentual differences and/or other practical aspects emerged, linking was corrected accordingly.

In the general education sector, where there are only a few types of training outcomes,[22] linking was carried out in a TÁMOP development project (SROP 3.1.8) by assigned experts. The certificate received at the end of the compulsory 8-grade primary school cannot be actually considered a "qualification" as it gives the foundation for further studies (in other words it prepares, "qualifies" for further school studies).

In VET the qualifications included in the national register (NVQR) are linked (641 pieces), linking was done by assigned experts in the SROP 2.2.1. project. NVQR has an internal levelling, with levels from 21 to 62, identified by (not continuous) numbers, being also different regarding the training input requirements (e.g. the required level of educational attainment or the required qualification). The lowest level is level 21, which provides a primary level partial qualification, and it does not require a completed school attainment. The highest level is level 62, it requires higher education qualification (completed degree program) as an input criterion. In linking, in order to harmonise the work of experts, first test-linking was done, then based on this, a methodological guide indicated the possible/probable/recommended HuQF levels (e.g. level 21 of the NVQR to level 2 of the HuQF, levels 31-33 of the NVQR to level 3 of the HuQF, level 34 of the NVQR to level 4 of the HuQF, etc.). There were qualification levels where the preliminary proposal included two possible (optional) HuQF levels. In other words, it can be stated that before linking each VET qualification, the preliminary linking of an independent hierarchic sub-system was carried out. This linking is shown by Figure 6.2.

[22] In the Hungarian system not only qualifications but some outcomes of formal training provided within the school system were also linked to the Framework. The certificate of completing grade 8 and the secondary school leaving examination shall be considered as real outcomes (though these are not qualifications either). They entitle their holders to continue their studies at a higher school level. At the same time, there are trades in which studies can be started without completing primary general education as well, or where it is enough to certify the completed secondary school grades, i.e. certificate of secondary school leaving examination is not required. Completing 6 grades of the primary school practically does not mean an actually full, certified outcome.

Figure 6.2. The relationship between NVQR and HuQF



For the higher education sector, already at the time of creating the HuQF levels, an agreement was made that the various higher education qualifications will be linked to the HuQF at certain levels (5,6,7,8). This means certain automatisms were used here as well: higher VET (which does not give a higher education degree) is linked to level 5, the Bachelor programme to level 6, the Master programme to level 7, whereas the doctoral programmes to level 8. Following this, again in a development project (SROP 4.1.3) so called "intermediary" levels (i.e. levels between the HuQF level and the concrete qualifications) in the special fields (a "special field framework" similar to the sectoral one) were created by the experts, teachers working in higher education (e.g. broken down by and specified for the technical, legal, agricultural special fields, etc.). Following this, the responsible ministry gave the task to HE actors to reword the educational and outcome requirements (EOR) of the higher education programmes into the form of learning outcomes. This allowed analysing actual correspondence to a level; however, it did not affect the already given level of linking.

This means that linking of the certificates obtainable within the school system does not have yet a separate order of procedure (that is independent of the projects, permanent, institutionalised, and sustainable) in addition to the above. The regulation and governmental separation of the three sectors (general education, VET, HE) remained in this field as well.

Linking of the VPRs of the so-called type B trainings classified as non-formal type (that are non-state recognised but subjected to the Adult Training Act) is required by a legal regulation; however, this task has to be carried out subsequently by the assigned organisation, HCCI. (According to the order of procedure, linking of the VPRs of type "B" trainings shall be the task of the training provider organisation that submitted them and requested registration; however, in the first round, as at that time no unified methodology elaborated in detail was available, the above requirement was removed from the expectations. The job of linking professional program requirements was launched by HCCI in November 2016. Experts found 19 PPRs problematic from the registered and online available 154 trainings; comments were made mostly regarding the gaps in learning outcomes descriptions. In the second round, other experts were also involved and 13 qualifications descriptions have been approved. The professional decision making committee refused the descriptions in 6 cases; these descriptions had to be revised and re-submitted by the submitting institutions in cooperation with the reviewing experts. This round of correction was originally not part of the procedure; however, this form of mutual learning proved to be necessary in practice. The original rules of procedure envisaged a correction round only for formal shortcomings, see Chapter 6.5 under point 8. The professional decision making committee is making a decision on the 6 refused cases at the end of January 2017. After this, the institutions submitting the PPRs have to make a proposal on the EQF/HuQF level on their own.)

The table below lists the qualifications and certifying documents that have been linked and have not been linked yet to the HuQF. The first column of the table names the qualifications (with the original Hungarian names in brackets). The middle column indicates which level the concerned certifying document has been linked to so far. The sometimes detailed remarks in the third column indicate the special conditions related to the concerned qualification, and they include additional information on the issues that emerged related to the linking.

Table 6.3. Training outcomes that have been and have not been linked to the HuQF

QUALIFICATIONS AND SCHOOL OUTCOMES THAT HAVE BEEN LINKED		
School type education	**HuQF level of linking**	**Remarks, questions**
Not completed general education (6 classes)	1	This is not a real outcome (certified by a certificate) but allows entering 6-grade secondary grammar school.
Completed (8 grade) primary general education (Primary school leaving certificates)	2	It gives a certificate required for entering secondary school, and it is an entrance criterion for learning certain trades.
Bridge I and II programme (Partial VET qualification after Vocational Bridge Programme)	2	Special catch-up programme preparing for further studies students who did not get into secondary level education.
Leaving certificates of skills developing special vocational schools	2	
Leaving certificates and VET qualifications of special vocational schools	3	
Secondary school leaving certificates	4	Secondary school leaving certificate is a proof of accomplishment of secondary education and it is required to take a secondary school leaving examination.
Certificate of secondary school leaving examinations	4	Certificate of secondary school leaving examination is partly a prerequisite for entering the tertiary education and for some VET qualifications.
VET qualifications		
Vocational qualifications listed in the NVQR	3, 4, 5, 6	641 vocational qualifications listed in the NVQR
Partial qualifications	2, 3, 4	It qualifies its holder for filling at least one scope of work.
Add-on qualifications	3, 4, 5	Special expertise to supplement an already existing qualification. (E.g. Lumberer – Urban lumberer).
Type B professional non-formal certificates (under the scope of Adult Training Act)	Any level excluding 1 and 8 depending on the entry requirements and learning outcomes	So-called "other vocational trainings" or those registered by the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (HCCI), whose vocational programme requirements (VPRs) have to be accepted in a special procedure.

Qualifications issued in HE		
HE VET qualification	5	Higher education short cycle training programmes that give higher vocational qualification but do not give higher education degree. Despite its name it is not considered as a higher education degree but it can be recognised with the determined number of credit points when entering higher education in the same specialisation.
BA, BSc	6	
MA, MSc	7	
PhD	8	
Postgraduate specialization training certificates (in HE)	6, 7	These 2- or 4-year-long programmes that can be chosen after the BA/BSc or MA/MSc programme do not give a higher level degree. They are practice-oriented specialising trainings, which deepen or broaden the professional knowledge certified by the BA/BSc degree, and they may be the criteria for another job in a workplace. Higher education institutions decide on postgraduate specialization trainings in their own power. (E.g. Lawyer specialized in environment protection, or Drama Teacher)
NON-FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS, CERTIFICATES OR CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION THAT HAVE NOT BEEN LINKED		
School type education	**HuQF level of linking**	**Remarks, questions**
Master craftsman title issued by Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	This is not a qualification but a title	Those already having a qualification can take a master craftsman examination after several years of professional practice, which is organised by HCCI and HCA. Preparation for the examinations is possible individually or in courses. Those who have taken a successful examination can use the title of a master (master joiner, master hairdresser, etc.). The above title certifies professional expertise to the customer and the authorities. Master craftsmen title is not regarded as (but based on) a NVQR qualification.
Qualifications of authority regulated trainings		These programmes are not legally subjected to the Adult Training Act, and they are not included in the NVQR. However, in practice there are some qualifications that cannot be obviously classified.

Type C language training certificate		The programme requirements[23] of language trainings are described in separate documents. As these certify a single competence, their linking to the complex requirements of the qualifications framework would arise several questions.
Type D „other" training programmes' (under the scope of Adult Training Law) - certificates of participation		In this category there are no elaborated programme requrements
Sector/Company certificates accepted internationally (Oracle, Cisco, Microsoft)		It is not identical to the international qualifications as the issued certifying documents are owned by one company.
Other certifying documents issued on the free training market		Although there are legal regulations for possible names of the papers, practically various names are used (degree, diploma, certificate).
Sectoral, international certificates (ECDL certificates)	3 certificates on one another	Despite the fact that this includes a single competence field, several countries linked (after agreement) the different certification levels.

The terms qualification and certificate (and their Hungarian translations) do not seem to be sufficiently precise for the adequate naming of the certifying documents.

Despite the fact that legal regulations arrange for the names and types of the issuable certifying documents,[24] the use in Hungary cannot be considered mature.

According to legal regulation, degree as an official document can only be issued by a higher education institution, after the examinee has successfully taken the required exams. A "certificate" (bizonyítvány) can be issued in general education, after the completion of primary and secondary level education, whereas VET institutions can issue qualifications. NVQR qualifications can also be obtained in a course outside the school system (based on a successful written and practical examination). In the case of courses, different trainings outside the NVQR, "only" a certificate can be issued (except the authority regulated qualifications).[25]

[23] https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=538

[24] The laws regulating the individual sectors of the training system (Act LXXX of 1993 on higher education /as amended many times/, Act XXIX of 2003 on the amendment of Act LXXVI of 1993 on VET, Act LXXIX of 1993 on general education as amended by Act LXVIII of 1999, and Act CI of 2001 on adult training) clearly state what closing document can be issued for each training.

[25] Each sub-field is subjected to independent regulation. Pursuant to the no. 16/2014. (IV. 4.) NGM Decree of the Ministry for National Economy on the requirements of registration and rules of procedure for adult training LPRs, and on the certification of meeting the requirements of language training, the criterion for issuing the certifying document is participation in 80% of the training hours and successful examination.

Presently there is a serious confusion in the training market regarding the names and real status of the issued certificates. Training companies like using impressive names otherwise positively accepted by training participants, which have no legal basis. In most cases the term "degree" and different foreign names such as "certificate" are fashionable.

There are also several problematic elements in the translations from international English language, used in the various documents on this topic (sometimes not only because the translators are not familiar with this topic but due to the fact that the professional terminologies of the target languages are limited, or the features of the concerned system cannot be described by expressions taken over from another language).

Presently there is only one type of non-formal qualification, for the linking of which regulation is in place, and a procedure has been described in detail. The actual linking has been completed by the end of January 2017. The non-formal trainings (outside the school system) regulated by the Adult Training Act, and the qualifications, certifying documents based thereon are of two types.

- The trainings belonging to type A providing state recognised qualifications are identical to the qualifications organised within the school system, and included in the NVQR. The linking of these has already happened in the VET development project (SROP 2.2.1).
- All others as listed by the Act (type B other vocational trainings, type C language trainings, and type D other trainings) can be included in the non-formal type. Presently legal regulation for type B other vocational trainings included in the non-formal vocational trainings, as well as for the training programmes leading to them arranges for their linking to the HuQF by HCCI maintaining their register. The new NVQR 2016 was published in September 2016; after this, the Chamber – in cooperation with experts – started the linking process of 154 professional program requirements. Most of the VPRs (134) have been levelled; the whole process will be finished by the end of January 2017.

Pursuant to Point 6 of Section 2 of the effective Adult Training Act (2013), **other vocational training**: is a training aiming at obtaining a non-state recognised vocational certificate, which aims at acquiring, developing a competence required for filling an occupation, or performing a job or work activity and is **not** an authority regulated training. With reference to the text of the Act, this training form is also called type B training as the texts lists it in point b) out of the four listed training forms, nevertheless, it is also referred to as chamber training as registration is the task of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, or it is also named "small NVQR" as the function of the vocational programme requirements giving a foundation to the trainings is similar to the vocational examination requirements determining the contents of the qualifications included in NVQR. Their function is to establish a unified system of requirements.

Annex 6.2 includes the unified form used for the description of the programme requirements to be submitted. The description of the programme requirements follows the structure of the HuQF descriptors.

The Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has prepared a guide[26] that describes in detail the method of writing the programme requirements (basically following the structure of the standard form).

Ownership

Ownership of the training programmes and qualifications raises several questions.

Non-formal training VPRs are submitted by training providers (companies) to the Chamber for approval. The programmes elaborated by them after their acceptance (already without the indication of the submitting organisation, company) are published on the public web surface of HCCI and so the companies lose their owner status for the concerned programme, i.e. the VPRs become "publicly owned", and other companies have to start their training programmes under the same name according to them. This means the descriptions become texts that can be known and used by anyone the same way as the VERs of state recognised qualifications. However, in the adult training market "it is a dog-eat-dog world out there" as one of our interview subjects said, i.e. the training companies are in sharp competition with one another. If a company develops a new training programme, it may mean temporary market advantages for it; therefore, the company handles the concerned programme as "an industrial secret". (It considerably hindered us from revealing the situation in the interview that companies did not intend to show the detailed descriptions of their most competitive programmes.) Besides, it is also characteristic that many training companies use NVQR descriptions for compiling their own training programmes and they are not interested to make this public. Customers and employees are interested to use cheap and short trainings, in which a "simplified", shortened training only aiming at creating certain skills is more advantageous than fully regulated training programmes.

This situation presently acts as a brake on including otherwise competitive programmes in the group of authorised and registered trainings (that are thus also linked to HuQF).

The present regulation of authorising the vocational programme requirements (VPRs), based on the interviews made by us with training companies, prevents the concerned training companies from flexibly establishing their programmes according to the market demands as if programmes are tailored to customers' needs, it means an amendment that leads to losing the authorised status, or it is considered a new training, which has to undergo the whole authorisation process again. Therefore, several companies do not even try to get the advantages related to the authorisation such as training without VAT, which would also offer market advantages (lower prices). The managers of several training companies said in the interviews that they rather stayed outside the effect of the Adult Training Act, in the so called free training market as they could tailor trainings to customers' needs only this way. In this case a regulation to improve quality (may) conflict the needs

[26] The guide in an electronic file format is available on the website of Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. http://www.mkik.hu/upload/mkik/felnottkepzes/programkovetelmeny_utmutato_vegleges_2016_01_01.pdf

of adaptation to the market and flexibility.

Problems of linking non-formal vocational programme requirements

In summer 2016, with the participation of five experts, we prepared the experimental linking of 13 non-formal programmes, with the particular aim to reveal the typical problems in this field. No programme descriptions were available for the non-regulated adult training market that would have met the profound expectation that the description should be in learning outcomes, and it should follow the structure of the HuQF. Namely, the companies providing non-formal training not regulated by the Adult Training Act do not necessarily prepare a structured programme description, or typically they write a simple thematics, or referring to market interests they do not let anyone have an insight into these „internal" documents. Therefore, we chose type B VPRs that met the above formal requirements. Type B VPRs mean an obligatory framework for the adult training companies if they want to start an authorised training therefore their linking automatically denotes the HuQF level of the training programmes built on them as well.

The project management initiated a discussion with the experts in the chamber responsible for the registration and linking of type B trainings regulated by the Adult Training Act to summarize and share conclusions. The most important statements of the discussion were the following.

Presently descriptions are of a very unbalanced quality. Although from a formal aspect they describe training requirements in learning outcomes, however, in many times the descriptions do not provide enough information for the determination of the adequate HuQF level. For example, they indicate the field of knowledge, but do not include the information for its depth and to identify the context. Sometimes they are too rough, and in the descriptions descriptors are mixed to a great extent, sometimes important competences are missing, or too many competences are described for a very short training.

The presently valid order of procedure (described above) does not allow correcting such problematic elements in the submitted programme requirement, for example correcting the improperly worded learning outcomes as a result of a professional consultation. This would be a more useful solution than rejecting registration or publishing the programmes including a lot of problems. With respect to the importance of this, and considering that the whole HuQF is in the initial phase of introduction, it would be reasonable to amend the order of procedure, and to insert this section to improve quality.

It also emerged in the discussion that the general training political function of type B trainings as regulated non-formal training programmes should be determined. Type B VPRs and training activities regulated by this tool take a kind of intermediary place between state recognised NVQR qualifications and certifying documents obtainable in the free market of adult training. Their regulation can be also characterized by the features of this intermediary nature (transitory category).

VERs used as a regulatory tool in the case of NVQR qualifications were regarded as a sample of regulation. Although type B VPRs describe the outcome characteristics of the training, they do not include uniform expectations for the assessment, which makes the actual quality of the trainings built on the programme requirements intransparent.

The experience gained from the company interviews prepared within the frame of the project also confirms that registered presence in this type of regulated adult training market and undertaking the related administrative burdens (also involving the loss of ownership for the programmes submitted for registration) is not attractive enough for training business enterprises and companies belonging to their clientele. In many cases, in particular among the conditions of the present serious shortage of labour force, employers satisfy their needs for qualified labour force outside the regulated adult training sector, by using their own solutions. This means that they are not interested in linking to the NQF either.

The Hungarian management of ECDL initiated a discussion with the project management as they wanted to use the indication of the HuQF level in the certifying documents issued by them. As there is no elaborated procedure for this, it can be regarded as an individual initiative.

6.5. Procedure of the Inclusion of Qualifications in the NQF

During the development of the HuQF state recognised formal qualifications were included in the framework within the three ESF projects. The inclusion procedures were different and inherent to the separated projects. So far linking has been organised with an experimental nature, and a uniform and compulsory order of procedure for linking has not been stated yet.

Presently for certain types of adult training, there is a single order of procedure, which is for authorising the VPRs of the non-formal, so called type "B" trainings, and linking of the programmes submitted for authorisation means a part of this; therefore, we describe it in detail. Now this order of procedure may serve as a model to be further developed for the subsequent elaboration of linking procedures.

VPRs of the so called type B (non-state recognised, non-formal) trainings regulated by the Adult Training Act can be authorised and registered in a relevant procedure. Their indication by a HuQF level number (i.e. their linking) is a part of preparing the proposal; therefore, this has to be performed by the person submitting the VPR.

Based on the order of procedure, the given vocational programme requirement (VPR) "automatically" becomes "a part of" the HuQF.

Based on the Adult Training Act (2013) and 3 additional related decrees, Educational and Training Directorate of HCCI shall perform the following:

- preparing the VPR proposal for decision making,
- the tasks related to the operation of the vocational Committee entitled to make decisions (consisting of 5 members,[27] normally holding meetings every 3 weeks) (the members are assigned by the Minister), and
- managing the register of programme requirement.

The order of procedure for the registration of adult training VPRs by HCCI is the following. Flow-chart in Annex 6.3 shows the authorisation process and related steps. Linking to the HuQF is a part of this process.

[27] In the decision making committee with five members, three adult training programme experts are delegated by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (HCCI), one member by the Chamber of Agriculture and one member by the Minister corresponding to the trade group in the NVQR of the VPR proposal, and being responsible for the majority of qualifications in the trade group (the members of the Committee delegated by the HCCI and the National Chamber of Agriculture and the President are assigned and released by the Minister).

1. Submitting the proposal

The proposal for the registration of adult training VPR can be submitted in the appropriate format by any legal personality, business association not incorporated, individual company, private enterpreneur. The programme requirement proposal can only be submitted in an electronic format on the website of HCCI.

The system sends an automatically generated message on the arrival of the programme requirement proposal to the person making the proposal.

The programme requirement proposal shall include the following:

a. the name of the VPR and the indication of the trade group in the NVQR which the programme requirement can be linked to, as well as the indication for the determination and linking of the level of the programme requirement according to the Hungarian Qualifications Framework related to the European Qualifications Framework.

b. depending on the nature of vocational qualification, the input competences required for starting the training, prior school attainment and vocational qualification, requirements of health aptitude test, and the required practice,

c. a brief description of the most typical activity/field of work that can be performed/filled with the concerned vocational qualification,

d. depending on the training form, the minimum and maximum number of training hours of the training required for obtaining the vocational qualification,

e. the description of vocational requirements,

f. depending on the nature of vocational qualification, the ratio of the theoretical and practical training time

g. the conditions for issuing the document certifying the obtainment of the vocational qualification.

2. Identification and linking of the VPR proposal

The VPR proposal is provided with continuous registration numbers by HCCI in the order of arrival. The registration number of the VPR proposal includes seven digits. The first five digits is the continuous registration number of the programme requirement proposal, whereas additional two digits are determined by the two last numbers of the year in which the proposal arrived.

3. Preparation of the decision

In order to conduct the procedure for the programme requirement proposal, HCCI uses a programme accreditation expert. HCCI sends the programme requirement proposal to the expert within 5 days from the arrival, in an electronic form, for giving an opinion on it. HCCI selects the expert, with the expert's competences taken into account and the sub-special field, trade group determined, and assigns the expert to perform the concerned task.

The expert can decide free on the acceptance of the request for expert activity, with the following taken into consideration:

- the subject of the assignment exceeds the expert's special knowledge at his/her own discretion,
- the expert cannot perform the task at the expectable professional level, also in compliance with the rules of the relevant order of procedure and legal provisions within the specified deadline,
- the expert considers the assignment incompatible for any other reason.

The expert cannot accept the assignment if

- the assignment is related to an adult training provider which employs the expert or with which the expert is in any other work-related legal relationship, or if the expert is the close relative or relative of the adult training provider's employee, or of the adult training provider's worker who is employed in any other work-related legal relationship.

The expert sends the expert opinion prepared with the content as specified by the given annexes to HCCI within 5 days from the request, with each page verified by the expert's signature, in a printed form, as well as electronically. The expert opinion is prepared by the expert with the relevant legal regulations taken into consideration, as well as based on this order of procedure.

Only the programme accreditation experts can be used as experts for evaluating the programme requirement proposal that have a permit according to the no. 10/2010. (IV. 15.) SZMM Decree of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour on the rules of adult training expert activity.

4. Making the proposal

Based on the expert opinion, HCCI prepares a proposal for the next meeting of the Committee, in a table format, including the following:

- data for identifying the person making the proposal, and the programme requirement,
- date of submitting the proposal,
- name of the expert participating in the study,
- information required for making the decision.

HCCI sends the expert statement for the cases indicated in the proposal to the members of the Committee electronically, as a main rule at least 3 work days before the Committee meeting.

5. Making the decision

The relevant legal regulations put exercising of the decision making power in the scope of activity of the Committee. The Committee makes a decision within 30 days

after the arrival of the VPR proposal. The Committee may lengthen the procedural deadline once, for maximum 30 days. The time from the request for completion to the completion is excluded from the procedural deadline.

HCCI notifies the person making the proposal of the decision made at the Committee meeting within 5 days after the decision has been made, in an electronic form, as well as if the Committee has made a supporting decision, it publishes the programme requirement on the website of HCCI.

The VPR submitted by the person making the proposal can be supported if it includes what is stated by Section 18 (4) of the Adult Training Act as follows:

- the programme requirement proposal has been linked to the most typical trade group according to the NVQR,
- the competence acquired during the training has been linked according to a field of work occupation based on the Hungarian Standard Classification of Occupation (HSCO),
- input requirements for starting the training have been determined, and they are in compliance with the description of vocational requirements,
- the competences required for performing the concerned work activity can be acquired with the planned number of training hours, according to the form of training,
- it determines the criteria for issuing the document certifying the successful completion of the training.

Additional aspects

- the name of the programme requirement proposal meets the requirements for fair information supply, it is not deceptive, and it is suitable for identifying the activity, field of work that is the most typical based on the competences that can be acquired through the training,
- the name of the programme requirement proposal is in compliance with the description of the most typical work activities that can be performed with the vocational certificate,
- the name of the programme requirement proposal helps the employer identify the fields of work that can be the most typically filled with the vocational certificate,
- the name of the programme requirement proposal informs the employee on the content and utilisation of the competence that can be acquired with the vocational certificate,
- the input competences indicated for starting the training only include the criteria that are minimally required for starting the training to acquire the competence attainable with the vocational certificate,

- the description of the most typical work activities that can be performed with the vocational certificate is unambiguously defined, and the competence that can be acquired with the vocational certificate is required for performing the activity or in the field of work,
- the minimum and maximum number of training hours required for obtaining the concerned vocational certificate providing sufficient time for acquiring the competence required for performing the indicated work activity, and the maximum number of training hours does not exceed the double of the minimum number of training hours,
- with the competences attainable through the vocational qualification, the activity/task in the work field can be performed, or it can be performed at a higher level, the description of VPRs include the vocational knowledge, skills describing the vocational competences required for performing the most typical work activities as well as personal competences, social competences and methodological competences,
- the VPR proposal includes a presentation and justification for the social and economic fields where the planned training is needed,
- the ratio of the theoretical and practical training time is adjusted to the nature of the vocational qualification, and it meets the time requirement for acquiring the competence related to the vocational certificate, stated by the training form,
- as two criteria for issuing the document certifying the obtainment of the vocational qualification, participation in seventy percent of the number of training hours stated for the training in the adult training agreement, and the successful completion of the final vocational report (hereinafter referred to as: the report) organised by the adult training institution were identified,
- if the proposal has a modular structure, it includes the minimum and maximum number of training hours, the description of vocational requirements, and the ratio of theoretical and practical training time by modules.

6. Completion, rejection

If the Committee states that the proposal prepared for decision does not comply with the criteria set forth by legal regulation, the person making the proposal is requested to correct deficiencies within a deadline of 10 days.

The Committee rejects the registration of the proposal by specifying the reason if the person making the proposal does not provide the requested data within the specified deadline or the submitted completion is not appropriate, furthermore, the proposal cannot be registered due to the legal regulation.

The VPR proposed by the person is rejected if

- the proposed VPR is considered as an authority regulated training regulated by other legal regulations,

- the proposed VPR is considered a state recognised NVQR training, or higher vocational education and training,
- the name of the submitted VPR proposal is identical or confusingly similar to the VPR included in the registration,
- any of its modules can be found in the government decree on the vocational requirements module of state recognised qualifications,
- in the case of an NVQR qualification, more than forty percent of the vocational competences, in the case of a partial qualification more than sixty percent of the vocational competences can be found in the VPR proposal,
- except for the case when the vocational competence in the proposal is aimed at acquiring the vocational competence of the qualification in the NVQR at a higher level, or at establishing special vocational knowledge and vocational skills (R. Section 2 (5) d)
- more than forty percent of the vocational competences in the higher VET and outcome requirements according to the National Higher Education Act can be found in the VPR proposal (R. Section 2 (5) e)
- more than forty percent of the vocational competences in the competence modules of the master craftsman trainings of HCCI and National Chamber of Agriculture can be found in the programme requirement proposal[28]
- the person making the proposal gives no reaction to the Committee's notification for completion within the given deadline, or the Committee does not accept the requested data.

7. Amendment and revision of the programme requirement

The Committee amends the VPR if

- the amendment proposal aims at Points c)-d) *and* f) of Section 18 (4) of the Adult Training Act (i.e. at the scope of work that can be filled, the number of training hours, or the ratio of practical training) and it is in compliance with the provisions according to Section 2 (1) of the Implementing Decree, without changing the contents of the existing modules, or
- due to a change in the legal regulation, the indication of the trade group according to the NVQR in the ID number of the VPR is changed.

[28] Regulation of HCCI master craftsman trainings: no. 8/2013. (III.6.) NGM Decree of the Ministry for National Economy; no. 47/2014. (X.29) EMMI Decree of the Ministry of Human Capacities; no. 31/1996. (VI.19.) IKM Decree of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce; no. 27/1996. (X.4.) FM Decree of the Ministry of Agriculture; no. 53/2013. (IX.11.) BM Decree of the Ministry of Interior; no. 21/1997. (VI.4.) MKM-IKIM Decree of the Ministry of Culture and Education-Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism. Regulation of National Chamber of Agriculture master craftsman trainings: no. 27/1996. (X.4.) FM Decree of the Ministry of Agriculture; (R. Section 2 (5) f).

- with the use of an adult training programme expert, the Committee revises the VPRs included in the register until 30 November every year, and within 10 days after the revision
- it changes the register in the case as stated by Point *b)* of Section 3 (1) of the Decree,
- it deletes the VPR from the register in the case as stated in Section 3 (3) of the Decree.

8. Objection to the rejection

The person making the proposal may raise an objection against the decision on rejection made by the Committee within 5 working days from the acceptance of the rejection notification, by specifying the reason, in a letter addressed to the Minister for National Economy.

The Minister decides on the objection within 10 days following the response of the Minister entitled to issue a professional stand, and there can be no further objection against this Ministerial decision. If the Minister accepts the objection, HCCI, based on the Minister's notification thereof, includes the adult training VPR in the register.

The objection against the rejection may not be submitted electronically.

9. Registration of VPRs

Based on the supportive decision of the Committee and the Minister for National Economy, HCCI includes the VPRs in the register. The VPR becomes effective for an indefinite time period. The register of VPRs shall include the following:

- the name of the VPR,
- indication of the trade group in the NVQR which the VPR can be linked to,
- indication for the determination and linking of its level according to HuQF,
- input requirements for starting the training (prior school attainment and vocational qualification, health aptitude requirements and the required practice),
- a brief description of the most typical activity/field of work that can be performed/filled with the concerned qualification,
- depending on the training form, the minimum and maximum number of training hours,
- the description of vocational requirements
- the ratio of the theoretical and practical training time
- the conditions for issuing the document certifying the obtainment of the vocational qualification

10. Deletion from the register

Based on the decision of the Committee, HCCI deletes the VPR from the register if

- the VPR is published in the NVQR,
- the VPR has been regulated based on other authority type legal regulation,
- a decision has been made during the revision on deleting the VPR.

HCCI notifies NLO of deleting the VPRs from the register within 5 days.

6.6. Quality Assurance of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Typology of the trainings in the non-formal training sector from the aspect of quality assurance

Based on the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning for the period 2014-2020 and the definitions of the Adult Training Act, those trainings can be considered non-formal trainings which are organised for training purposes, have a curriculum but are provided outside the school system, and do not lead to a state recognised qualification. Regarding non-formal trainings, the Adult Training Act makes a distinction between regulated, supported trainings and "free" market trainings. Only the training types subjected to the Act are referred to as adult training by the law. Training types subjected to the law include other vocational, language and other (general) trainings provided outside the school system, whereas the latter one includes an extremely wide range of trainings and continuing trainings, from sectoral trainings regulated by separate legal regulations to trainings organised on a market basis. It can be considered a general principle that in the group of trainings the state only regulates those for which it takes responsibility regarding their contents or financing (see Figure 6.2 of Chapter 6.4).

In Hungary quality assurance is linked to the training and to the provider and indirectly to the qualifications. Presenting quality assurance of non-formal qualifications requires an approach to describe quality assurance of non-formal trainings. From this perspective non-formal trainings can be divided into 5 main groups from the aspect of quality assurance:

1. Adult training activities based on authorised and determined VPRs, VERs and LPRs

These include trainings in adult training aimed at obtaining NVQR qualifications (type A trainings), other vocational trainings (type B trainings) and language trainings (type C trainings). Regarding the above training types, the law and its Implementing Decrees determine detailed quality assurance standards.

2. Authorised other (general) trainings and supported internal (in-company) continuing trainings

In the case of adult training activities belonging to this type (type D trainings), the state plays a supportive role, and the source of training can be: state budget or EU support, or a training implemented to the debit of the payment obligation of vocational training contribution. In such cases the adult training provider shall have a licence issued according to the Adult Training Act, however, it does not have to prepare a VPR and have it authorised, and it is also exempted from operating the quality management and quality assurance system as determined by the legal

regulation. However, the adult training provider shall provide the trainings based on a training programme complying with the aspects of the Adult Training Act, and conclude an Adult Training Agreement with the adult training participant. The training programme of the organisation providing internal training shall include the following elements in compliance with the Adult Training Act:

- the name of training,
- competences that can be acquired in the training,
- planned training time,
- the definition of the form of training delivery,
- curriculum units, their aims, contents, scope, as well as the number of theoretical training hours and if the curriculum unit includes practical training also the number of practical training hours assigned to the curriculum units,
- the maximum number of people in the group,
- the conditions for issuing a certificate on the training, and the completion of each curriculum unit of the training.

3. Authority regulated and sectoral vocational trainings, in-service training systems determined by legal regulations of the sector

Due to their sector specific nature, the norms and quality assurance of these trainings fall within the regulatory power of the relevant ministries. When authority regulated trainings are implemented, no VPR shall be prepared, and the organisation of trainings is not subjected to an authorisation procedure either. Section 1 (5) of Act LXXVII of 2013 on adult training lists the trainings belonging to this category, which are public service trainings and in-service trainings, sectoral trainings provided based on the Health Act, trainings of the teachers' in-service training and special examination system, course type vocational and compulsory in-service trainings accredited by the Ministry of Culture, and the group of authority regulated vocational trainings and legal and public procurement trainings.

Within the compulsory in-service training system, teachers' trainings have to be accredited separately. The request for establishing a teachers' in-service training can be submitted by any legal personality to Educational Authority. The request for establishment is evaluated by the In-service Teacher Training Accreditation Body (ISTTAB).[29] Compulsory in-service trainings organised for cultural experts shall be also accredited. The requirements of the training system and the financing of training are set forth by no. 1/2000. (I. 14.) Decree of the Ministry of National Cultural Heritage. The Minister shall decide on the accreditation of the vocational compulsory in-service training programme by involving a special committee, within a public administration procedure, by a decision.[30] A compulsory in-service training system is operated for health workers as well. Pursuant to Section 4 (2) of the no. 63/2011. (XI. 29.) NEFMI Decree of the Ministry of Human Capacities on the rules

[29] List of teachers' in-service trainings: http://pedakkred.oh.gov.hu/PedAkkred/Catalogue/CatalogueList.aspx

[30] Register of accreditated vocational in-service training programmes in general education: http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/e/0c/11000/Akkreditalt_kozmuvelodesi_programok_2013.pdf

of in-service training for skilled health workers, the compulsory in-service training according to trade groups of skilled health workers can be organised by medical or health science faculty of higher education institutions, the Health Registration and Training Centre, as well as by health institutions that obtained authorisation through the stated accreditation for providing compulsory in-service trainings according to trade groups and health VET institutions providing training within the school system. The trainings provided pursuant to the no. 273/2012. (IX. 28.) Government[31] Decree on the in-service training of public servants also belong to the system of compulsory in-service trainings. The in-service training of government officials and public servants is the task of the state; the trainings are implemented by the National University of Public Service.

In addition to the above, a compulsory in-service training system is operated in several other professional fields, for example for engineers, certified public accountants, etc.

4. Trainings implemented in programme financing, according to social and economic aims – for catching up or related to public employment provided by state institutions.

The former 9 regional labour market training and retraining centres as adult training state institutions have been operated as the regional offices of Türr István Training and Research Institute since 30 June 2011. Adult training activity provided by them is almost exclusively implemented from an EU or state source therefore the training programmes have to be authorised according to the effective Adult Training Act. Türr István Training and Research Institute as an adult training state institute, providing its trainings subjected to the Adult Training Act, shall meet all regulations of the Adult Training Act as other institutions providing authorised trainings (it shall have its trainings authorised, maintain a quality assurance system, have all the personal and objective conditions as stipulated by the legal regulation, etc.). The elements and standards related to the quality assurance of type D trainings are usually included in the programme financing document or call for applications in the case of an EU fund.

Free market trainings and non-state-funded in-company trainings

Non-funded in-company trainings organised on a market basis are trainings that are not considered an adult training activity according to the Adult Training Act, not subjected to the legal obligations imposed by the Adult Training Act, as well as these trainings do not have to be registered and authorised, and no complicated documentation has to be prepared. This training group includes trainings organised by companies to the debit of their own incomes. Trainings organised by training institutions, having no permit and providing free trainings can be short vocational type trainings (e.g. semi-skilled training, training aimed at developing

[31] List of compulsory in-service trainings according to trade groups: https://szaftex.aeek.hu/szaftex/szaftex/EntKtkListLazy.xhtml;jsessionid=CB6543DC105965ADBEC20FE5C0752495. Professional contents: https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/1271946/tovabbkepzes/kozponti_szakmai_tartalmak.pdf

special vocational competences, refreshing trainings, continuing trainings etc.),[32] language trainings and general competence development trainings (typically trainings) or general trainings related to culture, hobbies, free time or lifestyle. The quality assurance of the trainings is the competence of the training institution, company. Some legal norms also relate to market-based training services that can be free provided, namely Act CLV of 1997 on consumer protection and general legal regulations related to consumer protection (Farkas and Henczi, 2014.).

Change in the quality assurance of non-formal trainings

The Adult Training Act of 2011 introduced three elements from the aspect of quality assurance: the compulsory registration of training institutions, as well as institutional and programme accreditation. An accredited institution shall have a quality management and quality development system approved by the Adult Training Accreditation Body (ATAB). The accreditation of the training programme included analysing the training programme documentation in relation to whether it complies with the content features as stipulated by the law. The previous regulation and quality assurance of non-formal training was often criticised that regulation and market mechanisms could not lead to higher training quality, i.e. adult training institutions competed to offer better prices/number of training hours and not quality. The new regulation (Adult Training Act of 2013) imposes different requirements on the training activity and the adult training institutions, intending to make a distinction according to the aim and content of the training. The original aim of legislation was to strengthen the control with a focus on the profession and content in the control of training process. The stricter authorisation rules and criteria, and the elaborated requirements system for the profession and content were to exclude trainings of poor quality from the group of supported trainings (Bertalan, 2015). At the same time, the authorisation system as well as the professional and contentual control became stricter mainly from an administrative aspect.

Quality assurance of the regulated and supported trainings in the non-formal training sector

Act LXXVII of 2013 on Adult Training (Adult Training Act) and its Implementing Decrees introduced adult training licence instead of adult training accreditation (institution accreditation and programme accreditation). If an institution intends to obtain a licence for providing adult training, it has to introduce and operate a quality assurance system. According to the regulation of the quality assurance of

[32] Most of these trainings cannot be authorised according to the presently effective Adult Training Act. These trainings do not comply with the regulation according to the no. 59/2013. (XII. 13.) NGM Decree of the Ministry for National Economy on the VPR therefore no VPR can be elaborated for them and they cannot belong to other vocational training, i.e. cannot be authorised among type „B" trainings. At the same time as they include vocational competences they cannot be authorised among other trainings belonging to type D either.

trainings, training activity is considered to be a learning process implemented in an organised and purposeful method, which does not become separated from the outcome of training and learning therefore observing the quality standards and procedures aimed at the training process elements becomes a guarantee for the quality of training. In the sense of the above approach with a focus on regulation, a learning outcome can only be produced by "some formalized" activity therefore quality assurance is also aimed at the above process elements instead of the learning outcome, "qualification". Administrative and rigid over-regulation of the process elements in quality assurance (see later in detail) in many cases may become an obstacle to using more flexible learning forms, as well as various and varying learning methods and conditions. The concepts used in regulation are often confusing from a pedagogical aspect. The authorisation procedure used as a part of quality assurance is in many cases dysfunctional and far from practice in several elements from the aspect of implementing the training activity. The quality assurance system is less suitable for functioning as a regulation system for content. From the interviews made with the representatives of training institutions and training business enterprises and based on the practical implementation of the law, a pronounced opinion[33] was outlined that the regulation for the privatisation of adult training, with a legal system that cannot be complied with and far from practice, as well as constant fear from control and penalties do not improve training quality but leads to only formal and documented "compliance" with the requirements.

Below the quality assurance of the trainings in the non-formal training sector is described only for the training types affected by the regulation.

Quality assurance of non-formal (adult) trainings provided based on authorised VPRs

Pursuant to the law, adult training activity may only be provided with an official licence. Criteria of providing adult training are divided into two groups by the law:

a. criteria system required for obtaining the licence,

b. criteria system required for operation.

Though the above two criteria systems though can be separated in their elements, at the same time they are closely linked and built on each other. An adult training licence can be granted only to the organisation that has:

- elaborated VPR and/or LPR for the trainings and training programme, except for the institutions providing other, type "D" trainings,
- the personal and material conditions required for implementing the trainings,
- a quality assurance system according to the legal regulation,
- the conditions required for operating the Adult Training Information System,

[33] Also related to the Country Report, the Educational Authority conducted an empirical research, and within its frames several structured deep interviews were carried out, among others with adult training institutions and training business enterprises.

- the conditions required for operating a customer service and complaint management system,
- it determines quantifiable quality aims and indicators that can be checked from the aspect of content,
- it proves having the determined financial guarantee (Farkas – Henczi, 2014).

Criteria system required for obtaining the licence

The phases of authorisation are the following: preparing the request, documenting and certifying the annexes of the announcement, inspection by the Expert Committee and on-site visit, decision on issuing the licence and including in the register. HCCI maintains an electronic register of training institutions having a licence.

Vocational requirements

In trainings belonging to types A, B and C a permit can be obtained for only those trainings whose training programmes were prepared based on the relevant vocational or language programme requirement.

Introducing and using VPRs and LPRs is a new element in the regulation of adult training. In the case of other vocational trainings and language trainings (type B and C trainings) the preparation of the training programme was converted into a two-phase process. Regarding other vocational trainings, the basis of the training programme is determined by the VPR (vocational programme requirement), whereas in the case of language trainings, it is defined by the LPR (language programme requirement). VPR is approved and included in the register by the Programme Committee of HCCI. VPR becomes public after the inclusion in the register, and if anyone intends to start a training according to the VPR, they have to do this according to the requirements in the VPR. A VPR proposal can be submitted by any legal person (training institution, employer, professional organisation, etc.) to HCCI, it is of no importance who submitted the VPR, the concerned person has no "ownership" for it. The aim of VPR is that trainings in the other vocational trainings group can be implemented based on a uniform requirements system. By doing so the legislator wanted to avoid authorising several hundred or thousand training programmes under different names and with different numbers of training hours for trainings with identical or very similar contents. The Programme Committee of HCCI does not include another VPR in the register under the same name and with similar content. If anyone intends to start other vocational programme, first they shall check whether there is a registered VPR. If there is one, they shall elaborate their own training programme based on that, and have it authorised. If there is no such VPR, first they have to elaborate the VPR and submit it to HCCI.

So in the case of other vocational trainings the training programme consists of two phases. First the VPR has to be elaborated and registered by HCCI then based on that the training programme has to be elaborated and authorised by NOVETAL. VPRs state the contentual requirements imposed on training participants, as well as they determine the learning outcomes that have to be achieved by training

participants by the end of the training, and based on which the training participant is entitled to obtain a certifying document certifying a vocational qualification. VPRs have to be worded in the context of the HuQF level descriptors. Pursuant to Section 18 (7) of the Adult Training Act, linking the programme requirement to the HuQF levels is performed by HCCI based on the recommendation for linking provided by the person preparing the programme requirement. Presently the programme requirements do not have to include the linking of VPRs to the HuQF levels. The no. (59/2013. (XII. 13.) NGM Decree of the Ministry for National Economy sets forth the contentual and procedural protocol of the preparation of the programme requirement. The programme requirement template (procedure described in Chapter 6.5 and the form included in Annex 6.2) is available on the website of HCCI, and HCCI examines the compliance of the submitted request with the expectations for the programme requirements as included in the regulation.

The training programme has to be elaborated according to the VPRs or LPRs included in the register. HCCI publishes a document template on its website for the preparation of the training programme. This means that training programme remains the central element of the adult training activity, which is the only professional regulatory/prescriptive document that provides a basis for the concrete implementation of the of the training activity, and records the information for the content and organisation of a training. The preliminary assessment of the training programme may be performed by an adult training expert or adult training programme expert who is included in the recommendation list maintained by NOVETAL.[34] After the training programme requirements have been successfully fulfilled, the training participant receives a certifying document with the content as stated by the legal regulation. The contentual and formal elements of the certifying document certifying the obtainment of a vocational qualification are included in Annex 1 of the no. 59/2013. (XII. 13.) NGM Decree of the Ministry for National Economy. (Farkas, 2016.)

Criteria system related to operation

The regulation (no. 58/2013. (XII. 13.) NGM Decree of the Ministry for National Economy) stipulates the compulsory, standard elements of the quality management and quality assurance system. The institutions are free to decide whether to establish their own quality assurance system in compliance with the approved quality assurance framework, or to choose one of the accepted frameworks and adapt the standards to their own organisations. Frameworks are not elaborated by the authority but it expects recommendations for this from organisations with experience in quality assurance. Such request can be submitted by the creator, owner of any quality assurance system. The Minister responsible for the vocational qualification decides on the framework according to the standards based on the opinion and proposal of ATEC.

[34] The recommendation list is avalable on the website of NIVE: https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=476. Expert activity is regulated by the no. 14/2014. (III. 31.) NGM Decree of the Ministry for National Economy on the detailed rules of adult training expert and adult training programme expert activity.

The quality management and quality assurance system of the institution also covers the overall institutional regulation of operation-related activities, and based on PDCA logic – plan, do, check, act – the regulation of change management tasks. The standards of the quality assurance system include the following elements:

- overall institutional quality policy and the related strategy for the quality assurance of the training activities,
- regulated and documented internal mechanisms for the approval of starting, monitoring and regular internal assessment of the training programmes,
- management of change, procedures for handling problems that emerge during operation,
- self-assessment for the activity of the institution,
- procedures for providing permanent continuing training and qualifying of trainers,
- providing the resources required for the implementation of the training programme,
- ensuring the collection, analysis and use of the information to provide the efficiency of training activities:
  - collecting and analysing the data related to training participants' learning outcomes,
  - collecting and analysing the data related to training participants' satisfaction assessment,
  - collecting and analysing the data related to trainer's performance,
  - collecting and analysing the data related to the labour market use of the competences acquired through the trainings,
- according to transparency requirements, publishing the quantitative and qualitative information related to the training activity.

The majority of adult training institutions already obtained institutional accreditation qualification before the introduction of the new regulation, and several institutions have some certified (e.g. ISO, EFQM, TQM) quality management system. The institutions with such systems have to adapt their own systems to the expectations of the quality assurance frameworks (Farkas – Henczi, 2014).

The process of quality assurance

HCCI as a public body has decisive powers and in certain cases exclusive decision making competences in relation to non-formal trainings (see Chapter 6.3 in detail). HCCI gives the submitted VPR to an external expert for assessment then Adult Training Expert Committee (ATEC) with five members decides whether the proposal complies with legal regulations and can be included in the register.

Members of the expert committee are recommended by ATEC. For the assessment of the content and internal coherence of training programmes, the training programme elaborated by the institution has to be qualified in advance by an adult

training expert or an adult training programme expert. In this the expert examines whether:

a. the content of the training programme meets the legal requirements,

b. the competences stated in the programme can be acquired by the target group of the training with the content, criteria and in the method as stated by the training programme,

c. the training programme complies with the requirements in the relevant vocational or language programme requirements,

The expert has to prepare a written expert opinion that has to be provided to the adult training institution ordering the preliminary assessment of the training programme. (Farkas, 2016.)

Monitoring and checking the quality of training

Determination of quality features (indicators)

As a part of its quality assurance system, the training institution shall define indicators (e.g. for planning and contentual revising of the training programmes and curricula, the success of training, drop-out, or self-assessment). During the interviews, the managers of two big training business enterprises noted that the expected quality indicator system needed too much administration to be done by the training business enterprises, e.g. if target values assigned to the quality features are not achieved, the adult training institution has to reveal the reasons, make a plan for solving the problems, which reduces the flexibility of training.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment required as a part of the quality assurance system is a regular activity, which is performed by the training institution with a specified frequency. Self-assessment is carried out by the training institution according to the processes and indicators stated as a part of the quality assurance system.

Self-assessment has to be prepared in the form of a self-assessment report, which means the basis of external assessment carried out by ATEC.

External assessment

The institution shall have an external assessment prepared for the activity of the institution at least once every four years. An external assessment can only be prepared by a legal person whose quality assurance system submitted to the authority has complied with the criteria for the quality assurance framework, and its applicability has been approved by the relevant Minister. As a result of the external assessment, an action plan has to be prepared, which includes the recommendations for the current tasks that promote the greatest possible convergence between the strategic efforts and quality aims of the institution and the objective and factual indicators of institutional operation. The institution shall

publish the assessment and the recommended actions on its website, or in the lack of the above, in a way that is locally common.

The quality assurance system from the aspect of training institutions and stakeholders

The VPR system is a completely new element of the regulation of adult training, and it was introduced about 3 years ago. The aim of introducing the VPRs was to establish a uniform requirements system for non-state recognised other vocational trainings, and thus to achieve a higher labour market prestige for other vocational trainings. However, the efforts made for increasing their labour market prestige cannot be successful as compliance with the labour market is not implemented regarding the VPRs from a quality assurance aspect. The typical procedure is the following: a training institution elaborates a VPR, which is evaluated by the Programme Committee of HCCI whether it meets the improperly regulated requirements system, and the labour market demands. Nevertheless, VPRs are not validated by anyone (e.g. an employer's or professional organisation, etc.) thus no quality assurance element is implemented in the process, and the credibility of vocational requirements can be questioned from the aspect of labour market. The VPR system should be implemented from the aspect of the employer and employment. Therefore, it is reasonable that the persons making the proposals should be employers, employer's organisations, professional organisations, or adult training institutions supported by the above. The assessment closing the training is not explained in the VPR, this is a competence of the training institution although a uniform assessment system should be a criterion for a uniform requirements system.

According to the opinions of the training institutions and the stakeholders involved in the research the quality assurance system is over-regulated, similar to when a production plant has to describe its quality standards. Standards and process descriptions have nothing to do with the quality of the actual training. The quality assurance approach regulates the process itself but it does not provide the quality of learning outcome. The opinions were consonant regarding that quality assurance in its present form means excessive administrative work, whose documentation is a great burden for the training institutions. Setting quality aims practically creates absurd situations such as: quality aims (e.g.: the average study results of the group taking an examination) have to be set for the trainings when the trainings are not started yet. As a part of the quality assurance system, quality aims have to be set for such fields as well that training institutions cannot or can only slightly influence. Regulation is not flexible, changes can be only implemented in long amendment processes. Opinions were definitely not against regulation, they only emphasized that the above quality assurance system is only suitable for the administrative exercising of state control but it is not proper for implementing the quality of trainings.

6.7. Costs of Including Non-formal Sector Qualifications in the NQF

This chapter deals with the costs of NVQR qualifications obtainable in type A non-formal training, and certificates obtainable in type B vocational trainings.

Costs distribution of non-formal training and obtaining a qualification (general financing features)

Pursuant to (Point 26 Section 2 and Section 23 (1) of) the Adult Training Act those trainings are considered supported trainings that are partly or completely implemented to the debit of state budget sources (also including the EU sources and vocational training contribution). Based on Section 23 of the Adult Training Act, the support sources of adult training are: the state budget[35] as well as the part of the vocational training contribution that can be recognised for those entitled thereto, and for the training of own employees.[36] Financing of non-formal training happens through several channels, in addition to the state supports of adult training, the contributions of employers and individuals are determinant in the financing of trainings.

Studying the cost-bearing participants of non-formal training shows that while state sources were constantly decreasing from 2009, training costs of half of participants in adult training were paid by the employers until 2012 (it was 52% in 2011 and 47% in 2012). Employers trained employees mainly to the debit of their revenues (it was 33% in 2011 and 45% in 2012), secondly, they spent the part of their vocational training contribution obligation that can be used for their own employees for training (it was 19% in 2011 and 2% in 2012). The second greatest financing factor in adult training is the individual itself (it was 24% in 2011 and 28% in 2012). In 2013 training participants' costs were financed equally by EU sources and by the individuals themselves (in 30-30%). In 2013 the number of trainings with EU financing and participants in them considerably increased. State sources remained insignificant in the last years, they tended to stagnate at about 3% (*Farkas, 2016*).

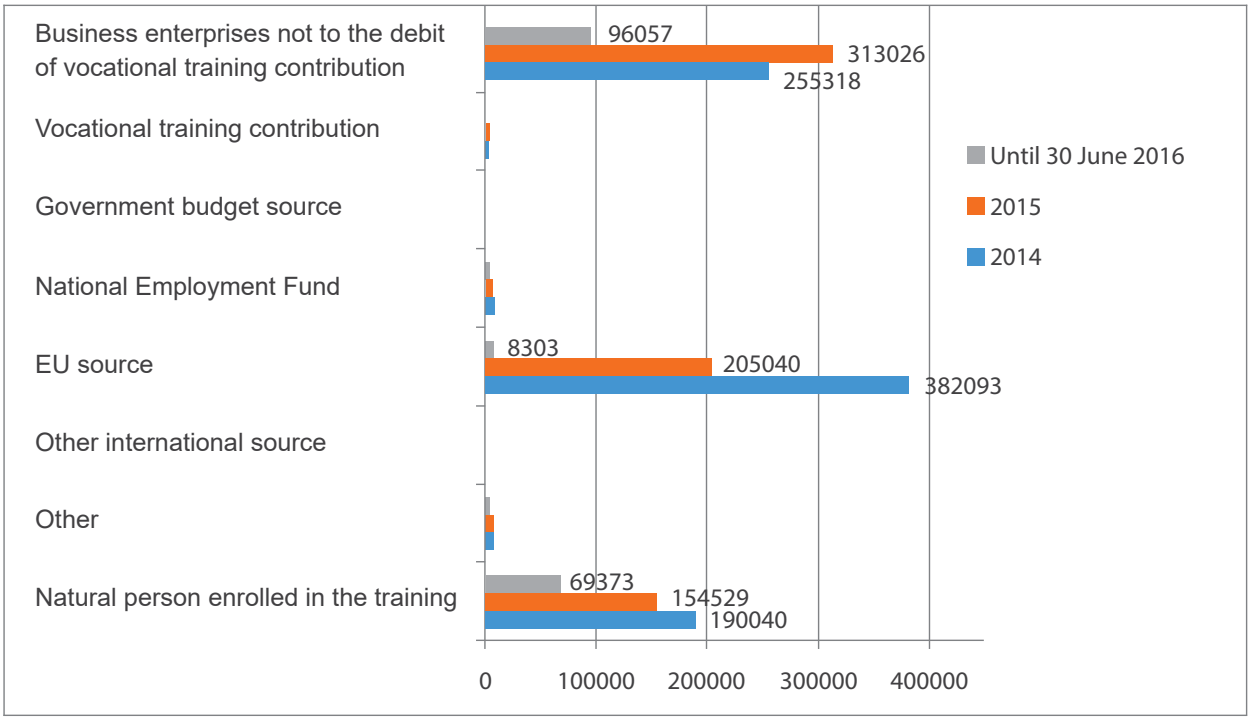
By 2014 the financing structure of adult training changed to a great extent. The ratio of adults participating in training financed by EU sources continued growing (44.4%). The second greatest financing factor was the employer (30%) and also individuals had a considerable part in financing the trainings (22%). The number of

[35] The money from EU sources that the government can influence, e.g. the sources for SROP, EDIOP, HRDOP programmes are also considered as state budget sources. Direct financing from Brussles (e.g. Erasmus+ programmes) do not belong to the support sources of adult training therefore these training programmes do not have to be authorised according to the regulations of the Adult Training Act.

[36] The (gross) amount of vocational training contribution remained 1.5% of the health insurance and labour market contribution base. However, the training costs of own employees can be recognised by only those companies obliged to pay vocational training contribution that provide the practical training of minimum 45 students with student agreement monthly. Usability became half of the former one from 2012, i.e. 16.5% of the gross obligation amount (Section 5 of Act CLV of 2011).

those participating in trainings implemented to the debit of the vocational training contribution, the National Employment Fund and the government budget sources is insignificant (Graph 2). By 2015 EU sources had been used up due to which ratios changed. Business enterprises became the most important financing factor (41%), while 27% of training participants studied to the debit of EU sources, and 20% was the ratio of individual financing (Figure 6.3) (Farkas, 2016).

Figure 6.3. Distribution of participation in adult training by financing types (persons)



Source: National Statistical Data Collection Programme, cited from: Éva Farkas, 2016, page 40

Typically, trainings implemented to the debit of the EU, the budget source and the vocational training contribution are authorised trainings. In the case of trainings financed by companies, one third of participants took part in authorised trainings.

Costs of linking NVQR qualifications obtainable in non-formal training to framework levels

In the case of NVQR qualifications,[37] the basis of the training programme is the VER issued by the responsible Minister in a decree, as well as the no. 217/2012. (VIII. 9.) Government Decree including the task and competence profiles of the modules of requirements. If the training can be started within the school system, the regulations of the vocational training framework curriculum for the concerned qualification shall also be taken into consideration during the elaboration of the training programme.

[37] The NVQR as modified by the no. 25/2016. (II.25.) Government Decree already includes NVQR qualifications linked to the HuQF levels. NVQR qualifications were linked between level 2 and level 6. From September 2016 certificates can include the HuQF/EQF level of the concerned qualification.

NVQR qualifications are state recognised qualifications, which are linked to the HuQF levels together with the elaboration or analysis of the VER of the NVQR qualification. The process of creating and modifying the qualifications is regulated by the VET Act and the no. 25/2016. (II. 25.) Government Decree on the NVQR and the order of procedure of modifying the NVQR. Pursuant to the Act (Section 80 of VET Act), NQC is a professional body to make proposals and give opinions for the continuous development and modernization of the content structure of VET. NQC is to continuously monitor the development of the VET structure, the economic, labour-market, technical-technological processes, and based on the above it can make proposals for modifying the NVQR in compliance with the government decree on the order of modifying the NVQR.[38] The Minister responsible for the qualification determines the VERs of the qualification for the qualifications included in the sector. The decision on the list of qualifications and together with this on the proposal for linking to the framework levels is made by the Government through a decree.

As the modification and creation of state recognised qualifications is the task of the state, the costs of linking the qualifications to the framework levels shall be borne by the state budget.

Linking the NVQR qualifications to the HuQF levels was carried out between 2012 and 2015 by the Government to the debit of the SROP 2.2.1 programme financed from the European Social Fund (ESF). During the development of the HuQF, all state recognised NVQRs (462 pieces) were linked. Linking happened within the frame of a research-development project. The total expert cost of linking was[39]: EUR 418,548 (HUF 129,750,000).

Within the project the following qualifications were linked:

NVQR Qualification	489
NVQR Partialqualification	152
Mastertitle (HCCI)	74
Mastertitle (National Chamber of Agriculture)	24
SVME (vocational maturity examination requirements within and outside the sector)	38
Authority regulated qualification	23

Due to the logic of the development project, no conclusion can be drawn from the above costs for the real costs of linking a qualification and the time spent thereon. When qualifications were first linked to the framework, several development tasks emerged that will not mean any cost later. In the project 800 qualifications were linked; therefore, a great number of descriptions corresponding to the HuQF

[38] NQC consists of thirty members, i.e. the Minister responsible for VET and adult training, the Minister responsible for education, the Chamber of Economy, the national organisations for the representation of economic interests, as well as the representatives delegated by the professional chambers interested in the whole sector. NQC establishes sub-committees by trade groups. The operation of NQC is provided by the VET and adult training body of the state.

[39] EUR 1 = HUF 310

descriptors had to be prepared and validated. Validation was performed by an expert from the employer and employee side so that labour market feedback and expectations can be also integrated in the determination of levels.

One expert worked on one qualification 2-4 expert's days depending on its complexity. Besides, within the trade groups of the qualifications; there was an expert coordinator, who coordinated the experts and harmonised the descriptions mainly when qualifications had several overlapping modules.[40]

Costs of linking certificates obtainable in type B non-formal training to framework levels

Based on Section 18 (7) of the Adult Training Act, linking VPRs to HuQF levels is the task of HCCI.

Based on the linking by trade groups according to the NVQR, HCCI links the vocational qualifications to trade groups with an ID, as well as determines and links the VPRs to the levels of the HuQF related to the EQF (Farkas – Rettegi, 2016). HCCI started linking the VPRs to the framework levels at the end of 2016, information on costs calculation is not available presently. HCCI can finance the expert costs of linking from two sources: (1.) on the one hand, for performing its adult training tasks as stated by the legal regulation, HCCI receives the support to the debit of the state budget of the training fund part of National Employment Fund based on an agreement concluded with NOVETAL;[41] and as linking is a basic task of the Chamber, this source can provide the costs of linking (2.) on the other hand, the administrative service fees related to the authorisation procedures of the adult training activity can also constitute the cover for linking costs. At the same time, linking costs do not appear explicitly in the composition of the costs emerging on the service provider side (see Table 6.3).

Adult training activity is bound to an official licence. In order to start the training after the obtainment of the licence, as required by the relevant ministerial decree, a programme requirement, or if there is no registered programme requirement, for the concerned other vocational training a training programme has to be prepared and authorised. The authorisation procedure is subjected to a fee. The issuance, modification or supplementation of the licence for providing adult training is also subjected to a fee.

The training institution shall pay an **administrative service fee** as stated on submitting the request or announcement, and the basic fee shall be paid every time when a modification or supplementation happens.

The extent of the administrative service fee to be paid in the authorisation procedure for providing adult training activity, and the rules of use, as well as the order of payment of the penalties imposed during the control of adult training institutions

[40] Lecture given at closing conference of the SROP 2.2.1. project.

[41] No. 16/2016. (V. 27.) NGM Decree of the Ministry for National Economy on the detailed rules of supports grantable from the National Employment Fund training fund part for certain VET and adult training purposes.

are set forth by the no. 56/2013. (XII. 4.) NGM Decree of the Ministry for National Economy. The fees in the decree are differentiated according to the training type to which the request relates to, whether it is for issuing, modifying or supplementing a licence, and the number of trainings the requester intends to provide.

Table 6.4. Costs of the authorisation procedures of adult training activity and providing adult training activity[42]

Cost types and activities	Fees and costs	Fees charged to the training institutions or business enterprises
Issuing (first time) and modifying an official licence	For NVQR training, type B other vocational trainings: a basic fee of EUR 322 + EUR 219 per training programme.	+
Preparing an official licence with request	A basic fee of EUR 203 + EUR 219 per training programme.	+
Supplementing an official licence with announcement	EUR 39 per training type	+
Preliminary evaluation of the training programme by an expert	Maximum EUR 193 per training programme	+
Including a VPR in the register and the registration of a training institution	Free – However, the announcement of any change in the data of the training institution holding a licence and included in the register involves a fee of EUR 18 per announcement.	+
Financial guarantee	2% of the actual net revenue from selling adult trainings in the year preceding the concerned business year, but minimum of EUR 1613. In the case of a state budget institution no financial guarantee is needed.	+
Revision of the quality assurance system by an external expert every 4 years[40]	As stated by the announcement of the Minister for National Economy yearly	+
The establishment and operation of quality assurance system	Varies by adult training institutions	+
Official external inspection every two years[41]	Performed by a regional government office to the debit of the state budget	

Source: Based on Act LXVII of 2013 and the no. 56/2013 (XII.4.) NGM Decree of the Ministry for National Economy, edited by Éva Farkas and Lajos Henczi

[42] EUR 1 = HUF 310

Adult training institutions need considerable financial means to perform their activities. Standard costs (administrative fees of permit, preliminary qualification, programme requirement, financial guarantee and external evaluation) affect all adult training institutions operated under the effect of the law. Changing costs (quality assurance, personal – objective conditions, preliminary assessment of knowledge, and considerable administration) depend on the organisational structure, business policy and capital intensity of the adult training institution.

[43] In the case of adult training permits issued before 30 June 2014, due to the prolongation of the decision on the legal personalities to perform external evaluation, the authority examines from 01 July 2016 whether the adult training institution has had the external evaluation performed as stipulated by the legal regulation.In the sense of the above, in the first quarter of 2016 those institutions should have the external evaluation performed that received their permit before 30 June 2014 so that external evaluation can be made before the official inspection being compulsory every two years, which would help preparation therefore.

[44] As of 18 June 2016 adult training institutions holding a licence are not inspected during their external official control related to the external evaluation of their quality assurance system.

6.8. Current Debate on Further Developments

State recognised vocational qualifications, higher education qualifications and primary and secondary educational attainment were linked to the HuQF as a part of the ESF SROP project to support the implementation of the development process. During the project periods an intensive professional discussion was conducted between the experts, and within the projects mainly recommendations, ideas or criticism was expressed, which have not been channelled into decision-making yet. With the projects closed, the above impetus disappeared, and with the referencing report accepted, the external compulsion for EU conformity generating the professional debates on the framework also vanished.

In the SROP project, experts expressed their opinions on the institutionalisation of operating the HuQF. According to experts' opinion, the establishment of a Hungarian Qualifications Board (HQB) and its Secretariat dealing with linking of old and new qualifications and maintaining the framework, updating databases, and performing international tasks is essential for the operation of the HuQF. The above coordinating and supervising body was to perform expert's, coordination and supervisory-monitoring tasks. Recommendations for linking each qualification were to be made by the HQB Secretariat for confirmation by the HQB, whereas codification tasks emerging from linking were to be initiated by the Deputy State Secretary relevant in the special field. An important prospective task of HQB is to elaborate, fill and maintain a national qualifications register, and to strengthen the learning outcomes approach: preparation for using and linking learning outcomes, organisation of trainings, and preparation of methodologies. In addition to the experts' opinion, it is an opinion preferred by the policy as well that according to the sectoral regulation, the operation and current tasks of the framework (development, linking, quality assurance, etc.) should be provided and performed according to the own internal system of responsibilities and mechanisms of each education and training sector.

Following linking, so far no regulation for the maintenance and operation of the HuQF has been adopted to provide the regulatory, institutional and financial background of the function of HuQF legitimated by the government. Considering the future of the HuQF, there is no vision and strategy decided by the government either regarding what schedule, methodology and development frame should be used for further development of the HuQF, and what this should cover. In this chapter the dilemmas and ideas that emerged within certain expert groups and consultations are introduced in the first place, and not those expressed by the policy makers.

Policy aims and future of the HuQF

The proposals of the government for further development of the HuQF included the following aims of the qualification framework among others:

- Contributing to the creation of a more unified qualification's system by bringing closer of the qualifications regulations in the different sub-sectors of

education and training, strengthening the outcome nature of qualifications' regulations, and thus helping their harmonisation,

- Including the non-formal sector qualifications and the qualifications issued in the formal sector in a common, uniform frame, and thus promoting the transparency and understandability of the relations among the qualifications;
- Strengthening the quality assurance systems of education and training, and supporting the creation of a harmony between them,
- Recognising learning outcomes achieved within non-formal and informal learning,
- Strengthening policy coordination within the education and training system, and the cooperation with the social partners,
- Achieving a more efficient orientation of establishing new qualifications, revising already existing qualifications, as well as planning and elaborating educational and training programmes content,
- Supporting a more successful operation of the systems for the individual's career choice, lifelong guidance and consultation services,
- Providing systemized information on the qualifications interpretable even in a european context to all employers,
- Strengthening educational and training services in the labour market.

Almost nothing seems to have been implemented from the above ambitious targets. Sectoral separation remained strong regarding the qualification systems and their regulations, there is no uniform methodology for linking to the HuQF, and the authorities responsible for the qualifications perform their linking in their own institution system, in compliance with their order of procedure, regulation standards, quality assurance framework, only relying on the compulsory consultation within the state administrative conciliation procedure. Due to the lack of regulation for the introduction of the framework, the effect of the HuQF on the outcome regulations and their standards is insignificant. At the same time, it should be emphasized that in the past five-eight years, as a result of SROP development projects, although not masses but more and more people understand the outcome-based approach, and its tool, i.e. the use of learning outcomes in the descriptions of requirements.

The HuQF is mainly a metaframe due to its abstraction level and the general nature of descriptors, which could only help the inclusion of the qualifications issued in the different education and training sectors into the uniform frame with different guidelines and sectoral, sub-sectoral descriptions that could also improve the transparency and understandability of the relations among the qualifications. A professional and stakeholders' debate would be needed on the framework, during which level descriptors that are more detailed and more precise, and give better reflections on the sector-specific features of the qualifications could be elaborated. The more precise and more detailed level descriptors prepared in SROP 4.1.3 project for levels 5, 6, 7, 8 of the framework taking the study fields of higher education into consideration are a good example of this. Without this, the framework cannot provide a more successful orientation of the establishment of qualifications, the

revision of already existing qualifications, and the planning and elaboration of educational and training programmes.

In expert discussions, the policy coordinating and system building function of the HuQF emerges several times, which is referred to in the government proposals in an implicit way when the policy functions of the framework is listed. At the same time, no regulation gives such a definite task to the framework, and the institutionalisation of the framework is missing from the regulation. Presently, in the legal sense the framework is still in a project status. A responsible organisation/body should be established so that tasks can have system level ownership, who would approve and comment linking to levels at the same time as well. This organisation/body should be responsible for the quality assurance of the framework and it should protect the accreditation of linking (when new qualifications are linked), as well as perform the professional, coordinating, communication and knowledge-sharing tasks related to the further development and efficient use of the HuQF.

During the national professional conference to introduce the HuQF[45] experts agreed that the HuQF on the one hand was a tool for creating transparency at a European level, which is served by the HuQF and EQF levels' number in the certificates and qualifications, at the same time it was a very abstract tool, which could be used for different development aims, and if it was used and filled with content, it could start working as a common tool of the actors and stakeholders in education, training and labour market, and as a result of their cooperation. Experts emphasized that the framework could comply with the above aim only if a quality assurance system was linked to it and learning outcome-based training description was really prepared during implementation in each educational sub-sector then in non-formal training as well. In any other case it simply means an additional administrative burden but it will not be put into use. In experts' opinion the HuQF can serve the following indirect aims:

- HuQF as a communication tool can be a catalyser of the conscious, coordinated and long-term developments of the Hungarian education and training sector.
- It can serve the quality development of the Hungarian education and training system.
- It can be a tool for bringing labour market demand and training supply closer to each other by comparing training contents and aims to labour market competences through the learning outcomes.
- It can have an effect on the spreading of student-centred pedagogical culture, whose basic elements are:
  - preliminary communication of the expected results;
  - coherence between the training aims, contents, chosen methods, ways of evaluation and the preliminarily stated learning outcomes;
  - operating an educational culture and system that endeavours for equity.
- Flexible training paths, permeability, supporting individual learning and career, establishing related services, recognising prior learning.

[45] A conference implemented in April 2015 organised jointly by EA and Tempus Public Foundation.

In the 2014-2020 financial period of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), the preparation of a framework strategy for lifelong learning (LLL) by the government is stipulated by the European Union regulation[46] as an ex-ante criterion for using the support of the ESF. The national framework strategy of the government for the policy of lifelong learning[47] calls for the further development of the HuQF as one field of intervention. It emphasizes that *"non-formal sector qualifications need to be placed within the scope of the framework, the framework needs to be connected to the validation system, and its relationship with lifelong career guidance needs to be strengthened. Efforts should be made to provide a real learning outcome basis for qualifications, and to allow the above concept to penetrate into all forms and levels of education and training. Potential advantages in the framework have to be maximized both in the systems of education and training (by conveying contents through the learning outcomes toward the curricula and for determining the assessment standards) and in the world of work and economy (transparency of qualifications, relationship with the world of work, HR)."*[48]

In accordance with LLL framework strategy, the operational programme document of the educational investments to be implemented from the EU supports between 2014 and 2020, the HRDOP Priority axis 3 identifies the further development of the HuQF as a measure. *"Taking actions to support lifelong learning, implementing system building to encourage participation, in particular further developing the HuQF as needed, linking of qualifications obtainable in non-formal training, improving validation, as a result of which knowledge contents obtainable in non-formal and informal learning become recognisable through formal learning. Hungary undertook to elaborate a national validation system by 2018, and based on the experience and results of the projects in the previous programming period it is necessary to elaborate a comprehensive "national" recognition model, based on which the structured system of knowledge recognition, operated within the institutional and legal system of the national education and training, being in compliance with the European norms can be established."* Concrete operative planning in compliance with the development aim has not been started yet.

Dilemmas in the mirror of stakeholders' opinions

We have conducted an empirical research for the Country Report to the NQF-In project, and for identifying further directions of the implementation and development of the HuQF. Within the frame of the empirical research, 80 semi-structured deep interviews were prepared with training providers, training policy experts, sectoral participants, employers and HR participants, etc.

[46] No. 1304/2013/EU Regulation of the European Parliament and Council (on 17 December 2013) on the European Social Fund and repealing no. 1081/2006/EC Regulation.

[47] No. 1791/2013. (XI. 7.) Government Decision on the tasks related to the introduction of the HuQF, and on the amendment of the no. 1229/2012. (VII. 6.) Government Decision on the amendment of the no. 1004/2011. (I. 4.) Government Decision on the establishment and introduction of the NQF

[48] National framework strategy for the policy of lifelong learning for the period between 2014 and 2020, page 95.

The study conducted with the interviews also seems to underpin the assumption that linking to the framework is not the single or the most important tool to get information on the preparedness and suitability of labour force for the employers either. Several alternative tools that have been used for a long time are available, which also have to be kept in mind when introducing the framework and arguing for its usefulness.

The dilemma emerged whether qualifications obtainable in the formal training system and the certificates obtainable in the non-formal training should be included in a single and uniform framework. The certificates issued under different names could be included in a single, uniform framework if the Hungarian training system would work on a credit basis as well, however, in the lack of this the level indicating number alone could only be confusing information. Therefore, the advantages and disadvantages of the (internal) duplication or definite separation of the qualifications framework need to be considered. In a part of the interviews the approach also emerged that the sector-level typical expectations of a special field could be much more easily interpreted, and they could serve as a more functional reference for the participants in the concerned sector than the competence expectations described in the national framework, sometimes worded in a very general form.

Based on the information collected so far, it is not clear how the operators of closed training markets (e.g. internal in-company trainings) are interested in the standard documenting of the activity performed by them, or in the linking of the certificates issued by them to the qualifications framework. There is a significant difference among the sectors regarding whether they need certifying of knowledge based on separate systems. The health sector has extremely strict qualification expectations, requirements, contrary to this, in the IT sector it is a widely known slogan that "paper doesn't matter" (however, these participants also rely on the socialisation process in the school system, as well as on the development of learning skills). Most companies use their own methods to determine to what extent an applicant is or will be suitable for filling a scope of work, performing the tasks related to the scope of work, and working for company interests (by having the applicants perform professional tasks, using the institution of probation period, etc.) The study conducted with the interviews showed that formal educational attainments, qualifications, and relative to this, the documents certifying the preparedness played a very minor role in everyday practice.

The option offered by the framework to consider training within the school system as a reference is rather worrying as training programmes provided in the non-formal sector cannot be measured to these, they are not equivalent. This approach would be only suitable for identifying input requirements. Assessment elements do not appear in type B i.e. non-formal VPRs, each training provider prepares assessment as per their requests, i.e. programme requirements are only verbal as they are not connected to clear assessment requirements to provide a basis for issuing the certifying document. It becomes necessary to establish a procedure being different from the existing one within the linking mechanism of the HuQF for formal qualifications, which is adapted to the characteristics of the non-formal training sector in its detailed requirements. (Naturally outcome descriptions,

competence requirement descriptions as references, derived from or comparable to the HuQF or intermediary or sectoral level descriptions are required.)

Is the framework suitable for planning individual learning paths?

It is an often cited argument for using the qualifications framework that it allows the individual to plan and overview his or her own training path. Considering the hierarchic characteristics of this, it should be noted that in the case of several trainings, when it is possible to step to a higher level, the framework does not express extra knowledge or extra competence. The master craftsman examination meaning a higher professional level compared to the NVQR level, or the obtainment of the master title cannot get onto a higher level of hierarchy as the NVQR and the master level built on it are at the same level of the HuQF. Those already having a degree have the opportunity of participating in post-graduate specialisation trainings where they can get deeper knowledge; however, this does not mean getting to a higher level, either. Similarly, obtaining several vocational qualifications does not mean a higher hierarchic level though this is a great advantage in the labour market today and it is an important step in forming life strategy for learning (which is also a problem for statistical analyses dealing with the qualification levels of the population). This means there is an important extra outcome, a richer composition of competences, which is not reflected in the framework for the individual. At the same time, the framework does not "indicate" at all major competence extensions such as learning a foreign language. It would be more practical to put emphasis on compiling an own portfolio, and find the way to somehow relate this to the operation and levels of the framework.

Usable alternative solutions

At the beginning of the empirical study, the baseline was that some functionalities of aligning non-formal certificates to the framework, or linking them to it can be identifiable. Among these it was emphasized that employers should get reliable information on the professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and autonomy of the holder of the certificate from the level number in the certificate (which indicates which level of the framework the person was linked to, i.e. which level of competence expectations the person complies with), provided that the concerned employer knows the levelling logic of the framework, as well as the description and levelling of the employer's own country for similar qualifications.

It should be also noted that the given number does not indicate the level of individual's knowledge but the linking level of the obtained qualification, which can be expected of the holder of the certificate, certifying document or qualification, however, it does not give a full guarantee at all for the person actually having the expected knowledge. Revealing interviews provided a lot of information about the opinion of each target group in the operation of the framework on such a solution. Naturally, the limited number of interviews does not allow referring to the majority opinion; therefore, we only list the arguments that have emerged so far:

- Some argued that learning and understanding such a complex system is a too difficult task for employers, who think that the methods used by them (test task, interview etc.) are more reliable and can be used rutinously.
- Representatives from the IT sector argued that professional knowledge quickly changes, emphasizing that by the time the qualification has been linked and understood by everyone, it is not valid any more.

Duplication of the framework

The question is how the two different qualities of the formal and non-formal sector qualifications' specifities can be represented in a single system in a way that the original aims (reference, information) are not damaged. For training experts, no matter to what extent they can accept and follow the learning outcome-based approach, the length of training remains very important information. A short (e.g. one-day 10-hour) programme can only include a part or fraction of the requirements that are described at the concerned level of the framework. However, if the training providers offering non-formal trainings still describe their outcome results in the form of learning outcomes, due to the programme periods it is usually less realistic, moreover, due to the declared aims of the training, it is less probable that there is sufficient information displayed in all the four descriptor columns for evaluation. Non-formal training programmes are usually relatively short and they focus on the development of a low number of competences, and they almost never make any efforts to form the elements listed under the attitude and autonomy descriptors.

If, logically, fewer learning outcome expectations belong to a relatively short training, the question is how these are compared to the expectations described in the qualifications framework. A qualification to be linked has to meet all requirements described at the given level of the framework, or there has to be an expected learning outcome that is included in the concerned level of the framework.

However, if both learning programmes get an identical level indicating number, this practically gives false information to employers being the target audience from the aspect of using the framework.

Including qualifications obtainable in non-formal training programmes in the framework inevitably leads to the duplication of the system, by linking elements generated by two different mechanisms to a single system. This means the internal disintegration or duplication of the framework only makes the above duality explicit. Namely, as there is no credit-based training system available, there is no tool for arranging the characteristics of the different programmes in a common interpretation framework.

"Intermediary", sectoral level of the framework

A serious obstacle to linking competence certifying document issued in the non-formal training sector is usually that there is no detailed description available as in the case of formal (school) qualifications (where this is made compulsory by the legal regulation). Anyway, if there is still such a description, it is usually a text not worded in learning outcomes, i.e. it can be compared with difficulty or it cannot be compared at all. The competence expectations described in the national framework shall be valid and interpretable for all qualifications to be linked. Due to this, however, expectations, competence descriptions become too general. They are too far from the concrete competence requirements for the representatives a trade.

Qualifications framework does not or cannot only have an informative function. Its additional functions, i.e. creating transparency, may be similarly important and not only at a system level but for a certain sector as well. The framework as a form (genre) may offer an organising principle for a special field or within this for a sector. However, this needs the elaboration of frameworks by the so called economic sub-sectors, which can properly provide this function if the widest possible range of professional participants is involved. Sectoral approach is not uncommon e.g. for the so called international qualifications, or for the trades originally working in the global market such as IT, transportation, bank-financial services. For the further development and use of the framework as a tool it would be needed to initiate and support the establishment of sectoral frameworks with a pilot nature.

6.9. Literature

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6.10. About the Authors

Zoltán Loboda

Zoltán Loboda has spent almost fifteen years of experience in senior and leaders position in policy domains of the Ministry of Education covering EU affairs, international relations and strategic planning of European Social Fund, policy information provision to international organisations and coordinating comparative analysis.

His main policy responsibilities were addressed to: prepare governmental education positions in decision-making process of the EU and other international organisations; prepare and coordinate strategic planning for European Social Fund Programs between 2004-2006; coordinate Hungarian participation in different OECD thematic programs and comparative analysis; compile and prepare the drafting of LLL Strategy for Hungary (2005 – 2013) and management of the whole process until Government adoption and monitoring of its implementation; redraft a new Government Lifelong Strategy in accordance with the EU ESF ex-ante criteria for the period 2014-2020; lead the conceptual and operational work for elaboration of Hungarian Qualification Framework; take part in the strategic Task Force commissioned to draw up a strategy Against Early School Leaving.

During the Hungarian Presidency of the European Union, he chaired the EU Education Committee, managed the implementation of the Presidency program and the preparation of Council dossiers in the field of education including negotiation on legal texts with Member States and Commission and the preparation of policy related professional content for Council meetings and professional events. Zoltan Loboda now is working for the Educational Authority and responsible for managing international projects, taking part in EQF implementation and HuQF developments.

Erzsébet Szlamka

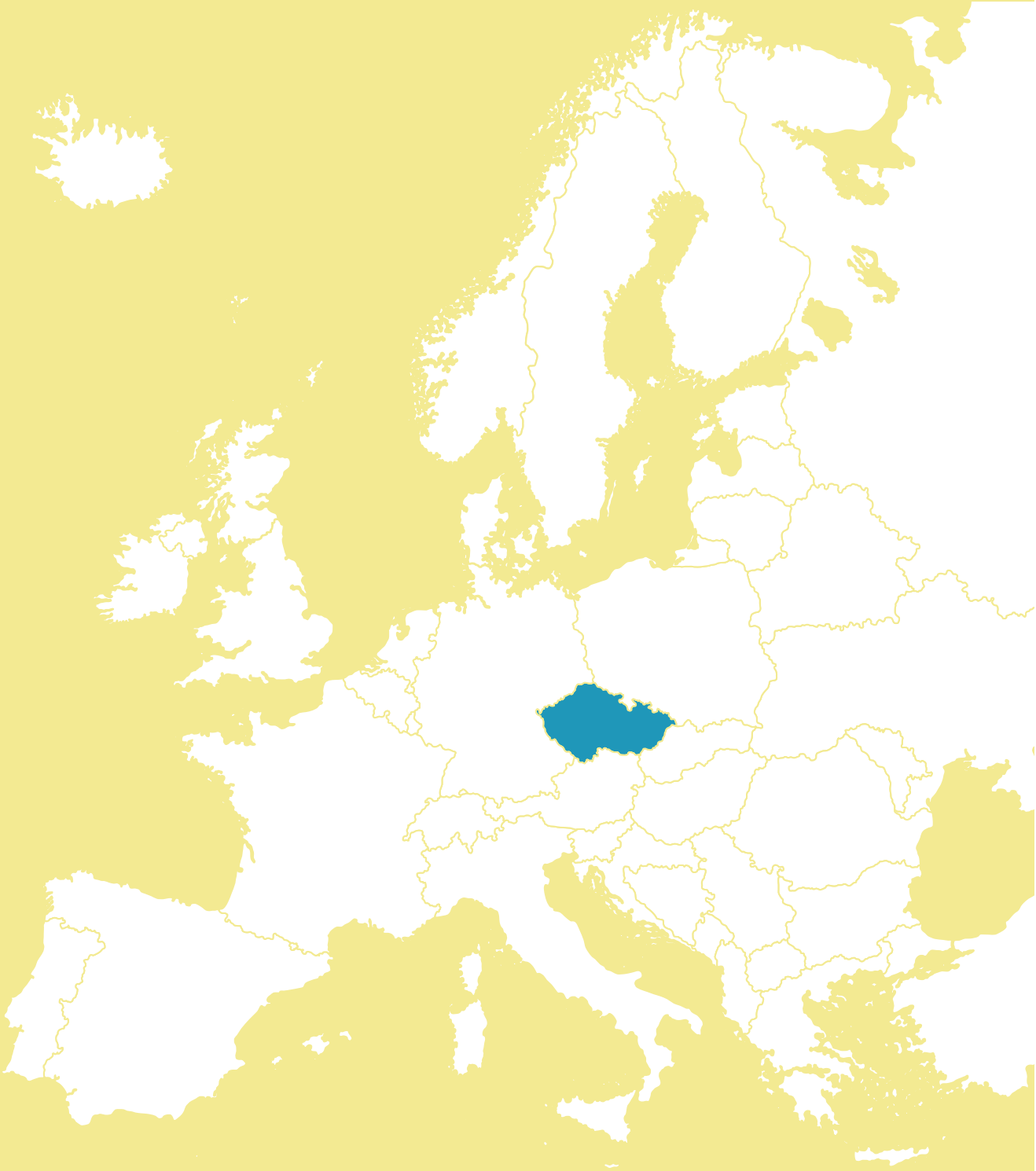
Erzsébet Szlamka worked for the National Institute of Vocational and Adult Education, where she gained knowledge on the National Vocational Qualifications Register, module system and regulations related to vocational education and training. Then, in the Ministry of Human Capacities, she became the member of the EQF Advisory Group and NCP, she also organised the Hungarian EU Presidency conference on EQF. She now works for the Educational Authority as a qualifications framework expert and Head of Unit for International Relations. Erzsébet Szlamka is a member of the team developing the Hungarian Qualifications Framework, where she is responsible for international cooperation and the management of NQF-related projects, including the coordination of the NCP. She is still a member of the EQF Advisory Group, where she was responsible for the presentation of the Hungarian Referencing Report; she also participated in the Polish referencing process as an international expert. She has extensive expertise on qualifications

systems, qualifications frameworks, lifelong learning policy tools, experience in dissemination (organized several conferences, roundtable discussions, PLAs).

Éva Tót

Ms. Éva TÓT (PhD) sociologist, researcher. She has more than 35 years of research and policy analysis experience. Until 2007 as a research fellow in the background institute of the Ministry of Education she conducted several research projects on informal learning, non-formal training market and LLL strategies. Besides she participated in several international research cooperation programs (as national coordinator for AMPHOR project on adult education system, expert in IWL project of ETF on work-based learning, national expert in Q4EU etc.). In 2005-2006 she organized field research on the work-related informal learning. She has written several expert papers for international organizations (ILO, ETF, OECD) and regularly participates in preparation of country reports (for Eurydice project on adult education and training, for OECD on recognition of prior learning and for European Inventory on validation on informal learning). Between 1997-2009 she participated as national delegate in the work of the OECD INES Network B (Social outcomes of learning). Recently she participated in the project for development of the national scheme for recognition of prior learning in HE. She has published more than 60 articles in academic journals and reviews.

5. Czech Republic



Introduction

This report was prepared by experts in the field of initial and continuing education from the National Institute for Education (NUV), which is an organization belonging to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT). Partial passages were consulted with experts from the MSMT.

So far, the Czech National Qualifications Framework with a single set of descriptors describing levels of all qualifications does not exist. The Czech Republic did not yet decided whether it will develop a comprehensive NQF, but discussions and surveys conducted so far conclude that establishing an NQF could be an important means for better coordination and communication among sectors of education and other stakeholders.

Many steps were already undertaken in the Czech Republic. In 2006, the National Register of Qualifications (NSK) was established using knowledge, skills and competency descriptors, which are fully compatible with EQF descriptors and has been continually developed since. In 2011, all levels of education have been thoroughly mapped and assigned to EQF levels according to EQF descriptors. In 2016, the National Qualifications Framework for Tertiary Education was approved. But an overarching framework including existing and emerging sector frameworks has not yet been created.

The Czech education system encompasses all secondary qualifications awarded within school system. The National Register of Qualifications includes only vocational qualifications, which are qualification focused primarily on the needs of the labour market. The National Qualifications Framework for Tertiary Education comprises only qualifications awarded in tertiary education. As these paths of acquiring qualifications complement each other, a comprehensive NQF would help increase their interconnectedness and permeability.

Characteristics of the main parts of the qualification system in the Czech Republic are summarized in the table below.

Qualifications obtained in formal education	According to the *Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on Preschool, Elementary, Secondary and Tertiary Professional and other education (Education Act)* qualifications are obtained by completing a field of study that forms a part of the Czech education system. Adequate knowledge, skills and competences are stipulated – as a curricular standard – by the framework educational programme (a national curriculum) and complemented by a concrete school educational programme. On the basis of the *National Referencing Report*, all qualifications obtained by this way have a level assigned according to the EQF.

Vocational qualifications in the National Register of Qualifications	Vocational qualifications defined by qualification and assessment standards in the National Register of Qualifications (NSK) are proved according to the act *of Act No. 179/2006 Coll., on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results.* Adequate knowledge, skills and competences are stipulated by the assessment standard of the vocational qualification. The NSK is a framework of vocational qualifications, and therefore all vocational qualifications in the NSK have a level assigned according to the EQF.
Other qualifications approved on the basis of a legislative anchoring	Qualifications are obtained in compliance with the *Act No. 18/2004 Coll., on the recognition of professional qualifications and other competences of nationals of Member States of the European Union,* or they are anchored by another legislative regulation with an intrastate, possibly European competence. The legislative regulation usually determines also the way of assessment and a character of the certificate confirming an attainment of the qualification. These qualifications have not a qualification level determined according to the EQF.

Information sources for this report

In preparing this report various available resources related to the development of the Czech education system and the involvement of the Czech Republic in European projects and initiatives were used. They consist of mainly legal documents, summary or final reports of related projects, National Referencing Report (updated version from 2015), the outputs of national and international projects (e.g. NSP – National System of Occupations, NSK - National Register of Qualifications, Q-RAM to qualifications framework within the tertiary education and other), documents resulting from Czech participation in international professional networks (e.g. ReferNet national reports) and other relevant sources.

The following acts form the fundamental legal framework for initial, tertiary and further education, as well as for the recognition of qualifications and their referencing to the EQF:

- **Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on Preschool, Elementary, Secondary and Tertiary Professional and other education, as amended** (the Education Act), which governs all education in all schools and educational institutions except for higher education institutions and education of students in state care. This act formulates the foundations and goals of education and introduces a new approach to curricula, with the possibility of creating content in individual schools in addition to the core curriculum specified by the state.
- **Act No. 111/1998 Coll., on Higher Education Institutions**, as amended, describes the goals and functions of non-vocational tertiary institutions, the role of the state and the institutions, specifies the types of institutions, their

financing, the courses of study, the rights and responsibilities of students, and the status of academic staff.

- **Act No. 563/2004 Coll., on Educational Staff**, as amended, specifies the positions of staff of schools and educational institutions, the qualifications required for these positions and their further education and partially their career structure.
- **Act No. 179/2006 Coll., on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results** as amended (the act on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning - VNFIL), specifies the method of assessing competences, the rules governing the authorisation of certification bodies and the responsibilities of individual agencies involved. It established the National Register of Qualifications (NSK) containing vocational and complete vocational qualifications and their qualifications and assessment standards. This act defines a **vocational qualification** as professional qualification of a person to duly perform an occupational activity or work activities in a specific occupation, or in two or more occupations to the extent specified in the qualification standard.
- **Act No. 18/2004 Coll., on the recognition of professional qualifications and other competences of nationals of Member States of the European Union and on the amendment of some Acts** (Act on recognition of professional qualifications) implements Directive 2005/36/EC and all the principles of free movement of workers arising from EU primary law. This act defines **vocational qualifications** as the ability to perform a regulated activity that is proved particularly by the evidence of formal qualification, license or a proof of performance of the activity.
- **Laws regulating qualification requirements for certain manual professions**: e.g. The Act on Municipal Officials, on Courts and Judges, on Tax Advisers, laws governing the education of health professionals and others. These regulations often stipulate special institutions that provide training or examinations.
- **Act No. 455/1991 Coll., on business** (Trade Act) specifies the requirements necessary to meet the proficiency for the release of certain trade licenses. This applies on reporting trades (craft and regulated trades) and also licensed trades that require professional qualifications.
- **Act No. 174/1968 Coll., on State Supervision of Safety, as amended**, and regulations on technical standards that specify requirements for the competence, qualification requirements, and periodical further training and examination of workers or to ensure security in the performance of certain professions.
- **Decree No. 3/2015 Coll., on some documents on education**, establishes the obligation to make reference to the EQF level in the documents on primary, secondary and higher vocational education. Indication of the level of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) will be mandatory from October 2017 on all graduation school reports, VET certificates and graduation diplomas.

- **Government Regulation No. 211/2010 Coll., on fields of studies in primary, secondary and higher vocational education**, as amended (Decree no. 367/2012 Coll., Decree no. 167/2014 Coll., Decree no. 197/2015 Coll.), establishes a system of fields of education and health conditions for those applying for education.

Other bylaws and strategic documents (approved by the Czech government) are based on the above mentioned laws and decrees; these are further elaborated and clarified as needed.

The following documents were also used as a source for this report:

- National referencing report Czech Republic (updated version 2015),
- Yearbook on development in education 2005/06 - 2015/16,
- Long-term plan for education and development of education system for the period of 2015-2020,
- New measures to promote vocational education (2013),
- Long-term plan for educational and scientific, research, development and innovation, artistic and other activities for tertiary sector for the period of 2016-2020 (updated 2016),
- selected outcomes of Q-RAM project (materials for development of tertiary qualifications framework),
- National report prepared within RNFIL project (OECD),
- National report prepared within QF Embodiment project (Leonardo da Vinci),
- selected outcomes and draft reports of NSK1 and NSK2 projects (ESF),
- selected outcomes and reports of UNIV and Pospolu projects (ESF),
- selected outcomes of „Keys for Life - Development of key competences in non-formal and informal education "and" K2 - Quality and competitiveness in non-formal education"[1] projects (ESF),
- national and thematic reports ReferNet, Eurydice etc.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CC – Coordination council (Koordinační rada)

CG – Coordination group for NSK (Koordinační skupina pro NSK)

ESF – European Social Fund (Evropský sociální fond)

EQF – European Qualifications Framework (Evropský rámec kvalifikací)

IS NSK – NSK information system (Informační systém NSK)

[1] Both projects were implemented by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in cooperation with the National Institute of Children and Youth Czech Republic.

ISTP – Integrated system of standardized positions (Integrovaný systém typových pozic)

MPSV – Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí)

MSMT – Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy)

NSK – National Register of Qualifications (Národní soustava kvalifikací)

NSK1 – Abbreviation used for a systemic project *Development of NSK to support link between initial and further education*

NSK2 – Abbreviation used for a systemic project *Development and implementation of NSK*

NSP – National System of Occupations (Národní soustava povolání)

NUV – National Institute for Education, Education Counselling Centre and Centre for Continuing Education of Teachers (Národní ústav pro vzdělávání, školské poradenské zařízení a zařízení pro další vzdělávání pedagogických pracovníků)

NUOV – National Institute for Vocational Education (Národní ústav odborného vzdělávání)

RVP – Framework educational programme (Rámcový vzdělávací program)

WG – Working group (Pracovní skupina)

Basic terms

Concepts specific for initial education and NSK

Assessment standard for vocational qualification	A set of criteria, organizational and methodological procedures and material and technical conditions laid down for verification of achievement of proficiency to perform an occupational activity or work activities in a specific occupation, or in two or more professions (Act No. 179/2006 Coll.).
Association of Adult Education Institutions	The most important association of providers of further education in the Czech Republic.
Authorizing body	Central administrative authority competent to decide on granting, renewal or withdrawal of authorization based on the fact that a mandate set out in the annex to the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. belongs a profession or work, the performance of the relevant professional qualifications is concerned, or whose scope is a profession, or work activities, the closest (law definition).
Authorized person	A person or entity that has been granted authorization by the Act No. 179/2006 Coll.

Central database of competences	A collection of more than 10,000 encoded professional competences, which are common to NSK and NSP.
Complete vocational qualification	Vocational competence of an individual to duly perform all activities in a certain profession (Act No. 179/2006 Coll.).
Confirmer	An expert with practical experience in certain areas of the labour market, who makes comments on occupation units, vocational qualifications and other materials produced by expert teams and working groups of sector councils. Confirmers are mainly representatives of employers, but they can also be educators and representatives of authorized persons.
Coordination council	Body composed of representatives of the overarching organizations of employers and other stakeholders, which manages and coordinates the activities of the network of sector councils.
Coordination group for NSK	Coordination group for involving representatives of employers in NSK processes; it addresses strategic issues and identifies problems, which are subsequently solved by responsible management personnel of both sides.
Expert and field groups	Groups of external experts, who facilitate communication between creators of educational programmes, representatives of schools and businesses and other institutions. They enable the involvement of social partners in the development of these programmes. In terms of vocational education, this allows compliance between educational programmes and labour market requirements.
Expert team	A temporarily established team of experts gathered to address challenges in the field in which there is no sector council. The expert team is directly subordinate to the Coordinating council and is responsible for range and quality of activities, outputs and information dissemination.
Formal education	Education carried out within the formal education system (i.e. as a part of the official school system); it leads to a specific level of education acknowledged by some kind of officially recognized document (e.g. certificate, diploma).
Framework educational programme	Document specifying general goals of education, core competences essential for personality development of students, identifying substantive areas of education and their contents, describing expected learning outcomes and determining framework and rules for creating school education programmes and education plans.
Further education	Education carried out after one‘s completion of initial education and entering the labour market (usually in adulthood); It can be focused on a diverse spectrum of knowledge, skills and competences important for application in professional, civic and personal life.
Initial education	All education that takes place before one‘s first entry into the labour market and leads to a qualification; it consists of the compulsory education at primary schools, vocational training at secondary schools, colleges and universities.

Integrated System of Standardised Positions	(Predecessor of the National System of Occupations) - A continuously updated set of information about the world of work and tools for the use of this information. A crucial part of the system was a database of standard positions, containing information on structure, content of individual professions, salaries, required skills, education and job vacancies.
National Register of Qualifications	A publicly accessible register of all complete vocational qualifications and qualifications confirmed, differentiated and recognized in the Czech Republic (Act No. 179/2006 Coll.).
National System of Occupations	Continuously developed and online available catalogue of descriptions of professions, which is a tool for increasing mobility of the workforce based on the needs of the labour market, identified by employers and experts from the labour market.
Non-formal education	Education carried out outside the formal education system (i.e. beyond the official school system); does not lead to a specific level of education; it may be provided in the workplace or through activities of organizations and civil society associations.
NSK information system	A portal to an information base for the system of nationally recognized vocational qualifications in the Czech Republic. It publishes information on vocational qualifications, which are approved and applicable on the labour market in the country. It informs about news and events in the area of verification and recognition of further education results in the country.
Qualification standard for vocational qualification	Structured description of professional competence of individuals necessary for a proper performance of certain work or working activities in a particular occupation or in two or more professions (Act No. 179/2006 Coll.).
Sector council	Sector council is a voluntary professional association, composed of representatives of delegates of prominent employers, professional associations and leading experts on human resources in given sector. Its aim is to represent interests of the sector in the human resource development in relation to government, educators, citizens and other stakeholders. Sector council is established by the Governing Board, the highest body in the network of sector councils. The process of establishing a new sector council is based on a proposal of the Coordinating Council.
Vocational education	Professional competence of an individual to duly perform an occupational activity or work activities in a specific occupation, or in two or more occupations to the extent specified in the qualification standard (Act No. 179/2006 Coll.).
Working group (appointed by the sector council)	A working group is a temporary group of experts – contractors. The purpose of creating working groups is to handle the tasks arising from activities of sector councils. Creating working groups is a fundamental principle of the workflow within sector councils. Working groups are formed continuously throughout the existence of the sector councils.

5.1. Historical Context

The historical context of the institutional framework of education system

Development of national education and qualification system of the Czech Republic after 1989 is strongly associated with social and economic changes in Europe. Political changes and economic transformation of the Czech Republic after 1989 had a strong impact mainly on the Czech system of vocational education and training. After the disintegration of state owned enterprises, which were previously the main providers of training for students and employers of graduates, practical education moved mainly in school premises and laboratories. Because of rapid technological development, a number of schools has faced a quick outdating of material equipment thus failing to keep pace with rapidly evolving employers´ demands on the skills of graduates.

A certain imbalance between the requirements of the employer sphere and possibilities of the educational system to satisfy these demands has led to a renewed interest of employers on cooperation with schools. It also hastened the development in the creation of a qualification system outside of the traditional formal system of school education - National Register of Qualifications (NSK). Czech Republic's involvement in international projects and initiatives has been very helpful in the process of development.

Even before joining the EU The Czech Republic was involved in European education programmes (Tempus, Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, Youth for Europe), and has shown allegiance to the European strategies and was actively involved in their formation. The Czech Republic joined the Bologna Process during its inception (in 2001 hosted a ministerial conference, in 2009 chaired the Steering Group in Bologna), has introduced a three-level structure of university studies and took other measures (Diploma Supplement, ECTS). In 1997, Czech Republic signed the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in the European region. Accession of the Czech Republic to the EU in 2004 therefore did not mean a major breakthrough in the educational field, but a deepening and broadening of existing European cooperation.

Collaboration with the OECD was also important for the Czech Republic, even in the time before the admission to this organization in 1995. In the period 2003-2005, the Czech Republic joined the OECD activities "Role of national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning." Comparison of different approaches to solving similar problems in different participating countries was very inspiring. Participation in the project meant speeding up processes in the Czech Republic leading to the development of the qualification system and resulted in the preparation of systemic project implemented by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT) with support from the ESF: Development of the National Register of Qualifications supporting links between initial and continuing education (NSK). In the field of vocational education and lifelong learning, the Czech Republic

participated in two OECD activities. In 2006-2007, it focused on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (OECD RNFIL), in 2007-2010 the activity of VET OECD Review: Learning Practice (Learning for Jobs) focused on linking vocational education and labour market needs.

One of the interesting initiatives was the Czech Republic's involvement in the project SECCOMPAT[2] in 2008-2010. This project was focused on the research of compatibility of vocational (sectoral) qualifications in the construction and hospitality industries between Lithuania, Ireland, France, Austria and the Czech Republic. Analysis of knowledge, skills and competences of specific qualifications proved that these qualifications are comparable within the partner countries and the EQF descriptors with their structuring are useful for such comparison. The Experience in benchmarking and referencing qualifications has been summarized in the "Guidelines for the use of national qualifications frameworks and the EQF in comparison of qualifications between countries."

The Copenhagen Declaration of 2002 played an important role in the field of vocational education. All priorities and tools introduced within the Copenhagen process, which aim to enable better transparency of qualifications, and to facilitate the mobility of citizens and lifelong learning, which include the EQF (European Qualifications Framework), ECVET (European Credit System for VET), EQAVET (European quality assurance) and Europass, are being implemented in the Czech Republic (or at least their implementation is being prepared). The National Europass Centre operates in the Czech Republic since 2005 and has so far released thousands of documents – certificate supplements, Europass mobility etc.

With joining the EU, the Czech Republic signed the Lisbon strategy, and thus the concept of lifelong learning strategy. In 2007, the Czech government approved an initial programme document for this area Lifelong Learning Strategy of the Czech Republic for 2007-2015. All learning and education options and paths (in traditional educational institutions or elsewhere) are perceived as an interconnected whole, which allows transitions between education and employment and allows the obtaining of the same qualifications and competence in various ways throughout life.

By adopting the Lisbon strategy and the concept of lifelong learning Czech Republic claimed the acceptance of the principles of the common European instrument EQF. The interest in supporting the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning is illustrated by an active involvement of the Czech Republic in all related activities and initiatives, as well as by the membership of Czech experts in the advisory and working groups, set up by the European Commission. Based on the recommendations on the implementation of the EQF decided in the MSMT has decided in 2008 to establish the EQF Coordination Centre (KC EQF) in the Czech Republic as an organizational unit of the National Institute of Vocational Education in Prague (now the National Institute for Education, NUV).

[2] LLP 2007-2013: „EQF and compatibility of sectoral qualifications between the countries" (SECCOMPAT) No. 137852-LLP-2007-LT-KA1-EQF.

The principles, on which the European Qualifications Framework was created, are to a certain extent and in different forms included in reforms, which the Czech educational and qualification system has been undergoing since 2004. The new curricula documents for elementary and secondary education, so called framework educational programmes (RVP, Rámcové vzdělávací programy) as well as qualification standards kept in the NSK are described and defined by learning outcomes. In the area of tertiary qualifications, the Czech Republic has been actively involved in the Bologna process since the beginning and has introduced (and enacted by law) a three-level degree structure (bachelor, master and doctoral programmes) even before the Bologna Declaration.

After joining the European Union, it was necessary to make changes in study programmes preparing students for the so-called regulated professions - e.g. Doctors, pharmacists, architects, lawyers, auditors and others, so that their diplomas could be recognized throughout the European Union (for more information on regulated profession see "Educational and qualification system in the Czech Republic").

The historical context of the institutional framework of NSK

The topic of qualification frameworks was first raised in the Czech Republic in connection with a OECD project *The role of national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning*, 2000 – October 2005. The importance of the project is illustrated by the participation of 23 OECD member states, as well as international organizations such as Cedefop, ETF or ILO.

Czech Republic took the opportunity to use and interact with all relevant outputs of the joint solution of tasks of activity. Through National Institute for Vocational Education (NUOV – predecessor of NUV) CR has been participating since 2003 on the work of thematic group for development and the use of "qualification frameworks" as means of change and management of qualification systems.

The project enabled a comparison on solving similar problems in different participating countries, which was very inspiring. Participation in the project meant speeding up the process that resulted in the preparation of a systemic project conducted by MSMT and development of the National Register of Qualifications supporting links between initial and further education.

Important milestones in NSK development

General overview of important steps in previous development of the NSK is presented in the table, followed by detailed information.

Year	Important events and activities
2004	Active involvement in the work of thematic group *Development and use of "qualification frameworks" as means of change and management of qualification systems* in the OECD project. Preparation of a systemic project NSK1 (*Development of the National register of qualifications to support link between initial and further education)*
2005	Approval of a systemic project NSK1 and launch of creating NSK. Consultation of EQF and a national report on results of the negotiation Initiation of preparation of the act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results
2006	Approval of the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results Pilot testing of activities of sector councils
2007	Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results comes into force Discussion on the proposal of descriptors of NSK qualification levels
2008	Completion of the project NSK 1 Evaluating the proposal of involving sector councils in NSK
2009	Approval of NSK qualification levels Launch of project NSK2 (*Development and implementation of NSK*)
2010	Preparation of new concept of sector councils Processing new methodology of using NSK Launching preparation works towards the National referencing report
2011	National referencing conference Submitting to the MSMT and Czech government
2012	Amendment of the act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results Approval of the process of creating English versions of qualification standards (as a part of the project NSK2)
2013	Preparation of the English version of NSK web site Development of activities of the team of feedback consultants
2014	Proposal of the concept of implementing a foreman examination in the Czech Republic Engaging sector councils into discussing potential links of NSK and ECVET

Year	Important events and activities
2015	New tasks in an extended NSK2 project Processing a work task on certified sets of competences
2016	Approval and implementation of the „Proposal of implementation of the Act no. 179/2006 Coll. on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results and of amendments of the act in 2015 and onwards“ Preparation of a systemic project on implementation of a foreman examination in the Czech Republic

NSK1 Project and preparation of the Act No. 179/2006 Coll., on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results

The beginning of NSK was linked to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT) project *Development of the national register of qualifications to support the link between initial and further education* (NSK1). The project was elaborated and presented by NUV (more precisely, by its predecessor NUOV), being approved in 2005 and implemented between April 2005 and March 2008 under the MSMT management. The general objective of the project was to contribute to improving the quality of education through validation of non-formal and informal learning. One specific goal was linking initial and further education, via development of NSK enabling the description of interaction between the qualifications in a unified, transparent and comprehensible system, accessible to all.

When drafting the NSK project, it was decided by the MSMT and NUV representatives that in the initial phase, the development of NSK would mainly focus on the general structure of NSK and its content for qualifications levels up to EQF3. The reason for this decision was led by the intention to help those candidates who could be most at risk in the labour market with the newly developed tool. Gradually, qualifications are created for higher levels according to the current employers' needs.

Simultaneously with the project, a bill for the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results was prepared. The project team suggested how the act could look like but it was only after its entry into force that validation of the results of the previous education results started. The approval of the Act specified and confirmed the role of the MSMT, NUV, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other ministries, and the role of employers' representatives and other relevant partners as well.

MSMT and NUV have been involved in NSK development since the very beginning (preparation and implementation of the project, preparation of the bill for the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results). Another important partner was the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MPSV), especially in relation to the development of the National System of Occupations (NSP) and consequently also in connection with the definition of the MPSV role in the Act.

Other ministries are involved in the NSK as authorizing bodies as defined by the Act.

In the course of NSK elaboration, many employers' representatives have been involved in the process, namely the Chamber of Commerce of the Czech Republic, the Chamber of Agriculture and the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic. Besides them, various professional associations, guilds and sectoral groups of experts have participated in NSK development as needed. Many companies (small, large, medium-sized) are involved mainly through sector councils. The concept has been developed since 2005 (when the first NSK project was launched). While the first sector council in the Czech Republic was established in 2005, there are currently 29 sector councils working to meet the needs of most sectors. More than 1,600 representatives of employers and other professionals are involved in the work of the sector councils and the working teams that set up these councils.

The project NSK1 was complemented with another project conducted by the MSMT – UNIV, aiming at developing of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning at schools providing education for adults.

In parallel with the NSK development, the curricular reform was associated with designing and implementing a qualifications framework and other tools needed to integrate the Czech Republic into the lifelong learning.

Integrated system of standardized positions and National System of Occupations

The development of NSK was preceded by the development of the Integrated system of standardized positions (ISTP, Integrovaný systém typových pozic). ISTP was established in 1998 and has been gradually being developed since. In addition to assuming use in career counselling and guidance, the aim of its creation and development was to create a modern system to replace periodically published catalogues of occupations. ISTP was gradually built in an on-line form, which later became the basis for the creation of the National System of Occupations (NSP). This conversion was both provoked and facilitated by the emphasis on so-called "Competency approach", meaning a focus on the formulation of qualification requirements for certain profession via learning outcomes.

NSP was developed under a project launched in 2007 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MPSV). The aim of the project was to create a basis for NSP and the development and implementation of mechanisms to ensure and support the network of sector councils and ensuring the functioning of this network for NSP and NSK.

As has been said in the text on NSP1 project, NSK is regulated by the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results, which falls under the competence of the MSMT. The NSP development is subject to the MPSV. The link between these two systems is very close from the very beginning. Expert teams of the MPSV created a system of occupations and, after creation of job descriptions, MSMT expert teams started to develop qualification and assessment standards based on these descriptions.

The main objective of the joint development of NSP and NSK was to significantly promote the flexibility and efficiency of the labour market in the Czech Republic. The development of the NSP was focused mainly on describing what current jobs in the labour market look like - what is the scope of typical work activities and competences of employees. This concept is linked to the definition of qualifications in NSK- the competences necessary to carry out work activities in specific sectoral areas where it is appropriate for potential employees to have a recognized certificate. An important feature and main advantage of the chosen approach is that both systems NSP and NSK are internally interconnected by a single central database of competences.

The demands for the development and later implementation of the National Register of Qualifications (NSK)

The necessity to create and develop the NSK based on demands and needs identified on both national and European level.

a. Needs, requirements and main trends in the Czech Republic

- The role of qualifications as bridges between the labour market and VET
- Strengthening the partnership (education – labour market) on both the system and school levels
- Accreditation of prior learning
- The stress on quality
- Strengthening the role of further education

The necessity of the NSK development and implementation follows from a number of national documents, for example:

- The Strategy of Lifelong Learning approved by the Czech Republic' government in 2007, and its implementation plan
- The government document in its introduction stresses, that the crucial pillar of success for the Czech Republic is especially the ability of the citizens to win recognition in the global and quickly changing labour market.
- Act No. 179/ 2006 Coll., on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results
- The Act should motivate adults in the Czech Republic to further education, broaden their possibilities to achieve a new qualification, and enhance their employability on the labour market, as well as it should improve the response of the education system on labour market demands.
- *Decree No. 176/2009 Coll., that specify necessities of the application for an accreditation of the education programme, an organisation of education in a retraining facility and a way of its completion*. The Decree opens the door into the retraining areas for both qualification and assessment standards. It makes available descriptions of desirable qualifications confirmed by employers for a significant group of potential labour market participants.

b. Needs, requirements and main trends identified in Europe

- Reflexion of labour market needs
- Learning outcomes
- Transparency
- Mobility
- Quality
- Partnership

The necessity of the NSK development and implementation follows from some European documents, for example:

- Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning
- Recommendation for Member States to create the National Qualifications Frameworks forms a part of the European document. European states are in this activity supported by possibility to share their experience up to now, to follow development in other European countries and to learn from time-tested ways of overcoming problems.
- *The conclusions of the Council on enhancing partnerships between education and training institutions and social partners, in particular employers, in the context of lifelong learning – accepted during CZ PRESS 5/2009*. The planned development of the sector councils' concept was fully in compliance with the goals, contents and requirements resulted from the document.

The NSK development simultaneously fulfils other significant goals:

- It is centred on learning outcomes, it means on real skills and competences. This is a key principle of qualification standards in the NSK, moreover viewed in a systematic way through the progressively constructed "central database of knowledge, skills and competences", which supports a good entering position of the Czech Republic into a similar European system development. The European system has been considered especially in connection with a progressive implementation of the ECVET credit system. This new European instrument (presented during the Czech EU Presidency in Prague, 2009) complementary complements the "higher education" ECTS and use "units of learning outcomes" as well. These can have a clear connection with vocational qualifications in the NSK.
- To develop mechanisms for involving employer representatives into defining descriptions of qualifications and influencing goals and contents of vocational education. This requirement had been fulfilled by the NSK development in the framework of another key principle, which was to define and describe qualifications in the network of sector councils and other teams of experts from employers' sphere. Even the European Commission considered a constitution of "European sector councils".

5.2. National Qualifications Framework – Basic Premises

Referencing process and development of the national qualifications framework

Right from the beginning it is necessary to say that the Czech Republic does not have one coherent national qualification framework. The above mentioned NSK (National Register of Qualifications) is intended as a tool for validation of non-formal and informal learning. There are no qualifications acquired during initial school VET (both secondary and tertiary) in the NSK. Consequently, NSK is only a part of the whole VET system. Formal VET qualifications are not included in the NSK.

Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (hereinafter EQF), invites Member States to bring into the relationship their national qualification systems to the EQF levels. This process is subject to ten criteria and procedures approved by the EQF Advisory Group. One of the first steps that were taken in the Czech Republic in order to meet the defined criteria was the preparation of the national referencing report and its submission to the European Commission (see the results of the referencing process in the Czech Republic below).

So far, a national qualifications framework with a single set of descriptors describing levels of qualifications in the Czech Republic does not exist. However, the results of the referencing process were perceived in Europe as well as in the Czech Republic as a basis for further discussions on the desirability of such a framework. The performed assignment to eight levels of qualifications can be seen as a spanning (bridging) type of national qualifications framework.

Czech referencing process and its results

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT) is responsible for the referencing process. The ministry established the National Coordination Point (NCP CZ), which has the responsibility for the coordination of the referencing process. The NCP is part of the NUV.

In August 2010 the MSMT approved a timetable for the referencing process, in which the procedure is detailed, including tasks for the relevant bodies. The NCP advisory group includes representatives of a number of stakeholders: social partners, other ministries, regional governments and educational institutions. Other experts and stakeholders were involved in the process of preparing and critiquing the studies conducted during the referencing process and in the editing of the national referencing report.

The Czech referencing process was based on following principles:

- emphasis on learning outcomes,
- validation of non-formal and informal learning,

- enhancing lifelong learning,
- genuine cooperation with social partners and their involvement in the referencing process,
- focus on employability, competitiveness and mobility.

The referencing report was prepared by the Czech NCP together with experts in various educational sectors, and discussed with other stakeholders. It describes the results of the Czech referencing process, respecting all the conditions set out in the Recommendation and by the EQF Advisory Group.

The report was approved by the Czech government in July 2011[3].

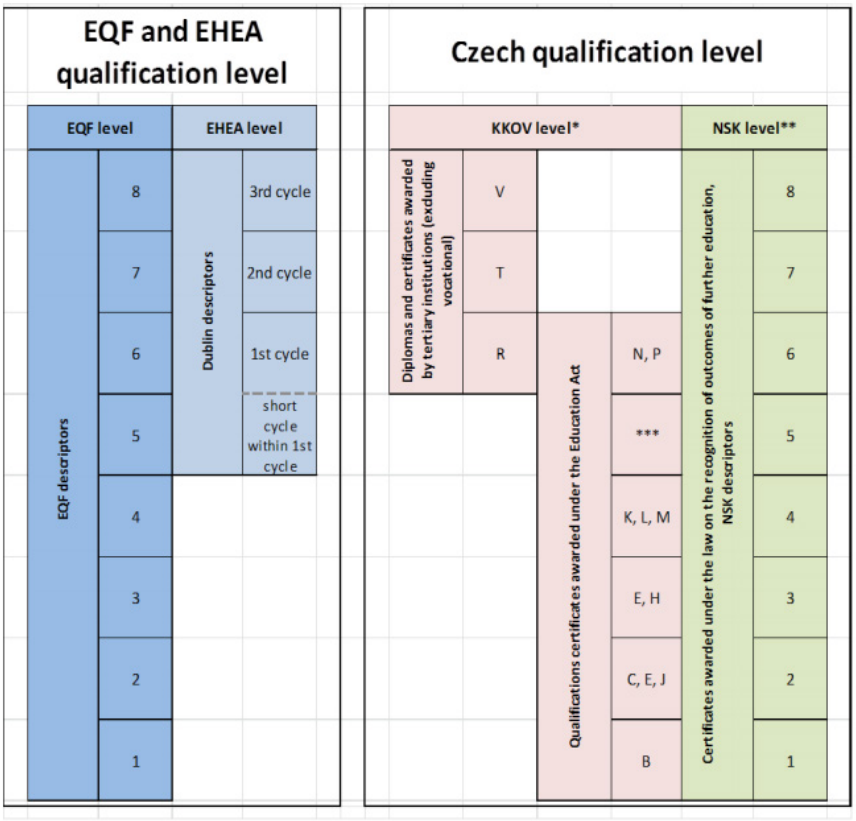
In the 2015 another minor adjustments and clarifications were made. Indication of the level of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) will from October 2017 be mandatory on all graduate school certificates, vocational certificates and graduation diplomas. This obligation is given by Decree No. 3/2015 Coll., on certain documents in education.

The national referencing report of the Czech Republic gives a general overview of the Czech education and qualification systems, describes the structure of qualifications awarded and presents the necessary evidence for their referencing to the EQF.

Qualifications acquired through formal school education and NSK (validation of non-formal and informal learning acquired outside the formal education system based on the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results) had been assigned to EQF. Analysis of the curricula for primary and secondary education and relevant documents for tertiary education (especially legal documents and documents for the accreditation of educational programmes) and NSK descriptors has shown a link between levels (types) of qualifications in the Czech Republic and the EQF levels.

The report classifies Czech qualifications into 8 levels, which are fully compatible with the EQF levels (see chart below). The chart contains both levels of qualifications acquired through formal education in the school education system (demonstrated with a final certificate, a certificate of final or graduation exam, diploma, or certificate of a professional qualification) and the qualification levels of the NSK (person is allowed to attend an exam (after fulfilling specific requirements) and obtain a professional qualification). The proposed scheme also fully respects the framework for higher education at levels 5 to 8.

[3] All versions of the report (2011, 2013 a 2015) are available online. English versions from 2011 and 2013 are available at http://www.nuv.ky-ramec-kvalifikaci-eqf/publikace-a-publicita



Qualifications in secondary education were assigned to the EQF levels by comparing the results of education described in core curricula - Framework educational programmes (curricula for general secondary schools *gymnazium* (EQF4) and curricula for VET (EQF3 and EQF4)), which are anchored in legislation since 2004 and implemented gradually.

Qualifications in tertiary education can be compared with the descriptors of the EQF and the framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA QF) mainly because the definition of various educational levels/degrees is quite broad and general. The EQF levels 6 to 8 were recognized as compatible with first to third cycle qualifications framework for the EHEA.

The results of the reference process are perceived by all parties as a basis for further discussions about the need for a national qualifications framework, which would be endowed with one set of common descriptors, describing levels of all qualifications awarded in the Czech Republic. The referencing process outlined possible future developments in the area of convergence of both established and emerging qualification frameworks for individual educational areas and forms a foundation for a bridging type of national qualifications framework. Its explicit establishment and development will be the subject of further discussions and decisions.

5.3. Institutional Setting

Education system in the Czech Republic

The basic principles governing the education in the Czech Republic, are contained in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, which is part of the constitutional order of the Czech Republic. General regulation of education is provided by laws that are listed in the section "Preparation of the reports". More detailed regulations relating to specific issues relating to education include decrees and some matters are regulated by Government regulations. All laws (acts) are published in the Collection of Laws.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT) is responsible for concepts, current condition and development of the educational system, it issues internal regulations published in the *Bulletin of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports*. In areas relating to the labour market and counselling MSMT cooperates with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and in some matters with other central government authorities (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Health).

The education system in the Czech Republic is (based on the principle of lifelong learning) divided into two stages, denoted as initial and further education. The initial education in the Czech Republic consists of kindergarten, primary school, secondary school (gymnasium, secondary vocational schools), conservatoires, higher vocational schools and universities. Further education occurs after completion of initial education and entering the learner into the labour market. Further education can emphasize a diverse spectrum of knowledge, skills and competences important for application in professional, civic and personal life.

After completing compulsory schooling, 96% of the population continue in upper secondary education. Students attend secondary schools generally at the age between 15 to 18 years. Czech Republic is among the countries with a high number of graduates of upper secondary education (EQF level 3 or higher). Compared with other OECD countries, Czech Republic belongs to the best ones. OECD statistics show that 95% of the population aged 25-34 (data from 2014) in the Czech Republic acquire this level of education. In 2014 there were 72% of people with upper secondary education in the 25-64 age group in the Czech Republic.

Secondary education is richly differentiated system guaranteeing education and vocational training for almost the entire population of young people who have completed their compulsory education and pre-employment or before entering college. A smaller share goes to schools providing general education, which offer also four-year study programmes (on top of the above mentioned eight- and six year programmes), 22.5% of primary school graduates entered a higher level of *gymnazium* in the academic year 2015/16). A larger proportion of students visit vocational (professional) schools (36% in four-year programmes

completed by graduation exam, 30% in two- to three year programmes completed by an apprentice exam), or at lyceums and conservatoires.[4]

Pupils with special educational needs can, after completing compulsory schooling, continue at two-year schools (Practical School), which provide secondary education (EQF2), or at schools offering secondary education (without a VET certificate or school-leaving examination, also at EQF2). For pupils with disabilities two- and three-year courses are established, providing secondary education with a VET certificate (EQF3). They are designed with lower demands in both general and vocational education. Graduates are prepared to perform simple work tasks mostly as manual workers.

Regarding the attractiveness of vocational education, the Czech Republic recorded a long-term decline in interest in vocational education in general, and in particular the decline of interest in the study in programmes with a VET certificate (EQF3) in favour of those study programmes where it is possible to obtain a graduation *maturita* certificate (EQF4). Despite this unfavourable development, the vocational education represents essential part of the Czech educational system (visited by more than 72% of the population after the end of compulsory schooling - see table). The total number of pupils in study programmes with maturita (EQF4) is increasing and in the academic year 2015/16 their share was 68.96%.

Type of study programme	2005/06	2010/11	2015/16	decline 2005/06-2010/11		decline 2010/11-2015/16		decline 2005/06-2015/16	
Number of students (without gymnazium)	**447 184**	**416 964**	**314 086**	**-30 220**		**-102 878**		**-133 098**	
Secondary education	2 381	2 107	2 201	-274	-11,5	94	4,5	-180	-7,6
Secondary education with VET certificate	136 603	108 529	91 841	-28 074	-20,6	-16 688	-15,4	-44 762	-32,8
Secondary education with *maturita*	248 761	240 009	184 583	-8 752	-3,5	-55 426	-23,1	-64 178	-25,8
Follow-up study programmes	45 255	43 207	20 437	-2 048	-4,5	-22 770	-52,7	-24 818	-54,8
Lyceum	14 184	23 112	15 024	8 928	62,9	-8 088	-35,0	840	5,9
Number of students of *gymnaziums*[5]	101 491	97 914	87 550	-3 577	-3,5	-10 364	-10,6	-13 941	-13,7
Ratio of students of secondary schools and gymnazium	22,7	23,5	27,9		0,8		4,4		5,2

Adapted from Statistical Yearbook Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports - Developmental Yearbook of Education 2005/06 - 2015/16.

[4] The development of educational and sectoral structure of pupils and students in secondary and higher vocational education in the Czech Republic and Czech regions and the status of young people in the labour market compared with the European Union - 2015/16. NUV 2016.

[5] Includes only students of 4-year programmes and students of higher levels of 6- and 8-year programmes.

The most frequent forms of obtaining secondary vocational qualifications in the Czech Republic are:

a) secondary education with a VET certificate preparing graduates primarily to enter the labour market; usually a three year programme (EQF3)

b) secondary vocational education with *maturita* certificate preparing graduates to enter the labour market as well as to continue on higher levels of education, usually a four year programme (EQF4).

Graduating a three-year vocational programmes (EQF3) with a VET certificate allows the graduates to enter directly the labour market and perform manual labour, crafts and related occupations (e.g. bricklayer, carpenter, plumber, electrician, mechanic, salesman, chemist, baker, tailor, bookbinder, hairdresser). These programmes are mostly offered at secondary vocational schools (SOU, *střední odborná učiliště*). Graduates of upper secondary education with a VET certificate may continue in a two-year follow-up courses (EQF4), which ends with a final exam, opening the way to higher education, or extend their qualifications in shorter study programmes. Secondary vocational schools also offer a small number of four-year programmes (EQF4).

Four-year vocational study programmes finished with maturita certificate (EQF4) are usually offered in secondary vocational schools (SOŠ, *střední odborné* školy) and enable the graduates to enrol colleges/universities or work in technical, administrative or similar mid-level occupations (e.g. Mechanic for machinery and equipment, Chemist operator, Garment technician, Trader, Photographer). Some study programmes have a broader concept and their name does not match a particular profession, but to the whole set of professionals in the sector (e.g. Metallurgy, Electronics, Construction, Printing, Clothing, Hospitality, Social work, Information Technology). Secondary vocational education is also offered in educational programmes of lyceums (EQF4) with a high proportion of general education (up to 70% of the curriculum), these prepare graduates especially for university studies. Graduation examination, maturita, obtained at any type of school, entitles the student to apply for admission to tertiary education.

Currently, a possibility of obtaining a VET certificate (EQF3) and maturita certificate (EQF4) within the vocational education programme of 4 years is being pilot tested. Students can take the final exam (EQF3) at the end of the third year of the educational programme and successful graduates will receive a VET certificate, which confirms obtaining appropriate vocational qualifications. Then they continue to study the programme and at the end of the fourth year attempt to pass the *maturita* exam (EQF4). The aim of introducing these programmes is to improve the position of graduates in the labour market, while preventing situations, when students who fail at maturita examination after four years of studies, went to the labour market without any qualification.

It is also possible to obtain another vocational qualification of the same or lower level, which one already has. This is the case of so called shortened educational programme, either for acquiring secondary education with a VET certificate

(EQF3) or the maturita certificate (EQF4). Studies last for 1-2 years. This option is particularly suitable for adults who wish to extend their skills and qualifications.

Qualifications framework for tertiary education in the Czech Republic

The characteristics of various educational levels / degrees in tertiary education in the Czech Republic are determined primarily by the relevant legislation. All tertiary education programmes must be approved in accordance to a type of school, either by the Accreditation Commission (for universities) or the Accreditation Commission for Higher Education. According to the rules of the accreditation process, universities define the education process through the content of individual courses as well as through the general characteristics of the study and a graduate profile.

Accreditation Commission in its "Standards for accreditation applications, extensions accreditation and prolongation of accreditation of study programmes and their branches" encourages expression of "graduate profile" and "learning objectives" in the categories of 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'competence'. This triad has not yet been applied across the board to all universities. Consistent implementation of this approach by the Accreditation Committee helps ensure that universities and higher vocational schools are increasingly using description of the qualifications submitted for accreditation on learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes in tertiary education are formulated differently than in the RVP and NSK. The difference of terminology used, is mainly based on different conceptualizations of tertiary education. Documents relating to tertiary education distinguish professional knowledge, professional skills and general competence. Knowledge and skills are tied to a narrower focus on the industry, while the competences of a more general nature. Knowledge and skills are explicitly linked. Using factual and theoretical knowledge in the field is referred to as skill. Subsequent use of the expertise and skills in a particular context, which is defined by the degree of autonomy and accountability, as well as the degree of complexity of the environment, is described as a general competence. The general competence includes the formation of judgment, communication skills, including communication in a foreign language, the ability to further education, etc.

Recently approved National Qualifications Framework for tertiary education in the Czech Republic (July 2016) works consistently with learning outcomes in the categories of vocational knowledge, vocational skills and general competence. Methodological bases for the development of the qualifications framework for tertiary education in the Czech Republic were created in the project Q-RAM (2009-2012), with representatives of Czech universities and foreign opponents as members of the project team. Q-RAM project created a qualifications framework with four levels - besides the Bachelor (EQF6), Master (EQF7) and doctoral levels (EQF8), it also described the potential of short-cycle programmes (EQF5). Description of general learning outcomes obtained by graduates of different levels was approved by the MSMT in 2012. In the same year, the project went through

international evaluations, which confirmed the quality of work and compliance of the framework with EQF and QF-EHEA.

In the years 2015 - 2016, the Q-RAM project outputs were used as a basis for the review and preparation of the updated framework of tertiary education of the Czech Republic. National Qualifications Framework for higher education consistently follows the European initiative in terms of categorization and definition of tertiary education qualifications using description of learning outcomes. The generality of the Framework does not limit the freedom of creating study programmes, but at the same time it provides a minimum standard. The use of learning outcomes as a tool to describe the level of tertiary studies also creates the conditions for wider usage at universities, which may have a direct impact on quality of teaching. It can thus become an essential regulatory tool for tertiary education. [6]

Creating a qualifications framework in tertiary education is of great importance both for the universities (it expresses a common understanding among members of the academic community) and social partners and other stakeholders at national and international level (employers in the Czech Republic and abroad, potential applicants, foreign universities etc.). The framework contributes to the transparency of the education system and the mutual trust between the actors at all levels.

Approval of the national qualifications framework in tertiary education and its link with the system of quality assurance is a necessary condition for the fulfilment of international obligations of the Czech Republic to the Bologna process and the European Union. By signing the Bergen Communiqué (2005), the Czech Republic pledged to introduce a national qualifications framework and connect it with the overarching QF EHEA. The Department of tertiary education at the MSMT plans to complete this process in the future by the so called self-certification of the national qualifications framework, i.e. by demonstrating the compatibility of the National Qualifications Framework in tertiary education towards the overarching QF-EHEA. This task arises from the Long term strategic plan for tertiary education for the period 2016-2020[7] (updated 2016).

National qualifications framework for tertiary education should also become part of a comprehensive national qualifications framework (covering all levels of education), which will be interconnected at the European level by associating them to the EQF levels.

Higher vocational education has a special position, which is still based on the level EQF6, but it not part of the qualifications framework for tertiary education in the Czech Republic. When assessing the development strategy of higher vocational education, it is necessary to take into account a large extent of uncertainties concerning the objectives, the status of the system and the potential for further development at the national and regional levels, to the unclear relationship and ties to the tertiary education. The higher vocational schools have been dealing

[6] Involvement of the Qualifications Framework of tertiary education in the processes of accreditation and external evaluation can be used as a specific expression of requirements for quality of the tertiary education.

[7] Long-term plan for the educational, research, development and innovation, artistic and other creative activities of tertiary education for the period 2016-2020.

with all of the above mentioned issues and to an extent have limited the adoption of any specific strategic plans.

National and international context of NSK development

Because initial formal education in the Czech Republic basically works well (including an initial vocational education for all levels and fields of initial qualifications), any other or further education is always rather "complement". It's either by providing a "second chance", or by maintaining and further developing and updating on modifications and changes of the already acquired initial qualification.

The concept of initial secondary general and vocational education in the Czech Republic carries out that:

- the Czech Republic does not have significant problems with illiteracy or functional adult illiteracy;
- education as a "second chance" and the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning are in the Czech Republic (for Czech citizens and foreigners resident) mostly as compensation (each individual acquires raw skills and foundation for lifelong learning).

Employers have the right to make decisions on required entry qualification, incl. its possible expansion or modification, except for regulated professions and other regulated activities. Further education and learning largely takes place through all of appropriate forms - according to the needs of individuals and / or requests by their current or potential future employers. Namely, as an informal learning in practice and / or informal education, internal corporate or external in various educational institutions, or as formally recognized further training.

Activities of field groups and sector councils

From the perspective of vocational education and considering the attention VET is receiving from the European Union, the Czech Republic has an exceptionally important partnership built since 1998 within the project of field groups. Field groups are currently coordinated at NUV on behalf of and with the continued support from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT). Their primary task is to promote, maintain and develop effective communication among creators of educational programmes of vocational education in with all relevant partners the Czech Republic.

Sector councils represent a completely new type of instrument, which began to operate on a national level during the project NSK1 and which has the potential to affect the overall development and definition of professions and qualifications in the Czech Republic. The concept of sector councils is inspired by the successful British project "Sector Skills Councils".

Detailed information on field groups and sector councils are given further on.

NSK as a national register of qualifications

The National Register of Qualifications, NSK, is a public register of vocational and complete vocational qualifications and their qualifications and assessment standards. Part of the NSK is a system of qualification levels, whose eight levels correspond to the eight levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The development of the framework and the register for vocational qualifications can be seen as a key instrument in the national strategy for lifelong learning[8] aiming at accessibility of lifelong learning and a more permeable education and training system. The main elements of this strategy, reflecting identified and agreed needs, are as follows:

- making the whole system more transparent and understandable for all stakeholders, e.g. learners and employers, employees, training providers;
- linking initial and continuing education;
- developing a system for the validation and recognition of learning outcomes, irrespective of the way they were achieved;
- systematically involving of all stakeholders in vocational education and training and in the development of 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.

In 2009 a new project The NSK Development and Implementation (NSK2) was started, it was implemented by the National Institute for Education and is also partially funded by the ESF.

This system is underpinned by the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results. Vocational qualifications are drafted by employers and are based on description of occupations as created and accessible in the National System of Occupations. Employers are grouped in sector councils, which are coordinated by a consortium of the Chamber of Commerce of the Czech Republic, the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic and Trexima, a consultation company.

[8] Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (2007). *The strategy of Lifelong Learning in the Czech Republic* is available at http://www.msmt.cz/uploads/Zalezitosti_EU/strategie_2007_EN_web_jednostrany.pdf (08.07.2011).

Institutional framework for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic

Function/process	(Type of) Institution responsible
Qualification and assessment standards	Approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Developed by the sector councils. Sector councils bring together: employers' and employees' representatives as well as the National Institute for Education (NUV), the National Council for qualifications, relevant ministries. The sector councils are expected to be proactive in suggesting what new standards are needed and where standards should be updated.
Conception of the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning processes	Ministry of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the National Institute for Education. The process and responsibilities of different institutions are defined in the Act No. 179/2006 Coll.
Assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (based on the standard) – for vocational qualifications	Authorised institutions – these can be schools, private institutions, companies as well as persons (for example a craftsman can become an authorised person). Some assessment standards require the presence of a jury (two or three people). In line with the assessment standard and the specified mode of assessment, the authorised persons are responsible to choose the most appropriate assessment methods, context, tools as well as the exact definition of the assessment (i.e. the formulation of the question or the assignment, etc.).

Function/process	(Type of) Institution responsible
Assessment of non-formal and informal learning (based on thestandard) – for complete vocational qualifications	Schools only. In line with the regulation and specifications for the specific full qualification. Note: final examinations for VET qualifications at upper-secondary level are all defined nationally and the same examination applies to regular students as well as to people who have achieved vocational qualifications within the NSK system but have not participated in the full formal educational programme.
Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning (i.e. delivery of certificate) – for vocational qualifications	The certificate is delivered by the authorised person or the jury. The No. Act 179/2006 Coll. specifies what information has to figure on the certificate.
Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (i.e. delivery of certificate) – for complete vocational qualifications	Only schools can award complete vocational qualifications – these are the same certificates as those awarded by schools to people who have achieved the qualification through formal education and training.
Quality assurance of the process	The Act No. 179/2006 Coll. stipulates the requirements regarding documentation and archiving of proceedings Appeals procedure: the applicants can request the authorised bodies to review the process.
Giving licence to authorised persons/ institutions	This is done by authorised bodies who are the ministries under which the given vocational qualification falls (there are currently six ministries concerned – the Ministries of Regional Development, Agriculture, Industry and Trade, Home Affairs, Education, and Transport). Authorisation is linked to a specific vocational qualification and is valid for the period of five years. Those interested to become authorised persons/ institutions need to request authorization. The process is set in the Act No. 179/2006 Coll.
Monitoring and expertise for the overall approach	National Institute for Education.

National context of NSK development

National Register of Qualifications (NSK) is based on the National System of Occupations (NSP) and has a significant impact on the educational programmes of initial and continues vocational education.

The link between NSK and study programmes of initial education is rather loose, the bond between and study programmes of further education is tighter. Training modules and programmes aiming at acquiring necessary qualifications are developed based on qualification standards of vocational qualifications.

A well-qualified work force is vital to economic competitiveness. It is important people enter the labour market with qualifications which correspond to the needs of employers.

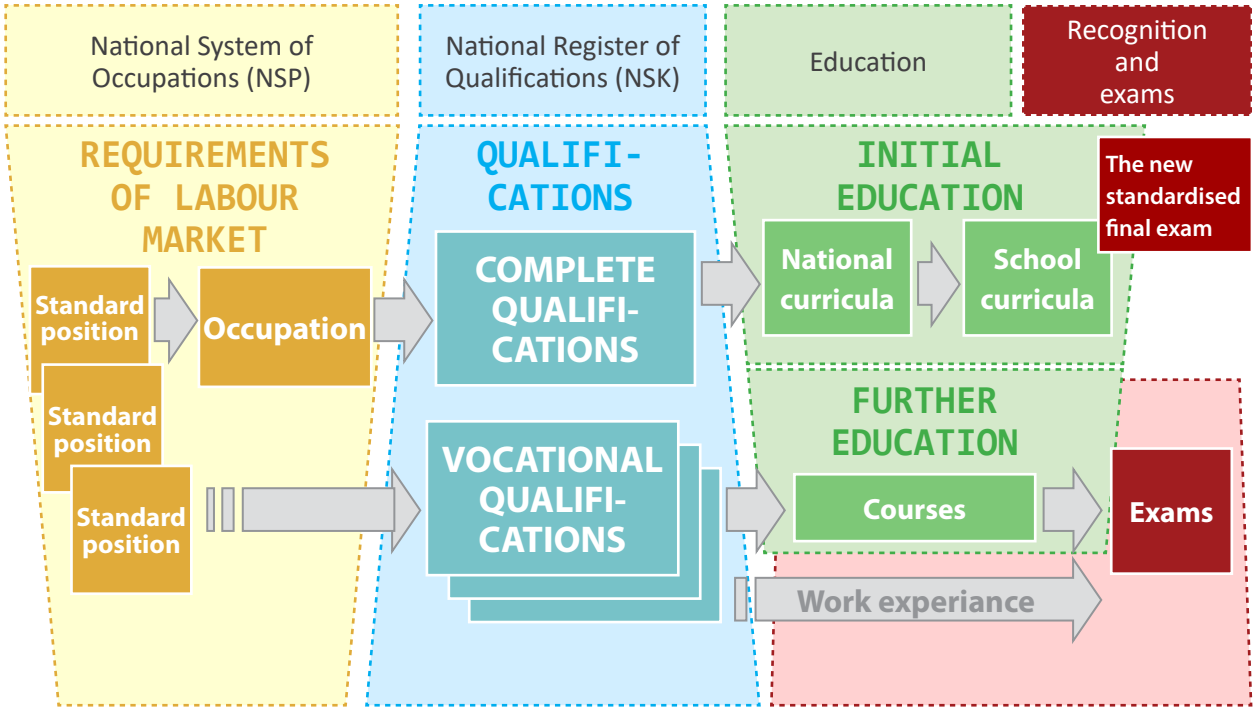
The rapid pace of technological change, changes in the division of labour, the development of new goods and services, globalisation and the accompanying shifts in production all require workers to continually update and further develop the knowledge, skills and competences they acquired in initial education.

This has two important corollaries:

- The starting point for the NSK must be the needs of the labour market. These are reflected in the National System of Occupations.
- The NSK qualifications standards are used in the development of national secondary education curricula and for retraining programmes.

As has been said in Chapter 1, the link between NSK and NSP is very tight. Both occupations and smaller work units in the NSP, and vocational and complete vocational qualifications in the NSK are described by competences, which are part of one common competences database. MPSV expert teams create a system of occupations by means of job descriptions and, after job descriptions are created, expert teams appointed by the sector councils start to develop qualification and assessment standards for required sector qualifications based on these job descriptions.

The following diagram illustrates the relations among the National System of Occupations (NSP), the National Register of Qualifications (NSK) and education:



Vocational qualifications have a key role in continuing education. If standards for a qualification exist, accreditation to an educational programme in further education is granted only to those that lead to exams as stipulated by the standards for the relevant qualification.

Accountability for management of NSK

The Act No. 179/2006 on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results (the act on VNFIL) specifies the responsibilities and competencies of all relevant stakeholders:

- The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports shall coordinate the activities of central administration bodies, approve, amend, repeal and publish the list of complete vocational and vocational qualifications broken down according to the competencies of authorising bodies, approve, amend and repeal qualification standards and assessment standards and support the activities of the Board materially and financially;
- Authorizing bodies (other relevant ministries) decide on granting authorisation to an applicant who is legally entitled to be granted authorisation provided that he/she satisfies all conditions for granting authorisation, monitor exams, maintain records stipulated by the law and provide them to the National Institute for Education and participate in preparing qualification standards and assessment standards.

- Authorized bodies (schools, associations, firms, public or private providers of continuing education etc.) assess learning outcomes of learners (exam applicants) regardless of the method they were obtained.
- Stakeholders (chambers of employers, associations, representatives of schools and universities) participate in preparing qualification and assessment standards.
- National Board for Qualifications is an advisory body of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in the area of qualifications.
- National Institute for Education administers the information system NSK and in cooperation with the National Board for Qualifications, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other stakeholders prepares qualification and assessment standards, submits them to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for approval and publishes them on the NSK information system.

Process managing and decision making in generating vocational qualification standards in the NSK framework

Process of generating and approving standards for qualifications consists of the following steps:

a)

Employers' representatives decide by consensus on the required qualifications. The sector councils then form working groups of experts who are asked to formulate proposed standards for these qualifications.

b)

The experts formulate uniformly structured qualifications on the basis of the Guidelines for Inclusion of Qualifications Standards in the NSK. These Guidelines contain rules for assigning individual qualifications to qualification levels and also descriptors for these levels. On the basis of these rules and descriptors, the experts then assign to each qualification which they generate, levels for the individual competences and for the qualification as a whole.

c)

The proposed standard is then evaluated by the sector council, including an evaluation of its proposed level. The qualification level is also evaluated by the council member from the NUV, who checks conformity with the Guidelines.

d)

The proposed qualification level is also evaluated in the course of the approval process:	
Consensus that a qualification is required. Setting up of a committee of experts.	Employers' representatives
Proposal of a qualification standard, with levels for the competences and an overall level.	Working group of experts formed by sector council
Approval of the proposed standard and its level by employers.	Sector council, National Institute for Education
State approval of the standard and its level.	Authorising body (relevant responsible ministry) Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

5.4. Types and Legal Status of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Three types of standards were enshrined in legislation in the Czech Republic, all of them being in compliance with the European concept of lifelong learning:

Occupational standards	Education/training standards	Assessment standards
As so called **qualification standards** (according to the Act on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning)	As so called **framework educational programmes** acting as curricula standards (according to the Education Act)	As so called assessment standards(according to the Act on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning and the Education Act)

Based on studies, sector councils processed job descriptions, which have the character of "occupational standards". These are then the basis for the creation of qualification standards. Education, specifically "curriculum" standards as a framework educational programmes reflect, especially in the vocational/qualifying part, what is the content of qualification standards. Assessment standards according to the Act on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning are part of NSK, assessment standards according to the Education Act have a character of Unified final examination.

Occupational standards are created by sector councils, development of curricula standards is supported by field groups.

Basic characteristic of vocational qualifications in the NSK

Act No. 179/2006 Coll., on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results, as amended (the act on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning - VNFIL) established the National Register of Qualifications (NSK) containing vocational and complete vocational qualifications and their qualifications and assessment standards.

The Act distinguishes between two types of qualification:

- complete (comprehensive) vocational qualifications - ability to work in a particular occupation,
- vocational qualifications - the ability to perform particular activities or groups of activities which lead to employability in the labour market (e.g. assembly of furniture, installation of elevators, sport massage, flower arrangement, ice cream making etc.). Vocational qualifications can be part of complete vocational qualification.

The procedures for awarding of vocational and complete vocational qualifications are specified by the Act. Each vocational qualification is described by a pair of

standards, a qualification standard (a list of expected units of learning outcomes) and an assessment standard (set of evaluation criteria):

- Qualification standard (kvalifikační standard) is a list of the skills required for a specific work activity or activities in a particular occupation. These are the skills which are required for the relevant qualification. In other words, it is a set of competences, whose acquirement must on demonstrate at an exam.
- Assessment standard (hodnotící standard) is a list of criteria and procedures for validating the skills required in a particular occupation. It describes how to verify that the candidate possesses the skills required for the qualification. It is a detailed description of ways of validating competences described in the assessment standard.

Validation and recognition of learning outcomes

The NSK provides a collection of standards, allowing the objective verification (validation) and recognition of abilities.

Vocational qualifications are awarded according to the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. by authorized bodies in accordance with the relevant assessment standards. Authorized bodies must have a representative who is a physical person. Conditions for the granting of authorization are governed by the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. and are of two kinds:

- Requirements regarding the professional competence of the authorized body or its representative
- Requirements regarding material and technical equipment of the authorized body.

Every organisation which wishes to conduct evaluations for a particular qualification must request approval from the authorizing body, which must be an agency of the Czech government, either a ministry or the Czech National Bank according to the Act No. 179/2006 Coll., listed for that qualification in the NSK (www.narodni-kvalifikace.cz).

Information on authorization requests is provided on the web pages of authorizing bodies. Authorizing bodies evaluate whether an applicant meets the conditions of the assessment standard and either grants or rejects the application accordingly.

A list of authorized bodies, including contact information, is included in the NSK web page along with each vocational qualification in the NSK, where authorization has been granted. Applicants for qualifications can then apply to individual authorized bodies for evaluation.

At the examination the applicant must demonstrate all the competences listed in the qualifications standard according to the criteria in the assessment standard. In case of success, he or she is awarded the vocational qualification.

The awarding of complete qualifications can take place in various ways:

- Under the Education Act, i.e., by graduation from a programme of study on successful completion of the examination required by the Act, e.g. the maturita examination or the final examination for obtaining a VET certificate .
- Under the Act No. 179/2006 Coll., in one of the following ways:
  - by acquiring the corresponding vocational qualifications and then completing the examination for the corresponding programme of study, where such exists;
  - by acquiring the corresponding qualifications after having already acquired a qualification at the same level in initial education, where no programme of study corresponds to the complete qualification sought.

Vocational qualification certificate is a nationwide valid certificate that contains personal data of the applicant, authorized body data, the exam report and a list of verified and validated competences. The certificate and the exam report are stored as required by the law on archiving.

Qualifications outside of the NSK recognized on a labour market

In 2015 sector councils were addressed with the intention to map the existing certificates of qualifications that apply and are recognized in the labour market and stand outside of the NSK.

After the agreement with the main actors the sector councils were assigned a task to help create conditions for the future validation and recognition of parts of vocational qualifications based on certificates acquired otherwise than under NSK. The Czech qualifications framework would be the superstructure above NSK making this all possible.

Mapping qualifications recognized in the labour market - description of the task, process and outcomes

The task assigned to the NSK2 research team assumed some form of involvement of sector councils. Therefore, the actual assignment was preceded by consultations with representatives of employers consortium, in which the goal of the task was discussed as well as the possibilities of involving the outcomes in activities related to the referencing process in the country. Current status of the assignment approved in 2011 by the Czech government, is described in the scheme in Chapter 2, chapter *Referencing process and development of the national qualifications framework*.

The main focus of the task was on those qualifications recognized in the labour market that are not marked in the scheme because they are not acquired under the Education Act, nor under the Higher Education Act and they are not a part of the NSK either.

Sector councils were assigned the task in May 2015.

Certificates were allocated to one, in a few cases, to more sector councils. Foreign language certificate were listed as a separate group.

Certificates assigned to more sector councils were marked as *cross-sector*.

Sector councils also described whether the certificate is recommended in the sector or mandatory by law.

Total number of 602 certificates was identified.

102 of them have a status of recommended in the sector and 221 are mandatory by law.

67 certificates are cross-sector and can be used at several sectors.

Regulated professions and activities

Performance of certain professions is subject to a number of criteria and conditions (e.g. Level of education, experience, integrity, physical fitness, liability insurance for damage caused by carrying out the activity, etc.); without respecting these it is not allowed to perform such professions. These occupations are collectively called **regulated professions or activities**.

It is a responsibility of each member state to determine which occupations and activities will be regulated. As a consequence, each member state regulates a different number of occupations and activities, has a different scope of this regulation and different requirements. Czech Republic regulates ca 330 occupations and professional activities. Information on regulated professions in the Czech Republic (including the required education, experience and other qualifications and relevant recognition authority) are published in the Database of regulated professions and activities of the Czech Republic. The database currently contains about 330 regulated professions and professional activities (2016). This number is constantly changing in relation to changes to performance requirements for a specific occupation enshrined in legislation or other subordinate legislation.

Requirements for these jobs and professional activities are determined by the level of educational attainment. The EQF terminology is not used in the database. Since the Czech Republic referenced its education and qualifications systems to the EQF (see "Czech referencing process and its results"), it is possible to "convert" these requirements into the language of the EQF and assign the appropriate EQF level to the regulated professions included in the database. Examples of these professions are Pyrotechnic (EQF2), Machinist hoist (EQF3), Mining designer (EQF4), Biotechnical assistant (EQF6), Optometrist (EQF6), Radiological technician (EQF6), Pharmacist (EQF7).

If a person is interested in joining a business, the requirements for a profession are usually looser, featured spectrum EQF level is wider for each profession (e.g.

Social services workers, required levels EQF2-EQF6; Teacher's assistant, required leve ls EQF2-EQF7; Catering, required levels EQF3-EQF7; Tinnery and body repair, required levels EQF3-EQF7; Installation, repair, inspection and testing of electrical equipment, required level EQF3-EQF7; Property and personal security, required levels EQF4-EQF7; Recruiters, required level EQF4-EQF7; Phytopatologists, required levels EQF7-EQF8). In some cases, the required level of education is not determined, e.g. Management of a driving school (governed by the specific instruments, requires 1 year experience).

If one intends to become a professional in a regulated business area in the Czech Republic, it is necessary to ask for the validation and recognition of the professional qualification by the competent recognition authority in the Czech Republic. If the profession is not regulated, a person is entitled to perform such profession without a need of validating and recognizing this qualification. Whether it will carry out the profession, depends on agreement with a potential employer.

The general regulation for the recognition of professional qualifications is the Act No. 18/2004 Coll. on the recognition of professional qualifications and other competences of nationals of Member States of the European Union and on the amendment of some Acts (Act on recognition of professional qualifications) implements Directive 2005/36/EC and all the principles of free movement of workers arising from EU primary law.

The recognition authority entitled to decide in a specific case for the recognition of professional qualifications in the Czech Republic is the central administrative authority of the Czech Republic, whose remit includes regulated profession or the scope of the regulated profession in the next (different ministries, chambers, etc.). In case the applicant intends to carry on a regulated activity as an entrepreneur or as an agent of the holder of a trade authorization, the recognition authority is the Ministry of Industry and Trade. In case the permission to perform a regulated activity according to special legal regulation is given by a professional chamber, this chamber is also the recognition authority.

A certificate of professional competence serves as one of base documents for the request for recognition of a vocational qualification. It must be submitted to the competent recognition authority so that the applicant could carry on a regulated activity for which he is qualified. The recognition authority in the Czech Republic will issue a certificate upon request. Most often, the applications for a certificate of competence are issued by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Czech Chamber of Certified Engineers and Technicians.

Development of legislation on the recognition of professional qualifications brought several ways to allow EU citizens to perform a profession for which they are qualified in another member state. The most common way of recognition of qualifications is a general system for the recognition of professional qualifications.

An exception from this system constitutes recognition of professional experience (covering mostly handicrafts), sectoral profession and lawyers.

Professional practice may be recognized for activities, which are listed in Annex IV of Directive 2005/36 /EC. Various lists of this Annex differ in combinations and time, how long must the applicant work in the relevant occupation in his/her home country as self-employed, or in a managerial position, in terms of meeting the criteria for recognizing the qualification. In the Czech Republic different conditions than the general system apply, according to Section 18 of Act No. 18/2004/Coll. Generally, it is often crafts in fields of construction, transportation and others.

The provisions of § 36b of the Act No. 18/2004 Coll. regulates the institute of **verification of vocational qualifications** (or a preliminary check of qualifications), which is an implementation of Article 7.4 of Directive 2005/36/EC. According to the directive, it is possible for the recognition authority to verify vocational qualifications prior to the first provision of services only if the profession has implications for public health or safety, and at the same time does not use automatic recognition.

Directive 2005/36/EC establishes minimum requirements for the **performance of selected sector occupations** (i.e. those professions are not regulated by internal regulations of member states). Directive in Annex V specifically appoints individual study fields and faculties, which are accepted and recognized by all member countries, as well as so-called *reference date*, i.e. the date since when the study programmes have been harmonized with European standards (i.e. the reference date of the Czech Republic is May 1st 2004). If a graduate of a programme for one of the sectoral professions graduated from the faculty (or obtained a certificate/ diploma) mentioned in this Annex and began the study after the reference date, the qualification should be automatically recognized, in order to legally perform this profession.

In the Czech Republic this adjustment applies to workers in seven sectoral professionals who can benefit from the highest possible degree of harmonization required study programmes and practices preparing individuals to perform these professions. These are the following professions:

- doctor, dentist, pharmacist (based on Act No. 95/2004 Coll., on conditions for obtaining and recognition of professional qualifications for pursuing the medical professions of doctor, dentist and pharmacist);
- nurse, midwife (based on Act No. 96/2004 Coll., On paramedical professions);
- veterinarian (based on Act No. 166/1999 Coll., On veterinary care);
- architect (based on Act No. 360/1992 Coll., On Professional Practice of Certified Architects and on the Professional Practice of Certified Engineers and Technicians in construction).

The recognition of vocational qualifications in selected professions can be applied for from January 18, 2016 through **European professional card** (EPC[9]). The EPC can be requested if the applicant has the following qualifications: a nurse (responsible for general care); pharmacist; physiotherapist; mountain guide; real estate agent (the profession is not regulated in the Czech Republic).

[9] EPC is an on-line process enabling a validation of a qualification in EU member states.

A separate legal regulation exists for two professions; lawyer (regulation of the profession is governed by Act no. 85/1996 Coll., On advocacy and so called "Specialist Directive" 98/5/EC), auditor (regulation of the profession is governed by Act No. 254/2000 Coll. on auditors, Directive 2006/43/EC).

Legal status of non-formal sector qualifications

Non-formal and informal learning include many disparate activities that have a hobby or professionally specialized character. All leisure and occupational activities going beyond formal schooling fall in this category. During these activities, people mostly unconsciously educate themselves, learn a whole new set of knowledge, skills and competences. Some competences go beyond professional qualifications, they are cross-sectional (e.g. driver's license, PC skills, use of information technology, management groups), other can be added in the system of existing vocational qualifications described in the NSK (e.g. Software designers, Aerobics instructor, Coordinator of volunteers, Mountain guide, Sommelier, Production of desserts and cakes). NSP contains several standardized positions in the field of sport and physical education, which do not have their equivalents in the NSK (Wellness specialist, Dance instructor, Animator of leisure time activities etc.).

In the Czech educational system basic conditions have been created for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning/education and their possible inclusion in the future National qualifications framework of the Czech Republic. These are mainly legislative framework of the Act No. 179/2006 Coll., on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results, as well as existing tools and structure for describing qualifications (i.e. knowledge, skills and competences) acquired during formal education, and validation and recognition of the results of formal education (NSP, NSK).

Initiatives related to the implementation of procedures for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning/education recommended by the European Commission fit appropriately in this context. Partial steps were already taken related to elaboration of some vocational qualifications in hobby and voluntary sectors and their integration into the NSP and NSK (including the assignment of appropriate EQF level according to descriptors). This has launched preparation and development of some other vocational qualifications in hobby and voluntary sectors, which are in demand on the Czech labour market. In the future, other necessary qualifications will be then added in the NSK and assign to EQF levels.

NSK plays a vital role during validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. It allows candidates to obtain a professional qualification to pass an examination and obtain the necessary qualifications. For these purposes, the MSMT as an authorizing body establishes so called authorised bodies, accredited to provide vocational examinations and certification. The first steps have been made in the context of creation of NSK qualification standards for selected professions in hobby and voluntary (non-profit) sector.

Qualifications obtained in hobby and voluntary sector

Validation and recognition of learning outcomes in hobby and voluntary sector and the creation of corresponding qualifications is still not a well elaborated topic in the Czech Republic. Its importance though is expected to grow in the upcoming years. This is apparent both from the changing needs of the labour market (increasing importance of workers' flexibility and diversity of skills and competences required from job seekers), and from Europe-wide trend towards validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Two important projects in this field were implemented in the recent years; "Keys for Life - Development of key competences in non-formal and informal learning" (hereinafter only "Keys for life") and "K2 - Quality and competitiveness in non-formal education", both implemented by the MSMT and coordinated by the National Institute for Children and Youth. Both projects focused primarily on work with children and youth in their free time. These projects created numerous outputs that contribute to tackling this topic and outline its further possible development. Their added value is an attempt to establish a framework for validation and recognition of learning outcomes in hobby and voluntary sector and for defining universally recognized qualifications.

In the project "Keys for life", the so called minimal competency profiles for 11 standardized positions were created for the field of work with children and young people, two of which have a wider overlap in the non-profit sector. Minimal competency profiles are linked to the NSP and NSK (see below), and are thus useful for the validation of achieved learning outcomes. Each profile includes a brief characterization of performed activities and a list of professional skills and competences. None of the profiles is assigned to the appropriate EQF level yet. Summary of the required knowledge and skills, however, helps to assign the required qualifications according to the EQF descriptors.[10]

In 2014 several vocational qualifications were created in the area of hobby and voluntary sector, which were submitted for an approval for possible inclusion in the NSK. National Institute for Children and Youth in cooperation with the Fund of Further Education elaborated occupation cards for selected standardized positions in the section of education and training. Some of the proposed qualifications correspond to standardized position in the NSP with the same name; it is therefore possible to assign the appropriate EQF level (e.g. Safety supervisor for work with children and youth in leisure and informal education, EQF5). For several qualifications it is easy to identify the EQF level because they already have an approved and valid qualification standard listed in the NSK (e.g. Leader of leisure activities for children and youth, EQF4; Leader of recreational activities for children and youth, EQF5).

In 2015, more vocational qualifications were developed and presented for approval (e.g. Manager of nongovernmental non-profit organizations, Accounting for

[10] To assign minimal competency profiles to the EQF levels, an overview of selected standardized positions in the NSP can be used. All standardized positions are assigned to the EQF level / NSP, which correspond to levels of NSK and EQF.

nongovernmental non-profit organizations, Ski instructor, Snowboard instructor). From showing these examples of qualifications it is clear

that their focus is not limited only on the field of work with children and youth, but extends to the area of work with adults, too.

From this perspective it seems to be most meaningful and useful to continue in mapping professions in hobby and voluntary sector and their development to the level of minimum competency profiles (with assigning appropriate levels according to the EQF descriptors). More minimum competency profiles for selected occupations in hobby and voluntary sector can be developed as part of the preparations for the inclusion of specific vocational qualifications to NSK.

Qualifications obtained through further education

The legal framework for the development of further education is given by Act No. 179/2006 Coll., on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results. It starts from the premise that lifelong learning is a continuous process which can follow multiple paths. The recognition of diverse educational paths is based on the validation and recognition of knowledge and skills in standardised examinations, on completion of which successful candidates receive a certificate of vocational qualification.

The Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results also specifies assembling individual (i.e. vocational) qualifications into complex (i.e. complete) vocational qualifications. Complete vocational qualifications have their equivalents in study programmes in initial education. The final exam is the same for such complete qualifications and their counterparts in initial education. Equivalence is defined in terms of learning outcomes - competences which are listed in both the NSK and in core curricula in initial education. Credits are not currently used in continuing education.

Each qualification, which can be obtained according to the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results, i.e. qualification acquired beyond initial education, vocational qualification, has an assigned qualification level described via working competences (abilities).

Descriptors describing the level of qualifications in the NSK were developed in close relation to the eight levels of EQF descriptors. They comprehensively describe activities that are required at certain level for certain job or occupation. Comparison of the NSK and EQF descriptors of qualifications found that, despite the formal distinction, eight levels of NSK qualifications correspond well with the eight levels of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. NSK qualification levels consist of an eight level scale and are common for the NSK and the NSP.

Adding qualifications into the NSK is a subject to its own exact procedures described in the guidelines. NSK qualification standards must be approved by the MSMT, which ensures consistency with the content of study programmes in the initial education and their inclusion in the appropriate level of NSK.

Legal status of vocational qualifications is given by the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results.

The Act defines the NSK, it determines the content, how and by whom the qualifications are described and approved, according to which rules the verification (validation) and recognition of qualifications is processed. It also sets out the ways to reach a level of education within the meaning of the Education Act.

The Act is followed by its decree of the MSMT No. 208/2007 Coll., specifying various aspects of the implementation of the Act, particularly in the area of entrusting authorized bodies to verify qualifications, conduct examination, issue certification, set different deadlines, etc. From the perspective of developing NSK is important that the decree explicitly mentions sector councils.

Additional legal documents are important for the implementation of the Act, establishing obtained vocational qualifications as a specific condition. It is mainly the Decree No. 176/2009 Coll., establishing the requirement for accreditation of educational programmes and education organization in retraining programmes. This decree, among others, stipulates that in the fields with existing approved vocational qualifications (under the Act No. 179/2006 Coll.), only those courses which will be completed with an exam for this qualification can be accredited by the MSMT.

The generally closer link to the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. was anchored with the amendment of Act No. 455/1991 Coll., on Trades (Trade Act). The assembly of vocational qualifications is now sufficient for obtaining a trade license for craft trades (even without the final examination and obtaining a VET certificate).

NSK received a significant support with introduction of the Government Resolution dated 27 February 2013 (no. 135), which requires members of the government to take into account the existence of NSK and the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results in the creation of its own laws governing the qualifications, qualification prerequisites for certain professions, or verification and exams of qualification eligibility.

5.5. Procedures of the Inclusion of Qualifications in the NQF

Incorporating qualifications into NSK

The process of defining qualifications, creating their qualification and assessment standards and approving proposals can be divided into the following phases:

- analysis of needs of certain vocational qualifications for a given area of the national economy;
- review of primary proposals and creation of an annual work schedule for the development and revision of qualification standards;
- development of qualification standards in working groups;
- approval procedures carried out by the competent authorizing bodies and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT).

Processing analysis of needs of certain vocational qualifications for a given area of the national economy

Analysis of the needs of certain vocational qualifications to satisfy requirements of the labour market has been carried out once a year since 2010, most often in the first quarter. Sector councils regularly process professional qualifications needs analysis for each covered area.

Input basis for the commencement of the analysis of needs at the beginning of the project NSK2 were so called "Information summaries for analysing occupational and skill requirements". These documents contained the foundation for a definition of professional and qualification requirements in the sector. Other background materials were also used to define qualification needs, such as:

- structure of NSP;
- overview of existing accredited educational programmes;
- list of regulated professions and activities;
- Annex of the Trade Act - Overview of licensed regulated trades and craft trades;
- previous proposals for the creation of standards which were not approved for the development, yet still meeting the demands of professional qualifications (usability, checkability, verifiability);
- overview of the standards of professional qualifications proposed to be revised after four years of use.

When defining demands for creation of standards of vocational qualifications, members of sector councils proceeded from the situation and trends in the labour market in areas that fall within the competence of each sector council, from their own experience with the requirements of sectors, from generally accepted

concepts and assumptions of development in the sector of the national economy and its professional (and qualification) needs in the future.

This phase had two objectives; first to identify areas suitable for processing qualification standards, and second to exclude areas where qualification requirements are defined by other legislation. Suggestions and justifications of the need for processing new qualification standards were submitted through standard forms according to the Act on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (i.e. "Birth certificates" – rodné listy[11]). Content of such birth certificate is a basic characteristic, justification of the need and relevance of the qualification (a brief analysis of the specific areas covered in terms of competence, link to the NSP, interest from applicants for certification, authorized persons and educators).

Conditions for the submission of the birth certificates were created not only for the sector councils, but also for external contributors. Standard mechanisms were created for processing new proposals submitted from the outside of sector councils. These procedures are described in detail in relevant methodological materials NSK (see in particular methodology and implementation of NSK and NSK Processing Standards).

Besides members of the sector councils, these following experts also contributed to proposing vocational qualification standards:

- members of working groups;
- feedback consultants;
- confirmation, authorizing bodies, Trade licensing office, Labour office, education providers (e.g. Association of institutions for adult education), MSMT, MPSV;
- other external contributors, who can submit their proposals either through NSK project team or via NSK on-line information system.

Review of primary proposals and creation of an annual work schedule for the development and revision of qualification standards

Originally, birth certificates were reviewed and approved only by the Coordination council. Given the need to increase the effectiveness of the process of development of qualification standards, other institutions, notably the authorizing bodies and the MSMT were involved in the process.

In 2014, the methodology was adjusted and now the Coordination council approves the creation of only those qualification standards, which are recommended by authorizing bodies and the MSMT without any serious comments.

The work tasks are planned in annual periods; new period begins in the second quarter of the relevant year and ended the first quarter of next year. The work schedules contain at least:

[11] See Annex 5.2.

- list of approved qualification standards (proposed names);
- level of qualifications;
- status of a qualification standards (new, revised, transfer from previous years);
- anticipated dates for the milestones in the process of creating / revising (set up a working group, first draft, approval of the draft by a field guarantor, handover to the approval team, handover of review to working group);
- anticipated dates of approval of the standards by sector councils;
- anticipated dates of handover of the standards to NUV;
- active sector councils (in terms of processing qualification standards)

Process of creating qualification standards in working groups

After approval of schedules for creating and revising the qualification standards, the working groups were established and became active. Each phase is described in details in relevant methodological materials (mainly procedural NSK standard no. 4: "The creation and revision of vocational qualifications in the working group"). The actual work was launched with distributing work tasks among members of the sector councils. Chairman of each council established deadlines for qualifications standards development - in accordance with the milestones set out in the work schedule - and appointed head of the working group, which was usually the author of a birth certificate.

Requirements for the composition and size of working groups are also described in the procedural NSK standards. The aim of these standards was to ensure the necessary quality and objectivity in proposals, qualification and assessment standards of professional qualifications. Working group leader worked mostly as a coordinator of activities related to emerging qualification standards and as a communicator between sector council, field guarantor, secretary or coordinator of the sector council on one side and a working group on the other. This person was also responsible for work distribution between members of the working group (and thus rewards for processing and revising standards), all of which are within the project limits.

The process of creating standards was under a methodological supervision of authorized NUV representatives (guarantors, field managers) and under a supervision of a secretary of each sector council. Other tools of methodical support were available for the members of working groups.

Gradually increasing pace of work performance within the NSK2 project is shown in the following chart:

Year	New vocational qualifications	Revised vocational qualifications	Total
2010	43	55	**98**
2011	173	118	**291**
2012	257	50	**307**
2013	199	76	**275**
2014	322	37	**359**
Total	**994**	**336**	**1330**

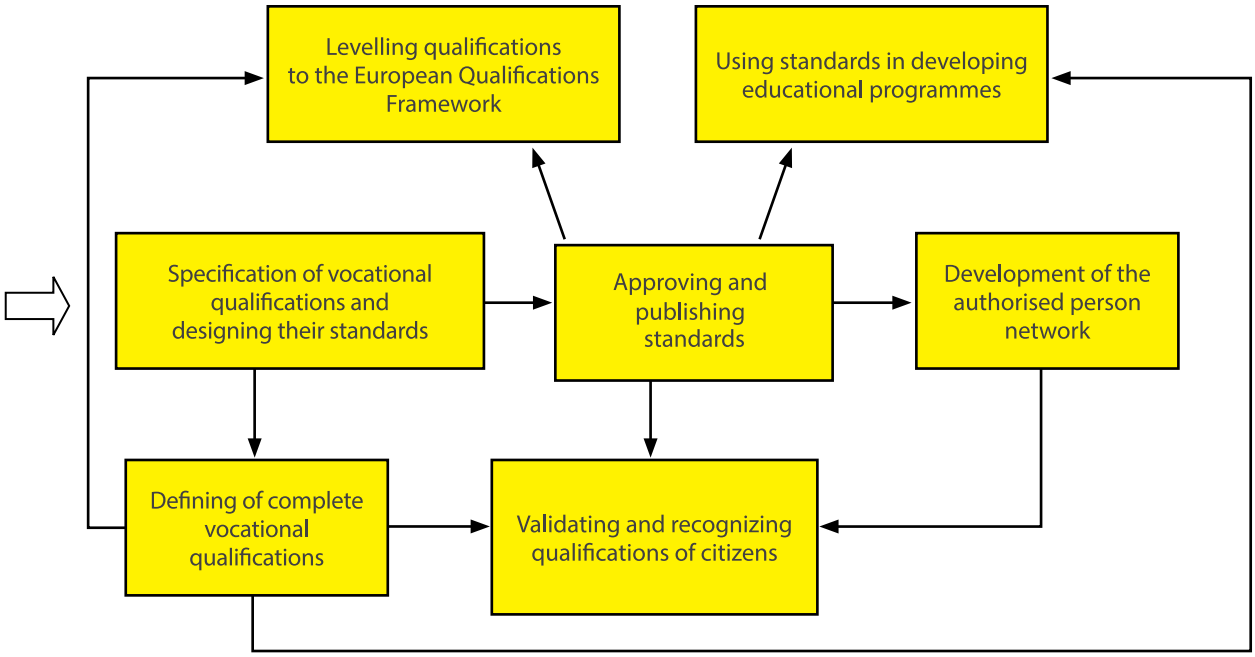
Approval procedures carried out by the competent authorizing bodies and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

The authorizing body is not legally an approving body; standards shall be approved by the Ministry of education, Youth and Sports (MSMT) in collaboration with authorizing bodies. However opinion of the authorizing body is crucial, therefor it is necessary to submit the qualification and assessment standards to the authorizing body before the MSMT.

Proposals are submitted by NUV, part of the submission is a statement of the sector councils, or even a statement of key associations, unions, etc. The ministry oversees primarily on systemic accuracy of the standards, the links between qualifications and compliance with Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results. The statement of the authorizing authority has a decisive status.

The entire sequence of above described processes is very demanding and is supported by the NSK information system.

The overall diagram of the processes in the NSK and their relations



Description of the procedure of submitting proposals for vocational qualifications in the NSK

The main sources of proposing new standards of vocational qualifications are sector councils.

The following table provides a description of a case, in which the initiative to create a new vocational qualification standards does not come from sector councils, but results from the interest of employers (or similar party outside of NSK).

Individual steps	Description, explanation, comments
1 ***Initial expressions of intent***	The incentive comes as an "entry order" addressed to NUV as "an organization that maintains and publishes NSK', possibly as a result of a work meeting. **Result: the intention is delivered to NUV**
2 ***Proposed solution***	NUV experts preliminarily assess the possibilities and offer solutions (a) through NSK under the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. (B) outside NSK - in exceptional cases, offering options for further action. To assess the possibility for further steps under NSK, the applicants are provided information and background materials (e.g. latest wording of the Act No. 179/2006 Coll., birth certificate form, selected methodological materials), and links to websites. **Result: proposal for further steps under NSK is delivered to the applicant** (including the necessary background and information materials)

Individual steps	Description, explanation, comments
3 ***Assessment of the proposal by the applicant***	The applicant assess proposed options and chooses the most suitable one. Proposals are negotiable. **Result: agreement of both parties on further progress under NSK**
4 ***Processing the proposal***	Applicant completes a birth certificate form – with this step the proposal for creating new vocational qualification becomes official. The birth certificate must contain all information on the applicant's intentions, as well as convincing arguments for the next steps in the process. If needed, NUV experts provide a methodical support. **Result: birth certificate created by applicant and submitted to NUV**
5 ***Proposal evaluation***	Birth certificate is submitted to NUV to be evaluated and commented on by the representatives of: ■ overarching organization of employers (if necessary, the proposal can be assessed also in relevant sector council) ■ authorizing bodies (relevant ministries) ■ NUV, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports Positive opinions from all mentioned entities are necessary for implementing the proposal into the annual work plan. Negative opinion or crucial reminder from any of these entities means that the proposal is not included in the annual work plan **Result: proposal is included in the annual work plan for creating and revising vocational qualification standards.** Proposal can also be denied.

The above described process ends at the level of evaluation mechanism. With regards to the information set out elsewhere in the report, the next steps are described rather briefly.

The proposal included in the annual plan for creating and revising qualifications standards is passed to a relevant sector council. Selected member of the council will establish a working group, the applicant of the proposal becomes a member of this group, too. The working group drafts qualification and assessment standard of the proposed qualification. It is then evaluated by independent experts and after potential adjustments approved by the sector council.

In the next step, the qualification and assessment standards are linguistically and formally adjusted by NUV staff and submitted for the approval process. As a part of the approval process, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and MSMT can make further comments and objections. After the approval from the MSMT, the qualification and assessment standards are published in the NSK information

system and become available for the authorization process and subsequently examination.

Influence of employers on NSK

Some means of influence of employers were mentioned and elaborated in the previous text. The following text illustrates the importance of employers as a target group the process of NSK development.

Employers can possibly affect NSK in following ways:

- applying their direct or indirect (through sector councils) influence, which derives directly from the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results, namely direct involvement in NSK development and participation on definition of new vocational qualifications and their description,
- applying its fundamental and essential impact on the use attested qualifications, either employing their owners or supporting further education of their employees, which seeks to extend their skills to the level of the standards in the NSK.

Benefit for employers is therefore primarily associated with using NSK assets:

- opportunity to influence the development of qualifications in the Czech Republic, allowing to meet the needs of employers and thus strengthen the competitiveness of the whole economy;
- NSK can be used to improve qualification structure of employees (recruitment of staff or improve skills of existing staff);
- opportunity to enhance further education of persons in the labour market while using qualification standards as a description of the desired state (ideally reached by employees and used by education providers).

Methodological materials for NSK development and determining levels of qualifications

The methodological support for NSK development consists mostly of materials and various forms of training for groups of professional involved in the development (NUV guarantors, field manager NUV, members of working groups…). All materials are intended for both creating new vocational qualifications and revision of existing qualifications. Created materials, particularly the *Methodology of developing NSK* reflect the experience gained from creating NSK, legislative changes or changes in the processes and conditions.

One of the themes mentioned in the *Methodology of developing NSK* is determining qualification levels of vocational qualifications. Following paragraph briefly summarizes this topic:

Each and every vocational qualification and its individual professional competences must have a set qualification level. For this purpose a system of eight centrally set

national descriptors is used. These descriptors, as well as their relationships with EQF levels and degrees of education under the Education Act are listed in the Annex of the *Methodology of developing NSK*.

The qualification level of vocational qualification as a whole is based on levels of individual competences. Elaborate rules are applied.

Coordination of processes and activities in creating NSK

The following text focuses on coordination activities related to the target group of employers, concerning the fact, that their role in NSK development is irreplaceable.

Setting the coordination of key activities in the project NSK2

Basic processes related to the involvement of employers in the development and implementation of NSK and their management are described in detail in the general text *Sector council's model* and material *Process Standards in development and revision of vocational and complete qualifications*, which are focusing on NSK. Both materials are available in a version from 2014, only in Czech language.

Within the project NSK2, the management of activities of representatives of employers' was ensured through communication and sharing of information at different levels, from communication guarantor - secretary of sector council to communication at the level of project management and management of public procurement.

Following entities and tools were used for managing processes related to various activities of employers:

The Coordination council (CC) is the executive body of employers responsible for coordination and operational management of the network of sector councils. The focus of the council was especially monitoring of labour market, ensuring quality and representativeness of personnel and institutional staff of sector councils and coordination and operational management of the network. During the project the Coordination council had 5 members (representatives of employers, project management NSK2). From 2013 meetings were also attended by a representative of the MSMT (factual project manager NSK2).

Coordination group for involving employers into NSK processes (CG) is a platform where the contractor reported in an agreed format about the status of public procurement and on the implementation of the contract. The group was addressing issues of strategic character and identifying problems which were subsequently solved by responsible management staff of both parties. During the project the coordination group had 7 members (three representatives of employers, three representatives of project management, secretary). Meetings were also attended by a representative of the MSMT (factual project manager NSK2).

Methodical group (MS) is a platform for discussing methodological issues. The group was addressing methodological issues related to NSK, linked between NSK and NSP and general issues related to legislative constraints NSK, e.g. Amendments to the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results, links to the Trade Act. Besides representatives of employers and project management, the group gathered together also representatives of ministries (MSMT, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Industry and Trade), DG for employment and Association of institutions for further education.

Management of processes related to activities of employers in 2016

Based on the previous discussion, it was agreed for 2016 to newly set up and use the necessary structures in new conditions. The management now stands on 3 pillars; (1) The Coordination Council, (2) Coordination Group for NSK and (3) Working group by the National Council for Qualifications.

In connection with the Coordination Council (CC) it was agreed to

a. Facilitate the functioning of the CC as the executive body of employers which ensures coordination and operational management of the network of sector councils.

b. Respect the fact that members of the CC will only be representatives of employers. Representatives of the MSMT and NUV may be in specific cases invited to CC meetings as guests.

c. Ask representatives of overarching organizations of employers to nominate their representatives or CC members into the newly conceived Coordination Group for NSK.

In connection with the Coordination Group (CG) for NSK it was agreed to

a. Create CG as comprehensively conceived body influencing the processes of management and coordination of the work of sector councils, and working groups of sector councils, NUV activities related to work with creating and revising qualification standards, relevant activities of the MSMT and authorizing bodies, and activities focused on methodology and quality assurance of outcomes and processes .

b. Establish the CG on the basis of MSMT – NUV – employers, in order to create a working environment in which they can develop synergies to promote sustainable development NSK, NSK use and selected stakeholder groups.

In connection with the Working group (WG) by the National Council for Qualifications it was agreed to

a. Establish the WG for coordination of NSP and NSK on the basis of Ministry of Labour – Fund of Further Education – MSMT – NUV.

b. Facilitate and support activities of the WG from the MSMT

c. Assemble the WG once every three months and invite representatives of employers to these meetings if needed.

Role of employers in sector councils

Human resource development is one of the key requirements for competitiveness of companies and of the whole economy. Putting the right people in the right positions and enabling their further development is particularly important. It is therefore necessary not only to educate people, but also to develop tools for human resource development on company, regional and national levels, and to develop systems which support initial and continuing education.

Cooperation among educators, employers and the state is necessary for creating a flexible, effective and trustworthy system to allow people to acquire qualifications which they can then use in the labour market.

The development of the NSK takes place through the creation of vocational qualifications by sector councils, in which employers and other actors in particular sectors are represented. The sector councils monitor the coverage of their sectors by vocational qualifications and propose, with reference to the National System of Occupations and the needs of the labour market, new vocational qualifications as needed.

They cooperate with experts in the field to monitor the labour market and identify trends. They exchange information on the needs of the sector, particularly in the area of human resources, actively support education and the development of professional skills in their sectors, propose new qualifications and their assessment standards. They communicate with state and educational institutions. One of the principal aims of the sector councils is the creation of sector agreements – see Appendix V, Sector Agreements - and their subsequent implementation.

Sector councils provide an important platform for the exchange of information and viewpoints among all relevant actors in the labour market. The state and stakeholders in the labour market gain detailed information and employers have the opportunity to influence education policy validation and recognition and of non-formal and informal learning.

Coordinators of the Coordination Council monitor and steer the activities of the sector councils. The activities of individual sector councils may vary according to the needs of individual sectors, contracts and projects in which the councils participate. Nevertheless, they must comply with common rules set in the methodological and organizational document *Sector Councils Model*. Sector councils' activities are regularly evaluated on the basis of pre-defined parameters set in Excellence of Sector Councils.

During the project NSK2, activities of sector councils were evaluated based on pre-defined parameters referred to as Excellence of sector councils.

Sector council working groups are created for specific clearly defined tasks. Members of working groups are mostly external experts in the given sector.

More and more companies and other labour market representatives understand the advantages and benefits of participating in sector councils. While the first council sector in the Czech Republic was established in 2005, currently there are a total of 29 sector councils covering the needs of most sectors.

- Sector council for agriculture
- Sector council for forestry, water management and environment
- Sector council for food processing and feed industry
- Sector council for mining and preparation of raw materials
- Sector council for textiles, clothing and leather industry
- Sector council for wood-processing and paper-making industry
- Sector council for glass and ceramics industry and mineral processing
- Sector council for chemical industry
- Sector council for mechanical engineering
- Sector council metallurgy, foundry and smithy
- Sector council for energy
- Sector council for construction
- Sector council for transportation, logistics and post and delivery services
- Sector council for trade and marketing
- Sector council for hospitality, gastronomy and tourism
- Sector council for printing, media and information services
- Sector council for security services, protection of persons and property and work safety
- Sector council for personal services
- Sector council for other services
- Sector council for management and administration
- Sector council for banking, insurance and financial services
- Sector council for information technologies and telecommunication
- Sector council for handicrafts (artisanal)
- Sector council for dedicated equipment
- Sector council for electrical engineering
- Sector council for armed forces
- Sector council for public services and administration
- Sector council for culture
- Sector council for justice and law

Confirmation of the draft of qualification standards by other representatives of the employers

Activities of representatives of employers in sector councils are complemented by so called confirmers. These experts representing certain areas of the labour market comment on draft versions of qualification standards and possibly other material created by expert teams and working groups of sector councils. The main reason for involving the confirmers is to gain greater support for the sector council outputs and to improve quality of these outputs.

Confirmers assess content, quality of processed standards, and utilization of vocational qualifications.

Identification of confirmers is performed by sector councils, the Coordination group, other representatives of employers (trade unions, guilds, associations ...).

List of confirmers for a certain vocational qualification is reviewed and approved by the appropriate sector council (or the Coordination group in the case of expert teams). The Coordination council is informed about the list of confirmers for each vocational qualification and has the right to supplement it.

Besides the comments received from confirmers, more feedback to the sector councils' outputs is gathered from websites of its members and the projects, and through e-mails collected and presented by the secretary of sector councils.

Comments received from reports, websites and e-mails must be processed in a standard way, i.e. experts from the working groups must create a list of comments specifying how each one of them was dealt with (whether they are incorporated or not and why). List is then given to Coordination group or sector councils for further discussion.

Need for implementation of laws after closing the NSK2 project

By the end of 2015 several projects were finished, whose common aim was to promote quality of education and skills availability in the Czech Republic.

Characterization of the overall situation after project completion

NSK2 project focused on development and implementation of NSK

NSK is a tool allowing validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. It is the basis for changing the content of both further and initial education, and it helps match labour market needs with education. Finally yet importantly, it is a tool that helps to eliminate the disproportion between the demand and supply of skilled labour.

The NSK2 project not only significantly accelerated development of the NSK, but also fundamentally influenced its actual use. This is evident from the following data from the end of 2015:

More than 120,000 individuals who passed an exam	Number of individuals who obtained a certificate of vocational qualification – professional competence approved by a state, when an individual demonstrated required competences and is now entitled to perform a certain profession.
Almost 800 published standards of vocational qualifications	Number of standards approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and published in the NSK information system. Another almost 300 standards are prepared and waiting for an approval to be added in the register.
More than 1000 authorized bodies	Number of authorized bodies (experts, schools, companies, etc.), who have the authorization to organize and conduct examinations, and issue certificates approved by the state.
More than 1300 companies using NSK	Number of companies acting in various fields, which use NSK in their HR activities. Thanks to the interest from employers, the NSK is an important tool in supporting competitiveness of the Czech economy.

The above described state is a result of an involvement of several thousand professionals who participated in the development and evaluation of standards of vocational qualifications. Standards of vocational qualifications, lists of authorized persons and other relevant information are published at www.narodnikvalifikace.cz. More Information about qualifications NSK is also available at www.vzdelavaniaprace.cz.

Preparation of modular programmes for further education in project UNIV

The aim of the implementation of one of the activities was to prepare at least three programmes for further education for each participating school (centre of lifelong learning). About a quarter of these programmes have been prepared at the request of employers, another quarter was created for the age group 50+; third quarter transformed the study programmes which are not open in initial education into further education; last quarter depended on the choice of each school and was meant to reflect local specifics.

The programmes were prepared in modular form; that way some portion of the modules could have been used in initial education programmes, which contributed to linking initial and continuing education. The programmes were enriched by 3 extra features; development of key competences and a motivational component. Programmes for further education were created as a result of negotiations with employers and other labour market representatives, representatives of state and local government and based on the needs of the regional labour market and offers from the regional education market.

Standardized final examination was implemented at all schools

The reform of final examinations in vocational programmes was completed thanks to the national project Final Exam 2 (NZZ_2, Nová závěrečná zkouška 2). It was

launched in 2004 and resulted in implementing common papers for educational programmes in vocational secondary education in the school year 2014/2015.

New topics for written, practical and oral parts of final examinations were prepared within the project NZZ_2 and developed unified requirements for final examinations in 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 for all study programmes with VET certificate. In cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce of the Czech Republic the content of every single task was evaluated by experts from relevant fields. After completion of the project, field groups became a platform for cooperation with employers. An expert from practice as a member of a field group has a good comprehension of both theory and practice in the field. He/she can therefore competently assess each newly created theme for compliance with corporate practices and learning outcomes. Without his/her consent the topic cannot be approved and listed in the database.

NZZ information system manages 500 schools which were provided technical and methodological support for the preparation and implementation of final examinations. In each school year, guidelines were created for both creators of unified requirements and teachers, as well as analytical materials to evaluate the implementation of final examinations at school, and comments from practitioners. All above mentioned materials are available at http://www.nuv.cz/nzz2.

New final exam was successfully implemented in the system of vocational education. Even before legalization of the final exam in the Education Act no. 82/2015 Coll. 90% of schools were voluntarily using the concept.

Project Pospolu proposed measures for better cooperation between schools and enterprises

Project Pospolu (Promoting cooperation between schools and enterprises focused on training in practice, ***Po****dpora* ***spolu****práce* škol *a firem se zaměřením na odborné vzdělávání v praxi*) mapped the cooperation between schools and companies, verified which elements of dual vocational education system known from German-speaking countries can be transferred to the Czech environment and suggested measures to improve vocational education in initial education.

Proposed measures are elaborately described in the conceptual study called *New Features of Dual Vocational Education which Support Cooperation between Schools and Enterprises*. It indicates, for example, that cooperation between schools and businesses should permeate the entire process of vocational education - from recruiting students through the creation of education programmes, on-site teacher training, training and practice for students in companies, to field specific part of the school-leaving examination. For a smooth and seamless transition of graduates from vocational schools to the labour market it is necessary for students to get in touch with the corporate environment already during their studies. Also, the cooperation between schools and businesses must focus on quality. Schools should therefore specify in advance together with the companies what the students shall learn during their training, and finally evaluate students' results.

The field groups were also involved in the process of negotiating a final version of applied models of collaboration. The list of members of field groups served as one of the background materials for yet another output - *Directory of organizations supporting cooperation between schools and businesses*. The materials were subsequently placed at pospolu.rvp.cz.

Ensuring the sustainability of NSK

Act No. 179/2006 Coll. declared from the very beginning expenses associated with creating and maintaining NSK, which would normally have been paid of the state budget. But given the fact that the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. was adopted in 2006, when the Czech Republic first began to draw funds from the ESF, it was decided to use only these resources for the creation and development of NSK. Up until 2015 the functioning of the NSK was thus financed via ESF as projects NSK1 and NSK2.

Given that the Ministry is the coordinator of the whole system of validation and recognition of further education under Act No. 179/2006 Coll., and in this area also coordinates activities of all authorizing bodies, it was necessary to ensure the long-term conditions for continuous operation and implementation of the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. and processes there under.

Even after finishing the project it is necessary to maintain the NSK up-to-date, concerning the changing demands of the labour market, including the identification and creation of new vocational qualifications. For that purpose a draft text was developed and approved - *Ensuring the implementation of the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. and the effective functioning of NSK*.

The discussed and approved model of funding takes into account one fundamental change; the operation of sector councils will be financially supported by the employment sphere. The essence of the approved proposal is a following agreement - MSMT funds the creation of standards of vocational qualifications while the employers bear the costs associated with processing proposals of vocational qualifications within the sector councils (including identification of possible proposals for new vocational qualifications in terms of meeting the needs of the labour market).

Options for further development of the NSK

Although NSK was originally created mainly for further education, in the near future it will be also used as a basic source of information for the initial education, specifically for framework educational programmes and school educational programmes. In the future it could also play a vital role in describing the needs of initial education in terms of sector or regional structures.

So far vocational qualifications were used rather as one possible (albeit supported and recommended) sources of information for creating school educational programmes. In the future should create a comprehensive system of reflection and transformation needs of employers in initial education outcomes.

Output will also provide feedback for NSK. This entire system will result in being an interconnected and integrated component of a national qualifications framework.

Constantly updated NSK has so far been researched and developed mainly in projects. In the future, it is anticipated to be used and developed also at the labour market, as well as initial training, retraining system or in several related legal regulations concerning qualifications:

- Candidates for obtaining qualifications, who believe that they have a set of required knowledge, skills and competences, need to be convinced that NSK contains updated qualifications. This will make them sure that obtaining a vocational qualification will help them find a job because they are endowed with demanded competences.
- Employers are interested in using NSK for specifying their current qualification requirements. At the same time, when a job applicant is a holder of a vocational qualification certificate, they want to be able to compare this certificate with the currently valid version of the standards of vocational qualification. Up-to-datedness of the NSK also plays an important role for HR professionals who use the register as a base for building corporate, personal or educational system, or competency models.
- Education providers need latest information on NSK primarily for preparation of their educational programmes. NSK ensures that these programmes will correspond with actual needs of the labour market.
- Finally, the permanent topicality of NSK is also needed for ministries acting as authorizing bodies. The main reason is the links of NSK with other legislation governing the area of qualifications. Based on the use of Government Decree no. 135/2013 the ministries can greatly simplify the drafting of legislation aimed at vocational competence and other qualification requirements in various fields, which are departmentally regulated. Along with this, it also reduces their administrative and financial burden connected with creation of these laws. Often it is sufficient to only refer to the Act no. 179/2006 Coll. and to the relevant vocational qualification in the NSK.

5.6. Quality Assurance of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Statutory responsibility of institutions

The main coordinator role in the process of NSK development of a validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning lies with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT, the author of the Act on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results).

The MSMT:

a. Coordinates the activity of central administrative bureaus (ministries) done in accordance with the law

b. Approves, changes, revokes and publishes the list of complete vocational and professional qualifications, thereby approving the content and form of NSK including the content of the qualification and assessment standards

Other ministries – authorizing bodies (including the MSMT):

a. Participate in development of the qualification and assessment standards

b. Decide on granting, extending the validity of and revoking the authorization

c. Maintain a register of those who were granted the authorization

d. Provide the MSMT with personal records of those who were granted the authorization, to be included in the register of authorized bodies in the NSK

e. Supervise the activity of the authorized bodies, whom they granted the authorization to

f. Maintain a register of exam results of authorized bodies, whom the authorization was granted to, including the register of granted certificates

The validation of the results of further education – the exams – is carried out by authorized bodies.

An authorized body can be any individual or organization that fulfils the criteria set by law (qualification requirements among others). These entities are authorized by the respective ministries according to their field of activity, e.g. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs authorizes in the area of labour law relations, work safety, employment, pension security, social care etc.

Basic principles of quality assurance and its establishment in the guidelines for using the NSK

The basic strategic approach to quality assurance is a "peer to peer" strategy. Its use is especially important at the national level, because it allows involving representatives from the world of work and also representatives from the world of education. The two sides then work together, interact and learn from each other.

Their work, however, is always preceded by the deployment of targeted training on the safe management of pre-determined and agreed methodologies and working procedures of quality control processes (especially when monitoring the results) and elements of supervision, e.g. stipulated by law, showing the key position of the MSMT.

Mutual learning and influence at the national level is complemented by impulses from the international environment. These are obtained by active involvement in international projects, which bring the possibility of cooperation with experts in other states who are dealing with similar or the same tasks.

Due to its content and obligation, the method of using the NSK can be observed as important means of quality assurance.

For demonstration purposes, here is an excerpt from the „Feedback and supervision" chapter.

Getting feedback about feasibility of the exams in accordance with the standards

For quality assurance of the validation and recognition system in accordance with the Act No. 179/2006 Coll., it is valuable to determine directly during the vocational qualification examinations how the standards are set up for their execution, especially from the following aspects:

Competence

– intelligibility

– adequacy to the aim of vocational qualification

Evaluation Criteria

– intelligibility

– adequacy (whether the criteria lead to proving the necessary competence or its part)

– clarity (whether the criteria do not lead to multiple levels of difficulty for multiple sorts of applicants)

– actual validation (whether a criterion can be validated)

Method of validation

– adequacy (whether the method of validation can be used to validate a certain criterion)

– actual validation (whether the method of validation can be applied)

Instructions for exam execution

– adequacy (whether the instruction lead successful execution of the exam)

– executables (whether the instructions can be carried out)

Requirements for competence of the authorized body

– adequacy (whether the exam is led by a qualified person)

Requirements for technical and material equipment of the authorised body

– adequacy (whether it is possible to perform an unbiased validation of all the criteria on a given technical and material equipment)

Exam term and exam preparation period

– adequacy (whether it corresponds with the content and extent of the exam)

Supervision of the exam process

The Act No. 179/2006 Coll. entrusts relevant authorizing bodies with execution of supervision of the exam process for vocational qualifications. Act No. 552/1991 Coll. on state supervision also relates to execution of supervision.

The subject of exam supervision is, in particular:

a. Whether formal requirements for exam execution are met (establishment of a commission, presented documents, exam duration, occupational health and safety requirements etc.)
b. Whether all criteria of all competences are validated against the assessment standards
c. Whether the successful passing of all criteria by the applicant is rated without bias
d. Whether the method of validation is complied with (practical demonstration, written or oral validation, test questions etc.)
e. Whether the requirements for material and technical equipment are met
f. Whether the standards are set in such a way that applicant's competence for a given vocational qualification can be objectively validated, and if they are not, determine how the standards should be revised (e.g. whether any criterion is not set as disproportionally strict, if it is ambiguous, whether the exam is not needlessly extensive etc.)

Quality assurance of revision of vocational qualification standards

Essential element of quality assurance of vocational qualification standards in NSK is setting up the mechanism for their revision.

Guidelines for using NSK counts on the fact that revision suggestions of already established vocational qualification standards come from multiple sources. If more than 4 years pass since the date when the vocational qualification standards were published, the revision requirement is essentially generated automatically. Besides that the revision suggestions come in shorter intervals as well, particularly from sector advice, employers outside sector councils and other members of the professional public, e.g. based on development and changes of the qualification content, requirements to implement EU regulations, unification of technologies

concerning vocational qualifications, based on experience with vocational qualifications validation in other projects, based on feedback from practical execution of exams of authorized bodies etc. and from particular authorizing bodies.

Guidelines were developed for processing the revision, and the chapter **Types of revision and their consequences** was selected for demonstration purposes:

- **„Blank“ revision**

  Vocational qualification is subjected to examination, whether its content is in accordance with the requirements of the job market or whether it can be re-evaluated and if it's educable and the result is positive.

  Vocational qualification stays in unchanged form, authorization and accreditation continue to be valid without changes.

- **"Small" revision**

  Its scope are some if the following changes:

  – Administrative changes (count of committee members, authorizing body, sector council etc.)

  – Contextual changes (composition matrix of the complete vocational qualification, connection with the unit of labour, entry requirements on the applicant)

  – Change of method and process of validation (validation methods, exam execution instructions, duration of exam, exam preparation time)

  – Partial content changes (in competences or evaluation criteria), which do not change the overall concept and focus of vocational qualification nor the requirements on authorized bodies or necessary length and difficulty of the course

  No change of name or code of vocational qualification is carried out.

  Result for authorizations:

  – Authorizations are still valid

  – Authorized bodies are due to be sent a memo on change of standards

  Result for retraining:

  – Decision to grant the accreditation does not need to be changed. It is noted that before commencing the retraining course leading to the final exam from the vocational qualification set by the Act No. 179/2006 Coll., the educational institutions must confirm the validity of the qualification standard and execute the course in accordance with the standard.

- **"Medium“ revision**

  Its scope are more substantial content changes (in competences or evaluation criteria), which do not yet change the overall concept and focus of vocational qualification, but result in one of the following changes:

- Change of requirements for the authorized bodies (authorized representatives)
- Increasing the financial demands of the course

No change of name or code of vocational qualification is carried out.

Result for authorizations:

- Authorizations are still valid
- Authorized bodies are due to be sent a memo on change of standards.
- Authorized bodies must be invited to present documents related to the change in requirements for them (if those requirements had changed).

Result for accreditations:

- Educational institutions are obliged to monitor these changes themselves. Educational institutions can require an amended contract (if the course financial demands increased), but in most cases an amended contract will not be possible, as if there is a change in price, the current tender has to be terminated.

- **"Large" revision**

Its scope are some if the following changes:

- A substantial content change, which changes the whole scope of the vocational qualification in such a way that the result is a completely new vocational qualification
- Splitting the original vocational qualification into two or more vocational qualifications
- Merging two or more vocational qualifications into one vocational qualification
- Change of the qualification level of a vocational qualification

A change of name or code of vocational qualification is carried out.

Results:

The following options are possible:

- No authorized body exists anymore – the original vocational qualification can be terminated with immediate effect
- Some authorized bodies exist – then the relevance of the original vocational qualification has to be determined and there are two options:
  - Original vocational qualification is incorrect or inapplicable – goes into „decay mode", i.e.:
    - Validity is set to 5 years,
    - The website will states it is running out
    - Authorizations and accreditations will cease to be granted

    - Current Authorizations and accreditations are valid
- Original vocational qualification is applicable – both vocational qualifications stay side by side with mutual validity
    - Current Authorizations and accreditations are valid, for the new vocational qualification it starts "from scratch".

Mechanisms using employers' input

Substantial role in quality assurance of the process of establishing and implementing NSK is with the employers.

Vocational qualification standards provide a clear and concise idea of what competences do potential employees truly have and how can they contribute in fulfilling the tasks of a company or a firm and in increasing its competitiveness.

Since the beginning, the employers have been and still are one of the main target groups for whom the NSK is developed. The overall success of this demanding project is thus greatly dependent on them. It's because they will really use the new features and demand the new vocational qualifications, among other reasons.

Basic scope for employers to come into the process of NSK is established by the Act on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results. The most important tool enabling the employers to come in to development and implementation of NSK are sector councils.

Employers as developers and users of NSK

The model form of the method of inclusion of employers' representatives into the NSK processes is the following „standard cycle":

- Analysis of the need to cover the market with vocational qualification. For analysis of the job market needs and leveraging of the already created vocational qualification, feedback consultants are utilized as well as sector councils.
- The proposal approval process and the creation of a timetable for development and revision of vocational qualification standards for the given year. The timetable is a solution for establishing work groups, in which the vocational qualification standards themselves are established.
- Established vocational qualification standards are then examined by a network of independent external experts (approvers). In the final stage, the content of the standards is commented on by the entire sector councils.
- The stage of creating vocational qualification standards is finalized by handing over the standards to NUV for further action.
- Action outputs are disseminated and fed back to the employers through a network of feedback consultants.

Further information on the aforementioned activities as well as on their executors are listed in other parts of the Report.

Confirmers of the vocational qualification standards

As already mentioned in the text above, the confirmers are independent external evaluators of proposed vocational qualification standards with verifiable expertise in the field appropriate to the evaluated vocational qualification.

This way, other representatives of the professional public (usually from the ranks of employers) are involved in the process of vocational qualification development and revision on top of the sector council members and work groups. Their primary task is to contribute to further improvement of proposed vocational qualification standards.

Addressing the broad professional public also had significant impact on the NSK publicity and broadens the public awareness of this tool. The following table demonstrates the gradual increase of the confirmers' activity.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Number of evaluations	58	605	1,134	1,018	1,811

Feedback consultants

The inclusion of *feedback consultants* in to the process of NSK development and implementation was a major part of the process of NSK2 project. It was prepared and launched as another important means of supporting the quality assurance of sector council's work outputs and their work groups in the field of vocational qualification identification, establishing boundaries and the vocational qualification standard development itself. Another aim for the inclusion of consultants was to accelerate the processes leading to approvals of created standards.

The consultants are to achieve the aforementioned and other targets by obtaining the feedback to said activities in all stages of the vocational qualification lifecycle in real employment environment.

Consultants were primarily recruited from representatives of the employer associations operating in the regions. They were in close contact with company representatives and, either on their own or based on sector council request, were facilitating the consensus of employers on the collection of currently examined vocational qualifications and the final form of their standards, in parallel with their development.

Both the activities related to identifying the necessity of new vocational qualifications and identifying the necessity of changes to existing vocational qualifications (feedback obtained based on the utilization of vocational qualification in practice), as well as activities editing/correcting the form of qualification and

assessment standards in their development stage in sector councils work groups fall into the same field of activity.

Key activities of confirmers thus were, in particular:

- Identification of the necessity of new vocational qualification creation;
- Gathering suggestions and comments to existing vocational qualifications (the so-called „blank" revision of standards, usability of a vocational qualification, its intelligibility, exam relevance…);
- Gathering suggestions and comments from employers to currently developed vocational qualification standards;
- Negotiations with actual and potential authorized bodies with the aim of identifying exam obstacles and their elimination
- Collection of suggestions from actual authorized bodies to the vocational qualification standards (intelligibility of formulations describing evaluation criteria, validation methods, method instructions, comments on exam feasibility in terms of time, financial and technical-material demands, comments on the standard structure...);
- Discussion about gathered suggestions and comments to the vocational qualification with sector councils and work groups representatives, as well as the Coordination council and NUV;
- Negotiations and consultation with sector council (eventually work groups, the Coordination council, NUV) about the employers' needs in given regions
- Recruiting confirmers from the ranks of employers;
- Key activities had the form of visits and employer sites and discussions with their representatives, this way any particular sub-activities framework to the key tasks can be identified
- Employer identification (with the specific aim of discussion with regards to sector councils' needs);
- Contacting the employer and setting up a meeting;
- Preparation for meetings (study of the standards to be discussed, consulting with sector councils/work groups);
- The meeting itself
- Processing the meeting outputs in standardized form (suggestion formulation, feedback…);
- Discussing gathered suggestions and comments with their target audience.

All outputs from the feedback confirmers were then used to improve the quality of activity outputs of the sector councils and to improve the established methods.

In relation to the primary aim of integration the employers' representatives to the NSK processes, the significant achievement was to increase awareness of NSK among specific employers. This was contributed to by a motivation tool in the form

of an honorary certificate „NSK in practice", which was gradually awarded to over 1,000 companies in different fields of activity and from different regions.

Most often, the companies implemented NSK in the area of recruiting and hiring new employers (58% of the organizations), where the certificate of vocational qualification was accepted as a relevant proof of qualification for specific job roles.

34% of the organizations utilize NSK primarily in the area of an employee education and development, i.e. prefers education completed by a vocational education exam, or eventually the organization itself carries out the vocational education examinations or the education related to those. Furthermore, organizations leveraged NSK for optimizing the professional composition of their employees in the sense of using qualification amendments or amendments to the job catalo.

So far, very few organizations have utilized NSK and a motivation tool in the form of a benefit or as part of a quality control audit.

From the sector composition point of view of companies using NSK, admittedly the most companies are from the engineering industry (16.4%), followed by a management and administrative sector (7.6%), construction sector (6.7%), food and feed industry (6.4%), textile, garment and leather industry and food service, hospitality and travel industry each covered 6% of businesses from the total number.

For the implementation in the engineering industry, the management and administrative sector, the food and feed industry and the textile, garment and leather industry, a large part was played by the member organizations of the network of sector councils, who also became the leaders in the implementation in these respective fields. The statistics do not count the security of persons and property and work safety sector, which has, from the legislative perspective, mandatory obligation of vocational qualifications Security Guard and Detective Trainee having 100% implementation in the hiring process of new employees.

In terms or regional location of employers utilizing NSK in personnel related processes, the highest impact has been in the Prague region, followed by Moravia-Silesia, South Moravia, Liberec and South Bohemia regions (58% of the total count of companies).

5.7. Costs of Including Qualifications in the NQF

Costs in the NSK and current methods of cost coverage

Thanks to NSK, alongside the existing „school system" that guarantees and enables the initial education, new ways are being paved to getting a qualification accepted by the employers through acknowledging the results of previous studies and further education. Therefore, a parallel system is created, whose actual potential and utilization is, from the state-approved vocational qualification certificate holders' point of view, currently already comparable with the number of graduates in the field of professional education within initial education. Its importance will surely keep growing and its extent is projected to be multiple times higher than that of the system of initial education. From the mutual openness, permeability and compatibility of the systems of initial and further education point of view, it is absolutely necessary that these systems are not developed separately, on the contrary – they should cooperate closely and develop mutually.

The system of initial education is guaranteed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT) legislatively and in terms of content, as well as being implemented through a network of schools of all kinds within a budget that exceeds 100 bil. CZK annually.

Contrary to that, the current situation in the field of further education is significantly different. The MSMT only sets up the system framework, defines qualifications and consequently accredits the requalification programmes, however it is not responsible for the actual implementation of further education, nor does it finance it.

The reason for maintaining of a functional validation and recognition system based on the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results is also a recommendation from the EU Council on recognition of non-formal and informal education from 2012, which concludes that by 2018 the latest, all EU member states should have a functional system of recognition of non-formal and informal education, which will enable individuals to obtain validation and recognition of gained knowledge, skills and competences and obtain complete vocational or vocational qualification of such. The NSK is already fulfilling all the requirements that EU put across.

Until 2015, all requirements for NSK system operation NSK secured and supported within ESF – NSK1 a NSK2 projects. The aim of these projects was and still is to fulfil the NSK system as well as to validate and run it.

For further NSK development, the crucial importance lies with the fact that based on agreements with the representatives of umbrella organizations of employers, a document called *„Ensuring the implementation of the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results in 2015 and onward"* was drafted and approved by the MSMT in succession to the end of those project.

The approved document stipulates that the MSMT will cover roughly 70% of total annual costs of the NSK maintenance and further development. Within the multi-source financing, 30% of set annual costs will be contributed by the employers, which will cover the operation of sector councils.

With regards to the fact that it is an ensuring of the statutory agenda, it was the MSMT that in 2015 and onward, the financial costs will be added to the core activities and budgets of NUV and the MSMT, including workload systematization.

Costs related with implementation and quality assurance in NSK

NSK is since the beginning formulated in close relation with the job market. If a holder of the vocational qualification certification is to stand a chance at succeeding on the job market, it is necessary to retain the inclusion of employers in the process of preparation and review of vocational qualification standards even after cessation of project funding.

With regards to importance of NSK, it is essential to maintain its validity, quality and reliability. That means carrying out revisions and changes of existing vocational qualification standards (circa 300 per year) and creation of a smaller amount of new vocational qualification standards (circa 40 per year) in reaction to changes on the job market or requirements of different departments related to the evolution of legislation.

Currently, the relation to the job market is ensured through the creation of vocational qualification standards in 29 sector councils. Sector councils identify possible vocational qualifications, whose proposals and descriptions are then being approved by applicable authorizing bodies (usually appropriate ministries). If a proposal for a vocational qualification is approved by authorizing bodies, the sector council passes the standard creation on to the appropriate workgroup. Standards created or revised in work groups are evaluated in sector councils and in case of their agreement, they enter the approval process at the respective ministry.

The approved document „*Ensuring the implementation of the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results in 2015 and onward*" stipulates that the MSMT finances the development of vocational qualification standards and the employer sphere bears the costs related to reviews of the proposals of vocational qualification by the sector councils including the identification of the potential for creating new vocational qualifications with regards to covering the job market needs.

Costs of maintenance and further development of existing IT systems

Also, the IT systems – IT System NSK (IS NSK), IT System for Qualifications and Authorizations (ISKA) and IT System for Education and Job Market (VAP) will have to be maintained and continuously updated.

IS NSK must publish revised and newly created vocational qualification standards.

At the same time it is necessary to register all authorized bodies, which were authorized to carry out examinations for given qualifications. Within this IT system, the vocational qualification creation, revision and changes are also controlled and carried out.

IT system ISKA was developed as another element of the validation system based on the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results. The primary aim was to create an IT system, that would enable securing and support of developmental and organizational side of all essential processes related to validation system implementation, particularly then the processes related to granting, extending and revoking authorization as well as function and activity of authorized bodies. ISKA is the primary communication platform for mutual information and data provision between authorized bodies and authorizing bodies. ISKA aids to and simplifies the activity of both the authorized bodies and authorizing bodies. Using the system should also lead to decreasing the administrative for both the authorized bodies and authorizing bodies.

IT system VAP is intended to be used by the broad professional and nonprofessional public and publishes the paths to getting the desired employment through obtaining a vocational qualification. This tool is important for the consulting point of view at the labour office.

Proceeds connected to NSK implementation

Implementation of the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results and NSK development does not only carry costs, it brings finances to the state budget, namely from two sources.

The first source is finances connected to collection of administrative fees for granting the authorization, the second being the taxation on vocational qualification exams.

The fee for granting an authorization (administrative fee) is 1,500 CZK for each requested vocational qualification. Currently, almost 4,000 authorizations have been granted.

The Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results stipulates that the authorized body is entitled a payment for conducting the vocational qualification exam, which is the salary to an authorized body. If the average price of an exam is approximately 2,500 CZK and the number of exams taken up until now is over 140,000, then the amount collected on VAT is reported to be in the range of tens of millions.

Side projects connected to finalized systemic projects

Halfway through year 2016 development works started for project „Setting up the mechanisms for cooperation and communication of employers and employer representatives with authorized bodies to increase the quality of exams and the process of applicant preparation in the system of recognition of further vocational education“, which is financed by the operational programme Employment

(coordinated by the Ministry of Labour) and co-financed from ESF resources and the state budget of the Czech Republic. The beneficiary of the grant is Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, its partner is Czech-Moravian Trade Union Confederation.

The aim of the project is to create conditions for efficient social dialog between social partners and authorized bodies (i.e. both individuals and corporations entitled to execute vocational qualification exams) to enhance the process of exam execution and thus improve competence of employees of future employees – vocational qualification exam graduates.

The social dialog will be carried out through visits for monitoring of the exams and at round table sessions dedicated to exam execution problem solving.

The project's contributions should be setting of the rules and mechanism of flexible and quick cooperation, which will replace ad hoc communication, which is not only inefficient but also time consuming. One prerequisite is also defining the mechanisms in the applicable legislation – based on a proposal compiled by the project managers and discussed by a broad spectrum of people involved in further vocational education.

Both parties will be able to communicate along set up rules already in the new vocational qualification standard creation stage, namely by inclusion of a competent, potential authorized body (representative) especially in creation of the vocational qualification proposal in work groups. The attendance of authorized representatives at the revision process of an appropriate vocational qualification, for which they have an authorization and are interested in discussing the matter with the creators of the standard, should be a completely standard approach.

On the other hand, employers, standard creators' representatives or potential employers of graduates would become, after notifying the authorized body, official participants of the exams with the right to recommend correctional and modified solutions to the authorizing bodies, NSK administrator and last but not least representatives of given industries involved in sector councils.

This should be a significant innovation of the project, as controlled monitoring of the exams by employers, standard creators and their cooperation with authorized bodies would be a guarantee of improving the quality of the exams if supported by legislation. It wouldn't just be an addition to the definition of the employers' participation in creating new proposals or revising existing qualification and assessment standards of vocational qualifications as declared by § 7 and 8 of the Act, but a completely new quality control element, which could be included in the prepared novelization of the Act.

5.8. Current Debates on Further NQF Developments

Process of ensuring the implementation of Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results

As mentioned in the previous chapter - the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT) approved the document *„Ensuring the implementation of the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results in 2015 and onward"*, which is essential for further development of NSK.

An important characteristic of the situation in which the document was approved, describes *Final report on implementation of the Plan of Implementation of Lifelong Learning Strategy for 2009-2015*. The report was submitted to the Government in October 2015. It states (among others):

- Significant legislative changes have been done at the secondary school level that encourages permeability and openness in the education system.
- The Czech government has approved new measures to support the vocational education, which are aimed at further improving of quality of education. The measures also include systemic adjustment of the number and content of the framework educational programmes and linking them with NSK qualification and assessment standards.
- 975 educational programmes for further education were prepared at secondary schools in terms of development of further education. Part of the prepared programmes for further education was created in compliance with the NSK standards; part was made upon request from employers regarding education needs of their employees. Emphasis was also placed on supporting the process of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.
- An extensive upgrade of an information system was completed, providing information on employability of school graduates, the current offer of educational programmes at secondary schools, colleges and universities in the Czech Republic. The upgraded system now also offers different ways to search for the information.

In compliance with the document approved in 2015, the MSMT was given a task for 2016 which mainly relates to activities aimed at reviewing and creating qualification and assessment standards demanded by the labour market, including the support for their use. The structure and content of the qualifications are the result of a consensus, in which representatives of employers' association in the sector councils played a key role. In the first half of 2016 proposals of new vocational qualifications were discussed with authorizing bodies and the MSMT. The task further sets the responsibility for ensuring operation and further development of information systems, including their potential modifications.

Activity Plan for 2016 anticipated basic support activities focusing on information and publicity towards the implementation of the NSK to enhance its use among target groups and stakeholders. Revision and editing of methodological materials

will continue to be done, following the needs of target groups (employers, citizens) and stakeholders (authorized bodies, education providers, counsellors, mediators, labour offices, state administration authorities ...), and based on previous acquired experience. An amendment of the Act (see further) will also be taken in account.

A complex of activities necessary for the introduction of the foreman examination in the Czech Republic was launched in direct connection with NSK. This was preceded by proposal of draft concept of the foreman examination approved by the MSMT, conclusions of a series of meetings of methodical team for the foreman examination, creation of pilot qualification standards *master craftsman* created within NSK2 project, and by discussion on implementation of the foreman examination with representatives of the MSMT.

Preparation of the amendment of the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results

During 2016, in accordance to fulfil the annual plan of development and revision of the vocational qualification standards, it was necessary to devote a considerable part of working capacity to the preparation of a new model of ensuring the NSK sustainability in 2017, based on the intended amendment of the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results. Following the decision of the MSMT from November 2016 not to submit the draft Act amendment to the Government, the negotiation between the MSMT and the National Institute for Education took place with a view to ensuring the involvement of employers into development and revision of the vocational qualification standards during the time of sustainability, i.e. up to November 2020. The most suitable form of ensuring this involvement was agreed. Subsequently, the invitation to tender was prepared and published in the end of 2016.

Continuation of formation of external links of NSK

The basic characteristic of the current national and international connections is set in *Methodology of developing NSK*. Given that this is a document approved by the MSMT (with respect to the role given by law) based on prior consultation of the National Council for Qualifications (this establishes a broader consensus over the draft), it is possible to understand the setup described in the introductory chapter (Putting NSK into the outer frameworks) as binding.

Further text in this section is based on what is stated in the *Methodology* and if necessary, it also develops and supplements the original document.

Developing national connections

Human resources are the key factor for a competitiveness of any economy. It is important that graduates entering the labour market have skills matching requirements of employers.

The rapid development of technologies, changes in division of labour, the development of new kinds of goods and services, globalization and the associated movements of individual productions and entire sectors between countries and continents; all these factors cause that all previously acquired knowledge must be continuously developed and extended. That is the only way to obtain and maintain qualifications needed for labour market, and to progress along the career path.

The above given information lead to two important principles:

- The basis for NSK are requirements of labour market. They are expressed and updated through the National System of Occupations.
- NSK Qualification standards are both the source for education and criteria for validation and recognition of qualifications. They are a source for the development of framework educational programmes for secondary schools and other educational programmes for educators.

More information about the context of national development of NSK (link to the NSP, the impact on initial and further education) is given in Chapter 3.

More information about the validation and recognition of qualifications can be added by following text (quotes from the text of the Methodology):

The main purpose of the NSK is to provide a register of standards for objective verification and recognition of meaningful qualifications related to the system of professions. Validation and recognition of vocational qualifications is processed/performed by authorized bodies, in accordance to the assessment standards of relevant vocational qualifications.

Verification takes the form of an examination. The candidate must demonstrate all the skills listed in the qualification standard according to criteria and other rules set out in the assessment standard. If he/she succeeds in doing so, he/she obtains a certificate of a vocational qualification.

Certificate of a vocational qualification is a nationally valid document. It contains information about candidates, the authorized body and an examination, and a list of proven and recognized professional competences. Certificates and records of the examination are archived in accordance with the legislation on archives.

Any natural or legal person can become an authorized body for a specific vocational qualification. A candidate needs to fulfil requirements specified in the assessment standard of a vocational qualification. There are two kinds of the requirements:

- *The requirements for the competence of authorized body, respectively on the professional competence of its authorized representative.*
- *Requirements for material and technical base of the authorized person, given by the list of required equipment.*

Requirements for applications for authorization are published on websites of each authorizing body. The authorizing body inquires whether the applicant for authorization meets the requirements for the authorized body specified in the assessment standard. These standard requirements must be clearly defined.

The list of authorized bodies for each vocational qualification, including contact information, is provided for each vocational qualification in the NSK (in case the relevant vocational qualification has already been granted an authorization). Applicants for a vocational qualification can apply for the exam by contacting individual authorized bodies.

National qualifications framework and NSK

Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008) (Recommendation) sets two milestones in the implementation of the EQF. First is to relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010 and second to adopt measures, so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level. Establishing an explicit national qualifications framework is not stated in the Recommendation as a necessary precondition for fulfilling of these milestones, but it is expected that at the end all European countries will reference their national qualifications framework to the EQF. This is the only way where referencing to the EQF could be acceptable and comparable for other member states.

To develop an NQF is among the short term deliverables in the Bruges Communiqué, which was signed by all European ministries for vocational education in December 2010.

The existence of a comprehensive NQF cannot be overestimated. It gives clear signal to other European countries that there is agreement among stakeholders on basic principles in designing, defining, validation and levels of qualifications, that there is a common system of quality assurance, and that after extensive discussions among stakeholders a consensus was reached.

The Czech Republic did not yet decided whether it will develop a comprehensive NQF, but discussions and surveys conducted so far conclude that establishing an NQF could be an important tool for better coordination and communication among sectors of education and other stakeholders.

It requires inclusion of the broadest circle of experts and public possible, with representation of all relevant stakeholders. Only then can be the NQF used and respected by all sectors and social partners and the sense of ownership among them can develop.

A comprehensive NQF could be potentially a very useful and important instrument for further development in education, especially because of its learning outcomes approach and cooperation among educational sectors that the NQF promotes.

Many steps were already taken in the Czech Republic. There are adopted level descriptors of the NSK and there is also the Qualifications Framework for Tertiary Education. The development of the National Programme for Education (a framework for primary and secondary education) is currently being discussed. The next step could be the decision, whether and how to overarch existing and emerging sector frameworks. In some European states the creation of an NQF provides opportunity

for education reforms (e.g. Poland), in others, where learning outcomes approach is well established; it only facilitates classification of existing qualifications (e.g. the Netherlands). Other, especially smaller countries such as Estonia or Austria use the EQF descriptors for overarching their sector sub-frameworks.

According to Ron Tuck, an expert on qualifications frameworks, three factors have been identified as inhibiting the implementation of NQFs. They are:

1. over-complex approaches;
2. over-ambitious visions;
3. top down strategies.

None of these approaches to implementation take account of the realities in which qualifications actually work. A logical conclusion would appear to be that any future strategy especially for a developing country with limited resources should be based on simplicity, an incremental vision and encouraging local initiative.

The process of mapping certificates proving vocational qualifications outside NSK is an important step, which can lead to a desirable increase of the transparency of qualifications in direct connection with the creation of the Czech qualifications framework.

A list of vocational qualifications well-established and recognized in the labour market, with an inherent quality assurance mechanism was another output of the task performed by sector councils in 2015. Therefore, it makes no sense to convert them into vocational qualifications described through qualification and assessment standards in the NSK.

As already mentioned, NSK is a register of qualifications and inherently framework of vocational qualifications. If it is not appropriate to transfer qualifications into the framework of NSK it is possible and highly desirable to describe or identify their relationship to the overarching framework which is (will be) the Czech qualifications framework.

The basic proposal for the validation and recognition of certified sets of competencies acquired in the Czech Republic outside of NSK must also address the relationship between qualifications "inside and outside NSK". In connection with formulation of this relationship it is primarily important to realize the difference between the Czech qualifications framework and the National Register of Qualifications.

The Czech qualifications framework should be an overarching framework including all types of qualifications acquired both within the formal education system and through informal and non-formal education, while the NSK includes vocational qualifications, which are gained through validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are focused primarily on the needs of the labour market and are subject to the Act No. 179/2006 Coll., on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results.

An example can be a qualification from the list created by the sector councils:

ID NSK	Name	Status	Cross-sectional certificate	Sector council
136	ECDL Advanced Certificate	Recommended in the field	x	Sector council for information technologies and telecommunication

This qualification has all already mentioned attributes:

- it is not explicitly obtained as a result of compulsory schooling;
- it is not part of NSK and would not make sense to transfer its content to the form of NSK qualification and assessment standards;
- it is precisely defined in the system EDCL, which is so well known and recognized in the Czech Republic, that the sector council proposed a status of recommended in the field. With that it's also related the fact that EDCL has its own quality assurance system. Credibility of the system is proven by the fact that the qualification is recognized internationally.

The proposal for the validation and recognition of certified competences acquired in the Czech Republic outside of NSK can be formulated as follows:

Sector councils create a draft, which can be used as a basis for continuing work of competent professionals, leading to include (or not) individual qualifications in the Czech qualifications framework. This can be processed in the future right after an approval of descriptors for each qualification level of the Czech qualifications framework.

Developing international connections with NSK

Among all European links, EQF has the crucial role. First NSK descriptions of qualification levels were approved, which allowed to define and specify the relation to EQF levels for each professional qualification.

Subsequent embedding of the NSK into the qualification system in the Czech Republic (as described in the referencing report) confirmed the position of NSK also in relation to the international environment.

Strategic documents were successfully supplemented for their implementation by other measures focused on communicating and using NSK in an international context. This is particularly true of the English versions of qualification standards of vocational qualifications, which are created and approved in parallel with their Czech counterparts and presented in the English NSK web site.

Within the project NSK2 it was also established a framework of linking NSK with the European tool ECVET.

Relation to EQF

Relation to EQF has been since the early NSK development distinct and crucial. It is described in several places in the text of this report. This can be supplied as follows.

Since July 2011, the qualification standards of vocational qualifications are submitted for the approval process at the MSMT also in English. An English portal, which is part of the information system NSK was designed, created and filled for their publication. It contains general information about NSK and all approved qualification standards for vocational qualifications.

Relation to Europass

Initiation of creating English versions of qualification standards pursued the possibility of using standards as the basis for the possible entry of Europass and many other things. The plan of the National Europass centre for 2016 contained two activities aiming at pilot issuing Europass Certificate Supplement to the certificate of vocational qualifications and a seminar for authorized bodies.

Relation to ECVET

A working group continued with its activities, preparing guidelines for creating units of learning outcomes based on standards of NSK vocational qualifications *(Designing ECVET units of learning outcomes based on standards of vocational qualifications in NSK)*.

Several drafts were prepared. The 2016 version was discussed in detail not only in the *Coordination Centre for ECVET*, but also with relevant NUV staff and NSK2 project members.

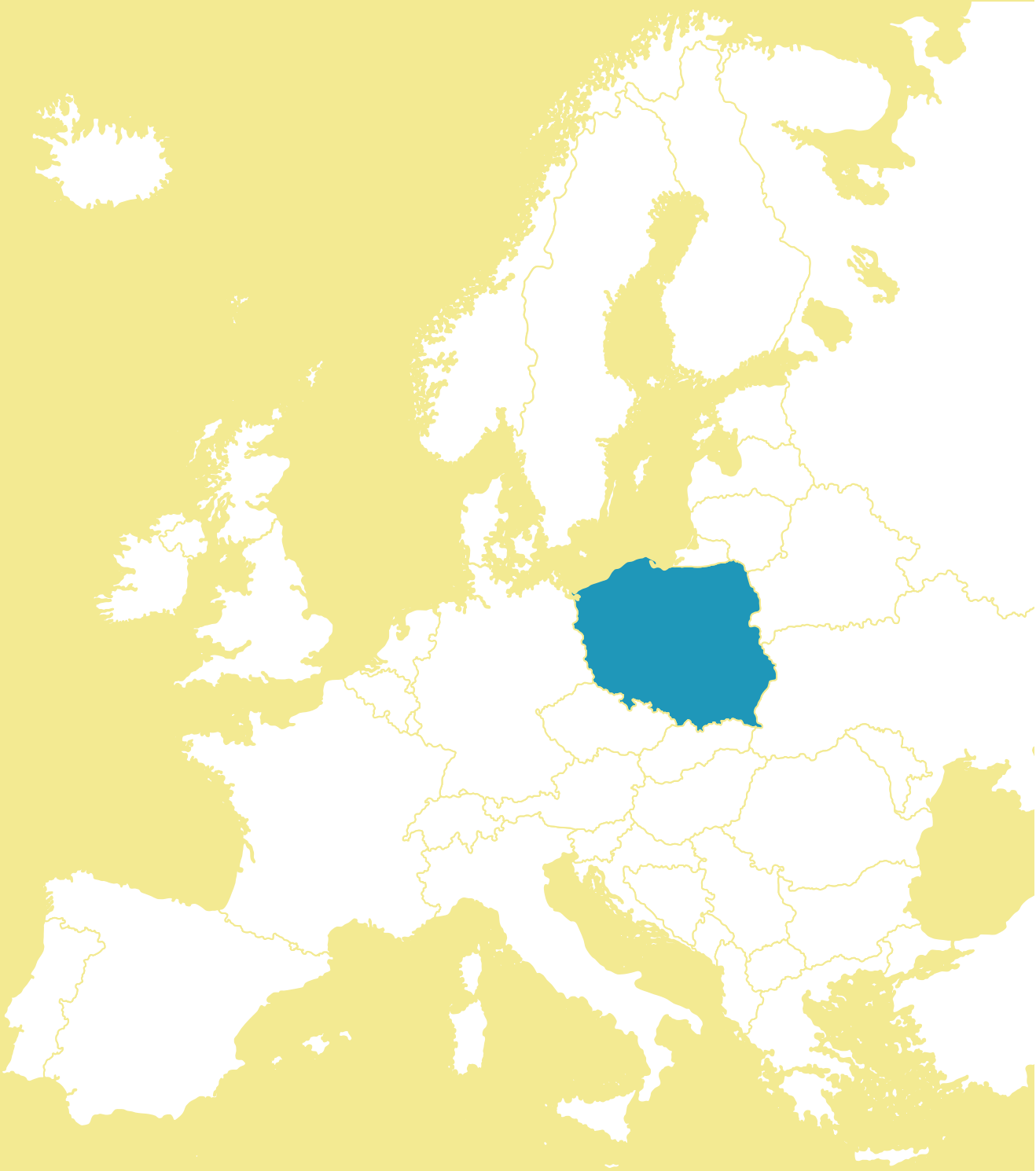
The 2016 version of the guidelines was published on the website and then used for revision of more than a hundred units of learning outcomes developed on the basis of standards of NSK vocational qualifications. Thanks to the field groups the units of learning outcomes were revised and will be available on the website to inspire and to be used by other VET professionals.

Relation to EQAVET

Part of the current international project that addresses NUV is task focused on preparing an analysis of the proposed methodology for identifying the need for revision and description of the reasons leading to the revision of individual standards of vocational qualifications and factors playing a major role in the revision.

The focus is mainly on deepening the culture of quality assurance in VET and the application review stage in the cycle of quality, including the use of feedback.

7. Poland



Introduction

This report was prepared by the NQF-in team at the Educational Research Institute (IBE). Since 2010, the Institute has been actively involved in the development and implementation of the national qualifications framework in Poland. In writing the country report, we used analyses and documents developed at IBE. We also consulted the text of the report with national stakeholders and officials at the Ministry of National Education.

Since the beginning of the work on the PQF, it was assumed that it must be "open to different types of qualifications" in order to be a policy driver and integrator of the national qualifications system. It was also assumed that the PQF has to be complemented by other elements of the qualifications system, including: a standard way of describing qualifications, quality assurance and validation procedures, credit accumulation and transfer principles. Therefore, work on the reforms not only concentrated on PQF implementation, it was much broader – its aim was the integration of the entire qualifications system. The introduction of a national qualifications framework in Poland covering all types of education came to be treated as the concluding act in a series of formal education system reforms and the impetus for changes in non-formal education. As a result, an overarching PQF came to be perceived as one of the most important lifelong learning policy tools in Poland.

In the report (Chapters 7.1–7.7) we show what types of qualifications can be included in the integrated qualifications system, what institutions are involved in the process of inclusion and describe in detail the procedures of including qualifications, following the structure of the chapters agreed to within the NQF-in partnership. Because the overarching PQF was implemented only recently (Chapter 7.8), we also wanted to show the scale of the efforts to make it operational, namely what legal acts needed to be prepared and adopted and what organisational infrastructure needed to be created. We also describe the activities undertaken to prepare the institutions and bodies that are involved in managing the integrated qualifications system.

The information in this report spans the time from 2006 when the first work started on developing a national qualifications framework in Poland to September 2017 – the date this report was finalised.

Abbreviations and acronyms

EQA – external quality assurance

EQAE – external quality assurance institution

EQF – European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

IBE – Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych (*Educational Research Institute*)

IQA – internal quality assurance

IQR – Integrated Qualifications Register

IQS – Integrated Qualifications System

NQF – national qualifications framework

PQF – Polish Qualifications Framework

Explanation of the basic terms used in the report[1]

Archival qualification – a qualification in the IQS which is „inactive" due to its being out-of-date, and is no longer awarded within the IQS.

Awarding body/certifying institution – an institution authorised to award particular qualifications.

External quality assurance institution – an entity authorised by the relevant minister responsible for a qualification to assess the quality assurance system of awarding bodies. The external quality assurance institution shall not have any relationship with any awarding body that it may be authorised to assess.

Formal education – learning within the framework of programmes leading to an awarded full or partial qualification, provided by an institution operating on the basis of legal regulations governing the general, vocational and higher education systems.

Formal general and vocational education (*system oświaty*) – the Polish national education system is divided into "*system oświaty*" and higher education. Many documents on Polish education translate the term "*system oświaty*" into "education system". From the perspective of this report, such terminology lacks precision for two reasons: it does not refer directly to vocational education and may suggest that it also includes higher education. For this reason, "*system oświaty*" is being translated in this report as "the formal general and vocational education system".

Full qualification – qualifications awarded solely within the formal general, vocational and higher education systems, after the learner has achieved the learning outcomes required for the qualifications attained in specific stages of education.

Informal learning – attaining knowledge, skills and competences through various means other than organised learning (formal or non-formal education systems). Informal learning can include: autonomous self-learning (e.g. foreign language, computer skills); learning through other activities – while working, performing household duties, developing a hobby, etc. (learning outcomes

[1] Based on the *Słownik Zintegrowanego Systemu Kwalifikacji* (*Glossary of the Integrated Qualifications System*), IBE 2017.

then become an added value of the activities performed, which are not undertaken with the intention of learning).

Integrated Qualifications System – a distinguished part of the national qualifications system governed by the regulations of the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System. Qualifications not included in the integrated qualifications system can function in Poland, but they are not assigned a PQF level and cannot be entered into the Integrated Qualifications Register.

Integrated Qualifications Register – the publicly accessible, national register of qualifications in the IQS. Qualifications included in the IQS are entered into the IQR regardless of whether they also exist in other registers (lists, catalogues) administered by other ministries, economic sector organisations, communities or institutions.

Internal quality assurance – the monitoring and periodic evaluation performed by awarding bodies relating to the process of awarding qualifications.

Market qualification – a qualification not regulated by legal regulations, developed by various entities and communities (social organisations, associations, corporations or other groups) on the basis of their experiences. All market qualifications included in the IQS are categorized as partial qualifications.

National qualifications system – all of the solutions implemented to develop and award qualifications and ensure their quality.

Non-formal education – organised institutional learning in the form of programmes that are not part of a formal education system. The education programmes of non-formal education do not have to lead to the attainment of a qualification. Qualifications awarded through non-formal education can be included in the IQS (and be assigned a PQF level).

Partial qualification – all qualifications in the IQS that are not full qualifications.

Qualification – a specific set of learning outcomes, defined according to established standards, whose attainment has been formally confirmed by an authorised institution.

Regulated qualification – a qualification established by legal regulations, awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems. Regulated qualifications may, but do not have to, be included in the IQS. The relevant minister decides whether it is to be included in the IQS. All regulated qualifications in the IQS are partial qualifications.

Relevant minister – the minister responsible for a specific area of government administration within which a given regulated and/or market qualification functions.

Suspended qualification – a qualification in the IQS which is momentarily "inactive" and cannot be awarded because of the temporary lack of an authorised awarding body.

7.1. Historical Context

Work in Poland on the national qualifications framework was started already in 2006, when the minister responsible for higher education appointed the Working Group for the NQF for Higher Education, assigning it the task of preparing an initial model of the framework (see Marciniak 2013 et al.).

In October 2008, the Minister of National Education appointed a team of experts recommending the preparation of a draft model of a Polish qualifications framework. (Chmielecka 2010). The team, which included experts representing different educational sectors, prepared a concept of the national qualifications framework and preliminary guidelines for its implementation.

In 2010, the Prime Minister appointed the *Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework* in order to manage work on the Polish Qualifications Framework at the governmental level. This Taskforce was led by the Ministry of National Education. At the same time, the Minister of National Education commissioned the Educational Research Institute (IBE) to prepare wide-ranging proposals for the development and implementation of the Polish Qualifications Framework and to prepare the Referencing Report (see Sławiński, Dębowski et al. 2013). This task was carried out within the framework of an EFS funded project: *The Development of Terms of Reference for the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for Lifelong Learning*, implemented from June 2010 to November 2015. From January 2013 to November 2015, this project was accompanied by two supplementary projects, also financed from ESF funds: *Developing the National Qualifications System – Organising and Institutionalising the Integrated Qualifications Register* and *Developing the National Qualifications System – Pilot Implementation of the National Qualifications System and its Promotional Campaign*.

Those three systemic ESF-funded projects were implemented by IBE to support the Ministry of National Education and the Polish government in the work of designing systemic solutions and preparing legal acts to implement an integrated qualifications system based on the NQF. Within the scope of these projects, the main components of the qualifications system in Poland were developed: level descriptors of the NQF, qualifications standards and levelling procedures, standards for quality assurance, validation, a proposed outline for the functioning of a qualifications register as well as credit accumulation and transfer. An important part of this work was to develop and promote the use of a common terminology, defined in a glossary of the most important terms relating to the qualifications system (Sławiński ed. 2013, Sławiński ed. 2015, Sławiński 2016).

The concept of the national qualifications framework was described in the Referencing Report, presented, after governmental approval, to the EQF Advisory Group of the European Commission in May 2013. The concept of the NQF reflected the reforms in higher, general and vocational education that were begun in the late 1990s, including the most important shift in the 2010s of basing education on learning outcomes. As a result of these reforms, the approach to developing qualifications that takes into account learning outcomes, their transfer, validation

and quality assurance in accordance with European standards was introduced to the entire formal education system before the PQF was established, and provided the foundation for its implementation (Sławiński, Dębowski et al. 2013).

Since the beginning of the work on the NQF in Poland it was assumed that in order to be a policy driver, the NQF has to be complemented by other elements of the qualifications system, including: a standard way of describing qualifications, quality assurance and validation procedures, credit accumulation and transfer principles. Therefore, work on the reforms was not only concentrated on NQF implementation, but it was much broader – on integrating the entire qualifications system. The introduction of a national qualifications framework in Poland covering all types of education came to be treated as the concluding act in the series of formal education system reforms and the impetus for changes in non-formal education. The framework would allow for the greater integration of the qualifications system and provide a better response to the lifelong learning challenges that Poland was and is still facing (Kocór, Worek (2017), Dębowski, Stęchły (2015), Szczucka, Turek, Worek (2012); Debowski, Lis, Pogorzelski 2010). An overarching NQF came to be perceived as one of the most important lifelong learning policy tools in Poland.

The IQS was developed in a participatory manner, following a number of debates with various stakeholders initiated and led by IBE (Chłoń-Domińczak, et al., 2011). Additionally, stakeholders were included in the conceptual work on developing the main elements of the system. The debate meetings provided the opportunity for social partners to actively participate in the development of a modernised qualifications system. This was important when the proposed Act on the IQS went through the legislative process. The acceptance of social partners provided a strong incentive to the newly elected government to adopt the Act in its first months of governance.

The Act on the Integrated Qualifications System establishing the Polish Qualifications Framework was passed in December 2015 and came into force in January 2016. Following the adoption of the Act, extensive activities were launched to ensure that the Integrated Qualifications System could start functioning. The implementation of these activities has been supported by funding from the European Social Fund, in particular within the framework of the systemic projects implemented by IBE (see Chapter 8 for a description of these project activities).

7.2. The Integrated Qualifications System – Basic Premises

Aims of the IQS

The aim of the Integrated Qualifications System based on the Polish Qualifications Framework is to raise the level of human capital in Poland (by increasing the number of learners and the effectiveness of investments in human capital) and to improve the ability to match supply and demand in the labour market, particularly with regard to qualifications awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems.

The solutions and mechanisms presented in the IQS Act serve to more effectively implement the lifelong learning policies corresponding to the needs of a modern knowledge-based economy. The IQS also increases the accessibility of qualifications offered in Poland, improves their quality and enables them to be compared to each other and referenced to the European Qualifications Framework, as the result of being assigned a level in the Polish Qualifications Framework.

Currently, two autonomous but internally consistent systems of formal education function in the Polish legal framework governing qualifications – the formal general and vocational education system (*system oświaty*) and the higher education system. The development and awarding of qualifications for both these systems are governed by legal regulations, which comply with European standards.

Awarding qualifications outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems is characterized by a great variety of regulatory approaches (legal and organisational) and varying degrees of required legal norms relating to the particular fields in which these qualifications operate. What is lacking are basic common standards guaranteeing the credibility of qualifications – from standards on how they are described and named, to validation and certification principles, as well as quality assurance procedures for awarding qualifications. Also striking is the lack of a connection between the qualifications awarded in various fields and qualifications systems.

The way the "qualifications market" currently operates in Poland affects attitudes towards lifelong learning. As a result, Poland, compared to other European Union countries, has relatively low investments in human capital (to increase and supplement competences after the completion of formal education) made by both adult Poles and the companies employing them.

The essence of the IQS Act is the introduction of a set of simple and consistent systemic solutions for qualifications awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems and the greater integration of all areas within which qualifications are awarded (formal general, vocational and higher education, regulated qualifications and market qualifications).

The IQS Act has introduced a new order in the area of awarding qualifications. The Act defines the roles and responsibilities of different entities operating in the area of qualifications and the relationships among them. It introduces uniform terminology and common rules for awarding and ensuring the quality of qualifications attained outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems (analogous solutions were introduced to these systems earlier).

Qualifications not included in the IQS can continue to function in Poland, but they are not assigned a PQF level and will not be able to be entered into the Integrated Qualifications Register.

The key solutions adopted in the Act on the IQS are as follows:

- All qualifications awarded in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems (after having completed first and second cycle studies and the doctorate degree) are included by law in the IQS.
- Other qualifications awarded in higher education (e.g. after completing post-graduate studies) and qualifications awarded outside the general, vocational and higher education systems may also be included in the IQS.
- Qualifications awarded outside the general, vocational and higher education systems are included in the IQS by ministers responsible for the qualification (relevant minister).
- All qualifications in the IQS will be entered in the Integrated Qualifications Register.
- Each qualification in the IQS must be described in the manner specified in the regulations and have a PQF (Polish Qualifications Framework) level assigned.
- Qualifications defined in the Act as a full qualification have their PQF level assigned by law.
- The remaining qualifications are assigned a PQF level as the result of comparing the required learning outcomes for the given qualification with the level descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework.
- A qualification in the IQS is awarded on the basis of achieving a positive result in the process of verifying that a person attaining the qualification has mastered its required learning outcomes (validation).
- Qualifications in the IQS can only be awarded by institutions authorised by legal regulations or by the relevant minister responsible for the qualification (certification).
- Each institution awarding qualifications included in the IQS is required to comply with internal and external quality assurance provisions that are consistent with the relevant regulations of the law.
- The relevant ministers of given qualifications are responsible for overseeing the awarding of qualifications and quality assurance.

The functioning of the integrated system is coordinated by the Minister Coordinator of the IQS with the support of the IQS Stakeholders Council.

Main elements of the integrated qualifications system

Polish Qualifications Framework

The Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF), like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), consists of eight qualification levels. Each PQF level is described with the use of descriptors. The descriptors in the PQF capture the full spectrum of learning outcomes. They reflect progress from the lowest to the highest level achieved by the learner. The PQF descriptors show how the following abilities advance at successive levels through learning in different contexts and stages of life:

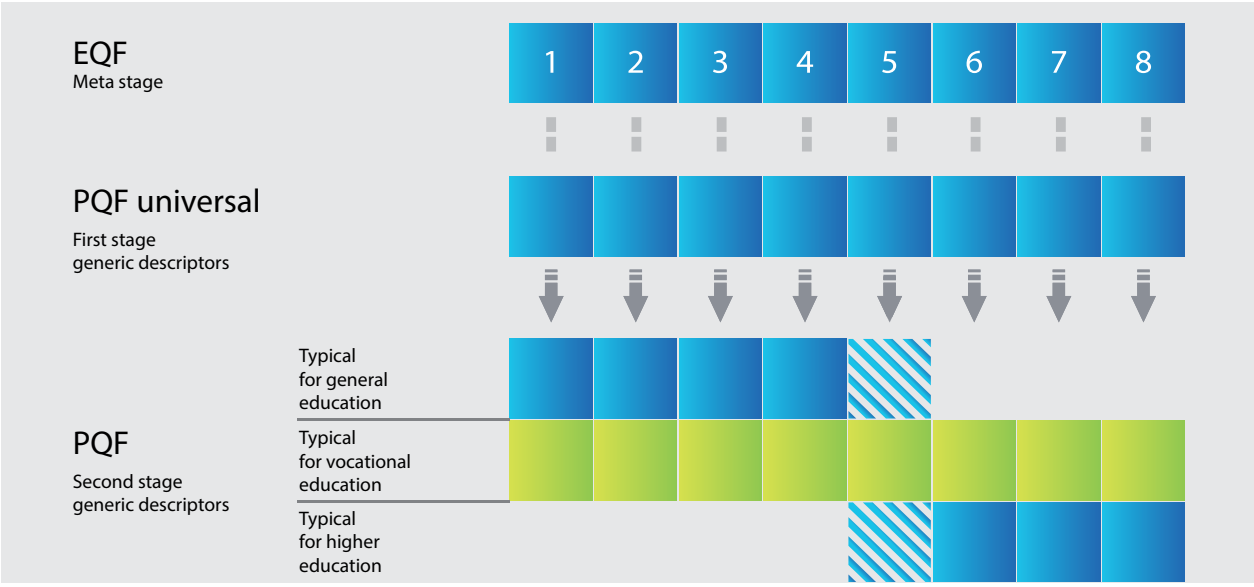
- knowledge (e.g. depth, scope),
- skills (including problem-solving, the innovative application of knowledge in practice, learning and communication),
- social competence (e.g. readiness to work with others and to assume responsibility for assigned tasks).

A unique Polish solution is to distinguish two stages of descriptors in the PQF levels:

- first stage generic (universal) descriptors – these relate to all sectors of education,
- second stage generic descriptors – these detail the first stage generic descriptors.

Universal descriptors and second stage generic descriptors should be read together. Figure 7.1 illustrates the structure of the Polish Qualifications Framework.

Figure 7.1. Structure of the Polish Qualifications Framework



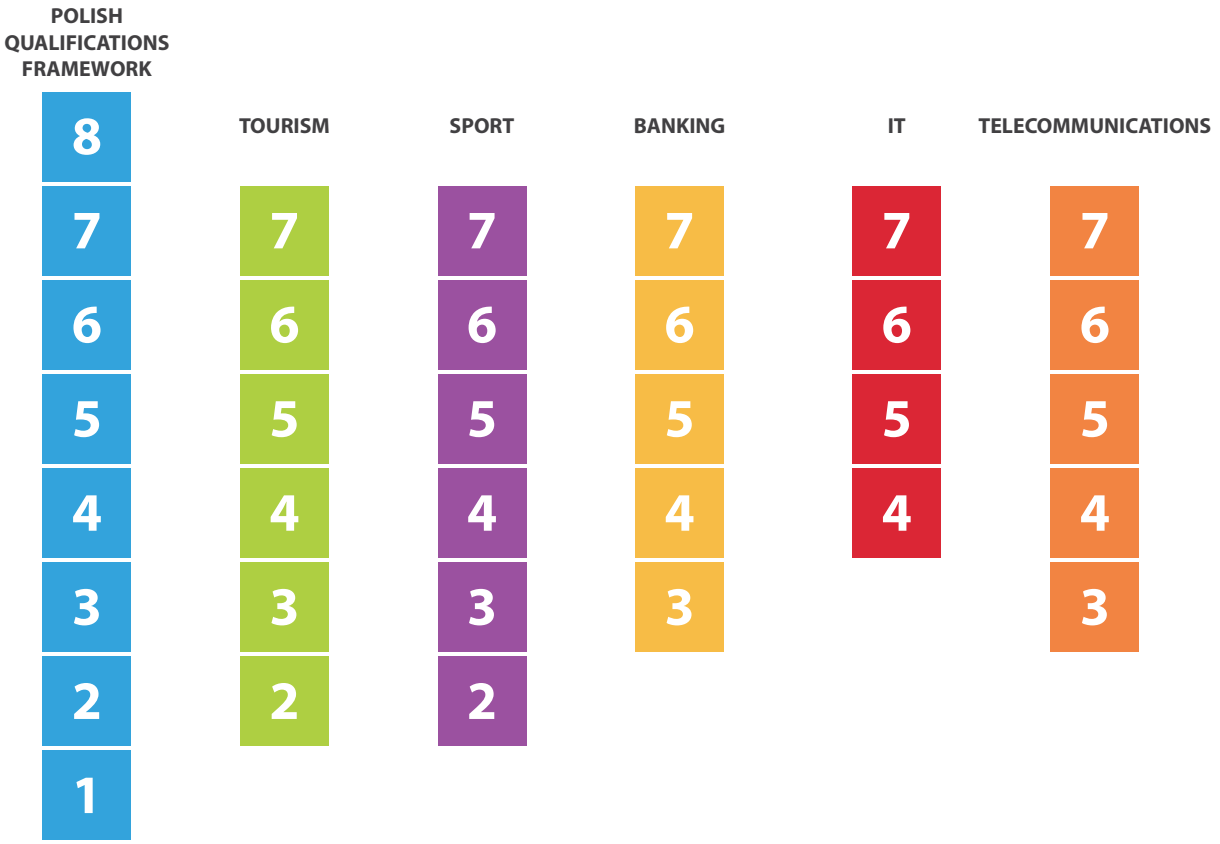
Source: IBE

The Polish qualifications system can also have third stage generic descriptors. These descriptors already function in fields of learning in higher education. They are also used to describe specific fields of activities (sectors) – known as "sectoral qualifications frameworks".

The purpose of the sectoral qualifications frameworks (SQFs), which are able to be referenced to the PQF, is to organise the qualifications and competences of a given industry, thus enabling a better understanding and comparability of its qualifications and creating better conditions for occupational mobility, both locally and internationally. They also provide both employers and employees with an intentional and individualized approach to career development (Trawińska-Konador et al. 2015).

Developing sectoral qualifications frameworks is the domain of interested sectors, but the decision of relevant ministers determines the inclusion of these frameworks in the IQS. Including a SQF in the IQS is voluntary. A decision to include a SQF in the IQS can be made after it has referenced its descriptors to those of the Polish Qualifications Framework.

Figure 7.2. Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks



Source: IBE

Integrated Qualifications Register

The IQS Act establishes the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR), a public register accessible through an on-line portal at the following website: http://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/.

The Register includes all qualifications in the IQS – those awarded in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems, regulated qualifications and market qualifications.

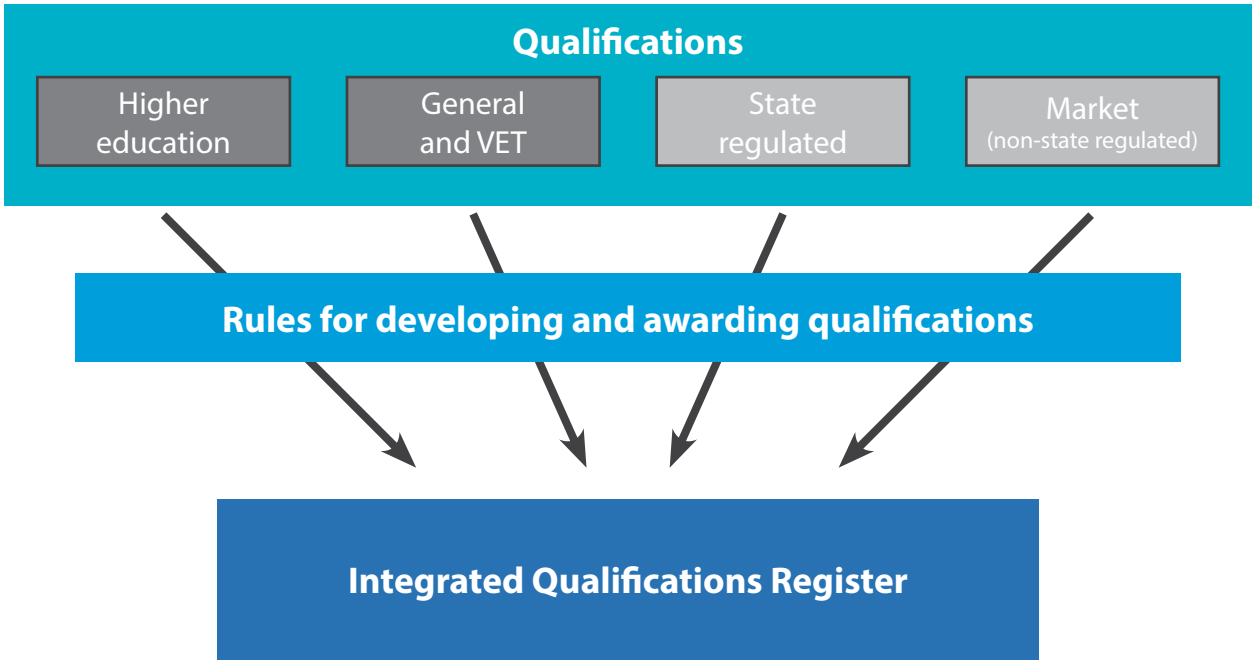
Qualifications included in the IQS are entered in the IQR regardless of whether they appear in other registers (catalogues, lists) maintained by individual ministries, industries, communities and institutions.

The presence of a qualification in the Register means that its credibility has been confirmed by public authorities and that it has a defined PQF level.

Qualifications that are not included in the IQS cannot be entered in the Register.

The data collected in the IQR about qualifications are publicly available from the IQS portal. The Act defines the methodology of obtaining the information listed in the IQR. Information on the listed qualifications is regularly updated.

Figure 7.3. Integrated Qualifications Register



Source: IBE

Standards of describing a qualification

The IQS Act does not change the standards for describing qualifications awarded within the formal general, vocational and higher education systems. The provisions of the Act on the standards of describing a qualification apply only to qualifications

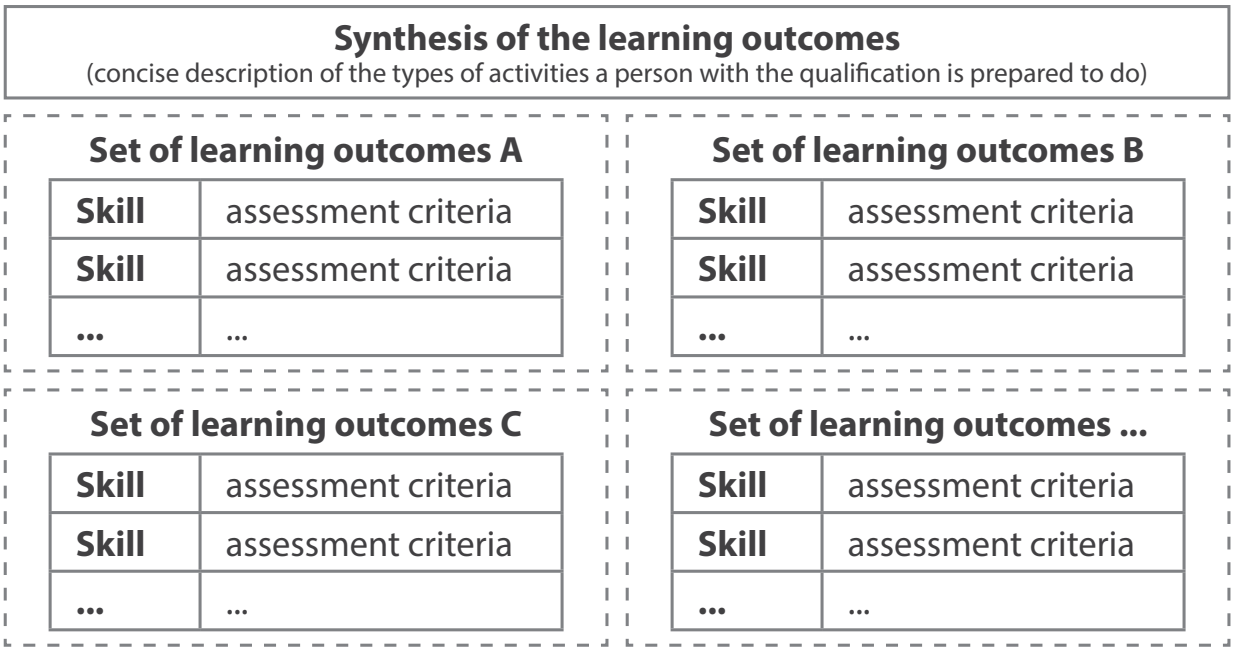
originating outside of these systems.[2] The provisions define the requirements for the scope and manner of presenting information about regulated and market qualifications in the application for including a qualification in the IQS and Integrated Qualifications Register.

In preparing the requirements for describing a qualification, it was assumed that information will be included on the qualification that is, above all, important from the point of view of those wishing to attain it, but also for validating and certifying institutions, as well as the government authorities responsible for policy development.

The most important part of the description is the presentation of the learning outcomes required for the qualification. According to the description requirements, learning outcomes are to be defined in several, complementary ways that include:

1) A synthesis of the learning outcomes – a concise description of the types of activities a person with the qualification is prepared to do,
2) Sets of required learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and social competence),
3) Descriptions of the individual learning outcomes comprising the sets and their verification criteria, which precisely state the scope of the required skills and define the knowledge and social competences relating to these skills that a person should have acquired.

Figure 7.4. Description of the learning outcomes of market qualifications included in the IQR



The description of the learning outcomes is supplemented by the requirements for validation (examination). Validation requirements play a key role in ensuring

[2] In this report, "standard of describing a qualification" is understood as the set of required information about a qualification, as well as the adopted approach to describing each element, based on guidelines (method).

the quality and comparability of qualifications awarded by various institutions. All components of the description of learning outcomes required for a qualification constitute an entirety – they are complementary and only read together, will they properly present the specific character of the qualification.

Validation and certification

A basic premise of the IQS is that only authorised institutions will be able to award qualifications in the integrated system.

Authorization to award qualifications arises directly from the law or is granted by the relevant minister pursuant to the provisions of the IQS Act. A qualification can only be awarded on the basis of a positive result of the validation of its required learning outcomes.

According to the provisions specified in the Act, the description of each regulated and market qualification must present the validation requirements, which are applicable to all institutions awarding the qualification. This ensures that the validation process conducted by different institutions can be compared.

Quality assurance of qualifications

The IQS Act does not change the quality assurance mechanisms applied in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems. These systems have had quality assurance solutions functioning in accordance with European standards and the provisions set out in the IQS Act for many years.

The IQS Act requires that the validation and awarding processes of each awarding body operating outside formal education systems must be internally and externally quality assured.

The awarding body must develop an internal quality assurance system in accordance with the provisions of the Act. The internal quality assurance system assesses the rules of conduct, procedures, methods and organisational solutions. The purpose of the internal quality assurance system in the awarding body is to ensure that validation and certification are properly performed and improved.

The IQS Act defines external quality assurance as monitoring and the periodic evaluation of activities relating to awarding qualifications, performed by an entity that is external to the awarding body. The external quality assurance institution strengthens the supervision of compliance with the standards of awarding qualifications and assists awarding bodies in improving validation and certification processes.

The provisions of the IQS Act require the IQS minister coordinator to develop and maintain a list of entities authorised to carry out external quality assurance activities.

Chapter 7.6 provides more information about quality assurance.

7.3. Institutional Setting

National authorities and IQS Stakeholders Council

The institutional framework of the integrated qualifications system is set out in the IQS Act.

The Act stipulates that the Integrated Qualifications System in Poland is coordinated by **the minister coordinator**, who is the Minister of National Education. The minister:

- leads the Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning,
- coordinates the activities of other ministries and leads activities on the development of the IQS,
- monitors the functioning of the IQS, prepares reports on qualifications at the request of the Council of Ministers,
- manages the IQS portal that links to the Integrated Qualifications Register,
- cooperates with the IQS Stakeholders Council and provides organisational support.

The **IQS Stakeholders Council** plays an advisory and supportive role to the IQS minister coordinator. The IQS Act states that the Council:

- supports the IQS minister coordinator to ensure the consistency of the qualifications system,
- monitors the functioning of the IQS, as well as analyses and exchanges experiences among groups of stakeholders,
- provides opinions on proposals of new legal acts on issues relating to the IQS,
- provides opinions on the recommendations prepared by teams of experts regarding the assignment of a PQF level to a qualification,
- provides opinions on sectoral qualifications frameworks before their inclusion in the IQS.

The IQS Stakeholders Council consists of representatives from: the National Chamber of Commerce, employers' organisations and trade unions, the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland, the Conference of Rectors of Vocational Schools Poland, the Central Examination Board, entities operating in the field of non-formal education, local governments, and the minister coordinator of the Integrated Qualifications System. The IQS Act provides detailed rules for appointing members of the Council, the duration of their term of office, selecting the chairperson of the Council and the way it operates.

The ministries play an important role in the IQS. **Relevant ministers** decide on the inclusion of qualifications and sectoral qualifications frameworks appropriate to their ministry. For example, the decision on including the qualification of wine maker in the IQS is made by the Minister of Agriculture, while the qualification of

fitness trainer is processed by the Minister of Sports and Tourism. The ministers also perform periodic reviews of the qualifications that fall within their area of responsibility. The relevant minister also:

- authorises awarding bodies to award qualifications,
- supervises the process of awarding qualifications and its quality assurance.

The IQS Act requires ministers to review all regulated qualifications within their area of responsibility in order to determine which of them should be included in the IQS. A transitional period is provided to allow regulated qualifications that existed prior to the Act to be included in the IQS.

The Act does not limit the existing scope of the competence of ministers on matters relating to qualifications. In order to reduce the number of new tasks relating to qualifications, other institutions may be authorised by particular minister to implement them.

An **institution operating the Integrated Qualifications Register** (IQR) is another crucial part of IQS institutional set-up. Initially, the IQR was operated by the Polish Agency of Enterprise Development (PARP), but since January 2018, this task was relegated to the Educational Research Institute (IBE). All qualifications included in the IQS are to be entered in the Register. Information on these qualifications is publicly available through the IQR portal, which began operating in mid-July 2016. The IQR operator is responsible for:

- registering qualifications and updating information on qualifications, awarding bodies and external quality assurance institutions,
- assessing the formal aspects of all types of requests made to the relevant ministers,
- collecting information on developments in the Integrated Qualifications System (statistical reports on awarded qualifications, evaluation reports, etc., contributing to labour market intelligence),
- informing awarding bodies about modifications made to qualifications,
- administering the part of the IQS portal relating to the Integrated Qualifications Register.

The IQR plays an important role in the integration of the qualifications system in Poland, as it contains all the different types of qualifications included in the IQS.

Awarding bodies

The awarding bodies functioning on the basis of the School Education Act (*system oświaty*) and higher education acts are included in the IQS by law. However, the qualifications of these education sectors are not covered by the provisions of the IQS Act for validation, certification, the quality assurance principles of awarding qualifications or the principles of supervising the awarding of qualifications. It

is assumed that the formal education system in Poland fully complies with IQS requirements and no changes are needed here.

A relevant minister is not only responsible for including regulated qualifications falling within the applicable sectors administered by his/her ministry in accordance with the IQS Act, but also for appointing awarding bodies and external quality assurance entities for those regulated qualifications.

In the case of market qualifications (non-statutory), institutions wanting to become awarding bodies apply for such authorisation to the relevant ministers. Upon a successful assessment of their capacity to meet the criteria to award qualifications (among others, on their organisational conditions and personnel capacity to conduct validation, and eventually other conditions pertaining to a given qualification), the relevant minister includes the institution as an awarding body in the Integrated Qualifications System. Ministers may also rescind authorisation to award or remove an entity from the list of awarding bodies in certain situations defined by the Act.

Awarding bodies may authorise other entities to conduct validation if they fulfil the requirements. Authorizing another entity to conduct validation, however, does not release the awarding body from the responsibility of ensuring that validation is properly performed.

Fees are charged to apply for the authorisation to award qualifications, as well as when an authorised awarding body awards qualifications (proportional to the income from the fees paid by persons to attain the qualifications).

Institutions responsible for quality assurance

The IQS Act also defines the principles of quality assurance.

In the case of qualifications awarded in the formal education system (general, VET, HE), the quality assurance of qualifications is ensured by relevant existing institutions functioning according to European standards and recommendations.

In the case of market and regulated qualifications, all awarding bodies (certifying institutions) must have a system of internal quality assurance and also be included in an external quality assurance system. External quality assurance is provided by an external quality assurance institution (EQAE) selected by the relevant minister from a list of external quality assurance entities administered by the minister coordinator (see Chapter 7 on the quality assurance of qualifications).

7.4 Types and Legal Status of Qualifications Included in the NQF

Types of qualifications included in the NQF

Any qualification awarded in the national qualifications system in Poland can be included in the integrated qualifications system (IQS) if it complies with the relevant provisions regarding:

- the description of qualifications (using the learning outcomes approach),
- quality assurance (external and internal),
- the quality of validation/examination,
- the quality of the levelling process.

Some qualifications are included in the IQS by law; others will have to follow an application procedure (see more in Chapter 5). Including qualifications in the IQS that are awarded outside the formal education system is not obligatory. Qualifications not included in the integrated system can still function in Poland however, such qualifications are not assigned a PQF level and cannot be entered into the Register.

Two criteria distinguish different types of qualifications in the IQS, although they are not stated explicitly in the legislation. The first criterion is whether the qualification relates to a level of formal education or not. The second criterion is the legal basis that governs the process of awarding the qualification.

The IQS Act states that full qualifications are those awarded in the formal general and vocational education system (*system oświaty*) after completing stages of education and the first, second and third cycle qualifications as defined in the Act on Higher Education.

Partial qualifications are those that are included in the IQS and are not full qualifications.

A reason for distinguishing full and partial qualifications was to have the IQS differentiate between qualifications confirming learning outcomes attained in a multi-year cycle of education relating to the completion of a particular level of education, and qualifications confirming the attainment of smaller sets of learning outcomes.

Full qualifications relate to the level of education and the traditional path of attaining qualifications in the formal education system. Another reason for the division between full and partial was the fear that the distinction between formal education system qualifications and the remaining ones would become blurred. It was feared, among other things, that students would stop acquiring skills in the formal education system in favour of attaining smaller, specialized qualifications that have been assigned high PQF levels.

While designing the systemic solutions in Poland and preparing the Referencing Report, discussions took place on whether Poland's systemic solutions would allow partial vocational qualifications awarded outside the formal higher education system to have levels above 4 and 5. Initially, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education was against this. The argument of having a clear distinction between full and partial qualifications helped soften the position of the Ministry. Full and partial qualifications also use different graphic symbols to denote the level of the qualification on certificates and diplomas.

Figure 7.5. Graphic symbols for the level of a qualification

The graphic symbol for a partial qualification at level 4 of the Polish Qualifications Framework	The graphic symbol for a full qualification at level 4 of the Polish Qualifications Framework
PRK 4	PRK IV

Source: Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 13 July 2016 on the graphic symbol to be used to inform about the Polish Qualifications Framework level assigned to a full or partial qualification included in the Integrated Qualifications System (Journal of Laws 2016, item 1022).

It should be added that the term "partial qualification" used in Polish documents, including the Referencing Report, does not fully reflect the concept behind this term in Polish. *Kwalifikacja cząstkowa* in the Polish language means that this is a smaller qualification and not necessarily a part of something larger (although it could be a part of a "larger" qualification). In this sense, the term *minor qualification* seems to better reflect the meaning of *kwalifikacja cząstkowa.*

The second criterion of distinguishing categories of qualifications is the legal basis governing their awarding process:

- The process of awarding qualifications in the formal general and vocational system (*system oświaty*) is governed by the School Education Act,
- The process of awarding qualifications in the higher education system is governed by the Act on Higher Education,
- State regulated qualifications are governed by legal acts, but not awarded in the formal (school) education system,
- Market qualifications are not regulated by legal acts and are awarded on the basis of the principle of economic freedom.

The scheme of the types of qualifications found in the IQS is presented in the following table:

Table 7.1. Types of qualifications in Poland's Integrated Qualifications System
Note: the awarding bodies are named in brackets

FULL QUALIFICATIONS			
Qualifications awarded within the formal general and VET education systems	**Qualifications awarded within HE**	**Regulated qualifications**	**Market qualifications (non-state regulated qualifications)**
■ Certificate of completing primary school [*school*] ■ Certificate of completing lower secondary school [*school*] ■ Matura certificate [*regional examination boards*] ■ Vocational Diploma [*regional examination boards*] ■ Journeyman's certificate (for occupations listed in the classification of vocational school occupations administered by the Ministry of National Education) [*boards of craft chambers*]	Examples: ■ Diploma certifying the title of *licencjat* ■ Diploma certifying the title of *inżynier* ■ Diploma certifying the title of *magister* ■ Diploma certifying the title of *magister inżynier* [*HE institutions*]	N/A	N/A

PARTIAL QUALIFICATIONS			
Qualifications awarded within the formal general and VET education systems	**Qualifications awarded within HE**	**Regulated qualifications**	**Market qualifications (non-state regulated qualifications)**
■ Vocational certificate [*regional examination board*]	Examples: ■ Certificates of completion of non-degree post-graduate studies [*HE institutions*]	Examples: ■ Diver – class one/ two/three [*Divers' Qualifying Commission of the Director of the Maritime Office in Gdynia*] ■ Tax advisor [*National Examination Board on Tax Counselling after having passed the examination for becoming a tax advisor*]	Examples: ■ Certificate of Risk Management of the Warsaw Institute of Banking [*Warsaw Institute of Banking*] ■ ECDL Certificates [*ECDL Poland*]

Source: proposed by the authors

Depending on the type of qualification, there are different procedures for their inclusion in the IQS:

- Full and partial qualifications awarded within the formal general and vocational education (*system oświaty)* and full qualifications awarded in HE are included automatically in the IQS,
- Partial qualifications in HE (non-degree post-graduate studies) are included in the IQS by the decision of higher education institutions, scientific institutions of the Polish Academy of Sciences or research institutions authorised to provide post-graduate studies,
- Regulated qualifications, which are always partial, are included in the IQS by the decision of the relevant minister,
- Market qualifications, which are also always partial, are included in the IQS based on the relevant minister's approval of an application from an interested institution.

It should be noted that market qualifications can be awarded by institutions that also award full, partial and regulated qualifications in the formal education system. For example, a university or VET school could decide to develop a short training programme (responding to the needs of employers or society) concluding with a qualification, but the training and awarding process for this qualification is not part of any study or school programme regulated by a legal act.

The IQS Act also defines the following types of qualifications based on their status in the IQS. Distinguishing these qualifications is technical in nature.

- Qualifications included in the IQS – a market or regulated qualification is deemed to be included in the IQS as of the date the notification is published of its inclusion in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland (*Monitor Polski*). An included qualification may not necessarily be awarded, because an awarding body has not yet been chosen (see more on this issue in Chapter 6).
- A qualification functioning in the IQS – a market or regulated qualification is deemed as functioning in the IQS as of the date an agreement has been signed between the awarding body (certifying institution) and an external quality assurance institution (see more on this issue in Chapter 6).
- Archival qualification – as the result of a review by the relevant minister, a given qualification may be deemed an archival qualification if it meets the conditions set out in the IQS Act. Notification of this is made through an announcement in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland (*Monitor Polski*).
- Suspended qualification – if the authorisation of all awarding bodies for a given qualification has expired, the relevant minister announces that the qualification has the status of a suspended qualification in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland (*Monitor Polski*).

Legal status of qualifications included in the NQF

The IQS Act does not specify the requirements for the formal general, vocational and higher education systems relating to validation, certification, qualifications' quality assurance or oversight of the process of awarding qualifications. Formal general and vocational education qualifications are established by the Minister of National Education, who determines the regulations governing all aspects relating to them. The qualifications (study programmes) offered in higher education are developed by higher education institutions, which own these programmes.

In the case of regulated qualifications, the relevant minister is formally responsible for defining the qualification and awarding system. The relevant minister designates the awarding body(ies) for the qualification.

A specific feature of the Polish system is that in the case of market qualifications, awarding bodies can be appointed for qualifications already entered in the Integrated Qualifications Register. Once a market qualification is entered in the Register, it becomes a public good. The institutions applying to have the qualification entered in the IQR cannot reserve the exclusive right to award it. Any institution interested in awarding a qualification already entered in the Register and being awarded by other entities can apply for the authority to award it and be included in the list of awarding bodies (see Box 7.1).

This solution is designed to protect the market of the Polish qualifications system from becoming excessively monopolized by particular entities.

Box 7.1. Granting the authority to award market qualifications

Let's use a hypothetical example: the Warsaw Confectioners Association applied to have a qualification included in the IQS, called "making jelly doughnuts". After approval by the relevant minister, the qualification is entered in the IQS and the Warsaw Confectioners Association is authorised to award the qualification. A year later, the Kraków Association of Confectioners asks whether it can also offer the same IQS-entered "making jelly doughnuts" qualification. The answer is yes. Under the IQS Act, the Kraków Association of Confectioners can apply to the relevant minister to become an awarding body for the qualification of "making jelly doughnuts". The minister makes the decision, and in doing so, does not need to obtain the consent of the Warsaw Confectioners Association, which originally applied to have this qualification entered in the IQS. The Kraków Association of Confectioners can achieve the status of awarding body as long as it meets the requirements specified in the IQS Act.

7.5. Procedures of Including Qualifications in the NQF

As indicated in Chapter 4, there are different procedures for including qualifications in the NQF depending on its type.

Formal general and VET qualifications are developed by the Ministry of National Education and when the relevant core curricula are accepted and entered into the law (by issuing regulations), they are automatically included in the IQS at the moment of their creation. The Minister of National Education is responsible for the process of assigning a PQF level to these qualifications by comparing their learning outcomes with PQF level descriptors.

Full higher education qualifications (*licencjat/inżynier*, *magister*, *doktor*) are assigned to a PQF level by the IQS law. When higher education institutions develop study programmes, they must reference them to the level descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework (to the second stage level descriptors). The appropriateness of the study programme's level and its compliance with the PQF level descriptors is verified by the Polish Accreditation Committee.

Market qualifications are included in the IQS by the relevant minister based on a request submitted by an interested institution (e.g. private training provider, business chamber, sectoral organisation). The relevant minister can include regulated qualifications in the IQS that are within his/her scope of ministerial responsibilities (sectors) based on the regulations and procedures described in the IQS Act.

The procedures of including regulated and market qualifications are similar. In this chapter, both of these procedures are described in detail, in addition to other activities required for the effective functioning of these qualifications in the system.

Market qualifications

Procedure of including market qualifications

Market (non-regulated) qualifications can be included in the IQS at the request of entities conducting organised activities in areas of the economy, labour market, education or training. For example, such an entity could be: a private company, an organisation of construction industry entrepreneurs, an association of shoe manufacturers, an association of training companies, etc. The intention of broadly defining the entities that can apply to have a qualification included in the IQS is to ensure that the system is open to different qualifications and groups of stakeholders.

An interested entity submits an electronic application to the relevant minister responsible for the qualifications of a given field through the Integrated Qualifications Register portal. The IQR operator[3] assesses the formal aspects of the

[3] IBE is the IQR operator as of January 2018.

application – this process cannot take longer than 14 days. The IQR operator then electronically transmits a correctly completed application to the relevant minister. The minister should review the application within four months, but this time period can be extended if needed.

Upon receiving the application, the relevant minister takes the following steps, which are described in the IQS Act (a diagram of the process of including market qualifications in the IQS is provided in Annex 3):

Step 1. Conduct consultations with stakeholders

The minister consults the proposed market qualification with relevant stakeholders. The minister sends information about the qualification to relevant stakeholders, announces on the IQS portal that the consultation process is starting and that opinions can be submitted. Then, the minister responds to the submitted opinions and prepares a summary of the results of the consultations. The summary is sent to the applicant (submitting body) and simultaneously published in the IQS portal.

Step 2. Obtain the opinions of specialists

After the consultations, the minister selects specialists and requests that they provide an opinion on the social and economic need for including the proposed qualification in the IQS. The minister provides the specialists with the opinions obtained from the stakeholders (the summary of the consultations). The specialists involved in this step:

1) have practical experience in the field of the market qualification,
2) represent various stakeholder groups for whom the market qualification is relevant,
3) have the competence to assess the individual learning outcomes of the proposed market qualification.

Step 3. Assess the application

After obtaining the opinion of the specialists, the minister assesses the application and makes a positive or negative decision. The following elements are taken into consideration:

1) the learning outcomes are assessed in relation to the tasks that a person with this particular qualification must perform; the adequacy of the validation requirements for these learning outcomes is also assessed,
2) the purpose of including the market qualification in the IQS is assessed, primarily by taking into consideration:
    a) the extent to which the proposed market qualification conforms to social needs, the needs of the labour market and employers,
    b) the adaptability of the qualification's requirements to objective circumstances and the ability to achieve the intended learning outcomes in a foreseeable amount of time,

c) the similarity of the market qualification to qualifications already included in the integrated qualifications system. There is a general rule that the IQS cannot have two qualifications in the Register that are the same or differ only superficially.

If the relevant minister rejects the application, the applicant is informed of this decision and provided justification for the rejection. It is important to note that there is no possibility to appeal a rejection to the administrative court. If the assessment results in a positive decision to have the qualification included in the IQS, the minister takes the steps described below.

Step 4. Assign a PQF level (levelling)

The relevant minister appoints a team of experts, which compares the learning outcomes required for the qualification to the Polish Qualifications Framework level descriptors. They then present their recommendation to the minister on the specific PQF level to be assigned. In addition to the proposed PQF level, the recommendation also contains a description of the learning outcomes required for the qualification (in accordance with art. 9, para. 1, item 1 of the IQS Act), as well as a reference to the level of the respective sectoral qualifications framework, if such a framework has been included in the IQS.

The minister coordinator issues regulations on the conditions to be met by the experts, how they are to be appointed, the procedure of comparing the learning outcomes required for a given qualification with PQF level descriptors, as well as the manner of documenting the course of the levelling process (art. 21, para. 8).

If the recommendation is that a particular qualification should be assigned to PQF level 6, 7 or 8, the relevant minister may request the opinion of the Minister of Science and Higher Education (art. 21, para. 5) to confirm the validity of the result of the comparison made by the experts.

The minister sends the experts' recommendation to the IQS Stakeholders Council for their opinion. If the opinion is positive, the minister assigns the PQF level to the qualification according to the recommendation. Otherwise, a team of experts once more prepares a recommendation, which refers to the opinion of the Council, and then the minister assigns the PQF level to the qualification in accordance with the new recommendation.

The recommendation prepared by the teams of experts on the PQF level is binding for the minister.

Step 5. Announce the inclusion of the market qualification in the Integrated Qualifications System

The announcement includes information on:

1) the name of the market qualification,
2) the type of document certifying that the market qualification has been awarded, the time period of its validity and (if needed) the conditions required to extend its validity,

3) the market qualification's assigned PQF level and its reference to the Sectoral Qualifications Framework level (SQF), if a relevant SQF has been established for the given sector or industry,
4) the learning outcomes described in accordance with the IQS Act (art. 9, para. 1, item 1),
5) the validation requirements and the entity conducting validation,
6) if needed, additional requirements ensuing from the character of the given qualification, relating to:
   a) the scope and frequency of the internal evaluation,
   b) the scope and frequency of producing reports from the external quality assurance process,
   c) the scope and frequency of reporting on activities,
7) if needed, additional conditions to be met by the institution applying for the authorisation to award the qualification,
8) if needed, the conditions to be met by the person who will be undergoing validation, particularly relating to the required level of education,
9) the time period after which the qualification is reviewed.

The announcement is published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland (*Monitor Polski*). The date of the announcement is the day that the market qualification is included in the IQS (art. 25, para. 3).

Note: a market qualification included in the IQS achieves the status of a qualification functioning in the IQS only when the relevant minister appoints the external quality assurance institution for at least one of the awarding bodies authorised to award this qualification.

Step 6. Send this information to the Integrated Qualifications Register operator

The Minister informs the IQR operator about the inclusion of a given qualification in the IQS and provides information about the qualification (in accordance with the scope set out in art. 84, para. 1).

Step 7. Announce that institutions may now apply for the authorisation to award the qualification

The minister places an announcement in the IQS portal that institutions may now apply for the authorisation to award the qualification.

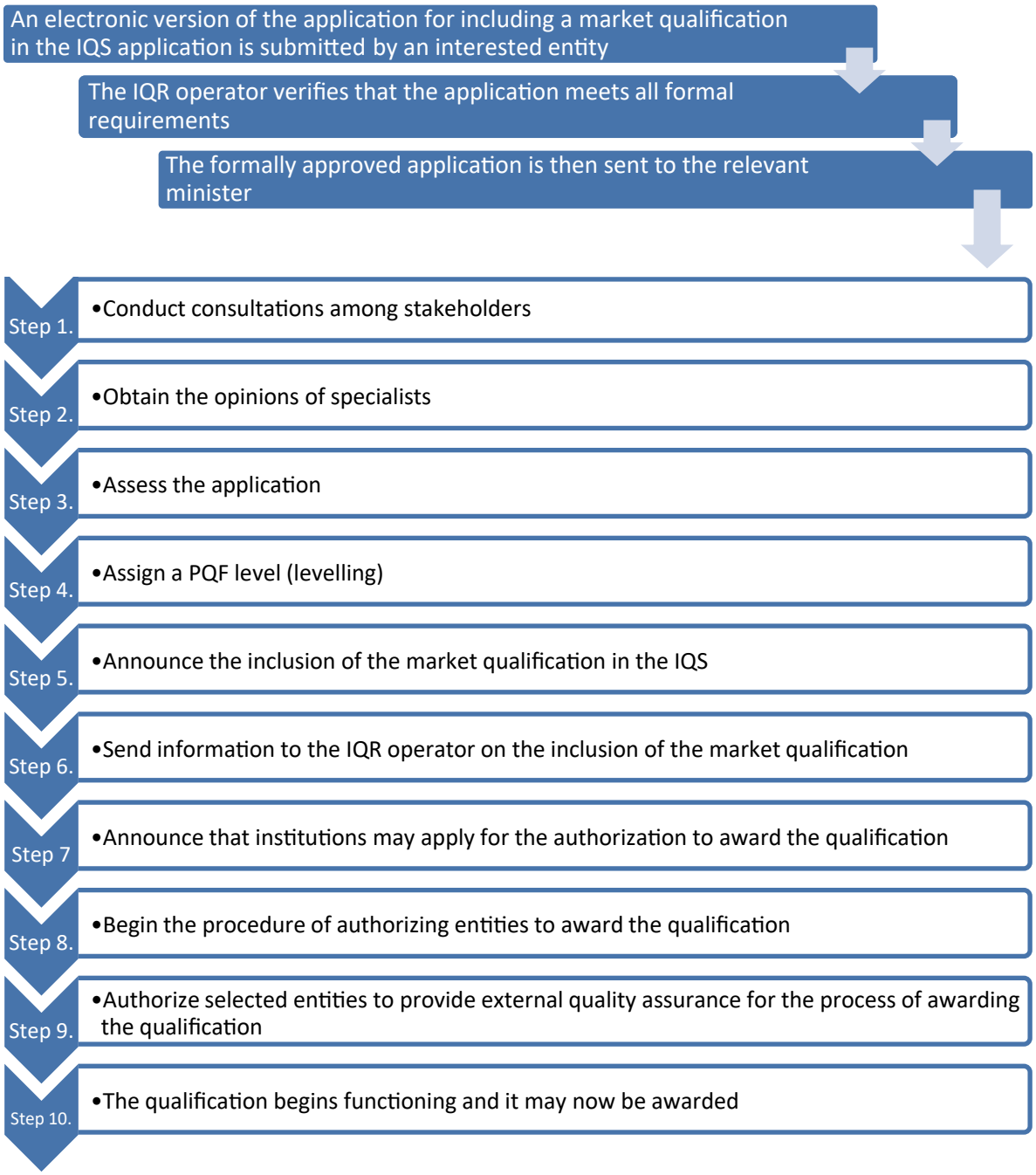
Step 8. Begin the procedure of authorising entities to award the qualification (art. 26)

In the case when an entity requesting the inclusion of a market qualification in the IQS also applies for the authorisation to award this qualification, the minister initiates both procedures simultaneously. Applying both for inclusion of qualification and authorisation to award this qualification decreases the fees (see Chapter 7 for more information on this).

Note: The minister, specialists and the team of experts work with the submitting body during the consultations, preparing the opinion on the validity of including the qualification in the IQS, assessing the application and assigning the PQF level (art. 22). The aim of this cooperation is to obtain necessary clarifications and to eventually modify the description of the qualification, if needed.

The above listed and described steps are reflected also in the figure below.

Figure 7.6. Steps of including market qualifications in the IQS



Source: Own work based on the IQS Act.

Granting the authority to award market qualifications included in the IQS

The IQS allows only institutions authorised by the relevant minister to award market qualifications. A request for the authorisation to award a market qualification can be submitted by an entity conducting business activities, if it satisfies the conditions set out in art. 41, para. 2 of the IQS Act (among others, ensuring that the institution meets the organisational conditions and has the personnel able to conduct

validation in accordance with the requirements specified in the announcement of including the qualification in the IQS, and any additional conditions presented in this announcement).

An interested entity submits an electronic application for the authorisation to award a qualification to the relevant minister through the Integrated Qualifications Register portal. The IQR operator assesses the formal aspects of the application and submits it electronically to the relevant minister.

If the application does not meet the formal requirements, the minister concludes the process according to the provisions of the Code of Administrative Procedure. An application meeting the formal requirements is reviewed, and if there are no questions about the information provided, the minister issues an administrative decision authorising the entity to award the market qualification indicated in the application (art. 41, para. 1).

If the administrative decision to grant certification authority is final, the minister chooses an entity from the list of external quality assurance entities (EQAE) and under an agreement, entrusts that entity to perform the external quality assurance activities for the awarding body of the given qualification (art. 59, para. 1). The awarding body may begin to award the market qualification as of the date the contract with the EQAE is concluded (art. 62).

When choosing an entity from the EQAE list, the minister takes into account:

1) the provision of the IQS Act stating there can be no more than five external quality assurance entities for one market qualification,
2) the economic rationale and effectiveness of the use of existing resources,
3) the principle of the balanced distribution of tasks among the entities included in the EQAE list (art. 59, para. 3).

Bearing in mind the efficiency of the procedure for issuing a decision on awarding authority, the minister may appoint other entities to perform this function, such as: a state body, the director of a subordinate organisational unit or one under the minister's supervision, or an entity of a professional self-governed organisation or business organisation. This authorisation is granted by issuing a regulation. In cases where decisions on granting awarding authority are made by an entity appointed by the minister, the appeal of a decision is considered in the first instance by the minister (art. 45, para. 1).

Reviewing market qualifications

One of the aims of establishing the IQS was to ensure that the qualifications functioning in the market are up-to-date. Therefore, market qualifications in the IQS are subject to mandatory reviews. The relevant minister is responsible for performing periodic reviews of qualifications under his/her jurisdiction by the dates specified in the announcement of their inclusion in the IQS. In cases justified by social or economic needs, the minister can perform such a review at an earlier time or under special circumstances.

The minister reviews the qualification in accordance with the relevant provisions governing market qualifications in the IQS (art. 19):

1) the qualification is consulted with stakeholder groups,
2) expert opinions and recommendations are obtained on extending the functioning of the given market qualification in the IQS, modifying the qualification, or discontinuing it due to the lack of a justification for its functioning (art. 27, para. 2).

As a result of the obtained opinions, the minister may:

1) acknowledge that the qualification will continue to function unchanged in the IQS,
2) make an appropriate modification to the qualification, or
3) change its status to that of an archival qualification.

Modifying a qualification

A modification to a market qualification cannot change its name or assigned PQF level. A modification (update) of the learning outcomes required for the qualification can be made only to the extent that this does not result in the need to change its name or PQF level. If more extensive modifications are needed, then a new qualification should be developed and processed for inclusion in the IQS.

The minister informs the public on modifications to a qualification in an announcement published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland (*Monitor Polski*).

Changing the status of a qualification to an archival qualification

A qualification becomes an archival qualification by the decision of the minister when it meets the following conditions:

1) during the three years preceding the review, not a single document has been issued confirming that the qualification was awarded, or
2) the continued awarding of the qualification is not justified due to social and/or economic reasons.

Authorisations and contracts relating to the qualification being archived are terminated on the date the relevant minister announces that it is now an archival qualification. This announcement is published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland (*Monitor Polski*).

Archiving a qualification does not invalidate previously issued documents certifying its attainment. Persons who are in the process of validating such a qualification on the day the change of status is announced will be able to attain the archival qualification as long as the validation result is positive.

Returning an archival qualification to the status of a qualification functioning in the IQS

An interested entity may request the minister to restore an archival qualification to its status as a functioning qualification. The interested entity initiates this process by submitting an electronic application to the relevant minister through the IQR portal. The IQR operator then assesses the formal aspects of the application and, if there are no problems, submits it electronically to the relevant minister.

The minister has four months to consider the application. He/she first obtains the opinions of experts on the rationale for having the qualification function again in the IQS. These opinions are general and not binding. Then the minister considers the application.

If the decision is positive, the minister informs the public by an announcement that the archival qualification is being restored to a functioning one in the IQS. This announcement is published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland (*Monitor Polski*). At the same time, notification is placed in the IQS portal that applications can be submitted for the authorisation to award this qualification.

If the decision is negative, the relevant minister informs the applicant of this decision and the reasons for it.[4]

Regulated qualifications

Inclusion of regulated qualifications in the IQS

As stated in Chapter 3, the relevant minister can include regulated qualifications within the scope of the ministry's responsibilities in the IQS based on the rules and procedures described in the IQS Act.

A qualification can be included in the IQS provided that this qualification has descriptions, among others, of:

- the learning outcomes, described in accordance with the IQS Act,
- validation requirements,
- institution(s) authorised as its awarding body(ies),
- if necessary, additional conditions to be met by institutions applying for the authorisation to award it,
- entities entrusted with the responsibility for external quality assurance,
- the term of validity of the document confirming the attainment of the qualification and (if necessary) the conditions for the renewal of this document.

Each regulated qualification to be included in the IQS must comply with the requirements enumerated above.

[4] There is no appeal to the administrative court if a negative decision has been issued.

Step 1. Assign a PQF level

The relevant minister appoints a team of experts, which compares the learning outcomes required for the qualification with the PQF level descriptors and presents a recommendation on a specific PQF level for this qualification.

The conditions to be met by the experts, how they are appointed and the procedure for comparing the qualification's required learning outcomes with PQF level descriptors, as well as the manner of documenting the work of assigning a level, is determined by the minister coordinator, who issues a regulation defining these issues (art. 21, para. 8).

If the recommendation is at PQF level 6, 7 or 8, the relevant minister may request the opinion of the Minister of Science and Higher Education (art. 21, para. 5) to confirm the validity of the result of the comparison made by the experts.

The minister sends the recommendation of the experts to the IQS Stakeholders Council for their opinion. If its opinion is positive, the minister assigns the PQF level to the qualification according to the recommendation. Otherwise, a team of experts once more prepares a recommendation, which refers to the opinion of the Council, and then the minister assigns the PQF level to the qualification in accordance with the new recommendation.

Step 2. Announce the inclusion of the regulated qualification in the IQS

The minister informs the public in an announcement published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland (*Monitor Polski*) that the regulated qualification has been assigned a PQF level and is now included in the IQS. The date the announcement is published is the date the qualification is considered to be included in the IQS.

Step 3. Provide information to the IQR operator

The Minister informs the IQR operator that the qualification has been included in the IQS and provides information about the qualification. If granting the authority to award this qualification is made by administrative decision, then the relevant minister places an announcement in the IQS portal that interested entities may apply for such authorisation.

Granting the authority to award regulated qualifications included in the IQS

Awarding bodies are granted awarding authority for a given qualification when the relevant minister issues separate regulations or an administrative decision about this issue.

When an administrative decision is used to designate the awarding body for a given qualification, an entity operating a business can apply if it meets the conditions specified in the IQS Act (among others, ensuring the organisational conditions and personnel to conduct validation in compliance with the requirements defined in

the announcement of the qualification's inclusion in the IQS, as well as fulfilling any other conditions listed in the announcement).

To become an awarding body, an interested institution submits an electronic application to the relevant minister through the IQR portal. The IQR operator assesses compliance with the formal requirements of the application and if there are no formal problems, submits it electronically to the relevant minister.

If the application does not meet the formal requirements, the minister concludes the proceedings according to the provisions of the Code of Administrative Procedure. An application fulfilling all the formal requirements is reviewed, and if there are no reservations, the relevant minister issues an administrative decision authorising the institution to award the regulated qualification indicated in the application.

The external quality assurance entity for the awarding body may be specified in the regulations governing the qualification. The relevant minister also can choose an entity to provide external quality assurance from a list and sign a contract with it to perform this function for the awarding body. The awarding can begin awarding the given qualification from the date the contract is signed with the external quality assurance entity.

Bearing in mind the efficiency of the procedure for issuing a decision on awarding authority, the minister may appoint other entities to perform this function, such as: a state body, the director of a subordinate organisational unit or one under the minister's supervision, or an entity of a professional self-governed organisation or business organisation.

Reviewing regulated qualifications

Within five years from the date of enacting the IQS Act, all ministers responsible for government departments are obliged to review the qualifications relating to the areas they oversee.[5] This review identifies the qualifications to be included in the IQS in the opinion of the minister.

Following the review, the minister can include a regulated qualification in the IQS that does not meet the requirements specified in the Act if it is possible:

1) to assign a PQF level to this qualification, and
2) identify an awarding body for this qualification.

The minister announces the assigned PQF level for such a qualification and its inclusion in the IQF by an announcement published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland (*Monitor Polski*).

When including a qualification in the IQS in this manner, the minister is obliged to ensure that it meets the requirements specified in the Act within three years from

[5] These qualifications are established by separate regulations and awarded according to the conditions defined in the regulations. They do not include qualifications awarded in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems.

the date of the announcement of its inclusion. If the qualification does not meet the requirements within this time, it will be designated as an archival qualification and announced as such in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland (*Monitor Polski*).

7.6. Quality Assurance of Qualifications Included in the NQF

The quality assurance system for formal general, vocational and higher education reflects the principles and standards presented in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the EQF, as well as other related European documents and guidelines.[6] However, the quality assurance measures for awarding qualifications outside the formal education systems do not always fully meet these standards.

One important aim of the Integrated Qualifications System is to extend systemic solutions for quality assurance to all qualifications listed in the Integrated Qualifications Register. Such qualifications must now comply with uniform quality assurance requirements, consistent with European guidelines.

The quality assurance of qualifications in the general, vocational and higher education systems continues to be the overseen by the relevant ministers. Responsibility for the quality assurance of qualifications under the direct or indirect authority of other ministers will remain there and is overseen according to the principles defined in the IQS Act. The IQS Act stipulates that the process of awarding qualifications is quality assured, thus, the key definitions, description of entities and their expected tasks directly concern the process of awarding qualifications.

The quality assurance of qualifications awarded in the formal education sector

The formal general, vocation and higher education systems were modernised before the introduction of the Polish Qualifications Framework and the Integrated Qualifications System. Between 2008 and 2011, the reforms of the general education and vocational education systems introduced learning outcomes as the primary reference point for education policies. Key changes were introduced in higher education in 2011 (Referencing Report, 2013; Dębowski, and Stęchły, 2015).

Formal general and vocational education system

All schools in the formal general and vocational education have external and internal quality assurance systems in place.

External quality assurance is provided by the system of pedagogical supervision. External pedagogical supervision is conducted by Regional Education Authorities (REA) (*kurator* oświaty), which are supervised by the Minister of National Education.

[6] European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), validation – European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP 2009) and higher education – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Pedagogical supervision covers three aspects: evaluation, an audit of legal compliance and support.[7]

The Head of the Regional Education Authority prepares an annual report on the results of the educational supervision and submits it to the Minister of National Education.

School principals are obliged by law to design and implement an internal quality assurance system, which should be done in cooperation with teachers. School principals are relatively free in how they design and implement these systems, but they are required to include the three aspects of pedagogical supervision mentioned above: evaluation, compliance audit and support. Internal evaluation is carried out annually and its results are taken into consideration in the external evaluation. In order to help school principals develop and implement internal quality assurance procedures, the National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education prepared "Quality Standards for VET" (2013), a document covering ten thematic areas relating to quality assurance in VET,8 which are in line with the 2009 EQARF/EQAVET Recommendation. This document can be used by schools voluntarily.

The system of external examinations is a key element in ensuring and improving the quality of the education and qualifications attained in school. The Central Examination Board and eight Regional Examination Boards are responsible for organising external examinations. The external examination system is supervised by the Minister of National Education. The external examination system is designed so that all examinees are solving the same problems to verify whether they have achieved the learning outcomes defined in the core curriculum. Trained examiners registered at the Regional Examination Boards assess examination results. The Central Examination Board analyses aggregate test and examination results and initiates research in the field of assessment. Results of external examinations are taken into consideration in both external and internal quality assurance as part of pedagogical supervision.

The collection and dissemination of information on the formal general and vocational education system by the School Information System is an important element in ensuring the quality of qualifications in Poland. The School Information System is maintained in electronic form and uses the Internet to provide information collected under the terms of a legal act.9 Each school and educational institution must submit data regarding the number and categories of pupils, teachers,

[7] Schools are evaluated according to uniform requirements set out in the legislation on such aspects as: the concept and organisation of work; educational processes; the implementation of the core curriculum; active participation and support for the development of pupils; shaping social attitudes and respect for social norms; cooperation among teachers and with parents and the local community; and management. The audit of legal compliance verifies whether the activities undertaken by schools comply with the relevant regulations. For more information, see the Eurydice Report for Poland.

[8] The ten thematic areas of the quality standards are: (1) teaching programmes, (2) school staff, (3) school material resources, (4) organisation of teaching, (5) students with special needs, (6) cooperation with employers: (7) cooperation with domestic and international partners, (8) assessment and validation of learning outcomes, (9) counselling, (10) strategic management of the school.

[9] Act of 15 April 2011 on the School Information System (Journal of Laws 2011, no. 139, item 814).

facilities, expenses, etc. Submission of data is done individually by each school through a web application. Information is collected regionally and then exported by Regional Education Authorities to the Ministry of National Education. Each user group (ministries, Central Statistical Office, local authorities, etc.) has access to its relevant part of the data base. Some information is available to the public. The system has been functioning in this manner since 2012.

Higher education

Higher education institutions in Poland are directly responsible for the quality of awarded qualifications and the study programmes leading to them. They are required by law to have an internal quality assurance system in place. The purpose of the external quality assurance system in higher education is primarily to verify the functioning of the internal quality assurance system of higher education institutions. The minister responsible for higher education defines the basic premises of these systems by formulating:

- the requirements for describing qualifications,
- the national qualifications framework for higher education, which includes descriptions of learning outcomes for eight broad areas of study,
- the organisational requirements of higher education institutions, especially with regard to the number and qualifications of staff required to offer studies in specific fields,
- the requirements of the study programme,
- the principles of programme and institutional assessment of higher education institutions.

Higher education institutions are required by law to be assessed by the Polish Accreditation Committee (their programmes or institutions), which submits the results of its assessments to the Minister of Science and Higher Education.

Assessments can also be performed by an institutions established by the academic community or an international accreditation body. The Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC) – an independent entity acting on the basis of the Act on Higher Education – performs external assessments of the quality of education, as well as of the qualifications awarded. PAC is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and is also registered with the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies. It belongs to the European Consortium for Accreditation, the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. PAC performs its activities in accordance with the "Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area".

PAC accredits programmes and institutions. Programme accreditation includes an assessment of, among others:

- the congruency of the learning outcomes determined by the higher education institution for a given study programme and the descriptors for the given field in the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education,
- the ability to attain these learning outcomes given the educational process and conditions under which these studies are offered,
- the propriety of validating the learning outcomes.

An institutional accreditation takes into account the following issues, among others:

- the operation and improvement of internal quality assurance systems,
- the accreditation or certification of the faculties of the higher education institution received from international institutions,
- the results of the previously performed programme accreditation.

The assessment procedure conducted by PAC is free of charge, mandatory and cyclical. In the case of a negative assessment, the minister responsible for higher education revokes or suspends the ability of an institution to provide higher education.

The quality assurance of qualifications awarded outside formal general, vocational and higher education systems

New systemic solutions for ensuring the quality of qualifications came into force with the Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System. The Act does not affect the principles or mechanisms of quality assurance in the formal general, vocations and higher education systems.

According to the IQS Act, the quality assurance of qualifications awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems consists of overseeing validation and certification, which is the responsibility of the relevant ministers. Awarding bodies are obliged to submit activity reports to the relevant ministers at least once every two years.

According to the IQS Act, each awarding body functioning outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems must have internal and external quality assurance systems for their validation and certification activities. The main premise of quality assurance is that it is considered from the point of view of the individual who attains the qualification.

The aim of an awarding body's internal quality assurance system is to ensure that validation and certification are performed properly and improved. To accomplish this:

- the education and training process is separated from the validation process,

- validation and certification are continuously monitored and assessed,
- validation and certification are regularly evaluated internally.

External quality assurance consists of:

- monitoring the internal quality assurance system used by the awarding body,
- regularly verifying that the awarding body is complying with the requirements of the IQS Act,
- conducting regular external evaluations of validation and certification of the awarding body and its internal quality assurance system.

The IQS minister coordinator maintains a list of entities authorised to provide external quality assurance and announces a call for institutions to join this list at least once every three years. The list is publicly available at the IQS portal.

An entity interested in providing external quality assurance submits an application to the relevant minister through the IQS portal. The fee for the application is 2000.00 PLN. The application requests information on:

- the applicant,
- the groups of qualifications for which the entity would like to conduct external quality assurance activities,
- the names of the applicant's employees, information on their educational background and professional experience relating to the activities that will be performed.

An external quality assurance entity (EQAE) must have at least 10 years of experience in conducting organised activities in a field relating to the economy, labour market, education or training. The EQAE can be an entity conducting business activity or an individual. The EQAE cannot be an awarding body for the groups of qualifications that it would like to quality assure. It must have an internal quality assurance system in place to ensure the quality of the processes performed.

The EQAE should have adequately trained personnel, who, as a team, will have knowledge about:

- the integrated qualifications system,
- the principles of validation,
- experience in the validation of learning outcomes acquired through formal and non-formal education and informal learning,
- knowledge of the principles of the internal and external quality assurance of awarding qualifications,
- experience in conducting evaluations or audits.

The IQR operator assesses the formal aspects of the submitted application within 14 days. If the application does not meet the formal requirements, the applicant has 30 days to correct it. If the formal requirements of the application are fulfilled,

it is sent to the IQS minister coordinator, who appoints a commission to evaluate the application.

The commission consists of:

- a chairperson representing the IQS minister coordinator,
- one representative of each relevant minister responsible for the specific fields of the groups of qualifications indicated in the application,
- three representatives of the IQS Stakeholders Council.

Entry on the list of EQAE is valid for a period of 6 years. The IQS minister coordinator may extend an institution's inclusion on the list for an additional six years, if the institution has properly performed its assigned functions and after consultation with the relevant ministers responsible for the qualifications, for which the institution performed external quality assurance activities.

The relevant minister for a given qualification appoints an EQAE by signing a contract with the institution that has a three month notice period of cancellation. When choosing an institution, the minister takes into account the effectiveness and rationality of the use of existing resources and the principle of evenly dividing duties among the institutions on the list. Additionally, a maximum of 5 entities from the list can be appointed as the EQAE for one market qualification. These institutions are required to cooperate in order to ensure a consistent standard of quality in the process of awarding a given market qualification.

A market qualification is considered to be functioning in the IQS from the date the contract between the Minister and the external quality assurance entity is signed. Also, from this day, awarding bodies can begin certification activities.

The EQAE is required to submit a report at least once every five years on its external quality assurance activities. The report includes recommendations of changes to improve the quality of the processes associated with awarding a given qualification and the functioning of the internal quality assurance system of the awarding body. The report contains, among others, an analysis of validation and certification, an analysis and evaluation of the internal quality assurance system, a description of eventual irregularities and recommendations for changes to improve the quality of validation, certification and internal procedures.

The EQAE monitors the internal quality assurance system based on the internal evaluation reports submitted to the relevant minister and information provided by the awarding body to the operator of the Integrated Qualifications Register. The EQAE can also observe the validation process being conducted by the awarding body.

The IQS minister coordinator can inspect the EQAE to verify that their external quality assurance activities are being performed properly. The relevant minister also can submit a request to the minister coordinator for such an inspection to be performed. Should irregularities be found, the EQAE is required to correct them or be removed from the list.

Awarding bodies are required to submit activity reports to their relevant ministers at least once every two years. Awarding bodies must also perform an internal evaluation at least once every three years for each market qualification that it has been authorised to award. The report of the internal evaluation includes:

- an analysis of the documentation on how validation and certification is conducted,
- an assessment of the methods used to comply with the requirements and the relevance of the methods and criteria used,
- information on activities undertaken to improve validation and certification methods,
- information on measures to improve the internal quality assurance system.

The awarding body submits its internal evaluation reports to the EQAE and the IQR operator. It also submits quarterly reports to the IQR operator on the number of certificates issued, the fees charged for validation and certification and revenue from these fees.

If there are suspicions that irregularities are occurring in an awarding body, the relevant minister can order the EQAE to conduct a non-scheduled evaluation or can independently perform an audit. The IQS Act provides procedures to ensure the impartiality of the inspection process. The inspection report contains, among others, a description of the established facts, including the irregularities found, their scope, causes and effects, along with the names and functions of those responsible for causing them, and recommendations for corrective actions. In the case of an external evaluation report prepared by the EQAE, the same information is included without providing the names of those responsible for any irregularities.

The relevant minister may rescind the authority to award a qualification when:

- the awarding body issues certificates to persons who have not been positively validated,
- glaring irregularities are found as the result of an inspection or external evaluation,
- the awarding body has not taken corrective action despite the recommendations received,
- the awarding body no longer meets the conditions set out in the IQS Act, e.g. the conditions governing organisational issues or personnel.

Review of the qualifications functioning in the Integrated Qualifications System

Qualifications shall be reviewed not less than once every ten years. The date of the review is provided in the announcement on including the qualification in the IQS, published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland (*Monitor Polski*).

The relevant minister may review the qualification at another time in cases justified by economic or social need.

The review takes place in consultation with relevant stakeholders, and then the opinions are sought of specialists with the same experiences and the same competences as the experts who were involved in preparing the opinion during the initial IQS inclusion process (see Chapter 6 for more information).

The appointed specialists recommend whether the qualification should continue to function in the IQS, be modified or be discontinued due to the lack of a justification for its continued functioning. The final decision on the outcome of the review is made by the relevant minister.

7.7. Costs of Including Non-Formal Sector Qualifications in the NQF

Basic premises of financing the IQS

Implementation of the IQS does not affect the way qualifications are established and awarded in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems, thus it does not affect the way these systems are financed nor the amounts they receive from the state budget.

Implementing systemic solutions for qualifications awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems is supported by funding from the European Social Fund. The process of implementing the IQS through the use of ESF funds does not require national co-financing.

The attainment of new qualifications by different groups of people (workers, people interested or forced by circumstances to change jobs, unemployed persons) is financed by various means. Public funds may be involved (e.g. from the Labour Fund for employment offices, the National Training Fund and the European Social Fund), funds from employers, as well as the personal funds of individuals. These costs did not change as a result of IQS implementation.

There are, however, a number of additional costs for implementing the IQS resulting from the need to finance new elements of the system – the Integrated Qualifications Register, the IQS Stakeholders Council, the work of assigning a PQF level to a qualification or the implementation of external quality assurance activities (see Chapters 5 and 6). In addition, the ministers are incurring costs associated with the processing of applications to register qualifications and authorise awarding bodies.

Once the IQS is fully implemented, these additional costs to the state budget will be offset by revenues from the fees paid by institutions participating in the system. These are one-time charges for applying to have a qualification included in the IQS (see Section 7.2), applying to become an awarding body or to be included in the list of external quality assurance entities. There are also fixed charges on the income received from the process of awarding qualifications. The fees were calculated to allow the IQS to function as a self-financing system after its initial implementation period. It is assumed that if needed, the level of the fees will be adjusted in line with this assumption.

Taking the above premises into consideration, it is expected that the IQS system should generate revenues in excess of maintenance costs in about 20 years of operation (generated revenues should exceed costs around 2030). During the period when the difference between costs and revenues will be the highest, that is, in the first few years of operation, the costs of implementing the IQS will be financed from the European Social Fund.

Types of costs in the IQS

Three types of costs associated with the functioning and implementation of the IQS in Poland can be distinguished, which are born by different institutions:

- Implementation costs: costs of developing and implementing the IQS (including designing procedures to establish qualifications, setting up the Integrated Qualifications Register). These are one-time costs borne by the state budget. Most of these costs are and will be financed from the European Social Fund.
- Fixed costs for the functioning of the IQS system: mainly the costs of operating the IQR. These costs are borne by the state budget; most are and will be financed by the European Social Fund during the first years of IQS implementation. After 2022, these costs will be financed by the state budget and paid fees.
- Variable costs: these costs vary with the number of qualifications submitted to be included in the IQS. The more qualifications submitted, the more work will have to be done by the public administration to process the applications (more analyses to be performed, PQF levels to be assigned, additional costs incurred for external quality assurance). Variable costs are mostly financed by the collected fees.

There are several types of fees in the IQS system:

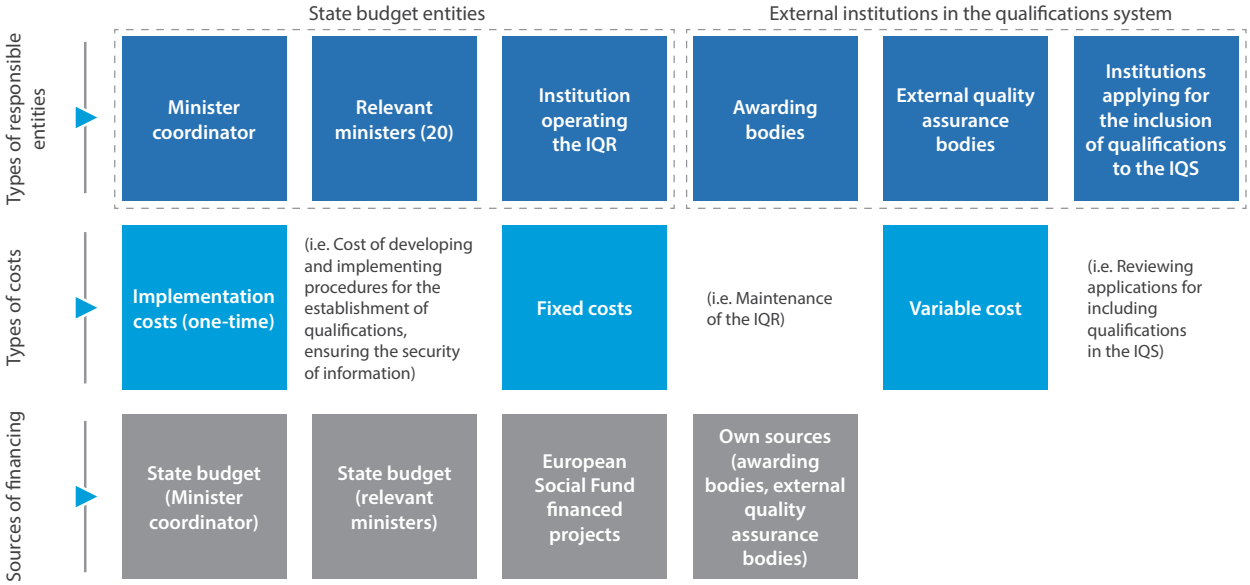
- Application fee for including a qualifications in the IQS (this process is described in Chapter 5). The fee for applying to have a market qualification included in the IQS is 2,000 PLN (approx. 500 EUR).
- Application fee for becoming an awarding body. The fee for applying to become an awarding body is 10,000 PLN (approx. 2,500 EUR).[10]
- Quarterly fees paid by awarding bodies. This is an ongoing quarterly charge in the amounts of 3% of revenue from fees charged during the process of awarding qualifications.
- Application fee for becoming an external quality assurance entity. The fee for applying to become an external quality assurance entity is 5,000 PLN (approx.1,250 EUR).

All fees are paid to an account of the state budget. The state budget finances the costs of state budget entities.

A summary of the different types of costs and sources of financing is presented in Figure 7.7 below.

[10] If this is the same entity that applied to have a particular qualification included in the IQS (the entity is submitting two applications: one for including a qualification to IQS and a second to become an awarding body for this qualification), the fee is lower: 5000 PLN (approx. 1250 EUR).

Figure 7.7. Institutions, types of costs and sources of financing in the Polish Integrated Qualifications System



7.8. Current Debates on Further NQF Developments – Implementation of the Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS)

The preceding chapters present the architecture of the Integrated Qualifications System and the procedures described in the IQS Act with particular attention to process of including qualifications in the IQS. This chapter describes the measures that have been taken to ensure that the IQS is successfully implemented.

The implementation of the IQS based on the Polish Qualifications Framework is considered one of the key actions of the Polish government in developing policies aimed at increasing the quality of human capital in Poland. Therefore, after passage of the IQS Act, national authorities wanted to make the system functional as quickly as possible so that qualifications could be included in the IQS, and at the same time, awarding bodies could begin awarding these qualifications. Of particular importance is the inclusion of qualifications awarded outside the formal education system.

This addresses three issues: 1) the development of the legal and organisational infrastructure of the IQS, 2) the activities undertaken to prepare the entities involved in operating the IQS, and 3) the first stage of the functioning of the IQS. The information in this chapter spans the time from January 2016, when the IQS Act implementing the NQF came into force, to September 2017 – the date this report was finalised.

Developing the legal and organisational infrastructure of the IQS

Implementing regulations for the IQS Act

One of the tasks of the Minister of National Education resulting from the IQS Act was to issue implementing regulations to the Act. Since its passage, a total of 13 implementing regulations have been issued, as follows:

1) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 12 April 2016 on the technical requirements to be met in the application for submitting information to the Integrated Qualifications Register (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 498),
2) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 13 April 2016 on the second stage descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework typical for general qualifications – levels 1–4 (Journal of Laws 2016, item 498),
3) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 13 April 2016 on the second stage descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework typical for vocational qualifications – levels 1–8 (Journal of Laws 2016, item 520),
4) Regulation of the Minister of National Education and the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 17 June 2016 on the second stage descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework typical for qualifications attained after having

achieved a full qualification at level 4 – level 5 (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 547),

5) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 13 July 2016 on the graphic symbols used to inform about the Polish Qualifications Framework levels assigned to the full and partial qualification included in the Integrated Qualifications System (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 915),

6) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 3 August 2016 on the scope of information collected in the Integrated Qualifications Register on qualifications awarded after having completed postgraduate studies (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 1022),

7) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 19 August 2016 on the conditions to be met by experts appointed to the team of experts, the procedure of appointing experts and the procedure of comparing the learning outcomes required for a qualification with the level descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 1204),

8) Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 26 September 2016 on the second stage descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework typical for qualifications attained in higher education after having achieved a full qualification at level 4 – levels 6–8 (Journal of Laws 2016 r,, item 1321),

9) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 10 October 2016 on the bylaws of the work of the commission assessing applications for inclusion in the list of entities authorised to perform external quality assurance, a template for the contract with an entity entrusted with the performance of external quality assurance, and the manner of determining the amount of payment for such a contract (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 1594),

10) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 16 January 2017 on the Polish Qualifications Framework levels for full qualifications awarded until 15 January 2016 (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 133),

11) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 3 April 2017 amending the regulation on the graphic symbol used to inform about the Polish Qualifications Framework levels assigned to full and partial qualifications included in the Integrated Qualifications System (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 764),

12) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 18 May 2017 on the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the Tourism Sector (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1155),

13) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 21 June 2017 on the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the Sport Sector (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1268).

Implementing regulations 1 through 9 enabled Poland to achieve a fully functional Integrated Qualifications System.

IQS Portal and Integrated Qualifications Register

Preparations to establish the Integrated Qualifications System Portal and the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR) were important activities undertaken to implement the IQS Act. They both were launched on 15 July 2016.

The IQS Portal operates as part of the governmental domain at kwalifikacje.gov.pl. It is fully available to the public. The IQS Portal serves all persons and institutions working together within the IQS or who need information. The portal provides the legal acts on the IQS as well as information on: the activities undertaken by the government on behalf of lifelong learning, the functioning of the IQS and the progress in developing the system. Documents, manuals and publications can be downloaded from the portal. The portal is regularly updated.

The IQS Portal is also an electronic forum for communication and cooperation in the tasks performed within the IQS. Through the portal, all formal applications (for example, to include a market qualification in the IQS, to apply for authorisation to award a qualification) are submitted to the ministers responsible for a given qualification. The portal also includes all announcements and communications about the required procedures of the IQS. The IQS Portal can be accessed through currently used web browsers via computers, tablets, and smartphones.

The Integrated Qualifications Register is a very important part of the IQS Portal, as it contains the most important information about each qualification included in the IQS. The IQR collects information on qualifications, regardless of other existing registers and lists of qualifications in Poland. The IQR operates entirely in an IT system at www.rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl.

Stakeholders Council of the IQS

On July 13, 2016, the Minister of National Education appointed the Stakeholders Council (see Regulation No. 35 of the Minister of National Education on the appointment of members of the IQS Stakeholders Council[11]). Pursuant to this regulation, 14 members were appointed to a 2-year term and 15 persons to a 4-year term. These members represent employers, employees, the education community, the scientific and professional communities, the training market, local government, the Central Examination Board (CKE) and the IQS minister coordinator (see section 3.1. for the responsibilities of the Stakeholders Council).

As of September 2017, the IQS Stakeholders Council has met four times. Detailed minutes from each meeting are available to the public on the IQS Portal.[12]

[11] http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/download/Prawo_o_ZSK/Zarzadzenie_w_sprawie_powolania_rady_interesariuszy.pdf

[12] http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/rada-interesariuszy

Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning and the Integrated Qualifications System

In May 2016, the *Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning and the Integrated Qualifications System* was established by a regulation issued by the Prime Minister. The Taskforce is an auxiliary body of the Prime Minister, chaired by the Minister of National Education, who serves as the IQS minister coordinator.

The tasks of the Taskforce include:

1) monitoring the implementation and functioning of the Integrated Qualifications System, to be consistent with the European Qualifications Framework,
2) monitoring the implementation of solutions for lifelong learning in the Republic of Poland, including the development of knowledge and skills important for an innovative economy, employment and a cohesive society,
3) preparing drafts of modifications to the government document on lifelong learning strategies,
4) cooperating with partners and institutions relevant to the development of lifelong learning, including the Stakeholders Council of the Integrated Qualifications System,
5) monitoring the work conducted in the European Union in the field of lifelong learning, including the European Qualifications Framework.

The Taskforce consists of:

1) Minister of National Education – Taskforce Chairperson,
2) Minister of Digital Affairs,
3) Minister of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation,
4) Minister of Culture and National Heritage,
5) Minister of Science and Higher Education,
6) Minister of National Defence,
7) Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy,
8) Minister of Development,
9) Minister of Sport and Tourism,
10) Minister of the Interior and Administration,
11) Minister of Health,
12) Minister from the Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

The Inter-ministerial Cooperating Network for IQS Implementation

At the request of the minister coordinator, a cooperating network was established of staff from various ministries involved in the implementation of the tasks resulting from the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System, as well as the development

of the government's integrated skills strategy. Also appointed were members of ministerial departments, who are supervising the implementation of these tasks.

Amendments to the IQS Act

In 2016, the IQS Act was amended twice. In 2017, the entity operating the Integrated Qualifications Register was changed from the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) to the Educational Research Institute (IBE).

From the date the IQS Act entered into force, the Ministry of National Education and IBE have been monitoring the solutions being enacted. For this purpose, questions, remarks and proposed amendments have been gathered during meetings, seminars, workshops and consultations, organised for ministry representatives, entities receiving support with the process of describing a qualification, awarding bodies, external quality assurance entities, and IQS stakeholders.

List of external quality assurance entities

Applications began to be accepted for the appointment of external quality assurance entities in 2016. By September 2017, 14 entities were listed as qualified to perform external quality assurance:

Maritime Academy in Szczecin, Butra Consulting Andrzej Butra, Medical Centre for Postgraduate Education in Warsaw, Public Affairs Institute Foundation, Warsaw Institute of Banking, Central Mining Institute, Gomułka Group Euroeducation Company Ltd., Institute of Nuclear Chemistry and Technology, Oil and Gas Institute – National Research Institute, Institute for Sustainable Technologies – National Research Institute, Institute of Tourism in Kraków Ltd., National Chamber of Real Estate, Silesian Medical University, Wielkopolska Academy of Science and Development Jakub Michałowski.

Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks

By September 2017, two sectoral qualification frameworks, one for tourism and one for sport, were included in the IQS under the following regulations:

- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 18 May 2017 on the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the tourism sector. The regulation entered into force on 4 July 2017.[13]
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 21 June 2017 on the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the sport sector. The regulation entered into force on 13 July 2017.[14]

[13] Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1155. See also: *Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Tourism (SQQT)*, IBE 2017, http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/publikacje/SQF-TOURISM.pdf

[14] Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1268. See also: *Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Sport*, IBE 2016, http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/publikacje/SRKS_ENG_FIN_internet.pdf

Educational Research Institute

As previously stated, the Educational Research Institute has been involved in the development of the IQS since 2010. IBE was the centre, from which the work was conducted on developing the new qualifications system, as well as being the centre for the public debates on this issue.

On 19 January 2016, acting pursuant to the IQS Act, the Minister of National Education, as the coordinator of the IQS, authorised the Educational Research Institute to conduct the following tasks:[15]

1) prepare the ministers to implement the solutions of the IQS, including the provision of support to the IQS minister coordinator, with activities relating to the functioning of the list of external quality assurance entities, monitoring and evaluation, and developing recommendations to ensure that the applied solutions are coherent,
2) prepare awarding bodies and validation institutions to implement the solutions of the IQS,
3) prepare solutions and methods for identifying and documenting the competences of persons seeking to attain qualifications, including methods of recognising competences attained outside of organised forms of learning,
4) prepare external quality assurance entities to perform external evaluations,
5) coordinate the work on producing descriptions of qualification awarded outside of the school and higher education systems in accordance with the standards of the IQS,
6) cooperate with representatives of relevant communities to develop sectoral qualifications frameworks referenced to the Polish Qualifications Framework,
7) monitor and evaluate the development of the Integrated Qualifications System, including the preparation of reports on the IQS and monitoring solutions from abroad,
8) disseminate information on the Integrated Qualifications System in Poland and in the international community and operate the IQS Portal, including cooperation with the IQR operator in modifications to the existing solutions on the procedures and operation of the information system and to update information resulting from developments to the IQS, as well as support the IQR operator in preparing and launching the IQR,
9) develop systemic tools to monitor the professional careers of school graduates,
10) monitor the professional careers of vocational school graduates for the classes of 2015–2022, with the use of the developed solutions.

IBE proceeded to implement these activities within the framework of an ESF-funded systemic project: *Support to central government administration, awarding bodies and quality assurance institutions in implementing stage I of the Integrated Qualifications System*, undertaken in 2016-2018.

[15] Quoted from the document of the Ministry of National Education of 19 January 2016.

There is evidence that the support provided by IBE to stakeholders is useful. There is great interest in regional conferences and thematic seminars. Every week, IBE experts receive questions and requests for consultations. Also, the publications issued by IBE are considered highly supportive. Stakeholders are especially interested in the printed versions, therefore key publications have been reprinted already several times.

By decision of the relevant authorities, IBE will be continuing these activities based on successive projects financed from European sources.

Preparing the entities involved in the functioning of the IQS

All necessary supportive and instructional materials have been developed to explain the functioning of the IQS. Informational seminars and workshop sessions are also being held for different target groups.

Instructional and supportive materials for various entities

Developing procedures

Procedures have been developed to facilitate cooperation between the IQS minister coordinator and relevant ministers, as well as with other entities involved in the process of including qualifications in the IQS. In total, 12 procedures have been developed, which have a universal character. They are designed in such a way that they can be adapted to the experiences and conditions of individual ministries. The minister coordinator has provided the procedures to the relevant ministers responsible for given qualifications, as proposals for use.

Procedures have been developed on the following activities, based on the IQS Act:

1) Including market qualification in the IQS,
2) Determining the relevant minister to consider an application for having a market qualification included in the IQS,
3) Organising and conducting consultations with relevant communities,
4) Securing the opinions of experts on the relevance of including qualifications in the IQS,
5) Setting up a panel of experts to determine the PQF level for a qualification,
6) Preparing the recommendation of the team of experts on the PQF level assigned to a qualification,
7) Granting authorisation to award qualifications,
8) Granting authorisation to perform the role of external quality assurance entity (entry in the EQAE list),
9) Performing extraordinary external evaluations of an awarding body,
10) Performing audits of an awarding body,

11) Including regulated (statutory) qualifications in the IQS,
12) Reviewing regulated qualifications.

Manuals on particular IQS-related topics and activities

IBE has produced numerous publications on topics relating to IQS implementation. These materials serve as a compendium of knowledge for those involved in its implementation. They are prepared especially with the staffs of government authorities and other institutions in mind, who will be performing specific tasks in developing and awarding qualifications. These publications allow persons to become familiar with the new terminology and the Polish Qualifications Framework, and explain how to include qualifications in the system. They are a primary source of information for interested parties applying to have qualifications included in the system, as well as for those applying to become awarding bodies and external quality assurance entities.

The most relevant publications include:

1) The Pocket Encyclopaedia of the Integrated Qualifications System http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/images/Publikacje/mala-encyklopedia-IQS.pdf
2) Glossary of the Integrated Qualifications System http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/slownik_zsk_2017.pdf
3) Polish Qualifications Framework http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/en/publications/1259-polish-qualifications-framework
4) Polish Qualifications Framework – User's Guide http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/en/publications/1258-polish-qualifications-framework-user-s-guide
5) How to describe market qualifications for the Polish Qualifications System http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/en/publications/1148-how-to-describe-market-qualifications-for-the-polish-qualifications-system
6) Assigning levels of the Polish Qualifications Framework to qualifications (only in Polish) http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/publikacje/Przypisywanie-poziomu-PRK-do-kwalifikacji.pdf
7) Including qualifications in the Integrated Qualifications System (only in Polish) http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/publikacje/Wlaczanie_kwalifikacji_do_zsk.pdf
8) Validation – new opportunities for attaining qualifications http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/images/download/Publikacje/Walidacja_nowe_mozliwosci_zdobywania_kwalifikacji_na%20www_2212_FIN.pdf (Polish version) http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/publikacje/Walidacja_EN_Internet5_FIN.pdf (English version)

9) The Review of Regulated Qualifications (only in Polish) http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/PKU_internet_fin_czerwiec%202017.pdf

10) Validation systems from abroad – a review of practices (only in Polish) http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/images/download/Publikacje/zagraniczne-systemy-walidacji.pdf

In addition to the publications printed by IBE, the Institute's experts also prepare additional instructional materials, presentations and exercises for seminar participants.

Informational seminars and workshops

From January 2016 – June 2017, seminars were held for the following groups:

- Ministry staff. Seminars were held on particular areas regulated in the IQS Act, including: procedures of including qualifications, the Polish Qualifications Framework, quality assurance, sectoral qualifications frameworks. Eleven seminars were held for a total of 344 participants. As a result of requests from ministry representatives, further seminars are being prepared.
- Institutions interested in becoming an awarding body. The seminars covered issues on the IQS solutions for validation, certification and quality assurance. 18 two-day seminars were held for a total number of 357 participants.
- Local government unit staff (mainly from the Marshall's offices and Voivodship Labour Offices). Basic information on the IQS was provided during 18 seminars for a total of 465 participants.

First stage of the functioning of the IQS – launching the system

Entering school qualifications in the Integrated Qualifications Register

Qualifications awarded in the formal education system were included in the IQS by the IQS Act. All these qualifications were included in the Integrated Qualifications Register in 2016. The Register currently has 9518 qualifications awarded in formal education – 9233 full qualifications and 285 partial qualifications that now have assigned PQF levels (from level 1 to 8):

- 1 qualification at level 1,[16]
- 10 qualifications at level 2,
- 191 qualifications at level 3,
- 268 qualifications at level 4,
- 39 qualifications at level 5,

[16] Certificate of completion of a 6-year elementary school. In 2017, the school system was changed – primary school now lasts for 8 years, and then pupils go on to a 4-year general upper secondary school or VET school; lower secondary school has been eliminated.

- 5035 qualifications at level 6,
- 2998 qualifications at level 7,
- 976 qualifications at level 8.

The inclusion of qualifications awarded outside the formal education system in the IQS

As of September 2017, 23 applications for the inclusion of qualifications awarded outside formal education, including craft trades qualifications, have been submitted by different entities, e.g. foundations, associations, chambers of crafts, training companies. One qualification, „Carpentry Assembly in Construction", was already included in the IQS in July 2017.

The following qualifications are currently being processed by the relevant ministries:

- Providing group fitness classes (forwarded to the Ministry of Sport and Tourism)
- Real estate management (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)
- Tiler – Master's diploma (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)
- Tiler – Journeyman's certificate (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)
- Beautician – Master's diploma (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Beautician – Journeyman's certificate (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Makeup artist / stylist – Master's diploma (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Makeup artist / stylist – Journeyman's certificate (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Furniture carpentry – Journeyman's certificate (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Panel beating and painting – Journeyman's certificate (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Confectioner – Master's diploma (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development)
- Hairdresser/Barber – Master's diploma (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Guiding tourism events (Ministry of Sport and Tourism)
- BIM Manager certificate (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)
- Recovery of data from HDD hard drives (Ministry of Digital Affairs)
- Nail styling (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Organising tourism events and services (Ministry of Sport and Tourism)
- Brokering the trading rights of property (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)
- Certificate of Computer Skills – basic level (Ministry of National Education)

- Real estate management (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)

According to the above list of qualifications proposed for inclusion, there are many from craftsmanship education which do not have an equivalent in the formal VET system.[17] These craft qualifications are classified as market qualifications in the IQS.

Most of the qualifications submitted thus far are rather small (in terms of workload needed to achieve the defined learning outcomes) and lower PQF levels were proposed for them. This may be explained by the initial stage of the functioning of IQS. In later stages, it is expected that qualifications with larger workloads and higher PQF levels will be submitted for inclusion.

Based on the experiences from the first 20 months of operation, one could say that the concept of the accumulation and transfer of units of learning outcomes was understood by stakeholders and therefore, has a chance of being developed and used further.

The first months of IQS functioning have allowed the process of including qualifications in the system to be assessed (effectiveness of procedures, methods of work, as well as the role and work of institutions, entities involved in particular stages of this process). Among the others, the duration of the process is now and should be analysed in the future. The IQS Act states that the process of including a market qualification in the system should take from 4 to 8 months. The experience gained so far shows that it takes around 8 months. It could be expected that in time, the duration of the inclusion process will become shorter.

Another issue relates to defining the relevant minister for a given, submitted market qualification. This was an issue with the qualification of "nail styling". First it was sent to the Minister of Health. One month later, it was sent to the Minister of National Education, and then finally to the Minister of Economic Development, which began the procedure of inclusion.

Moreover, during the consultation process, which is a required part of the inclusion procedure, it was observed that lively discussions were taking place among the sectoral stakeholders. The entities taking part in such consultations may be, in some cases, natural market competitors of the applicant, which could impact the results of the consultations.

Review of regulated qualifications

The IQS Act requires each minister to review all regulated qualifications that he/she has jurisdiction over within five years of the date that the Act enters into force.

Special materials were developed at IBE, including a tool for assessing individual regulated qualifications, to determine if they should be included in the IQS. At the same time, this tool guides the overall qualitative analysis of specific regulated qualifications, and thus facilitates the identification of requirements that have lost

[17] Craft qualifications that have equivalent qualifications in formal vocational education are included in the IQS according to the IQS Act together with the qualifications awarded in the formal education system.

their relevance as well as gaps that need to be addressed. The development of this tool and the training support provided by IBE to ministry staff involved in reviewing the qualifications serve to ensure the consistency of the actions undertaken by the various ministries in this regard.

The review of regulated qualifications should be completed in 2020. The intent of the Polish government is to use this review to have all regulated qualifications included in the IQS that are determined to be current and needed by the labour market.

Describing market qualifications in accordance with the requirements of the IQS Act

From mid-2016, IBE has been providing technical and organisational support to institutions and organisations that are describing market qualifications for their inclusion in the system. As of June 2017, IBE has organised:

- 9 informational seminars for entities interested in having a market qualification included in the IQS, with over 280 persons taking part,
- 14 consultative meetings on describing market qualifications, with over 300 persons taking part,
- over 150 working meetings on describing qualifications for over 200 experts representing several dozen entities, including, among others: the Polish Craft Association, The Accountants Association in Poland, French-Polish Chamber of Commerce, Scientific and Research Centre for Fire Protection – National Research Institute, Environmental Protection Institute – National Research Institute, Polish Scouting and Guiding Association and the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association of the Republic, 20 Olympic sport associations and the Polish Oncological Psychology Association.

During this period, IBE provided support in describing 31 market qualifications, including 15 qualifications from the craft trades. Some of these qualifications have already been submitted for inclusion in the IQS, the remaining ones will be submitted in the near future.

Developing sectoral qualifications frameworks

By September 2017, two sectoral qualifications frameworks were included in the IQS, one for tourism and the other for sport (see section 8.1.8).

Work is currently underway on two more sectoral qualifications frameworks, one for the personal development services sector and the second for the construction industry. Work is also underway on the pilot implementation of the sectoral qualifications framework for the telecommunications sector.

In future months, additional sectoral frameworks are planned. IBE has been supporting these activities, among others, by holding 4 seminars on this topic, attended by 90 persons from various sectors.

Informational activities

In consultation with the IQS minister coordinator, IBE is conducting information campaigns in a variety of settings and through mass media. Ministry representatives and IBE experts are presenting the issues on the functioning of the IQS during various conferences being organised in different regions of Poland, focused on education, employment and socio-economic issues. During these events, information materials and publications on the IQS are also distributed.

An important tool in making information accessible as widely as possible to the public is the IQS Portal (http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl), which is managed by IBE under the supervision of the Minister of National Education. Information about the IQS is also available from IBE's website at http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/en/ and http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/.

Press articles, brochures, animations and videos addressed to various target groups are placed on the Internet.

Ongoing monitoring of the IQS implementation process

IBE is preparing and performing an on-going evaluation of the implementation and operation of the IQS. To this end, information is collected and analysed about ongoing activities and the specific research programmes initiated by IBE. The IQS operations being monitored pertain to the qualifications awarded in formal education as well as the awarding of regulated and market qualifications. Recommendations from the monitoring are submitted to the IQS minister coordinator on a regular basis.

In particular, a research concept was developed for the functioning of qualifications in selected sectors: construction, IT, food service and hospitality, financial services and insurance, i.e. those sectors that have developed a sectoral qualifications framework. There will also be research conducted on the use of the IQS in employment offices, primarily by job counsellors. Projects to monitor the outcomes of formal education have also been prepared.

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