

# European Inventory on NQF 2012

## CYPRUS

### Introduction

Cyprus has developed a proposal for a comprehensive NQF which includes all levels and types of qualifications from all subsystems of education and training, from primary to higher education qualifications.

The system of vocational qualifications, being developed by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus, will be an integral, but distinct part of the proposed NQF. Common structures and elements, which will offer opportunities for combining and transferring credits, are being discussed.

A decision to create an NQF was taken by the Council of Ministers in 2008 (Decision No 67.445); a national committee for the development and establishment of the NQF was then set up. A first NQF draft, with detailed timetable for implementation, was presented in April 2010 and consultation with various stakeholders took place in spring 2011.

### Main policy objectives

The main role of the NQF is to classify qualifications according to predefined levels of learning outcomes. The reform potential ( <sup>1</sup> ) of the NQF is being acknowledged by linking it to wider reforms and procedures for quality assurance, assessment and awarding of qualifications.

More specific objectives and targets to be realised through NQF development are to:

- support recognition and validation of qualifications;
- enable progression and mobility;
- promote lifelong learning through better understanding of learning opportunities, improved access to education and training, creation of incentives for participation, improved credit transfer possibilities between qualifications and recognition of prior learning;
- improve transparency, quality and relevance of qualifications;
- strengthen the link with the labour market.

In the analysis of the existing national qualification system ( <sup>2</sup> ) it is emphasised that the NQF can contribute to these objectives if it is seen as one of several elements in a wider strategy. Only then will it be possible to initiate the necessary reforms and institutional regulations on quality assurance, assessment and awarding of qualifications. This strategy,

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(<sup>1</sup>) *Interim report of the national committee and working committee on the development and establishment of a national qualifications framework in Cyprus (CQF)*. November 2012, p 7 [unpublished].

(<sup>2</sup>) *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

however, must protect the quality and credibility of the system; this means making sure that all qualifications are the result of a formal assessment and validation procedure, safeguarding that an individual has achieved the necessary/required learning outcomes.

The objective is to develop an inclusive framework, open to qualifications awarded outside formal education. This will primarily be achieved by including the system of vocational qualifications – established by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus – into the framework. These qualifications refer to occupational standards and certify learning outcomes acquired at work or in simulation. This is important to increase the participation of adults in lifelong learning (currently at 7.7%) which is below the EU average of 9.1% in 2010 (European Commission, 2011) <sup>(3)</sup>.

Inclusion of the vocational qualifications system in the NQF will bring comparability and better correlation of various qualifications, acquired in formal or non-formal learning, which will result in the upgrading of knowledge, skills and competences throughout lifelong learning. One important policy objective is also to reinforce vocational education and training at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels.

## Stakeholder involvement and framework implementation

The General Directorate for Vocational and Technical Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture has initiated and is coordinating the NQF developments.

The National Committee for the Development and Establishment of NQF consists of the Director General of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Director General of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, and the Director General of the Human Resources Development Authority or their representatives. Higher education representatives are involved but they maintain a degree of autonomy.

The NQF of Cyprus will be established at the Ministry of Education and Culture as an in-service department. The stakeholders responsible for accrediting qualifications will continue to work according to the existing legislative framework for their operation. However, new legislation on the operation of the NQF, which would clarify the cooperation among different stakeholders, is thought necessary. A new permanent body, the Council of the national qualifications framework of Cyprus, has been established <sup>(4)</sup>. Its main tasks will be:

- consulting with stakeholders on NQF development and implementation;
- developing, implementing and reviewing NQF procedures;
- disseminating public information on the NQF;
- advising the Ministry of Education and Culture on policy and resource implications.

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<sup>(3)</sup> *Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020): country analysis*, p.24. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf) [accessed 5.12.2012].

<sup>(4)</sup> *Interim report of the national committee and working committee on the development and establishment of a national qualifications framework in Cyprus (CQF)*. November 2012, p 15 [unpublished].

## Level descriptors and learning outcomes

An eight-level reference structure is proposed, reflecting the main characteristics of the national qualification system. The level descriptors are described in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Knowledge is defined by the type and complexity of knowledge involved and the ability to place one's knowledge in a context. Skills are expressed by type of skills involved; the complexity of problem-solving; and communication skills. Competence contains the following aspects: space of action, cooperation and responsibility, and learning skills. These were simultaneously formulated for all levels so that there would be clear progression from one level to the next.

The VET qualifications, developed under the responsibility of the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus will most probably be aligned from level 2 to 6 of the NQF. This is still being discussed.

The existing national qualifications system is mainly based on inputs such as quality of teachers and length of education and training programmes. However, emphasis is increasingly being put on learning outcomes and the need to revise curricula, learning programmes and assessment methodologies towards learning outcomes. A number of reforms are under way, exemplified by upgrading of curricula for pre-primary and upper secondary education, upgrading of vocational education and training through the introduction of post-secondary institutes for vocational education and training (launched in September 2012) and the introduction of new modern apprenticeship. Experiences gained in developing competence-based vocational qualifications will feed into the NQF developments. These are based on occupational standards and make it possible to award a qualification to a candidate irrespective of how and where they have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills and competences.

In formal education, learning outcomes are mainly expressed as part of a subject and stage-based general education. In the curriculum, learning outcomes are described as the knowledge, skills and attitudes, and awareness learners are expected to achieve at the end of each stage. There are level descriptors indicating the standards a learner should achieve, when awarded certificates at different education levels.

## Links to other instruments and policies

The current proposal emphasises that the NQF cannot operate in isolation but must form part of a wider strategy: 'This framework can play a very important role, but if it is not part of a wider strategic policy resulting in the necessary reforms and institutional regulations, it will not achieve its objectives' <sup>(5)</sup>.

Discussions on recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning are an integral part of NQF development, with numerous public and private stakeholders participating. Competence-based vocational qualifications, which will constitute an integral part of the NQF, are already open for validation of non-formal learning. Through this the

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<sup>(5)</sup> Ibid., p 7.

NQF aims to bridge the various qualifications acquired via formal, non-formal and informal learning and strengthen the links between initial and continuous vocational education and training.

## Referencing to the EQF

The referencing of national qualifications to the EQF is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture, where the NCP has also been established. The referencing report is expected to be presented in early 2013.

## Important lessons and future plans

The comprehensive and inclusive nature of the proposed framework will require cooperation among different stakeholders. The proposal to set up a council for the national qualifications framework is important in establishing a permanent platform for cooperation between all stakeholders: the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, the Human Resource Development Authority and representatives of employer and employee organisations and the academic community.

The early stages of NQF implementation will adopt a flexible approach, based on key principles to be applied across subsystems, but also accepting differences and different approaches and practices in different education and training subsystems, if necessary.

### **Main sources of information**

National contact point has been established at the Ministry of Education and Culture. <http://www.moec.gov.cy> [accessed 16.12.2012].