BELGIUM
European inventory on NQF 2018

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

The country as a whole performs above average on a number of key education and training indicators: the rate of early leaving has fallen (8.9% in 2017, compared to 10.6% in the EU), tertiary educational attainment and the employment rate of recent graduates are high, and participation in early childhood education and care is among the highest in the EU. On the other hand, the percentage of adults in lifelong learning is below the EU target. Equity is one of the main challenges in the country. The gap in performance between students with low socioeconomic and migrant background and those that do not come from disadvantaged groups is one of the highest in Europe. Inequalities also exist between communities and education sectors, with students from the French Community and from vocational education and training (VET) performing less well. Plans to modernise school education were adopted in 2017, including a major systemic reform in the French Community. The Flemish Community adopted key measures targeted at secondary education, and introduced centrally validated tests to address concerns about the unequal value of primary school qualifications awarded. In 2017, participation in adult learning reached its highest level (8.5%) and was strengthened in line with the 2016 Council recommendation on upskilling pathways ([1]) (European Commission, 2018).

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

The German-speaking Community

Introduction and context

The German-speaking Community of Belgium adopted its qualifications framework (*Qualifikationsrahmen der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*, QDG) on 18 November 2013 ([2]). Being the smallest part of Belgium (geographically and in terms of population) the framework reflects the work done in the Flemish and French Communities but is also inspired by the German qualifications framework (DQR). The 2013 decision envisages that a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning will be linked to the QDG. The QDG has, so far, not been referenced to the EQF.

Policy objectives

A main objective for the framework is to strengthen national and international understanding and comparability of qualifications. While subject to federal laws on education applying in Belgium, the geographic location of the region means that citizens are likely to cross regional or national borders for living and working. This makes it a priority to clarify the relationship between own qualifications and those awarded in the neighbouring countries. The framework also promotes equivalence between general and vocational education and training ([3]), and the strengthening of the learning outcomes principle is an important step in increasing transparency and strengthening permeability.

Levels and use of learning outcomes

An eight-level, learning-outcomes-based framework has been introduced. The framework builds on the concept of *Handlungskompetenz* (action competence) with qualifications levels defined in terms of two categories of descriptors:

([2]) Ministry of the German-speaking Community (2013). Dekret zur Einführung eines Qualifikationsrahmens der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft [Decree of 18 November 2013 establishing a qualifications framework for the German-speaking Community]. *Belgisch Staatsblad,* p. 12532, 13.2.2014.
http://reflex.raadvst-consetat.be/reflex/pdf/Mbbs/2014/02/13/126688.pdf

([3]) For example, the completion of the general upper secondary level and upper secondary technical and arts education are both level 4.

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

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

Handlungskompetenz (action competence)			
Subject/occupation-oriented competence (*Fachliche Kompetenz*)		Personal competence (*Personale Komptenz*)	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Autonomy

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

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

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

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The framework has been developed over a relatively short time, involving all main education and training stakeholders in the German-speaking Community. This includes the social partners who normally play a key role in an education and training system inspired by that of Germany, such as Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen (IAWM) (Institute for education and training in small and medium-sized enterprises) [4]. Scientific cooperation has been established with the Flemish Community and the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB).

The department of VET and Organisation of Education in the Ministry of the Community acts as the EQF NCP and has the task of referencing QDG to the

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[4] http://www.iawm.be/de/ueberuns/aufgaben.html

EQF, using transparent methodologies and providing all stakeholders, institutions and companies with relevant information ([5]).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways ([6])

A strategy for introducing a validation system was outlined in 2015.This refers to European developments in this area and sees validation as an integrated part of an overall, lifelong learning strategy for the region. Individuals with no (or low) qualifications are seen as a key target group. A public launch event on the recognition of competences took place in October 2016, with stakeholders of the German-speaking Community invited to participate in a debate. Subsequently, a steering group was set up involving stakeholders from formal and non-formal education as well as employment and the social partners. Between February and November 2017, the steering group developed a validation concept with the aim of putting concrete arrangements in place by 2018. On that basis, application arrangements are being developed, jointly financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) (Cedefop, forthcoming). In July 2018, a pilot project *Creating future directions* was initiated to support validation of non-formal and informal learning. It is aimed primarily at low-skilled jobseekers and workers, as well as migrants whose foreign diplomas could not be recognised; access to education and employment is very difficult for these target groups. The project is divided into three parts: guidance and counselling to find an appropriate continuous training offer (support level); the ProfilPASS workshops focusing on the elaboration of personal competence profiles (level of formative validation); and the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired professional competences with reference to training occupations and programmes offered by the training providers in the German-speaking Community (level of summative validation).

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[5] See Eurydice description of the German-speaking Community's qualifications framework: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/belgien-deutschsprachige-gemeinschaft/national-qualifications-framework_en

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

NQF implementation

The QDG was adopted by decree on 18 November 2013 (Ministry of the German-speaking Community, 2013), paving the way for implementation. It is a comprehensive qualifications framework, covering qualifications from general education, higher education and VET. Criteria ([7]) and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications and diplomas to the QDG have been developed. Only qualifications with clear description of learning outcomes and those obtained in institutions accredited by Government are included. Among important criteria for inclusion is the relevance of a qualification on the labour market and for further learning. The inclusion of qualifications is work in progress by a technical commission in charge of inclusion and levelling. Currently, there are 21 qualification types included in the QDG ([8]).

Alignment of a qualification within the framework levels does not replace the existing system of access and does not provide automatic entitlement to access the next level ([9]). QDG qualification levels are not yet included in certificates and diplomas as the templates were adopted by the Government in 2009 and the QDG was only implemented in 2013. There is no register of qualifications. The templates for all certificates and qualifications that can be obtained in general education, higher education, and VET are part of the Government Decree of 28 May 2009 ([10]).

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

Available information indicates that QDG has so far played a limited role in supporting education and training practices in the region; as an example, the QDG is not referred to the 2025 vision for the region ([11]). Emphasis given to

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([7]) These criteria are mentioned in Article 6 of the decree of 18 November 2013.

([8]) See Articles 9 and 10 of the decree of 18 November 2013.

([9]) See Eurydice's description of the German-speaking Community's qualifications framework: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/belgien-deutschsprachige-gemeinschaft/national-qualifications-framework_en

([10]) Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2009). Erlass der Regierung vom 28. Mai 2009 über die Bescheinigungen, Nachweise, Brevets, Zeugnisse, Diplome und Zusatzdiplome zur Bestätigung der in der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft organisierten Studien [Government Decree of 28 May 2009 on certificates, diplomas and additional diplomas certifying studies organised in the German-speaking Community]. *Belgisch Staatsblad*, p. 62798, 17.9.2009. http://reflex.raadvst-consetat.be/reflex/pdf/Mbbs/2009/09/17/114314.pdf

([11]) See Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2015).

validation and competences indicates, however, that the learning outcomes orientation underpinning the QDG is being taken forward in a systematic manner. This is also apparent in relation to other projects outlined in the 2025 strategy, such as strengthening support to individual pupils and application of competence-oriented diagnostics.

Referencing to the EQF

The QDG has not been referenced to the EQF.

Important lessons and future plans

The German-speaking Community of Belgium has adopted its qualifications framework; it is being implemented but has not yet been referenced to the EQF.

The key task that remains is the full implementation of the framework; referencing it to the EQF and setting up arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning (the preparation of which was initiated in 2014) is needed.

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

Main sources of information:

- Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, Department of VET and Organisation of Education is the EQF NCP: www.ostbelgienbildung.be

- Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2014). *Dekret vom 18. November 2013 zur Einführung eines Qualifikationsrahmens der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft [Decree from 18 November 2013 establishing a qualifications framework of the German-speaking Community].* http://reflex.raadvst-consetat.be/reflex/pdf/Mbbs/2014/02/13/126688.pdf

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

NQF levels	General education qualifications	VET qualifications
8	Doctoral or postdoctoral degree/habilitation *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer Promotion oder Habilitation auf Doktoren- bzw. Professorebene)*	
7	Master degree *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines Hochschulstudiums langer Dauer auf Masterebene)*	Master degree on successful completion of dual track higher education (long duration) *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines dualen Hochschulstudiums langer Dauer auf Masterebene)*
6	Bachelor degree *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines Hochschulstudiums kurzer Dauer auf Bachelorebene)*	Master craftsperson certificate on successful completion of a three-year master craftsperson programme *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer dreijährigen Meisterausbildung mit dem Meisterbrief)* Professional bachelor degree on successful completion of dual track higher education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines dualen Hochschulstudiums kurzer Dauer auf Bachelorebene)*
5		Master craftsperson certificate on successful completion of a two-year master craftsperson programme *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer zweijährigen Meisterausbildung mit dem Meisterbrief)* Successful completion of supplementary secondary vocational education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer Ausbildung im ergänzenden beruflichen Sekundarunterricht)*
4	Successful completion of upper secondary general education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Oberstufe des allgemeinbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)*	Successful completion of upper secondary technical and arts programmes *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Oberstufe des technischen oder künstlerischen Sekundarunterrichts)* Attestation of competence upon successful completion of year 6 in vocational education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des sechsten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts mit Befähigungsnachweis)* Successful completion of year 7 (complementary year) in vocational education

NQF levels	General education qualifications	VET qualifications
		(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des siebten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts) Journeyman certificate on successful completion of an apprenticeship *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer mittelständischen Lehre mit dem Gesellenzeugnis)*
3	Successful completion of lower secondary general education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Unterstufe des allgemeinbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)*	Successful completion of lower secondary technical, vocational or arts programmes *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Unterstufe des technischen, künstlerischen oder berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)* Certified partial qualification acquired in year 2 of an apprenticeship *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer zertifizierten Teilqualifikation im zweiten Jahr der mittelständischen Lehre)*
2	Successful completion of 'common' year 2 in secondary education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des zweiten gemeinsamen Jahres des Sekundarunterrichts)*	Successful completion of year 3 in vocationally oriented education *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des dritten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterricht)* Attestation of competence certifying lower secondary special needs education *(Befähigungsnachweis der Unterstufe des Fördersekundarunterrichts)*
1	Successful completion of primary education, four years *(Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Grundschule)*	Certificate upon successful completion of year 2 in vocationally oriented education *(Das Studienzeugnis des zweiten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)*

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

Abbreviations

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

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