

ROMANIA

European inventory on NQF 2016

Introduction and context

Reform of the Romanian education system is underpinned by legislation, mainly the National Education Law, with subsequent amendments ⁽¹⁾. Promoting a broad lifelong learning perspective, the law also emphasises the importance of validation and implementation of learning outcomes. The country faces several education and training challenges: although the rate of tertiary education attainment has risen in recent years, it remains the second lowest in the EU (25.0% in 2014), and the early school leaving rate remains well above the EU average (18.1% in 2014) (European Commission, 2015).

In 2013, Romania adopted a learning outcomes-based national qualifications framework (NQF) for lifelong learning – the Romanian national qualifications framework (ROQF) – by Government Decision No 918/2013 ⁽²⁾. This aims to bring together nationally recognised qualifications from initial and continuing vocational education and training (CVET), apprenticeship, general and higher education, and to help integrate the validation of non-formal learning into the national qualifications system.

The framework builds on reforms in vocational education and training (VET) and development of competence-based qualifications since the 1990s. Parallel work was carried out in higher education, steered by the National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment (NAQHEPESE). A national qualifications framework for higher education (QFHE), in line with the Bologna process and the European qualifications framework (EQF), has been implemented. Self-certification was completed in 2011.

One of the main challenges of recent years was to link the development processes, structures and stakeholders from VET and higher education, and to improve links with the labour market. An important step was taken in June 2011 when the National Council for Adults' Vocational Training and the National

⁽¹⁾ National Education Law No 1/2011. <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/legaldocs/14847>

⁽²⁾ Government Decision No 918/2013 regarding the approval of the NQF, modified by Government Decision 567/2015.

http://www.isjcta.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/H.G.918_2013.pdf
<http://cnred.edu.ro/pdf/HG-567-2015.pdf>

Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment were merged into one single body – the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) – responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive NQF.

Policy objectives

Apart from its transparency function, the ROQF is seen as a tool to support national reforms and modernisation of education and training. It opens up the possibility to address several issues, such as coherence and progression in the education system, use of validation, adult participation, and transitions between work and education. Romania faces a challenge in raising the quality of education and skills shortage remains a problem for the country. There is also a reported lack of coherence in the qualification system and a lack of progression opportunities between initial VET, CVET and higher education. There is a lack of validation of non-formal and informal learning within formal education, needed to support entry and mobility within education. Adult participation in lifelong learning is low – 1.5% in 2014 (European Commission, 2015) – and the country has set the objective to increase this to 10% by 2020. Qualifications should respond better to labour market needs and there is a requirement for greater transparency of learning outcomes and labour force mobility. National qualifications also need to be understood abroad and linked to the EQF, to promote mobility of learners and workers between European countries.

Development of a comprehensive NQF addresses the following strategic objectives:

- (a) integration and coordination of national qualification subsystems;
- (b) improving transparency;
- (c) making access to lifelong learning easier for all;
- (d) ensuring progress;
- (e) improving qualification quality in line with the needs of the labour market and broader society;
- (f) developing recognition of the vocational qualifications system;
- (g) increasing awareness of the importance of indicating the EQF qualification level on all certificates, diplomas and Europass supplements.

Levels and use of learning outcomes

There is commitment to, and visible preoccupation with, strengthening the learning outcomes approach as part of the national reform programme. The ROQF comprises eight qualification levels that can be acquired in education and training and by validation of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning arenas. National level descriptors are identical to EQF level descriptors. They are described in terms of learning outcomes and defined in three categories: knowledge (theoretical and/or factual); skills, split into cognitive skills (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical skills (manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments); and competence (scope of responsibility and autonomy).

Changes in national policies are mainly generated by the European legislative framework, also influenced in recent years by workforce migration and student mobility. Low results in the programme for international student assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2014) resulted in pressure for a more comprehensive understanding, among practitioners in general education and teacher training (initial and continuous), of learning outcomes and use of knowledge and skills in real-life situations.

As reported for a Cedefop study on the subject (Cedefop, 2016), the learning outcomes concept is not widely shared. There are many different interpretations due to various linguistic and pedagogic concepts. For a successful shift to learning outcomes, an integrated approach to curriculum, assessment or examination, and teacher training would be required; these connections are not yet sufficiently coherent in the Romanian system,

The VET sector is at the forefront of the use of the learning outcomes approach, responding directly to social and economic needs. Initial VET qualifications are described in terms of training standards, which are based on occupational standards and which specify the units of learning outcomes. Vocational training standards have been developed in collaboration with the social partners and approved by the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research. New curricula have been designed. Occupational standards are also used in CVET and are based on elements of competence to be proved at the workplace. The standards are approved by the National Qualifications Authority, after consultation with sectoral committees. The new occupational standards include a curriculum unique to each occupation listed in the classification of occupations.

There are two factors in adult education which keep the implementation of the learning outcomes approach at an early stage: very low participation of adults

in lifelong learning (1.5% in 2014) and a diversified institutional landscape with different types of institutions, programmes and organisational arrangements.

Within higher education, qualifications are linked to the credit structure of the European credit transfer system (ECTS), which is compulsory for all higher education institutions in Romania. Use of a competence-based model is part of higher education reform. However, further efforts should be made to ensure better definition of certain competences for the study programmes to aid differentiation between bachelor and master degrees. There is a challenge in using competence-based models in designing curricula, learning resources and assessment tools (Cedefop, 2016).

It is yet to be clarified how – and how far – learning outcomes are to be implemented in the different education segments.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The involvement of stakeholders in the development of the national qualifications framework is underpinned by law ⁽³⁾. The main body responsible for developing and implementing the comprehensive ROQF, and also the national coordination point (NCP) for EQF, is the National Qualifications Authority, NQA (*Autoritatea Nationala pentru Calificari*, ANC). This was established in June 2011, under the coordination of the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research. NQA brings together two institutions: the National Council for Adults' Vocational Training, in charge of CVET qualifications, and the National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment, responsible for higher education qualifications. The bodies responsible for general education and initial VET in Romania are, respectively, the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research and the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development.

Quality assurance in Romanian education and training is coordinated through the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Pre-University Education. These are responsible for accreditation of education providers and programmes in higher education and, respectively, in general education and initial VET. The NQA is responsible for quality assurance in adult training (CVET). The National Group for Quality Assurance is an additional informal structure that ensures the coordination of quality assurance in all education and training subsystems.

⁽³⁾ Article 340 (4) of the National Education Law No 1/2011.

Positive aspects in Romania are the clear governance structure for the development of the NQF, the strong role of NQA as initiator of legislation, and good human resource capacity. There are 20 employees working part time in 2015 on activities supporting the development and dissemination of the NQF, and 16 experts (part-time) foreseen for 2016 for dissemination and other implementation activities. However, the downside of the current governance arrangement is that approval and implementation of legislative proposals is a slow process.

This NQA has the following competences in relation to the development of the NQF:

- (a) proposes elements of national policies and strategies, and drafts legislation on the NQF;
- (b) develops, implements and updates the NQF;
- (c) develops and updates methodologies for NQF implementation;
- (d) develops instruments needed for monitoring, evaluation and control of the NQF;
- (e) quality assurance in implementing the NQF;
- (f) is responsible for the national qualifications register;
- (g) ensures compatibility of the national qualifications system with other existing qualifications systems at European and international levels.

The NQA Council has an advisory role and is composed of 33 members, including representatives of several ministries, institutions of pre-university and higher education, students, social partners and sectoral committees ⁽⁴⁾. Other stakeholders are also expected to contribute to future NQF development. Consultative meetings and discussion sessions are being held with higher education institutions, training providers, authorising county commissions and sectoral committees, which is seen as a way of ensuring the sustainability of the framework ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽⁴⁾ Sectoral committees are social dialogue structures in 23 sectors, with a role in the development, update and validation of qualifications and training standards.

⁽⁵⁾ Cedefop (2015). *Survey on the sustainability and visibility of NQFs*.

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

The National Law of Education No 1/2011 ⁽⁷⁾ reaffirms the role of validation in lifelong learning policies in Romania, and defines validation as ‘the process of assessment and certification of informal and non-formal learning’. The chapter on lifelong learning creates the legal framework for developing community lifelong learning centres; these have a specific role in increasing access to non-formal and informal learning and to validation of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning, through second chance programmes and certification of skills and competences. The creation of these centres, however, is still under discussion. The methodology for their establishment has been proposed for public debate, but has not yet been approved.

The *National strategy for lifelong learning* (2015-20), adopted by the government in 2015 ⁽⁸⁾, provides a foundation for developing validation mechanisms and addressing issues related to financial incentives, information, counselling and access to validation, especially for disadvantaged groups. It is based on three strategic pillars: access and incentives for participation; quality and relevance; and partnerships for better information. The establishment of a dedicated structure responsible for validation within the NQA, the National Centre for Accreditation, and the current work on the national qualifications register are also expected to impact favourably on the development of validation services in the future.

Vocational skills acquired in non-formal and informal learning can be evaluated in professional competences assessment centres, authorised and monitored by the National Qualifications Authority. The qualifications awarded are stipulated in the existing national classifications, and can be acquired either by training or by skills assessment. According to interviews carried out in 2016 (European Commission et al., forthcoming), the number of accredited assessment centres and beneficiaries that gained certificates following validation processes decreased in 2014 and 2015 compared to 2010-13, and the national coverage of assessment centres remains a challenge.

⁽⁶⁾ This section draws mainly on input from the 2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

⁽⁷⁾ National Education Law No 1/2011. <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/legaldocs/14847>

⁽⁸⁾ Government Decision 418/2015.

Sectoral committees are also involved in defining validation procedures and tools and a growing number of non-governmental organisations are interested in mobility and non-formal learning projects linked to Youthpass and Europass.

An issue that remains to be clarified is the relationship (if any) between the proposed community lifelong learning centres and the existing professional competences assessment centres, and whether they will fulfil similar or distinct functions.

The National Education Law also provides regulations on using lifelong learning portfolios in pre-university education, with their evidence of learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. This practice has been taken up in some schools, but is not yet common.

The legislative basis for the ROQF states that qualifications obtained through non-formal and informal education will be included in the framework, using ROQF level descriptors. The methodology currently allows obtaining qualifications through validation of non-formal and informal learning up to level 3⁽⁹⁾. However, in the ROQF, validation is still linked only with occupational standards that relate to CVET qualifications. According to NQA, the current non-formal system in Romania operates parallel to the formal system, and the bridge between the two is still under development. It is not possible to obtain formal qualifications (full or partial) through validation of non-formal and informal learning. The validation system is mainly for adults and people who do not tend to go back to the formal system, though this is still an open discussion.

NQF implementation

The ROQF was adopted by Government Decision No 918/2013⁽¹⁰⁾ for the approval of the national qualifications framework, and includes higher education qualifications, those obtained through general education, vocational and technical education, and through adult continuing education.

The ROQF for lifelong learning includes the framework for higher education adopted in 2011. In 2014 a ministerial order⁽¹¹⁾ entered into force regulating equivalence between the five qualification levels available prior to 2013 and the eight levels of the ROQF. An amendment to the 2013 government decision for

⁽⁹⁾ According to Government Decision 918/2013 for the approval of the national qualifications framework, amended by Government Decision 567/2015.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Government Decision No 918/2013 regarding the approval of the NQF.
http://www.isjcta.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/H.G.918_2013.pdf

⁽¹¹⁾ Order of the Ministry of Education No 3973/2014.

the approval of the NQF was published in July 2015 ⁽¹²⁾. Its aim is to clarify correspondence between the NQF/EQF levels, the issued qualifications and the type of education and training programmes that lead to qualifications at each level, as well as the access requirements for each NQF level.

The ROQF, as proposed for referencing, is a classification framework. Its reforming role in supporting development and revision of qualifications and quality assurance arrangements is acknowledged.

The framework is at an early operational stage, and the related legislation is in the process of being amended and supplemented. The criteria and procedures for inclusion of qualifications into the ROQF and the methodologies for assigning qualifications to levels need to be further clarified. The question is how open or closed the framework will be in the future; what actual role will it play in supporting lifelong learning, access, progression and participation (especially of adults)? Will it become a tool for recognition of lifelong learning achievements?

Given its envisaged role in responding to changing labour market needs, in supporting national qualification system transparency and quality, and the recognition of qualifications needed to encourage mobility, the ROQF may become a permanent feature of the national qualifications system in the future ⁽¹³⁾.

The framework is made visible to potential stakeholders through meetings and workshops organised by the National Qualifications Authority, as well as promotional materials and social media. In 2015, NQF implementation activities were undertaken in the project *Financial support for the EQF NCP in Romania* ⁽¹⁴⁾, funded by the European Commission. One of the main outcomes of the project was the draft of a comprehensive national qualifications register ⁽¹⁵⁾, building on the national register of higher education qualifications ⁽¹⁶⁾ and the national register of vocational qualifications.

⁽¹²⁾ Government Decision No 567/2015 amending Government Decision No 918/2013 regarding the approval of the NQF. <http://cnred.edu.ro/pdf/HG-567-2015.pdf>

⁽¹³⁾ Cedefop (2015) *Survey on the Sustainability and Visibility of NQFs*.

⁽¹⁴⁾ ReferNet article in Romanian:
http://www.refernet.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=106:sprijinire-a-cadrului-naional-al-calificrilor-pentru-invarea-pe-tot-parcursul-vieii-i-corelarea-acestua-cu-cadrul-european-al-calificrilor&catid=37:informatii-diverse&Itemid=55&lang=ro

⁽¹⁵⁾ http://www.anc.edu.ro/?page_id=146

⁽¹⁶⁾ http://www.anc.edu.ro/?page_id=610

Referencing to the EQF

The first referencing report (Romanian Ministry of Education; NQA, 2014) was presented to the EQF advisory group in June 2014. The final referencing report is expected to be presented in December 2016. Steps are being taken to regulate the issuing of certificates and diplomas that indicate NQF levels. EQF levels are expected to be indicated on qualifications once the referencing process is completed.

Important lessons and future plans

It is essential to have good cooperation between different stakeholders and structures. Merging the National Council for Adult Training and the Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education into a single body – the National Qualifications Authority – responsible for the development and implementation of a comprehensive NQF is an important step in supporting more coherent approaches.

Increasing participation in adult learning remains a challenge. Recent amendments to legislation on adult training establish certified adult training as part of the national education and training system. Legislation also requires permanent community lifelong learning centres to be established by local authorities, in partnership with education providers. These centres are expected to play a key role in implementing lifelong learning initiatives at local level, focusing on education and training, information and dissemination and personal development. Activities foreseen include second chance programmes and validation. Establishing these centres is expected to help increase participation rates for underrepresented groups. However, the methodology and the exact role of these centres has not yet been established, and it is yet to be clarified whether there is a relationship between the proposed community lifelong learning centres and the existing professional competences assessment centres, and to what extent they fulfil similar functions.

Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning was an important driver of NQF development in Romania and progress has been made over recent years. Further clarifying how validation of non-formal and informal learning relates to the acquisition of formal qualifications would be of value.

The National Qualifications Authority will complete the referencing and an updated document is expected to be submitted to the EQF advisory group in 2017. More information would be needed to see how existing qualifications were placed in the framework and how the best fit between qualifications and

framework levels was reached. It is still to be clarified how qualifications will be placed in the framework in the future. The country is also in the process of revising methodologies for accreditation of qualifications, and the rules and guidelines for education providers and accreditation bodies, with a view to strengthening the quality of CVET qualifications ⁽¹⁷⁾.

The need to respond to changing labour market demands and to encourage mobility are seen as opportunities for the future implementation and promotion of the ROQF. However, information on concrete future plans and strategies for implementation of the framework is scarce.

Further source of information

The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) is the EQF NCP: <http://www.anc.edu.ro/>

⁽¹⁷⁾ Cedefop (2015). *Survey on the sustainability and visibility of NQFs*.

Romanian national qualifications framework (ROQF)

ROQF	Types of qualification	EQF
8	<p>Doctoral degree (<i>Diploma de doctor</i>) (third cycle of higher education)</p> <p>Certificate for postdoctoral studies (<i>Atestat de studii postdoctorale</i>) (postdoctoral studies)</p>	8
7	<p>Master degree (<i>Diploma de master</i>) and diploma supplement (second cycle of higher education)</p> <p>Bachelor degree/Architect diploma (<i>Diploma de licenta/Diploma de architect</i>) and diploma supplement (first and second cycle combined higher education study programmes)</p>	7
6	<p>Bachelor degree/Engineering diploma/Urbanism diploma (<i>Diploma de licenta/Diploma de inginer/Diploma de urbanist</i>) and diploma supplement (first cycle of higher education)</p> <p>Certificate of professional* competence (<i>Certificat de atestare a competentelor profesionale</i>) (postgraduate studies)</p> <p>Graduation certificate (<i>Certificat de absolvire</i>) (postgraduate studies)</p>	6
5	<p>Short-cycle higher education certificate (<i>Diploma de absolvire/calificare</i>) and certificate supplement (short cycle higher education)</p> <p>Post-secondary certificate (<i>Certificat de calificare</i>) and descriptive supplement (post-secondary non-higher tertiary education)</p> <p>Upper secondary school leaving certificate (<i>Diploma de Bacalaureat</i>) (general, technological or vocational education, four years of study)</p>	5
4	<p>VET certificate level 4 (<i>Certificat de calificare</i>) and descriptive supplement (technological/vocational high-school)</p> <p>VET certificate level 4/Qualification/Graduation certificate (<i>Certificat de calificare/absolvire</i>) and descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/training programme)</p> <p>VET certificate level 4/Qualification certificate (<i>Certificat de calificare</i>) and descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/apprenticeship programmes in the workplace)</p>	4

ROQF	Types of qualification	EQF
3	<p>VET/TVET certificate level 3/Qualification certificate (<i>Certificat de calificare</i>) and descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/apprenticeship programmes in the workplace)</p> <p>VET/TVET certificate level 3/Qualification certificate/Certificate of professional* competence (<i>Certificat de calificare/Certificat de competente profesionale</i>) and descriptive supplement (accredited training centre)</p> <p>VET/TVET certificate level 3/Certificate of professional* competence (<i>Certificat de competente profesionale</i>) (authorised assessment centre)</p> <p>VET/TVET certificate level 3/Qualification/Graduation certificate (<i>Certificat de calificare/absolvire</i>) and descriptive supplement (authorisd training provider/training programme)</p> <p>VET certificate level 3/Qualification certificate (<i>Certificat de calificare</i>) and descriptive supplement (education unit/technological/vocational high school)</p> <p>VET certificate level 3/Qualification certificate (<i>Certificat de calificare</i>) and descriptive supplement (education unit/vocational training programme organised in dual system)</p> <p>VET certificate level 3/Qualification certificate (<i>Certificat de calificare</i>) and descriptive supplement (education unit/professional* education lasting at least three years)</p>	3
2	<p>VET certificate level 2/Qualification certificate (<i>Certificat de calificare</i>) and descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/apprenticeship programmes in the workplace)</p> <p>VET certificate level 2/Qualification certificate/Certificate of professional* competence (<i>Certificat de calificare/Certificat de competente profesionale</i>) and descriptive supplement (accredited training centre)</p> <p>VET certificate level 2/Certificate of professional* competence (<i>Certificat de competente profesionale</i>) (authorised assessment centre)</p> <p>VET certificate level 2/Qualification/Graduation certificate (<i>Certificat de calificare/absolvire</i>) and descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/training programme)</p>	2
1	<p>Certificate of professional* competence (<i>Certificat de competente profesionale</i>) (authorised assessment centre)</p> <p>Graduation certificate (<i>Certificat de absolvire</i>) and descriptive supplement (authorised training provider/training programme)</p> <p>Graduation diploma (<i>Diploma de absolvire</i>) (basic education unit)</p>	1

(*) The term 'professional' denotes vocational and technological training aimed for the labour market.
Source: National Qualifications Authority, 2016.

List of abbreviations

CVET	continuing vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
EQF-NCP	national coordination point for EQF
NAQHEPESE	National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment
NRPQ	national register of vocational qualifications
NQA (ANC)	National Qualifications Authority (<i>Autoritatea Nationala pentru Calificari</i>)
NQF	national qualifications framework
NRQHE	national register of qualifications in higher education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ROQF	Romanian national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

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