

# TURKEY

## European inventory on NQF 2016

### Introduction and context

Turkey has developed and is implementing a comprehensive national qualifications framework (Turkish qualifications framework, TQF). The regulation on the procedures and principles of its implementation (TQF Regulation) and the description of the Turkish qualifications framework (TQF Document) <sup>(1)</sup> were adopted by a Ministerial Decision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in 2015 and published in the Official Journal in November 2015 and January 2016 respectively.

The framework aims to bring together a national vocational qualification system (NVQS), led by the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA), a qualifications framework for higher education, developed in the Bologna process <sup>(2)</sup>, and integrate them with the qualifications awarded by the Ministry of National Education. The framework will be open for all quality assured qualifications.

Passing the VQA law (Law No 5544, 2006) <sup>(3)</sup> was the first important step in developing a NVQS of labour market oriented qualifications. Through the law amendment (November 2011), the framework became more broadly defined as ‘principles of qualification designed in compliance with the European qualifications framework (EQF) and gained through vocational, general and academic education and training programmes including primary, secondary and higher education as well as other learning routes’. The main current challenge is to link the different qualification subsystems and processes in a coherent and comprehensive NQF.

Turkey continues to experience positive developments against the EU 2020 targets. Its education and training system is continuously expanding to provide

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<sup>(1)</sup> This regulation entered into force via Decision 2015/8213 of the Council of Ministers and publication in the Official Journal dated 19/11/2015 and numbered 29537, TQF Regulation: <http://myk.gov.tr/TRR/File9.pdf> , TQF Document: <http://myk.gov.tr/TRR/File6.pdf>

<sup>(2)</sup> The qualifications framework for higher education was developed and adopted in January 2010 by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE).

<sup>(3)</sup> Law 5544 was published in the Official Journal No 26312.

access for its growing population, while at the same time raising attainment levels. However, national and international studies and surveys confirm that acquiring the right skills remains a challenge. The TQF aims to support recognition, relevance and quality enhancement. Development of national standards and cooperation and coordination between the VQA, the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) is crucial to development of a more coherent national qualification system.

## Policy objectives

Turkey adopted the lifelong learning strategy and a vocational education and training (VET) strategy (2014-18) with an action plan <sup>(4)</sup>; this pays particular attention to improving access to lifelong learning beyond formal education and focuses on broadening access to VET, with improved VET system capacity and better employment outcomes for graduates. The latter is also the goal for the higher education strategy of Turkey (2007-25). The employment strategy of Turkey (2014-23) and its action plan <sup>(5)</sup> link to the Turkish qualifications framework. Setting up a national qualification system and NQF is seen as an important instrument to support national education and qualification reforms. According to government programme documents, including the 'action plan for the strengthening of relationship between education and employment', one of the main objectives of creating an NQF is to reduce mismatches and increase effective employment.

Gender-related difference in VET graduate employability remains a challenge: males have better employment prospects (71.4%, close to the 2015 EU average of 75%) than women (47.5%, EU average 70.6%) (European Training Foundation, 2016). Also, educational attainment of the population is still low compared to EU Member States and is not associated with labour market status. To address these challenges, Turkey is advised to upgrade and make better use of its human capital through the the education agenda and the deepening and widening of labour market reforms. Progress has been made, especially on the EU 2020 twofold target on education (reducing early leaving

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<sup>(4)</sup> Lifelong learning action plan 2014-18:  
[http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/str/files/LLL\\_ACTION\\_PLAN.pdf](http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/str/files/LLL_ACTION_PLAN.pdf)

<sup>(5)</sup> [http://g20.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/g20\\_employment\\_plan\\_turkey.pdf](http://g20.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/g20_employment_plan_turkey.pdf)

and increasing tertiary attainment) and adult participation in lifelong learning (albeit from relatively low levels) <sup>(6)</sup>. In 2012, the government extended compulsory education to 12 years, divided into three blocks of four years each, after which choices can be made for different pathways.

The policy objectives are defined in the TQF as:

- (a) provide a clear and consistent means of describing, classifying and comparing qualifications;
- (b) provide one integrated framework including all quality assured qualifications, (achieved in general, vocational and academic education and training programmes and in other learning environments);
- (c) improve qualifications continuously so that the system can provide appropriate recognition of qualifications achieved in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts;
- (d) contribute to training individuals who are employable and equipped with defined and measurable qualifications, and so help reduce unemployment;
- (e) strengthen institutional cooperation among all parties, primarily awarding bodies, industry and social partners;
- (f) provide a benchmark for recognition in Turkey of foreign qualifications and for recognition of Turkish qualifications abroad, and serve as an instrument of comparison.

In the medium term, it is expected that they will become part of a single database with all formal qualifications (secondary and higher education diplomas and other qualifications) for the TQF, consisting of three sub-frameworks; progression between all qualifications will be possible. One of the expected benefits is that, through the TQF, qualifications will be more labour-market oriented and dynamic. For individuals, the TQF will provide career mobility, flexibility, all kinds of learning activities to be evaluated, and progression routes to be clearly defined.

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<sup>(6)</sup> IPA II – the instrument for pre-accession assistance 2014-20 – will provide support to implementation of lifelong learning and the vocational education and training strategies.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are the backbone of the TQF, which comprises eight levels defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence and includes all types and levels of qualification and certification. Knowledge is defined as theoretical and/or factual, involving the comprehension of facts, principles, theories and practice. Skill is defined as utilisation of knowledge and problem-solving which requires the ability to use logical, intuitive and creative thinking and dexterity, method, material, tools and instruments. Competence is defined as utilisation of knowledge and skills in an area of work and/or learning by taking responsibility and/or displaying autonomy, determination and satisfaction in learning requirements, consideration of social and moral issues, and responsibilities. In addition to levels, the TQF uses qualification types and qualification categories

Vocational education and training (VET) is undergoing major reform with substantial EU support. Since 1992, Turkey has worked on developing occupational standards to identify the needs of the labour market. These are being used as a basis for development of national vocational qualifications <sup>(7)</sup> and for validating non-formal learning through accredited and authorised certification bodies. Occupational standards are used to define journeyman and master craftsman certificates issued by the Ministry of National Education (non-formal education) and for developing modules for school-based secondary vocational education; these modules do not yet have assessment components. Once aligning national curricula with occupational standards and quality assurance of training institutions are completed, schools will be allowed to issue both the school certificate and also vocational qualification certificates at various levels. New, outcomes-based qualifications are available and occupational standards are being developed for the framework.

Higher education has determined descriptors in terms of learning outcomes, as this approach is an essential part of framework implementation. The descriptors are compatible with the EQF and the qualifications framework in the European higher education area. Competence is further divided into four components: autonomy and responsibility, learning to learn, field-specific competences, and social and communication skills, with an emphasis on foreign language competences and information communication technology.

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<sup>(7)</sup> By mid-2016, NVQ had published 327 NVQs in 13 sectors.  
<http://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/tr/ulusal-yeterlilikler>

The Ministry of National Education has launched curriculum reform in secondary education, for general and vocational and technical schools. All the VQA qualifications modules used in MoNE VET training are defined by learning outcomes. However, there are no separate MoNE qualification specifications defined by learning outcomes. The process of transformation is continuing and the plan is to have all qualifications from MoNE and higher education institutions (HEIs) defined by learning outcomes by the end of 2017.

The learning outcomes approach is seen as an essential part of the development of the TQF and is the stated intention of current reform in all of education and training subsystems, supported by main stakeholders. However, the shift to learning outcomes takes time.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

TQF development was initiated by the Ministry of National Education in 2005 through the EQF consultation process. Since the VQA was established in 2006, it has been coordinating the process together with the Ministry of National Education, the CoHE and other stakeholders.

Passing the VQA law (Law No 5544, 2006) was the most important legal stage for developing an NVQS and framework. A tripartite VQA was established in 2006, coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security with a wider range of stakeholders, including the Ministry of National Education. Its main objective was to develop the NVQS and framework, based on occupation standards and with sectoral involvement. It is being developed parallel to existing formal education under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education<sup>(8)</sup>. The TQF Department of VQA undertakes secretariat services for the TQF Council and TQF Coordinating Council.

The three-member TQF Coordination Council is the decision-making body of the TQF. Its members are the Undersecretary of the Ministry of National

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<sup>(8)</sup> The certificates awarded under the VQA system are different from awards in formal education and can be provided via a process of validation. Aligning formal and non-formal curricula with the standards in this system continues. Once the system of standards is developed, qualifications in the formal system will be aligned with those used in the VQA system. For more information see European Commission et al., 2010, p.1.

Education (MoNE), the President of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE), and the President of the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA).

The TQF Coordination Council is assisted by the 22-member TQF Council, representing MoNE, CoHE, VQA and social partner organisations. The TQF Council addresses technical issues. According to the TQF Regulation, main duties and responsibilities of the TQF Coordination Council are:

- (a) evaluates and approves procedures, principles, decisions, suggestions and opinions submitted by the TQF Council;
- (b) collaborates with responsible bodies and institutions, international organisations, and the bodies and institutions of other countries.

Members of the Coordination Council are responsible for ensuring collaboration and coordination in implementing council decisions within their bodies. The TQF regulation foresees establishment of a consultation committee, with broad stakeholder participation, to evaluate issues and submit opinions on the framework.

Turkey has a system of sectoral committees, which is one of the cornerstones of National Vocational Qualification System sustainability, under the authority of the VQA. Sector committees in Turkey are tripartite structures with state, employer and employee representatives; their establishment, duties and operation are regulated by law. By 2016, VQA had defined 26 sectors; 23 sector committees <sup>(9)</sup> are operational. Sectoral committees perform tasks related to development and maintenance of occupational standards and qualifications for their sector.

The TQF regulation stipulates that all expenditures arising from drafting, updating and roll-out of the framework are covered by VQA. The Ministry of National Education, Council of Higher Education, and VQA designate personnel to work permanently at the TQF Department of VQA (Secretariat).

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is well embedded in the TQF. The TQF regulation and TQF document include provisions on the

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<sup>(9)</sup> Sectoral committees: <http://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/tr/sector-komiteleri>

recognition of prior learning, stipulating that all qualifications included in the TQF can be attained via recognition of prior learning (RPL). VQA and the Ministry of National Education are working to widen access to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Currently, 53 accredited and authorised certification bodies are operational. These include sectoral organisations (employer led, trade-union-led or bipartite) chamber affiliated centres as well as some universities and private companies. In addition to the 53 authorised certification bodies (October 2016) that function under the responsibility of VQA, validation of non-formal and informal learning is one of the six priorities for the lifelong learning strategy 2014-18.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is most advanced in NVQS. The VQA authorises VocTest centres that carry out assessment, evaluation and certification. By June 2016, the country had 45 authorised centres and numbers are increasing. VQA certification has become compulsory for 40 hazardous occupations, which puts a strain on the capacity of the system. The new EU project for the VQA foresees a grant scheme for candidates.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning was established in HE in 2011 but is still in its infancy.

The Ministry of Education has adopted a national framework and operational guidelines for RPL and also piloted the validation of non-formal and informal learning for three occupations; this is now expanded to eight new pilots.

TQF supports the processes for recognition of prior learning, helping clarify the meaning of the qualifications and make visible which learning outcomes are necessary to achieve them.

## NQF implementation

The TQF is designed as an inclusive, comprehensive framework for classification of all quality-assured qualifications, based on learning outcomes. The TQF will primarily include:

- (a) qualifications awarded under the mandate of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The ministry is responsible for developing qualifications under its mandate up to the fifth level <sup>(10)</sup>;

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<sup>(10)</sup> Vocational curricula are modularised and MoNE has a database of more than 4 000 modules that are also used for the licensing and certification of adult learning.

- (b) qualifications awarded under the mandate of the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA). The VQA is responsible for developing NOS and vocational qualifications at levels 2 to 8, except for the regulated occupations defined in the VQA law, Article 1<sup>(11)</sup>. Assessment, evaluation and certification for these qualifications is executed by Voc-Test centres, authorised by VQA. These qualifications are classified under vocational qualification certificate;
- (c) higher education qualifications awarded under the coordination and supervision of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE). For the higher education qualifications framework, a sub-framework within the TQF that is already functioning, national working groups have been established for different fields of learning, to define common outcomes as a guideline for qualification and curriculum developers. Links to specific programmes have been established that can be explored through a common register on the website of the higher education qualifications framework <sup>(12)</sup>.

In time, the TQF will include more qualifications awarded under the mandate of other institutions.

The TQF does not yet include qualifications; priority is given to establishing quality assurance arrangements for the inclusion of qualifications. The database has been recently established and will be populated with the qualifications defined in learning outcomes up to the end of 2018 (July 2017 is the estimated time for the start of the allocation of qualifications to the TQF levels).

## Referencing to the EQF

An important step in TQF implementation is referencing to the EQF and the framework of qualifications for the European higher education area. It is expected that both will be within a single process. The EQF referencing of the TQF is ready to be presented in the meeting of the EQF advisory group scheduled for end of March of 2017. The roadmap for the years 2016-20 has been included in the

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<sup>(11)</sup> VQA Law, Article 1, paragraph 2 defines these professions: medical doctors, dentists, nurses, midwives, pharmacists, veterinary doctors, engineers and architects as well as any other professions requiring education on a graduate level as a minimum, for which conditions for inception of respective professions are regulated by law.

<sup>(12)</sup> NQF-HETR: <http://tyyc.yok.gov.tr/>

Turkey *National action plan for the EU accession*; the *Roadmap 2016-19* <sup>(13)</sup> was submitted to Commission services in March 2016.

## Important lessons and future plans

An important condition for establishing an NQF is to have clear responsibilities, defined roles and a coordination body which has a clear mandate. The first step was reaching agreement on establishing the VQA in Turkey, in charge of developing and implementing the NVQS. Institutional arrangements for the TQF have been very much focused on and around VQA. Coordination of the comprehensive TQF will be shared between VQA, MoNE and COHE stakeholders, similar to how the executive board of VQA has been functioning. The VQA experience has greatly contributed to the developments so far.

As the ultimate goal is to introduce a single comprehensive national framework, encompassing all stages of formal and all kinds of informal learning, it will also be important to develop effective and sustainable cooperation between stakeholders across all three sectors, the VQA, the CoHE and MoNE. Strengthening and adjusting governance structures are also needed and are being discussed. The TQF regulation deals with the issues mentioned above and strengthens the basis for TQF.

One important objective of the TQF is to use it as vehicle for developing new occupational standards and qualifications, required by the labour market, and to use these for validation and reform of curricula. To retain employer engagement in qualifications development seems crucial.

Another challenge is to develop quality assurance in education and training outcomes, underpinning the whole TQF. VQA is supporting the implementation of the TQF but is also one of the three regulating bodies under the TQF and will establish a system for quality assurance of the provision. However, accumulation of different tasks within a single institution is not easy to manage and implement.

Training which can lead to qualifications is a next challenge. The role of the sectors in initial and post-secondary VET, and possibly HE, has to be clarified. There is interest from the private sector in using the TQF to make qualifications more relevant. Many training providers in Turkey provide adult learning courses

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<sup>(13)</sup> Turkish National action plan for EU accession.:  
<http://www.ab.gov.tr/files/5%20Ekim/uepkitapcik2016-2019-EN.pdf>

that remain outside the qualifications planned to be part of the TQF. Bringing such courses into the TQF by mapping them against the outcomes of units of VQA or MoNE qualifications is a process currently being considered to quality assure and certificate them within the framework of the TQF.

#### Further source of information

[URLs accessed 15.12.2016]

The VQA is the national coordination point. Information is available on its website:

[www.myk.gov.tr](http://www.myk.gov.tr)

For qualifications framework for higher education, detailed information is available on its website:

<http://www.tyyc.yok.gov.tr/>

## Turkish qualifications framework (TQF)

TQF levels	Qualifications types awarded in formal education and training system	NVQ	Anticipated EQF levels
8	Doctoral degree (PhD, proficiency in arts, specialty in medicine, dentistry)	Level 8 vocational qualification certificate	8
7	Master degree (with thesis) Master degree (without thesis)	Level 7 vocational qualification certificate	7
6	Bachelor degree	Level 6 vocational qualification certificate	6
5	Associate degree (academic) Associate degree (vocational)	Level 5 vocational qualification certificate	5
4	High school diploma Vocational and technical high school diploma Skilled worker certificate	Level 4 vocational qualification certificate	4
3	Semi-skilled worker certificate Lower secondary education certificate	Level 3 vocational qualification certificate	3
2	Primary education certificate	Level 2 vocational qualification certificate	2
1	Pre-school participation certificate		1

Source: Adapted from European Training Foundation, 2016.

## List of abbreviations

EU	European Union
CoHE	Council of Higher Education
IPA	Instrument for pre-accession, the EU's support programme for candidate and potential candidate countries
MoNE	Ministry of National Education
MYK	Mesleki Yeterlilik Kurumu [Vocational Qualifications Authority]
NQF	national qualifications framework
NOS	national occupational standards
NVQS	national vocational qualification system
RPL	recognition of prior learning
TQF	Turkish qualifications framework
TURKAK	Turkish Accreditation Agency
VET	vocational education and training
VQA	Vocational Qualifications Authority

## References

[URLs accessed 15.12.2016]

European Commission; Cedefop; GHK (2010). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: Country report: Turkey*.

<https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2011/77657.pdf>

European Training Foundation (2016). *Inventory of NQF recent developments in ETF partner countries: Turkey* (Latest update from ETF, October 2016).

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