

## **NQF state of play**

 **Netherlands 2020**

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# Overview

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**Stage of development:** Operational stage

**NQF linked to EQF:** ✓

**Scope of the framework:**

Comprehensive NQF including all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training (except primary education). Open to qualifications offered outside the formal education system. Qualifications below EQF level 1 included at entry level.

**Number of levels:**

Eight, including a sublevel at level 4 (4+), and an entry level

**Legal basis/stage of development:**

Approval of the NLQF by the Dutch Government and the Dutch Parliament (2011) (in Dutch) Law on NLQF in preparation; expected to enter into force in 2021/22

**NQF/EQF website:**

[Website](#)

**Qualifications register/database:**

[NLQF database](#)

## Introduction and context

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The Netherlands has exceeded most EU 2020 benchmarks for education and training. Schools and teachers have a high degree of autonomy and responsibility with regard to resource allocation, pedagogical processes, content and methods, aiming at innovation in teaching and learning. Student performance in basic skills in science and mathematics is above EU averages according to the Programme for international student assessment (PISA) 2018 ([1]), but has dropped below average in reading. Performance gaps between students are related to differences between schools and education tracks ([2]). Over half of the population in the 30-34 age group holds a tertiary education degree (51.4% in 2019), and the employment rate of recent tertiary graduates was at 91.9% in 2019 ([3]). The vocational education and training (VET) sector performs well and is closely linked to the labour market. A relatively high percentage of upper secondary students are enrolled in VET (67.5% in 2018, compared to 48.4% EU average) ([4]), with the highest increase in the school-based pathway (bol). The employment rate of recent VET graduates was 90.4% in 2019, one of the highest in the EU ([5]). The integration of the pre-vocational (vmbo) and vocational (mbo) tracks was recommended as part of measures to tackle school drop-out. Vocational schools shape their own strategy and priorities in consultation with regional partners. Partnerships with the labour market are strongly supported. There is continued focus on improving quality in initial VET and making continuous VET more flexible. A relatively high percentage of adults participate in lifelong learning (19.5% in 2019) ([6]), although fewer among the low-skilled. The forecast demand for highly skilled and medium-skilled workers until 2025 surpasses the expected supply. The introduction of individual learning accounts is being planned to facilitate lifelong skill development (European Commission, 2019).

The Dutch national qualifications framework (NQF) (*Nederlands Kwalificatieraamwerk*, NLQF) was adopted in 2011, building on and integrating the qualifications framework for higher education which had been self-certified to QF-EHEA in 2009. The comprehensive NLQF is a systematic classification of all qualifications in the country, aimed at transparency and increased comparability. It has eight levels, an entry level below EQF level 1, and a sublevel at level 4 (4+). Level descriptors are defined as knowledge, skills, responsibility and independence, and context. The framework covers two main groups of qualifications: government-regulated qualifications in the formal education and training

system, and non-regulated (mainly private) qualifications awarded on the labour market. The NLQF is operational. Progress has been made in levelling non-regulated qualifications to the NLQF, with 103 qualifications of this group included by November 2020. A comprehensive database for all Dutch qualifications with an NLQF level has been developed and is available online from mid-2020.

Several evaluations of different aspects of the NLQF and the NLQF/EQF NCP were conducted. A dedicated NLQF law is foreseen to be adopted in 2021, formally acknowledging the NLQF, its levels and level descriptors, and regulating the indication of NQF and EQF levels on qualification documents.

NLQF referencing to the EQF was completed in January 2012. An updated referencing report addressing developments over recent years was presented and adopted in 2019.

## Policy objectives

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Development of the NLQF was prompted by the 2008 recommendation on a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning ([7]). Its purpose is to support lifelong learning, and national and international mobility of students and employees, enabling them to identify their level of education and training, and to find appropriate programmes; to understand the levels of national and international qualifications; and how different qualifications contribute to improving workers' skills in the labour market. The main objectives of the NLQF include: to increase transparency and comparability of qualifications and learning routes within the Netherlands and within Europe; to stimulate thinking in terms of learning outcomes as building blocks of qualifications; to increase understanding of qualifications levels across the labour market and aid communication between stakeholders in education and employment (van der Sanden et al., 2012). The aims of the NLQF respond well to the renewed focus of the Dutch government on lifelong development, which includes actions to increase people's insight into formal and non-formal education and learning options, the creation of personal learning accounts; and the creation of the right preconditions to empower people in their learning and work life (NCP-NLQF, 2019).

Providing a systematic classification of all existing qualifications in the Netherlands, grouped into two categories (government-regulated qualifications and non-regulated qualifications), the NLQF reflects the nature of the Dutch qualifications system, where private and public providers supplement each other. 84% of adult learning takes place in the private sector and non-regulated private qualifications often have a strong 'qualifying power' in the labour market. Their inclusion in the NLQF increases their visibility and further strengthens their value.

The NLQF has no role in reforming education and training, in regulating transfer and access, or in entitlements to qualifications and degrees. In the formal system, education pathways are regulated by law. However, the process of provider validation and classification of non-regulated qualifications into the NLQF has led to an overall increase in the quality of these qualifications (Ockham IPS, 2017). The NLQF has also supported the revision of qualifications and development of new ones in the formal system, especially in VET. Thus, its influence beyond its descriptive role and its potential to support system-level developments is becoming apparent.

In a context characterised by a strong tradition of the learning-outcomes approach and relatively widespread use of validation of non-formal and informal learning, the NLQF seeks to strengthen the role of validation as an integrated part of the qualifications system. The framework is also expected to be instrumental in the possible development of a credit system covering all education sectors (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

# Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

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The NLQF covers the entire spectrum of Dutch qualifications:

- a. 'government-regulated qualifications' awarded in the formal education system (pre-vocational education (vmbo), senior secondary VET (mbo) and general education (havo), pre-university education (vwo), and higher education (wo and hbo)) and regulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science; traditionally they are classified in 17 qualification types and were levelled to the NQF *en bloc*.
- b. 'non-regulated qualifications' outside government regulation, awarded by stakeholders in the labour market (private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies).

The NLQF has one entry level (below EQF level 1), eight levels equivalent to those in the EQF, and a sublevel (4+). The entry level was created to support low-qualified individuals to get a certificate and increase their motivation to participate in further learning. Level 4+ was introduced to distinguish the pre-university pathway (*vwo*) from upper secondary general and VET qualifications classified at level 4. The reallocation of specific upper secondary VET qualifications from NLQF level 4 to level 5, based on their learning outcomes, has been under discussion, proposed by stakeholders in VET and opposed by those in higher education (NLQF NCP, 2019). Associate degrees were introduced in 2017 as a separate level in higher professional education (*hogeschole*) at NLQF level 5. In principle, all NLQF levels are open to all qualifications of all education sectors, based on a comparison of the learning outcomes of that qualification with the NLQF level descriptors, and not related to a particular study load ([8]).

Level descriptors of all nine NLQF levels are learning-outcomes-based, inspired by EQF descriptors and with some important differences resulting from elaboration and partial reorientation. They are defined in terms of knowledge, skills (applying knowledge, problem-solving skills, learning and development skills, information skills, communication skills), and responsibility and independence. A separate context descriptor has also been defined, used along with the described knowledge to determine the grade of skills difficulty. The subdomains introduced for skills are meant to make descriptors more relevant to the Dutch context, reflecting

experiences in applying learning outcomes, for example in VET (*mbo*). Guidelines were developed to avoid different interpretations of the descriptors when classifying qualifications ([9]). Since their adoption, level descriptors have been tested and fine-tuned in the process of classifying non-regulated qualifications. The updated descriptors are in use as of January 2020, without any changes in the initial levelling of qualifications.

Dutch education and training had a strong tradition of a competence and learning outcomes orientation before the development of the NLQF. Qualifications in secondary education are based on 'attainment targets'. VET is probably most advanced in competence orientation: a new VET competence-based qualifications structure has been developed and implemented; and VET qualifications were revised using the NLQF level descriptors and their number was reduced. A learning-outcomes-based qualifications framework for VET, using NLQF level descriptors, has been in place since 2016. The same tendencies can be observed in general and higher education, although less systematically. The introduction of the qualifications framework for higher education has contributed to the overall shift to learning outcomes. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is supporting higher education providers to use learning outcomes related to the NLQF levels in pilot projects aiming to develop flexible partial learning pathways ([10]). This has supported access to and participation in higher education. Parts of qualifications do not receive a separate NLQF level but are denominated as 'this partial qualification is part of a regulated qualification with NLQF-level 'X''. The NCP-NLQF supports owners of non-regulated qualifications in describing their qualifications in learning outcomes and has developed guidelines for this purpose ([11]). It is also looking into ways to classify non-regulated partial qualifications to NLQF levels (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). A discussion concerning the use of micro-credentials and *edubadges* has also started, including if and how the NLQF can play a role in it.

Higher education qualifications are accredited by the Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), taking into account both QF-EHEA and NLQF level descriptors. The Inspectorate of Education verifies compliance with quality assurance regulations in all education sectors, including higher education. ECTS is used in higher education and ECVET principles are applied in VET. Discussions have started on the development of an integrated credit system for all education sectors that would take the NLQF into consideration (European Commission; Cedefop, 2018).

# Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

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The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for the development and implementation of the NLQF, which was adopted in September 2011 by the Dutch Government and the Parliament. The need to strengthen the legal basis has been noted by stakeholders and a dedicated NLQF act is expected to be adopted in 2021. The legislative proposal for the new act was subject to two public consultations in 2015 and 2016. It is foreseen that the new NLQF act will acknowledge formally the levels and level descriptors of the NLQF, the generic classification of government-regulated qualifications and the possibility to classify non-regulated qualification; it will regulate the indication of NLQF/EQF levels on qualification documents and will address the legal status of the NCP as an independent organisation (NLQF-NCP, 2019).

The day-to-day running of the framework is carried out by the NLQF/EQF NCP. Since 2012 this has been hosted by the CINOP foundation ([12]), an independent organisation funded by, and reporting to, the Ministry of Education. The main tasks of the NCP are: levelling non-regulated qualifications to the NLQF (levelling of formal government-regulated qualifications is the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Education); maintaining the NLQF register of non-regulated qualifications and the new comprehensive NLQF database; maintaining and evaluating the NLQF and its links to the EQF; monitoring implementation; communicating the NLQF and supporting its main stakeholder groups. Systematic work has been carried out since 2012 informing potential labour market stakeholders about the framework.

The NCP accomplishes its tasks through its bureau ([13]), has 2.5 full-time employees (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020), and is supported by several independent external structures. Its Programme Council decides on the classification of non-regulated qualifications, based on advice from two commissions: the Quality Commission (which assesses the validity of applicant organisations, and is supported by a pool of auditors) and the Classification Commission (which makes recommendations on levelling of proposed qualifications based on assessment by a team of independent experts). The Programme Council and the two commissions are each composed of one representative of the labour market, one from the regulated formal education sector and one from the non-regulated education and training sector. An Appeal

Commission has also been set up. The activities of the NCP are funded by the Ministry of Education, through the European Commission grant, and through revenues from classification of non-regulated qualifications.

Main stakeholders (social partners, associations of education, the Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and Labour Market (SBB), the Education Inspectorate, NVAO, the association of private education providers (NRTO), NLQF experts, NLQF Commissions and NLQF Programme council) were consulted in the process of updating the EQF referencing report. It has been noted that communication with stakeholders has been intensified as an effect of preparing the updated report (NLQF NCP, 2019).

A mechanism for systematic stakeholder involvement has been recently set up, in the form of a new sounding board, to advise the NCP on policy aspects and to act as ambassador to a wider audience. It is composed of employer and employee associations, NRTO, the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA), a representative of the staffing industry, and NVAO. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has an observatory role (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

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

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[14]

A national system for validation of prior learning (VPL) (*Erkenning van Verworven Competentie (EVC)*) has been in place since 1998, aiming to bridge the gap between education supply and labour market demand by taking stock of existing knowledge and skills. It was based on the recognition that learning through practical experience can deliver the same professional skills and qualifications as formal classroom-based learning. Quality assurance came into focus in 2006, including linkages to national qualifications, sector standards, function profiles, career paths and citizenship activities. A new national policy on validation was initiated in 2013, with an orientation towards a participative society where all stakeholders take ownership for their role in lifelong learning, and increasingly focused on personalised learning. Effective since 2016, it has been a dual instrument operating on two routes: one linked to the labour market, and the other to the education system.

In the labour market route, VPL is aimed at career guidance and development for adults to support employability and better matching between employee capacities and occupational profiles or on-the-job learning. Prior learning outcomes are validated against sector/industry standards or national qualification standards. VPL tools used include the intake assessment, e-portfolio, the 'experience profile', competence tests, and workplace observations/performance assessment. A formal VPL procedure carried out by an accredited VPL supplier results in the award of a 'certificate of experience' (*ervaringscertificaat*) recognising vocational and general competences in relation to sectoral or formal education standards, and/or a 'certificate of professional competence' (*vakbekwaamheidsbewijs*) linked to professional standards and competences, or a 'certificate of generic and transversal competences' (*competentiebewijs*) linked to human resources systems.

In the education route, the goal is to validate formally/non-formally/informally acquired competences against national qualification standards, to support further learning: to grant exemptions or to acquire partial/full formal qualifications in VET and higher education, and for entry to an education programme. Legal provisions on validation are embedded in the legislation governing VET and higher education. In VET,

the focus is on the introduction of partial qualifications and on validating prior knowledge and skills for exemptions in learning units. VET schools are supported to validate competences at NLQF levels 2-4. In higher education, VPL is mainly offered in higher professional education (HBO), though less in research universities, which usually accredit only formally acquired learning outcomes. Initiatives based on the learning outcomes approach have been piloted since 2016 to make learning routes more flexible for students in part-time and work-based programmes, integrating independent learning and validation. VPL tools used include intake-assessment, e-portfolio, competence tests, and principles of the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET). The 'certificate of experience' can also be used, but it is no longer essential for obtaining exemptions or a partial/full qualification. Qualification awarding bodies can also use interviews, performance assessments and other learning-independent assessment techniques.

The focus at this stage is on increasing the quality and effectiveness of VPL services, better linking of VPL in the two routes, development of tailored learning and occupational options, a critical review of legal frameworks for VPL, and better communication on the recognition and value of VPL results. The NLQF aids implementation of the VPL policy. It makes relationships between non-regulated labour market qualifications and formal qualifications more transparent. NLQF levels and use of level descriptors also help to clarify the wider value of people's skills and competences beyond their performance on an occupational level. Sectoral organisations can have their standards validated against one of the NLQF levels. A sector standard used for learning or career advice in the labour market route can be registered on a specific NLQF level. Work is under way to create links between national and sector standards through the NLQF (Duvekot, 2019).

# NQF implementation and impact

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The NLQF is operational. All government-regulated qualifications have been included in the framework *en bloc* (more than 4 500 qualifications from general education, VET and higher education), and 103 non-regulated qualifications had been included by November 2020 ([15]). Netherlands is part of a working group set up by the EQF advisory group to look into the possibilities for inclusion of international qualifications into NQFs and their referencing to the EQF. One international qualification has been included in the NLQF at level 3.

The criteria and procedures for inclusion of non-regulated qualifications into the NLQF are presented in Box 1.

## **Box 1. Inclusion of non-regulated qualifications into the NLQF: criteria and procedures**

To be included in the NLQF, a non-regulated qualification must be:

- written in learning outcomes;
- concluded with a summative assessment independent of the learning path (courses or training concluded with proof of participation are not accepted on their own);
- substantial (at least 400 hours) or labour market relevant;
- underpinned by quality assurance.

If a private training provider, company, sector or examination body submits a qualification for classification to the NLQF, it undergoes a two-stage procedure:

- (1) validity check of provider;
- (2) classification of qualification to an NLQF level.

The validity check aims to ensure the trustworthiness of the organisation. Aspects such as legal status, property rights, the continuity of the organisation, and quality assurance arrangements are checked. Approved quality assurance systems include: accreditation by NVAO; supervision by the Education Inspectorate; ISO 9001: 2008/2015; INK (EFQM) model with external audit; and supervision by Stichting Examenkamer). If the provider does not use one of these external quality systems, an on-site

organisational audit is carried out. Validity is granted for six years, during which the applicant can submit qualifications for inclusion and levelling. Validity is assessed by the Quality Commission, and the final decision is made by the Programme Council of the NLQF NCP.

The organisation indicates the level it sees most appropriate for a qualification, based on comparison of learning outcomes with NLQF level descriptors. In addition, the workload, the approach to assessment/examination, and links to the relevant occupational profiles must be specified. The application for classification is assessed by two independent experts and the Classification Commission. The final decision is made by the Programme Council. The 'best fit' principle is used. Once approved, the classification is valid for six years and the qualification is included in the NQLF register.

Organisations must pay to use the system. Validity checks cost between EUR 1 000 and EUR 7 500, depending on whether an approved quality assurance system is in place. Submitting one qualification for inclusion is set at EUR 2 500. Re-evaluation of organisational validity and of the classification of a qualification (every six years) costs EUR 1 000 each.

*Source:* NLQF-NCP (2019).

Several registers have been developed for qualifications from the different education and training subsystems. Non-regulated qualifications levelled to the NLQF are entered into the NLQF register of non-regulated/private qualifications, operated by the NLQF NCP since 2013. A comprehensive database covering all qualifications with an NLQF level has been developed and is operational as of 2020 ([16]). By November 2020, it had been populated with 671 qualifications from general education and VET, and from the non-formal education sector. It includes search and filter functions (EQF and NLQF levels, field (Isced-F), education sector, qualification owner and awarding body, workload (hrs and ECTS), and descriptions of learning outcomes of qualifications ([17]). EQF and NQF levels are indicated in the comprehensive NLQF database and the NLQF register of private qualifications, on Europass certificate supplements and diploma supplements for VET and higher education qualifications. EQF levels are indicated on new qualification documents in VET and higher education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). The obligation to indicate NLQF and EQF levels on all qualification documents from formal education, and the possibility to indicate levels on non-regulated qualifications, will be regulated by the new NLQF act, expected to be adopted in 2021.

Several evaluation studies on different aspects of the NLQF have been conducted ([18]). One of the most recent (Ockham IPS, 2017) included an inventory of stakeholder views on the functioning of the NLQF and the NLQF NCP, and on the draft proposal for the NLQF law and its potential impact, and recommendations for possible adjustments to the legislative proposal and to the implementation process. A new impact analysis is being carried out ([19]), with results expected by the end of 2020. It aims to assess the impact of the NLQF on participation in lifelong development and to identify actions to increase awareness about it. Preliminary findings suggest that the NLQF needs to be better communicated to a wider audience; that the procedures for classifying non-regulated qualifications are robust, but may be sometimes complicated for providers; and that the requirement for describing qualifications in learning outcomes is sometimes considered a barrier (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The NCP has developed a set of tools to support providers of non-regulated qualifications in the process of classification: a toolbox, validity and classification application manuals, guidelines for communication and use of the NLQF logo, and for description of qualifications in learning outcomes. The NLQF is known by nearly all education and training providers in the Netherlands; though it is not used by all, there has been an increasing demand from market-oriented departments of public providers to classify qualifications to the NLQF. Recognition authorities and bodies, quality assurance bodies and labour market stakeholders at national level are also well informed about the framework. It is less known among guidance and counselling practitioners, labour market actors at regional and local levels, workers and students (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). Research commissioned by the NLQF NCP over recent years on the use of the NLQF/EQF in vacancies on the labour market showed that there was minimal, yet increasing, use of NLQF/EQF levels, mainly in the south of the country, in the healthcare sector. A communication campaign will be initiated by the Ministry of Education when the new NLQF act is adopted (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Referencing to the EQF

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The Netherlands referenced its NQF to the EQF in parallel to the development of the framework. The referencing report (van der Sanden, K.; Smit, W.; Dashorst, M., 2012) was approved in the EQF advisory group in January 2012.

An updated referencing report (NLQF-NCP, 2019) was presented and adopted in 2019. It addresses developments over recent years, including: the criteria and processes of classifying non-regulated qualifications, results of studies and evaluations of the NLQF and the NCP, the update of level descriptors, the development of the law on the NLQF, and current challenges for implementation.

## Important lessons and future plans

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The Dutch NQF is operational and it is open to qualifications from all education and training subsystems, at all levels. Social partners recognise its added value, as well as the need to implement and communicate the NLQF further. Demographic and economic trends, such as an aging population, fast-changing labour market demand, insufficiency of medium and highly skilled workers, and recently the Covid-19 crisis, have led to renewed focus on lifelong development among policy-makers. The NLQF is well suited to support new policy initiatives in this direction, making the education and training offer more transparent, strengthening the quality of qualifications awarded on the labour market, supporting the creation of more flexible training routes, and potentially aiding with the introduction of individual learning accounts ([20]). NLQF levels and level descriptors are being used in current work on development of partial qualifications and flexible pathways in VET and higher education. The framework is also linked with the policy on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Procedures for inclusion of non-regulated qualifications in the framework are considered transparent, robust and intensive, and interest in the framework among labour market stakeholders has been growing. No influence of the Covid-19 crisis has been observed on requests for classification into the NLQF; online meetings of the commissions continued well, and online information sessions had a good level of attendance (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). A possible high increase in the number of requests for classification in the future may represent a challenge to the current capacity of the NLQF-NCP and its external structures, requiring their expansion. A new sounding-board of key stakeholders has been set up by the NCP to advise on the wider social and political context and support in communicating the framework and clarifying misconceptions about it (NQFL-NCP, 2019).

The adoption of a dedicated NLQF legal act (foreseen for 2021) is expected to accelerate NLQF implementation and to raise its profile, including through the regulation of the inclusion of EQF/NLQF levels on qualification documents. A national communication strategy is foreseen once the new act is adopted, to inform the wider public about the NLQF in the context of promoting lifelong learning.

Other challenges that have been identified for the following period are the classification of international qualifications, which is currently a time-

consuming and complex process for which solutions are being sought at EU level, and the open question of whether specific VET qualifications currently at NLQF level 4 could be reclassified at level 5. Recognition of foreign qualifications can also be a challenge as, in some cases, similar qualifications from different countries may be referenced to different EQF levels; examples of qualifications from the Netherlands, Germany and Flanders having this issue have been identified, and it has been suggested that the countries work together to map the differences and reach a solution (NQFL-NCP, 2019). The use of 'achieved learning outcomes' instead of 'intended learning outcomes' in the classification of qualifications has been contested by some higher education stakeholders; the NCP, in collaboration with NVAO, has tested during 2019 the effects of using 'achieved learning outcomes' in the process of classification. The test will be discussed with the Ministry of Education, NVAO and the Inspectorate (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

## Main sources of information

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- The EQF/NLQF NCP is hosted by the CINOP foundation:  
<https://www.nlqf.nl/over-nlqf-eqf>
- NLQF qualifications database: <https://database.nlqf.nl/>
- NLQF register of non-regulated/private qualifications:  
<https://www.nlqf.nl/database-nlqf-kwalificaties/register>
- Database of vocational qualifications (Kwalificaties mbo):  
<https://kwalificaties.s-bb.nl/>
- Central Register of Vocational Training (CREBO):  
[https://duo.nl/open\\_onderwijsdata/databestanden/mbo/crebo/crebo-2.jsp](https://duo.nl/open_onderwijsdata/databestanden/mbo/crebo/crebo-2.jsp)
- Central Register of Higher Education (CROHO):  
<https://www.duo.nl/zakelijk/hoger-onderwijs/studentenadministratie/croho.jsp>
- van der Sanden, K.; Smit, W.; Dashorst, M. (2012). *The referencing document of the Dutch national qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework*.  
[https://www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/NLQF/20122202\\_Referencing\\_document\\_the\\_Netherlands\\_NLQF\\_EQF.pdf](https://www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/NLQF/20122202_Referencing_document_the_Netherlands_NLQF_EQF.pdf)
- NLQF-NCP (2019). *Referencing the Dutch qualifications framework NLQF to the European qualifications framework – Update September 2019 final version*.  
<https://europa.eu/europass/en/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf>

# National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	<p><b>Doctorate (Doctoraat)</b>  <b>Category</b>            Formal qualifications</p> <p><b>Designer (Ontwerper)</b>  <b>Category</b>            Formal qualifications</p> <p><b>Medical specialist (Medisch specialist)</b>  <b>Category</b>            Formal qualifications</p>	8
7	<p><b>Master degree</b>  <b>Category</b>            Formal qualifications</p> <p><b>Other qualifications (*)</b>            Example: Social studies</p> <p>(*) Non-regulated qualifications awarded by organisations outside the formal education and training system and relevant for the labour market (e.g. from private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies), included in the NLQF following quality assurance procedures. The 'size' of these qualifications varies.</p>	7

**Bachelor degree****Category**

Formal qualifications

**Other qualifications (\*)**

Examples: Anesthetist employee  
(Anesthesiemedewerker)

Certified leader excellent level (Gecertificeerd leider  
uitstekend niveau)

Dialysis nurse (Dialyseverpleegkundige)

Secondary defence formation (Middelbare defensie  
vorming)

Officer Royal Military police (Officier koninklijke  
marechaussee onderbouw)

Officer Navy force (Officier korps zeedienst)

(\*) Non-regulated qualifications awarded by organisations outside the formal education and training system and relevant for the labour market (e.g. from private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies), included in the NLQF following quality assurance procedures. The 'size' of these qualifications varies.

5

## **Associate degree**

5

### **Category**

Formal qualifications

### **Other qualifications (\*)**

Examples: Consultant payroll services & benefits (CPB)

Hotel service management

Operational technician energy production technology  
(Operationeel technicus energie productietechniek)

Instructor 5 (Opleider 5)

Trainer-coach 5

(\*) Non-regulated qualifications awarded by organisations outside the formal education and training system and relevant for the labour market (e.g. from private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies), included in the NLQF following quality assurance procedures. The 'size' of these qualifications varies. The NLQF register for non-formal qualifications: <http://www.nlqf.nl/register>

4+

## **Pre-university education (vwo)**

4

### **Category**

Formal qualifications

## **Pre-university education for adults (vavo-vwo)**

### **Category**

Formal qualifications

**VET level 4 (MBO 4)****Category**

Formal qualifications

**Upper secondary general education for adults (vavo-havo)****Category**

Formal qualifications

**Upper secondary general education (havo)****Category**

Formal qualifications

**Other qualifications (\*)**

Examples: Instructor 4 (Opleider 4)

Airport service agent

Application training food technology (Applicatie opleiding levensmiddelen technologie)

Industry diploma all-round beautician (Branchediploma allround schoonheidsspecialist)

Industry diploma medical pedicure (Branchediploma medisch pedicure)

(\*) Non-regulated qualifications awarded by organisations outside the formal education and training system and relevant for the labour market (e.g. from private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies), included in the NLQF following quality assurance procedures. The 'size' of these qualifications varies. The NLQF register for non-formal qualifications: <http://www.nlqf.nl/register>

3

### **VET level 3 (MBO 3)**

3

#### **Category**

Formal qualifications

#### **Other qualifications (\*)**

Examples: Dog grooming (Hondentoiletteren)

General investigator (Algemeen Opsporingsambtenaar)

Swimming teacher (Zwemonderwijzer)

Trainer-coach 3

Industry diploma pedicure (Branchediploma pedicure)

(\*) Non-regulated qualifications awarded by organisations outside the formal education and training system and relevant for the labour market (e.g. from private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies), included in the NLQF following quality assurance procedures. The 'size' of these qualifications varies. The NLQF register for non-formal qualifications: <http://www.nlqf.nl/register>

**VET level 2 (MBO 2)****Category**

Formal qualifications

**Basic education 3 for adults (vavo)****Category**

Formal qualifications

**Pre-vocational secondary education - theoretical pathway (vmbo tl)****Category**

Formal qualifications

**Pre-vocational secondary education - combined theoretical pathway (vmbo gl)****Category**

Formal qualifications

**Pre-vocational secondary education - advanced vocational pathway (vmbo kb)****Category**

Formal qualifications

**Basic education 3 for adults (Basiseducatie 3)****Category**

Formal qualifications

**Other qualifications (\*)**

Examples: Military police security  
(Marechausseebeveiliging)

Assistant swimming teacher (Assistent  
zwemonderwijzer)

Sales employee (Verkoopmedewerker)

(\*) Non-regulated qualifications awarded by organisations outside the formal education and training system and relevant for the labour market (e.g. from private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies), included in the NLQF following quality assurance procedures. The 'size' of these qualifications varies. The NLQF register for non-formal qualifications: <http://www.nlqf.nl/register>

1	<p><b>VET level 1 (MBO 1)</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>Formal qualifications</p> <p><b>Pre-vocational secondary education - basic vocational pathway (vmbo bb)</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>Formal qualifications</p> <p><b>Basic education 2 for adults (Basiseducatie 2)</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>Formal qualifications</p> <p><b>Other qualifications (*)</b></p> <p>Examples: Operating assistant (Bedieningsassistent)</p>	1
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Kitchen assistant (Keukenassistent)

(\*) Non-regulated qualifications awarded by organisations outside the formal education and training system and relevant for the labour market (e.g. from private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies), included in the NLQF following quality assurance procedures. The 'size' of these qualifications varies. The NLQF register for non-formal qualifications: <http://www.nlqf.nl/register>

Entry level	<p><b>Basic education 1 for adults (Basiseducatie 1)</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>Formal qualifications</p>	No EQF level
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# Acronyms

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BOL	school-based pathway
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
EVC	validation of prior learning [ <i>Erkenning van Verworven Competenties</i> ]
Havo	upper secondary general education [ <i>Hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs</i> ]
HBO	higher professional education [ <i>Hoger beroepsonderwijs</i> ]
MBO	upper secondary vocational education [ <i>middelbaar beroepsonderwijs</i> ]
NLQF	qualifications framework for the Netherlands
NQF	national qualifications framework
NVAO	the Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders
QF-EHEA	Qualifications framework for the European higher education area
Vavo	general secondary education for adults [ <i>Voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs</i> ]
Vmbo	lower secondary general and pre-vocational education [ <i>Voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs</i> ]
VET	vocational education and training
VWO	pre-university secondary education [ <i>Voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs</i> ]

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## Notes

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[1] [https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/pisa-2018\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/pisa-2018_en)

[2] At the end of primary education (age 12), Dutch students are directed to different types of secondary education based on study results and advice from school (Cedefop, 2018).

[3] Data from European Commission, 2020.

[4] Idem.

[5] Idem.

[6] Idem.

[7] European Parliament and Council; Council of the European Union (2008). recommendation of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning. Official Journal of the European Union, C 111, 6.5.2008, pp. 1-7. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32008H0506%2801%29>

[8] Initially, classification and inclusion into the NLQF of non-regulated qualifications was possible only for qualifications requiring a substantial volume of learning of minimum 400 hours of nominal study time. This requirement was subsequently amended and smaller qualifications with a volume less than 400 hours can be included provided they demonstrate labour market relevance.

[9] The level descriptors of the NLQF and guidelines for their application are available in NLQF-NCP (2019), Annex 4.

[10] The Accreditation Organisation for Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) has developed a dedicated accreditation framework for these pilots, focusing on learning outcomes instead of input requirements.

[11] They are available on the NLQF-NCP website, at:

[https://nlqf.nl/images/downloads/Verzoek\\_tot\\_inschaling/6\\_Handleiding\\_In\\_schaling\\_Formuleren\\_van\\_Leerresultaten\\_13042018.pdf](https://nlqf.nl/images/downloads/Verzoek_tot_inschaling/6_Handleiding_In_schaling_Formuleren_van_Leerresultaten_13042018.pdf)

[12] The website of the CINOP foundation is available at:

[https://www.cinop.nl/1\\_3128\\_About\\_CINOP.aspx](https://www.cinop.nl/1_3128_About_CINOP.aspx)

[13] The NLQF NCP Bureau comprises a programme director, three consultants, communication and project support staff.

[14] This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update of the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (Duvekot, 2019).

[15] Data from the register of non-regulated qualifications:

<https://www.nlqf.nl/database-nlqf-kwalificaties/register> [accessed 24.8.2020].

[16] It currently contains all VET qualifications, those from general

secondary education, and non-regulated qualifications. Higher education qualifications will be added in the future. It is available at:

<https://database.nlqf.nl/>

[17] All government-regulated qualifications and most non-regulated qualifications in the database are described in learning outcomes (European Commission and Cedefop; 2020).

[18] The Hobéon Study (2013). Implementatie van het NLQF- Juridische modaliteiten en consequenties (Implementation of the NLQF, legal modalities and consequences) &#xD;

[https://www.hobéon.nl/uploads/nieuws/130628\\_juridische\\_implementatie\\_nlqf\\_onderzoeksrapport\\_ocw\\_huisman\\_hendriks\\_def.pdf](https://www.hobéon.nl/uploads/nieuws/130628_juridische_implementatie_nlqf_onderzoeksrapport_ocw_huisman_hendriks_def.pdf) &#xD;

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[https://www.nlqf.nl/images/Eindrapport\\_OCKHAM\\_IPS\\_definitief\\_29112013\\_NCP\\_NLQF.pdf](https://www.nlqf.nl/images/Eindrapport_OCKHAM_IPS_definitief_29112013_NCP_NLQF.pdf)&#xD;

Profitwise (2014). De waarde van het NLQF â Onderzoek naar kenmerken, eigenschappen en voordelen (The value of the NLQF â Research into characteristics, properties and benefits): &#xD;

[https://www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/De\\_Waarde\\_van\\_het\\_NLQF\\_-\\_Eindrapportseptember2014\\_-\\_ProfitWise.pdf](https://www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/De_Waarde_van_het_NLQF_-_Eindrapportseptember2014_-_ProfitWise.pdf)&#xD;

ProfitWise Onderzoek & Advies (2015) study on communication and marketing 'Goed voorbeeld doet goed volgen': &#xD;

[https://nlqf.nl/images/Eindrapport\\_ProfitWise\\_onderzoek\\_SCQF-NCP\\_NLQF-definitieve\\_versie.pdf](https://nlqf.nl/images/Eindrapport_ProfitWise_onderzoek_SCQF-NCP_NLQF-definitieve_versie.pdf) &#xD;

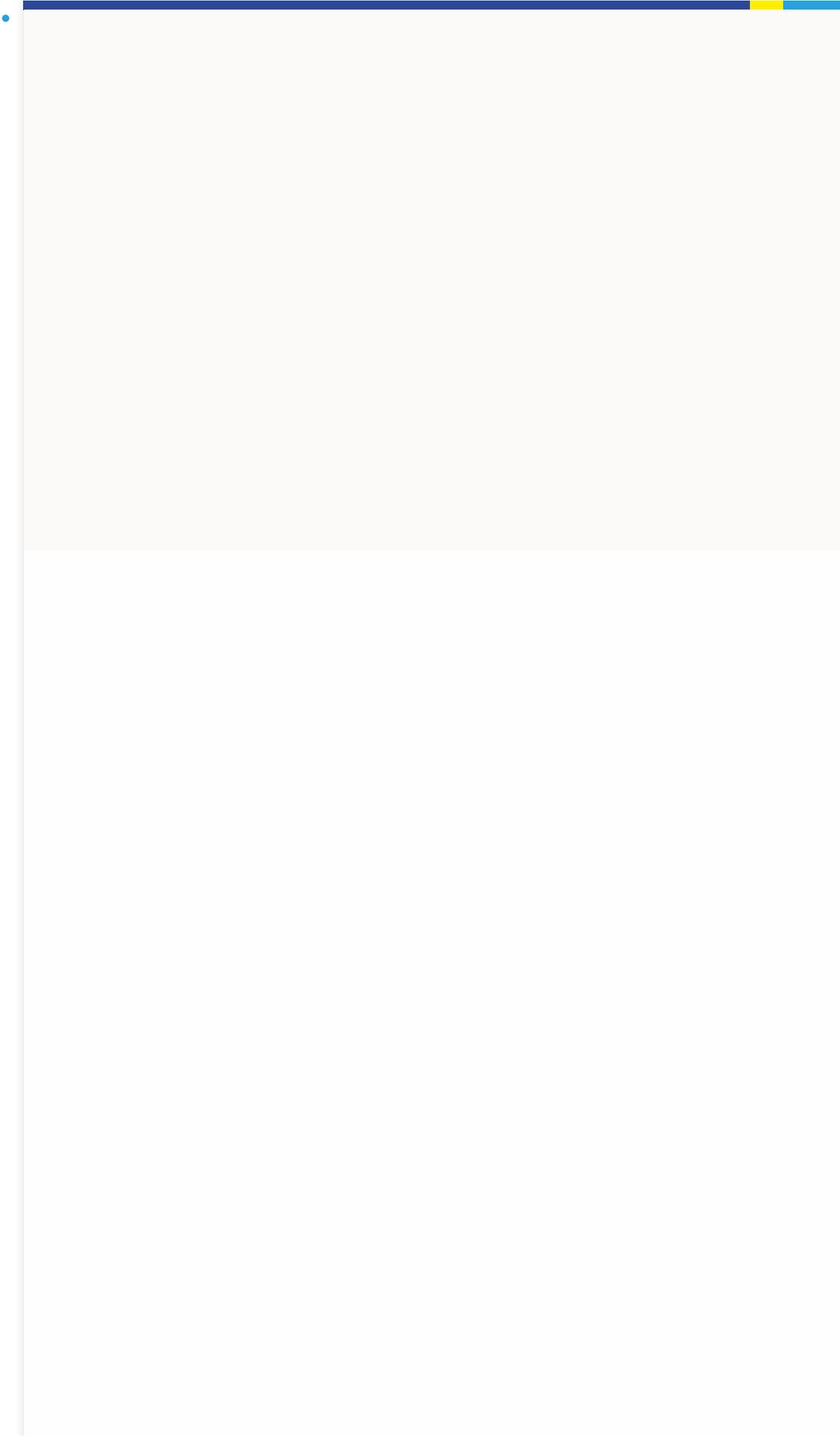
Ockham IPS (2017). Onderzoek NLQF (NLQF Research): <https://ockham-ips.nl/nl/project/onderzoek-nlqf>

[19] It includes interviews with the main stakeholders and a questionnaire for NLQF users (providers, employers, employees and students).

[20] Studying for a qualification with an NLQF level might be one of the criteria for using funds from the individual learning account (NLQF-NCP, 2019).

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2020

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