

## **NQF state of play**



**Albania 2020**

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# Overview

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**Stage of development:** Activation stage

**NQF linked to EQF:** ✗

**Scope of the framework:**

Comprehensive NQF including all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training and lifelong learning qualifications for adults and people undertaking specialised courses for professional development.

**Number of levels:**

Eight

**Legal basis/stage of development:**

NQF law (adopted in 2010, revised in 2018) (in Albanian)

**NQF/EQF website:**

[Website](#)

**Qualifications register/database:**

[VET register](#)

# Introduction and context

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## NQF snapshot

Albania's parliament adopted the country's first law on an NQF in 2010, so establishing the Albanian qualifications framework (AQF). Parliament adopted a revised law in 2018, which added clauses on raising the quality and relevance of the country's qualifications, including provision to engage social partners in the identification and development of new VET qualifications.

The AQF has eight levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications and certification. The 2017 law on vocational education and training (VET) specifies that curricula should be modularised or unitised by learning area so that learners can take these units separately, thus offering flexible options for different groups of learners.

While the framework is not fully operational, the responsible Ministries and national VET agency have sought to adapt and update it. Most notable recent improvements are the introduction of sectoral committees, criteria to include a wider range of qualifications in the framework and reinforcement of the AQF's level descriptors. Albania has reached the activation stage.

## Policy context

Albania has been a candidate country for EU entry since 2014 and seeks integration and compatibility with EU policies, tools and systems in education and training. It is a member of the EQF advisory group but has not referenced yet to the EQF.

The AQF is integral to meeting the country's employment and skills needs, and so is a principal instrument in contributing to the objectives specified in the National employment and skills strategies (NESS) 2014-20 ([1]) and 2019-22. A mid-term report on the first NESS in 2018 concluded that Albania had made partial progress towards its original objectives of fostering decent work, providing quality VET, promoting social cohesion and strengthening labour market governance and modernising the qualifications system.

Before the start of 2020, labour market data had shown marked improvement in outcomes since 2013; Covid-19 will have increased unemployment levels. The employment rate for people aged 15-64 in

Albania grew from 50% in 2013 to 59.5% in 2018, one of the highest in the Western Balkans. Employment rates have improved, notably for women, from 40% in 2013 to 52.4% in 2018. However, gender inequality remains problematic, with women's employment rates being 14% lower than for men.

Despite these generally upward trends, unemployment remains high at more than 11%, recorded mid-2019 and this figure is bound to surge following Covid-19.

### **NQF legal basis**

Law No 10 247 on the Albanian qualifications framework (AQF) was adopted by parliament on 4 March 2010 ([2]). A revision of this law (23/2018) was adopted on 18 May 2018 ([3]). It describes the main characteristics of the AQF, such as its structure, scope, objectives and functions, as well as arrangements for governance, institutional management, implementation, quality assurance and financing.

Law No 15/2017 On vocational education and training ([4]) defines the AQF as a national classification system of qualifications.

Three by-laws, adopted by the Council of Ministers, implement specific features of the AQF:

- a. Decision of Council of Ministers (DCM) No 426, June 2019 On organisation and functioning of the sector committees and the criteria for their selection;
- b. DCM No 427, June 2019 On approval of criteria and procedures for including the qualifications received through lifelong learning into the AQF levels for VET;
- c. DCM No 428, June 2019 On detailed level descriptors of the AQF level.

# Policy objectives

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## Aims of NQF

The aims of the AQF are to classify and link qualifications, ensure they are relevant to learners and employers, and to raise their quality. Additionally, the AQF, as most international equivalents, acts as an identifiable entry point for foreign qualifications to the country's education system and employment market.

Like their counterparts in the region, Albania's education and employment actors and stakeholders view the AQF as one of a set of tools to reform and govern the labour market and qualifications system. The AQF will contribute to achieving NESS strategic objectives B, on VET provision, and D, which concerns governing the labour market and the qualifications system.

Strategic objective B, On the quality offer of vet for youth and adults, includes actions to:

- a. diversify VET provision;
- b. develop post-secondary VET qualifications and assess provision of post-secondary VET;
- c. in recognition of prior learning (RPL), complete the legal framework to move it towards implementation, and pilot RPL in two occupations;
- d. in quality assurance, implement accreditation of public and private VET providers;
- e. develop a first model of a teacher training qualification.

Objective D includes measures to:

- a. implement the AQF, including via updating and maintaining the national catalogue of vocational qualifications;
- b. complete the AQF's legal framework;
- c. introduce mechanisms to include non-formal qualifications in the AQF;
- d. revise professional qualifications based on labour market needs;
- e. introduce a VET credit system aligned with ECVET;
- f. complete regulations for sectoral committees and pilot a committee in a chosen sector;
- g. strengthen the National Agency for Vocational Education and

Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ), e.g. via staff training and formalisation in law of its functions.

NESS aims to raise the quality of VET, and, by extension, its attractiveness. There are signs that this strategy is bearing fruit: enrolments for VET programmes at secondary level increased from 17% of all secondary programmes in 2014 to 20.6% in 2018. Most other countries in the region still have higher VET enrolment levels than Albania, as VET has traditionally been an unattractive option compared to academic education.

Vocational schools offer formal initial vocational education. Both general education (gymnasium) and four-year vocational education programmes lead to the State *matura* exams. Successful completion of this stage allows access to higher education and/or post-secondary education. Vocational education offers exit points after two, three or four years, depending on the programme. On completion, graduates receive a vocational State *matura* diploma (ISCED/Albanian qualification framework (AQF) level 4), as well as a final certificate for the vocational education programme they will have attended (usually ISCED 3/AQF level 4).

Vocational training centres offer short vocational training courses. NAVETQ has recently developed 35 curricula for such courses.

Authorities plan to merge the two separate VET provider systems, vocational schools and vocational training centres, into one system of VET multifunctional centres, to maximise efficiency and quality. The Integrated Policy Management Group, or IPMG, the forum of national and donor actors which coordinates human capital development policies, consulted on this merger proposal in 2020. A technical working group established by the minister responsible for VET is undertaking the necessary institutional preparatory work, including identifying the required legislative changes and implications for providers.

During 2020, as in other countries, the education and training systems was hit by Covid-19. There was a rapid transfer to online teaching, albeit hampered by incomplete broadband coverage, as some areas could not access fast internet services. Television delivered extensive general education content, although the passive learner experience of watching TV means that it is only partially effective in supporting learning aims.

# Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

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## **NQF scope and structure**

Inspired by the EQF, the AQF consists of eight levels, whose descriptors are written in learning outcomes organised in the three domains of knowledge, skills and competence. Originally the descriptors were simply a language translation of the (very basic and short) EQF level descriptors, but a ministerial decree of June 2019 replaced them with more detailed descriptors. These draw on the taxonomy in the EQF descriptors but expand to cover many more elements. For example, level 4 knowledge includes Exercise self-management within work context guidelines, while the level 3 skills include Work independently in variable conditions, etc.

The AQF's eight levels correspond one-to-one to the EQF's.

## **Types of qualification**

The AQF is open to all types of qualifications. There are three main categories identified in the AQF handbook and 2018 Law: general and higher education qualifications; professional or VET qualifications; and lifelong learning qualifications catering to adults and people undertaking specialised courses for professional development (Cedefop, 2020).

The term 'qualifications for lifelong learning' in the AQF laws is used to distinguish between the formal qualifications that are automatically included in the AQF, based on existing legislation (such as the VET law, the law on higher education) and all other qualifications.

ETF's inventory and analysis of vocational qualifications in Albania in 2017 identified 85 qualifications that are not part of formal education subsectors. A total of 80 of these are vocational training courses developed for vocational training centres or by private schools. Five are courses designed for managers or higher technicians developed by private universities, at AQF level 5. Currently, there are a few Level 5 qualifications in the NLVQ or AQF, which have often been pursued outside the scope of programmes or qualifications covered by legislation.

However, one level 5 qualification in post-secondary VET has been approved by Ministry Order No 149, June 2020 and is now levelled in the AQF. This qualification is in fashion design and was developed by NAVETQ

and implemented in the Secondary Technical and Economics School in Tirana during 2020.

In June 2019, the Council of Ministers adopted a bylaw on the inclusion of lifelong learning qualifications in the AQF; this stipulates criteria and procedures to place such qualifications on the AQF levels. It should open the way for applications for qualifications obtained outside formal subsystems to be levelled in the AQF and so should lead to, among other gains, inclusion of AQF Level 5 qualifications.

### **Use of learning outcomes and standards**

All VET qualifications are defined in learning outcomes and have a clear division between knowledge, skills and broader competences. Learning outcomes for individual qualifications are more detailed in terms of knowledge, skills and broader competences compared to the more generic AQF level descriptors.

VET qualifications derive from occupational descriptions contained in the national list of occupations (NLO) ([5]). The NLO contains 10 major occupational groups, 43 major subgroups, 133 minor groups, 480 unit groups and 5 489 job titles ([6]). NAVETQ draws on the NLO, then uses the AQF descriptors as occupational standards to develop VET qualifications. The template for occupational standards is being currently improved and will include performance criteria, tools and equipment. All future standards will be developed against this new template.

The vocational part of the national curricula framework is modularised. Vocational theory modules/subjects are organised in outcomes and themes with respective teaching hours. The modularised curricula are crucial in supporting flexible delivery of qualifications; they develop a flexible pathway between different qualifications and between different learning contexts.

No measures have been taken to date towards delivering certification of partial qualifications or units of qualifications, although this option is an element in the NESS 2014-22 action plan.

Higher education qualifications are not yet based on learning outcomes; instead, student workload is referenced for allocation of credits. A working group is developing new legislation, which will introduce outcomes in the higher education system.

### **Quality assurance of qualifications**

The AQF law stipulates that all qualifications in the AQF shall be quality assured. There is not yet a coherent, national system of external quality assurance of development, provision, assessment and certification of vocational qualifications. In VET, QA has hitherto mainly been internal.

All public VET schools in the country have now completed a self-assessment exercise. NAVETQ is working to develop the accreditation model to be implemented in VET schools. This measure addresses both providers and the qualifications themselves.

VET providers are responsible for internal assessment and certification of vocational qualifications at AQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. NAVETQ provides guidelines on both formative assessment and for summative assessment to achieve the certification. The framework curricula include recommendations on verifying whether learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes in the qualification. NAVETQ also produces guidelines for VET teachers and providers, with assessment methods and assessment tools such as tests, projects, and check lists.

The Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AQAHE) manages quality assurance for this sector. It requires higher education institutions and their programmes to be accredited before they can issue degrees or other qualifications.

### **Credit systems**

The AQF law stipulates that the AQF should facilitate accumulation and transfer of credits. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credit system in higher education is operational.

VET does not yet have a credit system. Authorities have written a concept paper looking at how a credit system in VET could be established. Aims would include improving quality assurance and supporting learner progression. Qualifications for lifelong learning are generally not expressed in credits.

# Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

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## Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

Ministries, rather than a dedicated NQF authority, are responsible for the AQF. Broadly, the ministries concerned manage qualifications in the AQF which correspond to the education subsystem the respective ministry coordinates. Therefore, the Ministry of Education covers qualifications in elementary, lower and upper secondary general education, and higher education and lifelong learning, while the Ministry of Finance and Economy leads on VET qualifications.

The AQF laws define three implementing institutions:

- a. the National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ);
- b. higher education institutions in cooperation with institutions which carry out periodic labour market assessments and employment surveys of graduates;
- c. the ministries responsible for education and their associated agencies in accordance with the relevant provisions of the applicable legal framework (ETF, 2018b).

Implementation is coordinated by a dedicated AQF taskforce jointly chaired by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Its tasks include development of an AQF handbook for users, revision of the AQF law, and referencing the AQF to the European qualifications framework (EQF). During 2020, its mandate was extended to end 2022.

## Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

Sector committees can now be established, following the June 2019 bylaw adopted by the Council of Ministers. This is an important step in delivering objectives within NESS to revise existing, and develop new, professional qualifications based on labour market needs. The Committees' functions will include identifying qualifications needed, based on studies; proposing new qualifications to NAVETQ; working with NAVETQ to draft the occupational standards and vocational qualifications standards included in the national catalogue of vocational qualifications; and broader support to AQF implementation.

The Committees will be organised by technical groups for each sector, to a maximum of 10 national committees, each of fewer than 10 persons to facilitate decision-making. Members will be drawn from the different ministries responsible for the AQF; ministries responsible for the respective committee's economic sector; employers' associations; trades unions; VET institutions; a human resources specialist from the sector; and an independent expert with experience of developing and implementing the AQF.

At the time of writing, stakeholders are developing a roadmap to operationalise the committees. A regulation on the functions of the committees' supporting technical secretariat is being drafted.

Implementation has begun. Stakeholders are establishing criteria to define the sectors and to prioritise a number for first phase piloting. In early 2021, piloting in a chosen sector will start with the support of RISI Albania, a joint Swiss-Albanian project which supports employment opportunities for young Albanians. Pilots will expand to further sectors during 2021 and after.

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

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## VNFIL arrangements

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is one of the priority measures in NESS and provided for in both the VET and AQF laws. Implementation so far has been confined to pilots and has not yet been applied country wide.

NESS outlines a national system for validation. Actions to be taken include:

- a. selecting bodies and putting in place procedures for the validation of qualifications, skills assessments, certification and the validation/recognition of prior learning;
- b. appointment of special bodies and establishment of procedures for the validation of qualifications, assessments of knowledge, skills and competences; certification; and validation of prior learning;
- c. establishment of a national system to recognise qualifications, work experience, skills obtained/received abroad;
- d. consolidating the legal framework for recognition of prior learning (RPL);
- e. defining roles of implementing institutions in managing RPL;
- f. identifying priority sectors for RPL and piloting in two occupations.

Officials are currently preparing a draft decision of the Council of Ministers on the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

# NQF implementation and impact

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## Key achievements and main findings

NAVETQ has compiled the national list of vocational qualifications (NLVQ) ([7]), which is approved by the Ministry of Finance and Economy. The NLVQ contains more than 100 qualifications at AQF levels 2, 3 and 4, offered through the 2+1+1, 2+2 and four years formal educational structure. The list is now available online in the national catalogue of vocational qualifications (NCVQ) in the form of a public, interactive, searchable web portal/database on qualifications, curricula and training offers by VET providers.

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth is creating a national register of higher education programmes. Each programme will be coded according to the field of study. The required legal framework is under development.

AQF levels are included on new certificates and diplomas and Europass supplement documents and indicated in the national catalogue for VET qualifications.

## Recognition of foreign qualifications

Information on the ENIC-NARIC website about recognition of foreign qualifications in Albania is limited. The national information centre is the Technical Secretariat for the Recognition of Foreign Diplomas under the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth. Albania has procedures in place for the recognition of foreign certificates and diplomas at levels 5 to 8 of the AQF, issued by foreign higher education institutions. Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications is under development. An instruction of the Minister of Finance and Economy to the procedures for recognition of qualifications at levels 2 to 5 was adopted in 2018.

# Referencing to the EQF

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## Referencing to regional frameworks

Albania participates as a full member in both the EU's EQF process as a member of the EQF advisory group and the Council of Europe-chaired Bologna process in higher education. The AQF is not yet referenced to the EQF or self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA). However, authorities have been working on a draft report and plan to link the AQF to both frameworks in one process, resulting in one report.

## International cooperation

As an EU candidate country, Albania receives financial assistance from the EU via IPA (Instrument for pre-accession). The government has prioritised skills mismatch as the country prepares for the next round of EU support through the Instrument for pre-accession assistance 2021-27.

EU assistance focuses on democratic development, good governance, regulatory reform, administrative capacity-building and infrastructure development. EU funding for [projects in Albania](#) is provided in the form of grants, contracts, and, increasingly, budget support.

The current education, social policy and employment portfolio is worth EUR 30 million and is mainly rolled-out through a budget support programme that is currently being adapted to the Covid-19 context.

The next programme, entitled *EU for social inclusion* has been under preparation during 2020, and provides EUR 50 million, much of it addressing VET and employment. It replicates in many ways for Albania the EU 2020 programmes, providing support for transitioning to the knowledge economy and adopting the European social model. It will support implementation of NESS, the Strategy for development of pre-university education 2014-20 (PUE) and the National strategy for decentralisation and local government 2015-20.

As an EU candidate country, Albania implements actions consistent with the RIGA 2015 conclusions on new medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015-20 (Riga is a follow-up of the Bruges process). MTD 3 is related to the NQF: Enhance access to VET and qualifications for all, through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available

validation of non-formal and informal learning.

## **Important lessons and future plans**

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The adoption of the revised, 2018, AQF law steers the AQF development process towards achieving more relevant qualifications, including through establishment of sector councils comprising social partners and other stakeholders. Pilot committees will provide feedback to inform orientations in reforming existing or designing new qualifications.

Application of learning outcomes in higher education would more closely align Albania's higher education sector to those in other countries in the European higher education area.

Recognition of prior learning, facilitated by early adoption of a Ministerial decision, would contribute to the development of lifelong learning opportunities and improve adult participation.

Two other priorities are developing a communication strategy and referencing of the AQF to the EQF.

## Main sources of information

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The Albanian Ministry of Education and Sports is the main source of information and the EQF NCP: <http://www.arsimi.gov.al>

*National catalogue of vocational qualifications (NCVQ).*  
<http://www.akafp.gov.al/lista-kombetare-profesionale/>

*European Training Foundation NQF inventory, NQF inventory Albania | Open Space (europa.eu)*

# National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	<p><b>Doctorate</b>  <b>Category</b>                      General/traditional qualifications                      Qualifications from initial education</p> <p><b>Graduate school study in advanced studies</b>  <b>Category</b>                      General/traditional qualifications                      Qualifications from initial education</p> <p><b>Executive master/second level master/postmaster</b>  <b>Category</b>                      Vocational/professional qualifications                      Qualifications from initial education</p> <p><b>Long term specialisation</b>  <b>Category</b>                      Vocational/professional qualifications                      Qualifications from initial education</p> <p><b>Study programmes for continuous education</b>  <b>Category</b>                      Lifelong learning qualifications</p>	No EQF level

7	<b>Master of science</b>	No EQF level
	<b>Category</b>	
	General/traditional qualifications	
	<b>Master of arts/ master of fine arts/programme level II study</b>	
	<b>Category</b>	
	General/traditional qualifications Qualifications from initial education	
<b>Integrated study programme of the second cycle</b>	No EQF level	
<b>Category</b>		
General/traditional qualifications Qualifications from initial education		
<b>Four-year study programme (pre-Bologna programmes)</b>		
<b>Category</b>		
General/traditional qualifications Qualifications from initial education		
<b>Professional master/first level master</b>	No EQF level	
<b>Category</b>		
Vocational/professional qualifications Qualifications from initial education		
<b>Study programmes for continuous education</b>		
<b>Category</b>		
Lifelong learning qualifications		
6	<b>Bachelor</b>	No EQF level
	<b>Category</b>	
	General/traditional qualifications Qualifications from initial education	
	<b>Study programme first level</b>	
<b>Category</b>	No EQF level	
General/traditional qualifications Qualifications from initial education		

5	<p><b>(not available)</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>General/traditional qualifications</p> <p>Qualifications from initial education</p> <hr/> <p><b>Post-secondary study programme of professional type</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>Vocational/professional qualifications</p> <p>Qualifications from initial education</p> <hr/> <p><b>Professional non-university study programme after secondary education</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>Vocational/professional qualifications</p> <p>Qualifications from initial education</p> <hr/> <p><b>Vocational certificate</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>Vocational/professional qualifications</p> <p>Qualifications from initial education</p> <hr/> <p><b>Bridging courses (certificate)</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>Lifelong learning qualifications</p> <hr/> <p><b>Specialisation courses based on professional requirements</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>Lifelong learning qualifications</p>	No EQF level
4	<p><b>State matura diploma (Upper secondary general education)</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>General/traditional qualifications</p> <p>Qualifications from initial education</p> <hr/> <p><b>State vocational matura diploma issued upon completion of the vocational high school programme</b></p> <p><b>Category</b></p> <p>Vocational/professional qualifications</p> <p>Qualifications from initial education</p>	No EQF level

**Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the four-year study programme for middle technicians/middle managers**

**Category**

Vocational/professional qualifications

Qualifications from initial education

**Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the two-year programme for technicians/ middle managers**

**Category**

Vocational/professional qualifications

Qualifications from initial education

**Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the one-year programme for technicians/ middle managers**

**Category**

Vocational/professional qualifications

Qualifications from initial education

**Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of an apprenticeship programme**

**Category**

Vocational/professional qualifications

Qualifications from initial education

**Bridging courses**

**Category**

Lifelong learning qualifications

**Vocational training courses**

**Category**

Lifelong learning qualifications

**Specialisation courses based on professional requirements**

**Category**

Lifelong learning qualifications

**(not available)**

**Category**

General/traditional qualifications

Qualifications from initial education

3	<p><b>Vocational certificate issued at the end of a three-year programme for skilled workers</b> <b>Category</b></p> <p>Vocational/professional qualifications Qualifications from initial education</p> <p><b>Vocational certificate issued at the end of a one-year programme for skilled workers</b> <b>Category</b></p> <p>Vocational/professional qualifications Qualifications from initial education</p> <p><b>Vocational Certificate issued at the end of an apprenticeship programme</b> <b>Category</b></p> <p>Vocational/professional qualifications Qualifications from initial education</p>	No EQF level
2	<p><b>(not available)</b> <b>Category</b></p> <p>General/traditional qualifications Qualifications from initial education</p> <p><b>Vocational certificate issued at the completion of the two-year programme for semi-skilled workers</b> <b>Category</b></p> <p>Vocational/professional qualifications Qualifications from initial education</p>	No EQF level

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**Final school report after completion of compulsory nine-year education**

**Category**

General/traditional qualifications

Qualifications from initial education

**Minimum entry requirements to work or social life**

**Category**

Lifelong learning qualifications

No  
EQF  
level

# Acronyms

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AQAHE	Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
AQF	Albanian qualifications framework
DCM	Decision of Council of Ministers
EQF	European qualifications framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
NAVETQ	National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications
NESS	National employment and skills strategy
NQF	national qualifications framework
NCVQ	national catalogue of vocational qualifications
NLVQ	national list of vocational qualifications (NLVQ)
NLO	national list of occupations

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## Notes

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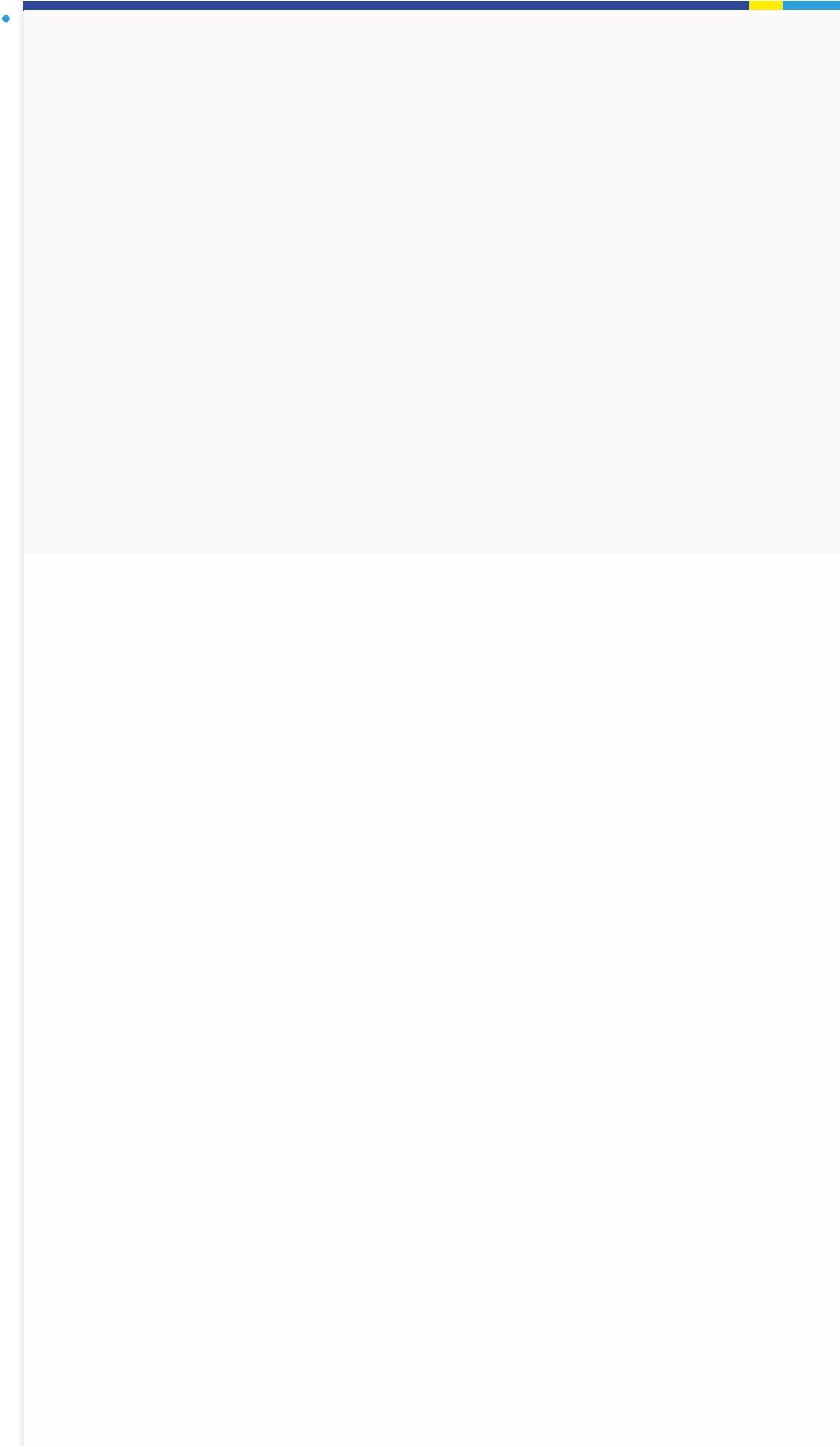
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