

NQF state of play



Cyprus 2022

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Overview

Stage of development: Operational stage

NQF linked to EQF: 

Scope of the framework:

The NQF includes all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training and qualifications from the system of vocational qualifications; the latter are awarded through non-formal and informal learning.

Number of levels:

Eight, with sublevels at levels 5 and 7

Legal basis/stage of development:

Decision of the CoM, No 67445 on establishing the CyQF (2008)

NQF/EQF website:

 [Website](#)

Introduction and context

1.1. Policy context

Cyprus performs well against most key EU indicators for education and training. Public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020 remained well above the EU-27 average (5.9 % versus 5.0 %). In 2020, participation in early childhood education was 91.1 %, an increase of more than 26 percentage points since 2013. In 2021, the share of early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (10.2%) remained slightly above the EU average, while tertiary educational attainment (for those aged 25-34) was one of the highest in the EU (58.3 %). In 2021, participation in vocational education and training (VET) remained very low (16.8 %) (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022).

1.2. NQF legal basis

In 2008, Cyprus decided to develop a comprehensive NQF, the CyQF ([1]). The Council of Ministers approved the establishment of the framework based on the eight levels of the EQF in 2012, and work on framework design was finalised in 2017, along with its referencing to the EQF.

Policy objectives

The CyQF aims to have an impact specifically on the promotion of lifelong learning, enable the recognition and validation of qualifications, enhance learners' opportunities by creating an education and training system with vertical and horizontal permeability, and support workers' mobility (Cedefop, 2020). Another aim was to develop an inclusive framework of qualifications, including those awarded outside formal education. The reform potential of the framework is being acknowledged by linking it to wider reforms and procedures for quality assurance, assessment and award of qualifications. Furthermore, a policy objective is to reinforce VET at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels through the framework initiative the Cyprus Productivity Centre ([2]).

The CyQF operates as a reference framework, enabling the validation and comparability of qualifications, and hence the mobility of workers and learners. The main role of the CyQF is to classify qualifications according to defined levels of learning outcomes. Another main function of the framework is to include qualifications awarded outside formal education. This is primarily achieved by including the SVQ within the framework (levels 3–6) to allow comparability and better correlation of qualifications acquired through formal and non-formal learning. The CyQF supports recognition of prior learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The CyQF consists of two distinct strands: one for formal education (primary education, lower and upper secondary education, tertiary education and apprenticeship schemes) and one for non-formal and informal learning (the SVQ). Level descriptors were defined using three categories (knowledge, skills and competence), inspired by those of the EQF but further expanding them, with an emphasis on problem solving, communication, cooperation, learning skills, and understanding and application of knowledge. The SVQ system uses the same level descriptors.

Levels 5 and 7 have been divided into three hierarchical sublevels (a, b and c) to better represent the diversity of qualifications in the country. Qualifications in sublevel a cover fewer elements of each level descriptor (e.g. knowledge) than those in sublevels b and c; only sublevel c qualifications cover all elements of level descriptors. Developing three sublevels for EQF levels 5 and 7 was necessary to represent the awarded qualifications in accordance with how they are described by law and the current state of the country's labour market. For example, CyQF level 7 covers completed master's degrees carrying at least 90 European credit transfer and accumulation system points (sublevel 7c), but some study programmes also allow for two other exit points: sublevels 7a and 7b (Table 1) (Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).

3.2. NQF scope and coverage

The CyQF is a comprehensive framework, including qualifications from all levels and types of formal education and training and the SVQ. Competence-based vocational qualifications in the SVQ are based on occupational standards (in 2023 there will be 167 vocational qualifications available) ([3]), making it possible to award qualifications to candidates irrespective of how and where they acquired the knowledge, skills and competences, for instance through non-formal and informal learning ([4]). The SVQ can lead to full or partial qualifications; the latter could be considered microcredentials (Cedefop, 2023). Their inclusion in the CyQF is subject to completing the process for recognising non-formal and informal learning ([5]).

3.3. Use of learning outcomes

The qualifications system has traditionally been based on input (quality of teachers, infrastructure, and length of education and training programmes), but there has been a move towards an outcome-based approach with the SVQ system, the emphasis on learning outcomes and the validation of non-formal learning. The term 'learning outcomes' usually has a uniform interpretation across all education levels (Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). Attention is increasingly being directed to the need to focus on 21st-century skills and key competences, and to revise curricula, learning programmes and assessment methodologies in line with learning outcomes. Implementation of the learning outcomes approach has coincided with Cyprus's ambitious national reform programme for 2020. In education, the programme proposed comprehensive changes and innovations at all levels and in all aspects of the system; its main objectives were to create a democratic and learner-centred education system, improve teacher competences, and establish and monitor the quality of learning outcomes.

In programmes leading to qualifications up to CyQF level 4, intended learning outcomes are set out in national core curricula (Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). A committee at the Ministry of Education and Culture – the Advisory Committee for the Implementation of Curricula, Assessment and Teaching – (*Syntunistiki Epitropi Analytikon Programmaton*) is the body responsible for the implementation of learning outcomes in all grades across education departments in formal education (EQF/CyQF levels 1-4). The modernisation of pre-primary and upper secondary curricula is ongoing. Since 2019/2020, an integrated student evaluation system has been in place. It aims to emphasise formative assessment, to diagnose student needs in relation to specific expected outcomes, and to offer at an early stage the educational interventions required for improvement.

In VET, the 2015–2020 strategic plan for technical and vocational education and training set as a goal the development of modularised curricula based on learning outcomes (with particular emphasis on key competences) and units of the European credit system for vocational education and training. The curricula were introduced in the school year 2016/2017. Starting from the same school year, the country has been updating or introducing new specialisations to increase VET's attractiveness and relevance to labour market needs (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

3.4. Quality assurance arrangements

Two bodies are responsible for ensuring the quality of higher education in Cyprus. The first is the Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications ([KY.S.A.T.S](#)), an independent body responsible for the recognition of diplomas awarded by higher education institutions within the country and abroad. The second is the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CyQAA) ([6]), an independent body responsible for accrediting higher education institutions and programmes, and assessing the conditions for the provision of cross-border education from foreign institutions ([7]) (Cedefop and HRDA, 2019). CyQAA is fully aligned with the processes and procedures of the CyQF authority (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). For continuing VET and the SVQ, the body responsible is the HRDA.

The CyQF supports the development and implementation of the procedures for quality assurance and qualifications award. Legislation provides a quality assurance framework for higher education, within which higher education institutions will be driven to improve quality and develop an internal quality culture ([8]). The HRDA has a robust quality assurance process in place for monitoring the SVQ. The quality of all aspects of the system and those participating in it is assured by the HRDA, which holds the registers of assessment centres and assessors for each vocational field and region. The HRDA has also introduced a system for evaluating and certifying training.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

In 2017, the national qualifications authority ([9]) was set up ([10]) as the main body for CyQF implementation and the EQF national coordination point. The authority is an in-service department (under the Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training) of the education ministry ([11]), overseeing the day-to-day implementation of the framework and coordinating the inclusion of qualifications in the CyQF registry. The authority has the power to improve quality assurance systems in education and training; to monitor the scheme for validating non-formal and informal learning, and integrate it into the CyQF; to monitor the CyQF/EQF levels on certificates, diplomas and Europass documents; to strengthen the legal aspect of CyQF; and to develop a registry for it.

The main stakeholders in CyQF implementation are the labour ministry and the HRDA. A permanent advisory body – the CyQF Council – has been established as a forum for collaboration between stakeholders, including the Permanent Secretary of the education ministry (President of the Council), the Permanent Secretary of the labour ministry, the General Director of the HRDA (or their representatives), and representatives of employer and employee organisations and the academic community. Apart from being the consultative body for the CyQF referencing report, its main tasks are advisory and focus on:

- consulting with stakeholders on CyQF development and implementation;
- developing, implementing and reviewing CyQF procedures;
- disseminating public information on the CyQF;
- advising the education ministry on policy and resource implications.

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

5.1. Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Cyprus does not have a national framework for validating non-formal and informal learning, but an appropriate mechanism is currently being developed through a project partly funded by the European Social Fund. This project has supported a mapping study of the current situation in Cyprus, and a national action plan setting up a mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (*epikirosi mathisis*) was developed at the beginning of 2018 (Manoudi, 2019). This plan was opened for public consultation during the first half of 2018 and was completed in May 2018. The COVID-19 pandemic caused serious delays in launching the piloting phase of the mechanism, which will take place in 2023 (Cedefop and ReferNet, forthcoming). The validation process will have five stages: information-individualised counselling, identification, recognition of learning outcomes, assessment of learning outcomes, and certification. The national qualifications authority will evaluate the results from the pilot implementation and will integrate them into the plan for establishing a national framework for validating non-formal and informal learning (Manoudi, 2019).

Implementation will build on work already done by the HRDA, for instance in developing the SVQ, through which it is possible to validate non-formal and informal learning by awarding full or partial qualifications. It is planned that 167 vocational qualifications will be available in 2023. The 82 vocational qualifications already developed will be revised in response to labour market needs ([12]). Standards used in the vocational qualifications system relate not only to occupational skills, but also to soft skills developed through work experience (such as teamwork and collaboration) ([13]); they are different from those used in apprenticeship or school-based VET qualifications, and are not recognised in formal education. However, ways of linking the two VET systems are being considered as the CyQF is developed, and a link may be possible once the process is completed ([14]).

5.2. Credit systems

The autonomous nature of higher education institutions enables them to

accept credits from prior learning. KYSATS also recognises work experience credits as part of an individual's qualification. Success in information and communication technology examinations is certificated regardless of where and when the knowledge was developed.

5.3. Promoting lifelong learning

Cyprus is linking the recommendation process for upskilling pathways closely with the development of arrangements for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This makes it possible for learners to bridge different learning routes, or to accumulate credits and partial qualifications to gain access to further learning opportunities. The first draft of Cyprus's lifelong learning strategy (2021–27) sets the main areas of focus as promoting digital transformation, green transition and sustainability, inclusion and equality, validation of non-formal and informal learning, health and well-being, and a lifelong learning culture (Cedefop and ReferNet, forthcoming).

NQF implementation and impact

6.1. Stage of implementation

The CyQF implementation structures, criteria and procedures for allocating qualifications to levels are in place, and end users are being made aware of the existence of the NQF and related services. The CyQF has fulfilled the criteria of the activation stage and, as Cyprus reports, the framework is at an operational stage. The CyQF provides a map of and references to all nationally recognised qualifications; however, further action is needed regarding strengthening its legal basis, indicating NQF/EQF levels on certificates and diplomas, and developing qualifications registers or databases.

6.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

Some institutions have begun to indicate CyQF and EQF levels in national qualifications databases, on VET certificates and on Europass certificate and diploma supplements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020) ([15]). Higher education programmes approved by the CyQAA can use the CyQF logo on their diplomas and supplements ([16]). The CyQF Council is responsible for approving the use of the CyQF logo on diplomas and supplements issued by institutions.

6.3. NQF dissemination

An NQF/EQF communication strategy has not yet been developed in Cyprus due to budget limitations. However, the main communication channels and tools used for disseminating information on the NQF/EQF are leaflets (a leaflet is circulated in all schools and higher institutions every school/academic year) ([17]), school-based seminars (for counselling practitioners) and conferences organised in the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry and by the Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020, 2022). Although education and training institutions and providers, labour market stakeholders and recognition bodies are aware of the framework, interaction and constant dialogue are needed. The development of the CyQF website, providing citizens with updates on news and changes, has been very helpful.

To support CyQF implementation, guidelines, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the national register were developed in

consultation with stakeholders. The comprehensive and inclusive nature of the new framework requires systematic collaboration between stakeholders.

6.4. Qualifications databases and registers

A national qualifications register is under development ([18]) and will cover qualifications from general education, VET and higher education; it will cover the SVQ at a later stage.

6.5. Awareness and use of the NQF

CyQF awareness is increased through its day-to-day implementation and use. For instance, learners and education providers are often aware of it, as its levels are mentioned on certificates, while employers, workers and jobseekers often use CyQF because levels are specified in job advertisements. CyQF levels are also used by recognition authorities and quality assurance bodies in their evaluation processes. Labour market stakeholders make use of CyQF levels in their analyses, for instance on skills mismatches (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.6. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

An evaluation of the framework is not yet planned. However, in 2021, the HRDA published an evaluation of the impact of the SVQ (2013-19) (HRDA, 2021). The evaluation showed that the SVQ is mostly used by employed people; unemployed people participated to a far lesser extent.

Approximately 8 out of 10 employed participants reported that the acquisition of an SVQ qualification was positively recognised by enterprises, and that the SVQ had a very positive or positive impact on their career progress. Almost 85 % of them consider the connection between their current tasks and the knowledge acquired from the SVQ to be very good or good. More than 85 % of enterprises reported that employees who have obtained an SVQ qualification perform better, and 66.7 % reported that holding an SVQ qualification is considered during the recruitment process. Over 7 out of 10 enterprises reward employees who have been certified, mainly through professional development (33.3 %) and upgrading their duties (28.6 %) (HRDA, 2021).

Referencing to the EQF

The CyQF was referenced to the EQF in February 2017. An updated referencing report will be submitted once the system for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is in place and its links to the CyQF are defined.

Important lessons and future plans

Development of the NQF and the SVQ, which is an integral part of the NQF, is expected to strengthen the ties between VET for young people and vocational training for adults, and to improve their knowledge and skills. Consequently, one of the main objectives of the CyQF – to include qualifications awarded outside formal education in the framework – was fulfilled, supporting the comparability and better correlation of qualifications acquired in formal and non-formal learning. However, the comprehensive and inclusive nature of the new framework requires stakeholders to work together.

The work of the HRDA and the setting up of a national Qualifications Authority, as well as a Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency in Higher Education (CyQAA), have been very important elements in implementing the CyQF. In the same vein, setting up a CyQF council was important in establishing a permanent forum for collaboration between stakeholders. The main success factor to date is the use of the CyQF as a comparison tool for qualifications within and outside the country and as a guideline for new developments in the education field. The CyQF and the SVQ have also supported the use of learning outcomes, development and implementation of quality assurance procedures in education and training, transparency of qualifications, and mobility of learners and employees (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020, 2022).

Plans for future actions include strengthening the legal basis of the CyQF. Once the reformation process relating to the national qualifications authority is completed, and following approval by the Council of Ministers, the CyQF will be regulated by law by the House of Representatives. The possibility of changing the three sublevels to a single level 7 will be studied carefully and will be considered in the next updates of the CyQF (Cyprusiot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). Including microcredentials in the CyQF is a priority (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). In future it will be necessary to develop a national register and establish the criteria and procedures for including qualifications in this register. The piloting of the mechanism for validating non-formal and informal learning, which was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, is expected to contribute to developing a national framework (Cedefop and ReferNet, forthcoming).

Main sources of information

URLs accessed 5 April 2023

- [CyQF](#) website.
- [SVQ](#)(*Σύστημα Επαγγελματικών Προσόντων, ΣΕΠ*)
- Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture (2017). *The referencing of the Cyprus qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*. Nicosia.

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	Doctoral degree (Διδακτορικός Τίτλος)	8
7c	Master's degree (Μεταπτυχιακός Τίτλος)	7
7b	Postgraduate diploma (Μεταπτυχιακό Δίπλωμα)	
7a	Postgraduate certificate (Μεταπτυχιακό Πιστοποιητικό)	
6	Bachelor's degree (Πτυχίο) Qualifications at SVQ level 6 The system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) is an integral, but distinct, part of the CyQF, incorporating qualifications awarded through non-formal and informal learning.	6
5c	Higher certificates and diplomas - 3 years (Ανώτερα Διπλώματα και Πιστοποιητικά)	5
5b	Post-secondary certificates and diplomas - 2 years (Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Διετούς Διάρκειας)	
5a	Post-secondary certificates and diplomas - 1 year (Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Μονοετούς Διάρκειας)	
5	Qualifications at SVQ level 5 The system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) is an integral, but distinct, part of the CyQF, incorporating qualifications awarded through non-formal and informal learning.	

4	<p>Upper secondary general education and evening school certificates - 12th grade or 12th and 13th for some private schools (Απολυτήριο Μέσης Γενικής Εκπαίδευσης)</p> <p>Upper secondary technical and vocational education and evening technical school certificates - 12th grade (Απολυτήριο Μέσης Τεχνικής Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης)</p> <p>Qualifications at SVQ level 4</p> <p>The system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) is an integral, but distinct, part of the CyQF, incorporating qualifications awarded through non-formal and informal learning.</p>	4
3	<p>Lower secondary education certificate - 10th grade - preparatory year for upper secondary education</p> <p>New modern apprenticeship certificate - 10th grade (Απολυτήριο Πρώτου Κύκλου Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης - 10η τάξη)</p> <p>Qualifications at SVQ level 3</p> <p>The system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) is an integral, but distinct, part of the CyQF, incorporating qualifications awarded through non-formal and informal learning.</p>	3
2	<p>Compulsory lower secondary education certificate - 9th grade (Απολυτήριο Πρώτου Κύκλου Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης - 9η τάξη)</p> <p>Preparatory programme - New modern apprenticeship (Προπαρασκευαστικό Πρόγραμμα Νέας Σύγχρονης Μαθητείας)</p>	2
1	<p>Compulsory education certificate - elementary school certificate, or graduates of 7th and/or 8th grade (Υποχρεωτική Εκπαίδευση)</p>	1

Acronyms

CyQAA	Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education
CyQF	Cypriot qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework
HRDA	Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus
KYSATS	Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications
NQF	national qualifications framework
SVQ	system of vocational qualifications (<i>Σύστημα Επαγγελματικών Προσόντων</i>)
VET	vocational education and training

References

[URLs accessed 5.4.2023]

Cedefop (2020). *National Qualifications Frameworks Developments in Europe 2019 – Qualifications frameworks: Transparency and added value for end users*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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Manoudi, A. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Cyprus*. Thessaloniki: Cedefop.

Notes

[1]Decision of the Council of Ministers Îo 67445/2008 on establishing the CyQF.

[2]The labour ministry is responsible for the Cyprus Productivity Centre, which offers short modular programmes for employees in technical occupations and management; the Higher Hotel Institute of Cyprus offers upgrading courses for employees in the hotel and restaurant sector.

[3]Communication from the education ministry.

[4]More information on [the SVQ](#) (in Greek).

[5]Communication from the education ministry.

[6]More information on the [CyQAA](#).

[7]Private universities are evaluated by CyQAA every 5 years after their establishment, in line with European standards.

[8][Law 136\(I\)/2015, Official Gazette Annex Î\(i\), No 4526, 21 July 2015](#) (in Greek).

[9]More information on the [CyQF](#).

[10][Decision No 82.592/2017](#) (in Greek).

[11]More information on the [Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth](#).

[12]More information on [the SVQ](#) (in Greek).

[13]Qualifications standards have been developed in the following areas: the tourism industry, manufacturing, the construction industry, wholesale and retail trade, vehicle repair professional training, communication systems and networks/computers, and hair and make-up.

[14]Source: Manoudi (2019) and internal communication with the education ministry.

[15]This process is under revision within the context of the ongoing reformation of the national qualifications authority, the governing body of the CyQF. There is a preliminary approval by the Council of Ministers in relation to the process. Following the final decision, the process will be regulated by law by the House of Representatives (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

[16]Communication from the education ministry.

[17]The CyQF booklet, which provides full information on the CyQF and its social benefits, was prepared and circulated to all stakeholders.

[18]The national qualifications register (Ethniko Mitroo Prosonton) is in the early stages of development, as a decision is pending in relation to regulating the inclusion of qualifications within the NQF.

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Cyprus