NQF state of play

Belgium-FR 2022

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Overview

Stage of development: Activation stage

NQF linked to EQF: ✓

Scope of the framework:

The framework includes educational and professional qualifications awarded by the public sector and skills certificates awarded through the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Number of levels:

Eight

Legal basis/stage of development:

Decree on cooperation agreement between the three francophone governments on the creation and management of CFC (2015)
(in French)

NQF/EQF website:
Website

Qualifications register/database:
Qualifications register

Introduction and context

1.1. Policy context

In Belgium in 2020, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product was 6.6 %, which was 1.6 percentage points higher than the EU average. The country performs above average on several key education and training indicators. In 2020, participation in early childhood education was 98.5 %, while in 2021 the share of early leavers from education and training was 6.7 %. In 2020, the share of upper secondary students in vocational education and training (VET) was 55.7 %, while tertiary educational attainment (age 25–34) was 50.9 % in 2021. Only participation in adult learning was slightly lower than the EU average (10.2 % and 10.8 % respectively) (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022).

1.2. NQF legal basis

Although the development of the framework started in 2006, the current framework was introduced in 2010, when the French Community (Federation Wallonia-Brussels), the Walloon Region (Wallonia) and the French Community Commission (COCOF) agreed on the principles of the framework and on a structure similar to that applied by the Flemish Community of Belgium (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonie and COCOF, 2013). The CFC was formally adopted in 2015, through a decree operationalising the agreement between the three francophone governments. Among other things, the decree defines learning outcomes, describes the criteria and the procedure for a qualification to be levelled to the CFC and defines the operating costs (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Policy objectives

The CFC seeks to improve the transparency and comparability of qualifications across regional and national borders, to ease mobility and support learner progression, and to help bridge the different parts of the education and training system and promote permeability. While the framework does not have a regulatory role and is not an instrument for reform, the CFC aims to strengthen the quality of teaching and training, to support VNFIL and better link it with formal education and training, and to facilitate job-seeking, recruitment and staff development processes. Through its focus on learning outcomes, it supports equal opportunities for citizens (Cedefop, 2020; Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023). The framework is also not seen as a control device for the validation of qualifications but rather as a support instrument aiming at the continuous improvement of qualifications (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonie and COCOF, 2018).

The CFC's main function is to map educational and professional qualifications awarded by the public sector and skills certificates awarded by a consortium for validation, following the validation of non-formal, informal or formal learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The CFC is based on learning outcomes. An eight-level structure has been adopted, using two blocks of terms: knowledge/skills and context/autonomy/responsibility. The descriptors developed by the Flemish qualifications framework have been used as a basis, but have been adjusted according to the conditions of the community. The use of EQF levels supports international mobility and lifelong learning, and promotes learning outcomes as an international common language (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

3.2. NQF scope and coverage

At the first stage of implementation, only qualifications delivered by public providers are included. The introduction of the distinction between educational and professional qualifications was an important milestone in the CFC's development process. This distinction made it possible to include professional qualifications at higher levels. In principle, both types can be placed at any level in the framework. Skills certificates awarded by a consortium for validation are included at levels 2 to 4 ([1]). The allocation of qualifications to CFC levels started in 2017. Since 2020, there has been considerable progress: approximately 200 qualifications have been levelled to the CFC, which in total includes 391 qualifications (November 2022) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

3.3. Use of learning outcomes

A competence-based approach is established in compulsory education and training. In the national context, learning outcomes are described as *socles de compétences* and *compétences terminales*.

The Francophone service for trades and qualifications *(Service francophone des métiers et qualifications*, SFMQ) ([2]) plays an important role in promoting learning outcomes, in both initial VET and continuing VET. The descriptions of qualifications are based on the occupational profiles (occupational standards) defined by the social partners. Common training profiles (defined by providers), described in units of learning outcomes (*unités d'acquis d'apprentissage*), ensure the labour market relevance of training. Since 2011, certification by learning-outcome units

(*certification par unites d'apprentissage* – CPU) has gradually been implemented in formal initial VET programmes. CPU divides upper secondary VET tracks into units of learning outcomes. Learners receive their qualification certificate after completing all necessary units of learning outcomes. In 2018, a guidebook for the better implementation of CPU was developed. In 2020, a quantitative (internal) evaluation demonstrated that CPU is generally well accepted and well implemented. This initiative is part of the pact for excellence in education aiming to improve education quality and reduce inequalities (between schools, learners and genders) ([3]) (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

In adult education, the term used for learning outcomes is '*capacités terminales*'. Regional providers of continuing VET have developed a common certification procedure (*reconnaissance des acquis de formation*) based on common qualifications and assessment standards, with a competence-based approach, since 2010.

Although higher education institutions are autonomous in designing their curriculum, they are required to align their programmes with the common competences (*competences communes*) developed by the ARES (*Académie de recherche et d' enseignement supérieur*) ([4]). A guide has been produced to help higher education institutions define their learning outcomes to fit into common-competence reference systems. There is little information on the extent of the use of learning outcomes in higher education in practice, except for university colleges.

3.4. Quality assurance arrangements

The Agency for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (AEQES) is responsible for the external and formative assessment of higher education programmes ([5]). In addition, a legal assessment and inspection procedure is implemented by the General Inspectorate for basic, secondary, special and social promotion education. This approach is also used by the IFAPME/SFPME through the Training Directorate, the role of which is to inspect training centres. In VET, a team has been appointed within the education ministry to coordinate the cross-analysis of the evaluation procedures of schools and training centres, and the validation of skills providers ([6]). The aspects under revision include the evaluation of learning outcomes; the material resources; and the monitoring of quality in the assessment of learning outcomes and of the staff who carry out this process (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

In 2015, Instance CFC (the CFC Forum) was established as a steering authority, responsible for managing the inclusion of qualifications in the framework and for CFC dissemination. The forum also acts as the EQF national coordination point and operates under the Ministry of the French Community of Belgium. It has four constitutive substructures ([7]):

a. the Management Committee ([8]);

b. the Executive Committee;

c. the Committee of Experts ([9]);

d. the Board of Appeal ([10]).

The Management Committee oversees the overall coordination and oversight of the NQF. The Executive Committee acts as a CFC secretariat, manages the day-to-day running of the framework and requests the allocation of qualifications to levels, the evaluation of the CFC and the updating of the qualifications register. It is composed of a coordinator, an employee in charge of communication and an employee responsible for administrative issues. The Management and Executive Committees meet every 6 weeks to validate level allocations and to deal with other important topics regarding CFC implementation. The budget is covered by the three French-speaking governments and by EU funds (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

The division of the framework into two main strands had implications for stakeholder involvement. The Ministry of the French Community regulates formal education and is responsible for defining and positioning educational qualifications at levels 1 to 4. The SFMQ plays a key role in defining and positioning professional qualifications at levels 1 to 4. ARES is responsible for defining and positioning educational higher education qualifications at levels 6 to 8 (this is still in progress). ARES and the SFMQ share responsibility for qualifications at level 5, reflecting the extensive mix of professional and educational qualifications at this level. ARES and the SFMQ are also represented on the Management Committee.

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

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

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) has undergone significant developments and is framed by important pieces of legislation ([11]). There are two types of VNFIL in Belgium: the validation of competences (*validation des compétences*, VDC) in the continuing VET sector, leading to the CFC level 2 to 4 skills certificate (*titre de competence*) following an assessment procedure; and the valorisation of prior experience (*valorisation des acquis de l'expérience* – VAE) in adult education and higher education, leading to the validation of learning units or exemptions from certain parts of a study pathway, but not to a CFC-levelled qualification ([12]). VNFIL is embedded in the CFC decree; promoting VNFIL is an objective of the framework. It defines certification as the formal result of an evaluation and validation carried out by a competent authority, validating that the applicant has achieved the learning outcomes described in relevant standards, following either an education or training pathway or the validation of their competences. The Validation of Competences Consortium grants skills certificates on behalf of the three governments. They can be used in the job market and are recognised by public services for employment and adult education schools. They allow navigation between all of the vocational training providers, as long as they are members of the consortium (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

At the secondary level, VAE is used to grant admission into education and vocational pathways or exemptions, but it can also lead to a certificate of achievement (*attestation de réussite*) when the learner passes the integrated final test (*épreuve intégrée*). In higher education, with a regulatory framework that has been in place since 2014 (decree on the organisation of higher education), VAE has a stronger institutional basis and is used to grant admission to education pathways (all cycles of higher education) or exemptions. In adult education, a 2018 decree ([13]) promoted a unified approach to the admission, exemption and certification of formal, non-formal and informal prior learning.

NQF implementation and impact

6.1. Stage of implementation

The CFC is seen as an integral part of an evolving education and training system, gradually playing a role in improving the transparency and comparability of qualifications, and it is at the activation stage. Important steps have been taken in developing the framework – it is firmly legally embedded, its implementation bodies have been set up and the main working methods and instruments are being put in place, while criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications have been adopted and used (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020; 2022).

6.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

CFC/EQF levels are indicated on diploma supplements of educational qualifications at levels 5 to 8. It is planned for CFC levels to be indicated on professional diplomas at levels 3 and 5, on apprenticeship certificates at levels 3 and 2 and on their Europass certificate supplements. Users can be informed about the CFC/EQF level of all qualifications included in the qualification register (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020; 2022).

6.3. NQF dissemination

A CFC communication strategy has been developed, but has not yet been approved (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The EQF national coordination point is planning to disseminate information about the framework using its website, videos, brochures and guidance documents. The target group to be prioritised will be the general public, as the framework is, for instance, less well known among labour market actors at the regional and local levels. Employers, guidance counsellors from education and training providers, employment counsellors from public employment services, teachers, trainers, trade union representatives and human resources managers are advised to refer to the CFC as much as possible, for instance on job vacancies (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020; 2022).

6.4. Qualifications databases and registers

A qualifications register (Registre des certifications) has been developed; it includes CFC qualifications (391 in November 2022) ([14]). The purpose of the register is to make CFC qualifications accessible to all target groups. For each qualification, the register provides the following, in

French: information on the field of study, the CFC level and the awarding body; a description in open text of what the learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do; and a link to Europass supplements. The register is connected to the Europass platform (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.5. Awareness and use of the NQF

Education and training providers are aware of the CFC, as they participate actively in levelling qualifications. The same applies to quality assurance bodies and recognition authorities. There is a low level of awareness among learners, workers, jobseekers, labour market stakeholders (employers, trade unions, employment services) and guidance and counselling practitioners. CFC levels are used in education legislation, for instance in the 2013 decree on the organisation of higher education and in certain job offers for the public sector (2019 decree). However, the framework is not particularly well used by individuals and labour market stakeholders (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.6. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

To date there have been no evaluation studies on the various aspects of the framework and its impact (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.7. Impact of the NQF

The CFC has had an impact on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Several skills certificates awarded through a validation procedure are levelled to the framework, while the Validation skills consortium is an important stakeholder in Instance CFC (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The framework has, to a limited extent, promoted parity of esteem between different types of education and training, as end users (e.g. employers and jobseekers) often focus not on learning outcomes but on the institution that issued the qualification and the education sector it belongs to (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The CFC, mainly through its Management Committee, has promoted dialogue and cooperation across education and training sectors and institutions, and between them and the labour market (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Referencing to the EQF

The CFC levels were referenced to the EQF levels in 2013 (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonie and COCOF, 2013). Self-certification to the QF-EHEA is in progress.

Important lessons and future plans

The main enabling factor in the CFC's implementation is its properly functioning institutional structure. The Management Committee, which brings together stakeholders from various sectors, cooperates smoothly with the Executive Committee, which focuses primarily on levelling qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). Considerable progress has been made on including qualifications and qualification types in the framework. This has strengthened the position of the CFC as a credible reference point, promoting the comparability of qualifications. Distinguishing between educational and professional qualifications at all levels has been instrumental in making progress. Whether this structure can be used to open up for future developments of professional qualifications at higher levels and for establishing stronger links between educational and professional sectors remains to be seen.

One major challenge in implementing the CFC has been to disseminate the benefits of the framework to citizens and beneficiary institutions. For instance, a common misconception among the general public – including learners, workers and jobseekers – is that they consider the CFC to be a tool for the equivalence of diplomas. The main priorities are implementing the communication strategy (under development) and strengthening links with existing stakeholders to ensure they use, disseminate and fully understand the CFC (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). One of the main objectives of the communication strategy is for CFC/EQF levels to be indicated on all qualifications ([15]).

Main sources of information

URLs accessed 8 June 2023

- CFC Forum (*Instance CFC*).

- Qualifications register (*Registre des certifications*)

- Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonie and COCOF (2013). *Report on referencing the French-speaking qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning.*

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	**Doctoral degree – PhD (Grade générique de Doctorat de l'enseignement supérieur)** **Category** Educational qualification type	8
7	**Master's degree (Grade générique de Master de l'enseignement supérieur)** **Category** Educational qualification type **Advanced master's degree (Master de spécialisation)** **Category** Educational qualification type	7
6	**Bachelor's degree (Grade générique de bachelier de l'enseignement supérieur)** **Category** Educational qualification type	6

5	**Associate degree (Brevet de l'enseignement supérieur)** **Category** Educational qualification type	5
	Professional diploma, level 5 (Diplôme de formation, niveau 5) **Category** Professional qualification e.g. diploma for commercial agent business managers (Diplôme de chef d'entreprise agent(e) commercial(e))	
	Professional foundation diploma, level 5 (Diplôme de formation de base) **Category** Professional qualification e.g. professional foundation diploma for police officers	
	Skills certificate, level 5 (Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 5) **Category** Professional qualification e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for professional trainers for adults (Certificat de compétences acquises en formation de formateur.rice professionnel.le d'adultes)	
4	**Upper secondary education certificate (Certificat de l'enseignement secondaire supérieur (CESS))** **Category** Educational qualification type	4
	Upper secondary vocational education certificate (level 4) (Certificat de qualification en plein exercice ou en alternance) **Category** Educational qualification type	

Qualification certificate for technical qualifying post-secondary education – 7th year (Certification de qualification de septième année technique)
Category

Educational qualification type

Qualification certificate for vocational qualifying post-secondary education – 7th year (Certificat de qualification de septième année professionnelle)
Category

Educational qualification type

Qualification certificate (level 4) – education for social promotion, e.g. qualification certificate for laboratory technicians (Certificat de qualification de technicien.ne chimiste)
Category

Educational qualification type

Certificate of apprenticeship (level 4) offered by regional training services (Certificat d'apprentissage, niveau 4)
Category

Professional qualification

e.g. certificate of apprenticeship for machining technicians (Certificat d'apprentissage de technicien.ne en système d'usinage)

Professional diploma, level 4 (Diplôme de formation, niveau 4)
Category

Professional qualification

e.g. diploma for coordination and supervision – hairdressing manager (Diplôme de coordination et d'encadrement de coiffeur.euse manager)

	Skills certificate (level 4) offered by public employment/training services (Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 4) **Category** Professional qualification e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for graphic	
3	**Upper-secondary vocational qualification certificate (level 3) (Certificat de qualification en plein exercice ou en alternance, niveau 3)** **Category** Educational qualification type	3
	Upper-secondary vocational qualification certificate for special and alternance education (level 3) (Certificat de qualification spécifique (CQS) à l'enseignement spécialisé et en alternance, niveau 3) **Category** Educational qualification type	
	Qualification certificate (level 3) – education for social promotion e.g. qualification certificate for hairdressers (Certificat de Qualification de Coiffeur.euse) **Category** Educational qualification type	
	Certificate of apprenticeship (level 3) offered by regional training services (Certificat d'apprentissage, niveau 3) **Category** Professional qualification e.g. certificate of apprenticeship for hairdressers (Certificat d'apprentissage de Coiffeur.euse)	
	Professional diploma (level 3) (Diplôme de formation, niveau 3) **Category** Professional qualification e.g. diploma for coordination and supervision – supervisor bartender (Diplôme de coordination et d'encadrement de chef barman/barmaid)	

Skills certificate (level 3) offered by public employment/training services (Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 3) Category

Professional qualification

e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for administrative employees (Certificat de compétences acquises en formation d'employé.e administratif.ive)

Skills certificate (level 3) awarded by a consortium for validation (Titre de compétence, niveau 3) Category

Professional qualification

e.g. skills certificate – managing incoming and outgoing contacts as part of the profession of call centre operator (Titre de compétence gérer les contacts entrants et sortants constituant le métier d'opérateur/rice call center)

2	**Lower secondary vocational qualification certificate for special and alternance education (Certificat de qualification spécifique (CQS) à l'enseignement spécialisé et en alternance)** **Category** Educational qualification type	2
	Qualification certificate (level 2) – education for social promotion, e.g. qualification certificate for electrician fitters (Certificat de qualification de monteur électricien) **Category** Educational qualification type	
	Certificate of apprenticeship (level 2) offered by regional training services (Certificat d'apprentissage, niveau 2) **Category** Professional qualification e.g. certificate of apprenticeship for manufacturing agents in the food industry (Certificat d'apprentissage d'agent de fabrication du secteur alimentaire)	
	Skills certificate (level 2) offered by public employment/training services (Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 2) **Category** Professional qualification e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for production operators in the food industry (Certificat de compétences acquises en formation d'opérateur de production en industrie alimentaire)	
	Skills certificate (level 2) awarded by a consortium for validation (Titre de compétence, niveau 2) **Category** Professional qualification e.g. skills certificate – transporting and placing theatre equipment as part of the profession of assistant theatre technician (Titre de compétence transporter et placer le matériel de spectacle faisant partie du métier d'auxiliaire technique de spectacle)	

| 1 | **Certificate of elementary education (6 years) (Certificat d'études de base)** **Category** | 1 |
| | Educational qualification type | |

Acronyms

ARES   Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement supérieur (Academy of Research and Higher Education)

CFC   Cadre francophone des certifications pour l'éducation et la formation tout au long de la vie (French-speaking qualifications framework for lifelong learning)

COCOF   Commission communautaire française de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale (French Community Commission in the Brussels Region)

CPU   *certification par unités d'apprentissage* (certification by learning-outcome units)

CVDC   Consortium de validation des compétences (Skills Validation Consortium)

EQF   European qualifications framework

IFAPME *Institut de formation en alternance des petites et moyennes entreprises* [SME work/study training institute]

NCP   national coordination point

NQF   national qualifications framework

SFPME   Service Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises [Training service for SMEs]

SFMQ   Service francophone des métiers et qualifications (Francophone Service for Trades and Qualifications)

VAE   *validation des acquis de l'expérience* (valorisation of prior experience)

VET   vocational education and training

VNFIL   validation of non-formal and informal learning

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Cedefop (2020b). National qualifications frameworks developments in Europe 2019. Qualifications frameworks: transparency and added value for end users. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

European Commission and Cedefop (2020*). Survey on implementation, use and impact of NQF/EQF* [unpublished].

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European Commission and Directorate General for Education Youth Sport and Culture (2022). *Education and training monitor 2020: Belgium.* Luxembourg: Publications Office.

Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonie and COCOF (2013). *Report on referencing the French-speaking qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning.*

Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonie and COCOF (2018). *Activity report of the CFC* (May 2016-June 2018) [unpublished].

Popovic, M. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Belgium – French speaking community*.

Notes

[1]Skills or validation certificates can partly be considered to be microcredentials, as although they certify (through a formal assessment procedure) the learning outcomes of short-term learning experiences, they do not require a course of training. Source: Internal communication with Instance CFC.

[2]The SFMQ brings together public employment services, social partners, all VET providers and the CVDC. It is responsible for creating profession profiles and training profiles, thus ensuring consistency between the training offered and the needs of the job market. It establishes a link between profiles and the structures of public employment services and improves the legibility of qualifying education systems, training courses, skills validation and job offers. It provides common references and terminology for all partners (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

[3]See the education portal of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles.

[4]ARES is a public-interest organisation funded by the French Community and created by the decree of 7 November 2013 defining the landscape of higher education and the academic organisation of studies. The decree aims to support student success by promoting excellence (of research), consistency (of provision) and quality (of teaching).

[5]The agency is an independent public service and a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and is included in the European quality assurance register for higher education.

[6]A team of two experts (diagnosticians) from the fields of education, training or validation of skills evaluate on-site the assessment processes of VET providers. Data collected were used in the cross-analysis. This was an external evaluation in accordance with the reference framework set out by European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019). The relevant report is available online (in French).

[7]The government order introducing these substructures offers information on their composition.

[8]The Management Committee consists of a president and a vice-president, along with various other members, including important stakeholders.

[9]The Committee of Experts meets with the Management and Executive Committees once a year to provide its opinion on current and future decisions, along with useful information on the functioning of the system and an evaluation of its implementation.

[10]The Board of Appeal deals with appeals on the allocation of levels to

qualifications.

[11]This section draws mainly on input from Popovic (2019).

[12]It is important to make the distinction between the concepts of âvalorisationâ (enhancing and getting credit for prior experience with a view to obtaining access to formal education and training) and âvalidationâ (giving access to a recognised title or qualification). Skills certificates awarded through validation are recognised by educational authorities and use the same standards as the formal system. They are not awarded by vocational training institutions, but are instead organised by the CVDC and the accredited validation centres. They can be used to access further training courses and can be combined to obtain a qualification in the adult education sector that may be included in the CFC.

[13]Order of the government of the French Community setting out the methods of valuing acquired knowledge for admission, exemption and sanction in one or more social advancement teaching units.

[14]All levelled qualifications are automatically included in the register and published on the website.

[15]Source: Internal communication with Instance CFC.

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