NQF state of play

Austria 2024

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Overview

Stage of development: Operational stage

NQF linked to EQF: ✓

Scope of the framework:
The NQF is open to all types of qualifications from the formal and non-formal sectors. It has a 'Y structure', which captures differences between higher education and all other qualifications at higher levels.

Number of levels:

Eight

Legal basis/stage of development:

Federal Law 14/2016 on the NQF
(in German)

NQF/EQF website:
⧉ Website

Qualifications register/database:
⧉ Qualifications register

Introduction and context

1.1. Policy context

In Austria, the 2023 public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) was 4.9%, above the EU-27 average of 4.7% for the same year ([1]). The percentage of tertiary education attainment (aged 25-34) increased from 43.5% in 2023 to 44.1% in 2024, almost equal to the EU-27 average of 44.2% in 2024 ([2]). Participation in upper secondary vocational education and training (VET) remained steady over the last three years (2021-23) at 68.9%, well above the EU average, of 49.1% in 2023 ([3]). The employment rate of recent VET graduates (aged 20-34) also remained high in 2024 at 85.3%, well above the EU average of 80.0% for the same year ([4]). Participation in early childhood education in 2023 was 91.2%, below the EU average of 94.6% ([5]). In 2024, the share of early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) was 8.1%, lower than the EU average of 9.3% ([6]). Finally, in 2024, adult participation in learning increased to 17.6% (from 15.8% in 2022), well above the EU average of 13.3% in 2024 ([7]).

The Federal Act on the National Qualifications Framework (NQR Act) provides a foundation and framework for policy initiatives in various areas (e.g. education, economics, youth) undertaken by ministries and the social partners. These include measures to create a legal basis for, and to expand, tertiary VET, in parallel to higher education. A non-paper from the labour ministry, submitted for the European Year of Skills 2023, highlights the importance of the EQF in developing new vocational qualification models (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

1.2. NQF legal basis

The NQR Act, approved in 2016 (and its explanatory document), established the governance structure and outlined implementation procedures, including the levelling of formal and non-formal qualifications to the NQR and the publication of levelled qualifications in the NQR register. Further explanations of principles - along with detailed descriptions of NQR levels, criteria and levelling/allocation procedures - are contained in the NQR manual, which was also adopted in 2016. Updates to the allocation request form were adopted in 2019. The NQR is well embedded in the legislation governing education and training, especially the legal basis for VET qualifications, including the 2017 Engineering Act, curriculum ordinances, curriculum reform ordinances,

qualification examination ordinances and training ordinances (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). Since 2022, Austria has adopted several legal acts on the levelling of several qualifications. With the adoption of the Higher Vocational Education Act, higher vocational qualifications have also been included at level 7. The education ministry ([8]) also integrates learning outcomes with reference to the NQR when developing new curricula in vocational education (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Policy objectives

The NQR aims to clarify educational pathways, promote lifelong learning by bridging the formal and non-formal education sectors, and ensure that Austrian qualifications are understood across Europe. More specifically, and according to the explanatory document attached to the NQR Act, the framework aims to:

a. increase the transparency, understanding and comparability of Austrian qualifications at national and European levels;
b. promote cross-border mobility;
c. promote permeability within and between the formal and non-formal sectors of the qualification system in the context of lifelong learning;
d. strengthen the recognition and value of qualifications and skills;
e. promote learning outcomes as a common denominator of levelled qualifications;
f. promote the European dimension in higher education.

The NQR also aims to promote benchmarks and targets relating to quality, as defined in the 2020 strategic framework for education and training, and to competitiveness, employability and social cohesion in the context of the 2030 strategy on education and training. In summary, it ensures international comparability of qualifications, supports cross-border recruitment, and enhances transparency of graduate competencies for job descriptions and curriculum development (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The NQR has eight levels ([9]), equivalent to those of the EQF. A 'Y structure' was agreed to capture differences between higher education and VET qualifications at levels 6 to 8 of the NQR. EQF level descriptors are used for all qualifications at levels 1 to 5, while levels 6 to 8 follow two strands: qualifications related to the Bologna cycles (bachelor degree, master degree and doctorate), for which Dublin descriptors are used; and other qualifications, for which EQF level descriptors are used. Additional explanations ([10]) serve as a guide to make the EQF descriptors understood in the national context ([11]).

3.2. NQF scope and coverage

The NQR includes qualifications from the formal sector (higher education, VET and qualifications under the responsibility of other ministries such as defence and health) and the non-formal sector. Considerable progress has been made in expanding the coverage of the NQR. Since 2022, 25 new qualifications (15 non-formal and 10 formal) have been included, bringing the total number of qualifications as of 2024 to 114. The new additions reflect a broadening of the framework to incorporate diverse fields such as digital skills, healthcare, education, customs, and trades. Notable examples include new formal qualifications like the Dual Academy Professional tracks and medical specialisations, alongside non-formal qualifications such as certified trainers, digital coaches, and customs professionals (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The NQR is open to qualifications awarded outside formal education and actively includes them. As of September 2024, 41 such qualifications have been integrated into the framework. Since 2019, efforts have been made to systematically map these qualifications, supported by dedicated NQR service points that assist providers in submitting mapping proposals. This initiative aims to enhance the visibility and comparability of non-formal learning, contributing to a more comprehensive representation of the national education and training system (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). Since 2020, professional qualifications have been included at NQR levels 6, 5 and 4, youth qualifications at NQR levels 4 and 3 and Chance B qualifications at levels 2 and 1. In 2024, the adoption of the Federal Act on Higher Vocational Education established higher

vocational qualifications, assigning them to NQR levels 5, 6, and 7. Additional, sector-specific regulations also reference the NQR. The 2023 qualifying examination for government approved master builder maps this qualification to NQR level 7. The 2023 revised shoemaker master craftsman examination is referenced at NQR level 6, as was the 2022 qualifying examination for government-approved body piercing (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The NQR does not include, nor is it open to, partial qualifications, microcredentials, international qualifications, or individual modules/units of learning outcomes. While Austria is open to European initiatives, there are no plans to incorporate them at this stage. The framework remains focused on full qualifications, whether formal or non-formal, and aligns with the national approach set out in the Austrian NQR Act (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

A quality assurance process was put in place, and six NQR service points were set up in the same year (Chapter 5) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020).

3.3. Use of learning outcomes

The implementation of the NQR has strengthened the focus on learning outcomes in both formal and non-formal education. Training providers now increasingly design or revise qualifications based on learning outcomes, using NQR level descriptors as a guide. This approach has shaped curricula and the development of training programmes. Examples include the prison officer and Staff Non-Commissioned Officer qualifications in the formal sector, and the Certified Education Manager and Youth Leader training based on nature experience education in the non-formal sector (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

In school-based VET, learning outcomes are defined by VET educational standards, implemented using a step-by-step approach. Educational standards for VET schools and colleges define 'content' (subject and knowledge areas and topics with specified goals), 'action' (cognitive achievements required in specific subjects), and personal and social competences related to a specific field. Competence-oriented and standardised upper secondary school leaving examinations have been in place since the 2015/2016 school year; they grant direct access to higher education.

Higher VET curricula are being revised and qualifications awarded by VET colleges are being updated based on NQR principles. In 2028, master

craftsperson qualifications have been aligned to the requirements of the NQR and included at level 6 of the framework, reflecting the high level of esteem in which this qualification is held in Austria. The necessary qualification standards have been developed for each craft or regulated trade (using the learning outcomes approach), along with training documents, guidelines for the design of examinations and competence-oriented examination tasks. The use of learning outcomes plays an important role in promoting quality assurance (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023).

The inclusion of apprenticeship qualifications (dual system) in the NQR introduced new requirements for the development/revision of apprenticeship profiles. Expected learning outcomes should be aligned with the corresponding NQR level descriptors. Specific guidelines have been adopted, and apprenticeship profiles are being developed or revised in accordance with them (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023).

The implementation of the learning outcomes approach in higher education is linked to the Bologna process and Dublin descriptors. Higher education institutions have already described their programmes and qualification profiles in learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences), and have developed guidance material on implementing the learning outcomes approach (Cedefop, 2022), but implementation differs between institutions.

Guidelines for developing learning outcomes approaches in adult education became available in 2011, as part of NQR development, and learning outcomes were introduced in quality guidelines for the accreditation of institutions offering free basic skills courses (Cedefop, 2016).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The main authority in charge of NQR development and implementation is the education ministry, which is responsible for all education and training subsystems. The EQF national coordination point for the national qualification framework' (NCP NQF) - the main administrative, coordinating and information office on the NQR and the EQF - was set up by the Federal Act on the NQR as an independent body within the Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (*Österreichischer Austauschdienst* - OeAD). It is governed by a contract between the OeAD and the education ministry and funded by the education and labour ministries, along with EU grants. The EQF NCP is staffed by five employees (2.5 full-time equivalents). It is responsible for the day-to-day running of the NQR, while its tasks include (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020):

    a. mapping qualifications to the NQR in accordance with the NQR Act;
    b. further developing the NQR register;
    c. supporting all relevant bodies involved in the process (NQR steering committee, NQR advisory board, NQR service points and experts);
    d. public relations and consultation;
    e. networking at the national and European levels.

The Austrian context has been characterised from the beginning by active stakeholder involvement and occasional conflicting views on the NQR's role ([12]). Cooperation has been strong, especially with the social partners, who were both part of the development of the legal framework of the NQR and part of the qualification mapping process (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020).

The NQR steering committee, chaired by the education ministry, has 32 members representing all key stakeholders (all relevant federal ministries, social partners, stakeholders from the various fields of education and training, the public employment service, federal youth representation and the *Länder*). The committee was set up to advise the education and labour ministries and meets regularly but is not involved in the day-to-day running of the NQR (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020). Further tasks include approving operational procedures (such as

the inclusion of qualifications in the NQR register and appeals) and content-related issues (such as the adoption of the NQR manual). This broad representation reflects stakeholder interests and acknowledges the importance of social aspects in the allocation of qualifications to levels.

An NQR advisory board, consisting of seven experts from different education sectors (initial, further and continuing education and training, professional practice, higher education), was established to advise the EQF NCP by providing a written opinion on allocation requests. In addition, the EQF NCP maintains a list of experts who may be consulted in the process of examining allocation requests.

The NQR service points were introduced by the NQR Act and authorised by the education ministry. There are six service points, which are intermediaries between qualification providers and the EQF coordination point, and which serve as gatekeepers of the NQR ([13]). They perform a quality assurance function and support qualification providers in preparing allocation requests (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; Cedefop & ReferNet Austria, 2020).

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

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

The national strategy for validating non-formal and informal learning, adopted in November 2017, is linked to the 2020 lifelong learning strategy and the development of the NQR. The strategy has not yet been fully implemented. It aims to improve the steering, coordination, coherence and quality assurance of validation activities in various sectors (Luomi-Messerer, 2024). Another aim is to promote a learning outcome orientation of education and training. Validation arrangements remain very limited. Only a small number of professional qualifications at NQR levels 5 and 6, particularly in adult education (e.g. certified adult educators and education managers), are available through validation. For most qualifications, however, there are no validation routes, no credits, and no alternative access paths through prior learning or experience (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). Validation exists in the various education and training sectors but lacks coherence, as there is no uniform legal framework regulating the strategy for validating non-formal and informal learning (Luomi-Messerer, 2024). To date, various acts and regulations have included mechanisms and arrangements that enable formal education and training institutions to recognise learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings, such as through external exams. Thus, there are distinct validation initiatives in different formal and non-formal sectors.

Examples of external exams include the acquisition of the compulsory school leaving certificate (*Pflichtschulabschluss*) by young people and adults, and exceptional admission to the final apprenticeship exam for those without formal training ([14]). Validation is also used to obtain exemptions and shorten programmes in general education or VET, and to shorten degree programmes at universities of applied sciences based on the recognition of professional experience.

In 2021, the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences in higher education was legally strengthened. Since then, all higher education institutions are required to carry out procedures to identify, document and assess achieved learning outcomes in order for them to be recognised (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023).

NQF implementation and impact

6.1. Stage of implementation

The NQR has reached the operational stage. In 2023, a new strategy was adopted to support its continued development, building on the provisions of the NQR Act. The primary goal of this strategy is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the qualification mapping process. Additionally, it aims to improve communication regarding the benefits of NQR referencing, both for qualification providers and individuals, by emphasising the value of aligning qualifications with the framework (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.2. Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF

The NQR provides a structured approach to referencing all types of qualifications, ensuring consistency and transparency across the education and training system.

Higher education qualifications within the Bologna system - bachelor, master and doctorate degrees - are automatically referenced to the NQR through provisions in the NQR Act. All other qualifications are levelled through a formal allocation process ([15]) initiated by a submitted request. While the process itself is consistent across qualification types, the submitting body varies depending on the qualification's origin. Since 2019, dedicated procedures and structures have been established to enable the levelling of non-government-regulated qualifications, particularly those acquired through adult education, continuing training, and youth work.

The process of referencing formal qualifications in the NQR, as described in the NQR Act, begins when the relevant federal ministry or provincial government which holds responsibility for the qualification in question, initiates a request for referencing. This request must include a proposal for the qualification's NQR level, along with all necessary supporting documentation and descriptions of learning outcomes. Once submitted, the request is reviewed by the EQF NCP. This body carries out a formal and content-related examination of the proposal. As part of its evaluation, the EQF NCP may seek expert opinions from qualified professionals and always requires an official statement from the NQR Advisory Board, a group of independent experts. Following this, the EQF NCP presents the qualification and its mapping decision to the NQR Steering Group. This

group, composed of representatives from ministries, educational institutions, and other stakeholders, holds the power to veto the referencing decision. A veto requires a two-thirds majority within a three-month period. If no veto is raised during that time, the qualification is officially entered into the NQR register, making its referencing public and official. Once entered, the qualification provider receives confirmation and may refer to the assigned NQR level in public communications, for informational purposes only, as referencing has no direct legal effect on professional rights or entitlements.

The same process is followed for non-formal qualifications, those not regulated by law. The only difference is that a qualification provider works with an authorised NQR service centre, which assists in preparing and submitting a referencing request to the EQF NCP, ensuring the learning outcomes are well-defined and verifiable.

6.3. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

Since 2020, there has been considerable progress in indicating NQR levels on qualifications. The qualification provider is entitled to use the awarded NQR level on its certificates. Most providers use this opportunity. NQR levels are often indicated on many Europass certificate supplements at levels 4 to 6. All NQR qualifications are included in the qualifications register, where their NQR and EQF levels are indicated (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.4. NQF dissemination

The NQR communication strategy is part of the annual report to the parliament on the NQR, with the most recent one published in 2023. The EQF NCP acts as the central authority for the implementation and promotion of the NQR. Its core mandate is to increase public awareness and understanding of the NQR through targeted communication measures, including events, seminars, consultations, and the distribution of brochures and promotional materials. Comprehensive information on the NQR, such as qualification assignments, the European and national frameworks, learning outcomes, and national developments, is made accessible to all stakeholders via the official NQR register website. The EQF NCP worked closely with Europass and Euroguidance to align efforts with the European Skills Agenda and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. These partnerships supported the dissemination and promotion of EU tools that facilitate mobility, lifelong learning, and employability (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

In 2023, the EQF NCP focused its communication efforts on promoting the recent NQR developments, particularly in light of the growing number of qualifications included - 87 in that year alone. A key priority was raising awareness of non-formal qualifications, in coordination with NQR service points and the OeAD (Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation). The EQF NCP also hosted the NQF Forum at the OeAD House, during which various stakeholders, including qualification providers, service centres, and Advisory Board members, engaged in discussions on the benefits, visibility, and opportunities of the NQR. Brochures and promotional materials are published regularly, while a handbook on the mapping of formal and non-formal qualifications to the NQR has also been developed ([16]). Public engagement was enhanced through targeted events, training for guidance counsellors, participation in fairs, and the use of NQR levels on certificate supplements. Online visibility also improved significantly, with over 95 000 website visits, an increase of 33% from the previous year, reflecting rising public interest and awareness (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

More qualification providers and databases now indicate NQR levels, often linking directly to the official NQR register. This supports easier comparison of qualifications and encourages further uptake (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.5. Qualifications databases and registers

All qualifications assigned an NQR level are published in the national qualifications register, which is available in German and partly in English. No unlevelled qualifications are included, as publishing the qualification in the register is a legal requirement for the levelling to become effective. As if 2024, the register contains 114 qualifications ([17]). The register targets experts, stakeholders, qualification providers and learners. It provides information in German and English on the field of study, the EQF level, what the learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do (as open text), the awarding body, and entry requirements. Elements such as further information on the qualification and links to qualification supplements are partially covered. Only the main learning outcomes (10 to 15) are published in the register, aiming to depict the level of the qualification concisely, depending on the chosen verbs. While some additional national databases exist, only certain ones are interconnected with the NQR register. The national data model is aligned with the European Learning Model v.3, enabling data exchange and interoperability (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

6.6. Awareness and use of the NQF

Awareness of the NQR/EQF in Austria has gradually improved across various stakeholder groups, though levels vary.

Among learners and students, awareness of the NQR/EQF remains moderate and is supported by indirect evidence. The visibility of the NQR has increased, as shown by the growing traffic to the EQF NCP website and the NQR register. The indication of NQR/EQF levels on qualification certificates, especially in vocational and apprenticeship pathways, has also contributed to increased awareness. While more qualification providers and public databases now reference NQR levels, the framework is still not widely relevant or recognised by the average learner. Ongoing efforts to integrate NQR references into learner-facing materials are helping to gradually build awareness in this group.

Similarly, workers and job seekers show moderate familiarity, with the NQR becoming increasingly relevant for continuing education and job applications. Among education and training providers, awareness is high due to the promotional value of NQR mapping, although administrative demands remain a limiting factor.

Labour market stakeholders present a mixed picture. Employers and trade unions demonstrate moderate awareness, with the NQR becoming more pertinent in international recruitment and qualification transparency. Trade unions are increasingly recognising the NQR as a means to enhance permeability across education sectors, supporting both workers and employers, in line with their broader role in promoting lifelong learning and continuing professional development. Employment services, on the other hand, show high awareness and actively integrate NQR data into their systems.

Awareness of the NQR/EQF among guidance and counselling practitioners in Austria is high, supported by initiatives such as a project on validating transversal skills.

Recognition authorities report high awareness due to frequent public queries, while public authorities and key actors in the NQR governance structure exhibit very high awareness through their direct involvement in the NQR Steering Group (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The use of the NQR across different groups in Austria remains varied but generally moderate to high. Learners and students use the NQR at a moderate level, mainly through its presence on qualification certificates and in online tools. While not embedded in everyday decisions, the framework is increasingly used for job or visa applications abroad,

notably in Australia. Workers and jobseekers also demonstrate moderate use, often leveraging the NQR when pursuing further training or international employment.

Among labour market stakeholders, employers and trade unions show moderate engagement. Employers use the NQR particularly in international recruitment and tenders, while trade unions are beginning to explore its potential to support mobility and recognition across sectors. Employment services, however, show high use, actively integrating the NQR in databases and qualification descriptions to support job matching and guidance.

Education and training providers exhibit high use of the NQR. Providers mapped to the NQR use it prominently for programme promotion, supported by the NQR register and oversight from the EQF NCP. Bodies designing or revising qualifications also show high use, especially in vocational education, where NQR descriptors are embedded in qualification standards and legislation, shaping qualification development.

Guidance and counselling practitioners have a moderate but rising level of use, supported by collaboration within the OeAD and involvement in EU-level projects. Quality assurance bodies show very low use. There is no clear link between quality assurance procedures and the NQR, with quality largely governed by national legal frameworks. Recognition authorities demonstrate high use of the NQR, especially when evaluating foreign qualifications, where the framework serves as a useful reference, even if not a formal recognition tool (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.7. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

No formal evaluation has taken place. However, the institutional structure and the implementation of the NQR have been monitored through working groups. The focus was on the cooperation among the NQR steering committee, NQR service points, the EQF NCP and the responsible ministries, and on how to speed up the levelling process and better communicate the framework. This has led to a better understanding of specific elements of the levelling process, more transparency and faster levelling of qualifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). Regarding the monitoring of the NQR service points, several feedback meetings between the service points, the EQF NCP and the education ministry took place in 2022. The service units were also able to provide written feedback. The EQF NCP drew conclusions from the results

(Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023) and is now working with the service points on measures to increase the number of qualifications levelled to the NQR, enhance visibility and ensure high quality ([18]).

6.8. Impact of the NQF

The NQR has contributed notably to increasing transparency and comparability of qualifications, particularly through the growing number of qualifications referenced in the NQR. This facilitates the visibility of both formal and non-formal qualifications and supports comparability at national and international levels, aided by tools such as qualification registers.

While the NQR itself is not a quality assurance instrument, it has significantly supported the use of learning outcomes in curriculum development and revision across various sectors. Formal qualifications such as those for prison officers and staff non-commissioned officers, as well as non-formal ones such as certified education managers, now increasingly reflect learning outcome-based approaches. There is limited evidence of the NQR directly enhancing employability, though the EQF is increasingly used for international mobility and comparison of foreign qualifications, despite the NQR not serving as a formal recognition or admission tool. Since 2019, efforts have been underway to systematically map non-formal qualifications to the national framework. To facilitate this process, NQR service points were established, providing guidance and support to qualification holders in preparing and submitting their mapping proposals. By integrating a broad spectrum of non-formal qualifications, the framework aims to enhance transparency and ensure that the full scope of the national education system is accurately reflected (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Institutional dialogue and cooperation have been strengthened through the NQR Steering Group, which includes stakeholders from education and labour market sectors and meets regularly. The NQR has also played a supportive role in broader system reforms, notably influencing the development of Austria's law on higher vocational education and training (HBB-Gesetz).

Finally, the NQR is a useful reference tool for lifelong learning, offering learners guidance on continuing education and training opportunities by integrating qualifications from both formal and non-formal sectors (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Referencing to the EQF

Austria referenced its national qualifications framework to the EQF and self-certified its higher education qualifications to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area in June 2012, by means of a single comprehensive report.

Important lessons and future plans

Although the national qualification system has traditionally witnessed a distinct separation between education and training sectors, the NQR has helped reduce barriers between them, promote permeability, and increase the transparency of qualifications. One major success in the NQR implementation process has been the considerable increase in the number of levelled qualifications, including those awarded through non-formal learning and validation. NQR qualifications cover a wide range of education fields and sectors, constantly expanding the framework's coverage; nevertheless, general education qualifications are still not levelled (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

Major enabling factors in the implementation of the NQR include:

a. the adoption of the NQR Act, which serves as an institutional foundation for the development of the framework and the expansion of its coverage;
b. the commitment of EQF NCP staff in supporting the process of levelling qualifications;
c. the support of the education and labour ministries and their efficient collaboration.

The engagement of a broad range of stakeholders, representing all education and training sectors and social partners through the NQR steering committee and the NQR service points, is another enabling factor. Close cooperation between the EQF NCP, Euroguidance, and Europass, all based at OeAD, fosters valuable synergies and a coordinated approach to raising awareness and integrating the NQR into guidance practices (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

The strategic plan introduced to further develop the NQR in alignment with the NQR Act is expected to streamline and improve the qualification mapping process and increase the visibility and value of qualifications. Looking ahead, ongoing outreach, clearer qualification labelling, and the continued expansion of NQR service points are expected to deepen public understanding and support broader implementation of the framework (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Main sources of information

[URLs accessed 9/5/2025]

Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation OeAD.

NQR register.

Austria. Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Federal Ministry of Science and Research (2011). *Austrian EQF referencing report*.

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	**Doctorate (Doktorgrade)** **Level 8 professional qualifications in the health sector awarded by the Federal Ministry of Health** e.g. clinical psychology (Klinische Psychologie); healthcare psychology (Gesundheitspsychologie), General Practitioner, Specialised doctor for cardiac surgery, Specialised doctor for internal medicine	8
7	**Master degree (Master- bzw. Diplomgrade)** **Level 7 professional qualification. Qualifying examination for the regulated trade of building construction and civil engineering**	7
6	**Bachelor degree (Bachelorgrade)** **Master craftsperson (Meister)** e.g. Meister/in für das Handwerk Kraftfahrzeugtechnik, Master craftsperson (gewerblicher Meister/in) - Meister/in für das Handwerk Fleischer, Master craftsperson - Meister/in für das Handwerk Friseur und Perückenmacher (Stylist), Master craftsperson - Meister/in für das Handwerk Orthopädieschuhmacher, Master craftsperson - Meister/in für das Handwerk Spengler **Master of agriculture (landwirtschaftliche/r Meister/in)** e.g. Graduate professional agriculturist,Graduate professional horticulturist, Graduate professional rural businnes manager **Engineer (Ingenieur)**	6

Level 6 professional qualification in the health sector– nurse responsible for general care (RL 2005/36/EG) (Gehobener Dienst für Gesundheits- und Krankenpflege (Diplomierte Gesundheitsund Krankenpflegerin, Diplomierter Gesundheits- und Krankenpfleger))

e.g. Gehobener Dienst für Gesundheits- und Krankenpflege (Diplomierte Gesundheitsund Krankenpflegerin, Diplomierter Gesundheits- und Krankenpfleger

Level 6 professional qualification

e.g. certified master chef (WIFI Diplom-Küchenmeister/in); managing director cooperative Raiffeisen bank (Geschäftsleiter/in genossenschaftliche Raiffeisenbank), WIFI Fachtechniker/in für Automatisierungstechnik: specialist graduated from WIFI post-secondary VET college for automation technology, Diplomierte/r Erwachsenenbildner/in (wba) mit einem der folgenden Schwerpunkte: Lehren/Gruppenleitung/Training; Beratung; Bildungsmanagement; Bibliothekswesen, certified professional photographer+, Supervisor/Supervision, certified education manager, Befähigungsprüfung für das reglementierte Gewerbe der Überlassung von Arbeitskräften (Arbeitskräfteüberlassungs-Befähigungsprüfungsordnung), Befähigungsprüfung für das reglementierte Gewerbe der Bestattung, Befähigungsprüfung für das reglementierte Gewerbe

5	**VET college/school leaving certificate - 5-year programmes (BHS) (Reife- und Diplomprüfung der berufsbildenden höheren Schulen))**	5

e.g. Controlling, business practice and taxes, Entrepreneurship and management, Financial and risk management, Information and communication techology –e-business, International business, Communcation management and marketing, Logistics management, Management, controlling and accounting, Quality management and integrated management systems, Ecologically-oriented management, Sports Management

	Level 5 professional qualification awarded by the Federal Ministry of Defence – staff non-commissioned officer (Stabsunteroffizier oder Stabsunteroffizierin (StbUO, Erstverwendung))	
	Level 5 professional qualification awarded by the Federal Ministry of Justice – senior prison officer (Exekutivdienst in der Verwendungsgruppe E2a im Justizressort (Dienstführenden Grundausbildung - mittleres Management))	
	Level 5 professional qualification e.g. certified adult educator (zertifizierte/r Erwachsenenbildner/in wba); customs declarant (Zolldeklarantin/Zolldeklarant), EBC*L CERTIFIED MANAGER, Duale Akademie (DA) Professional - Mechatronik - Automatisierungstechnik, certified trainer plus in adult education, MEPA Course – Preventing and Combating Cross-Border Crime (MEPA-Kurs - Vorbeugung und Bekämpfung grenzüberschreitender Kriminalität), Nursing assistance (level 2), Digital Systems Professional, Duale Akademie Professional — Application development-Coding, Duale Akademie Professional — Wholesale, Certified Instructor for Functional Claw Trimming, certified trainer and digital coach in adult education, BFI Expert Trainer Digital+, BFI Junior Software Developers (BFI JSD)	
	Level 5 formal qualification (Stabsunteroffizier Miliz (StbUO Miliz, Folgeverwendung))	
4	**VET school qualification - 3- and 4-year programmes (BMS) (Abschluss der berufsbildenden mittleren Schule)**	4
	Apprenticeship certificate (Lehrabschluss) e.g. Apprenticeship Office Assistant, Apprenticeship Bricklayer, Apprenticeship Restaurant Specialist, Apprenticeship Metal Technology, Apprenticeship Motor Vehicle Engineering, Apprenticeship Installations and Building Technology, Apprenticeship Retail Trade Services, Apprenticeship Bricklayer, Apprenticeship Electrical Engineering, Apprenticeship Cook, Apprenticeship Joinery	

	Level 4 professional qualification awarded by the Federal Ministry of Defence – career non-commissioned officer (Militärberufsunteroffizier oder Militärberufsunteroffizierin (MBUO, Erstverwendung))	
	Level 4 professional qualification awarded by regional governments – agricultural technical schools – 3 years (Abschlussprüfung an der landwirtschaftlichen Fachschule) e.g Business and Household Management, Horticulture, Agriculture, Pomiculture, Horse Management, Viticulture and Cellar Management	
	Level 4 youth qualification e.g. alpine education course (Lehrgang Alpinpädagogik), Pedagogical foundation for trainers in self-defense, combat sports and martial arts (SKuK), Jugendleiter/innenausbildung auf Basis der Naturerlebnispädagogik, Certified Course for Rural Youth´s top Functionaries	
	Level 4 professional non-formal qualification e.g. EBCL Betriebswirtschaft; BFI Professional Trainer (BFI Fachtrainer/in)	
	Level 4 health qualification awarded by the Federal Ministry of Health – nursing assistance (level 1)	
	Level 4 formal qualification e.g. Basic police training for law enforcement service, prison officer	
3	**Level-3 youth qualifications** e.g. family group leader (Familiengruppenleiter/in des Österreichischen Alpenvereins), Youth leader	3
	Level 3 professional non-formal qualification e.g. EBCL JobReady	

2	**Level-2 Chance B qualifications** e.g. housekeeping level 2 (Grundqualifikation hotellerie), Grundqualifikation Grünraumpflege Level 2, technisch-handwerkliche Grundqualifikation Level 1, Grundqualifikation Einzelhandel Level 2, Grundqualifikation Bürokraft Level 2, Grundqualifikation Gastronomie-Küchenkraft Level 2	2
1	**Level-1 Chance B qualifications** e.g. housekeeping level 1 (Grundqualifikation hotellerie), Grundqualifikation Grünraumpflege Level 1, technisch-handwerkliche Grundqualifikation Level 1, Grundqualifikation Einzelhandel Level 1, Grundqualifikation Bürokraft Level 1, Grundqualifikation Gastronomie-Küchenkraft Level 1	1

Acronyms

EQF	European qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
NQR	Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen (Austrian qualifications framework)
OeAD	Österreichischer Austauschdienst (Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research)
VET	vocational education and training

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Notes

[1]More information at Eurostat [gov_10a_exp], accessed 6 May 2025.

[2]More information at Eurostat [edat_lfs_9912], accessed 6 May 2025.

[3]More information at Eurostat [educ_uoe_enra13], accessed 6 May 2025.

[4]More information at Eurostat [edat_lfse_24], accessed 6 May 2025.

[5]More information at Eurostat [educ_uoe_enra21], accessed 6 May 2025. Definition differs for EU 27.

[6]More information at Eurostat [edat_lfse_14], accessed 6 May 2025.

[7]More information at Eurostat [sdg_04_60], accessed 6 May 2025.

[8]The official title is Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung - BMBWF).

[9]The decision on the number of levels followed broad consultation, a study that provided information on the implicit hierarchy in the national qualification system and NQR pilot projects (Austria. Federal Ministry of Education, Arts & Culture and Austrian Federal Ministry of Science & Research, 2011).

[10]The explanations were formulated to build on existing qualification descriptions, curricula, training regulations and legal documents.

[11]In addition to the EQF descriptors and the national explanations, reference qualifications were also used in the referencing process to illustrate the learning outcome requirements for each level and to guide the allocation process.

[12]For example, on the topic of opening up NQF levels 6 to 8 to non-traditional higher education qualifications, with VET stakeholders on one side and higher education on the other.

[13]They are responsible for ensuring that the qualification to be submitted meets the NQR requirements, and that the information contained in the application is well documented, trustworthy and sufficient for making a levelling decision (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020).

[14]The requirement is that they are over 18 years old and have evidence of having acquired the corresponding vocational skills and knowledge, for example through work experience or courses (Luomi-Messerer, 2024).

[15]A schematic view of the mapping process is available in Cedefop and ReferNet Austria (2020).

[16]The handbook provides general information on the NQR and the EQF, along with a checklist of requirements that must be met for a qualification to be levelled to the NQR. The handbook also presents the levelling and a detailed explanation of level descriptors.

[17]Doctoral and master degrees are not mapped in the register. (Source: Internal communication with the OeAD.)

[18]Source: Internal communication with the OeAD.

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