

NQF state of play

 **Belgium-DE 2024**

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Overview

Stage of development: Activation stage

NQF linked to EQF: ✗

Scope of the framework:

The NQF includes all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training.

Number of levels:

Eight

Legal basis/stage of development:

Decree on establishing a qualifications framework for the German-speaking Community (2013)

([in German](#))

Introduction and context

1.1. Policy context

In Belgium in 2022, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product was 6.3%, which was 1.6 percentage points higher than the EU average. The country performs above average on several key education and training indicators. In 2022, participation in early childhood education was 98.4%, while in 2023 the share of early leavers from education and training was 6.2%. In 2022, the share of upper secondary students in vocational education and training (VET) was 56.5%, while tertiary educational attainment (age 25-34) was 52.3% in 2023. Only participation of adults in learning (age 25-64) was lower than the EU average (34.9% and 39.5% respectively) (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport & Culture, 2024).

1.2. NQF legal basis

In 2013, the Ministry of the German-speaking Community adopted a [Decree establishing the QDG](#). The Decree sets the general principles and objectives of the QDG, describes in detail the level descriptors of the framework, outlines criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications, and presents the level of each qualification included in the QDC.

Policy objectives

A main objective of the framework is to strengthen national and international understanding and comparability of qualifications. While subject to federal laws on education applying in Belgium, the geographic location of the region means that citizens are likely to cross regional or national borders for living and working. This makes it a priority to clarify the relationship between own qualifications and those awarded in the neighbouring countries. The framework also aims to promote parity of esteem between general education and VET ([1]) and increase permeability among education sectors. Promoting learning outcomes is an important step in increasing transparency and strengthening permeability.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The QDG is an eight-level, learning-outcomes-based framework. Only qualifications with clear description of learning outcomes and those obtained in institutions accredited by the Government are included. The framework builds on the concept of *Handlungskompetenz* (action competence) with qualifications levels defined in terms of two categories of descriptors: subject/occupation-specific competences, referring to knowledge and skills; personal competences, referring to social competence and autonomy.

Table 1. **Level descriptors of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, main categories**

<i>Handlungskompetenz</i> (action competence)			
Subject/occupation-oriented competence (<i>Fachliche Kompetenz</i>)		Personal competence (<i>Personale Kompetenz</i>)	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Autonomy

Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2013).

In addition to the legally stipulated descriptors, the so-called Dublin descriptors also apply to qualifications in the higher education sector in the German-speaking Community.

3.2. NQF scope and coverage

The QDG includes qualifications from primary and secondary general education, VET and higher education. An important criterion for a qualification to be included in the QDG, is its relevance to the labour market and for further learning. According to the 2013 Decree, a total of 21 qualification types have been assigned to QDG. A technical commission in charge of levelling and inclusion has been put in place.

It distinguishes between general and vocational qualifications. General upper secondary education (*Abitur*) is placed at level four, with the three

cycles of bachelor, master and doctor placed at levels six to eight. In vocational education and training, completed apprenticeship (dual system) is at level four. A master craftsman with two years of training is placed at level five, one with three years of training at level six. The 2013 Decree, setting the QDG, envisages that validation of non-formal and informal learning will be linked to the framework.

3.3. Use of learning outcomes

The framework is seen as an instrument for promoting a learning-outcomes- or competence-based approach across the different parts of education and training in the region.

3.4. Quality assurance arrangements

Quality assurance arrangements in the German-speaking Community are organised as follows: the higher education institution Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien coordinates the internal and external evaluation of schools ([2]); the School Inspectorate (*Schulinspektion*) is in charge of the quality assurance and development of the teaching system of primary, secondary as well as school-based continuing education ([3]); and an external evaluation agency for VET schools and VET competence centres is in place (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Department of VET and Organisation of Education in the Ministry of the Community has been appointed as the EQF NCP and a leading institution; it has the task of referencing QDG to the EQF, using transparent methodologies and providing all stakeholders, institutions and companies with relevant information. The framework has been developed over a relatively short time, involving all main education and training stakeholders in the German-speaking Community. This includes the social partners who normally play a key role in an education and training system inspired by that of Germany, such as the Institute for Education and Training in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (*Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen, IAWM*). Scientific cooperation has been established with the Flemish Community and the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB).

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

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

In 2014, the German-speaking Community started developing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning linked to the QDG, as envisaged by the 2013 decree introducing the framework. The strategy for introducing a validation system was outlined in 2015 and referred to European developments in this area; its key target group was individuals with no (or low) qualifications (Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, 2015). Validation has been mainly implemented through the ESF project Shaping future paths (launched in 2018). Individuals were offered skills assessment, counselling, and validation/recognition of vocational competences. Validation is linked to apprenticeships, as individuals holding non-formal and/or informal competences in an occupation for which there is an apprenticeship in the German-speaking Community, are given the opportunity to sit the practical final examination to certify their practical vocational skills at a Centre for Education and Training of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises ([4]) (*Zentrum für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes, ZAWM*). The IAWM is the supervisory authority. Since 2021, validation arrangements have been operating under a new project name: *KomAn (Kompetenzen anerkennen*, acknowledging competences) sustained by the Government and is fully implemented. Since 2022, they have been considered a regular practice (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2024).

NQF implementation and impact

6.1. Stage of implementation

The framework is at activation stage.

6.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

QDG levels are not yet indicated on certificates and diplomas ([5]). The templates for all certificates and qualifications that can be obtained in general education, higher education, and VET are part of the [Government Decree of 28 May 2009](#).

6.3. Qualifications databases and registers

No register of qualifications has been set up yet.

6.4. Awareness and use of the NQF

Given the small size of the German-speaking Community, actors in the education sector and the labour market are aware of the different diplomas and certificates that are awarded within the Community. However, including levels on certificates and diplomas would facilitate transparency and comparability of qualifications in the broader Belgian landscape and international context.

Referencing to the EQF

The QDG has not been referenced to the EQF.

Important lessons and future plans

Although the QDG is not referred to in the 2025 education and training vision for the region (German-speaking Community of Belgium, 2015), the emphasis given to validation and competences over recent years indicates that the learning outcomes orientation underpinning the framework is being taken forward in a systematic manner. This is also apparent in relation to other projects outlined in the 2025 strategy, such as strengthening support to individual learners and application of competence-oriented diagnostics. Alignment of a qualification within the framework levels does not replace the existing system of access and does not provide automatic entitlement to access the next level.

The key task that remains is the full implementation of the framework; referencing it to the EQF, indicating QDG levels on the qualifications and developing a qualification database. The Ministry still needs to ensure the transparency of the methodology used to link the QDG with the EQF and ensure access to information and guidelines for the different institutions, educational actors, enterprises and citizens.

Main sources of information

[URLs accessed 7/2/2025]

[Education portal](#) of the German-speaking Community of Belgium.

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	Doctoral or postdoctoral degree/habilitation (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer Promotion oder Habilitation auf Doktoren- bzw. Professorebene) Category General education qualifications	No EQF level
7	Master degree (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines Hochschulstudiums langer Dauer auf Masterebene) Category General education qualifications Master degree on successful completion of dual track higher education (long duration) (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines dualen Hochschulstudiums langer Dauer auf Masterebene) Category VET Qualifications	No EQF level

6	Bachelor degree (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines Hochschulstudiums kurzer Dauer auf Bachelorebene) Category General education qualifications Master craftsperson certificate on successful completion of a three-year master craftsperson programme (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer dreijährigen Meisterausbildung mit dem Meisterbrief) Category VET Qualifications Professional bachelor degree on successful completion of dual track higher education (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss eines dualen Hochschulstudiums kurzer Dauer auf Bachelorebene) Category VET Qualifications	No EQF level
5	Master craftsperson certificate on successful completion of a two-year master craftsperson programme (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer zweijährigen Meisterausbildung mit dem Meisterbrief) Category VET Qualifications Successful completion of supplementary secondary vocational education (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer Ausbildung im ergänzenden beruflichen Sekundarunterricht) Category VET Qualifications	No EQF level

Successful completion of upper secondary general education (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Oberstufe des allgemeinbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)

Category

General education qualifications

No
EQF
level

Successful completion of upper secondary technical and arts programmes (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Oberstufe des technischen oder künstlerischen Sekundarunterrichts)

Category

VET Qualifications

Attestation of competence upon successful completion of year 6 in vocational education (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des sechsten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts mit Befähigungsnachweis)

Category

VET Qualifications

Successful completion of year 7 (complementary year) in vocational education (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des siebten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts)

Category

VET Qualifications

Journeyman certificate on successful completion of an apprenticeship (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer mittelständischen Lehre mit dem Gesellenzeugnis)

Category

VET Qualifications

3	Successful completion of lower secondary general education (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Unterstufe des allgemeinbildenden Sekundarunterrichts) Category General education qualifications Successful completion of lower secondary technical, vocational or arts programmes (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Unterstufe des technischen, künstlerischen oder berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts) Category VET Qualifications Certified partial qualification acquired in year 2 of an apprenticeship (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss einer zertifizierten Teilqualifikation im zweiten Jahr der mittelständischen Lehre) Category VET Qualifications	No EQF level
2	Successful completion of 'common' year 2 in secondary education (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des zweiten gemeinsamen Jahres des Sekundarunterrichts) Category General education qualifications Successful completion of year 3 in vocationally oriented education (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss des dritten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterricht) Category VET Qualifications Attestation of competence certifying lower secondary special needs education (Befähigungsnachweis der Unterstufe des Fördersekundarunterrichts) Category VET Qualifications	No EQF level

1	Successful completion of primary education, four years (Der erfolgreiche Abschluss der Grundschule) Category General education qualifications	No EQF level
	Certificate upon successful completion of year 2 in vocationally oriented education (Das Studienzeugnis des zweiten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts) Category VET Qualifications	

Acronyms

EQF European qualifications framework

IAWM *Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen* [Institute for Education and Training in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises]

NQF national qualifications framework

QDG *Qualifikationsrahmen Deutschsprachiger Gemeinschaft*
[qualifications framework of the German-speaking Community of Belgium]

VET vocational education and training

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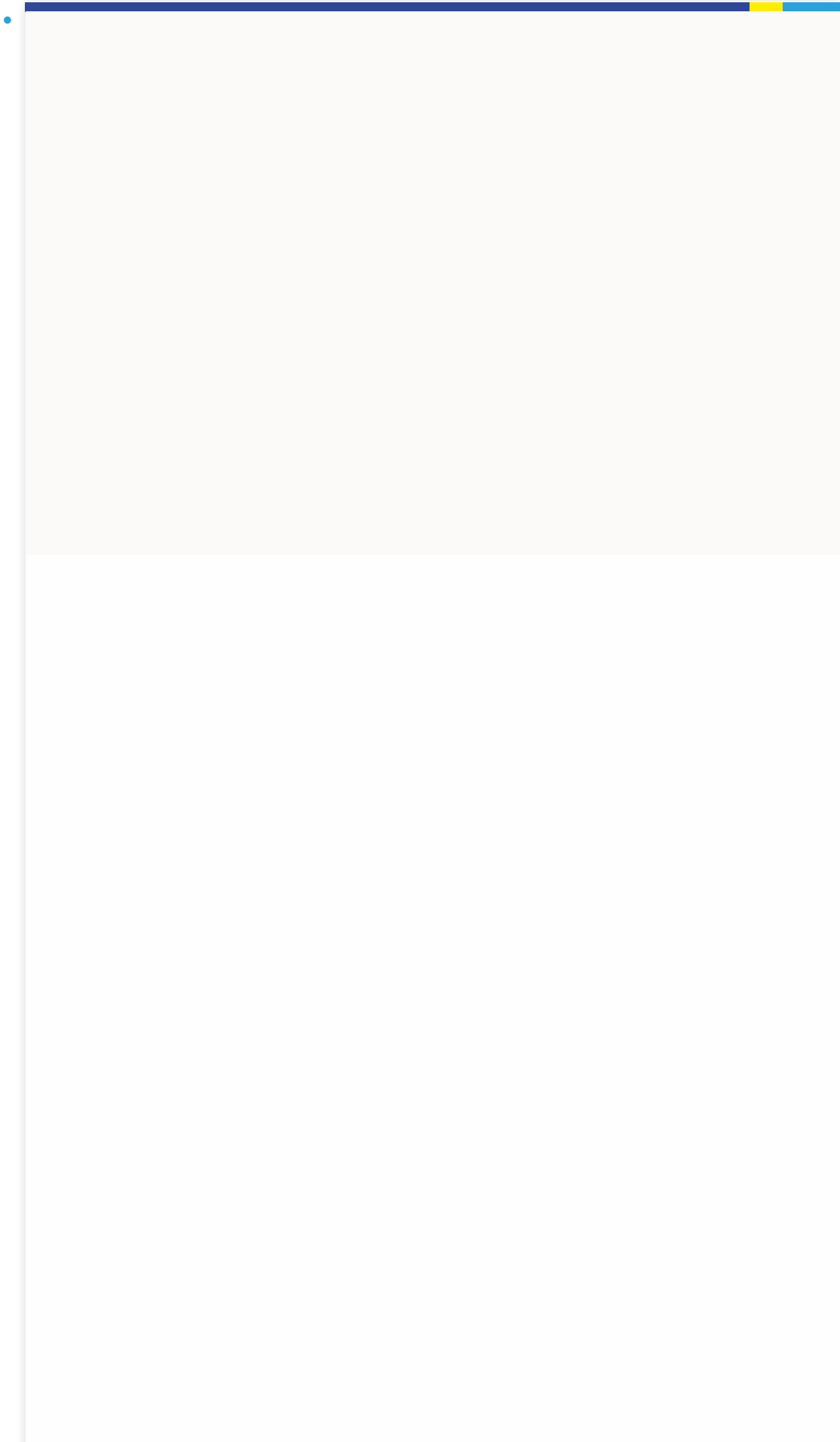
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