NQF state of play

France 2024

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Overview

Stage of development: `Operational stage`

NQF linked to EQF: ✓

Scope of the framework:
The NQF covers all levels and types of formal qualifications apart from initial education qualifications (nursery school, primary school and first cycle/lower secondary level). It is open to qualifications awarded outside the regulated qualification system, including private-sector and international qualifications, and industry or sectoral qualifications (CQPs).

Number of levels:

Eight

Legal basis/stage of development:

Law No 2002-73 on social modernisation (2002)
(in French)

Law No 2018-771 for the freedom to choose one's professional future (2018)
(in French)

Decree No 2019-14 on the NQF of vocational and professional qualifications (2019)
(in French)

NQF/EQF website:
⧉ Website

Qualifications register/database:
⧉ National register of vocational and professional qualifications (RNCP)

Introduction and context

1.1. Policy context

In France in 2023, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (5.2%) was above the EU average (4.7%). The entire eligible population participated in early childhood education and care (100% in 2023), while the rate of early leaving from education and training was significantly lower than the EU average (7.6% compared to 9.5% in 2023). In 2023, tertiary education attainment among those aged 25-34 (51.9%) was higher than the EU-27 average (39.5%). In 2022, participation in upper secondary vocational education and training (VET) was relatively low (40.6% compared to 52.4% in the EU). The participation of adults aged 25-64 in learning increased considerably (+8pp) over the past decade and was above the EU average (49.2% and 39.5% respectively in 2023) (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport & Culture, 2024).

The functioning and governance of the national qualifications system are aligned with major national strategies on skills investment (PIC) and recovery (France Relance), aiming to prepare citizens for future jobs and to strengthen the country's international competitiveness (Hampe-Nathaniel, 2024; European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). Reflecting the aims of the national France 2030 strategy, a faster process is in place for including new qualifications in emerging sectors in the framework and established mechanisms to help awarding bodies review and adapt their offer ([1]) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024; Cedefop, 2022).

1.2. NQF legal basis

The 2018 law on the freedom to choose one's professional future and the 2019 decree on the NPQF have legally embedded the framework as distinct from the RNCP, defining a new eight-level structure and the level descriptors.

The framework has been revised to reflect considerable changes in all parts of education and training and of the qualifications system. For example, the 2018 law transformed continuing VET, along with apprenticeship-system governance and financing; aimed to improve links between apprenticeship-based and academic pathways; and supported lifelong learning and re-enter into education and training (France Compétences, 2021). In 2021 and 2022, several legislative actions ([2])

clarified the predominant role of France Compétences in monitoring the system from design to assessment of qualifications and introduced changes to how validation leads to (units of) RNCP qualifications. France Compétences has a statutory power of control over awarding bodies of NPQF qualifications. It has the right to verify and investigate the truthfulness of the information provided by an awarding body when it proposes a new qualification project to be registered in the RNCP (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Policy objectives

Between 1972 and 2002, the development of a classification system for vocational and professional qualifications was closely related to labour market needs, aiming to promote social justice and parity of esteem between qualifications awarded through adult training and those awarded through education. In the 1990s, policy objectives began to shift towards combating unemployment. This period also saw the shift towards learning outcomes and the assessment of competences (Paddeu et al., 2018). At that time, the French NQF aimed to ensure the quality, transparency and comparability of vocational and professional ([3]) qualifications through a publicly accessible register of qualifications formally recognised by the state and social partners. The main objectives of the revised framework (the NPQF) are to increase the transparency and flexibility of qualifications, enable horizontal and vertical progression, support the international dimension of NPQF qualifications, and better align them with European and international standards (France Compétences, 2021). Another important objective is to define units/blocks of competences common to different RNCP/levelled qualifications, to allow flexibility in career changes in initial VET and in less linear career paths in continuing training (France Compétences, 2021).

The RNCP has been an important tool in assuring the quality of qualifications and promoting lifelong learning, closely linked to the system for validating non-formal and informal learning. The NPQF provides an efficient and competence-based overview of vocational and professional qualifications to the active population and enabling them to use their VET credits to attend training programmes that address local, social and economic challenges. The framework also improves the transparency of qualifications certified by private training providers (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The NPQF has eight levels. The three level descriptors are similar to those of the EQF (France Compétences, 2021):

a. complexity of knowledge ([4]);
b. level of expertise, according to the complexity and technical nature of an activity ([5]);
c. level of responsibility and autonomy ([6]).

Level descriptors reflect national specificities. For example, the term 'expertise' is used instead of 'skills', emphasising the importance of 'evaluation of competences and the desire to give an operational dimension' to levelled qualifications. The contextualisation of qualifications and the international dimension of qualifications at higher levels are also crucial elements (France Compétences, 2021).

NPQF level 1 has no descriptors as it covers mastery of basic knowledge, which is not sufficient to certify the ability to exercise a professional activity. There are no qualifications included at this level. The newly introduced level 2 covers simple activities and limited autonomy. Levels 3 to 8 cover qualifications previously included at the five levels of the RNCP.

3.2. NQF scope and coverage

The NPQF is a demand-driven framework, open to all qualifications with a clear professional scope awarded through VET and higher education. The upper secondary general and technological baccalaureates (*baccalauréat général and technologique*) are included at level 4 of the framework as they are recognised by the labour market, even if they are not professionally contextualised, and they provide access into higher education. Learning acquired in initial education up to grade 9 (nursery school, primary school and first cycle/lower secondary level) has no professional dimension and remains outside the scope of the framework.

The framework is responsive to the evolution of professional qualifications. In the public tertiary sector, the University Bachelor of Technology ([7]) has gradually replaced the undergraduate technology certificate (*diplôme universitaire de technologie*, DUT) (Cedefop, 2022;

European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The NPQF is open to qualifications awarded outside the regulated qualification system, i.e. professional certificates/titles, professional qualification certificates (CQP) and professional qualifications on demand ([8]). These qualifications can be awarded by private providers, labour market stakeholders, adult learning providers, civil society organisations etc. The framework includes private-sector and international qualifications as long as they meet the respective quality criteria for the RNCP ([9]).

Industry or sectoral qualifications recognised by the professional branches (*certificats de qualification professionnelle* - CQPs) ([10]) can be registered, following approval by the committee within *France Compétences*, in either the RS, without a level, or the RNCP, with a level. This makes them valid nationally and eligible for funding through the individual learning account (*Compte personnel de formation*, CPF). They can be obtained through training or validation arrangements, but not through apprenticeship (Cedefop, 2022; France Compétences, 2021; European Commission & Cedefop 2024).

One of the main objectives of the national framework is to set up a system that is easier for users to understand. The obligation to structure into blocks of assessable competences encourages the acquisition of competences and qualifications throughout a person's working life, if necessary, by alternating the acquisition of blocks with periods of employment (France Compétences, 2021).

The framework is open to any qualification with a professional scope, regardless off its length, as long as the qualification is recognised by a national authority. There are ongoing discussions about developing a commonly agreed national definition for microcredentials to be shared among all stakeholders with a view to their inclusion in the NPQF (European Commission, & Cedefop, 2024).

3.3. Use of learning outcomes

The notion of 'competence' was introduced in French VET in the 1970s and in general education in the 1980s. It is explicitly mentioned in curriculum documents in all subsystems of education and training (Cedefop, 2016). The learning-outcomes approach was strengthened by the 2002 law on social modernisation, while subsequent decrees established the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning, based on learning outcomes. Further, descriptions of learning outcomes

form the basis for including qualifications in the NPQF.

The NPQF is integral part of the national qualification system, which includes two registers: the RNCP, which includes levelled qualifications corresponding to a profession; and the Specific Register of Awards (*Répertoire spécifique des certifications et habilitations,* RS), which includes qualifications without levels corresponding to skills that complementa profession, but with possible connections to the NPQF through units/blocks of competences (France Compétences, 2021; European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The notion of 'units/blocks of competences' (*blocs de compétences*) was introduced in 2014, as an organisation of competences in qualification standards following the logic of socially meaningful activities. Gradual implementation enabled initial education and training (IVET) learners who failed their exam to certify units/blocks of competences and (re)-enter adult/continuing training or validation arrangements to obtain the full qualification ([11]) ([12]) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025 upcoming). A unit/block of competences is not a distinct qualification per se, but an 'identified part of a vocational qualification', defined as a 'homogeneous and coherent set of competences contributing to carrying out a professional activity autonomously, and which can be assessed and validated' (Labour Code, Article L6113-1). They are accumulable, mandatory components of RNCP qualifications. Although assigned to the same level as the qualification they belong too, when assessed individually, the certificate issued does not have a designated level (France Compétences; European Commission, & Cedefop, 2024). The restructuring of RNCP qualifications in units/blocks of competences aims to make their analysis easier, establish equivalences and streamline the offer (registration is valid for a maximum or five years; three for rapidly changing sectors). Outside the regulated system, the reorganisation in blocks of competences helps to establish correspondences between similar qualifications offered at the same level by different providers (Cedefop, 2022; France Compétences, 2021).

Initial vocational qualifications are increasingly defined in line with the NPQF level descriptors. In the last two decades, higher education has been aligned with the landscape of the European higher education area, for instance through the three-level structure of studies, European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credits ([13]) and bridging solutions between bachelor degrees to prevent dropping out. Further changes introduced in 2018 ([14]) clarified the learning outcomes certified at the bachelor, master and doctoral degree levels and

programme descriptions based on ECTS credits.

3.4. Quality assurance arrangements

At system level, France Compétences is the national reference point for quality assurance and, since 2019, has been responsible for the quality assurance of the framework and registers ([15]). The quadripartite composition of France Compétences and its committee ([16]) guarantees the nation-wide value of qualifications included in the two registers. (Cedefop, 2022; France Compétences, 2021).

Quality requirements for qualifications, including sector-specific levelled qualifications in the RNCP (CPQs, table 1), are embedded in the nine compulsory requirements for registration, which ensure their labour market relevance and employability prospects for their holders.

The NPQF focuses on the capacity of awarding bodies to comply with the criteria set ([17]) and guarantee the quality of qualifications, rather than on the learning pathway used to acquire them. The 2023 RNCP handbook and, Qualiopi, the 2022 national reference tool for VET providers, both serve as guidance tools to increase understanding of the framework and create common practices for the design and assessment of qualifications (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2024).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The 2018 law on the freedom to choose one's professional future established France Compétences, a national public institution with a quadripartite structure representing the state, the regions, and employer and employee organisations at national and international levels. France Compétences operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Professional Integration. It is fully responsible for coordinating and overseeing the NPQF and acts as the EQF national coordination point (NCP). It is also responsible for ensuring the implementation of national continuing VET policies, financing vocational training and apprenticeships and regulating the VET market in terms of skill needs and demands. The Department of Professional Qualifications (*Départment de la certification professionnelle*) of France Compétences manages the day-to-day running of the NPQF. It has 27 employees and comprises two offices, each responsible for one of the registers, an operations division running controls and transversal projects, an IT service, and a national coordinator regarding the registration by law (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

In 2019, France Compétences set us a committee (*Commission de la certification professionnelle*) to ensure that qualifications included in the RNCP and RS registers meet the needs of society and the economy, and that they respond quickly to changes. The composition of the committee ensures stakeholder involvement and cooperation between ministries participating in the design and award of qualifications. It has 16 members, representing the state, regions and social partners in a balanced way (European Commission and Cedefop, 2024). Its mission is to (France Compétences, 2021):

a. evaluate applications for the registration of qualifications in the RNCP and the RS ([18]);
b. draw up a list of emerging or rapidly changing professions;
c. request that qualification awarding bodies establish equivalences between qualifications and units/blocks of competences at the same NPQF level ([19]);
d. issue methodological recommendations for awarding bodies;
e. contribute to harmonising the terminology used for the titles of vocational and professional qualifications;
f. contribute to international work on the quality of qualifications.

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 validation of non-formal and informal learning is closely linked to lifelong learning, training and employment policies, and builds on long-standing practices. It is a fourth route to acquiring a professional qualification, on an equal footing with initial education and training, continuing training and apprenticeships.

The VAE (*Validation des acquis de l' expérience*) system allows 'the award of whole or parts of an NPQF qualification and can give credits/exemptions towards such qualifications, without the need to go through formal training' (Mathou, 2019; European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). Both full and partial validation are possible, with partial validation resulting in a document recording the blocks of competences validated. A VAE procedure must be in place for all qualifications registered in the RNCP, except for those linked to regulated professions. This obligation has increased the focus on recognition of non-formal and informal learning and on flexibility (individualisation) of training pathways (France Compétences, 2021; Hampe-Nathaniel, 2024).

The system is governed by France Compétences and aligned to the NPQF's functioning and aims. A 2021 decree clarified and strengthened the control powers of France Compétences over ministries and other public and private awarding bodiesregarding the qualification standards they must communicate to France Compétences, while streamlining the functioning of the VAE procedure. Since 2022, one year of professional experience is no longer required. The focus has shifted from the notion of 'proof' to the capacity of awarding bodies, and other accredited assessment centres, to assess freely the applicant's prior experience against the qualification standards targeted by the VAE ([20]) and the conditions for validation of blocks of competences of RNCP qualifications embedded in legislation (L6313-5 of the labour code). In 2024, the gradual implementation of the revamped public services was ongoing through France VAE, a single digital platform (European Commission & Cedefop 2024; Cedefop & ReferNet, upcoming).

In addition to VAE, there is a mechanism for the recognition of professional and personal experience, granting access to programmes

through an exemption from normal requirements (at the higher education level, this procedure is known as *validation des acquis professionnels et personnels*). The Enic-Naric centre, operating within the education ministry, examines free of charge the applications for recognition of diplomas of refugees and asylum seekers and has established mechanisms ([21]) to support their integration in French universities. If no diploma can be provided, (partial) validation of their skills is possible (Hampe-Nathaniel, 2024).

There are also skill audits (*bilans de compétences*) aimed at identifying skills and competences acquired during one's professional life without leading to certification and without an assessment procedure, and other types of competence portfolios developed outside validation procedures.

5.2. Credit systems

The establishment of the ECTS system and gradual adaptation to the Bologna process allowed a common understanding of higher education degrees and created a benchmark of 180 credits for bachelor and 300 credits for master degrees. Studies were restructured into specialisations, organised in semesters corresponding to blocks of competences and learning outcomes defined for each education level ([22]) (France Compétences, 2021; Hampe-Nathaniel, 2024).

5.3. Promoting lifelong learning

The focus on certification is considered a strength of the VAE system, which was developed in parallel with the restructuring of the qualifications system in 2002. The reform of the continuing training system in 2018 placed the NPQF framework and RNCP qualifications at the heart of education and active labour market policies for the (up-)reskilling of individuals for social advancement and sustainable employment. The lifelong learning system is learner driven. At provider level, all continuing training schemes financed by public and interprofessional funds must lead to an RNCP (nationally recognised) qualification. In turn, by making use of their learning credits through the CPF individual learning account, individuals engage in CPF-funded programmes which are all linked to RNCP qualifications.

The requirement that RNCP qualifications should be structured into units/blocks of competences encourages the lifelong acquisition of competences and qualifications. It also enables the transfer of qualifications included in the RS as recognised units of competences of qualifications already registered in the RNCP and the definition of

common blocks of competences between two or more RNCP qualifications (France Compétences, 2021). By the end of 2023, around 30% of qualifications in the registers included such correspondences (France Compétences, 2023, June 27).

NQF implementation and impact

6.1. Stage of implementation

The NPQF is at the operational stage and was reviewed in 2021 to increase its relevance and responsiveness to labour market needs. It provides a map of all nationally recognised qualifications and a quality assurance mechanism for the design, registration and renewal of qualifications. It also offers a reference point for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. A qualifications database now incorporates the two existing registers.

6.2. Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF

Certification of professional skills has always been central to the national qualifications system and is valued in the labour market. The registration procedure for the RNCP and the RS ensures the quality and transparency of the system of professional qualifications ([23]) (France Compétences, 2021; European Commission, & Cedefop, 2024).

The registration process is the same for both registers. State-issued qualifications are automatically included in the NPQF ([24]) (registration by law). Other qualifications are included following approval by the committee set up within France Compétences (registration on demand).

Registration by-law applies to diplomas and qualifications supported by a ministerial order after receiving assent from one of the 11 interministerial advisory committees ([25]) and following examination by the committee within France Compétences ([26]). Registration on demand applies to qualifications issued by other public and private VET providers and labour market stakeholders, after examination by experts within France Compétences and following assent of its committee. Requests to introduce a new qualification, or to review or remove an existing one are submitted to the professional qualifications department within France Compétences and are examined, based on the applicable criteria, for inclusion in either the RNCP or the RS (European Commission, & Cedefop, 2024). There are nine criteria for including qualifications in the RNCP (seven mandatory and two optional) and six criteria for the RS (four mandatory and two optional). According to the relevant decree, qualifications included in the RNCP should:

    a. consist of an occupational standard (*référentiel d'activités*), a competence standard (*référentiel de compétences*) including

knowledge and transversal competences, and an assessment standard (*référentiel d'évaluation*) defining the criteria and methods for assessing learning outcomes;

b. be structured in units/blocks of competences;

c. be classified by field of activity and allocation of an NPQF level.

The validity of the registration of RNCP/RS qualifications is a maximum of five years. To accelerate the matching of the offer of qualifications with skill needs in the sectors, a faster registration process applies for qualifications relating to emerging or rapidly evolving occupations, which can be registered for a maximum of three years ([27]). (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024; France Compétences, 2021).

In 2023, France Compétences updated the RNCP handbook (*Vademecum*). Work is under way to produce a similar handbook for the SR (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.3. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

Only NPQF levels are indicated on the certificates or diplomas of all levelled qualifications in the RNCP. NPQF/EQF levels are indicated on all Europass certificate supplements. NPQF levels are indicated on some diploma supplements, and it is planned that EQF levels will also be indicated on them. Following the updated referencing report in 2021 when NPQF levels were aligned to EQF levels using the eight-level structure, the qualification level is indicated only as a number (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.4. NQF dissemination

The main channel for disseminating information on the NPQF and the EQF is the EQF NCP website. Since 2019, France Compétences has also hosted the RNCP and the RS, along with media interviews. Other types of dissemination action, such as webinars, conferences, and updates of reference documents ([28]) and web site content take place on a day-to-day basis. The RNCP handbook is a valuable guide for all stakeholders, bringing together all previously published guidelines, enriched with the experience and good practices collected during the years that the committee for professional qualifications has been active. Linking the NPQF to the funding of training has increased awareness and use of the framework (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.5. Qualifications databases and registers

There is a single database that acts as an entry point for two distinct but

fully interconnected registers. The RNCP includes all levelled qualifications (registered by law or on demand), apart from the general and technological baccalaureates. The specific register (RS) includes awards that could not be levelled, as they are not directly associated with an occupation recognised through an industry-level agreement (Paddeu et al., 2018). These awards are complementary to a qualification in the RNCP or attest to transversal or basic skills, such as the interprofessional certificate Cléa. Together, the two registers give an overview of all diplomas and certificates relevant to the labour market, awarded within and outside formal education and training. The database targets employees, jobseekers, young people, employers, public career guidance services and institutional actors. In September 2024, the RNCP included 5019 qualifications and the RS 1 191 awards (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The RNCP is connected to the Europass platform and the CPF. The CertifInfo online tool offers an entry point to training offers of the CARIF-OREF network ([29]) and the ONISEP national guidance service. The database allows users to establish links between qualifications, training programmes, professions, jobs and VAE schemes, and offers an overview of qualifications offered in the country (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The NPQF database hosted by France Compétences provides information, in French, on the title of the qualification, the NPQF/EQF level, the awarding body, the entry requirements, ways to acquire the qualification and the relationship to occupations or occupational fields, along with further information such as links to the qualification or to supplements. It also provides a description of the learning outcomes and links (common units/block of competences) with other RNCP qualifications. The RNCP keeps a record of former qualifications that are no longer awarded (20 065). Qualifications are registered for five years at most (three in the case of qualifications in emerging sectors); after this period, they should be renewed (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.6. Awareness and use of the NQF

NPQF/EQF levels are systematically mentioned in the RNCP register and on the CPF mobile application. In general, there is public interest, as the registration of a qualification in the RNCP is seen as proof of recognition by the state. Results from the 2024 survey show a gap between the technical nature of the framework and the perception that individuals may have of it. Evidence shows that the training programme (courses, examinations, assessments and certification) takes priority over the

qualification it leads to ([30]). NPQF qualifications are valued as a signal on the job market, proof of the employee's involvement, a tool for legitimation, or for professional mobility.

The NPQF is increasingly known and consistently used by education and training institutions and providers who, as awarding bodies, (re)design, own and certify NPQF qualifications in compliance with the updated NPQF framework and rules.

Guidance and counselling practitioners and recognition authorities use the national registers in their daily work. Cooperation has been established between the EQF NCP and the National Office for Guidance (*Office national d'information sur les enseignements et les professions*, ONISEP), the employment service and ENIC-NARIC France. The regions, through their involvement with local guidance and counselling schemes and contacts with ONISEP, are mostly concerned with the use of units of competences established in the new NPQF (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.7. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

In 2024, France Compétences has carried out a survey on the use of NPQF qualifications by beneficiaries of CPF-funded training schemes. The survey builds on qualitative data from 78 interviews and statistical data from 2022. The data (not yet publicly available) suggest that appropriate professional guidance and support during the preparation of a CPF-funded training plan plays a decisive role in understanding qualifications. Moreover, the assessment framework plays influences the value given to training, particularly when it resembles a school-type assessment. For other, less qualified audiences, the assessment framework may seem too rigid and unsuitable (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.8. Impact of the NQF

Inclusion in the NPQF ensures that each qualification is quality assured. Any qualification registered in the RNCP and RS undergoes strict quality control. The framework promotes the universal and compulsory use of level descriptors. This brings clarity to qualifications and helps users understand how NPQF qualifications are structured. Quality assurance therefore forms a solid basis for the functioning of the NPQF. Promoting parity of esteem between qualifications at the same level, regardless of the awarding body, is a cornerstone of the framework. Being levelled to the NPQF signals the national and international validity of the qualification. The recognition of foreign qualifications has been

encouraged and simplified through learning-outcome descriptors, and the ENIC-NARIC centre works in cooperation with the EQF NCP. Registration in the database is necessary to receive funding, including financing for the validation of non-formal and informal learning; to practice certain professions and occupations, and to enter apprenticeship schemes. The interrelation of publicly funded training schemes and individual training rights (CPF) for the acquisition of RNCP qualifications, has placed the NPQF at a centre place of lifelong learning policies for professional development.

The gradual use of units/blocks of competences in all new/reviewed RNCP qualifications, together with the requirement for awarding bodies to networkwhen their qualifications are similar, it has strengthened connections between education sectors and institutions. The involvement of social partners (representatives of professional sectors) in the daily implementation of the framework maintains a high level of social dialogue between education and the labour market (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The NPQF is closely linked to the system for validating non-formal and informal learning, with the two being mutually supportive. Qualifications included in the RNCP can be acquired through validation and must have a specified VAE procedure. Units/blocks of competences can be assessed through VAE, allowing adults to acquire a qualification gradually or by combining a training course with one or more VAE processes. This makes the validation procedure easier (Cedefop, 2022; European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The introduction of a new university-level bachelor in technology at level 6 in 2019, and the harmonisation of bachelor programmes delivered by different types of higher education institutions in 2020 ([31]), are also direct results of the restructuring of the higher education sector in line with the QF-EHEA and EQF recommendation (France Compétences, 2021).

Referencing to the EQF

The five-level structured framework was referenced to the EQF in October 2010 (Commission nationale de la certification professionnelle, 2010). The evolution of the national qualifications system and the introduction of the eight-level NPQF in 2019 required an updated referencing report. A single, combined report on referencing the NPQF to the EQF and on self-certifying the compatibility of the framework with the QF-EHEA was adopted in February 2021.

Important lessons and future plans

The eight-level structure and learning-outcome-based level descriptors of the NPQF, adopted in 2019, have brought the framework closer to the EQF, increasing the transparency and comparability of French and other European qualifications. The revised framework is broader in scope, including upper secondary general and technological baccalaureates.

The NPQF has evolved through several stages over decades to address new challenges, policy objectives and trends both national and European contexts. Three main trends have emerged: the significant diversification of the range of qualifications recognised by the state; the shift in recognition from the duration of training to learning outcomes; and, more recently, the strong encouragement for providers to create common qualifications, share blocks of competences between different qualifications and operate within networks.

Key developments that have shaped the discussion on qualifications and made learning pathways more flexible include the introduction of units/blocks of competences as identifiable parts of qualifications and the introduction of the new RS. The introduction of the individual learning account (CPF) and its mandatory use for engaging in training to acquire an RNCP qualification, have played a crucial role in enabling the implementation and expansion of the NPQF and its' impact.

Linking the NPQF to the funding of training has made the framework much more visible and increased its use by the public. Together with interconnecting qualifications and the implementation of a robust quality assurance mechanism for including qualifications in the framework, these are considered the three main success factors (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). Further, the quality assurance role of the committee within France Compétences as the gatekeeper of the framework has been important for two reasons: it has continued to support the credibility of levelled qualifications and has created joint ownership of levelling decisions across a wide range of stakeholders due to its quadripartite composition.

One particular challenge is that the waiting time for on-demand registration of qualifications in the RNCP needs to be shortened, which will help keep the register up to date and increase responsiveness. However, this has been a demanding process for the participating experts, and work is ongoing. Important progress was achieved as the

waiting time was reduced to 5.3 months in 2023 compared with 6.5 months in 2022. Developing the system of blocks of competences for all NPQF qualifications would improve clarity and transparency between different types of qualification, especially within the same occupation or profession. It would also make it easier to develop equivalences and flexible pathways between RNCP and non-levelled RS qualifications. Nevertheless, strengthening bridges and reinforcing pathways between different education sectors and institutions remain major priorities (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Main sources of information

[URLs accessed 22/7/2025]

France Compétences

RNCP and RS

CertifInfo

France Compétences (2021). *Update of the referencing report of the French qualifications framework to the European qualification framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework of the European higher education area*

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	**Doctoral degrees (Doctorat)** **Professional certificates/titles - level 8 (Titres professionnels - level 8)** Professional certificates/titles are awarded by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Integration; they are registered by law and may be classified at any level. **Professional qualification certificates - level 8 (Certificat de qualifications professionnelles - CQP - level 8)** CQPs are under the responsibility of social partners; they are registered on demand. **Professional qualifications on demand – level 8** Qualifications registered on demand are awarded by public or private bodies.	8
7	**Master degrees (Grade de Master)** **Professional diploma in engineering with master degree (diplôme / titre d'ingénieur)** **National diplomas at level 7** An overview of national diplomas and vocational certificates registered by law is available in France Compétences (2021), Annex 9. **Professional certificates/titles (Titres professionnels)** Professional certificates/titles are awarded by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Integration; they are registered by law and may be classified at any level. **Professional qualification certificates (CQP) - level 7** CQPs are under the responsibility of social partners; they are registered on demand. **Professional qualifications on demand - level 7** Qualifications registered on demand are awarded by public or private bodies.	7

6	**Bachelor degrees (Grade Licence)**	6
	Bachelor (Licence)	
	University bachelor in technology (Bachelor universitaire de technologie - BUT)	
	BUT programmes have gradually absorbed undergraduate programmes in technology leading to the DUT qualification, which is no longer awarded as from January 2024. (European Commission, & Cedefop, 2024.).	
	National diploma in arts (Diplôme National d'Art - DNA)	
	National diplomas at level 6	
	An overview of national diplomas and vocational certificates registered by law is available in France Compétences (2021), Annex 9.	
	Professional certificates/titles - level 6 (Titres professionnels - level 6)	
	Professional certificates/titles are awarded by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Integration; they are registered by law and may be classified at any level.	
	Professional qualification certificates (CQP) - level 6	
	CQPs are under the responsibility of social partners; they are registered on demand.	
	Professional qualifications on demand - level 6	
	Qualifications registered on demand are awarded by public or private bodies	

5	**Undergraduate technician certificates (Brevet de technicien supérieur – BTS)**	5
	Undergraduate technician certificates in agriculture (Brevet de technicien supérieur Agricole - BTSA)	
	National diplomas at level 5	
	An overview of national diplomas and vocational certificates registered by law is available in France Compétences (2021), Annex 9.	
	Professional certificates/titles - level 5 (Titres professionnels - level 5)	
	Professional certificates/titles are awarded by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Integration; they are registered by law and may be classified at any level.	
	Professional qualification certificates (CQP) - level 5	
	CQPs are under the responsibility of social partners; they are registered on demand.	
	Master craftsman qualifications issued by the Chambers of Trades (Brevets de maîtrise - Chambre des métiers)	
	Professional qualifications on demand - level 5	
	Qualifications registered on demand are awarded by public or private bodies	

4	**National baccalaureate diploma - general, technological or vocational education (Diplôme national du baccalauréat général, technologique ou professionnel)**	4
	Applied arts certificates (Brevet des métiers d'art – BMA)	
	Professional certificate for youth, adult education and sports (Brevet professionnel de la jeunesse, de l'éducation nationale et du sport - BPJEPS)	
	Higher technical diploma in craftmanship (Brevet technique des métiers)	
	Secondary vocational certificates at level 4 An overview of national diplomas and vocational certificates registered by law is available in France Compétences (2021), Annex 9.	
	Professional certificates/titles - level 4 (Titres professionnels - level 4) Professional certificates/titles are awarded by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Integration; they are registered by law and may be classified at any level.	
	Professional qualification certificates (CQP) - level 4 CQPs are under the responsibility of social partners; they are registered on demand.	
	Professional qualifications on demand – level 4 Qualifications registered on demand are awarded by public or private bodies	

3	**Secondary vocational certificates (Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle - CAP)**	3
	Secondary vocational certificates in agriculture (Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle agricole– CAPA)	
	Secondary vocational certificate for youth, adult education and sports (Certificat professionnel de la jeunesse, de l'éducation nationale et du sport - CPJEPS)	
	Certificate issued by the Chambers of Trades and Crafts (Certificat technique des métiers - CTM)	
	Secondary vocational certificates at level 4	
	An overview of national diplomas and vocational certificates registered by law is available in France Compétences (2021), Annex9.	
	Professional certificates/titles - level 3 (Titres professionnels - level 3)	
	Professional certificates/titles are awarded by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Integration; they are registered by law and may be classified at any level.	
	Professional qualification certificates (CQP) - level 3 (Professional qualifications on demand - level 3)	
	CQPs are under the responsibility of social partners; they are registered on demand.	
	Professional qualifications on demand - level 3	
	Qualifications registered on demand are awarded by public or private bodies	
2	**Currently no qualifications**	2
1	**(not available)**	1

Acronyms

BUT	*Bachelor universitaire de technologie* (university bachelor of technology)
Carif	C*entres d'animation, de ressources et d'information sur la formation* (training management, resource and information centres)
CPF	*Compte personnel de formation* (individual learning account)
CPNEFP	*Commission paritaire nationale de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle* (joint employment and vocational training committee)
CQP	*Certificats de qualification professionnelle* (professional qualification certificates)
DUT	*Diplôme universitaire de technologie* (undergraduate technology certificate)
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
NPQF	National professional qualifications framework
ENIC-NARIC	European network of National Information Centres - Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres
EQF	European qualifications framework
NCP	National coordination point
NQF	National qualifications framework
Oref	*Observatoires régionaux de l'emploi et de la formation* (regional employment and training observatories)
PIC	*Plan d'investissement dans les compétences* (skills investment plan)
QF-EHEA	Qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area

RNCP	*Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles* (national register of vocational and professional qualifications)
RS	*Répertoire spécifique des certifications et habilitations* (specific register of awards)
VAE	*Validation des acquis de l'expérience* (validation of non-formal and informal learning)
VET	Vocational education and training

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Notes

[1]France Compétences regularly publishes sectoral reports on skills and jobs; Interministerial advisory committees publish a biennial list of diplomas to be created, reviewed or updated at the beginning of each year.

[2]Decree No 2018-1172 of 18 December, decree 2021-389 of 2 April; article 10 of Law No 2022-1598, decree No. 2023-1275 of 27 December and decree 2024-332 of April 10.

[3]In addition to vocational diplomas and certificates at levels 3 and 4 that have a professional scope, all higher education diplomas and degrees, at levels 5 to 8, are equally considered professional qualifications due to their strong labour market orientation.

[4]The descriptor illustrates the knowledge necessary to carry out professional activities at each level (processes, materials, terminology relating to one or more fields and theoretical knowledge).

[5]The descriptor defines the complexity and technical nature of a task or activity in a process, the level of mastery of the professional activity, the mobilisation of a range of cognitive and practical skills and the ability to communicate and develop interpersonal relations in the professional context.

[6]The descriptor defines the level of responsibility and autonomy regarding organisation of work, reaction to unforeseen situations, awareness of the complexity of the environment, understanding of interactions with activities in other professional fields, ability to advise supervised staff and participation in collective work.

[7]Bachelor universitaire de technologie, BUT (EQF level 6) was introduced in 2021/22 as part of the reform of the professional bachelor pathway in technological institutes (IUT) (Cedefop, 2022). It supports horizontal and vertical progression and professional integration of HE graduates.

[8]In the national context, these qualifications are usually referred to as private qualifications. Two important trends witnessed over the past 40 years are the diversification of nationally recognised qualifications and the increase in the number of requests by private providers to register qualifications.

[9]Examples of international qualifications currently in the register: RS5443 Administer Microsoft 365 desktop security; RS5375 Administer Cloud Microsoft Azure services and the International norm ISO (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

[10]CQPs are designed by joint employment and vocational training

committees (CPNEFP - Commission paritaire nationale de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle) and can be submitted for inclusion in the RNCP by the CPNEFPs.

[11]Moreover, the 2018 law introduced the possibility of bridging solutions between the blocks of competences for RNCP and RS qualifications (France Compétences, 2021).

[12]CAP decree 2016-772, vocational baccalaureate decree 2016-771, and decree No 2020-726.

[13]Bachelor level corresponds to 180 credits and master level to 300 credits; ECTS are not used at doctoral level (France Compétences, 2021).

[14]Order of 30 July 2018 relating to the national bachelor degree; Order of 30 July 2018 modifying the 2014 decree amending the national qualifications framework for the delivery of the national bachelor, professional bachelor and master degrees.

[15]The certification committee within France Compétences gives assent before inclusion of a qualification in the register. It analyses the blocks of competences of qualifications, may ask awarding bodies to create equivalences between qualifications and in case of repeated refusals may remove the qualification from the register (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

[16]The members of the certification committee are appointed by ministerial order (not by the Director of France Compétences) ensuring its autonomy.

[17]Quality labelling is in place. The Eduform quality label for public schools, which also provides access to the national Qualiopi certification quality label for public and private training providers (Cedefop & ReferNet, upcoming).

[18]Qualifications awarded by public bodies, such as ministries, do not need to be evaluated by the committee; however, they are controlled by France Compétences.

[19]The new legal framework gives France Compétences the ability to remove qualifications with similar content for which bridging pathways cannot be established.

[20]Article 10 of Law No 2022-1598, decree No. 2023-1275 and decree 2024-332.

[21]A specific procedure applies, in line with Art. VII of the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of qualifications of refugees, displaced persons and persons in a similar position.

[22]Specialisations are complemented by cross-disciplinary competences common to all degrees at a specific level, forming the higher education national records for each degree registered in the RNCP.

[23]All RNCP qualifications comply with the same criteria for registration

and their value is recognised by both the State and social partners.

[24]State-issued qualifications can be registered either in the RNCP or the RS.

[25]Decree No 2019-958 established 11 interministerial advisory committees (commissions professionnelles consultatives, CPCs) in the sectors of agriculture, agri-food and space planning; arts, entertainment and media; social cohesion and health; commerce; construction; industry; sea and inland waterway transport; mobility and logistics; business services; consumer products and services; sport and entertainment (Cedefop, 2022).

[26]Registration by law also applies to regulated qualifications and some RS authorisations (such as Cléa, registered by law in the RS) (France Compétence, 2021).

[27]Criteria one and two, provided for in article R.6113-9 of the labour code, are not considered in the analysis of qualifications corresponding to professions in emerging or rapidly evolving sectors.

[28]For example, the list of emerging professions complied annually by the commission within France Compétences informs awarding bodies on the needs for qualification design and update.

[29]The network operates at national and regional levels providing research on training needs, professional mobility and job trends. Their analysis supports the anticipation of economic changes and skills for the future (Cedefop, 2022).

[30]Users often do not distinguish between the different types of existing qualifications: diploma, professional qualification, professional title, or professional qualification certificate.

[31]Decree of 6 December 2019 reforming the professional bachelor's degree.

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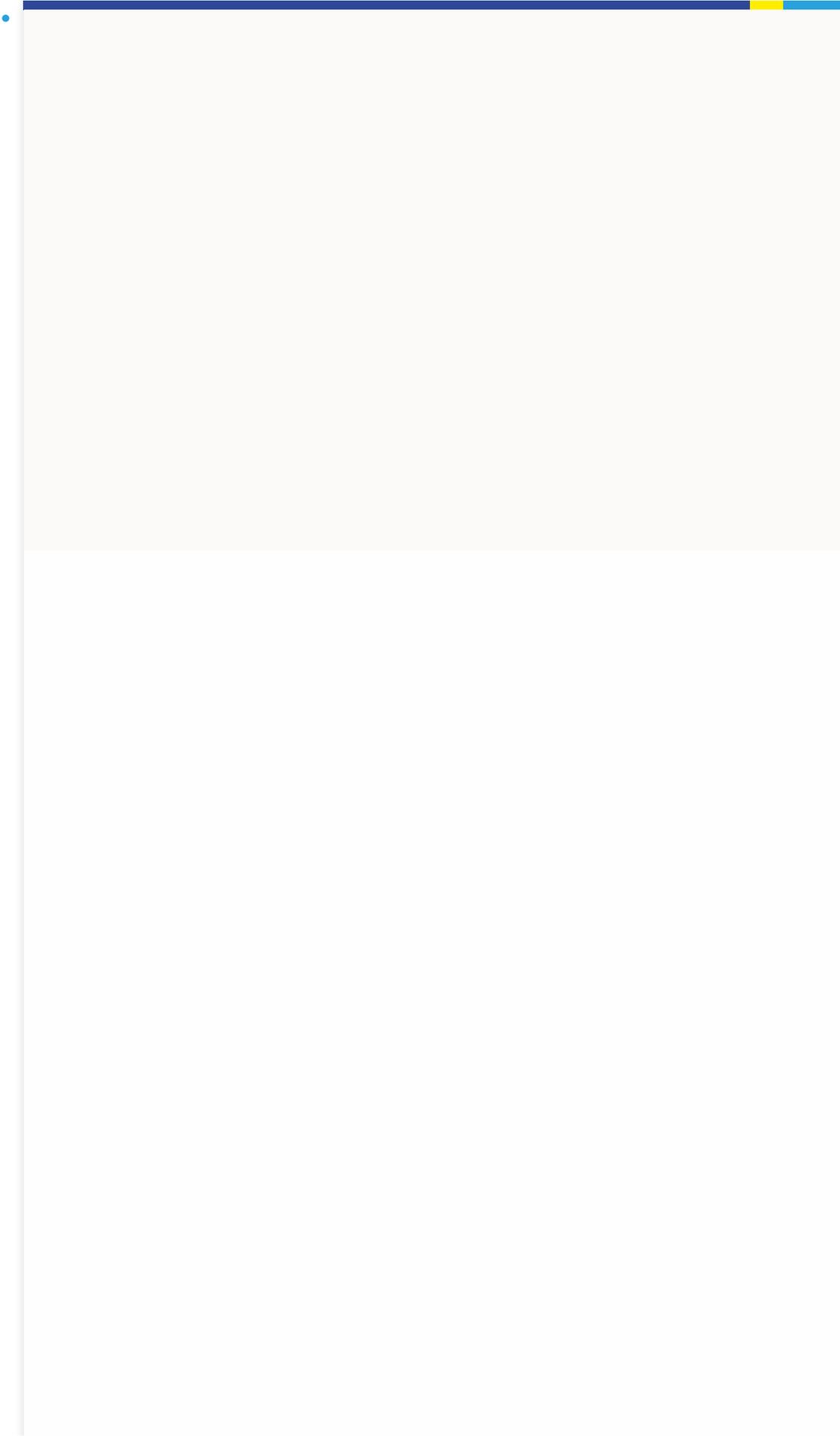
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