

# European Inventory on NQF 2012

## BULGARIA

### Introduction

The Bulgarian national qualifications framework for lifelong learning was adopted by the Council of Ministers decision No 96 of 2 February 2012. The Bulgarian government sees the NQF as a precondition for implementing the EQF and an important national priority <sup>(1)</sup>.

The Bulgarian national qualifications framework is one single, comprehensive framework, which includes qualifications from all levels and subsystems of education and training (pre-primary, primary and secondary general education, VET and HE). It will provide a reference point for validating non-formal and informal learning.

Amendments to national legislation are foreseen in support of implementation of the framework.

### Main policy objectives

The overall objective of developing and introducing a comprehensive NQF compatible with the EQF and the QF-EHEA is to make the levels of the Bulgarian education system clearer and easier to understand by describing them in terms of learning outcomes. This will improve the extent to which target groups and stakeholders are informed about national qualifications. It is hoped that this will raise trust in education and training and make mobility and recognition of qualifications easier. More specific aims addressed by NQF development are to:

- develop a device with a translation and bridging function;
- promote mobility within education and in the labour market;
- promote learning outcomes orientation of qualifications;
- support validation of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning;
- strengthen orientation towards a lifelong learning approach;
- strengthen cooperation between stakeholders.

Apart from offering transparency, the NQF is seen as an important tool supporting national reforms and needs, for example by setting up a system for validating non-formal learning, improving education quality, modernising curricula and strengthening provider accountability. The NQF aims to play an important role in supporting lifelong learning and in promoting the participation of adults in learning in Bulgaria.

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(<sup>1</sup>) Programme for the European development of Bulgaria (2009-13).  
<http://www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/03.11.2009FINAL-ednostranen%20pechat1.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

## Stakeholder involvement and framework implementation

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science coordinated and led the drafting the NQF and is now coordinating its implementation.

Between 2008-11, a working group developed proposals for level descriptors for VET and general education. Higher education levels had already been developed in 2007 by another working group. Both processes served as an important base for further developments.

In January 2011, a more coherent approach was requested and a new task force, responsible for drafting a comprehensive framework with a coherent set of levels and level descriptors was set up. This task force included all national stakeholders. A broad national consultation process was carried out in 2011. Finding an agreement on the level descriptors for higher education was particularly challenging. The result, based on closer comparison of the learning outcomes, merged four sublevels of master programme into one generic level.

## Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The NQF comprises eight levels and an additional preparatory level (NQF level 'zero'), covering pre-school education. Level descriptors take into account EQF and QF-EHEA descriptors.

All levels are described in terms of knowledge (theoretical and factual), skills described as cognitive (use of logical and creative thinking) and practical (manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments), and competences. The descriptor distinguishes between personal and professional competences. They include autonomy and responsibility, but key competences such as learning competences, communicative and social competences are also emphasised.

The expected qualifications levels learning outcomes reflect both the legal acts governing different subsystems of education and training and state education requirements of the contents and expected learning outcomes in the national education system (general and vocational education and training) and in higher education.

It is expected that learning outcomes-based qualifications levels will strengthen the outcomes-dimension and give the learning outcomes a more prominent role in planning education provision. This is especially linked to the development of VET standards divided into units of learning outcomes. In 2011 a draft model of a new VET standard (the so-called State educational requirement for the acquisition of vocational qualification for profession) was elaborated in line with the principles and characteristics of EQF and ECVET. VET standards are seen as a prerequisite for setting up a validation system and updating VET curricula, two important policy priorities.

## Links to other instruments and policies

Discussions on recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning have been intensified by the NQF development. Bulgaria is actively involved in ECVET and EQAVET implementation. Two main policy objectives are emphasised: to support transnational mobility and reform of the national VET system (e.g. improving the readability of qualification defined in units of learning outcomes) and improve transfer and recognition in further learning (e.g. in higher education).

Amendments to the VET Act are foreseen to create the necessary conditions for the implementation of all EU instruments (ECVET, EQF, EQARF and validation mechanisms) and to provide their synergy in reforming VET in Bulgaria <sup>(2)</sup>. It will be closely interlinked with the upcoming Preschool and School Education Act, which will introduce a new structure to secondary school education.

## Referencing to the EQF

Bulgaria aims to reference its NQF to the EQF and the QF-EHEA in early 2013. One joint report is being prepared.

## Important lessons and future plans

The aims of the NQF are to increase transparency in education and training and to aid knowledge and skills transfer and so improve labour force mobility. Level descriptors defined in learning outcomes aim to provide a reference point and common language for diverse qualifications from different education subsystems. By referring to educational levels and state educational requirements, the NQF has been given a strong input orientation. It is expected, however, that learning outcomes-based level descriptors will play a very important role in supporting dialogue and discussion among stakeholders will strengthen the learning outcomes dimension in qualifications design. It will also address vertical and horizontal progression possibilities.

The framework can play an important role, but only if it is a part of wider strategic policy resulting in necessary reforms and institutional regulations. The forthcoming Law on Pre-school and School Education, the Higher Education Act and amendments to the VET Act will feed into these developments.

### Main sources of information

The International and European Cooperation Directorate in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science is designated as the EQF national coordination point (NCP). <http://www.mon.bg> [accessed 6.12.2012]. It plays an organisational, coordination and supportive role in the referencing process.

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<sup>(2)</sup> See Cedefop (2012b). *ECVET monitoring* [forthcoming].