

European Inventory on NQF 2012

THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Introduction

The Czech Republic has yet to decide whether to develop a comprehensive NQF. However, partial frameworks for vocational qualifications and for tertiary education qualifications have been developed and are now operational. The proposed descriptors for primary and secondary education may also be seen as pointing in this direction; the question now being discussed is whether an overarching framework can help to coordinate and bridge these separate developments. The latest preliminary surveys among various stakeholders are supportive of developing a comprehensive NQF as a tool for communication, mutual cooperation and improving the quality of education and training in general (¹).

Work on the framework for vocational qualifications started in 2005, based on the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results (2006) (²), which is also the legal framework for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Both processes are closely related. The core of the framework is the publicly accessible national register of qualifications (NSK).

A framework for tertiary qualifications has been designed under the Q-RAM project, initiated in 2009.

Main policy objectives

The interlinked development of a framework and a register for vocational qualifications has been a cornerstone in the national strategy for lifelong learning (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2007) (³). Aiming at improving access to lifelong learning and creating a more permeable education and training system, the main elements of this strategy, reflecting identified and agreed needs (⁴), are:

- creating a system to recognise and validate learning outcomes, irrespective of the way they were achieved;
- making the whole system more transparent and understandable for all stakeholders, e.g. learners and employers, employees, training providers;

(¹) NCP survey, September 2012.

(²) The Act No 179 of 30 March 2006 on verification and recognition of further education results and on the amendments of some other acts. <http://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/act-no-179-of-30-march-2006> [accessed 5.12.2012].

(³) The strategy of lifelong learning in the Czech Republic. http://www.msmt.cz/uploads/Zalezitosti_EU/strategie_2007_EN_web_jednostrany.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

(⁴) Despite apparent progress achieved in lifelong participation in recent years (to 7.5% in 2010) it is still below EU average (9.6%).

- linking initial and continuing education;
- systematically involving all stakeholders in vocational education and training and in developing national qualifications;
- responding to European initiatives such as making qualifications more transparent and supporting the mobility of learners and workers;
- supporting disadvantaged groups and people with low qualification levels.

Another important issue is to open up different pathways to qualifications and to increase flexibility in the qualifications system. Complete vocational qualifications in the register for vocational qualifications are broadly comparable and compatible with qualifications acquired in initial VET, opening up both ways of acquiring qualifications (formal and non-formal learning). Also, one can acquire vocational (formerly called partial) qualifications listed in the register and build a complete qualification step-by-step. Exams can be taken for all vocational qualifications of a given complete qualification but to achieve complete qualification (attaining a level of education) it is necessary to pass the final exam. This makes final exams based on qualification standards a bridge between the two systems. The focus is more on vocational (formerly called partial) qualifications, because these aid employment and can address relatively quickly shortages of certain qualifications in the labour market.

Developments in VET and higher education – to some extent pursued through projects – have not been coordinated or connected. This leaves a number of questions and challenges for the development of shared concepts and the design of a structure which could provide the basis for a future comprehensive national qualifications framework. This challenge is accentuated by the fact that the idea of a comprehensive framework is not yet well understood among the broader public ⁽⁵⁾.

Stakeholder involvement and framework implementation

The framework for vocational qualifications is fully operational. More than 60 000 applicants have been awarded qualification certificates (their competences validated) ⁽⁶⁾.

The Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results, which came into force in 2007, sets out the basic responsibilities, powers and rights of all stakeholders in developing and awarding vocational qualifications. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) coordinates the activities of the central administrative authorities (ministries) and approves, modifies and issues the list of vocational and complete vocational qualifications. It supports the activities of the National Qualifications Council. This in turn – including all stakeholders – acts as an advisory body to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) in the area of qualifications. Sector councils are in charge of developing qualification and assessment standards of the NSK up to level 7; most qualifications are, however, placed at levels 2 to 4. At higher levels they define only specialised supplemental

⁽⁵⁾ NCP survey, September 2012.

⁽⁶⁾ Ibid.

qualifications, not those awarded by higher education institutions (bachelor, master and PhD degrees) (European Commission et al., 2010, Czech Republic, p. 3) ⁽⁷⁾. Opening up higher levels (up to level 7) for qualifications awarded outside higher education institutions is seen as an important means of supporting lifelong learning.

The national coordination point has played an important role in referencing Czech qualifications to the EQF: it leads the discussion on establishing the comprehensive national qualifications framework and provides and disseminates information on European tools.

Level descriptors and use of learning outcomes

The framework and register for vocational qualifications consists of eight levels. Level descriptors reflect the complexity of work activities ⁽⁸⁾. A national meeting identified a need for modification and broadening of NSK descriptors but a decision can be taken only after the results of the Q-RAM project are published, which will feed into these developments.

In the tertiary education system the framework will consist of two layers. The first layer will be generic descriptors for each level of qualifications, compatible with the overarching framework for EHEA and also with the EQF descriptors. These descriptors cover four levels, corresponding to levels 5 to 8 in the EQF, and cover short cycle (no qualifications at this level currently in the system), bachelor, master and doctoral degrees.

A set of level descriptors for primary and secondary education (EQF level 1 to 4) has also been drafted, based on core curricula. In this proposal, descriptors are grouped into three categories; knowledge, specific study and work skills, and transferable skills. Discussion on the need, scope and goals of the comprehensive qualifications framework between all education sectors continues ⁽⁹⁾. The learning outcomes approach is widely used in the Czech education system, although applied and interpreted slightly differently across levels and subsystems. Core curricula for primary and secondary education emphasise key competences and their practical use. Expected learning outcomes are defined in terms of activities, i.e. tasks students should be able to perform. The Education Act, which came into force in 2005, regulates curriculum reform at primary and secondary level, emphasising learning outcomes and strengthening social partner influence in VET. Key competences (e.g. ICT skills, learning to learn, problem-solving) have become very important. Modularisation of courses was introduced to improve transferability between various

⁽⁷⁾ *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010, country report: Czech Republic.* <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77454.pdf> [accessed 26.11.2012].

⁽⁸⁾ In the proposal on qualifications levels in the national qualifications systems, adopted by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in 2010, these levels were linked to levels of education and types of programmes. During the referencing process it was decided that all qualifications awarded in formal education will be referenced to the EQF levels by comparison of learning outcomes in national curricula and the EQF.

⁽⁹⁾ The Czech Republic has referenced its formal initial qualifications to the EQF based on the classification of educational qualification types (KKOV) and nationally approved curricula.

pathways in initial and continuous education, but it has not yet been implemented in most schools (Cedefop Refernet, Czech Republic, 2010) ⁽¹⁰⁾.

A competence-based and learning outcomes oriented approach is shared by VET and higher education and has broad political support. This is documented and confirmed by the curriculum reform of vocational education (including relevant methodologies) and by the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Results of Further Education. IVET framework curricula are increasingly being aligned with competences defined in the NSK. The majority of standards for levels 4 and higher, however, are still being drafted.

In the project Q-RAM (on the development of a qualifications framework for HE), the learning outcomes approach has been crucial in developing generic descriptors and subject-specific benchmarks and will be further promoted in specific study programmes. A pilot study tested the subject specific benchmarks within this project in 2011.

Links to other instruments and policies

Europass, ECVET and EQAVET are closely coordinated with the EQF implementation, because all these instruments are implemented and promoted within one institution. Policy objectives linked to the ECVET are to support domestic and international mobility and transparency of qualifications (connection of qualifications in NSK with the credit system ECVET is planned) ⁽¹¹⁾. Pilot projects are underway.

The NQF and register of vocational qualifications and the system being developed for validating non-formal and informal learning are closely related. The legal framework for recognising non-formal and informal learning and the register of vocational qualifications is the Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results. The act also establishes the NSK, which is based on the framework for vocational qualifications. Validation and recognition procedures are carried out according to the qualifications and assessment standards included in the national register of qualifications. Currently, only qualifications included in the NSK register can be acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Referencing to the EQF

The Czech Republic referenced its formal qualifications to EQF levels in December 2011. The qualifications referenced are those awarded in lower and upper secondary education, in higher education and in continuing education (under the Act 179/2006 on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results). Higher education qualifications are linked to the EQF, but not yet self-certified against the QF-EHEA. The Czech Republic intends to self-

⁽¹⁰⁾ *VET in Europe: country report Czech Republic*.
http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/eu/pub/cedefop/vetreport/2010_CR_CZ.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

⁽¹¹⁾ See Cedefop (2012b). *ECVET monitoring* [forthcoming].

certify its higher education framework against the QF-EHEA at a later stage, following the completion of a project in 2012.

Important lessons and future plans

An important topic of discussion will be the development towards a more comprehensive overarching national qualifications framework with a coherent set of level descriptors, which will bring together subframeworks for vocational qualifications, for higher education and lower and upper secondary education. Explicit levels would make more transparent the links to the EQF levels. Discussions have started, but no decisions have been taken yet.

Main sources of information

The National Institute for Education (NUV) is the EQF NCP, which manages the operational agenda and creates proposals of the NCP for referencing qualifications levels to the EQF. <http://www.nuov.cz> [accessed 6.12.2012].

A register of all approved qualification and assessment standards is available at <http://www.narodni-kvalifikace.cz/> [accessed 6.12.2012].