

# European Inventory on NQF 2012

## ITALY

### Introduction

Italy has carried out technical work pointing towards a national qualifications framework ( <sup>1</sup>). Political agreement is currently being sought on how to take this technical work forward ( <sup>2</sup>), supported by the fact that, since 2003, reforms have been implemented in education and training (upper secondary general education and VET ( <sup>3</sup>) and higher education) pre-empting the principles of a learning outcomes based NQF. The responsibility for taking forward this initiative is shared between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Ministry of Education, University and Research; the process is supported by regions and social partners.

In spite of not having secured political support for an NQF, Italy has started to link its qualifications levels to the EQF. According to the EQF recommendation this is possible, and Italy refers to the learning outcomes descriptions and definitions already in place for most of its education and training system. The Italian qualifications framework for higher education is already in place.

### Main policy objectives

Italy faces a challenge of integrating different levels of lifelong learning systems into a coherent national qualification system. 'The absence of an explicit and adequately regulated national qualifications' framework is regarded as a barrier for taking forward coherent lifelong learning policies and validation of non-formal and informal learning and making learning pathways for lifelong learning more visible' (European Commission et al., 2010) ( <sup>4</sup>). This is important to support participation of adults in lifelong learning, which was 6.2% in 2010, lower than the EU average of 9.1%. Also, labour market mobility between regions is hampered due to the fact that qualifications awarded in some regions are not always

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(<sup>1</sup>) EQF NCP survey, September 2012.

(<sup>2</sup>) See also the 'Linee Guida per la Formazione' [Training guidelines] of February 17, 2010 signed by the Ministry of Labour, Regions and Social Partners, aimed at relaunching the national qualifications framework as a fundamental basis for the effectiveness and interoperability of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, in compliance with European indications.

(<sup>3</sup>) Regulation for upper secondary school reform was approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2010. The institutional consultation round and the relevant information on reform can be found on <http://nuovilicei.indire.it/> [accessed 5.12.2012].

(<sup>4</sup>) *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: country report: Italy*. pp. 1-3. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77467.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

recognised in other regions (European Parliament; Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2012) <sup>(5)</sup>.

The development of a 'national regulated system of qualifications' – in the direction of an NQF – would respond to several needs:

- it should make the integration of the different systems within the national context easier;
- it responds to the request of the EQF recommendation designed to ease dialogue between education systems and the labour market;
- it should make individual geographic and professional mobility easier, both at national and European levels;
- it should help individuals, along the course of their life, to capitalise on their non-formal and informal experiences. The system should promote social inclusion with reference to people who do not hold regular qualifications and competences needed in the labour market; the national system, based on the learning outcomes approach, and involving different stakeholders, is a precondition for validating non-formal and informal learning.

Evidence suggests that all the institutional, national and regional authorities (including the current government) are more explicitly aiming towards an NQF and a more clear commitment to EQF.

## Stakeholder involvement and framework implementation

The Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies are leading developments in EQF implementation, in agreement with the regions and autonomous provinces and the social partners as laid down in many agreements. At the technical level, the national institute for development of vocational training (ISFOL) set up the national methodologies and coordinates sectoral and professional expert groups involving social partners.

ISFOL is designated the NCP. Its main tasks include management of the EQF implementation process and preparing the technical referencing report, communication with stakeholders, and planning and implementation of the national qualifications database.

## Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The NQF levels and level descriptors have not yet been defined, although there are components in place, e.g. QF for higher education (Quadro dei Titoli Italiani, n.d.) <sup>(6)</sup> and more recently at upper secondary level. Italy uses a learning outcomes approach and the EQF level descriptors as a basis for further developments.

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<sup>(5)</sup> *State of play of the European qualifications framework implementation*, p.93 .  
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/studiesdownload.html?languageDocument=EN&file=73578> [accessed 5.12.2012].

<sup>(6)</sup> *Italian qualifications framework for higher education*.  
<http://www.quadrodeititoli.it/Index.aspx?IDL=2> [accessed 5.12.2012].

Eight EQF levels and level descriptors have been used directly in the Italian referencing process to link all national qualifications from formal education and training to the EQF.

In the QF for higher education, Dublin descriptors are used nationally for three cycles agreed within the Bologna process. More specific descriptors are being defined for each programme by universities. Short cycle qualifications will be defined by subdescriptors taking into account differences in specific elements of qualifications (e.g. workload, length, access).

Italian education and training has introduced the learning outcomes approach at national and regional levels, with each subsystem having its own characteristics.

In February 2010, the reform regulation of the upper secondary education system was adopted <sup>(7)</sup>. Three main secondary school pathways are introduced: general (lycées); technical and vocational education pathway, leading to five-year diplomas; and learning outcomes linked to the EQF.

In vocational training, where the regions have the main responsibility, according to the Italian constitutional reform (National Law No 3, October 2001, concerning modifications of V title of second part of Italian constitution) an update of the local qualification system adopting the learning outcomes approach has been launched. Curricula will be redesigned according to EQF indicators and descriptors. Three-year vocational qualifications and a four-year vocational diploma will be awarded. Implementation started in September 2010 and will continue up to 2013.

The higher (non-academic) professional education and training pathway (IFTTS) used a national standard system based on competences since 2000. After the decree of 25 January 2008, the National Committee on IFTTS agreed to update the standards to make them more coherent with the learning outcomes approach. There will be a regional supply of training courses in IFTTS (one year) and a national supply of IFTTS courses (two years): the one-year courses are already based on national standards of profiles and competence units of learning outcomes but they will be suited to local needs. The two-year courses will soon be based on learning outcomes standards.

In academic education (universities) policy-makers strengthened the need to align diplomas and certificates to the commitments of the Bologna process. In particular, the national decree reforming the academic system (first cycle, three years) and Laurea Magistrale (second cycle, two years) states that the new programmes have to be based on learning outcomes compatible with Dublin descriptors.

## Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report is scheduled to be presented in early 2013. Italy will reference its formal qualifications to the EQF without an NQF, adopting national methodology and criteria to present correlations between the national qualifications (and their learning outcomes) and the EQF levels.

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<sup>(7)</sup> Regulation for upper secondary school reform was approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2010. The institutional consultation round and the relevant information on reform can be found on <http://nuovilicei.indire.it/> [accessed 5.12.2012].

## Important lessons and future plan

Italy has been implementing reforms consistent with EQF principles and learning outcomes approach in various subsystems of education and training.

However, this process and linking implicit national levels to the EQF has been so far treated more as technical procedure (European Parliament; Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2012, p. 89) <sup>(8)</sup>. Real discussions on national learning outcomes based qualifications levels, how qualifications from different subsystems (VET, HE, general education) are aligned to the explicit learning outcomes based levels, and how they relate to each other, seem to be pending. Clear political commitment seems to be lacking. The focus is now on implementing the national Law on Labour Market, setting important priorities in defining national qualifications standards based on learning outcomes, and developing national register of qualifications and a national public certification system.

### Main sources of information

For policy-related information the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies; for the technical level ISFOL; ISFOL acts as national coordination point. <http://www.isfol.it> [accessed 12.12.2012].

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<sup>(8)</sup> European Parliament (2012). *State of play of the European qualifications framework implementation*. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/fr/studiesdownload.html?languageDocument=EN&file=73578> [accessed 11.12.2012].