

# European Inventory on NQF 2012

## LATVIA

### Introduction

Latvia has introduced an eight-level classification. Nationally recognised educational programmes from formal education system (i.e. from primary, secondary and higher education) are referred to a Latvian qualifications framework level (LQF) and linked to the EQF level. Master of crafts, journeyman and qualifications acquired in non-formal and informal learning will be attributed levels in the second phase (2013-15) of NQF development and consequently referenced to the EQF.

The present developments build on reforms initiated in the 1990s and, in particular, the introduction of a five-level structure of professional qualifications in 1999 (through the Vocational Education Law).

In October 2010, amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers regulations on the classification of Latvian education were approved. A new column was added to the table included in these regulations, outlining Latvian education stages and the respective programmes, and referencing each education programme to the LQF/EQF level. Additionally, eight-level descriptors, based on learning outcomes and developed in line with the EQF descriptors, were outlined.

Further developments are planned within the ESF supported projects (see below). Two important laws (Vocational Education Law and Higher Education Law) are in preparation. Both laws will further support the implementation of an eight-level national qualifications framework.

### Main policy objectives

The framework, based on learning outcomes, is seen as an import tool for describing the Latvian education system both for international and national stakeholders, and for ensuring greater lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals according to their needs. Adult participation in lifelong learning in Latvia remains limited, only 5% of adults (age 25-64) participated in lifelong learning compared to EU average of 9.1% (European Commission, 2011, p. 84) <sup>(1)</sup>.

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<sup>(1)</sup> *Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020): country analysis.* [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf) [accessed 5.12.2012].

In this context, the development and implementation of a comprehensive LQF aims to:

- increase transparency and consistency of qualifications;
- develop a comprehensive NQF in line with the needs of lifelong learning;
- strengthen the link between the labour market and education;
- strengthen the cooperation of those involved in the design and award of qualifications;
- increase public understanding of national qualifications and ease their linking to the EQF.

The qualifications framework is based on the classification of education programmes in formal education and on current education provision. Implicit levels of education have been made explicit and linked to level descriptors, which describe expected levels of learning outcomes.

## Stakeholder involvement and framework implementation

The Ministry of Education and Science has the leading role in developing and implementing the LQF. However, the ministry delegated responsibility for coordinating the referencing to the Academic Information Centre. In September 2009, a working group was set up to link Latvian qualifications to the EQF in accordance with the recommendation. The working group included representatives from ministries, national agencies, employer organisations, trade unions, student organisations, and education quality agencies. This working group mostly acted as a consulting and supervisory group, reviewing and approving materials prepared by the experts. There was the overall support of key institutions.

Consultation on the referencing report was organised and results presented to national conferences and workshops. It was emphasised that there is a need to communicate the results of the referencing to the wider audience and to strengthen ownership of the framework and commitment to implement it. Currently, awareness of the LQF remains low among the general public.

The Academic Information Centre has been appointed as the NCP and played a key role in coordination of the referencing process, preparing and updating the referencing report, and communication and dissemination of information among all relevant stakeholders.

## Levels and descriptors and use of learning outcomes

An eight-level framework with level descriptors based on learning outcomes has been adopted. Level descriptors for each of these levels are defined as knowledge (knowledge and comprehension), skills (ability to apply knowledge, communication and general skills) and competence (analysis, synthesis and assessment). When developing the level descriptors, relevant state education standards, the EQF and Dublin level descriptors, and Bloom's taxonomy were used to provide evidence.

There is growing emphasis on learning outcomes in Latvia, although the term is not widely used and there is not yet a systematic approach. Skills and knowledge are commonly used terms.

Subject-based outcomes in general education have been defined in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The compulsory education content is stated in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations on the state standard in basic education and in basic education study subjects' standards (2006). The content of general secondary education is regulated by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations on the state general secondary education standard and standards of general secondary education study subjects (2008).

The content of vocational education is regulated by state vocational education standards, occupational standards and vocational education programmes. The state vocational education standards determine the strategic aims of educational programmes, compulsory education content, and assessment principles and procedures for the education obtained. The occupational standards stipulate the basic tasks and obligations for the respective professional activities, the basic requirements of professional qualification, and the general and professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences needed to fulfil them. Vocational education programmes include the objectives and content of vocational education, an implementation plan, previous education requirements, and the necessary personal, financial and material resources. Programmes are developed by education establishments in line with the state education and occupational standards.

The framework for higher education is founded on three Bologna cycles, based on learning outcomes. They are defined as results of study programmes expected from an average student in the programmes (Academic Information Centre; Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, 2011) <sup>(2)</sup>. The content of professional higher education programmes is determined by the relevant occupational standards and state education standards, which are outlined in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations on the state first level professional higher education standard (2001). In July 2011, the Parliament (*Saeima*) adopted the Amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions which introduced the term learning outcomes.

## Links to other instruments and policies

NQF developments are closely related to opening up the qualification system to competences acquired outside the formal system.

The system on validating professional competence obtained outside formal education is new in Latvia and was legally introduced in February 2011. Regulations stipulate the procedure for how professional competence (except for regulated professions) that corresponds to the EQF level 3 to 4 can be assessed, validated and recognised. In June

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<sup>(2)</sup> *Referencing of the Latvian education system to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area: self-assessment report.* <http://www.nki-latvija.lv/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Latvian-education-system-referencing-to-EQF-Self-assessment-Report.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

2011, the first qualifications were awarded using this procedure. For levels 5 to 8, in January 2012 the Cabinet of Ministers 'Regulations on recognising the learning outcomes acquired in previous education and professional experience' were approved to determine the procedures for assessing and recognising learning outcomes (for higher education) obtained during previous education or professional experience, as well as criteria for recognition.

## Referencing to the EQF

Latvia referenced its national qualifications levels to the EQF and self-certified to the QF-EHEA in October 2011.

Table **Level correspondence established between the Latvian qualifications framework (LQF) and the EQF**

<b>LQF</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>EQF</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

## Important lessons and future plans

The present referencing report is limited to formal qualifications; in a second phase, the exercise will be extended to include other qualifications accommodating the new legal regulations <sup>(3)</sup>.

In the coming years several large projects with ESF support will support further development of the LQF. For example, the ESF project Development of sectoral qualification system and increasing efficiency and quality of vocational education (2010-13), aims to explore professions in 12 sectors by identifying relevant knowledge, skills and competences, and place these professions on the relevant LQF/EQF levels.

To promote the quality and efficiency of higher education, an ESF project for evaluating higher education programmes and developing recommendations has been launched within ESF activity. Improvement of study programme content in line with the needs of the national economy, implementation and development of academic personnel competence, and setting up a study field accreditation system are the main goals of this project.

### Main sources of information

Information on the referencing process and the self-assessment report is available on the website of the Latvian national coordination point (Academic Information Centre). <http://nki-latvija.lv> or <http://nqf-latvia.lv> [accessed 5.10.2012].

<sup>(3)</sup> NCP survey, September 2012.