

European Inventory on NQF 2012

LITHUANIA

Introduction

An eight-level Lithuanian qualifications framework (LTQF) was formally adopted through a government resolution 4 May 2010 (government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2010) ⁽¹⁾. The LTQF is based on eight learning outcomes levels, and covers all officially recognised qualifications in primary and secondary general education, vocational education and training and higher education. The formal framework has been further strengthened through two amendments to the Law on Education (17 March and 24 August 2011) clarifying its role and function. A joint referencing/self-certification to the EQF and QF-EHEA was completed in late 2011, underlining the comprehensive character of the framework. The LTQF has now entered an early operational stage.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The development of the LTQF forms part of a decade-long effort to reform and modernise Lithuanian education and training. The national education strategy for the period 2003-12 stresses the need for flexible and open education structures, for better coordination between general and vocational education and training, and for stronger links to non-formal and informal learning ⁽²⁾. The LTQF emerged from this strategy and addresses five main objectives:

- the framework should play a role in better adapting qualifications to the needs of the labour market and society;
- it should help to improve the clarity of the design of qualifications to improve assessment and recognition;
- it should increase transparency of qualifications and assist individuals in using them;
- it should support national and international mobility;
- it should encourage lifelong learning and allow individuals to build on outcomes of non-formal and informal learning.

The Lithuanian NQF is based on complete (full) qualifications. However, and according to the 2011 referencing report to the EQF, the medium- and long-term strategy is to introduce units of qualifications defined as the combinations of the competences needed for

⁽¹⁾ *Resolution on approving the description of the Lithuanian qualifications, 4 May 2010.* http://www.kpmc.lt/LTKS_EKS/LTQF_official_translation.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

⁽²⁾ Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 4 July. *Provisions for the national education strategy 2003-12.* http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Lithuania/Lithuania_National_Education_Strategies_Provisions_2003-2012.pdf [accessed 20.12.2012].

executing certain tasks. It offers the potential for referencing the qualifications units to certain levels of the NQF, but such possibilities are not yet foreseen in legal documents.

The LTQF includes qualifications awarded by formal education and training. There are currently no plans to open the framework up to qualifications offered by the private or non-formal sector.

Stakeholder involvement and framework implementation

Work on the NQF was initiated by the Labour Market Training Authority of Lithuania, which launched the ESF -funded project for the design of the NQF in 2006. Following extensive technical work, a National Authority of Qualifications was established in 2008 to coordinate NQF implementation. This authority was abolished in 2009, following the election of new Parliament late 2008; the Ministry of Education and Science then took over the main responsibility for NQF development in 2009 and has retained this role since. The Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC) has been appointed as the national coordination point for EQF and will take on the day-to-day responsibility for promoting and implementing the LTQF.

The development of the LTQF since 2009 has been dominated by stakeholders from education and training. Both the vocational and higher education sectors have contributed actively and jointly to the process, paving the way for one comprehensive framework. The limited direct involvement of social partners in the process does not mean, however, that the link to the labour market has been overlooked. The framework has a clear labour market orientation, for example defining qualification 'as the ability and right to engage in a certain professional activity recognised under the procedure established by laws, legal acts adopted by the government or an institution authorised by the government' (Qualifications and VET Development Centre, 2012) ⁽³⁾. This orientation is also reflected by the activity focused level descriptors (see below), referring back to the work on VET-standards developed since the late 1990s.

The influence of labour market stakeholders has been strengthened by the involvement of the Central Professional Committee in the referencing of the LTQF to the EQF. This is a tripartite committee, established under the Law on VET, signalling that an operational LTQF will require active involvement of stakeholders outside the education and training. This broadening of the LTQF base is also reflected by the fact that the Ministry of Economy (responsible for the human resource development strategy in Lithuania) was involved in the referencing of the LTQF to the EQF.

⁽³⁾ *National report 2012: referencing the Lithuanian qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area.* http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/documentation_en.htm [accessed 26.11.2012].

Level descriptors and use of learning outcomes

The eight levels of the LTQF combine the existing structure of the Lithuanian qualifications system with principles introduced by the EQF. The group of experts involved in designing the framework took as their starting point the two existing level arrangements, the five vocational education levels introduced in 1997 (and updated in 2001), and the three levels of higher education introduced in 1992. Combined with the priority attributed to the referencing to the EQF, it was decided that eight levels would be the optimal number for the LTQF. It is interesting to note that while qualifications equivalent to level 5 were awarded by vocational colleges until 2004, there are currently no qualifications being awarded at this level. It has been indicated that this may change in the future as the potential for developing advanced vocational education and training is of particular interest.

The level descriptors are defined according to two parameters: characteristics of activities and types of competences.

While the distinction between cognitive, functional and general competences broadly reflects the EQF distinction between knowledge, skills and competence, the criteria on activity can be seen as a further development and specification of the autonomy, responsibility and context aspects introduced – explicitly and implicitly – in the EQF descriptors. The combination of the two parameters results in a detailed description of each level. The slightly different descriptor logics of the LTQF and the EQF was not considered to create difficulties for the referencing, which was generally considered transparent by the EQF AG in 2011.

Table **Level descriptors in the Lithuanian NQF**

Parameters		
	Characteristics of activities	Types of competences
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · complexity of activities · autonomy of activities · variability of activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · functional competences · cognitive competences · general competences

The learning outcomes (competence) approach is broadly accepted and implemented in Lithuanian vocational education and training. VET uses a learning outcomes (competences) based approach both for definition of standards and for their translation into curricula.

The university sector is still at an early stage in using learning outcomes for defining and describing degrees and qualifications. A national project for implementing the ECTS system has been launched recently; this may support the use of learning outcomes in defining higher education degrees and qualifications. In vocationally oriented higher education, standards are already defined and described in terms of competences.

The current learning outcomes situation reflects different traditions and approaches. While VET has made some progress in standards and curriculum design, the provision of training is mostly oriented to subject and time/duration; learners are only partly able to tailor their own learning programme or pathway.

The implementation of the LTQF is seen as part of a strategy to move towards a more consistent and comprehensive use of learning outcomes across education and training levels and types.

Links to other tools and policies

There is currently no comprehensive strategy on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Lithuania. The LTQF is, however, seen as an instrument which can promote practices in this area and the existence of competence based standards in VET is seen as a positive factor. Recent legal reforms in education and training have also favoured validation and the report on EQF referencing states that political preconditions for recognition of prior learning now are in place. No plans currently exist for the introduction of ECVET in Lithuania though implementation of ECTS for higher education has started.

Referencing to the EQF

The Lithuanian NQF was referenced to the EQF in November 2011, with one integrated report covering both the EQF and QF-EHEA. The report outlines a one-to-one relationship between LQF and EQF levels.

Table **Level correspondence established between the Lithuanian qualifications framework (LTQF) and the EQF**

LTQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Important lessons and future plans

The LTQF has now moved into an early operational stage and its relevance to education and training and labour market stakeholders will have to be demonstrated in the coming years. It will be even more important to demonstrate the relevance of the framework to ordinary citizens and learners, a challenging task as the framework and its potential usefulness is relatively little known outside those committees and institutions that have developed it. In this sense Lithuania faces many of the same challenges as other emerging NQFs.

Main sources of information

The Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC) has been appointed as the EQF NCP.

More information to be found at <http://www.lnks.lt> [accessed 12.3.2013].