

European Inventory on NQF 2012

SPAIN

Introduction

Spain is currently developing an NQF for lifelong learning (*Marco Español de Cualificaciones*, MECU), based on learning outcomes. It will link and coordinate different education and training subsystems. The framework will include qualifications obtained in compulsory education, in post-secondary and higher education and will integrate validation of non-formal and informal learning processes.

The draft Royal decree on the introduction of MECU has now been prepared following delay due to restructuring of the government. It defines levels and level descriptors as the basis for referencing the MECU to the EQF levels. It has been supervised and positively reported by the national advisory bodies ⁽¹⁾. It is expected to be adopted in 2013.

The higher four levels of MECU will be linked to the qualifications framework for higher education (*Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior*, MECES), which has been put in place separately ⁽²⁾.

Main policy objectives

One of the main objectives of developing a Spanish qualifications framework for lifelong learning compatible with the EQF and the QF-EHEA is to make Spanish qualifications easier to understand by describing them in terms of learning outcomes; it should also clarify relations between them. It is expected that this will improve the extent to which stakeholders are informed about national qualifications, raising trust and making mobility easier. The NQF aims to support lifelong learning, link IVET and CVET, and improve access and participation for everyone, including the disadvantaged. Through the NQF – it is expected – it will be easier to identify, validate and recognise all kinds of learning outcomes (including non-formal and informal learning), regardless of the way they were acquired. It will support better use of qualifications at national and European level.

Developments take into account experiences with the national catalogue of professional qualifications, established by the Law on Qualifications and Professional Training in 2002. Of special attention, and lively discussion, are levels 3 and 4 of the NQF, where formal vocational qualifications/titles, regulated by the Ministry of Education and professional qualifications/certificates under the remit of Ministry of Labour would be assigned. They are different in scope of learning they acquire, but can be linked to the same level of the catalogue.

⁽¹⁾ *Spanish qualifications framework. State-of-play*. October 2012 [internal].

⁽²⁾ <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2011/08/03/pdfs/BOE-A-2011-13317.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012].

Another important aim is to support transition and progression possibilities within the various subsystems of education and vocational training, e.g. the progression from short cycle to university programmes and opening up higher education for non-traditional learners, who might have no school leaving certificate. Another challenge is to put procedures in place for recognising non-formal learning and to reduce early school leaving (18-24 age group) (Cedefop ReferNet Spain, 2010, pp. 17-18; European Commission, 2011, pp.138-143) ⁽³⁾.

The MECU should also have an important communication role for diverse stakeholders.

Stakeholder involvement and framework implementation

The Ministry of Education, Directorate General for Vocational Training, is coordinating NQF development and implementation in cooperation with other ministries (e.g. employment and social security, industry, energy and tourism, health, social services and equality, economy and competitiveness). The development work includes a wide range of other stakeholders such as social partners (unions, Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations, Spanish Confederation of Small and Medium Enterprises), institutional coordination bodies (e.g. Sectoral Conference of Education, General Conference for University Policy), consultative bodies (State School Council, Vocational Training Council, Arts Education Council, University Council), agencies for evaluation and others (professional corporations and associations).

Cooperation with the Bologna process is ensured with members represented in both the Committee for MECU and in the group for MECES to achieve methodological and structural coherence, making possible the alignment of the two frameworks.

Level descriptors and learning outcomes

An eight-level framework has been proposed to cover all main types of Spanish qualification. The four highest levels are compatible with the Spanish QF for higher education, which is based on the Dublin descriptors.

Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. They have been inspired by the EQF level descriptors, but adopted to suit the national context. This is particularly the case for skills, where the ability to communicate in different languages and analytical skills are emphasised. Competence is defined as autonomy and responsibility and including learning skills and attitudes.

⁽³⁾ *VET in Europe country report: Spain 2010.* <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77419.pdf> [accessed 5.12.2012]. *Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), country analysis for Spain.* http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012]. The percentage of the population in this age group that has not finished the second phase of secondary education and is not in education or training rose to 30.8% in 2005, slightly decreased in 2006 to 30.6%, but in 2008 it increased to 31.9%; in 2010 it was 28.4%, twice the EU average.

Broad generic descriptors for the NQF will be supplemented with more detailed descriptors when necessary (e.g. for professional qualifications).

The learning outcomes approach is seen as an essential part of the development of the MECU and is supported by all stakeholders. It is work in progress. It is expected that the development of both MECU and MECES will further support the strengthening of learning outcomes at all education and qualification levels to make qualifications more readable and easier to compare.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport has established national core curricula for the various levels of education: pre-primary, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and vocational training. These are determined by central government. The core curricula determine the general objectives for each stage of education as well as specific objectives for each area or subject. They also establish the content and evaluation criteria for each area and the basic skills for each stage of compulsory education.

The new VET qualifications are already defined in terms of learning outcomes. The professional modules contained in each qualification gather the learning outcomes and the corresponding assessment criteria that show that the qualification holder knows, understands, and is able to do as expected on completion of the programme. These learning outcomes are closely related to work activities and required professional competences.

In higher education, new study programmes have to include expected outcomes and achievement of learning objectives set for the student. All study programmes have to be accredited according to national guidelines.

Links to other instruments and tools

The NQF aims to reinforce the link to validation of non-formal and informal learning. In July 2009, the new Royal decree for the recognition of professional competences (1224/2009) was adopted; this regulates the procedures for validating professional competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning and professional experience. The national catalogue of professional qualifications is used as a standard for validating non-formal learning as well as for official diplomas on vocational training.

Referencing to the EQF

The draft referencing report is expected to be prepared in early 2013. The self-certification report has been prepared. Spain has not yet decided whether there will be one joint report prepared to reference to the EQF and self-certify to the QH-EHEA.

Important lessons and future plans

Dialogue with stakeholders is a cornerstone of the process. It is a challenge to link the two NQF development processes and to strengthen cooperation between stakeholders from all

subsystems. Reinforced cooperation with the Ministry of Employment and Social Security has been developed recently.

Main sources of information

The Ministry of Education is the main source of information on NQF development, (MECU and MECES), also for all formal qualifications, including VET diplomas. <http://www.educacion.es/portada.html> [accessed 14.12.2012].

The Directorate General for Vocational Training has been designated the national contact point.

The MECU website has been launched <http://www.educacion.gob.es/mecu> [accessed 14.12.2012].