

Albania

European inventory on NQF 2016

Introduction and context

The national employment and skills strategy (NESS) and action plan 2014-20 was presented in February 2014, bringing together, as part of the same strategic plan for the first time, VET for young people and adults, active policies for employment, and social inclusion. The strategy is ambitious, aiming to increase employment by aligning VET to labour market needs, in turn promoting inclusion and cohesion (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2014a and 2014b). Complying with the European employment strategy 2020, the employment and skills strategy is seen as bringing Albania closer to EU integration: since June 2014, Albania has been a candidate country for EU entry.

With unemployment a major challenge in the country, the employment and skills strategy aims to reduce youth unemployment; the rate was 32.3% in 2015 for those aged 15 to 29 ⁽¹⁾. Most of the unemployed have low levels of education and, for those living in rural areas, the main source of employment or self-employment is agriculture. Participation of women on the labour market is much lower than men and declined in recent years of crisis. Increasing the share of students choosing VET programmes, increasing the employment of VET graduates, and boosting the participation of women are further aims.

The Albanian qualifications framework (AQF) is to become one of the policy pillars for employment, education and training, according to the employment and skills strategy AQF implementation is also considered instrumental to strong governance of the labour market and qualification systems. VET is centralised, with limited involvement of social partners and low responsiveness to local needs, and low attractiveness to learners. The two separate VET provider systems, vocational schools and vocational training centres, will be merged in one system of VET multifunctional centres. Five multifunctional centres ⁽²⁾ are

⁽¹⁾ See Eurostat labour force survey statistics: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Labour_market_and_Labour_force_survey_\(LFS\)_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Labour_market_and_Labour_force_survey_(LFS)_statistics)

⁽²⁾ *VET multifunctional centre*, is a provider of vocational education and training, which has the legal mandate and capacity to provide initial and post-secondary vocational education, as well as continuous training for youth and adults. This institution offers vocational qualifications in different areas/profiles, full-time and part-time, within the

currently being established: four in the scope of the IPA 2013 project ⁽³⁾ and one supported by the German Association for International Cooperation (GIZ) ⁽⁴⁾. By 2020 a total of nine multifunctional centres are planned. The attractiveness of vocational education is still low and perceived as a second best path to tertiary education, rather than a route to labour market entry.

AQF development has been continued over several years with EU recommendations and standards and the Bologna process as strong drivers. The law on the Albanian qualifications framework ⁽⁵⁾ was adopted in 2010 and is currently under revision; this revision and preparing secondary legislation are part of the mandate of the AQF taskforce ⁽⁶⁾.

Policy objectives

Developing and implementing the Albanian qualifications framework is one of the policy objectives of the national employment and skills strategy 2014-20. It is part of the strategic objective to strengthen the governance of the labour market and qualification systems, including developing and implementing the AQF. Another strategic objective of the employment and skills strategy is to provide quality VET for youths and adults (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2014a and 2014b). Actions to reach the objective to develop and implement AQF goal include:

- (a) review of work already undertaken: the AQF law of 2010 will be revised and implemented. Amendments to the law will be arranged in by-laws. The work done on qualifications by the National Agency for Vocational Education and

institution, through various forms of work-based learning and for different age groups (youth, adults and persons with disabilities or with specific needs) in conformity with labour market needs. The centre can hold specific functions related to continuous professional development of teachers and instructors. (New draft VET law)

- ⁽³⁾ The Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA) is the EU's support programme for candidate and potential candidate countries.
- ⁽⁴⁾ The work of GIZ in Albania: <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/294.html>
- ⁽⁵⁾ Law No 10 247 of 4.3.2010 on the Albanian qualifications framework (LIGJ Nr.10 247, datë 4.3.2010 – për Kornizën Shqiptare të Kualifikimeve): <http://80.78.70.231/pls/kuv/f?p=201:Ligj:10247:04.03.2010>
- ⁽⁶⁾ The AQF taskforce was established at the end of 2015 with a double mandate from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. The mandate includes development of an AQF handbook for users, revision of the AQF law, EQF referencing of the AQF and development of an implementation plan. The mandate lasts until the end of 2017.

- Training and Qualification (NAVETQ) and in different donor projects will be reviewed alongside those offered by public or private VET providers or universities. Evaluation and certification of qualifications will be revised;
- (b) establishment and operationalisation of sector committees: sector committees with social partner representation and minimum representation of 30% of qualified women will be established. Each sector committee will review the qualifications required within its sector and will participate in revising the national list of professions, developing occupational standards and vocational qualifications for priority sectors, and placing these in the AQF database;
 - (c) revision and linking of curricula to the AQF: curricula will be revised and interlinked using AQF qualifications and standards, and referenced to AQF levels;
 - (d) selecting bodies and putting in place procedures for validation.

The law on the AQF is due to be revised now that the process has been revitalised. According to current law, some of the main objectives of the AQF are to:

- (a) provide a basis for comparison of achievements in all parts of the education system and national and international training;
- (b) stimulate the development of qualifications, based on internationally comparable standards of knowledge, skills and wider competences;
- (c) encourage the development of lifelong learning, including skills for adults;
- (d) promote flexible and individualised learning and support transfer and progress;
- (e) improve employment opportunities and learning for individuals;
- (f) be an instrument for quality improvement.

Levels and use of learning outcomes

The AQF law of 2010 describes a comprehensive eight-level framework that corresponds to the EQF. In addition to levels, the AQF uses qualification types to distinguish between groups of education programmes/qualifications recognisable for Albanian stakeholders. Each qualification type is allocated to an AQF level.

Three types of qualification are identified:

- (a) general qualifications at secondary school level; AQF levels 1 to 4;
- (b) higher qualifications offered at, or in cooperation with, universities; AQF levels 6 to 8;

- (c) vocational qualifications provided in VET schools, training centres or at the workplace; AQF levels 2 to 5.

Examples of qualification types are:

- (a) one-year programme for technician/middle managers/vocational certificate at AQF level 4;
- (b) two-year programme for semi-qualified workers/vocational certificate at AQF level 2 and bachelor at AQF level 6 (Table 1).

AQF level descriptors have been defined in terms of learning outcomes: they are the backbone of the AQF and use the domains knowledge, skills and competence (AQF law of 2010). These level descriptors are a copy of the EQF level descriptors. The AQF taskforce acknowledges that the current level descriptors are too general and not fit for assigning qualifications to levels; they are being revised. More detailed level descriptors have been defined – and are used – by NAVETQ for AQF levels 2-5 and in higher education for AQF levels 5-8. These are tailored to education subsectors and are used for development of new qualifications and programmes. However, an AQF for lifelong learning needs a coherent set of descriptors that describe learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and (broader) competences for each AQF level, regardless of types of qualification.

The new VET law (draft October 2016) states that ‘Acquisition, recognition and certification of vocational qualifications in Albania are based on qualification descriptions which include knowledge, skills and competences to be achieved by the student or trainee.’ (Article 14.1) and that ‘Assessments and tests are done to determine whether learning outcomes have been achieved to given standards.’ (Article 26.1). So, VET qualifications are based on learning outcomes.

Higher education qualifications are not yet based on learning outcomes but, according to the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), all learning programmes in higher education will be expressed in learning outcomes. Despite including many innovative elements, the new curricula for VET and higher education still take an input- and subject-based approach. Work remains to be done in moving towards an approach based on learning outcomes and competence levels.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

According to the AQF law of 2010 ⁽⁷⁾ the NQF is managed by an AQF council, chaired by the Minister for Education and Science. The AQF council is supported by a secretariat which helps to manage its administrative and organisational tasks. The law defines composition of the AQF council and the secretariat but the council and unit have not yet been established. The implementing institutions mentioned in the law are:

- (a) for general education (elementary, lower and upper secondary education): the National Agency of Vocational Education and Training (currently NAVETQ), the Institute of Curricula and Training (currently Institute for Education Development) and the National Agency for Assessment of Students' Achievements
- (b) for higher education: the Agency for Accreditation of Higher Education, the Council of Accreditation and higher education institutions
- (c) the National Employment Service.

According to the law (Article 10.2) the tasks of implementing agencies are periodically to conduct qualification assessment surveys, compare them to international qualifications and to advise institutions responsible for recognition of foreign qualifications for academic or employment purposes, for comparability or/and equivalency matters. The law does not stipulate which institutions are responsible for which tasks.

The AQF taskforce is currently redefining AQF institutional arrangements. Financial resources for AQF functions and bodies have not been defined, but will be regulated in AQF legislation. The NAVETQ shall be assigned AQF implementation tasks and needs to be staffed and resourced accordingly. As the development of the AQF is one of the areas covered by the IPA II Budget Support programmes ⁽⁸⁾, respective work should also get appropriate resources. There are three quality assurance regulating bodies ⁽⁹⁾ but a challenge is that,

⁽⁷⁾ Law No 10 247 on the Albanian qualifications framework (AQF):
<http://www.akafp.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/LIGJ-10247.pdf>

⁽⁸⁾ Financial assistance under IPA II programme for Albania:
https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/funding-by-country/albania_en

⁽⁹⁾ The Ministry of Education is responsible for the quality assurance (QA) of qualifications in general/pre-university education, NAVETQ is responsible for the QA

currently, there is no structured social partner engagement in the governance of quality assurance related to VET qualifications and quality assuring qualifications standards in terms of relevance and attainment in general.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The action plan for the employment and skills strategy specifies a national system for validation. Actions to be taken include ⁽¹⁰⁾:

- (a) 'Selecting bodies and putting in place procedures for the validation of qualifications, skills assessments, certification and the validation/recognition of prior learning;
- (b) appointment of special bodies and establishment of procedures for the validation of qualifications, assessments of knowledge, skills and competences; certification; and validation of prior learning;
- (c) establishment of a national system to recognise qualifications, work experience, skills obtained/received abroad.'

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is one of the priority measures in the national strategy for employment and skills 2014-20. Recognition of knowledge and skills acquired through work experience and/or voluntary activities is a valuable tool to encourage people to pursue lifelong learning and for optimising the training costs.

NQF implementation

Tools and approaches are available to support the reform of qualification systems, the implementation of the NQF, and redesign of vocational qualifications. The Albanian VET and qualifications agency – NAVETQ – compiles a national list of vocational qualifications that includes all vocational qualifications at AQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. Design of a public interactive,

of vocational qualifications (AQF Level 2-5) and AQAHE is responsible for QA of higher education programmes and institutions.

⁽¹⁰⁾ See action D2.4 of the action plan (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2014b):
http://www.sociale.gov.al/files/documents_files/Albania_EMP-SKILLS_STRATEGY_ActionPlan_2014_.pdf

searchable web portal/database on qualifications, curricula and training offers by VET providers is one of the deliverables – action B3.2 – in the action plan of the national employment and skills strategy 2020. No action has yet been taken.

The Ministry of Education and Science is creating a national register of higher education programmes, with each programme coded according to field of study.

The employment and skills strategy includes actions aimed at developing and implementing the AQF. Revision of existing legislation is foreseen, as well as reviews of work already carried out on vocational qualifications. The establishment of sector committees is planned, to review and develop occupational standards. So far, information on how these plans will be put into practice is lacking. The AQF has not yet had an impact on end users, while principles and procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the AQF have still to be developed and a qualifications database to be established. The focus for the coming years will be on AQF implementation and strengthening of the qualification system and the labour market.

Referencing to the EQF

Referencing the AQF to the EQF is part of the mandate of the AQF taskforce and is foreseen for 2018.

Important lessons and future plans

Establishment of the AQF taskforce with a broad but clear mandate is speeding up the development and implementation of the AQF and related legislation. The composition of the AQF taskforce ensures good coordination between the work of the taskforce and related developments in VET, pre-university/general education and higher education. The taskforce will present proposals about structure, institutional management and quality assurance of the AQF (among others). The final decision, however, will be made at a political level not represented in the task force. Two ministries are involved in reaching political consensus: the Ministry of Education for the higher education and general education sectors and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth for the VET sector.

Further source of information

[URLs accessed December 2016]

- The Albanian Ministry of Education and Sports is the main source of information and the national coordination point for AQF development:
<http://www.arsimi.gov.al>
- ETF (2014). *Developed countries are not rich because they have, they are rich because they know*. Press release on the national strategy for employment and skills 2014-20:
http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Albania_National_Employment_and_Skills_Strategy_Launch_EN
- ILO (2014) *New national strategy to foster conditions for jobs in Albania*. Press release on the national strategy for employment and skills 2014-20:
http://www.ilo.org/budapest/information-resources/press-releases/WCMS_237056/lang--en/index.htm

Albanian qualifications framework (AQF)

Level	Qualifications for initial education			Qualifications for lifelong learning (examples)
	Pre-university qualifications	Vocational qualifications	Higher qualifications	
8			Doctoral studies; Long-term specialisations; Executive master Master of arts;	Continuous professional development programmes
7			Master of Science; Professional master	
6			Bachelor	Courses designed for managers, higher technicians
5		Up to two-year post-secondary programmes; Professional diploma (two years); Professional certificate (one year) (Apprenticeship programmes vocational certificate)		

Qualifications for initial education				Qualifications for lifelong learning (examples)
Level	Pre-university qualifications	Vocational qualifications	Higher qualifications	
4	State Matura Diploma	Professional State matura diploma Four-years programmes for technician/mid managers; vocational certificate		Bridging courses Vocational training courses
		One-year programme for technician/ middle managers; vocational certificate		
		Two-year programme for technician/ middle managers; vocational certificate (Apprenticeship programmes vocational certificate)		
3	One-year programmes for qualified workers vocational certificate (Apprenticeship programmes vocational certificate)			
2		Two-year programme for semi-qualified workers vocational certificate		
1	Certificate after compulsory nine-years education			

Source: Adapted from European Training Foundation (2016).

List of abbreviations

AQAHE	Albanian agency for quality assurance in higher education
AQF	Albanian qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
IPA	Instrument for pre-accession, the EU's support programme for candidate and potential candidate countries
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
NAVETQ	National Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Qualification
NESS	national employment and skills strategy
NQF	national qualifications framework

References

[URLs accessed 2.12.2016]

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http://www.sociale.gov.al/files/documents_files/Strategjia_per_Punesim_dhe_Aftesim_2014-2020.pdf

Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (2014b). *Action plan and indicators for the national strategy for employment and skills 2014-20*.

http://www.sociale.gov.al/files/documents_files/Albania_EMP-SKILLS_STRATEGY_ActionPlan_2014_.pdf

European Training Foundation (2016). Inventory of NQF recent developments in ETF partner countries: Albania (update based on an ETF fact finding mission in December 2016 and on the Albanian national employment and skills strategy 2014-20).

https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Albania%20-%20NQF%20Inventory