

Albania

European inventory on NQF 2018

Introduction and context

The National employment and skills strategy (NESS) and action plan 2014-20 ⁽¹⁾ bring together, as part of the same strategic plan for the first time, vocational education and training (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. Annual progress reports are compiled and an integrated policy management group monitors implementation. NESS 2014-20 comprises 52 actions to be implemented over a seven-year period. In 2017 ⁽²⁾, of these 52 actions, 49 (94%) were initiated. Actions not implemented concern targeting extension of employment services into rural areas. 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 33.8 in 2017 for those aged 15 to 29. 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. Enrolment in VET increased in 2017 by 14% compared to 2014, and there is a positive trend in VET enrolment and participation, though the increment rate is half of that of the objective set in the national strategy (Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2018).

The implementation of the Albanian qualifications framework (AQF) is considered as a tool for strong governance of the labour market and qualification

⁽¹⁾ Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (2014). *National employment and skills strategy 2014-20: higher skills and better jobs for all women and men*.
https://financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NESS-ENG-8-1-15_final-version.pdf

⁽²⁾ Ministry of Finance and Economy (2018). *National employment and skills strategy 2014-20: annual progress report 2017*.
https://financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Progress-Report-2017-NESS-28-June-2018-FINAL_EN-converted.pdf

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⁽³⁾. Reorganisation of the VET schools, and the programmes offered, continued in 2017. By 2020 a total of nine multifunctional centres are planned.

The Albanian qualifications framework (AQF) has eight levels, and is comprehensive of all types of qualifications and levels. Its descriptors are learning-outcomes based, divided by knowledge, skills and competence. Its development has continued over several years with EU recommendations and standards and the Bologna process as strong drivers. The law on the Albanian qualifications framework was adopted in 2010⁽⁴⁾ and a revision of the law was adopted in May 2018⁽⁵⁾. This revision has been part of the mandate of the AQF taskforce⁽⁶⁾.

⁽³⁾ A 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 the young and adults. This institution offers vocational qualifications in different areas/profiles, full-time and part-time, within the institution, through various forms of work-based learning and for different age groups (the young, 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 (VET law, 2017).

⁽⁴⁾ Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2010). *Ligj No 10 247, datë 4.3.2010 përkornizën shqiptare të kualifikimeve* [Law No 10 247 of 4 March 2010 on the Albanian qualifications framework]. <http://80.78.70.231/pls/kuv/f?p=201:Ligj:10247:04.03.2010> [in Albanian].

⁽⁵⁾ Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2018). Ligj Nr. 23/2018 Për disa ndryshime dhe shtesa në ligjin nr. 10 247, datë 4.3.2010, “Për kornizën shqiptare të kualifikimeve” [Law No 23/2018 of 10.5.2018 on the revised Albanian qualifications framework]. <http://www.qbz.gov.al/Botime/Akteindividuale/Janar%202018/Fletore%2079/LIGJ%20nr.%2023-2018,%20date%2010.5.2018.pdf>

⁽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 lasted until the end of 2017. The mandate of the taskforce was renewed in 2017 until the end of 2019.

Policy objectives

The aims of the AQF are to classify and link qualifications, ensure qualifications are relevant to learners and employer's needs, and to promote wider quality in qualifications and VET systems. Developing and implementing the AQF 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. Another strategic objective of the employment and skills strategy is to provide quality VET for youths and adults.

NESS links the AQF policy objectives to the following action lines (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2014):

- (a) review of existing qualifications and qualification development processes by the National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ) and under different donor projects as well as qualifications offered by public or private VET providers or universities;
- (b) revision of the system for assessment and certification;
- (c) establishment of sector committees;
- (d) developing the national catalogue for vocational qualifications;
- (e) revision of curricula based on AQF qualifications and standards, and referenced to AQF levels;
- (f) selecting bodies and putting in place procedures for the validation of qualifications, skills assessments, certification and the validation/ recognition of prior learning.

VET reform is a main pillar of the NESS and a new VET law is intended to pave the way for improvements and stronger involvement of social partners and responsiveness to local needs ⁽⁷⁾.

Enrolments in VET programmes at upper secondary level have increased, though the VET student population is still small compared to other Western Balkan countries. VET used to be the less attractive option at upper secondary level compared to academic general education. Now this image is changing, also because VET graduates find jobs easier (ETF, 2018b).

⁽⁷⁾ Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2017). Ligj Nr. 15/2017 Për arsimin dhe formimin profesional në republikën e shqipërisë datë 16.2.2017 [Law No 15/2017 of 16.2.2017 on VET in the Republic of Albania]. http://www.akafp.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Ligji-i-ri-per-AFP_Gazeta-Zyrtare-43-2017-1-1.pdf

Levels and use of learning outcomes

The AQF handbook, developed by the AQF taskforce, distinguishes between two groups of qualifications; the principle distinction is between qualifications for initial education and those for lifelong learning. The former category covers pre-university qualifications, vocational/professional qualifications, and higher education qualifications. The latter category includes short courses for adults and specialised courses for professional development (Cedefop, 2018).

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. These level descriptors are a copy of the EQF level descriptors ⁽⁸⁾.

The AQF will, in principle, be open for all types of qualifications but, while the formal qualifications can be included in the AQF based on existing accreditation and quality assurance procedures, inclusion of qualifications for lifelong learning requires special criteria and procedures that will be regulated in a by-law ⁽⁹⁾ (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018)

The new VET law (2017) states that national vocational qualifications are defined by learning outcomes and derived from qualification descriptions and occupational standards, and that assessments and tests are done to determine whether learning outcomes have been achieved to given standards. Higher education qualifications are not yet based on learning outcomes but all learning programmes in higher education will be expressed in learning outcomes (ETF, 2018b).

Descriptions of post-secondary vocational qualifications and curricula have been drafted with support from donor projects. In 2017, however, no development on post-secondary vocational programmes or framework curricula has been reported (Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2017).

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

According to the revised AQF law 2018, the management of the AQF is divided between the ministries in charge of the educational subsystems. The Ministry of

⁽⁸⁾ More detailed level descriptors have been defined – and are used – by NAVETQ for AQF levels 2 to 5 and in higher education for AQF levels 5 to 8. These are tailored to education subsectors and are used for development of new qualifications and programmes.

⁽⁹⁾ This by-law is drafted and ready for adoption by the Council of Ministers.

Education, Sport and Youth is responsible for pre-university elementary, lower and upper secondary general education and higher education, as well as for the qualifications for lifelong learning for these sub-systems; for VET, the ministry in charge is currently the Ministry of Finance and Economy. A coordination body is not foreseen.

The law defines three implementing institutions:

- (a) the National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ);
- (b) higher education institutions in cooperation with institutions responsible for employment and ability to carry out periodic labour market assessments and employment of graduates;
- (c) the ministry responsible for education and its subordinated agencies in accordance with the relevant provisions of the applicable legal framework (ETF, 2018b).

The AQF taskforce represented by different stakeholders, and co-chaired by the representatives of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Finance and Economy is in place to support further development and AQF implementation. Additionally, the establishment of the sectoral skills committees, currently being established, will be done pursuant to the respective Council of Ministers' Decree ⁽¹⁰⁾ (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

The Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AQAHE) manages quality assurance for this sector. It requires higher education institutions and their programmes to be accredited before they can issue degrees or other qualifications. In VET, quality assurance is mainly internal.

Efforts are being made to design and conceptualise the system and procedures for self-evaluation and further independent accreditation of public and private education and training providers ⁽¹¹⁾.

⁽¹⁰⁾ A by-law has been drafted and is ready for adoption by the Council of Ministers.

⁽¹¹⁾ Specifically, an instruction of the Minister of Finance and Economy was approved in this direction: Instruction No 16, dated 8.5.2018, *on the development of self-evaluation in VET providers*. Also, a guideline for self-evaluation of VET providers was approved by the minister See *NESS Annual progress report, 2017* (Ministry of Finance and Economy (2018)).

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

NESS outlines a national system for validation. Actions to be taken include:

- (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 and provided for in both the VET and AQF laws. Implementation so far has been confined to pilots and has not yet been applied country-wide. However, a by-law under the new VET law on the system of recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning is ready for adoption by the Council of Ministers.

NQF implementation

Tools and approaches are available to support the reform of qualification systems, the implementation of the AQF, and redesign of vocational qualifications. However, the AQF is not yet operational. The focus is now on implementation but an action plan for this has yet to be developed.

The *National catalogue of vocational qualifications* (NCVQ) has been regulated since it became part of the new VET law of 2017. NAVETQ has developed all necessary elements in the catalogue, including a list of vocational qualifications, titles and descriptions of vocational qualifications, and the frame curricula. It is published on the dedicated website of the Ministry of Finance and Economy ⁽¹²⁾.

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth is creating a national register of higher education programmes. Each programme will be coded according to the field of study. The required legal framework is under construction.

⁽¹²⁾ <http://www.akafp.gov.al/lista-kombetare-profesionale/>

Recognition of prior learning would contribute to the development of lifelong learning opportunities and improve adult participation. Completion of a decree on the system of recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning would unlock the progress of this activity. Establishment of the sector councils with participation of social partners will set up and revise VET qualifications in selected sectors and thus significantly contribute to the external quality assurance of the vocational qualifications in the AQF.

AQF levels are included on new certificates and diplomas and Europass supplement documents and also indicated in the national catalogue for VET qualifications.

Information about recognition of foreign qualifications in Albania on the ENIC-NARIC website is limited. The national information centre is the Technical Secretariat for the Recognition of Foreign Diplomas under the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth. Currently, Albania has procedures in place for the recognition of foreign certificates and diplomas at levels 5 to 8 of the AQF, issued by foreign higher education institutions. Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications is in development. An instruction of the Minister of Finance and Economy on the procedures for recognition of qualifications at levels 2 to 5 was adopted in 2018.

Referencing to the EQF

Albania is a member of the EQF advisory group and also a member of the Bologna process in higher education. The AQF is not yet referenced to the EQF or self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA).

Referencing the AQF to the EQF is part of the mandate of the AQF taskforce and is foreseen for 2019.

Important lessons and future plans

The adoption of the revised AQF law is a long step towards a more relevant qualifications and education system. The AQF law provides conditions for a more coherent system of quality assured qualifications, with the establishment of sector councils to ensure the relevance of qualifications for the labour market.

Challenges to address include improved administration, efficient use of financial resources and better design, monitoring and evaluation of learning

outcomes and a fully developed legal framework (including by-laws). Involvement of all stakeholders has been, and still is, a main challenge.

Further sources of information

- The Albanian Ministry of Education and Sports is the main source of information and the EQF NCP: <http://www.arsimi.gov.al>
- *National catalogue of vocational qualifications (NCVQ)*.
<http://www.akafp.gov.al/lista-kombetare-profesionale/>
- European Training Foundation (2018a). *Inventory of NQF in Albania*.
https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Albania%20-%20NQF%20Inventory

Albanian qualifications framework (AQF)

The revised AQF law differentiates between qualifications from initial education (covering general education, higher education and vocational/professional qualifications) and lifelong learning qualifications.

| AQF level | Qualifications from initial education | | Lifelong learning qualifications |
|-----------|---|---|---|
| | General/traditional qualifications | Vocational/professional qualifications | |
| 8 | Doctorate | Executive master/second level master/postmaster Long term specialisation | Study programmes for continuous education |
| | Graduate school study in advanced studies | | |
| 7 | Master of science | Professional master/first level master | Study programmes for continuous education |
| | Master of arts/ master of fine arts/programme level II study | | |
| | Integrated study programme of the second cycle 4-year study programme(pre-Bologna programmes) | | |

| AQF level | Qualifications from initial education | | Lifelong learning qualifications |
|-----------|---|---|--|
| | General/traditional qualifications | Vocational/professional qualifications | |
| 6 | Bachelor Study programme first level | | |
| 5 | | Post-secondary study programme of professional type Professional non-university study programme after secondary education Vocational certificate | Bridging courses (certificate) Specialisation courses based on professional requirements |
| 4 | State <i>matura</i> diploma (Upper secondary general education) | State vocational <i>matura</i> diploma (high school vocational programme) Vocational certificate (four-year study programme for middle technicians/middle managers) Vocational certificate (two-year programme for technician/ middle managers) Vocational certificate (one-year programme for technician/ middle managers) Vocational certificate (apprenticeship programme) | Bridging courses Vocational training courses Specialisation courses based on professional requirements |
| 3 | | Vocational certificate (three-year programme for skilled workers) Vocational certificate (one-year programme for skilled workers) Vocational Certificate (apprenticeship programme) | |
| 2 | | Vocational certificate (two-year programme for semi-skilled workers) | |
| 1 | Certificate after compulsory nine-year education | | Minimum entry requirements to work or social life |

Source: Adapted from European Training Foundation (2018).

Abbreviations

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|--------|---|
| AQAHE | Albanian agency for quality assurance in higher education |
| AQF | Albanian qualifications framework |
| EQF | European qualifications framework |
| ETF | European Training Foundation |
| NAVETQ | National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications |
| NESS | National employment and skills strategy |
| NQF | National qualifications framework |
| NCVQ | National catalogue of vocational qualifications |

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<http://80.78.70.231/pls/kuv/f?p=201:Ligj:10247:04.03.2010> [in Albanian].

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