



EUROPEAN INVENTORY OF NQFs 2022

BELGIUM

German-speaking Community



European inventory of NQFs 2022 – Belgium, German-speaking Community

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1. Introduction

This report is part of the European inventory of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs). Since 2009, Cedefop has carried out a systematic mapping and analysis of NQF developments in countries participating in the European qualifications framework (EQF) process. These reviews, done in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group, the European Commission and European Training Foundation (ETF) have directly supported the development of operational and sustainable NQFs. The report offers a detailed description of the structure and scope of the NQF of the German-speaking Community in Belgium, its objectives, functions, and institutional arrangements, as well as data on the framework's implementation and impact to broader policy areas.

Due to its federal structure, Belgium developed three NQFs, one for each of the three language communities: Flemish, French and German. Despite adaptation to the needs of each community, the three frameworks share important common features, supporting interoperability. An amendment to Belgian federal law on the general structure of the education system was adopted in 2012, stating that the EQF will be used as a common reference for all three communities; this addresses the challenge of linking the three frameworks and potentially eases mobility of Belgian citizens within the country.

The German-speaking Community of Belgium adopted its qualifications framework (*Qualifikationsrahmen der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*, QDG) on 18 November 2013. The framework reflects the work done in the Flemish and French Communities but is also inspired by the German qualifications framework (DQR). The QDG has not yet been referenced to the EQF.

2. National context

2.1 Policy context

In 2020, the public expenditure on education as a percentage of the country's GDP was 6.6%, 1.6 percentage points higher than the EU average. The country performs above average on several key education and training indicators; in 2020, participation in early childhood education was 98.5%, while in 2021 the share of early leavers from education and training was 6.7%. In 2020, the share of upper secondary students in vocational education and training (VET) was 55.7%, while tertiary educational attainment (age 25-34) was 50.9% (2021). Only participation in adult learning was slightly lower than the EU average (10.2% and 10.8% respectively (European Commission and Directorate General for Education Youth Sport and Culture, 2022)).

2.2 NQF legal basis

In 2013, the Ministry of the German-speaking Community adopted a [Decree establishing the QDG](#). The Decree sets the general principles and objectives of the QDG, describes in detail the level descriptors of the framework, outlines criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications, and presents the level of each qualification included in the QDC.

3 NQF objectives and functions

A main objective of the framework is to strengthen national and international understanding and comparability of qualifications. While subject to federal laws on education applying in Belgium, the geographic location of the region means that citizens are likely to cross regional or national borders for living and working. This makes it a priority to clarify the relationship between own qualifications and those awarded in the neighbouring countries. The framework also aims to promote parity of esteem between general education and VET ⁽¹⁾ and increase permeability among education sectors. Promoting learning outcomes is an important step in increasing transparency and strengthening permeability.

4 Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1 NQF structure and level descriptors

The QDG is an eight-level, learning-outcomes-based framework. Only qualifications with clear description of learning outcomes and those obtained in institutions accredited by the Government are included. The framework builds on the concept of *Handlungskompetenz* (action competence) with qualifications levels defined in terms of two categories of descriptors: subject/occupation-specific competences, referring to knowledge and skills; personal competences, referring to social competence and autonomy.

Table 1. **Level descriptors of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, main categories**

| <i>Handlungskompetenz</i> (action competence) | | | |
|--|--------|---|----------|
| Subject/occupation-oriented competence (<i>Fachliche Kompetenz</i>) | | Personal competence (<i>Personale Kompetenz</i>) | |
| Knowledge | Skills | Social competence | Autonomy |
| | | | |

Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2013).

In addition to the legally stipulated descriptors, the so-called Dublin descriptors also apply to qualifications in the higher education sector in the German-speaking Community.

4.2 NQF scope and coverage

The QDG includes qualifications from primary and secondary general education, VET and higher education. An important criterion for a qualification to be included in the QDG, is its relevance to the labour market and for further learning. According to the 2013 Decree, a total of 21 qualification types have been assigned to QDG. A technical commission in charge of levelling and inclusion has been put in place.

It distinguishes between general and vocational qualifications. General upper secondary education (*Abitur*) is placed at level 4, with the three cycles of bachelor, master and doctor placed at levels 6 to 8. In vocational education and training, completed apprenticeship (dual

(1) For example, the completion of the general upper secondary level and upper secondary technical and arts education are both at level 4.

system) is at level 4. A master craftsman with two years of training is placed at level 5, one with three years of training at level 6. The 2013 Decree, setting the QDG, envisages that validation of non-formal and informal learning will be linked to the framework.

Table 2. **Qualifications framework of the German-speaking Community (QDG)**

| NQF levels | General education qualifications | VET qualifications |
|------------|--|---|
| 8 | Doctoral or postdoctoral degree/habilitation (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss einer Promotion oder Habilitation auf Doktoren- bzw. Professorebene</i>) | |
| 7 | Master degree (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss eines Hochschulstudiums langer Dauer auf Masterebene</i>) | Master degree on successful completion of dual track higher education (long duration) (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss eines dualen Hochschulstudiums langer Dauer auf Masterebene</i>) |
| 6 | Bachelor degree (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss eines Hochschulstudiums kurzer Dauer auf Bachelorebene</i>) | Master craftsperson certificate on successful completion of a three-year master craftsperson programme (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss einer dreijährigen Meisterausbildung mit dem Meisterbrief</i>) Professional bachelor degree on successful completion of dual track higher education (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss eines dualen Hochschulstudiums kurzer Dauer auf Bachelorebene</i>) |
| 5 | | Master craftsperson certificate on successful completion of a two-year master craftsperson programme (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss einer zweijährigen Meisterausbildung mit dem Meisterbrief</i>) Successful completion of supplementary secondary vocational education (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss einer Ausbildung im ergänzenden beruflichen Sekundarunterricht</i>) |
| 4 | Successful completion of upper secondary general education (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss der Oberstufe des allgemeinbildenden Sekundarunterrichts</i>) | Successful completion of upper secondary technical and arts programmes (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss der Oberstufe des technischen oder künstlerischen Sekundarunterrichts</i>) Attestation of competence upon successful completion of year 6 in vocational education (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss des sechsten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts mit Befähigungsnachweis</i>) Successful completion of year 7 (complementary year) in vocational education (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss des siebten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts</i>) Journeyman certificate on successful completion of an apprenticeship (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss einer mittelständischen Lehre mit dem Gesellenzeugnis</i>) |

| NQF levels | General education qualifications | VET qualifications |
|------------|---|---|
| 3 | Successful completion of lower secondary general education (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss der Unterstufe des allgemeinbildenden Sekundarunterrichts</i>) | Successful completion of lower secondary technical, vocational or arts programmes (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss der Unterstufe des technischen, künstlerischen oder berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts</i>) Certified partial qualification acquired in year 2 of an apprenticeship (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss einer zertifizierten Teilqualifikation im zweiten Jahr der mittelständischen Lehre</i>) |
| 2 | Successful completion of 'common' year 2 in secondary education (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss des zweiten gemeinsamen Jahres des Sekundarunterrichts</i>) | Successful completion of year 3 in vocationally oriented education (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss des dritten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts</i>) Attestation of competence certifying lower secondary special needs education (<i>Befähigungsnachweis der Unterstufe des Fördersekundarunterrichts</i>) |
| 1 | Successful completion of primary education, four years (<i>Erfolgreicher Abschluss der Grundschule</i>) | Certificate upon successful completion of year 2 in vocationally oriented education (<i>Studienzeugnis des zweiten Jahres des berufsbildenden Sekundarunterrichts</i>) |

Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (2013) and internal communication with the EQF NCP.

4.3 Use of learning outcomes

The framework is seen as an instrument for promoting a learning-outcomes- or competence-based approach across the different parts of education and training in the region.

4.4 Quality assurance arrangements

Quality assurance arrangements in the German-speaking Community are organised as follows: the higher education institution Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien coordinates the internal and external evaluation of schools ⁽²⁾; the School Inspectorate (*Schulinspektion*) is in charge of the quality assurance and development of the teaching system of primary, secondary as well as school-based continuing education ⁽³⁾; and an external evaluation agency for VET schools and VET competence centres is in place (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

⁽²⁾ The main objectives of the evaluation are related to personal responsibility, participation, cooperation within and outside the school as well as sustainable school and teaching development. See Chapter VII of the [Decree of 31 August 1998](#) (Dekret über den Auftrag an die Schulträger und das Schulpersonal sowie über die allgemeinen pädagogischen und organisatorischen Bestimmungen für die Regel- und Förderschulen)

⁽³⁾ For more information, refer to the [Decree of 25 June 2012](#).

5 Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Department of VET and Organisation of Education in the Ministry of the Community has been appointed as the EQF NCP and a leading institution; it has the task of referencing QDG to the EQF, using transparent methodologies and providing all stakeholders, institutions and companies with relevant information. The framework has been developed over a relatively short time, involving all main education and training stakeholders in the German-speaking Community. This includes the social partners who normally play a key role in an education and training system inspired by that of Germany, such as the Institute for Education and Training in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (*Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen, IAWM*). Scientific cooperation has been established with the Flemish Community and the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB).

6 Recognition and validation of prior learning

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

In 2014, the German-speaking Community started developing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning linked to the QDG, as envisaged by the 2013 decree introducing the framework. The strategy for introducing a validation system was outlined in 2015 and referred to European developments in this area; its key target group was individuals with no (or low) qualifications (Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, 2015). Validation has been mainly implemented through the ESF project Shaping future paths (launched in 2018). Individuals were offered skills assessment, counselling, and validation/recognition of vocational competences. Validation is linked to apprenticeships, as individuals holding non-formal and/or informal competences in an occupation for which there is an apprenticeship in the German-speaking Community, are given the opportunity to sit the practical final examination to certify their practical vocational skills at a Centre for Education and Training of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises ⁽⁴⁾ (*Zentrum für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes, ZAWM*). The IAWM is the supervisory authority. Since 2021, validation arrangements have been operating under a new project name: *KomAn (Kompetenzen anerkennen*, acknowledging competences) sustained by the Government and is fully implemented. Since 2022, they have been considered a regular practice (Cedefop and ReferNet, forthcoming).

(⁴) Validation procedure at the level of small and medium-sized enterprise training (*D356 Validierungsverfahren auf Ebene der mittelstaendischen Ausbildung*)

7 NQF implementation and impact

7.1 Stage of implementation

The framework is at activation stage.

7.2 Indicating EQF/NQF levels

QDG levels are not yet indicated on certificates and diplomas ⁽⁵⁾. The templates for all certificates and qualifications that can be obtained in general education, higher education, and VET are part of the [Government Decree of 28 May 2009](#).

7.3 Qualifications databases and registers

No register of qualifications has been set up yet.

7.4 Awareness and use of the NQF

Given the small size of the German-speaking Community, actors in the education sector and the labour market are aware of the different diplomas and certificates that are awarded within the Community. However, including levels on certificates and diplomas would facilitate transparency and comparability of qualifications in the broader Belgian landscape and international context.

8 Referencing to the EQF

The QDG has not been referenced to the EQF.

9 Reflections and plans

Although the QDG is not referred to in the 2025 education and training vision for the region (German-speaking Community of Belgium, 2015), the emphasis given to validation and competences over recent years indicates that the learning outcomes orientation underpinning the framework is being taken forward in a systematic manner. This is also apparent in relation to other projects outlined in the 2025 strategy, such as strengthening support to individual learners and application of competence-oriented diagnostics. Alignment of a qualification within the framework levels does not replace the existing system of access and does not provide automatic entitlement to access the next level.

The key task that remains is the full implementation of the framework; referencing it to the EQF, indicating QDG levels on the qualifications and developing a qualification database. The Ministry still needs to ensure the transparency of the methodology used to link the QDG with the EQF and ensure access to information and guidelines for the different institutions, educational actors, enterprises and citizens.

⁽⁵⁾ Further legal provisions would be needed to indicate QDG levels on certificates and diplomas (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Acronyms

| | |
|------|--|
| EQF | European qualifications framework |
| IAWM | <i>Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen</i> [Institute for Education and Training in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises] |
| NQF | national qualifications framework |
| QDG | <i>Qualifikationsrahmen Deutschsprachiger Gemeinschaft</i> [qualifications framework of the German-speaking Community of Belgium] |
| VET | vocational education and training |

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