

CYPRUS

European inventory on NQF 2018

Introduction and context

Investment in education and training in Cyprus is among the highest in the EU for primary and secondary education. While the rate of early school leaving is relatively low (7.7% in 2016, compared to 10.7% the EU average), the high level of spending per student does not translate into comparable education outcomes. According to the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the proportion of 15 year olds with low achievement in basic skills in reading, mathematics and science is among the highest in the EU, with significant differences in performance between genders, especially in reading. Measures are being taken by the government to improve outcomes in response to the PISA results, as well as to integrate the growing number of migrants in the education system. A new system for appointing teachers began implementation in 2017 and new legislation reforming upper secondary general education will follow in the school year 2018/19. While the economy has started to recover after the crisis, employment of recent graduates remains below the EU average at all qualification levels. Participation in vocational education and training (VET) has reached only 15.6% in 2015; however, the employability of recent VET graduates has increased more compared to general and tertiary education, pointing to a valuable VET sector for economic recovery. Measures to reform secondary technical and vocational education and to develop post-secondary VET include upgrading of apprenticeship schemes, revision of curricula and introduction of new specialisations. The rate of tertiary education attainment is among the highest in the EU (53.4 % in 2016), but the employment of recent graduates is below the EU average and marked by skills mismatches. Quality assurance of higher education and increased cooperation between universities and the world of business are among the government's priorities. Adult participation in lifelong learning is relatively low and has been decreasing (6.9% in 2016), especially among the low-skilled. A validation system for non-formal and informal learning is currently being developed (European Commission, 2017).

Cyprus has developed a comprehensive national qualifications framework called the Cyprus qualifications framework (CyQF) to improve permeability, both horizontal and vertical, within its education and training systems. CyQF incorporates all levels and types of qualification from all subsystems of education and training and from primary to higher education. The system of vocational

qualifications (SVQ) being developed by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA) is an integral, but distinct, part of CyQF. A total of 120 SVQ qualifications are expected to be integrated in the system until 2019. Discussions are being held to develop common structures and elements for combining and transferring education credits.

A decision to create a national qualifications framework (NQF) was taken by the Council of Ministers in 2008 ⁽¹⁾. A first NQF draft, with a detailed timetable for implementation, was presented in April 2010; consultation with stakeholders took place in spring 2011. The NQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in February 2017.

Policy objectives

The CyQF operates as a reference framework, enabling the validation and comparability of qualifications and hence the mobility of workers and learners. It is an attempt to encompass the diversity of lifelong learning, formal, non-formal and informal learning (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). More specific objectives and targets are:

- (a) the recognition and validation of qualifications;
- (b) mobility;
- (c) quality assurance of education and training programmes;
- (d) promotion of lifelong learning.

The aim is to develop an inclusive framework of qualifications, including those awarded outside formal education. This is primarily achieved by including the vocational qualifications system – established by HRDA – within the framework (at levels 3 to 7) to bring about comparability and better correlation of qualifications acquired in formal or non-formal learning. These qualifications refer to occupational standards and certificated learning outcomes acquired at work. This is important for increasing adult participation in lifelong learning which remains below the EU average and is decreasing (see introduction). This is clearly linked to the aim of the NQF to promote lifelong learning, giving all Cypriots a second chance for educational advancement and job progression.

The CyQF aims to support greater worker and learner mobility, and provide quality assurance through the existing competent authorities and according to specific principles. A newly established Cyprus Agency of Quality

⁽¹⁾ Law No 67445, 9/7/2008.

Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education is the competent authority responsible for ensuring the quality of higher education in Cyprus.

A further policy objective is to reinforce vocational education and training (VET) at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels through the framework initiative the Cyprus Productivity Centre (CPC). The Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance (MLSI) is responsible for the CPC, which offers short modular programmes for employees in technical occupations and management; the Higher Hotel Institute of Cyprus offers upgrading courses for employees in the hotel and restaurant sector. The New modern apprenticeship scheme (NMA) (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017) provides alternative learning pathways and increased employability, based on labour market needs, for those who leave formal education without basic or vocational skills. Implementation of the NMA has begun and embraces young people between 14 and 21 years of age at two apprenticeship levels (preparatory and core, CyQF levels 2 and 3). The NMA is part financed by the ESF and has been fully operational since 2015. The setting-up and upgrading of post-secondary VET institutes (MIEEK) has been a major step towards attracting more students to this pathway. They deliver qualifications at CyQF/EQF level 5 fully integrated into the framework.

Levels and use of learning outcomes

An eight-level reference structure has been adopted to reflect the national qualification system's main characteristics. Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Knowledge is defined by the type and complexity of knowledge demanded and the ability to place one's knowledge in context. Skills are defined according to the complexity of problem-solving and communication skills involved. Competence relates to the following aspects: space of action, cooperation and responsibility, and learning skills (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017; Cedefop, 2018). These descriptors were developed concurrently for all levels so there would be clear progression from one level to the next. CyQF level descriptors give a broad profile of what an individual should know and do with varying degrees of autonomy and responsibility. The current qualifications system is input-based (quality of teachers, infrastructure, and length of education and training programmes). Assessment of learning outcomes is not presently covered by national legislation, policy documents or development programmes. However, attention is increasingly being directed to the need to focus on skills and key competences required in the 21st century, and to revise curricula, learning programmes and assessment methodologies in line with learning outcomes. Several reforms are

under way, such as modernising pre-primary and upper secondary curricula, and improving VET by introducing post-secondary VET institutes. A committee at the Ministry of Education and Culture – advisory committee for the implementation of curricula, assessment and teaching – (*Syntonistiki Epitropi Analytikon Programmaton*, SEAP) is the body responsible for the implementation of learning outcomes in all grades across education departments in formal education (levels 1 to 4).

Implementation of the learning outcomes approach has coincided with the ambitious *Cyprus national reform programme 2018* ⁽²⁾. Educational reform proposes comprehensive changes and innovations at all levels and aspects of the system; its main objective is to create a democratic and learner-centred education system.

Emphasis is being placed on improving teacher competences and establishing and monitoring the quality of learning outcomes. NQF implementation will benefit from experience gained in developing competence-based vocational qualifications in SVQ. These are based on occupational standards (currently available for 83 occupations) and make it possible to award a qualification to a candidate irrespective of how and where they acquired the relevant knowledge, skills and competences.

Learning outcomes are mainly expressed in formal education as part of subject and stage-based general education. In the curriculum, learning outcomes are described as the knowledge, skills and attitudes, and awareness learners are expected to achieve at the end of each stage. Level descriptors indicate the standards a learner should achieve at each certificated level of education. The development of a single unified curriculum from pre-primary to primary and lower secondary education, based on learning outcomes, is an important goal.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The general directorate for VET at the Ministry of Education and Culture initiated and is coordinating NQF developments. Since 2012, the Ministry of Education has operated as the competent authority and designated EQF national coordination point (NCP). It includes representatives from all departments of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA). Stakeholders play a

⁽²⁾ Cyprus Presidency Unit for Administrative Reform (2018). *Europe 2020 - Cyprus national reform programme 2018*. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-national-reform-programme-cyprus-en.pdf>

central role in existing validation practices but there is limited involvement from social partners such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

A new permanent advisory body – the council of the NQF of Cyprus – has also been established and acts as a forum for collaboration between stakeholders. Consultation with stakeholders and evaluation of the CyQF implementation was planned for 2018.

The Council of Ministers on 18 May 2017 approved ⁽³⁾ the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority, with the powers to improve quality assurance systems in education and training, to monitor and integrate into the CyQF the scheme for validating non-formal and informal learning, to monitor the CyQF/EQF levels on certificates, diplomas and Europass documents, to strengthen the legal aspect of CyQF, and to develop a registry for it. The National Qualifications Authority is operational.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways ⁽⁴⁾

Cyprus does not yet have a national framework for validating non-formal and informal learning but this is currently under development, through a project, ESF part funded, to establishing an appropriate mechanism. This project has supported a mapping study of the current situation in Cyprus ⁽⁵⁾ and a national action plan setting up a validation mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (*epikirosi mathisis*) was developed at the beginning of 2018. This plan was put into public consultation during the first half of 2018 ⁽⁶⁾ and was completed in May 2018. It will enter pilot implementation during 2019, focusing on adult education, youth and volunteering. The validation process will entail five stages: information-individualised counselling; identification; recognition of learning outcomes; assessment of learning outcomes; and certification. The first results from the pilot are expected to be available at the end of 2019.

⁽³⁾ Decision No 82.592.

⁽⁴⁾ This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

⁽⁵⁾ EEO Group (2017). *Mapping study on the validation of non-formal and informal learning* [unpublished].

⁽⁶⁾ See the text for consultation prepared by the EEO Group for the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture:

http://www.moec.gov.cy/eiao/el/drastiriotes/imerides_seminaria_synedria/2018/2018_protasi_ehtnikou_sd_diavoulefsi.pdf

Implementation will build on work already done by HRDA, which has developed a system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) – *Systima epagelmatikon prosondon* (*ΣΕΠΠ*) – through which it is possible to validate non-formal and informal learning by the award of full or partial qualifications. It is planned to develop a further 80 vocational qualifications during the 2014-20 ESF programming period. The 83 vocational qualifications already developed will also be revised in response to labour market needs. Standards used in the vocational qualifications system relate not only to occupational skills but also soft skills developed through work experience (such as teamwork and collaboration); they are different from those used in apprenticeship or school-based VET qualifications and are not recognised in formal education. However, ways of linking the two VET systems are being considered as CyQF is developed.

The autonomous nature of higher education institutions enables them to accept credits from prior learning. The Cyprus Council for Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS), also recognises work experience credits as part of an individual's qualification. Success in information and communication technology examinations is certificated regardless of where and when the knowledge was developed. In terms of implementing upskilling pathways, the Ministry of Education and HRDA are preparing a report during July 2018 on how Cyprus is responding to the Council recommendation on upskilling pathways.

NQF implementation

The framework is at early stage of implementation. The EQF national coordination point was established at the Ministry of Education and Culture as an in-service department overseeing the development and gradual implementation of the framework. Stakeholders responsible for accreditation of qualifications will continue to work according to the existing legislative framework but new legislation is required for CyQF to clarify how stakeholders will work together. A decision of the council of ministers is expected and a new legislative framework will be introduced if required (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). A new permanent body – council of the NQF of Cyprus – has been established, which includes all stakeholders ⁽⁷⁾; it is the consultative body for the CyQF referencing report. Its main tasks are advisory and focus on:

⁽⁷⁾ The National Committee for the Development and Establishment of a National Qualifications Framework in Cyprus, consists of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Culture (President of the Committee), the Permanent

- (a) consulting with stakeholders on CyQF development and implementation;
- (b) developing, implementing and reviewing CyQF procedures;
- (c) disseminating public information on CyQF;
- (d) advising the Ministry of Education and Culture on policy and resource implications.

In 2017, the board of ministers approved the development of the National Qualifications Authority ⁽⁸⁾.

The CyQF includes the development and implementation of the procedures for quality assurance and qualifications award. Quality assurance should underpin all levels of the NQF. A new Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (QAAA) in higher education was established by law in March 2016, bringing together quality assurance functions under one roof. The agency is operational. The new legislation provides a quality assurance framework for higher education, within which higher education institutions will be driven to improve quality and develop an internal quality culture.

HRDA has a robust quality assurance process in place for monitoring the SVQ. All aspects of the system, and those participating in it, are quality assured by HRDA, which holds the relevant registers of assessing centres and assessors for each vocational field and region. The HRDA has also introduced a system for evaluating and certifying training providers ⁽⁹⁾.

A national qualification database is planned to be ready by mid-2019. When it is finalised, qualifications from general, VET and higher education systems will be included in the register.

The Ministry of Education and Culture has decided that a reference to corresponding EQF levels will be included on qualification certificates and diplomas on approval of the referencing report. Some institutions have proceeded with the indication of NQF and EQF levels in national qualifications databases. Full implementation is expected to be finalised by the end of 2019 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). Further communication is needed to raise the importance of the indication of NQF and EQF levels on new certificates, diplomas and/or Europass supplements.

Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and the General Director of the Human Resource Development Authority or their representatives.

⁽⁸⁾ Decision No 82.592.

⁽⁹⁾ This system is entitled *Evaluation and certification of training providers (AxioPistoSyn)*:
http://www.hrdauth.org.cy/easyconsole.cfm/page/project/p_id/23/pc_id/17154

Referencing to the EQF

The Ministry of Education and Culture is the national body responsible for referencing national qualifications to the EQF. The CyQF was referenced to the EQF in February 2017. The CyQF booklet, which provides full information on the CyQF and its social benefits, was prepared and circulated to all stakeholders.

Important lessons and future plans

Development of the NQF and of a competence-based system of vocational qualifications, which is an integral part of the NQF, is expected to strengthen the ties between VET for young people and vocational training for adults, and to improve their knowledge and skills. However, the comprehensive and inclusive nature of the new framework requires stakeholders to work together. Setting up a council for the NQF was important in establishing a permanent forum for collaboration between stakeholders: the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, the Human Resource Development Authority and representatives of employer and employee organisations and the academic community.

An NQF/EQF communication strategy is yet to be developed in Cyprus, due to budget limitations. However, the main communication channels and tools used for disseminating information on the NQF/EQF are leaflets, school-based seminars and conferences organised in the Cyprus chambers of commerce and Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation. Although education and training institutions and providers, labour market stakeholders and recognition bodies are aware of the framework, interaction and constant dialogue is needed. In 2019, evaluation of the framework and an updated referencing report to the EQF advisory group is planned. The expected change in the NQF that calls for an updated report is inclusion of a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning.

Future plans for Cyprus include strengthening the CyQF legal base, while future CyQF NCP actions will include developing the CyQF guidelines handbook. This handbook will contain guidelines, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the national registry. Establishment of a validation agency, the development of guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning, and analysing and implementing learning outcomes in different subsystems are expected to be completed by 2020 to ensure continuity and consistency between levels and services (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).

Main sources of information

- CyQF: <http://www.cyqf.gov.cy>
- The Cyprus EQF NCP, established by the Ministry of Education and Culture: <http://www.moec.gov.cy>
- Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture (2017). *The referencing of the Cyprus qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*: <http://www.cyqf.gov.cy/archeia/dimosiefseis/cyqf-referencing-report.pdf>

Cypriot national qualifications framework (CyQF)

CyQF levels	Educational qualifications	SVQ levels	EQF levels
8	Doctoral degree (<i>Διδακτορικός Τίτλος</i>)		8
7c	Master degree (<i>Μεταπτυχιακός Τίτλος</i>)		
7b	Postgraduate diplomas (<i>Μεταπτυχιακό Δίπλωμα</i>)		7
7a	Postgraduate certificates (<i>Μεταπτυχιακό Πιστοποιητικό</i>)		
6	Bachelor degree (<i>Πτυχίο</i>)	SVQ 6	6
5c	Higher certificates and diplomas – three years (<i>Ανώτερα Διπλώματα και Πιστοποιητικά</i>)		
5b	Post-secondary certificates and diplomas – two years (<i>Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Διετούς Διάρκειας</i>)	SVQ 5	5
5a	Post-secondary certificates and diplomas – one year (<i>Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Μονοετούς Διάρκειας</i>)		
4	Upper secondary general education and evening schools certificates – 12th grade or 12th and 13th for some private schools (<i>Απολυτήριο Μέσης Γενικής Εκπαίδευσης</i>) Upper secondary technical and vocational education and evening technical schools certificates – 12th grade (<i>Απολυτήριο Μέσης Τεχνικής Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης</i>)	SVQ 4	4
3	Lower secondary education certificate – 10th grade – preparatory year for upper secondary education (<i>Απολυτήριο Πρώτου Κύκλου Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης – 10η τάξη</i>) New modern apprenticeship certificate - 10th grade (<i>Νέα Σύγχρονη Μαθητεία – 10η τάξη</i>)	SVQ 3	3
2	Compulsory lower secondary education certificate – 9th grade (<i>Απολυτήριο Πρώτου Κύκλου Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης - 9η τάξη</i>) Preparatory programme – New modern apprenticeship (<i>Προπαρασκευαστικό Πρόγραμμα Νέας Σύγχρονης Μαθητείας</i>)		2
1	Compulsory education certificate – elementary school certificate, or graduates of 7th and/or 8th grade (<i>Υποχρεωτική Εκπαίδευση</i>)		1

Source: Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017: <http://www.cyqf.gov.cy/index.php/en/diagram>

Abbreviations

CPC	Cyprus Productivity Centre
CyQF	Cyprus qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework
HRDA	Human Resources and Development Agency
MLSI	Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
MIEEK	<i>Metalykeiaka Instituta Epaggelmatikis Ekpaideysis kai Katartisis</i> (post-secondary VET institutes)
NMA	new modern apprenticeship scheme
NQF	national qualifications framework
PISA	programme for international student assessment
QAAA	Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency
SVQ	system of vocational qualifications
VET	vocational education and training

References

[URLs accessed 6.12.2018]

- Cedefop (2018). *Analysis and overview of NQF level descriptors in European countries*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 66.
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/5566>
- Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture (2017). *The referencing of the Cyprus qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*.
<http://www.cyqf.gov.cy/archeia/dimosiefseis/cyqf-referencing-report.pdf>
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Websites

Human Resources and Development Agency - Evaluation and certification of training providers:

http://www.hrdauth.org.cy/easyconsole.cfm/page/project/p_id/23/pc_id/17154