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OF NQFs 2022

FRANCE



European Inventory of National Qualifications Frameworks 2022 – France

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1. Introduction

This report is part of the European inventory of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). Since 2009, Cedefop has been carrying 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 the European Training Foundation, have directly supported the development of operational and sustainable NQFs. The report offers a detailed description of the structure and scope of the French NQF, and its objectives, functions and institutional arrangements, along with data on its implementation and impact.

The French national professional qualifications framework (NPQF) ⁽¹⁾ belongs to the first generation of EQFs. In 2018, the eight-level NPQF was introduced, with three level descriptors: complexity of knowledge; level of expertise; and degree of responsibility and autonomy. The framework includes general upper secondary, vocational, professional and higher education qualifications, along with qualifications awarded outside formal education and training. In 2002, the National register of vocational and professional qualifications (*Repertoire national des certifications professionnelles, RNCP*) was set up, covering vocationally and professionally oriented qualifications, including those from higher education. The RNCP was referenced to the EQF in 2010. In 2021, the NPQF was referenced to the EQF and self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA).

2. National context

2.1. Policy context

In France in 2020, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (5.5 %) was above the EU average (5 %). The entire eligible population participates in early childhood education and care (100 % in 2020), while the rate of early leaving from education and training is lower than the EU average (7.8 % versus 9.7 % in 2021). In 2021, tertiary education attainment (age 25–34) (50.3 %) was higher than the EU-27 average (41.2 %). In 2020, participation in upper secondary VET was rather low (39.3 %). The participation of adults in lifelong learning is close to the EU average (respectively 11 % and 10.8 % in 2021) (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022).

(¹) This is the term used in the referencing report (France Compétences, 2021).

2.2. NQF legal basis

The [2018 law on the freedom to choose one's professional future](#) and the [2019 decree on the NPQF](#) have legally embedded the framework as distinct from the RNCP, defining a new eight-level structure and the level descriptors. The quality assurance function of the framework and supporting registers ⁽²⁾ has been reinforced by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all qualification certification bodies (France Compétences, 2021) and by defining 9 criteria for including qualifications to the RNCP (7 mandatory and 2 optional) and 6 criteria for RS (4 mandatory and 2 optional) ⁽³⁾. The law made mandatory RNCP qualifications to be structured into units/blocks of competences, encouraging the lifelong acquisition of competences and qualifications. It also enabled the transfer of qualifications included in the Specific Register of Awards (*Répertoire spécifique des certifications et habilitations, RS*) as recognised units of competences of qualifications already registered in the RNCP and defining common blocks of competences between two or more RNCP qualifications (France Compétences, 2021).

The framework has been revised to reflect considerable changes in all parts of education and training and of the qualifications system. For instance, the 2018 law has transformed continuing VET, along with apprenticeship-system governance and financing; has aimed to improve links between apprenticeship-based and academic pathways; and has supported lifelong learning and re-entering education and training (France Compétences, 2021).

3. NQF objectives and functions

Between 1972 and 2002, the development of a classification system for vocational and professional qualifications was closely related to labour market needs, aiming to promote social justice and parity of esteem between qualifications awarded through adult training and educational qualifications. Policy objectives started to shift in the 1990s towards combating unemployment. This was also when the shift towards learning outcomes and the assessment of competences began (Paddeu et al., 2018). The RNCP aimed to ensure the quality, transparency and comparability of vocational and professional ⁽⁴⁾ qualifications through a publicly accessible register of qualifications formally recognised by the state and social

⁽²⁾ The NPQF is a part of the national qualification system, which includes two registers: the RNCP, including levelled qualifications; and the Specific Register (RS), including qualifications without levels, but with possible connections with the NPQF through units/blocks of competences (France Compétences, 2021).

⁽³⁾ Source: internal communication with France compétences

⁽⁴⁾ Higher education diplomas and degrees, at levels 5 to 8, are considered professional qualifications due to their strong labour market orientation.

partners. The major objectives of the revised framework (the NPQF) are to increase the transparency and flexibility of qualifications and to increase the possibility of horizontal and vertical progression. Another important objective is to define units/blocks of competences common to different qualifications to allow flexibility in career change in initial VET and in less linear career paths in continuing training (France Compétences, 2021).

The RNCP has been an important tool in assuring the quality of qualifications and promoting lifelong learning, closely linked to the system for validating non-formal and informal learning. The NPQF functions as a tool providing an efficient and competence-based overview of vocational and professional qualifications to the active population and enabling them to use their VET credits to attend training programmes that address local, social and economic challenges. The framework also improves the transparency of qualifications for private companies (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

4. Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The NPQF has eight learning-outcome-based levels. The three level descriptors are similar to those of the EQF (France Compétence, 2021):

- (a) complexity of knowledge ⁽⁵⁾;
- (b) level of expertise, according to the complexity and technical nature of an activity ⁽⁶⁾;
- (c) level of responsibility and autonomy ⁽⁷⁾.

Level descriptors mirror national specificities. For instance, the term ‘expertise’ is used instead of ‘skills’, emphasising the importance of ‘evaluation of competences and the desire to give an operational dimension’ to levelled qualifications. Also, the contextualisation of qualifications is a crucial element (France Compétences, 2021).

⁽⁵⁾ The descriptor illustrates the knowledge necessary to carry out professional activities at each level (processes, materials, terminology relating to one or more fields and theoretical knowledge).

⁽⁶⁾ The descriptor defines the complexity and technical nature of a task or activity in a process, the level of mastery of the professional activity, the mobilisation of a range of cognitive and practical skills and the ability to communicate and develop interpersonal relations in the professional context.

⁽⁷⁾ The descriptor defines the level of responsibility and autonomy regarding organisation of work, reaction to unforeseen situations, awareness of the complexity of the environment, understanding of interactions with activities in other professional fields, ability to advise supervised staff and participation in collective work.

NPQF level 1 has no descriptors as it covers mastery of basic knowledge, which is not sufficient to certify the ability to exercise a professional activity. There are no qualifications included at this level. The newly introduced level 2 covers simple activities and limited autonomy. Levels 3 to 8 cover qualifications previously included at the five levels of the RNCP.

The role of the EQF levels was significant in helping the country develop a new framework structure based on level descriptors. The former levels had been used since 1969, and were based on labour market elements and the duration of studies rather than on the learning outcomes of qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

4.2. NQF scope and coverage

The NPQF is a comprehensive and demand-driven framework, open to all qualifications with a clear professional scope awarded through VET and higher education. The upper secondary general and technological baccalaureates (*baccalauréat général and technologique*) are included at level 4 of the framework as they are acknowledged by the labour market, even if they are not professionally contextualised, and they legitimate entry into higher education. Learning acquired in initial education up to grade 9 (nursery school, primary school and first cycle/lower secondary level) has no professional dimension and remains outside the scope of the framework. The NPQF is open to qualifications awarded outside the regulated qualification system ⁽⁸⁾, including private-sector and international qualifications, as long as they satisfy the respective quality criteria for the RNCP and the RS. Industry or sectoral qualifications recognised by the professional branches (*certificats de qualification professionnelle – CQPs*) ⁽⁹⁾ can be registered, following approval by the committee within *France Compétences* (see Chapter 5), in either the RS, without a level, or the RNCP, with a level, thus making them valid nationally and eligible for funding through the personal training account (*Compte personnel de formation, CPF*). They can be obtained through training or validation of acquired experience (*validation des acquis de l'expérience – VAE*) processes, but not through apprenticeship (Cedefop and Centre Inffo, 2019; France Compétences, 2021).

State-issued qualifications are automatically included in the NPQF. Other qualifications are included following approval by the committee on vocational and

⁽⁸⁾ Two important trends witnessed over the last 40 years are the diversification of nationally recognised qualifications and the increase in the number of requests by private providers to register qualifications.

⁽⁹⁾ CQPs are designed by joint employment and vocational training committees (CPNEFP – *Commission paritaire nationale de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle*), and can be submitted for inclusion in the RNCP by the CPNEFPs.

- professional qualifications set up within France Compétences. According to the relevant [decree](#), in order for qualifications to be included in the RNCP they should:
- consist of an occupational standard (*référentiel d'activités*), a competence standard (*référentiel de compétences*) including knowledge and transversal competences, and an assessment standard (*référentiel d'évaluation*) defining the criteria and methods for assessing learning outcomes;
 - be structured in units/blocks of competences (Section 4.3);
 - be classified by field of activity and allocation of an NPQF level.

Table 1. **National professional qualifications framework (NPQR)**

NQF level	Qualification type	EQF level
8	Doctoral degrees (<i>Doctorat</i>) Professional certificates/titles (<i>Titres professionnels</i>) – level 8 (*) Professional qualification certificates (<i>Certificat de qualifications professionnelles – CQP</i>) – level 8 (**) Professional qualifications on demand – level 8 (***)	8
7	Master's degrees (<i>Grade de Master</i>) Professional diploma in engineering with master's degree (<i>diplôme / titre d'ingénieur</i>) National diplomas at level 7 (****) Professional certificates/titles (<i>Titres professionnels</i>) – level 7 Professional qualification certificates (<i>CQP</i>) – level 7 (**) Professional qualifications on demand – level 7	7
6	Bachelor's degrees (<i>Grade Licence</i>) Bachelor's (<i>Licence</i>) University bachelor's in technology (<i>Bachelor universitaire de technologie – BUT</i>) National diploma in arts (<i>Diplôme National d'Art – DNA</i>) National diplomas at level 6 (****) Professional certificates/titles (<i>Titres professionnels</i>) – level 6 Professional qualification certificates (<i>CQP</i>) – level 6 (**) Professional qualifications on demand – level 6 (***)	6
5	Undergraduate technician certificates (<i>Brevet de technicien supérieur – BTS</i>) Undergraduate technician certificates in agriculture (<i>Brevet de technicien supérieur Agricole – BTSA</i>) Undergraduate diploma in technology (<i>Diplôme universitaire de technologie – DUT</i>) National diploma 'One of the best workers in France' (<i>Diplôme d'Etat 'Un des meilleurs ouvriers de France'</i>) National diplomas at level 5 (****) Professional certificates/titles (<i>Titres professionnels</i>) – level 5 Professional qualification certificates (<i>CQP</i>) – level 5 (**) Professional qualifications on demand – level 5 (***)	5

	Master craftsman qualifications issued by the Chambers of Trades (<i>Brevets de maîtrise – Chambre des métiers</i>) Professional qualifications on demand – level 5 (***)	
4	National baccalaureate diploma – general, technological or vocational education (<i>Diplôme national du baccalauréat général, technologique ou professionnel</i>) Applied arts certificates (<i>Brevet des métiers d’art – BMA</i>) Professional certificate for youth, adult education and sports (<i>Brevet professionnel de la jeunesse, de l’éducation nationale et du sport – BPJEPS</i>) Higher technical diploma in craftsmanship (<i>Brevet technique des métiers</i>) Secondary vocational certificates at level 4 (****) Professional certificates/titles (<i>Titres professionnels</i>) – level 4 Professional qualification certificates (<i>CQP</i>) – level 4 (**) Professional qualifications on demand – level 4 (***)	4
3	Secondary vocational certificates (<i>Certificat d’aptitude professionnelle – CAP; Brevet d’études professionnelles – BEP (****)</i>) Secondary vocational certificates in agriculture (<i>Certificat d’aptitude professionnelle agricole – CAPA; Brevet d’études professionnelles agricoles – BEPA (****)</i>) Secondary vocational certificate for youth, adult education and sports (<i>Certificat professionnel de la jeunesse, de l’éducation nationale et du sport – CPJEPS</i>) Certificate issued by the Chambers of Trades and Crafts (<i>Certificat technique des métiers – CTM</i>) Secondary vocational certificates at level 4 (****) Professional certificates/titles (<i>Titres professionnels</i>) – level 3 Professional qualification certificates (<i>CQP</i>) – level 3 (**) Professional qualifications on demand – level 3 (***)	3
2	Currently no qualifications	2
1	-	1

(*) Professional certificates/titles are awarded by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Integration; they are registered by law and may be classified at any level.

(**) CQPs are under the responsibility of social partners; they are registered on demand.

(***) Qualifications registered on demand are awarded by public or private bodies.

(****) An overview of national diplomas and vocational certificates registered by law is available in France *Compétences (2021)*, Annex 9.

(*****) BEP and BEPA are intermediary qualifications granted to young people who have passed the BEP exam and are preparing for the vocational baccalaureate.

Source: European Commission and Cedefop (2022); France *Compétences (2021)*, pp. 7 and 102–103.

4.3. Use of learning outcomes

The notion of ‘competence’ was introduced in French VET in the 1970s and in general education in the 1980s. It is explicitly referred to in curriculum documents in all subsystems of education and training (Cedefop, 2016). The learning-outcomes approach was strengthened by the 2002 law on social modernisation, while the subsequent decrees set up the system of validation of non-formal and

informal learning, based on learning outcomes. Furthermore, the descriptions of learning outcomes form the basis for including qualifications in the RNCP.

The notion of ‘units/blocks of competences’ (*blocs de compétences*) was introduced in 2014, as an organisation of competences in qualification standards following the logic of socially meaningful activities. A unit/block of competences is an ‘identified part of a vocational qualification’, defined as a ‘homogeneous and coherent set of competences contributing to carrying out a professional activity autonomously, and which can be assessed and validated’ ([Labour Code, Article L6113-1](#)). Since 2019, qualification awarding bodies that want to register their qualifications in the RNCP have had to provide a presentation of the units/blocks of competences corresponding to the different parts of a qualification. A [2020 decree defined the conditions for recognising completed units of competences](#) in the event that the full initial VET qualification was not obtained, making it easier to (re)-enter adult/continuing training or VAE to obtain it (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2021).

Initial vocational qualifications are increasingly defined in line with the NPQF level descriptors. In the last two decades, higher education has been aligned with the landscape of the European higher education area, for instance through the three-level structure of studies, European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credits ⁽¹⁰⁾ and bridging solutions between bachelor’s degrees to prevent dropping out. Further changes introduced in 2018 ⁽¹¹⁾ clarified the learning outcomes certified at the bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degree levels and programme descriptions based on ECTS credits.

5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The 2018 law on the freedom to choose one’s professional future set up [France Compétences](#), a national public institution with a quadripartite structure representing the state, the regions, and employer and employee organisations at the national and international levels. France Compétences operates under the supervision of the labour ministry (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Professional Integration); it is fully responsible for the coordination and oversight of the NPQF and acts as the EQF national coordination point (NCP). It is also

⁽¹⁰⁾ Bachelor’s level corresponds to 180 credits and master’s level to 300 credits; ECTS are not used at doctoral level (France Compétences, 2021).

⁽¹¹⁾ [Order](#) of 30 July 2018 relating to the national bachelor’s degree; [order](#) of 30 July 2018 modifying the 2014 decree amending the national qualifications framework for the delivery of the national bachelor’s, professional bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

responsible for ensuring the implementation of national continuing VET policies, financing vocational training and apprenticeships and regulating the VET market in terms of skill needs and demands. The department of professional qualifications of France Compétences is responsible for the day-to-day running of the NPQF; it has approximately 30 employees. The department is composed of two offices, each responsible for one of the registers (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

In 2019, a [committee was set up within France Compétences \(*Commission de la certification professionnelle*\)](#) to ensure that qualifications included in the RNCP and RS registers meet the needs of society and the economy, and that they respond rapidly to changes. The composition of the committee ensures the involvement of stakeholders and cooperation between ministries participating in the design and award of qualifications. It is made up of 16 members, representing the state, regions and social partners in a balanced way (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). Its mission is to (France Compétences, 2021):

- (a) evaluate applications for the registration of qualifications in the RNCP and the RS ⁽¹²⁾;
- (b) draw up a list of emerging or rapidly changing professions;
- (c) request that qualification awarding bodies establish equivalences between qualifications and units/blocks of competences at the same NPQF level ⁽¹³⁾;
- (d) issue methodological recommendations for awarding bodies;
- (e) contribute to the harmonisation of the terminology used for the titles of vocational and professional qualifications;
- (f) contribute to international work on the quality of qualifications.

6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

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

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is strongly connected to lifelong learning, training and employment policies, while its development builds on long-standing practices. The VAE system leads to qualifications registered in the RNCP; it is governed by France Compétences. VAE allows 'the award of whole or parts of qualifications with a vocational and professional orientation and purpose (*finalité professionnelle*) at all levels' (Mathou, 2019), without the need to go through formal

⁽¹²⁾ Qualifications awarded by public bodies, like ministries, do not need to be evaluated by the committee; however, they are controlled by France Compétences.

⁽¹³⁾ The new legal framework gives France Compétences the ability to remove qualifications with similar content for which bridging pathways cannot be established.

training. Thus, both full and partial validation are possible, the latter resulting in a document taking stock of the units of competences validated.

The focus on certification is considered a strength of the VAE system, which was developed in parallel with the restructuring of the qualifications system in 2002. Qualifications obtained through VAE are the same as those awarded via initial or continuous formal education and training or apprenticeships, and they must be registered in the RNCP. Qualification standards (*référentiels de certification*) in the RNCP describe knowledge, skills and know-how, and their assessment in relation to occupation standards (*référentiels d'activités*). A VAE procedure must be in place for all qualifications registered in the RNCP (except for those linked to regulated professions).

In addition to VAE, there is a mechanism for the recognition of professional and personal experience, granting access to programmes through an exemption from normal requirements (at the higher education level, this procedure is known as *validation des acquis professionnels et personnels*). There are also skill audits (*bilans de compétences*) aimed at identifying skills and competences acquired during one's professional life without leading to a certification and without an assessment procedure, and other types of competence portfolios developed outside of validation procedures.

6.2. Credit systems

The establishment of the ECTS system and gradual adaptation to the Bologna process resulted in the compartmentalisation and reclassification of studies into specialisations corresponding to competences and learning outcomes defined for each education level⁽¹⁴⁾, increased focus on recognition of non-formal and informal learning and flexibility (individualisation) of training pathways (France Compétences, 2021).

7. NQF implementation and impact

7.1. Stage of implementation

The NPQF is at the operational stage. It provides a map of all nationally recognised qualifications and a quality assurance mechanism for the design, registration and renewal of qualifications and offers a reference point for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. A qualifications database has incorporated the two existing registers.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Specialisations are complemented by cross-disciplinary competences common to all degrees at a specific level, forming the higher education national records for each degree registered in the RNCP.

Regarding NQF-related cooperation with non-EU countries, a memorandum of understanding was signed in 2021 with the United Arab Emirates, while France has started a dialogue with the Chinese equivalent of ENIC-NARIC (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

NPQF levels are indicated on the certificates or diplomas of all levelled qualifications, while it is planned that EQF levels will also be indicated on them. NPQF/EQF levels are indicated on all Europass certificate supplements. NPQF levels are indicated on some diploma supplements, while it is planned that EQF levels will also be indicated on them. For qualifications included in the RNCP, following the updated referencing report, the level is indicated only as a number (since the NPQF and EQF levels are the same) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.3. NQF dissemination

The main channel for disseminating information on the NPQF and the EQF is the EQF NCP [website](#). Since 2019, France Compétences has also hosted the RNCP and the RS, along with media interviews. Other types of dissemination action, such as webinars, occur on a regular basis. A [guide](#) on how to use the criteria for qualifications registered on demand has been published and is updated regularly. In 2023, France Compétences updated the [RNCP handbook \(Vademecum\)](#), targeting public and private certifying bodies, along with other labour market, career and VET stakeholders. Its aim is to make the process of registering professional qualifications in the RNCP easier. This publication gathers together all previously published guidelines, enriched with the experience and good practices collected during the 3 years that the committee for professional qualifications has been active, evaluating more than 2 500 qualification applications. Linking the NPQF to the funding of training has resulted in increased awareness and use of the framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.4. Qualifications databases and registers

There is a single [database](#) that operates as an entrance point for two distinct but fully interconnected registers. The RNCP includes all levelled qualifications (registered by law or on demand), apart from the general and technological baccalaureates. The second register, including awards that could not be levelled as they were not directly associated with an occupation recognised through an

industry-level agreement ⁽¹⁵⁾ (Paddeu et al., 2018), has been renamed the RS. The awards in the RS are complementary to a qualification in the RNCP, or attest to transversal or basic skills. The two registers together give an overview of all diplomas and certificates relevant to the labour market, awarded within and outside formal education and training. The database targets employees, jobseekers, young people, employers, public career guidance services and institutional actors. In September 2022, the RNCP included 4 681 qualifications and the RS 1 019 awards (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The number of qualifications has decreased, especially in higher education, where the number of diplomas has been reduced by half (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). The RNCP is connected to the Europass platform and the CPF, while it is planned that it will be linked to a database of training offers ([Réseau des CARIF OREF](#)) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

The database provides information, in French, on the title of the qualification, the NPQF/EQF level, the awarding body, the entry requirements, ways to acquire the qualification and the relationship to occupations or occupational fields, along with further information such as links to the qualification or to supplements ⁽¹⁶⁾. It also provides a description of the learning outcomes. The RNCP keeps a record of former qualifications that are no longer awarded. Qualifications are registered for 5 years at most; after this period, they should be renewed (the average time before renewal is 3 years) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.5. Awareness and use of the NQF

Learners have had to get used to new qualification levels. NPQF/EQF levels are systematically mentioned in the RNCP register and on the CPF mobile application. In order for a qualification to be part of an individual's (e.g. learner's or jobseeker's) CPF, it must be registered in the RNCP, while financing of training by the CPF is available only for qualifications included in the two national registers. In general, there is interest from the public, as the registration of a qualification in the RNCP is seen as proof of recognition by the state. Employers, human resources departments and employment agencies are aware of and use the NPQF levels to verify the existence of a diploma and the expected learning outcomes (though they are not always aware of the NPQF itself) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020 and 2022).

⁽¹⁵⁾ Examples include accreditations that result from a legal obligation and are required to work in a particular profession, such as electrician accreditations; those highly valued in certain fields and recommended by social partners or certain bodies, such as qualifications in copper welding; and those related to a homogeneous set of competences that are required in one or more occupations and help to access the labour market, such as the *Certificat Voltaire* (spelling skills).

⁽¹⁶⁾ International Standard Classification of Education levels are not indicated, as France uses its own classification system.

The NPQF is known and used by education and training institutions and providers. They are currently rewriting qualification standards to be expressed in units/blocks of competences. A common working group is in place to better align the learning outcomes of the NPQF with the learning outcomes of the [Register of occupations](#) in the labour market, of the national employment service (*Pôle emploi*).

Guidance and counselling practitioners and recognition authorities use the national registers in their daily work. Cooperation has been established between the EQF NCP and the National office for guidance (*Office national d'information sur les enseignements et les professions*, ONISEP), the employment service and ENIC-NARIC France. The regions, through their involvement with local guidance and counselling schemes and contacts with ONISEP, are mostly concerned with the use of units of competences established in the new NPQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020 and 2022).

7.6. Impact of the NQF

Inclusion in the NPQF ensures that each qualification is quality assured; any qualification registered in the RNCP and RS is submitted to strict quality control, with nine criteria for the RNCP (seven mandatory and two optional) and six for the RS (four mandatory and two optional). Thus, quality assurance forms a solid basis for the functioning of the NPQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). Promoting parity of esteem between qualifications at the same level, irrespective of the awarding body, is a cornerstone of the framework, while being levelled to the NPQF signals the national and international validity of the qualification. The recognition of foreign qualifications has been encouraged and simplified using learning-outcome descriptors, and the ENIC-NARIC centre is in cooperation with the EQF NCP. Registration in the database is necessary to receive funding, including financing of the validation of non-formal and informal learning; to exercise certain professions and occupations; and to enter apprenticeship schemes.

The design, review and renewal of qualifications is in line with the NPQF's procedures and quality criteria. The gradual introduction of units/blocks of competences from 2014 became mandatory in 2019 for all RNCP qualifications. Together with introducing the requirement for awarding bodies to network in the event that their qualifications are similar, it has made it easier to strengthen connections between education sectors and institutions. The involvement of social partners (representatives of professional sectors) in the daily implementation of the framework maintains a high level of social dialogue between education and the labour market (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

The NPQF is closely associated with the system for validating non-formal and informal learning, with the two being mutually supportive: qualifications included in the RNCP can be acquired through validation and must have a specified VAE procedure. Units/blocks of competences can be assessed through VAE, allowing adults to acquire a given qualification gradually or by combining a training course with one or more VAE processes, thus making the validation procedure easier (Cedefop and Centre Inffo, 2019; European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

The introduction of a new university-level bachelor's in technology at level 6 in 2019 and the harmonisation of bachelor's programmes delivered by different types of higher education institutions in 2020⁽¹⁷⁾ are also direct results of the restructuring of the higher education sector in line with the QF-EHEA and EQF recommendation (France Compétences, 2021).

8. Referencing to the EQF

The five-level structured framework was referenced to the EQF in October 2010 (Commission nationale de la certification professionnelle, 2010). The evolution of the national qualifications system and the introduction of the eight-level NPQF (2019) called for an updated referencing report. A single, combined report on the referencing of the NPQF to the EQF and on self-certifying the compatibility of the framework with the QF-EHEA was adopted in February 2021.

9. Reflections and plans

The eight-level structure and learning-outcome-based level descriptors of the NPQF, adopted in 2019, have brought the framework closer to the EQF, increasing the transparency and comparability of French and other European qualifications. The revised framework is broader in scope, including upper secondary general and technological baccalaureates.

The NPQF has evolved through different stages over several decades to address new challenges, policy objectives and trends in the national and European contexts. Three main trends have been noted: the remarkable diversification of the range of qualifications recognised by the state; the shift in the object of recognition from duration of training to learning outcomes; and, more recently, the strong encouragement of providers to create common qualifications, share blocks of competences between different qualifications and operate within networks.

(17) [Decree](#) of 6 December 2019 reforming the professional bachelor's degree.

Important developments that have shaped the discussion on qualifications and made learning pathways more flexible include the introduction of units/blocks of competences as identifiable parts of qualifications, the advent of the personal training account (CPF), and the introduction of the new RS.

Connecting the NPQF to the funding of training has made the framework much more visible and led to it being used much more by the public. Together with interconnecting qualifications and the implementation of a solid quality assurance mechanism for including qualifications in the framework, are considered the three main success factors (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). Furthermore, the quality assurance role of the committee within France Compétences as the gatekeeper of the framework has been important for two reasons: it has continued to support the credibility of levelled qualifications; and it has created joint ownership of levelling decisions across a wide range of stakeholders (due to its quadripartite composition).

One particular challenge is that the waiting time for the on-demand registration of qualifications in the RNCP needs to be shortened, which will help keep the register up to date. However, this is a demanding process for the participating experts. Developing the system of blocks of competences for all NPQF qualifications would facilitate clarity and transparency between different types of qualification, especially within the same occupation or profession. It would also make it easier to develop equivalences and flexible pathways between RNCP and non-levelled RS qualifications. However, this is a time-intensive process (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020 and 2022). Nevertheless, strengthening bridges and reinforcing pathways between different education sectors and institutions are major priorities (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Acronyms

CPF	Compte personnel de formation (personal training account)
CPQ	<i>certificats de qualification professionnelle</i> (professional qualification certificates)
ENIC-NARIC	European Network of National Information Centres and Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres
EQF	European qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area

RNCP	Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles (National Register of Vocational and Professional Qualifications)
RS	Répertoire spécifique des certifications et habilitations (Specific Register of Awards)
VAE	<i>validation des acquis de l'expérience</i> (validation of non-formal and informal learning)

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[France Compétences](#)

[RNCP](#) and RS