

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

European inventory on NQF 2016

Introduction and context

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia became an EU candidate country in December 2005. The country has registered positive trends in the past years, such as a significant growth in higher education attainment and a reduction in the rate of early leavers from education and training. In 2015, the unemployment rate (15 to 64 years old) reached a historical low level (26.3%) due to fast growth in labour demand, while active measures on the labour market, focused on job creation and social inclusion, have been associated with a reduction in unemployment in the most vulnerable age groups. The share of the population with low levels of education or training has also decreased following the extension of compulsory education to upper secondary education; however, 40% of the total working age population is still only educated to lower secondary level or less. With respect to other European benchmarks, such as the participation of adults in lifelong learning and participation in early childhood education and care, the country is still far below the EU average (European Training Foundation, 2015).

The country has been working towards a national qualifications framework (NQF) for several years, with international assistance. In September 2005, the proposal for development of a national qualifications framework was prepared by a working group of national experts ⁽¹⁾ supported by the ETF. The initial idea for the development of a NQF started in 2002 under the *Programme for vocational education and training* ⁽²⁾. Subsequently, development work focused on a NQF for higher education, a political priority at the time. The higher education qualifications framework (NQF HE) was legislated in 2010, setting a legal basis for further development.

⁽¹⁾ ETF project 'Developing strategies for national qualifications frameworks for south-eastern Europe' (2004-05).

⁽²⁾ Contract No 02-0003, second phase, CARDS.

Aiming to finalise the concept and to complete a draft law of a comprehensive NQF for lifelong learning (the Macedonian qualifications framework (MQF)), the NQF working group led by the Ministry of Education and Science was re-established in November 2012. Building on the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF), the Copenhagen process, the Bologna process, and the Decree on the national framework for higher education qualifications ⁽³⁾, the resulting document outlining the basic concept of the MQF *Baselines of the national qualifications framework (Macedonian qualifications framework)* was adopted in July 2013, following a public debate.

The law on the MQF for lifelong learning ⁽⁴⁾ was adopted in November 2013 and its application started in September 2015. The comprehensive MQF incorporates the qualifications framework for higher education and includes qualifications acquired through non-formal learning. It was referenced to the EQF and self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF EHEA) in February 2016.

Policy objectives

The primary roles of the MQF are communication and support to reforms. Its main objectives are to provide a transparent description of all qualifications in the national system of education, and flexible paths to qualifications. The MQF is seen as an important tool and valuable contribution to modernising education and training, with a view to improving quality and adaptability of education to labour market needs, and promoting lifelong learning and mobility. In a demonstration of the reform support role of the MQF, in 2016 the country engaged in development of a new generation of vocational education and training (VET) qualifications aligned with the MQF. The framework is also seen as an instrument of communication among stakeholders.

The associated quality-assurance processes are intended to improve credibility and transparency of MQF qualifications. The main quality assurance processes will include evaluation and approval of qualifications for inclusion in

⁽³⁾ Official Gazette of the Republic Macedonia No 154/2010.

⁽⁴⁾ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia No 137/2013:
http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Zakon_za_nacionalna_ramka_2014.pdf

the MQF and accreditation of institutions to deliver and/or award these qualifications.

The main policy objectives listed in the law on the MQF ⁽⁵⁾ are to:

- (a) define learning outcomes;
- (b) establish a system for valuing different qualifications within the overall qualifications system;
- (c) encourage and promote lifelong learning;
- (d) demonstrate clear links between different parts of the education and training system;
- (e) indicate transfer and progression (horizontally and vertically) through and within all types of education and training (formal, non-formal and informal);
- (f) enable international comparability of qualifications;
- (g) promote importance of key and professional competences;
- (h) ensure mobility of participants in education and training and inclusion in the labour market at national and international levels;
- (i) create a single system for quality management;
- (j) balance quality of service providers;
- (k) ensure cooperation of all stakeholders;
- (l) ensure harmonisation with national economic, social and cultural needs;
- (m) be part of the developments related to the EQF.

Levels and use of learning outcomes

The comprehensive MQF comprises educational qualifications from all education sectors (general education, VET, higher education) and vocational qualifications ⁽⁶⁾. The eight levels of the framework, of which levels 5 to 7 have

⁽⁵⁾ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia No 137/2013:
http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Zakon_za_nacionalna_ramka_2014.pdf

⁽⁶⁾ Vocational qualification is a qualification acquired for part of a publicly adopted education programme (modules, courses, etc.), by completing a special programme for adult education, or through validation of non-formal learning. The achieved learning outcomes are documented with a certificate. They contain competences relevant for the labour market presented within one or more standards of occupations. These qualifications aim to enable employment and personal development. By their nature, these qualifications, in principle, do not provide access to vertical progression in the formal education system. Vocational qualifications can be acquired for all MQF levels and sublevels, except level VIII. This type of

two sublevels each, are characterised by level descriptors defined in terms of expected learning outcomes: knowledge and understanding, skills and competence. Different dimensions of learning and capabilities are taken into account, such as applied knowledge, practical skills, working with others, autonomy and responsibility, and complexity of context. The decision to accommodate different sublevels for different types of qualifications at levels 5 to 7 is acknowledged as a temporary arrangement in response to specificities of the education and training system.

The volume of qualifications is expressed in credits: ECTS ⁽⁷⁾ for qualifications at levels 5A to 8, and ECVET ⁽⁸⁾ for qualifications at levels 2 to 5B. Qualifications at level 4 can also use MCSGE ⁽⁹⁾ credits. ECTS has been used for all three cycles of higher education since 2005; implementation of ECVET and the MCSGE is yet to be achieved. The different sublevels located at the same level of the MQF represent qualifications of different types and size, differentiated in terms of number of credits.

The shift to learning outcomes is seen as an essential part of qualifications development and is stipulated in the law on MQF as one of the leading principles. Other principles include transferability of credits, classification of qualifications at levels and sublevels, comparability with the EQF, and quality assurance in the development and acquisition of qualifications. Several documents were produced to support the development of qualifications and their allocation in the MQF: *Procedure for development of qualifications*, *Format of qualifications*, *Protocol for cooperation among the stakeholders involved in the process of MQF*, and *Methodology for including qualifications in MQF* ⁽¹⁰⁾.

The law also stipulates standards of qualifications ⁽¹¹⁾ and their mandatory elements: title and type, level or sublevel, qualification code, credit value, description of qualification (measurable indicators of learning outcomes relating to the acquired knowledge and understanding, skills and competence) and

qualifications in some countries is known as 'partial qualification'. (Ministry of Education and Science, 2016).

⁽⁷⁾ ECTS: European credit transfer and accumulation system.

⁽⁸⁾ ECVET: European credit system for vocational education and training.

⁽⁹⁾ MCSGE: Macedonian credit system for general education (in Macedonian language: MKCOO – *Makedonski kredit system za opshto obrazovanie*).

⁽¹⁰⁾ Documents are available at: http://mrk.mk/?page_id=73&lang=en

⁽¹¹⁾ Law on NQF, Article 6 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia No 137/2013).

contents (entry requirements, number of mandatory and optional subjects, assessment methods and criteria for assessment of learning outcomes).

However, analysis of qualifications and relevant legislation carried out over 2014-15 (ETF, 2016) revealed that the laws on primary education, secondary education, VET and adult education require further updating to introduce and strengthen the learning outcomes approach throughout the education system.

Learning outcomes have been linked to occupational standards in 12 VET programmes lasting three years and one lasting two years. These reformed qualifications match MQF descriptors at level 3 and level 2, respectively. The remaining three-year and two-year qualifications and the four-year technical VET qualifications are expected to be reformed in the future. By 2015, the country had developed 65 occupational standards and 25 qualification standards in 14 sectors, most as part of a twinning project in 2013. The project included VET teacher training and methodology packages for design of standards and curriculum.

As of 2010, higher education institutions have revised all programmes, to ensure compliance with the mandatory learning-outcomes approach, according to the Decree for the national framework for higher education qualifications. This reform was linked with legal quality assurance requirements and all higher education study programmes were subject to restructuring and re-accreditation.

In adult education, verified non-formal training programmes are designed in terms of learning outcomes and are linked to occupational standards. Qualifications acquired via non-formal learning can be located at levels 1 to 5B in the MQF, according to their level of complexity. During 2012-16 the number of such programmes has increased rapidly, to over 100. The Employment Service Agency is an important user of these programmes, in the framework of active labour market measures.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The MQF is seen as an instrument for communication between stakeholders; it aims to take into account the needs of the labour market, society and the individuals. The governance structure of the framework is defined in the Law on the MQF ⁽¹²⁾, that came into effect in 2015.

⁽¹²⁾ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia No 137/2013.

The Ministry of Education and Science has had overall responsibility for developing the MQF and is the national coordination point (EQF NCP). It has the coordinating role, together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. In the development phase, a number of working groups were established: one in 2012 for the development of the MQF ⁽¹³⁾, one in 2014 for its further development (composed of representatives of the same institutions as the 2012 working group), and one for the preparation of the referencing report to the EQF ⁽¹⁴⁾.

In 2015, awareness and involvement of stakeholders in matters related to the MQF increased through a series of actions: establishment and staffing of the NQF unit within the Ministry of Education and Science, launch of the MQF website, establishment of the National Board for the MQF, and establishment of Sectoral Qualifications Councils.

The National Board for the MQF, created in October 2015, ensures the involvement of stakeholders in governance of the framework. Its role is to discuss education, employment and regional development policies, to help forge links between education and the labour market, to propose development of qualifications and decide on their allocation in the MQF; it also has a monitoring and methodological role. It has representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, VET Centre, Centre for Adult Education, Bureau for Development of Education, National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility, higher education institutions, one representative of the chambers and the Independent Trade Union for Education, Science and Culture.

Sectoral qualifications councils have been established by the National Board, with members representing the Ministry of Education and Science, the Association of Employers from the relevant sector, the Trade Union in the sector, universities, the VET Centre, the Centre for Adult Education, the Bureau for

⁽¹³⁾ Including representatives of: Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Centre for Adult Education, VET Centre, Bureau for Development of Education, Employment Service Agency, State Statistical Office, Ministry of Information Society and Public Administration, Chamber of Commerce, Organisation of Employers and Chamber of Crafts.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Including representatives of: Ministry of Education and Science, academia, Board for Accreditation and Evaluation of Higher Education, VET Centre, Centre for Adult Education, Bureau for Development of Education, National Examination Centre, State Educational Inspectorate, National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility, VET school, Student Union, Organisation of Employers and the Chamber of Crafts.

Development of Education, and the relevant body for regulated professions in the country. Their mandate is to analyse labour market trends, propose and promote sectoral or subsectoral qualifications, analyse and evaluate current qualifications, propose priorities in developing new qualifications, give opinions on the compliance of assessment standards with occupational and qualification standards, and establish commissions for assessment and validation of non-formal learning.

The institutions responsible for the development of qualifications at levels 1 to 5B are the VET Centre, the Centre for Adult Education and the Bureau for Development of Education. Higher education institutions are responsible for qualifications at levels 5A to 8.

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

A major policy objective, stipulated in the law on MQF, is including in the MQF all types of education and training and indicating possibilities for transfer and progression. Putting in place mechanisms and procedures for validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018 is a key milestone in the strategy for development of vocational education and training in a lifelong learning context 2013-20.

Work has been done to improve access and quality of adult learning provision, aiming to cater for a large proportion of low-educated adults. Dialogue has been started to design a concept of non-formal education and validation of competences acquired throughout life, signalling that the government is aware of the need for many adults to acquire a qualification through a system of validation of knowledge and skills acquired at work and in life. The concept paper for non-formal adult education and informal learning, developed with support from the ETF and approved in September 2015, provides a basis for future policy developments in adult education and non-formal learning. One of its priority objectives is to develop and implement a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018. A roadmap ⁽¹⁵⁾ was set out in 2016, in cooperation

⁽¹⁵⁾ Roadmap for implementing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:
http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/VNFIL-Roadmap_angl-1.pdf

with the ETF. The concept paper for primary education of adults was developed with support from the United Nation Development Programme and adopted in 2015.

While informal education is not yet systemically regulated, the recently adopted MQF incorporates qualifications acquired through non-formal learning. Since 2012, the Centre for Adult Education has verified 159 non-formal training programmes, of which 144 lead to a vocational qualification. All verified non-formal programmes are described in terms of learning outcomes and are linked to occupational standards.

NQF implementation

The framework has entered an early operational stage.

Reforms are under way in different parts of the education and training system, in line with the national education strategy. Higher education has been subject to extensive change in line with the Bologna principles; the law on higher education of 2010 introduced learning-outcome-based study programmes. The strategy for vocational education and training in a lifelong learning context 2013-20⁽¹⁶⁾ has boosted the work on the MQF and its implementation.

The law on the MQF was adopted in 2013 and entered into force in September 2015. It defines the principles and goals of the framework, its structure, levels and sublevels, standards, volume and types of qualifications, as well as quality assurance aspects and institutional roles. Until this law entered into force, the work towards MQF implementation and referencing to the EQF was steered by the working group for further development of the NQF for lifelong learning, established in 2014 and coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science.

The development and implementation of the framework were supported in recent years through projects with international partners: European Union (EU) – particularly the European Training Foundation (ETF) - and the British Council. The ETF supported the referencing of the MQF to EQF (2014-15) focusing also on capacity building for stakeholders, revision and analysis of qualifications, and levelling of a small number of VET qualifications using learning outcomes. A

⁽¹⁶⁾ Strategy for vocational education and training in a lifelong learning context and action plan 2013-20:
http://www.csoo.edu.mk/images//vet%20strategy_en%20-%20final.pdf

memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education and Science and the British Council was signed with the aim of supporting implementation of the MQF. With the main objective being provision of expertise from the UK, emphasis was placed on capacity building for employers, employer engagement with MQF development, and the importance of establishing sectoral qualifications councils.

During 2015-17, the implementation work aims to progress the framework in line with the EQF and to strengthen national capacity for effective and efficient functioning of the MQF. This work is currently carried out as part of a new twinning project (*Further improvement of the system for development and implementation of the national qualifications framework*) launched in March 2016. It has three components:

- (a) improvement and harmonisation of relevant legislation in relation to the NQF;
- (b) strengthening the institutional capacity for the introduction of the NQF;
- (c) strengthening the development of qualifications in the NQF.

Specific projects aim to improve the quality and labour market relevance of technical vocational education and training (TVET) and collaboration between schools and industry, and between higher education and the business community (Ministry of Education and Science, 2016).

Referencing to the EQF

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been a member of the EQF advisory group since 2013. A multi-stakeholder referencing group was established in 2014 under the coordination of the Ministry of Education and Science. Its activities were supported by the ETF throughout the referencing process. The referencing report of the MQF to the EQF and self-certification to the QF-EHEA (Ministry of Education and Science, 2016) was presented and endorsed in the EQF advisory group in February 2016. The report is published on the website of the Macedonian qualifications framework ⁽¹⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁷⁾ The website of the Macedonian qualifications framework: <http://mrk.mk/?lang=en>

Important lessons and future plans

The entering into force of the law on the MQF, the establishment of the National Board of the MQF, and the endorsement of the referencing report in the EQF advisory group, were important milestones in the development of the Macedonian framework. Given its reforming role, it is natural that the further development of the framework and the referencing process will continue in stages. Although the legislation is now in place, challenges remain, especially in areas of capacity-building, funding and stakeholder involvement and cooperation. On this last issue, insufficient involvement of stakeholders representing the labour market, and a need to take labour market information more into account in the next phases of MQF implementation, have been signalled by international experts involved in the referencing process. Output from EU projects and other relevant international cooperation projects face difficulties in securing sustainability, due to low State funding and institutional capacity constraints.

According to the referencing report (Ministry of Education and Science, 2016), among the medium- and long-term challenges to be tackled are harmonisation of the relevant legislation (with the law on MQF aiming to implement the learning outcomes approach throughout the education system), continuing the reform of the VET qualifications system, populating the framework with qualifications based on transparent procedures, and developing the register of qualifications. Other future plans are the introduction of ECVET, the development and implementation of a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the strengthening of the quality assurance system.

In the short term, the country's main priorities will include: capacity building of the NQF unit within the Ministry of Education and Science; revision of existing qualifications and their description in terms of learning outcomes; development of new TVET qualifications and levelling of existing four-year VET qualifications; design and launch of the qualifications database; and development of a systematic approach for validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018.

Further source of information

[URLs accessed 5.12.2016]

 MQF website: <http://www.mrk.mk>

 The Ministry of Education and Science is the EQF national coordination point:
<http://www.mon.gov.mk/>

Macedonian qualifications framework (MQF)

MQF levels	Educational qualifications (formal)	Vocational qualifications (non-formal)	EQF levels
8	Doctorate diploma		8
7	7 A Second cycle master of science diploma (from 60 to 120 ECTS)		7
	7 B Second cycle diploma for specialist studies (60 ECTS)		
6	6 A First cycle university diploma (240 ECTS) First cycle vocational diploma (240 ECTS)		6
	6 B First cycle university diploma (180 ECTS) First cycle vocational diploma (180 ECTS)		
5	5 A Short cycle higher education (vocational) diploma		5
	5 B Post-secondary diploma for specialist education Craftsman diploma		
4	Upper secondary general education diploma Upper secondary technical diploma Upper secondary arts diploma	Vocational certificate (CVET)	4
3	Vocational diploma (three years)	Vocational certificate (CVET)	3
2	Vocational certificate (two years)	Vocational certificate (CVET)	2
1	Certificate of primary education	State certificate for adult education (literacy and numeracy skills)	1

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Education and Science, 2016.

List of abbreviations

ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
MQF	Macedonian qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VET	vocational education and training

References

European Training Foundation (2015). Inventory of NQF recent developments in ETF's partner countries: the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/The%20former%20Yugoslav%20Republic%20of%20Macedonia%20-%20NQF%20Inventory

European Training Foundation (2016). *Inventory and analysis of existing qualifications: study supporting the EQF referencing process: the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: synthesis report 2016.*

http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Inventory_Analysis_NQF_Eng.-1.pdf

Ministry of Education and Science (2016). *EQF referencing report of the Macedonian qualifications framework and self-certification to the QF-EHEA.*

https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/eqf_referencing_report_of_the_macedonian_qualification_framework_and_self-certification_to_the_qf-ehea.pdf