



EUROPEAN
INVENTORY
OF NQFs 2022

ITALY



European Inventory of National Qualifications Frameworks 2022 – Italy

This report was produced by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), Department for VET and Qualifications. Cedefop would like to thank the National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies (ANPAL) for their valuable contribution.

This report is part of the [European inventory of national qualifications frameworks \(NQFs\)](#). For additional information please visit Cedefop's [NQFs online tool](#).

Please cite this publication as:

Cedefop (2023). *European Inventory of National Qualifications Frameworks 2022 – Italy*.
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/italy-european-inventory-nqfs-2022>

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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 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 Italian NQF, and its objectives, functions and institutional arrangements, as well as data on its implementation and impact.

The Italian NQF (*Quadro Nazionale delle Qualificazioni, QNQ*) is structured in eight levels, covering qualifications from general, technical and vocational education, higher education, adult education, VET qualifications administered at regional level and qualifications of regulated professions. The framework is at the activation stage. With the first referencing report (2013), formal education and training qualifications were directly linked to the EQF. In 2022, an updated referencing report was presented to the EQF advisory group. A qualifications framework for higher education was self-certified to the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2012.

2. National context

2.1. Policy context

In 2020, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (4.3%) was below the EU average (5.0%). Participation in early childhood education and care is higher than the EU average (94.6% versus 93.0% in 2020), while the rate of early leaving from education and training is rather high (12.7% in 2021). In 2021, tertiary education attainment (age 25-34) (28.3%) was significantly lower than in EU 27 (41.2%). In 2021, participation in upper secondary VET was higher than the EU average (51.9% versus 48.7%) (European Commission. DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022). In post-secondary non-tertiary and in short-cycle tertiary education there are only vocational pathways available ⁽¹⁾.

2.2. NQF legal basis

The QNQ was adopted through the [inter-ministerial decree No 20/2018](#). The decree has established the structure of the framework and regulates the procedures, the bodies involved and the criteria for levelling qualifications to the

⁽¹⁾ More information at [Eurostat \[educ_uoe_enra13\]](#), accessed 28 August 2023.

QNQ. In 2023, the updated referencing report was adopted by an [inter-ministerial decree](#); this was an important milestone for the further implementation of the QNQ. Prior to these, a national strategy on lifelong learning was defined, establishing a National System for Certification of Competences (NSCC) (the QNQ includes NSCC qualifications) and a national repository of education, training and vocational (learning-outcomes-based) qualifications awarded at national and regional levels ⁽²⁾. In the [Decree](#) adopting the National plan for new skills, the QNQ is used as a reference point to define essential quality levels for upskilling and reskilling activities. The [inter-ministerial decree](#) adopting the national guidelines for the interoperability of the competent authorities ⁽³⁾ of the NSCC states that certificates issued at the conclusion of a validation process are transferable in the different sectors of the NSCC, and recognisable at European and international level, as they are levelled to the QNQ (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

3. NQF objectives and functions

The objectives of the QNQ include:

- (a) improving access, transparency and permeability of the qualifications system;
- (b) promoting transferability of qualifications at national and European level and professional mobility;
- (c) promoting validation and certification of competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, and those acquired through work-based learning;
- (d) contributing to improving quality of education.

The QNQ is a reference tool in implementing the three main pillars of the lifelong learning strategy: the national system for certification of competences; an integrated system of training, education and employment services; and a single system for the interoperability of the different information sources. The NQF has

⁽²⁾ Only levelled qualifications to the QNQ can be included in the national repository. In order to be included Developments towards the creation of a national system for certification of competences were legislated through the [National Law No 92/2012](#) on the reform of the labour market, the [Decree No 13/2013](#) on the national certification of competences and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the Decree No 166/2015 on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills.

⁽³⁾ The term competent authorities refers to public administration authorities, operating at national and regional level, responsible for the identification, validation and certification of competences (i.e. relevant ministries and the regions and the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano). The term entitled body refers to public or private entities, including chambers, authorised or accredited by a competent authority, or delegated according to State or regional law, along with educational institutions, universities and institutions of higher education in Arts and Music, to provide all or part of services for the identification and validation and certification of competences (ANPAL, 2022).

two main functions: description and classification of Italian qualifications that are part of the NSCC and referencing of qualifications to the EQF to enable comparison with those of other European countries (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). The framework fosters the coordination among education and labour market stakeholders, supports skills needs analysis, promotes up- and re-skilling of individuals, supports interoperability of national and European databases, while it is also used in qualification design (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

4. Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The QNQ was developed in close alignment to the structure of the EQF ⁽⁴⁾. It consists of eight qualification levels defined by level descriptors covering three dimensions: knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy. To ensure all qualifications are included, sub-descriptors have also been developed, extending the EQF level descriptors. The dimensions of the EQF descriptors were analysed by the technical working group (Chapter 5), resulting in the adoption of the explicit dimensions and in clarifying the implicit ones. In some cases, particularly for the ‘knowledge’ and ‘responsibility and autonomy’ descriptors, the explicit and implicit dimensions were adjusted to the national context; in other cases, especially for the ‘skills’ descriptors, additional elements were adopted to make the QNQ descriptors more inclusive.

QNQ levels can be divided in 6 sub-levels (sub-articulations), providing additional qualitative information on whether general qualifications allow direct access to next-level learning pathways or not (sub-levels 1-2), whether specialisation qualifications provide access to next-level learning pathways or not (sub-level 3-4), if they are a micro-qualification composed of one or more competences of a broader qualification (sub-level 0), and if they are international qualifications not included in the national repository (sub-level 5) (ANPAL, 2022).

4.2. NQF scope and coverage

The framework covers formal qualifications awarded within the National System of Certification of Competences (NSCC), including school education (general, technical and vocational), higher education, adult education, VET qualifications administered at regional level and qualifications of regulated professions.

⁽⁴⁾ In the first referencing report, the EQF descriptors were used to link directly formal education and training qualifications to the EQF (the QNQ was not developed at the time).

The 2022 updated referencing report, based on the 2018 QNQ inter-ministerial decree, specifies the minimum criteria and the procedure for levelling NSCC qualifications awarded at national and regional level. The procedure will have 5 phases and will be managed by ANPAL through an IT application, interoperable with national and European databases (especially with the Atlas of Work and Qualifications). Competent authorities, awarding NSCC qualifications, will apply to ANPAL for levelling individual qualifications to the QNQ, and an independent evaluation will be performed by the National Institute for Public Policies Analysis (INAPP). The adoption of the updated referencing report through a 2023 inter-ministerial decree, is expected to kick start the levelling procedure of individual qualifications to the QNQ. It is estimated that once the referencing procedure for existing qualifications will be completed, the QNQ register (Section 7.4) will include approximately 12 000 national and regional qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

In the future, it will be possible international qualifications ⁽⁵⁾ to be included in the QNQ. Qualifications of non-regulated professions do not currently have national or regional frameworks of qualifications to be referenced to the QNQ (ANPAL, 2022). Micro-qualifications, introduced by the 2013 decree setting up the NSCC, can be levelled to the QNQ (Cedefop, 2023).

Table 1. **Italian qualifications framework (QNQ)**

NQF level	Italian formal qualifications	EQF level
8	Research doctorate – <i>Dottorato di ricerca</i> Research training academic diploma – <i>Diploma accademico di formazione alla ricerca (AFAM)*</i> Specialisation diploma – <i>Diploma di specializzazione</i> Second level university master – <i>Master universitario di secondo livello)</i> Second level Academic specialisation diploma - <i>Diploma accademico di specializzazione di secondo livello (AFAM)</i> Higher specialization diploma or Second level post degree - <i>Diploma di corso di perfezionamento o Master di secondo livello (AFAM)</i>	8

⁽⁵⁾ The levelling of such qualifications does not give them the legal value of qualifications awarded under the supervision of competent authorities.

NQF level	Italian formal qualifications	EQF level
7	<p>Single-cycle Master Degree - <i>Laurea Magistrale/Specialistica a ciclo unico</i></p> <p>Single-cycle second level academic diploma – <i>Diploma accademico di secondo livello (AFAM)</i></p> <p>Master Degree - <i>Laurea Magistrale/Specialistica</i></p> <p>First level university master – <i>Master universitario di primo livello</i></p> <p>Second level Academic diploma - <i>Diploma accademico di secondo livello (AFAM)</i></p> <p>First level academic specialisation diploma – <i>Diploma accademico di specializzazione di primo livello (AFAM)</i></p> <p>Higher specialisation diploma - <i>Diploma di corso di perfezionamento</i></p> <p>Higher specialisation diploma or first level master – <i>Diploma di perfezionamento o Master di primo livello</i></p>	7
6	<p>Bachelor degree – <i>Laurea</i></p> <p>First level academic diploma – <i>Diploma accademico di primo livello (AFAM)</i></p> <p>Applied technologies higher specialisation diploma (three-year course) - <i>Diploma di specializzazione superiore per le tecnologie applicate di durata triennale</i></p> <p>Regional higher vocational training qualification - <i>Qualificazione di alta formazione professionale regionale</i></p>	6
5	<p>Applied technologies specialisation Diploma (two-year course) - <i>Diploma di specializzazione per le tecnologie applicate di durata biennale</i></p> <p>Regional vocational training qualification for technical area - <i>Qualificazione di formazione professionale di area tecnica</i></p>	5

NQF level	Italian formal qualifications	EQF level
4	<p>Upper secondary education diploma – <i>Diploma liceale</i></p> <p>Upper secondary education diploma (technical or vocational) – <i>Diploma di istruzione tecnica or professionale</i></p> <p>Initial education and vocational training diploma - <i>Diploma professionale di Istruzione e Formazione Professionale (IeFP)</i></p> <p>Regional vocational training qualification for technical area - <i>Qualificazione di formazione professionale di area tecnica</i></p> <p>Higher technical specialisation certificate – <i>Certificato di specializzazione tecnica superiore (IFTS)</i></p> <p>Certification for admission to the third teaching period of second level (Adult education) - <i>Certificazione per l'ammissione al terzo periodo didattico (IDA) del secondo livello</i></p> <p>Technical, vocational or artistic upper secondary level diploma (Adult education) - <i>Diploma di Istruzione secondaria di secondo grado degli istituti tecnici o professionali (IDA)</i></p>	4
3	<p>Initial education and vocational training certificate - <i>Qualifica professionale di Istruzione e Formazione Professionale (IeFP)</i></p> <p>Regional vocational training qualification for professional operator - <i>Qualificazione di formazione professionale di area operativa</i></p>	3
2	<p>Compulsory education certificate - <i>Certificazione delle competenze dell'obbligo di istruzione</i></p> <p>Compulsory education certificate (IeFP) - <i>Certificazione delle competenze dell'obbligo di istruzione (IeFP)</i></p> <p>Regional vocational training qualification for professional operator - <i>Qualificazione di formazione professionale di area operativa</i></p> <p>Certification attesting the acquisition of basic competences corresponding to the compulsory education (Adult education) - <i>Certificazione attestante l'acquisizione delle competenze di base connesse all'obbligo di istruzione (IDA)</i></p> <p>Certification for admission to the second teaching period of second level (Adult Education) - <i>Certificazione per l'ammissione al secondo periodo didattico (IDA) del secondo livello</i></p>	2

NQF level	Italian formal qualifications	EQF level
1	Final diploma of the first cycle of education - <i>Diploma di licenza conclusiva del primo ciclo di istruzione</i> Certificate attesting the achievement of a level of knowledge of the Italian language at level A2 of the CEFR - <i>Titolo attestante il raggiungimento di un livello di conoscenza della lingua italiana di livello A2 del QCER (IDA)</i> Final diploma of the first cycle of education (Adult education) - <i>Titolo conclusivo del primo ciclo di istruzione (IDA)</i>	1

* Higher education for the fine arts, music and dance (AFAM)

Source: European Commission and Cedefop (2022).

4.3. Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach has been introduced at national and regional levels, with each subsystem having its own characteristics. At upper secondary level (QNQ level 4), general (*licei*), technical and vocational education qualifications and regional qualifications awarded within the State-Regions agreement are described in learning outcomes according to a 2010 [Presidential decree](#) on general education reform.

In vocational training administered at regional level, there is a focus on competences, defined as the smallest units for certification, collected into codified lists based on the relevant EQF level and on a clear explanation of learning outcomes (Italian technical working group, 2012). The apprenticeship system has been reformed in recent years to integrate training and employment within a dual system (Section 7.5).

In the higher (non-academic) technical education and training pathway (*istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore* – IFTS and *istruzione tecnica superiore* – ITS, QNQ/EQF levels 4 and 5) a national standard system based on competences (coherent with the learning outcomes approach) is used.

In higher education, Dublin descriptors ⁽⁶⁾ are used nationally for the cycles of higher education agreed within the Bologna process. More specific descriptors are being defined for each programme by universities but clear evidence of applying the learning outcomes approach is still missing (Cedefop, 2016). Higher education is still under reform, aiming to move the system closer to the European standards designed by the Bologna process.

Despite legislative developments that take into consideration the learning outcomes orientation and their potential to change teaching and learning, a gap

⁽⁶⁾ The Dublin descriptors used are: knowledge and understanding; applying knowledge and understanding; making judgements; communication skills; learning skills.

still exists between theory and practice, making difficult to assess the extent to which the approach is applied or its impact on the ground.

5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of University and Research and in agreement with the regions, autonomous provinces and social partners, has been leading the QNQ development at a strategic level.

Operational functions have been assigned to the EQF NCP, which is hosted by the National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies ([ANPAL](#)). The agency has also been designated national Europass centre and national coordination point for Euroguidance and is responsible for promoting all EU tools for employability and mobility. The EQF NCP is staffed by 5 ANPAL employees with permanent contracts. It is financed from EU funding (EQF NCP joint grant agreement - EQF, Europass and Euroguidance), complemented by national funds. The EQF NCP is responsible for NQF operational implementation, including the referencing procedure of Italian qualifications to the EQF, monitoring, evaluation and maintenance of the framework and for updating the referencing report (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

There are also inter-agency bodies responsible for discussing QNQ-related topics and supervising and coordinating its implementation. The technical working group provides technical and methodological advice; the National technical committee has guiding, coordinating monitoring and evaluating functions, it is composed of representatives of all the competent authorities issuing qualifications within the NSCC at national and regional level; the State-Regions Conference is responsible for approving the updated referencing report (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). INAPP is currently involved as an independent evaluator to guarantee quality and reliability in levelling qualifications to the QNQ/EQF.

One of the main challenges in establishing and implementing the QNQ has been the high number of stakeholders involved and the complexity of the education, training and qualification system.

6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

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

The validation system, defined by the Decree No 13/2013, is national and comprehensive and covers competences related to qualifications included in the national repository of education, training and vocational qualifications (Perulli, 2019). The strong links between the QNQ and the progressive implementation of the National System for Certification of Competences (NSCC) was confirmed by the adoption of the inter-ministerial decree on the National Guidelines for the interoperability of the competent authorities of the NSCC; they have introduced the QNQ as the reference point for the identification, validation and certification services. The guidelines define the provisions that make the NSCC operational. According to them, public competent authorities within the NSCC, through their entitled bodies, upon request and in compliance with the standards described in the guidelines can identify, validate and certify credits and competences (acquired through prior learning) as parts of qualifications included in their repertoires and in the national repository (up to the total number of competence units of a full qualification). QNQ qualifications issued after a validation process are portable in the different education sectors of the NSCC (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7. NQF implementation and impact

7.1. Stage of implementation

The Italian NQF is at the activation stage. Implementation structures are in place, and the roles of different stakeholders have been formally defined. In 2023, the adoption of the updated referencing report has kickstarted procedures that will move the QNQ to the implementation phase.

7.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

According to the decree that set up the QNQ, all certificates issued under the NSCC should indicate the QNQ level (ANPAL, 2022). However, the implementation of this measure hasn't started yet (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). EQF levels are already included on new qualification documents from general education, initial VET and higher education. Starting with the school year 2015/16, it has been compulsory to indicate the EQF level on Europass

certificate supplements for qualifications from upper secondary education (general, technical and vocational) ⁽⁷⁾.

7.3. NQF dissemination

ANPAL hosts the NCPs of EQF, Euroguidance and Europass and carries out joint multi-channel communication and dissemination activities ⁽⁸⁾. ANPAL aims to increase the awareness of EU transparency tools and inform the public on their implementation at national level (including the EQF referencing process). ANPAL has created a common brand name/ identity (SkillON, *Metti in luce le tue competenze* - Highlight your skills) to reach the main target audiences, including end users, through online communication tools ([website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [videos](#)) and onsite communication products/activities (publications, [promotional material](#), etc.). ANPAL has organised an online [conference](#), nine joint seminars and webinars for education practitioners, guidance counsellors and representatives of chambers of commerce, along with participating at job and career fairs. Finally, the EQF is also promoted through ANPAL's Youtube [channel](#) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.4. Qualifications databases and registers

The QNQ register is under development. It will be populated in parallel with carrying out the levelling procedure of individual qualifications to the QNQ (Section 4.2). The register will provide for all included qualifications a common set of information covering the data fields of the Annex VI of the 2017 EQF recommendation. It will have a double function:

- (a) a 'back office' function, for managing the levelling procedure;
- (b) a 'front office' function, which will make QNQ qualifications transparent and comparable at national and international level.

The register will be interoperable with national databases and freely accessible to the public for data download. It will be fully compliant with the standards of the Europass portal and will include information on learning opportunities, job vacancies, training, validation of competences and the Digitally-signed-credentials framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

The QNQ qualifications are published in different databases/registers, which are not interconnected. The portal of the education ministry ([La scuola in chiaro](#)) includes the qualifications of the first and second cycle of general, vocational education and training, targeting teachers learners and their families. [UniversItaly](#) is the web portal of the Ministry of University and Research including all university

⁽⁷⁾ The Certificate supplements [repository](#) for general education.

⁽⁸⁾ Although no official strategic document has been developed, the country has adopted a strategic approach regarding NQF dissemination.

qualifications, diplomas of academies of fine arts or music conservatories and higher technical education institutions diplomas. It targets high schools and universities along with Italian and international students, graduates and their families, providing information in Italian and English. INAPP has developed the [Atlas of Work and Qualifications](#): a classification and information tool, aiming to systematise information on qualifications and correlate it with the needs of the labour market and economic sectors. It supports stakeholders involved in lifelong learning and active employment policies, providing standardised references for skills needs analysis, skill gap analysis and supporting the services for the identification, validation and certification of competences, qualification design and guidance. The Atlas hosts the [National repository of education, training and vocational qualifications](#), which includes 116 qualifications from the second cycle of education, 4 709 higher education qualifications and 4 974 regional vocational training and IFTS qualifications (August 2023). The QNQ register will complement the information infrastructure of the national repository.

7.5. Awareness and use of the NQF

Competent authorities are fully aware and are actively involved in its implementation. The public consultation that took place during the updating of the referencing report, has showed that lifelong learning stakeholders (general, vocational and higher education institutions, along with central and regional administrations and public bodies and agencies) have a medium/high level of awareness and usage of QNQ/EQF. The feedback received during dissemination actions and communication events has showed that specific groups of end users, such as teachers, learners, recent graduates, job seekers are aware (to some extent) of the QNQ/EQF. However, the public does not fully use the QNQ due to the high level of complexity. Guidance practitioners and education and training providers are highly interested in using it in validation, designing learning pathways and counselling. Labour market stakeholders (employers and trade unions) use it in collective bargaining, specifically the national collective agreement of metalworkers (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

The QNQ is used in the implementation of policy measures. The [Worker employability guarantee](#) programme aims to help individuals obtaining a QNQ-levelled qualification (or part of it), included in the national repository, thus increasing education and training attainment in the country. The [Dual system investment](#) programme has promoted the implementation of the EQF recommendation at national level, by developing learning-outcomes-based qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.6. Impact of the NQF

Participants in the public consultation believe that the first referencing report has contributed to improving transparency and portability of qualifications, promoting validation and certification of competences in non-formal and informal contexts, and supporting the recognition of qualifications or part of them. The QNQ decree has introduced common criteria for describing and levelling national and regional individual qualifications. The levelling procedure is fully consistent with the EQF quality assurance requirements, thus contributing to improving quality of qualifications. The decree also promotes the use of learning outcomes in qualification design. The levelling of regional VET qualifications to the QNQ has determined the progression route to higher levels of the framework and different qualification types. The QNQ is the reference point for the identification, validation and certification of competences acquired through prior learning. The QNQ aims to support recognition of qualifications for professional and learning purposes, but it does not generate automatic legal effects of equivalence with national or foreign qualifications at the same level. The framework has also fostered cooperation among education and training stakeholders and between them and labour market representatives (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

8. Referencing to the EQF

Italy initially referenced all its formal qualifications (general education, VET and higher education qualifications). The first Italian referencing report was adopted in 2012 and presented to the EQF advisory group in May 2013. Following the implementation of the NSCC and the legal adoption of the QNQ in 2018, an updated referencing report was presented at the EQF Advisory Group in 2022 and formally adopted by the Italian government in 2023.

9. Reflections and plans

The official adoption of the updated referencing report (2023) is a milestone in the QNQ implementation, as it will enable the launching of the levelling procedure of individual qualifications to the framework and, through this, the progressive implementation of the QNQ register. The inclusive nature of the framework, legally embedded by the 2018 QNQ degree, is considered a success factor in increasing transparency and comparability of qualifications and learning and professional mobility both within the country and at European level. The setting up of the national repository and the creation of the Atlas of work and qualifications have been important steps of the QNQ implementation process. An enabling factor is the three fundamental principles of the process:

- (a) a cooperative approach, enabling active participation of all competent authorities;
- (b) a progressive approach, ensuring continuity and promoting the best and well-established practices and experiences;
- (c) a substantive approach, using and enhancing the informative systems already available (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Main challenges include the high degree of fragmentation of the qualification system, with different repositories managed by different awarding bodies, and the difficulty of harmonising qualifications issued at regional level. Although work on the QNQ has resulted in the adoption of a learning outcomes orientation in several legislative acts, further promoting the learning-outcomes approach in qualification design remains a challenge. Furthermore, the way QNQ/EQF function is considered complex by certain target groups (e.g. final users), who for instance, often confuse transparency with recognition of qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

The next steps are developing the QNQ register and an IT platform to manage and store levelled qualifications from the competent authorities. Initially a pilot phase of the levelling procedure will be carried out in collaboration with competent authorities, aiming to optimise it and fine-tune possible challenges (ANPAL, 2022).

Acronyms

ANPAL	National Agency for Active Labour Policies
EQF	European qualifications framework
EQF NCP	EQF national coordination point
IFTS	higher (non-academic) technical education and training pathway [<i>Istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore</i>]
INAPP	National Institute for Public Policies Analysis [<i>Istituto nazionale per l'analisi delle politiche pubbliche</i>]
ITS	higher technical education [<i>istruzione tecnica superiore</i>]
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

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Webpages and databases

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[ANPAL](#)

[Atlas of Work and Qualifications](#)

[National repository of education, training and vocational qualifications](#)

[QNQ – EQF webpage](#)