

ITALY

European inventory on NQF 2016

Introduction and context

The Italian education system has undergone several improvements in recent years, with greater proficiency in basic skills and almost universal participation in early childhood education. However, although the early school leaving rate has decreased, it remains above the EU average. The rate of tertiary education attainment is the lowest in the EU – 18.8% in 2014, compared to the EU average of 33.6% – while the employment rate of recent graduates is relatively low at 45.0% in 2014, compared to the EU average of 76.1% (European Commission, 2015).

Since 2003, reforms have been implemented across education and training (upper secondary general education, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education) anticipating the principles of a learning-outcomes-based NQF. Technical work has been carried out in recent years towards a national qualifications framework (NQF). Given the complex model of governance in the country and the fragmentation of the education and training system ⁽¹⁾, one of the challenges has been to achieve effective inter-regional coordination with a view to encouraging recognition of the regional qualification systems and inter-regional mobility, especially with reference to the labour market ⁽²⁾.

The European qualifications framework (EQF) is seen as a point of reference for indicating the level of learning outcomes related to nationally recognised education and training pathways. In spite of not yet having an NQF, work has been done to reference public national formal qualifications directly to the eight EQF levels. The first Italian referencing report was adopted in December 2012 and presented to the EQF advisory group in May 2013 (Italian technical working group, 2012). The report focuses on describing levels and subsystems of formal education and training, along with the formal qualifications awarded throughout,

⁽¹⁾ In Italy there are 21 regions and two autonomous provinces. With the modification of the V Title of the Constitution in December 2001, the regions increased their competence in education, maintained the competence in vocational training field and in the definition of the professional profile and qualifications, with a greater need for coordination between regions.

⁽²⁾ Cedefop (2014). *The common European tools reaching European citizens – Country studies: Italy* [unpublished].

and those awarded by regions in the framework of the State-regions agreement, and on their referencing to the EQF.

The Italian qualifications framework for higher education (*Quadro dei Titoli Italiano dell'Istruzione Superiore – QTI*) ⁽³⁾ was published in 2010 by the Ministry of Education, University and Research. Self-certification to the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) was completed in 2012 ⁽⁴⁾ and decisions made for higher education qualifications were taken up in referencing to EQF.

Referencing is work in progress towards putting in place an NQF, in dialogue with all national stakeholders. The EQF national coordination point has been mandated to prepare a proposal for a comprehensive national qualifications framework, which has been submitted for approval. A decree for the establishment of an NQF is currently underway.

Policy objectives

Italy faces a challenge of integrating different levels of lifelong learning systems into a coherent national qualification system. It is a complex context, governed by multiple legislation on competences of regional and national authorities in designing and awarding qualifications.

A comprehensive NQF would help with transparency and comparison between different qualification types awarded by different authorities. A coherent NQF, based on explicit levels of learning outcomes, would also ease validation of non-formal and informal learning. It would also support adult participation in lifelong learning, an area challenged by both low participation and a large proportion of people with low literacy and numeracy skills ⁽⁵⁾.

Development of a system in the NQF direction would respond to several needs:

- (a) make integration of the different systems within the national context easier;
- (b) respond to a request of the EQF recommendation designed to ease dialogue between education systems and the labour market;

⁽³⁾ The Italian qualifications framework for higher education is available at:
<http://www.quadrodeititoli.it/index.aspx?IDL=2>

⁽⁴⁾ National report regarding the Bologna Process implementation 2012-15 – Italy, 2015.
http://media.ehea.info/file/Italy/84/4/National_Report_Italy_2015_567844.pdf

⁽⁵⁾ Adult participation in lifelong learning has increased to 8% in 2014, but remains lower than the EU average (10.7% in 2014). European Commission (2015). *Education and training monitor 2015: Italy*.

- (c) make individual geographic and professional mobility easier, both at national and European levels;
- (d) help individuals, throughout their lives, to capitalise on their non-formal and informal experiences. The system should promote social inclusion for people without regular qualifications and competences needed in the labour market; a national system based on a learning outcomes approach and involving different stakeholders is a precondition for validating non-formal and informal learning.

All institutional, national and regional authorities are aiming towards a NQF and a clearer commitment to the EQF. An important milestone is Law 92/2012 on labour market reform ⁽⁶⁾, with provisions related to lifelong learning. This aims to set up a national system of certification of competences and services for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In 2015 ⁽⁷⁾, stakeholders reached agreement on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills. For the purposes of matching and recognising regional qualifications across the whole national territory ⁽⁸⁾, this common framework is seen to represent:

- (a) a professional reference in terms of occupational standards;
- (b) a reference for the recognition of the regional qualifications and competences at national and European level;
- (c) a performance reference for the assessment to be carried out within the services of identification, validation and certification of competences (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

Levels and use of learning outcomes

The Italian education and training system has introduced the learning outcomes approach at national and regional levels, with each subsystem having its own characteristics. The debate on using learning outcomes in the country started about a decade ago and it is still going on, along with the gradual reform of the

⁽⁶⁾ Law 92/2012 on labour market reform:
<http://www.dplmodena.it/leggi/92-2012%20legge%20RML.pdf>

⁽⁷⁾ Inter-ministerial decree of 30 June 2015 (Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education) defining the operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills.

⁽⁸⁾ Qualifications databases of 21 regions can be found at:
http://nrpitalia.isfol.it/sito_standard/sito_demo/atlante_repertori.php

entire education and training system. One of the main fora for this debate was the public consultation that preceded the adoption of the first EQF referencing report.

The eight EQF levels and level descriptors have been used directly in the Italian referencing process to link all national qualifications from formal education and training to the EQF. The starting point of the referencing process was analysis of both learning processes and learning outcomes in relation to the EQF levels, including a critical analysis of the EQF level descriptors: knowledge, skills and competence. The 'knowledge' and 'skills' descriptors of the EQF were deemed clear enough to permit correlation with Italian qualifications, while the 'competence' descriptor was divided into three dimensions: work/study context; type of tasks, problems and problem-solving approaches; and autonomy and responsibility.

However, despite the move towards a learning outcomes approach, a gap still exists between theory and practice, especially in general school education and higher education. Learning outcomes implementation is mainly part of pilot projects.

In general school education, there has been a shift towards a more student-centred approach and, due to the introduction of ICT tools, teaching is more focused on competences: a combination of competences and knowledge replaces the idea of purely content-based learning (Cedefop, 2016). At upper secondary level, there are three main pathways: general (*licei*), technical and vocational education. Each pathway lasts five years, leading to a diploma, and learning outcomes are linked to the EQF.

In vocational training, where the regions have main responsibility, there is a focus on competences, which are described in terms of learning outcomes. There are two different possibilities for vocational training: a three-year or a four-year pathway. Both lead to a diploma and a qualification acknowledged at national level. The four-year course can open up higher education options, provided the student takes an additional year and sits a State exam. The apprenticeship system has also been reformed in recent years, and the new legislative framework ⁽⁹⁾ includes important references to the EQF and the use of learning outcomes. It contains the definition of competences as the smallest units for certification defining a professional profile, collected into codified lists based on the relevant EQF level and on clear explanation of learning outcomes (Italian technical working group, 2012).

⁽⁹⁾ Legislative Decree No 167/2011 (entered into force on 25 April 2012) and the State-regions agreement on the national apprenticeship certification system (19 April 2012).

The higher (non-academic) technical education and training pathway (*Istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore*) (IFTS) used a national standard system based on competences from 2000; since 2008 the standards have been updated to make them more coherent with the learning outcomes approach. With this 2008 amendment, IFTS was reorganised and higher technical education (*istruzione tecnica superior* (ITS)) was established ⁽¹⁰⁾. IFTS courses last one year, ITS courses two. Both types of curricula are made up of units consistent with the learning outcomes approach. They are linked to EQF levels.

In academic education (universities), policy-makers strengthened the need to align diplomas and certificates to commitments of the Bologna process. In the existing framework for higher education (QTI), Dublin descriptors ⁽¹¹⁾ 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 on application of 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.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies are leading developments in EQF-related processes, in agreement with the regions, autonomous provinces and social partners, as laid down in several agreements. The Ministry of Education, University and Research is the competent authority for qualifications awarded in the education system, while the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies is responsible for qualifications awarded by the regions.

At technical level, the National Institute for the Development of Vocational Training (ISFOL) sets up national methodologies and coordinates sectoral and professional expert groups involving social partners. ISFOL has been designated as the EQF national coordination point (NCP), and hosts the national Europass centre and the national reference point for quality assurance in VET (part of the EQAVET network). The country is represented in the EQF advisory group by a representative of ISFOL, and a representative jointly designated by the two leading ministries (labour and education).

⁽¹⁰⁾ Higher technical education and training courses organised by higher technical institutes with qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Education.

⁽¹¹⁾ The Dublin descriptors used are: knowledge and understanding; applying knowledge and understanding; making judgements; communication skills; learning skills.

Since the referencing process started in 2008, a technical group has involved stakeholders in the work: Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Ministry of Education, University and Research, Department for European policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (involved in referencing professional licences in regulated professions), regions and autonomous provinces (in charge of initial and continuous vocational training) and the social partners. In addition, ISFOL and the Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence (CIMEA), a body of the Ministry of Education, were involved.

The first Italian referencing report was adopted in the State-regions conference, following public consultation in 2012. A total of 150 stakeholder organisations took part in the consultation, along with universities, regions and enterprises.

The national repertory of qualifications, established by Decree 13/2013 ⁽¹²⁾, will comprise six different sections ⁽¹³⁾, with three already available. The repertory is managed by a national technical committee led by the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education and composed of all the qualification authorities. The committee is also responsible for developing the validation system.

The EQF NCP was tasked with managing EQF implementation, preparing the technical referencing report, and communication with stakeholders. It has also been mandated to develop the proposal for a comprehensive national qualifications framework based on the national repertory of qualifications ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways ⁽¹⁵⁾

A national legal framework on validation has been progressively developed in Italy since 2012. Law 92/2012, reforming the labour market, prepared the creation of a national system of competence certification and validation of non-

⁽¹²⁾ Legislative Decree No 13/2013 *Definition of general rules and basic level of performance for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning and minimum service standards of the national system of competences certification.*
http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/02/15/13G00043/sg;jsessionid=QtVQDnVhW+1EjOvvz7I8GA__.ntc-as1-guri2b

⁽¹³⁾ The national repertory of qualifications (*Repertorio nazionale dei titoli di istruzione e formazione e delle qualificazioni professionali*):
http://nrpitalia.isfol.it/sito_standard/sito_demo/atlante_repertori.php#repertori_SR

⁽¹⁴⁾ Cedefop (2015). *Survey on the sustainability and visibility of NQFs* [unpublished].

⁽¹⁵⁾ This section draws mainly on input from European Commission et al. (forthcoming).

formal and informal learning as key elements of lifelong learning. The law establishes rules and regulatory requirements (standards) concerning the characteristics of validation/certification services and the parties involved, with the aim of ensuring transparency, usability and broad accessibility. The implementation of Law 92/2012 led to the adoption of different provisions including Legislative Decree No 13/2013 on National competences certification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The decree defines some important principles and features for the validation system in its Article 3:

- (a) the focus is on the competences acquired by an individual;
- (b) a whole qualification or parts of it can be validated;
- (c) the system is designed to serve the individual, assuring simplicity, confidentiality and reliability;
- (d) documents and certificates issued in the validation process are public;
- (e) the reliability of the national competence certification system is based on a shared and progressive system of indicators, tools and quality standards applied at national level.

The system designed by Decree 13/2013 is national and comprehensive as it covers all qualifications from general education, higher education and VET. It also includes professional qualifications and regulated ones. The institutional authority in charge of implementing the system is a national technical committee led by the Ministry of Labour and by the Ministry of Education and comprising all qualification authorities (entitling bodies). The committee took office on 28 January 2014.

Agreement on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills was reached in 2015, followed by an inter-ministerial decree signed by the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education. This framework establishes a mechanism of mutual recognition for regional qualifications, and standard procedures for the process, attestation and system for validation services. It is expected that, by 2016, validation services will be available across the regions according to the same methodological and system standard; the outcomes of validation processes will be related to the official qualifications framework and recognised at national level. The national technical committee decided in 2015 to agree on a draft of national guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning and certification of competences.

There is already some application of these rules for specific target groups: a national programme has run over the course of 2015/16 to validate the competences of approximately 5 000 volunteers in the civil service within the *Youth guarantee programme*. The main challenge for the future will be to extend the new validation services to other target groups, to ensure reliability and

sustainability. Other priorities are related to training or requalifying practitioners (counsellors and assessors), and strengthening the capacity of the education system to develop validation tools and create greater involvement of companies and the third sector.

NQF implementation

Developing an Italian national qualifications framework is still a work in progress and has been carried out alongside wider reforms of the education and training system. In the first stage, the country has referenced its formal qualifications recognised at national level directly to the eight levels of the EQF. The qualifications described in the referencing are already included and positioned in the national education and training system. These qualifications are used by almost 85% of people involved in education and training activities in Italy. One important issue not covered by the referencing report refers to the qualifications awarded by regional authorities, their importance, the methodologies used for developing them and their recognition beyond the regions. This issue remained to be dealt with in the second stage of referencing planned for 2017.

An important milestone towards the development of an NQF occurred as part of wider labour market reform. Law 92/2012 and the ensuing Decree 13/2013 support the work on a comprehensive validation system and further developments towards a NQF.

Decree 13/2013 also establishes a national repertory of education, training and professional qualifications ⁽¹⁶⁾ as the single framework for certifying competences, which could form the basis for designing a comprehensive NQF. The register is a comprehensive collection of existing national, regional and sectoral repertories, under the responsibility of the competent authorities or 'entitling bodies'. It contains qualifications from the following subsystems: higher education (universities); secondary education; vocational education and training; national framework of regional qualifications; apprenticeship system; regulated professions. For each title, it is necessary to identify standard features: competent certification bodies, definition of qualifications including the relevant competences, correlation with the national statistical code of economic activities and of professional units, and correlation with the EQF. According to comments

⁽¹⁶⁾ The national repertory of qualifications (*Repertorio nazionale dei titoli di istruzione e formazione e delle qualificazioni professionali*):
http://nrpitalia.isfol.it/sito_standard/sito_demo/atlante_repertori.php#repertori_SR

and suggestions on the first referencing report, Italy is analysing regional vocational qualifications to be included in the national repertory.

In January 2015 the State and the regions agreed on setting up the national framework of regional qualifications, in order to reference qualifications issued by the regions, and on using the national repertory of qualifications as a basis for this work. The operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills was subsequently established through a decree in June 2015. The national framework of regional qualifications is structured according to the classification of 24 economic-professional sectors and is intended to serve as a reference for the regional qualifications repertories, including:

- (a) referencing to the national statistical codes and to the sequence of descriptors of the classification of economic-professional sectors;
- (b) identification and description of qualifications and their related competences in line with the criteria of the EQF;
- (c) referencing of qualifications according to the EQF, carried out through the formal inclusion of these qualifications in the EQF national referencing process (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

Work towards an overarching NQF has progressed over the past couple of years. The EQF NCP has set up a working group composed of representatives of qualification authorities and social partners. In 2016, a technical proposal for a comprehensive framework was elaborated, along with guidelines for its management. The proposal was submitted to the institutional stakeholders and a decree for establishment of the NQF is currently underway. The Italian NQF will be a comprehensive framework including qualifications from general education, higher education, regional qualifications and, in the future, also professional and private qualifications.

The EQF NCP has also organised communication actions aiming to inform Italian citizens and different groups of stakeholders on the qualifications referenced to the EQF and on the significance of the EQF levels recorded on qualifications. This has been done through events, articles, leaflets and brochures, as well as workshops and promotion on the web.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing of Italian qualifications to the EQF started in 2008; the first report was adopted in 2012 and presented to the EQF advisory group in May 2013.

National qualification descriptors have been analysed in terms of learning outcomes and mapped directly to EQF level descriptors.

The first referencing report represented an important milestone for subsequent developments. The second stage of referencing has built upon new legislative measures brought about by labour market reform and materialised in the form of the new national repertory of education, training and professional qualifications, which is seen as a step towards a comprehensive NQF.

The EQF level is currently indicated directly on several types of certificate and diploma ⁽¹⁷⁾; starting with the school year 2015/16 it is compulsory to indicate the EQF level on Europass certificate supplements and diploma supplements. The country is preparing a national qualifications database (called DBQc) and all qualifications included in this will indicate the EQF level.

The referencing of qualifications to the EQF is continuing in dialogue with stakeholders.

Important lessons and future plans

Italy has been implementing reforms consistent with EQF principles and the learning outcomes approach in various subsystems of education and training. In recent years, legislative initiatives as part of the labour market reform have led to important steps forward: setting important priorities in defining national qualifications standards based on learning outcomes; developing a national public certification system and a national register of qualifications as a step towards the NQF; and setting out principles for developing a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Now the main challenge is to put in place a comprehensive NQF including all qualifications awarded at national and regional level and to establish procedures for including private qualifications in the NQF. The main difficulty in this is the high degree of fragmentation of the education and training system and the difficulty of harmonising qualifications issued at regional level. Steps towards this aim have been the creation of an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills, and the establishment of

⁽¹⁷⁾ The EQF level is indicated in the following types of certificate and diploma: professional operator certificate (EQF level 3); professional technician diploma (EQF level 4); upper secondary education diploma (EQF level 4); higher technical specialisation certificate (EQF level 4). For higher technical education diploma (EQF level 5) and university degrees the EQF level is indicated in Europass diploma supplement.

the national repertory of education, training and professional qualifications. Adoption of the decree for a comprehensive NQF establishment is expected in the near future.

A related area of work in recent years has been the development of a national system for validating non-formal and informal learning. Here the main challenge is to implement the newly adopted validation services beyond the initial target groups and to ensure the sustainability of validation practices.

The adoption of a learning outcomes approach has gradually started, but the gap between formal regulations and practical implementation of learning outcomes remains a challenge. For example, curricula in VET and higher education are still influenced by the subject-based approach, although necessary regulations are in place. According to a recent Cedefop study on the application of learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2016), more tools and incentives should be provided to teachers and a cultural change from an input to an output orientation is necessary.

Although working with national qualifications in a possible framework should strengthen the orientation towards a lifelong learning approach, it remains a challenge that lifelong learning aspects are not well enough communicated. There is little information so far on system flexibility and on future plans for promoting lifelong learning and supporting access, progression and participation, especially for adults.

Further source of information

The Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research: <http://www.istruzione.it/>

The Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies:
<http://www.lavoro.gov.it/Pagine/default.aspx>

ISFOL (National coordination point for EQF): <http://www.isfol.it>

Italian national qualifications framework

EQF levels	Qualifications
8	<p>Research doctorate (<i>Dottorato di ricerca</i>) Academic diploma for research training (<i>Diploma accademico di formazione alla ricerca</i>) Specialisation diploma (<i>Diploma di specializzazione</i>) Second level university master (<i>Master universitario di secondo livello</i>) Academic specialisation diploma (II) (<i>Diploma accademico di specializzazione (II)</i>) Higher specialisation diploma or master (II) (<i>Diploma di perfezionamento o Master (II)</i>)</p>
7	<p>Master degree (<i>Laurea magistrale</i>) Second level academic diploma (<i>Diploma accademico di secondo livello</i>) First level university master (<i>Master universitario di primo livello</i>) Academic specialisation diploma (I) (<i>Diploma accademico di specializzazione (I)</i>) Higher specialisation diploma or master (I) (<i>Diploma di perfezionamento o Master (I)</i>)</p>
6	<p>Bachelor degree (<i>Laurea</i>) First level academic diploma (<i>Diploma accademico di primo livello</i>)</p>
5	<p>Higher technical education diploma (<i>Diploma di tecnico superiore</i>)</p>
4	<p>Professional technician diploma (<i>Diploma professionale di tecnico</i>) Upper secondary education diploma (<i>Licei diploma liceale</i>) Upper secondary education diploma – technical schools (<i>Diploma di istruzione tecnica</i>) Upper secondary education diploma – vocational schools (<i>Diploma di istruzione professionale</i>) Higher technical specialisation certificate (<i>Certificato di specializzazione tecnica superiore</i>)</p>
3	<p>Professional operator certificate (<i>Attestato di qualifica di operatore professionale</i>)</p>
2	<p>Compulsory education certificate (<i>Certificato delle competenze di base acquisite in esito all'assolvimento dell'obbligo di istruzione</i>)</p>
1	<p>Lower secondary school leaving diploma (<i>Diploma di licenza conclusiva del primo ciclo di istruzione</i>)</p>

Source: Adapted from the Italian technical working group (2012).

List of abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework
IFTS	<i>Istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore</i> [higher (non-academic) technical education and training pathway]
ISFOL	National Institute for the Development of Vocational Training
ITS	<i>Istruzione Tecnica Superiore</i> [higher technical education]
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
QTI	<i>Quadro dei Titoli Italiano dell'Istruzione Superiore</i> [Italian qualifications framework for higher education]
VET	vocational education and training

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European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (forthcoming). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2016: country report Italy*.