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A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (<http://europa.eu>).

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1. Introduction

Cedefop's work on qualifications frameworks dates back to 2003. The Centre has contributed to the conceptual development of the European qualifications framework (EQF) and has supported its further implementation, working alongside with the of national authorities and stakeholders to introduce and develop national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). This report is part of the European inventory of NQFs, which systematically maps and analyses NQF developments in countries participating in the EQF process. The inventory is updated biennially in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group, the European Commission and the European Training Foundation. The report provides a detailed description of the structure of the NQF of the Dutch NQF (*Nederlands Kwalificatieraamwerk* NLQF) and its institutional arrangements. It also examines the framework's implementation and its impact on broader policy areas, focusing on key developments since 2022.

The NLQF was adopted in 2011 and referenced to the EQF in 2012, building on the qualifications framework for higher education, which was self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2009. The NLQF is a systematic classification of qualifications, covering two main groups: regulated qualifications awarded in the formal education and training system, and non-regulated qualifications awarded on the labour market (non-formal qualifications). It has eight main levels, plus an entry level below EQF level 1, and a sublevel of level 4 (level 4+). Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, responsibility, and independence, and context.

2. National context

2.1. Policy context

The Netherlands continues to perform well against most key EU indicators for education and training. In 2022, the public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP was 5.1% (EU average 4.7%). The share of Dutch young people (aged 15 to 29) not in employment, education or training is among the lowest in Europe (10.7% in 2023) ⁽¹⁾. A very low percentage of students leave education and training early (6.2% in 2023). Vocational education and training

⁽¹⁾ More information at [Eurostat](#).

(VET) performs well compared with the EU average, capturing 69.7% of upper secondary pupils in 2022. The employment rate of recent secondary VET graduates is 91.6%. The country has a relatively high percentage of highly skilled young people with a tertiary degree (54.5% in 2023), and the employment rate of recent tertiary graduates is very high (95.2%). In 2022, participation in adult learning activities was the second highest among EU countries (56.1% of the population aged 25-64) and well above the EU target for 2025 (47%) (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport & Culture, 2024).

The NLQF plays a crucial role in promoting lifelong learning (e.g. by bridge informal, non-formal and formal learning), which is an interdepartmental policy area in which the departments of Education, Culture and Science, Social Affairs and Employment, and Economic Affairs cooperate (see Section 6.4). For example, the EQF NCP is a member of the advisory board and feedback group of the initiative [CompetentNL](#). Through the cooperation between stakeholders from the public and private sectors, this initiative aims to make skill descriptions in vacancies, occupational profiles, study programmes and courses as clear as possible, linking skills described in certifiable units in secondary vocational education with occupations in the labour market (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

2.2. NLQF legal basis

The NLQF was adopted in September 2011 by the Dutch government and parliament. In 2024, the [NLQF act](#) was adopted by the House of Representatives and the Senate; it has been in effect since 1 January 2025, setting the legal basis of the framework and giving it statutory status. The Act:

- (a) includes a generic classification of formal qualifications in the NLQF;
- (b) sets the tasks of the EQF National Coordination Point (EQF-NCP), making it an independent administrative body (see Chapter 5);
- (c) determines that NLQF and EQF levels must be indicated on the value documents of formal qualifications;
- (d) defines the basic principles for including individual non-formal qualifications in the framework, offering them the option to indicate the NLQF level on the diplomas or certificates;
- (e) determines the sanction provisions in cases of unlawful use of the NLQF levels (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

3. NLQF objectives

The NLQF Act has formalised the objectives of the framework (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). The main objective of the NLQF is to increase the

transparency and comparability of qualifications and learning routes within the Netherlands and within Europe. It aims to promote national and international mobility of students and employees by helping them understand qualification levels, find appropriate programmes, and see how qualifications can improve career prospects. The NLQF also seeks to encourage lifelong learning, establish learning outcomes as the building blocks of qualifications, enhance understanding of qualification levels in the labour market, and support communication between stakeholders in education and employment (van der Sanden et al., 2012).

The NLQF is primarily a communication framework. In the formal system, education pathways are regulated by law, and the NLQF does not regulate transfer and access or decide entitlement to qualifications and degrees.

4. Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The NLQF has one entry level (below EQF level 1), eight levels equivalent to those in the EQF, and a sublevel (level 4+). The entry level was created to support low-qualified individuals in obtaining a certificate and to motivate them to pursue further learning. Level 4+ was introduced to distinguish the pre-university pathway (pre-university secondary education – *voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs* (VWO)) from upper secondary general and VET qualifications classified at level 4.

Descriptors of NLQF levels are based on learning outcomes, inspired by EQF descriptors but with some important differences. The NLQF level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills (applying knowledge, problem-solving skills, learning and development skills, information skills, communication skills), and responsibility and independence. A separate context descriptor has also been defined, which is used alongside the described knowledge to determine skills complexity. The subdomains introduced for skills make descriptors more relevant to the Dutch context, reflecting experiences of applying learning outcomes, for example, in VET (e.g. upper secondary vocational education – *middelbaar beroepsonderwijs* (MBO)). Guidelines were developed to prevent different interpretations of the descriptors when classifying qualifications ⁽²⁾. The level descriptors were tested and fine-tuned in the process of levelling non-formal qualifications; since 2020, the updated descriptors have been used in the initial levelling of qualifications.

⁽²⁾ More information is available in Annex 4 of NLQF NCP (2019).

4.2. NQF scope and coverage

The NLQF covers the entire spectrum of education and training:

- (a) qualifications awarded in the formal education system, apart from primary education, regulated by the education ministry ⁽³⁾ and offered by public and private providers (lower secondary pre-vocational education, upper secondary VET and general education, pre-university education, adult education, and higher education). Traditionally, these are classified into 17 qualification types;
- (b) non-formal qualifications, which are not regulated by the education ministry, but rather are awarded by stakeholders – mainly private – in the labour market (private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies). Approximately two-thirds of adult education is offered through non-formal channels (NLQF NCP, 2025).

By systematically classifying both formal and non-formal qualifications, the NLQF reflects the nature of the Dutch qualifications system, where private and public providers complement each other. In principle, all NLQF levels are open to all qualifications from all education sectors, based on a comparison of the learning outcomes of a qualification with the NLQF level descriptors, and are not linked to a specific study load.

All formal qualifications have been linked to the NLQF (approximately 4 000): six general education qualifications, 500 VET qualifications (levels 1–4), and 3 476 higher education qualifications (levels 5–8) ⁽⁴⁾. In 2023 and 2024, 71 non-formal qualifications were included in the NLQF, bringing the total to 279 by February 2025 (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The NLQF includes non-formal partial qualifications and microcredentials. Components of formal qualifications do not automatically receive an NLQF level; NLQF levels are indicated on the formal qualification to which partial qualifications belong. If a component of a formal qualification is independently offered and is relevant to the labour market, it can be classified in the NLQF as a non-formal qualification. Partial non-formal qualifications can also be considered as modules/units of learning outcomes. The NLQF also includes international qualifications from levels 3 to 7 (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The reallocation of specific upper secondary VET qualifications from NLQF levels 4 to 5, based on their learning outcomes, has been under discussion. This proposal, made by stakeholders in VET, has been opposed by those in higher education (NLQF NCP, 2019).

⁽³⁾ The official title is [Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science](#).

⁽⁴⁾ Internal communication with the NLQF-NCP.

Table 1. Dutch qualifications framework (NLQF)

NLQF level	Formal qualification	Non-formal qualification ^(a)	EQF level
8	Doctorate (<i>Doctoraat</i>) Designer (<i>Ontwerper</i>) Medical specialist (<i>Medisch specialist</i>)		8
7	Master degree	Social Studies Klinisch Perfusionist NIMA C Marketing	7
6	Bachelor degree	Examples: Stressmanagement Coaching Counseling (<i>Conflictbemiddeling Professional</i>) Secondary military education (<i>Middelbare defensie vorming</i>) Officer of the royal military police (<i>Officier koninklijke marechaussee onderbouw</i>) Officer of the navy force (<i>Officier korps zeedienst</i>)	6
5	Associate degree	Examples: Consultant for payroll services and benefits Operational technician for energy production technology (<i>Operationeel technicus energie productietechniek</i>) trainer-coach 5	5
4+	Pre-university education (VWO) Pre-university education for adults (VAVO-VWO)		4
4	VET level 4 (MBO 4) Upper secondary general education for adults (VAVO-HAVO) Upper secondary general education (HAVO)	Examples: Interior design (<i>Interieurdesigner</i>) training in food technology (<i>Opleiding levensmiddelentechnologie</i>) industry diploma for all-round beautician (<i>Branchediploma allround schoonheidsspecialist</i>) industry diploma for medical pedicure (<i>Branchediploma medisch pedicure</i>)	4

NLQF level	Formal qualification	Non-formal qualification ^(a)	EQF level
3	VET level 3 (MBO 3)	Examples: Retail specialist (<i>Eerste verkoopmedewerker</i>) Trainer-coach 3 Industry diploma pedicure (<i>Branchediploma pedicure</i>)	3
2	VET level 2 (MBO 2) Pre-vocational secondary education – theoretical pathway (VMBO tl) Pre-vocational secondary education – combined theoretical pathway (VMBO gl) Pre-vocational secondary education – advanced vocational pathway (VMBO kb) Basic education 3 for adults (VAVO) Basic education 3 for adults (<i>Basiseducatie 3</i>)	Examples: Military police security (<i>Marechausseebeveiliging</i>) Assistant swimming teacher (<i>Assistent zwemonderwijzer</i>) Sales employee (<i>Verkoopmedewerker</i>)	2
1	VET level 1 (MBO 1) Pre-vocational secondary education – basic vocational pathway (VMBO bb) Education courses (for adults)	Examples: Assistant waiter/waitress (<i>SVH Bedieningsassistent</i>) Logistics Assistant (<i>Assistent logistiek</i>)	1
Entry level	Basic education 1 for adults (<i>Basiseducatie 1</i>)		

NB: VAVO, general secondary education for adults (*voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs*).

(a) In the national context, non-formal qualifications are qualifications that are not regulated by the education ministry, are awarded by organisations outside formal education and training, and are relevant to the labour market (e.g. those from private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies).

Source: European Commission & Cedefop (2024).

4.3. Use of learning outcomes

Dutch education and training had a strong tradition of competence and learning outcomes orientation before the development of the NLQF. Qualifications in secondary education are based on attainment targets. VET is probably the most advanced in competence orientation. A learning outcomes-based qualifications framework for VET, using NLQF level descriptors, is in place. Since 2016, VET qualifications have been revised using the NLQF level descriptors to become more flexible and reduced in number. Each VET programme consists of a general part, a profile part, and optional modules.

Similar changes can be observed in general and higher education. The introduction of the qualifications framework for higher education has contributed to an overall shift towards learning outcomes. The education ministry has supported higher education providers in using learning outcomes related to the NLQF levels in pilot projects aimed at developing flexible partial learning pathways. This has improved access to, and participation in, higher education. In 2024, the [Act](#) on learning outcomes in higher education was adopted. By making these pilot projects a permanent element of tertiary education, the act aims to enable demand-driven part-time and dual higher education for working and job-seeking adults in higher vocational education, in programmes regulated by the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act, and to extend it to academic education. The objective is to create more space for personalised learning pathways, better addressing the needs of learners, educational institutions and the labour market. The Act also allows learners to obtain accreditation for partial completion of study programmes (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The EQF-NCP helps organisations that grant non-formal qualifications to describe their qualifications in terms of learning outcomes (e.g. through workshops) and has developed [guidelines](#) for doing so.

4.4. Quality assurance arrangements

In higher education, regulated qualifications are accredited by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). In this process, the organisation considers the correspondence of the programmes with the level descriptors of both the qualifications framework of the European higher education area and the NLQF. The Education Inspectorate verifies compliance with quality assurance regulations in all education sectors, including quality development in higher education (but excluding programme accreditation). The NLQF Act jointly appoints the Education Inspectorate and the EQF-NCP to monitor the lawful use of the NLQF. The Inspectorate is mandated to impose sanctions and may impose an administrative fine in the event of misuse of an NLQF designation (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024; NLQF NCP, 2025).

The EQF-NCP regularly meets quality assurance bodies. Even though the NLQF does not offer a quality assurance label, non-formal providers that have included their qualifications in the framework report that going through this procedure has helped them improve the quality of their programmes (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Department for Vocational Education within the education ministry is responsible for the development and implementation of the NLQF, including the legislative process, governance, and funding. The day-to-day running of the framework is carried out by the EQF-NCP. Since 2012, this has been hosted by [CINOP](#), an independent organisation reporting to the education ministry. The [NLQF Act](#) describes the main tasks of the NCP, which are levelling non-formal qualifications to the NLQF; maintaining the NLQF register of non-formal qualifications and the NLQF database; maintaining and evaluating the NLQF and its links to the EQF; monitoring implementation; communicating information about the NLQF; and supporting the NLQF's main stakeholder groups. The Act designates the EQF-NCP as an independent administrative body.

The EQF-NCP accomplishes its tasks through its bureau ⁽⁵⁾, has 3.5 full-time equivalent employees ⁽⁶⁾, and is supported by policy advisors from the education ministry and several independent external structures (see Section 7.2). The activities of the NCP are funded by the education ministry (with an increased budget), a European Commission grant, and revenue from the classification of non-formal qualifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

A mechanism for systematic stakeholder involvement has been set up in the form of an advisory board to the EQF-NCP on policy aspects. This board acts as ambassadors to a wider audience, answer questions, and addresses concerns from education and training stakeholders (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

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

A national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning (*Erkenning van Verworven Competentie – EVC*) was introduced in 1998. Since 2016, validation has operated along two routes: one linked to the labour market, and the other to the education system.

⁽⁵⁾ More information (in Dutch) about the national NLQF NCP ([Nationaal Coördinatiepunt NLQF](#)).

⁽⁶⁾ Internal communication with the NLQF-NCP.

The main aim of the labour market route is to support adults' career development. Prior learning outcomes are validated against sector/industry standards or national qualification standards. A validation procedure results in the award of a certificate of experience (*ervaringscertificaat*) recognising vocational and general competences in relation to sectoral or formal education standards, and/or a certificate of professional competence (*vakbekwaamheidsbewijs*) linked to professional standards and competences, or a certificate of generic and transversal competences (*competentiebewijs*) linked to human resources systems (Duvekot, 2023). Non-formal qualifications can be used as a basis for validation in the labour market route. Validation arrangements can either give credits/exemptions towards some non-formal qualification or lead to a full non-formal qualification (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The education route validates formally/non-formally acquired competences against national qualification standards to grant exemptions or to acquire a formal qualification. Non-formal qualifications can be used in validation arrangements giving exemptions towards general, VET, and higher education formal qualifications (depending on the decision of the examination board of the formal educational institution). Legal provisions on validation are embedded in the legislation governing VET and higher education. VET schools are supported to validate competences at NLQF levels 2 to 4. In higher education, validation was mainly offered in higher professional education. The new act on learning outcomes (see Section 4.3) aims to expand validation further in research universities and academic education, making learning pathways more flexible. In VET and higher education, validation arrangements can lead to a formal qualification or to exemptions but this is not the case for all individual qualifications (Duvekot, 2023; European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The NLQF seeks to strengthen the role of validation as an integrated part of the qualifications system. It makes relationships between non-formal labour market qualifications and formal qualifications more transparent. The NLQF levels and the use of level descriptors also help to clarify the wider value of people's skills and competences beyond their performance at occupational level. Sectoral organisations can have their standards validated against one of the NLQF levels. A sector standard used for learning or career advice in the labour market route can be registered as being at a specific NLQF level.

6.2. Credit systems

The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) is used in higher education. The principles of the European credit system for vocational education

and training are applied in VET; however, there are not specific plans to introduce credits in VET (NLQF NCP, 2019).

6.3. Recognition of foreign qualifications

Both the NLQF and EQF levels are considered in recognising foreign qualifications. Recognising foreign qualifications can be a challenge, as, in some cases, similar qualifications from different countries may be referenced to different EQF levels. Examples of this issue with qualifications from the Netherlands, Germany, and the Flemish Region of Belgium have been identified (NLQF NCP, 2019). Further, the EQF-NCP receives questions on foreign qualifications from sectors and companies operating in an international context (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.4. Promoting lifelong learning

The NLQF responds well, as a transparency and stimulation instrument, to the Dutch government's focus on lifelong development. This includes actions to increase people's insight into formal and non-formal education and the creation of preconditions to empower people in their learning and work life. Inclusion in the NLQF is a condition if a qualification provider wants to qualify for a subsidy for lifelong-learning-oriented training (NLQF NCP, 2019; European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Among these actions is the public individual learning and development account (*Stimulans Arbeidsmarktpositie* (STAP)), a policy initiative to encourage adult learning, contribute to long-term employability, and create a positive and strong formal and non-formal learning culture. It refers to a subsidy (up to EUR 1 000 per year per person) that adult learners can use for educational activities listed in the STAP database. Education providers can be included in the STAP database if their offer is classified within the NLQF. Following the STAP subsidy, the SLIM subsidy is under design, aiming to fund training through NLQF qualifications in socially crucial sectors, such as care and welfare, construction, and energy (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025; European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

Another instrument promoting participation in lifelong learning is the [Leeroverzicht](#) platform, which provides information on learning opportunities and instruments to finance them, targeting jobseekers and employees. There are plans to include information on the NLQF levels (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7. NQF implementation and impact

7.1. Stage of implementation

The development of the NLQF was prompted by the 2008 Council recommendation on the EQF. The NLQF is operational. The adoption of the NLQF Act gives new impetus to implementation actions and strengthens the NLQF's role in promoting lifelong learning (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The EQF-NCP develops, in cooperation with the education ministry, a multiyear policy plan on which the annual action plans are based. The 2024-28 policy plan describes the vision, mission, key objectives, and governance structure of the NLQF. The main focal points include providing information on the NLQF and EQF, managing the NLQF, including non-formal qualifications and managing the register of non-formal qualifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7.2. Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF

Including formal qualifications in the NLQF is the responsibility of the education ministry. All formal qualifications have been levelled to the NLQF, following a batch approach. Each level of the education system has been linked to an NLQF level. For instance, the VET system has four levels; since level 4 is linked to NLQF level 4, all level 4 qualifications are linked to NLQF level 4. The Cooperation Organisation for VET and the Labour Market is responsible for maintaining the framework and files of regulated VET qualifications. The organisation uses the NLQF level descriptors as VET level descriptors and develops new qualifications files, based on those descriptors. The minister approves the files, which also include the NLQF level. New regulated higher education qualifications are included in the NLQF based on accreditation by the NVAO (see Section 4.4) (NLQF NCP, 2019).

The EQF-NCP is responsible for including non-formal qualifications in the NLQF. Requests from private training providers, companies, sectors, or examination bodies can be submitted through a digital application system. Initially, the procedure includes a validity check on the provider as a conditional step (for first-time applicants). This [step](#) ensures the trustworthiness of the organisation, looking at aspects such as legal status, property rights, sustainability, and quality assurance. Approved quality assurance arrangements include accreditation by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders, supervision by the Inspectorate of Education, fulfilment of the criteria of International Organization for Standardization standard 9001:2008/2015, and supervision by the Stichting Examenkamer. In the absence of an approved external quality system, an on-site

organisational audit is carried out. Validation is granted for six years, during which the applicant can submit qualifications for inclusion and levelling.

Subsequently, the training provider [applies](#) for level classification in the NLQF by suggesting the most appropriate level for a qualification, based on a comparison of its learning outcomes with the NLQF level descriptors. Qualifications should be concluded with a summative assessment that is independent of the learning path and be labour market-relevant or have a substantial number of study hours ⁽⁷⁾.

The EQF- NCP is supported by 17 external experts and four auditors, as well as by the programme council, the quality commission, the classification commission, and the appeal committee. Initially the EQF – NCP checks if the application is complete to give the green light for the procedure to begin. The programme council decides on the validity of providers, based on advice from the quality commission (which, depending on approved quality assurance arrangements, considers a report drafted by either the applicant or one or two independent auditors) and the classification commission (which makes recommendations on qualification levels based on assessment by a team of independent experts). The programme council also makes the final decision on the levelling of non-formal qualifications, based on advice from the independent classification commission (which considers a report drafted by two independent education experts). The 'best fit' principle is used for level classification. The programme council and the two commissions are each include at least of one representative of the labour market, one of the formal education sector, and one of the non-regulated education and training sector. Validity checks cost between EUR 1 000 and EUR 2 400, depending on whether an approved quality assurance system is in place. Submitting one qualification for inclusion costs EUR 2 400. Re-evaluation of organisational validity and of the qualification classification (every six years) costs EUR 1 000 each. The procedure takes 13 weeks in total (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). In cases of a positive decision, the qualification is included in the [NLQF register](#) of non-formal qualifications; the registration is valid for six years (NLQF NCP, 2019; NLQF NCP 2025) ⁽⁸⁾.

The procedures for including international qualifications in the NLQF are essentially the same as those for non-formal qualifications. However, there is the further condition that the organisation granting the international qualification must be a Dutch legal entity, registered with the Chamber of Commerce in the Netherlands (NLQF NCP, 2022a).

⁽⁷⁾ Initially, only non-formal qualifications with a minimum of 400 hours of nominal study time could be included. Now, smaller qualifications can also be included.

⁽⁸⁾ More information in English on the [EQF-NCP website](#).

7.3. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

According to the NLQF Act, the NLQF level is stated on all formal qualifications. The task of level indication is assigned to the EQF-NCP. NLQF/EQF levels are already indicated on all non-formal qualifications included in the framework. EQF and NLQF levels are mentioned in the comprehensive NLQF database and the NLQF register of non-formal qualifications for some VET and higher education qualifications. NLQF/EQF levels are indicated on some Europass certificate supplements and most diploma supplements (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7.4. NQF dissemination

Following the adoption of the NLQF Act, which includes rules on how NLQF communication should be conducted, the education ministry is developing a communication strategy targeting end users and aiming to ensure the effectiveness of the Act. The EQF-NCP has developed an analytical communication plan. It defines key actions and campaigns to promote the positive impact of the NLQF, the use of NLQF levels in job vacancies, and the use of NLQF levels in LinkedIn profiles. The EQF-NCP has created numerous materials and tools to support non-formal providers which have included their qualifications or are aiming to do so (a [toolbox](#), validity and classification application manuals, level indication process tutorials, guidelines for communication and use of the NLQF logo, [LinkedIn](#) content and guidelines for the description of qualifications in learning outcomes). It has also produced material to disseminate the NLQF to the broader public (leaflets, videos, facts and figures, the magazine *10 years NLQF*, etc.) ⁽⁹⁾.

Systematic work has been carried out by the NCP to inform potential stakeholders about the framework. There are information sessions on the EQF and the NLQF for different stakeholders (employers, employees, education providers) and webinars, for example, for HR or career guidance professionals and employer organisations. Annual meetings are held with policymakers, social partners, associations of education providers, and social services (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

7.5. Qualifications databases and registers

The [NLQF Qualifications Database](#) covers formal general education and VET qualifications at levels 1 to 4 and 223 non-formal qualifications (in total 1 303, March 2025). Qualifications from higher education are yet to be included. The

⁽⁹⁾ More information (in Dutch) on these materials and tools is available on the [NLQF NCP website](#).

database includes a comparison function, search and filter functions (EQF and NLQF levels, field, ISCED-F), education sector, organisation granting the qualification, and awarding body for the qualification, workload (hours) and ECTS), and descriptions of the learning outcomes of the qualifications. It is connected to the Europass platform.

NLQF non-formal qualifications are entered into the [NLQF register](#) of non-formal qualifications, which is interconnected with the database. By February 2025, 279 such qualifications were included in the register.

The database and register target education providers, learners, employers, employees, and professionals in the field of education. Their purpose is to provide information on and build trust in NLQF qualifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

7.6. Awareness and use of the NQF

Education and training providers are kept well informed about the NLQF through communication events, workshops and webinars. The growing number of applications for level classification of non-formal qualifications shows that non-formal providers are highly aware of, and use the framework. Formal qualifications in VET and higher education are developed with NLQF level descriptors in mind, and EQF/NLQF levels are included in study guides. Learners' awareness and use of the framework remain low, except for those interested in studying abroad. The new NLQF act is expected to increase awareness by requiring NLQF levels to be indicated on diplomas and certificates. Among workers, jobseekers and employers, awareness and use of the NLQF are also low but improving, partly due to funding opportunities for education and training programmes leading to NLQF qualifications (see Section 6.4) and targeted communication campaigns. NIDAP findings showed that awareness among large enterprises (with more than 1 000 employees) has steadily grown since 2014; in 2023, approximately 20% of respondents knew what NLQF stands for, and another 20% had heard of it but did not know its meaning. Since 2021, NLQF levels have been used (to a limited extent) in job advertisements some employment agreements. Trade unions and employment services are aware of the framework but do not use it extensively (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Recognition authorities and quality assurance organisations are also well informed about the framework. However, it is less well known among guidance and counselling practitioners, though they have recently been included in the EQF-NCP's communication activities (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

7.7. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

Several evaluation studies have assessed aspects of the NLQF over the years, including its implementation, added value, communication and marketing, stakeholders' views on its functioning, and the potential impact of the draft NLQF Law ⁽¹⁰⁾.

NIDAP regularly conducts studies to assess the awareness, use and impact of the NLQF. The most recent study measured the NLQF's impact on workers, trainers and employers. The findings were used to improve the level classification procedure and shape the communication plan. The study made the following recommendations (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024):

- (a) communication efforts should highlight the NLQF's benefits for educators and employers, focus on managers, emphasise how the framework promotes a learning culture, and target employers not yet using the NLQF to ensure awareness continues to grow;
- (b) the EQF-NCP should inform human resource services about how the NLQF acts as a valuable tool for understanding the level of skills, knowledge and competences of job candidates;
- (c) the communication strategy should directly target employees.

A previous study assessed the NLQF's impact on participation in lifelong development, focusing on schools, employees and employers, and identified actions to increase awareness and use of the framework (NIDAP & NLQF NCP, 2020). Key elements evaluated included the NLQF's importance and relevance for target groups, the extent of its recognition, reasons for using the framework, possible actions to improve dissemination, and the functioning of the NLQF-NCP. This study contributed to the development of online procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the NLQF, and led to a decision to focus communication efforts on employers (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

7.8. Impact of the NQF

The NLQF plays a crucial role in increasing the transparency of non-formal qualifications, especially as many formal providers are exploring the option of offering non-formal qualifications. The NQFL provides employees and employers with information on the quality, content, length, and labour market relevance of these qualifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). Employers viewed the NLQF positively as a system that allows education levels to be compared and determined quickly and clearly (NIDAP & NLQF NCP, 2020). According to the

⁽¹⁰⁾ Hobéon (2013), Ockham Institute for Policy Support (2013, 2017), and Stoel & Wentzel (2014, 2015).

Ockham Institute for Policy Support (2017), the inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the NLQF increases their visibility and value. The NLQF also links various training pathways, creating more opportunities for further learning, clarifying choices, and facilitating decisions on admissions and exemptions. The NLQF has improved the quality of non-formal qualifications by validating providers and classifying qualifications. Applying for NLQF levelling has led to rationalisation of intended learning outcomes, improved examinations, and reflection on training programmes. The EQF-NCP promotes the use of learning outcomes, for example by organising [workshops](#). A strong indication of the NLQF's support for international mobility is the high number of emails the EQF-NCP receives with questions on the topic. However, mobility is sometimes hindered by differing regulations, for example, on recognition at national level (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Regarding the NLQF's impact on participation in lifelong development, stakeholders believe that the NLQF offers clear benefits. Educational institutions with qualifications already levelled to the NLQF intend to continue using the classification in the future (NIDAP & NLQF NCP, 2020). The NLQF's importance is twofold (NIDAP & NLQF NCP, 2020):

- (a) it is a widely accepted framework that promotes lifelong learning;
- (b) it supports education at lower levels and strengthens lifelong learning ambitions among less-educated individuals, reducing the risk of segregation.

Inclusion in the NLQF is a prerequisite for courses to access the STAP subsidy (see Section 6.4), which promotes lifelong learning; this approach will continue with the SLIM subsidy. For schools and education institutions, the main reasons for using the NLQF are the improved quality of education and strengthened corporate identity. Well-organised communication efforts have brought formal and non-formal education subsystems closer together, for example, through information sessions (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

8. Referencing to the EQF

The Netherlands referenced its NQF to the EQF during the framework's development. The referencing report (van der Sanden et al., 2012) was approved by the EQF advisory group in January 2012. An updated referencing report was adopted in 2019 (NLQF NCP, 2019).

9. Reflections and plans

The NLQF has significantly impacted the Dutch qualifications system, and is recognised as a valuable tool for lifelong development. The framework raises the value and quality of qualifications and helps citizens choose further training and employers recruit staff (NLQF NCP, 2022b). By 2024, awareness of the NLQF had increased considerably, and it was more valued by stakeholders. Two key factors in its success have been building trust in qualifications and communicating the framework's added value (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). Another success factor is the growing interest from private providers in including their qualifications in the NLQF. This is partly due to targeted communication with labour market stakeholders, and partly due to government support and its linkage to other lifelong development policies, such as the STAP subsidy. A crucial milestone in the NLQF's implementation was the adoption of the NLQF Act in 2024. The Act is expected to reduce the improper use of the NLQF.

However, low awareness of the NLQF among target groups such as learners, employees and employers remains a key challenge. Another challenge is linking the framework to other government subsidy programmes; the benefits of including a qualification in the framework need to be better communicated to providers, who often find the procedure as burdensome. Despite this, demand for including non-formal qualifications in the NLQF is steadily increasing, though skilled human resources are limited. Some non-formal qualification providers see the cost of inclusion of their qualifications in the NLQF as a barrier. Current priorities include adjusting the level classification procedure and communication to meet the requirements of the NLQF Act. Future efforts will focus on engaging new target groups (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022 and 2024).

Acronyms

EQF	European qualifications framework
HAVO	upper secondary general education [<i>hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs</i>]
MBO	upper secondary vocational education [<i>middelbaar beroepsonderwijs</i>]
NLQF	Dutch qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders
STAP	incentive for improvement of labour market position [<i>Stimulus Arbeidsmarktpositie</i>]

VET	vocational education and training
VMBO	lower secondary general and pre-vocational education [<i>voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs</i>]
VWO	pre-university secondary education [<i>voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs</i>]

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[Central Register](#) of Higher Education.

[Central Register](#) of Vocational Training.

[Database](#) of vocational qualifications (*Kwalificaties mbo*).

NLQF qualifications [database](#).

NLQF [register](#) of non-formal qualifications.

NLQF [website](#).