

CROATIA

European inventory on NQF 2014

Introduction

The Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) Act (2013) established the CROQF based on learning outcomes ⁽¹⁾. It is a single, comprehensive eight level framework, which incorporates credit systems. It includes qualifications from all levels and subsystems of formal education and training (general education, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education); it will also be the basis for validating non-formal and informal learning.

The framework has entered an early operational stage. Implementing structures have been set up and responsibilities among stakeholders agreed. The CROQF Act foresees development of two by-laws. The ordinance on CROQF register has recently been adopted ⁽²⁾. The ordinance on validation of non-formal and informal learning is in preparation.

Main policy objectives

Apart from offering transparency, CROQF is seen as an important tool for reforming national education and training. It builds on the reforms under way since 2005, such as developing new educational standards and national curricula for general education, as well as introducing the State *matura*. In 2006, as part of this process, a total of 13 sector councils were established. These councils were entrusted with defining the necessary vocational qualifications, analysing existing and necessary competences within sectors and subsectors, and developing contents for parts of the vocational qualification standard, providing the basis for new VET curricula. The ordinance on CROQF register envisages expansion to 25 sector councils, considering different subsystems of education and training (general, vocational and higher education).

Besides helping a link to the European qualifications framework (EQF) (and to the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA)), thus allowing for international comparability of Croatian qualifications,

⁽¹⁾ The English version is available at <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/documents-and-publications> [accessed 23.7.2014].

⁽²⁾ See 'Ordinance on the register of CROQF' (*Pravilnik o Registru Hrvatskog kvalifikacijskog okvira*). <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/Default.aspx> [accessed 23.7.2014].

the framework is seen as reflecting national needs and priorities and as an instrument for developing new education and training solutions specific to the Croatian context to:

- (a) link education and training better with labour market needs;
- (b) improve social inclusion and equity;
- (c) improve pathways between subsystems and between sectors;
- (d) make qualifications transparent and more consistent;
- (e) support lifelong learning and offer a good basis for validating non-formal and informal learning.

Specific CROQF aims include setting up a system for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning, and creating a well-founded quality assurance system (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2013).

Stakeholder involvement

Although the idea had been considered earlier, development of CROQF officially commenced in 2006, when the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports formed the first committee for the purpose. The national committee for development of the CROQF was set up in 2007 aiming to ensure close cooperation and coordination between public authorities, employers, learning providers and other social partners. This committee was chaired by the deputy prime minister and comprised 27 members representing different ministries, social partners, schools, universities and agencies. In 2010, it was succeeded by a 25-member high level committee, the national committee for implementation of the CROQF. With adoption of the CROQF Act, stakeholders' involvement in CROQF implementation was institutionalised (see framework implementation).

Framework implementation

The CROQF Act (2013) set up the institutional and legislative framework for CROQF implementation and defined involvement, roles and responsibilities of key bodies and stakeholders. Setting up an appropriate institutional structure for decision-making and implementation was challenging. According to the CROQF Act, the national council for development of human potential, national coordination group and sectoral councils take on particular responsibilities for putting the framework in place. The national council comprises 24 representatives of national ministries, regional structures, social partners and national agencies involved in development and award of qualifications in different

subsystems of education and training. This body oversees policies in education, training, employment and human resource development and monitors and evaluates CROQF's impact. The national council was appointed by the Croatian parliament on 6 June 2014. On a more technical level, the Ministry of Education (also EQF national coordination point (NCP)) coordinates implementation – in close cooperation with the Ministries of Labour and Regional Development. Their main tasks include: adopting guidelines for developing qualification standards, setting up a national register, quality assurance and validation procedures, preparing an ordinance on validation of non-formal learning and referencing the CROQF to the EQF. With adoption of the ordinance on the CROQF register (May, 2014) ⁽³⁾, CROQF entered an early operational stage. The ordinance stipulates content and management of the CROQF register, procedures for requests, validations and entries into the CROQF register, sectors and new sectoral councils' designations criteria for selection of new sectoral councils' members (sectoral councils have increased from 13 to 25 to cover all subsystems), and their operational activities as well as the internal and external quality assurance system.

CROQF is supported by a new register bringing together subregisters of occupational standards, qualifications standards, units of learning outcomes including both programmes and awarding bodies.

The main challenge in implementation consists of securing quality assurance procedures and principles – as the system should improve and consider all existing procedures in different educational sectors. Other challenges are linked to timely establishment of the new sectoral councils by end of 2015 and capacity-building of their members as well as administrative capacities of ministries and agencies responsible for their coordination and administration.

The draft ordinance on recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is under development (see validating non-formal and informal learning).

Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The shift to learning outcomes is seen as an essential part of CROQF development and is supported by all stakeholders. CROQF is a qualifications and credit framework. It has eight reference levels, in line with the EQF, but with two additional sublevels at levels 4 and 8 to cater for existing qualifications.

⁽³⁾ See 'Ordinance on the register of CROQF' (*Pravilnik o Registru Hrvatskog kvalifikacijskog okvira*). <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/Default.aspx> [accessed 23.7.2014].

Each qualification in CROQF is defined in terms of profile (field of work or study), reference level (complexity of acquired competences) and volume (credit points). Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge (theoretical and factual) and skills (cognitive, practical and social skills). A third column is defined as responsibility and autonomy. It is emphasised that key competences should be included in each qualification (Vlada Republike Hrvatske, 2009, p. 47).

CROQF introduces two classes of qualifications: full and partial. For example, a qualification with a minimum of 180 ECVET and/or HROO points ⁽⁴⁾ (from which a minimum of 120 ECVET and/or HROO points are acquired at the fourth reference level or higher) is referenced to level 4.1. For a qualification at level 4.2, a minimum of 240 ECVET and/or HROO points are required (a minimum of 150 ECVET and/or HROO points at the fourth reference level or higher).

CROQF plays a central role in developing and implementing the learning outcomes approach in all subsystems of education and training, building on the reforms so far. It will be further operationalised by the strategy for education, science and technology – currently under development – aiming at establishing conditions for high quality education and training.

The VET reform agenda includes a move towards an outcomes-based approach in standards and curricula; pilot occupational standards and outcomes-based curricula are being developed. A new approach to evaluating school output introduces a system of common final exams (State *matura*) for grammar schools and other four-year secondary schools in Croatian language, mathematics, the first foreign language and the mother tongue for ethnic minority pupils.

Higher education has undergone extensive change in the past decade, including use of learning outcomes. The decision (2001) to take part in the Bologna process made it necessary for Croatia to adjust its higher education system significantly. Introduction of undergraduate (first cycle) and graduate (second cycle) programmes started in 2005. Change of curricula seeks development of competences needed on the labour market, but the functional link between higher education institutions and the labour market, and the social community in particular, has not yet been well established.

⁽⁴⁾ Croatian credit system for general education.

Validating non-formal and informal learning and links to the NQF ⁽⁵⁾

One explicit aim of CROQF is to set up a system for validating non-formal and informal learning (Article 3 of the CROQF Act). Article 15 establishes creation of an ordinance on recognition and validation that will specify the procedure in detail and establish a closer link to CROQF. This is currently being developed for consultation with the wider public. Further, a new draft of the strategy for education, science and technology recognises validation as an essential part of adult and higher education. Another important precondition for validation is setting up qualification standards, currently under development.

In practice, validation of learning outcomes acquired outside formal education and training is still rare. No access to formal qualifications can be granted without formal learning. Validation arrangements are in place for adult education and crafts, for instance, a master craftsperson qualification validates and recognises non-formally acquired knowledge and competences.

Referencing to the EQF

Croatia referenced its national qualifications levels to the EQF and self-certified to QF-EHEA in March 2012, preparing one comprehensive report.

According to the CROQF Act and the ordinance on CROQF register, indication of NQF/EQF levels on certificates/diplomas/Europass documents will start when in line with the respective qualification standard in the CROQF register.

⁽⁵⁾ This section draws mainly on input from European Commission et al., 2014.

Table 1 **Level correspondence established between CROQF and the EQF**

NQF	EQF
Level 8.1	Level 8
Level 8.1	
Level 7	Level 7
Level 6	Level 6
Level 5	Level 5
Level 4.1	Level 4
Level 4.1	
Level 3	Level 3
Level 2	Level 2
Level 1	Level 1

Source: Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2013.

Important lessons and the way forward

Relatively rapid development of CROQF illustrates the importance of stimulating active and broad participation throughout the entire process. If complemented by targeted support for, and training of, stakeholders, this can support genuine partnerships. Progressive, step-by-step development is emphasised. It has, so far, been a very inclusive process with more than 200 meetings, workshops and conferences and consultations with different groups of stakeholders, including more than 10 000 individuals. However, it is still not easy to evaluate ownership of the NQF among different stakeholders – it will be more visible once the register is fully operational. Until now, levels of ownership have been highest among ministries involved in preparation of the ordinance on the CROQF register, but it is gradually being accepted by others through events and projects. A positive effect can be seen in the financial opportunities provided under pre-accession assistance, such as the project ‘Further development of CROQF’, where universities have proven to be very active and have started developing qualifications standards and occupational standards in line with new developments in CROQF implementation.

However, much needs to be done in developing or redefining qualifications so they can be aligned with CROQF levels.

Main sources of information

[Urls accessed 23.7.2014]

The EQF NCP for Croatia is the sector for development of higher education at the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.

A CROQF website has been established: <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/hko-hr>

Table 2 The Croatian qualifications framework

NQF levels	Qualifications	EQF levels
8.2	Doctor diploma	8
8.1	Post-graduate research master of science diploma <i>poslijediplomski znanstveni magistarski studiji</i>	
7	Master diploma (graduate university studies) <i>sveučilišni diplomski studiji</i>	7
	Professional master diploma (specialist graduate professional studies) <i>specijalistički diplomski stručni studiji</i>	
	Post-master specialist university studies <i>poslijediplomski specijalistički studiji</i>	
6	Bachelor diploma (undergraduate university studies) <i>sveučilišni preddiplomski studiji</i>	6
	Professional bachelor diploma (undergraduate professional studies) <i>stručni preddiplomski studiji</i>	
5	Professional higher education diploma (short cycle) <i>kratki stručni studiji</i>	5
	VET post-secondary development and training certificate <i>strukovno specijalističko usavršavanje i osposobljavanje</i>	
	Master craftsman diploma	

NQF levels	Qualifications	EQF levels
4.2	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate	4
	Upper secondary VET certificate (four years)	
	Upper secondary VET certificate (five years) for nursing technicians	
4.1	Upper secondary VET (three years)	
3	Upper secondary VET certificate (two years)	3
	Upper secondary VET certificate (one year)	
2	Vocational training certificate	2
1	Primary education certificate (eight years*)	1

(*) First eight years of schooling are called primary education. It refers to both ISCED 1 and 2 (primary and secondary education).

Source: Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2013.

List of abbreviations

CROQF	Croatian qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework
HROO	Croatian credit system for general education
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework in the European higher education area
SER	State regulations requirements
VET	vocational education and training

References

[Urls accessed 23.7.2014]

Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (2013). *The Croatian Qualifications Framework Act*. Zagreb: Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/fgs.axd?id=257>

Vlada Republike Hrvatske [Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports] (2009). *Hrvatski kvalifikacijski okvir: Uvod u kvalifikacije* [CROQF: introduction to qualifications]. http://personal.unizd.hr/~mdzela/hko/HKO_Prirucnik.pdf