

THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

European inventory on NQF 2014

Introduction

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) has been working towards a national qualifications framework (NQF) for several years, with international assistance. Initial development work focused on a NQF for higher education, a political priority at the time. The higher education qualifications framework was legislated in 2010, setting a legal basis for further development.

Aiming to develop a concept and complete a draft of a comprehensive NQF for lifelong learning (the Macedonian qualifications framework, (MQF)), and draft the law, the NQF working group led by the Ministry of Education and Science was reactivated in early 2013. The resulting document 'Basic concept of the NQF for lifelong learning' was adopted in spring the same year, and the law on the MQF for lifelong learning was passed in August 2013. The new MQF incorporates the qualifications framework for higher education and includes qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning. It also specifies quality assurance aspects and institutional roles.

Although educational attainment in the adult population is improving, there is still a significant proportion of the population with primary and lower secondary education only (31.4% in 2011). Recognising vulnerability of these adults in working life, one of the main policy objectives of the MQF is to encourage and promote lifelong learning.

Main policy objectives

The MQF's main objective is to provide a transparent description of all qualifications in the national system of education. The MQF is seen as an important tool and valuable contribution to modernising education and training, with a view to improving quality and better adaptability of education to labour market needs.

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

inclusion in the NQF and accreditation of institutions to deliver and/or award these qualifications.

The law on MQF will be implemented in September 2015. Until then, there is scope for preparatory steps for the institutional setting and capacity as well as elements of methodologies and procedures. These are the main policy objectives listed in the law:

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

Stakeholder involvement

The Ministry of Education and Science has had overall responsibility for developing the MQF. The MQF will be coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The working groups established and reestablished over the period 2008-13 have included representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, Bureau for Development of Education, Vocational Education and Training (VET) Centre, Adult Education Centre, State Examinations Centre, State Education Inspectorate, Accreditation Board (higher education) and Agency for Higher Education Evaluation. Most of these agencies are or have been involved in reforms in their respective sectors linked to the MQF.

Sector qualifications committees have been formed with a mandate to analyse labour market trends, propose qualifications, analyse and evaluate current qualifications, propose priorities in developing new qualifications, give

opinions on harmonisation of standards of professions and standards of qualifications with the test programmes, among others. It is foreseen that these committees will play a role in validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Framework implementation

Reforms are under way in different parts of education and training in line with the national education strategy for 2005-15. For VET, a VET strategy 2020 is under way. Higher education is subject to extensive change in line with the Bologna principles.

Despite the law on the MQF having been adopted and being effective from September 2015, institutional capacity and funding remains a challenge regarding implementation. Concrete projects to support implementation are being prepared with international partners (European Union (EU), European Training Foundation and British Council).

Until the law enters into implementation, an intermediate institutional setting, partly based on the current NQF working group, will be responsible for coordinating work towards MQF implementation, including referencing to the EQF. So far the Ministry of Education and Science has led the MQF development process and related institutional capacity building and systematically involved other relevant ministries, agencies and social partners.

Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The comprehensive MQF comprises eight levels, of which levels 5 to 7 have two sublevels each. The eight levels are characterised by level descriptors, defined in terms of expected learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and competence. Different dimensions of learning and capabilities are taken into account, such as applied knowledge, practical skills, working with others, autonomy and responsibility and complexity of context.

The shift to learning outcomes is seen as an essential part of the development and is stipulated in the law on MQF as one of the leading principles. Other principles include transferability of credits, classification of qualifications at levels and sublevels, comparability with the EQF and quality assurance.

The law also stipulates standards of qualifications; their mandatory elements and content. Qualifications acquired via non-formal and informal learning are located from levels 1 to 5B.

For VET, 51 occupational standards for 13 professional fields; 25 standards of qualification and 13 new curricula were developed in 2013, in a project to support modernisation of the VET system. The newly-designed curriculum is oriented towards learning outcomes and competence-based, professional competences from occupational standards are translated in the curriculum. The project included VET teacher training and methodology packages for design of standards and curriculum. Implementation of the new curricula started in 19 schools in the 2013/14 academic year.

As for higher education, higher education institutions have revised all programmes, to ensure compliance with the mandatory learning-outcomes approach (according to the Ministry of Education and Science). This reform process was linked with legal quality assurance requirements (accreditation of programmes).

Validating non-formal and informal learning and links to the NQF

The recently adopted MQF incorporates qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning. It is a major policy objective to include all types of education and training and to indicate possibilities for transfer and progression.

To cater for a large proportion of low-educated adults, work has been done to improve access and quality of adult learning provision. A dialogue has been started to design a concept of non-formal education and validation of competences acquired throughout life, signalling that the government is aware of the need for many adults to acquire a qualification through a system of validation of knowledge and skills acquired at work and in life. However, a systematic approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning is yet to be developed.

Referencing to the EQF

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been a member of the EQF advisory group since 2013. However, the country representative has not participated in any of the meetings so far, thus has not been able to benefit from the exchange and debates in the advisory group. The country has committed to referencing the MQF to the EQF, but a realistic target date has not yet been announced.

Important lessons and future plans

Although the legislation is in place and the MQF as such is established, challenges remain, especially in areas of capacity-building, funding and stakeholder involvement and cooperation.

Output from EU projects and other relevant international cooperation projects face difficulties in securing sustainability, due to low State funding and institutional capacity constraints.

Main sources of information

Legislation and other documents are available on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science: <http://www.mon.gov.mk> [accessed 22.10.2014].

List of abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework
EU	European Union
MQF	Macedonian qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training