

ITALY

European inventory on NQF 2014

Introduction

In recent years, Italy has carried out technical work pointing towards a national qualifications framework (NQF). Since 2003, reforms have been implemented in education and training (upper secondary general education and vocational education and training (VET) ⁽¹⁾ and higher education) preempting the principles of a learning outcomes-based NQF. There is clear need to create a national register of qualifications to ensure wide recognition of skills (European Commission, 2014). Responsibility for taking this initiative forward is shared between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Ministry of Education, University and Research; the process is supported by regions and social partners.

In spite of not having a comprehensive NQF in Italy, work has been done to reference public national formal qualifications directly to the eight European qualifications framework (EQF) levels, as described in the Italian referencing report adopted in December 2012 and presented to the EQF advisory group in May 2013 (Italian technical working group, 2012). The report focuses on describing all levels and subsystems of formal education and training, along with the formal qualifications awarded throughout, and on referencing them to the EQF in line with the 10 European criteria, describing accompanying choices of method and procedure. The referencing process is work in progress as is an attempt to put the NQF in place, in dialogue with all national stakeholders.

As for higher education, the Italian qualifications framework for higher education (*Quadro dei Titoli Italiano dell'Istruzione Superiore*) (QTI) was published in 2010 by the Ministry of Education, University and Research. It is linked to the official European higher education area website, but the self-referencing process is not yet completed.

Work on the referencing process started in 2008 and has been carried out by a technical group, in close cooperation with the relevant education and training authorities, regions and social partners. The work has served to underpin

⁽¹⁾ Regulation for upper secondary school reform was approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2010. The institutional consultation round and the relevant information on reform can be found on <http://nuovilicei.indire.it/> [accessed 24.7.2014].

parallel reform processes contributing towards a more coherent education and training system in line with European principles.

Main policy objectives

Italy faces a challenge of integrating different levels of lifelong learning systems into a coherent national qualification system. It is a complex system governed by various legislations considering competences of regional and national authorities in designing and awarding qualifications. Absence of an explicit and adequately regulated national system of qualifications (even if there are regional qualifications systems) is a barrier to taking coherent lifelong learning policies and validation of non-formal and informal learning forward, and making learning pathways for lifelong learning more visible (European Commission et al., 2010). This is important to support adult participation in lifelong learning, which was with 6.6% in 2012, lower than the EU average (9% in 2012). Labour market mobility between regions is also hampered because qualifications awarded in some regions are not always recognised in others (European Parliament, 2012, p. 93).

A comprehensive NQF would help with transparency and comparison between different qualification types awarded by different authorities. A more coherent NQF, based on explicit levels of learning outcomes, would also ease validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is important to 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.

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;
- (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 with reference to people not holding regular qualifications and competences needed in the labour market; the national system, based on a learning outcomes approach, and involving different stakeholders, is a precondition for validating non-formal and informal learning.

Evidence suggests that all the 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 ⁽²⁾, that contains provisions related to lifelong learning, lines to set up a national system of certification of competences and services for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Stakeholder involvement

The Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies are leading developments in EQF processes, in agreement with the regions and autonomous provinces and social partners as laid down in many agreements. At technical level, the National Institute for the Development of Vocational Training (ISFOL) set up national methodologies and coordinates sectoral and professional expert groups involving social partners.

Since the referencing process started in 2008, a technical group has involved all 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, regions and autonomous provinces and the social partners. In addition, ISFOL and the Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence, a body of the Ministry of Education, were involved in the process.

The referencing report was submitted to an open public consultation process in 2012. A total of 150 stakeholder organisations took part in the consultation, along with universities, regions and enterprises.

Framework implementation

The national coordination point (NCP) is at ISFOL. Main tasks include management of the EQF implementation process and preparing the technical referencing report, communication with stakeholders and planning and implementation of the national qualifications register.

The qualifications described in the referencing process are already included and positioned in the national education and training system as such, but there is little additional information on overall flexibility of the system, such as possibilities for horizontal progression or alternative pathways.

It is expected that legislation on reform of the labour market (2012) and the ensuing decree on validation (2013) will support work on a comprehensive validation system and further developments towards a NQF. Decree 13/2013

⁽²⁾ <http://www.dplmodena.it/leggi/92-2012%20legge%20RML.pdf> [accessed 9.9.2014].

also establishes a 'national register of education, training and professional qualifications' which is the single framework for certification of competences. The register is a comprehensive collection of national, regional and sectoral repertoires that already exist, under the responsibility of the competent authorities or 'entitling bodies'.

One important issue not covered by the current report are qualifications awarded by regional authorities, their importance, the methodologies used for developing these qualifications and their recognition beyond regions. This will be dealt with in the second stage of referencing.

According to comments and suggestions related to the first referencing report, Italy is analysing regional vocational qualifications to be included in the national register in accordance with Law 92/2012 and subsequent decree. Further referencing to the EQF will be carried out according to the procedures defined in the first phase, through involvement of all relevant actors.

Level descriptors and learning outcomes

Italy uses a learning outcomes approach and EQF level descriptors as a basis for further developments. 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.

In the existing framework for higher education (QTI), Dublin descriptors are used nationally for three cycles agreed within the Bologna process. More specific descriptors are being defined for each programme by universities.

Italian education and training has introduced the learning outcomes approach at national and regional levels, with each subsystem having its own characteristics. Over the past decade the whole education and training system has been gradually reformed; a process which is still going on.

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 regions have the main responsibility with strong focus on competences, there are two different possibilities; 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 higher (non-academic) technical education and training pathway (*Istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore*) (IFTS) used a national standard system based on competences from 2000. After the decree of 25 January 2008,

the national committee on IFTS agreed to update the standards 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, higher technical education and training courses organised by higher technical institutes with qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Education. 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 particular, the national decree reforming the academic system (first cycle, three years) and the master's degree (*laurea magistrale*) (second cycle, two years) states that new programmes have to be based on learning outcomes compatible with the Dublin descriptors. Higher education is currently under reform, aiming to move the higher education system closer to the European standards designed by the Bologna process.

Validating non-formal and informal learning and links to the NQF ⁽³⁾

In general, the approach to validation in Italy until 2012 could be considered mostly bottom-up; however, from 2012, a new trend emerged in which the bottom-up experiences started to converge methodologically and resulted in certain top-down measures. All the Italian qualification authorities, and especially the regions, formally engaged in establishing the NQF, based on learning outcomes and including a comprehensive credit and validation system. Law 92/2012, reforming the labour market, foresees creation of a national system of competence certification and validation of non-formal and informal learning as key elements to implement lifelong learning. Subsequently, in January 2013 the government adopted Legislative Decree 13/2013 on national certification of competence and validation of non-formal and informal learning, which has an implementation phase of 18 months.

This decree establishes the 'national register of education, training and professional qualifications' which is the single framework for certification of competences. The decree states that every qualification can be accessible by validation of non-formal or informal learning, and defines the principles and

⁽³⁾ This section draws mainly on input from European Commission, et al., 2014.

institutional responsibilities and tasks of the different actors in relation to validation. It also defines three types of standards: process, attestation and system.

Until implementation of the 2013 decree is finalised, validation systems vary in their scope and degree of implementation in each of the Italian regions. In most cases, validation mainly deals with professional or VET regional qualifications. In the more advanced regions, introduction of the 'citizen learning booklet' (*libretto formativo del cittadino*) is already integrated. It is a tool to record citizens' learning history and acquired competences.

Full implementation of the validation system is foreseen to take from March 2013 to September 2015 (18 months), guided by work already done by the regions. A memorandum of understanding signed by several regions agrees to exchange experiences, tools and technical devices regarding competence recognition. Several pilot projects have been carried out, mainly in the construction, maintenance services', welfare and tourism sectors.

Referencing to the EQF

A referencing report was 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. In the current report, Italy referenced its formal qualifications (general education, VET and higher education qualifications), awarded by Ministry of Education and University, and those awarded by the regions in the State-regions agreement. Only qualifications that are still awarded are included in the report and referenced to the EQF. These qualifications are used by 90% of people involved in education and training activities in Italy. Other qualifications awarded by the regions, licences for regulated professions and private qualifications, are not included and will be dealt with in the second stage of referencing.

The first Italian referencing report represents an important milestone for further developments.

Table 1 **Level correspondence between the Italian national qualifications and the EQF**

Italian qualification	EQF
	Level 8
	Level 7
	Level 6
	Level 5
	Level 4
	Level 3
	Level 2
	Level 1

Source: Italian technical working group, 2012.

The qualifications at EQF levels 6 to 8 present a particular challenge, as information on higher education qualifications is limited. There are several types of diplomas at these levels, but it is not clear whether they are all fully included in the framework for higher education. On the website ⁽⁴⁾, they are listed separately as ‘other qualifications’. Some qualifications such as first level university master (*universitario di primo livello*) are classified in level 7. However, ‘the student could acquire this qualification without fulfilling all the conditions of a typical level 7 qualification (like a real master) and without giving the degree holder access to a specialised higher education cycle/level qualification’ (Italian technical working group, 2012, p. 15). There are six types of diplomas linked to EQF level 8, one being the higher specialisation diploma or master (II) (*diploma di perfezionamento*) with 60 credits.

As for VET, it can start from age 14 in the ‘second cycle’ of education, either as a five-year technical or vocational pathway in the State upper secondary system, or in the VET system under the regions, providing three- and four-year pathways. Further possibilities include higher technical education and training at post-secondary level. The ITS diploma (*diploma di tecnico superiore*) is placed at level 5.

Referencing to the EQF is ongoing, in dialogue with all stakeholders.

⁽⁴⁾ See <http://www.quadrodeititoli.it/Index.aspx?IDL=2> [accessed 24.7.2014].

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. However, information on implementation status remains scattered. In dialogue with the EQF advisory group, the referencing report will be amended and supplemented with comments on issues raised during presentation of the report.

Although working with national qualifications in a possible framework should strengthen orientation towards a lifelong learning approach, it remains a challenge that lifelong learning aspects are undercommunicated. There is little information so far on flexibility of the system and on future plans for promoting lifelong learning and supporting access, progression and participation especially for adults.

It is foreseen that the next stage of the EQF referencing process will profit from the recent law on labour market reform (2012), setting important priorities in defining national qualifications standards based on learning outcomes and developing a national public certification system and a national register of qualifications as a step towards the NQF. As explained above, the reform also sets out principles for developing validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Main sources of information

[URLs accessed 24.7.2014]

For policy-related information the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies;
for the technical level ISFOL; ISFOL acts as NCP. See <http://www.isfol.it>;
QTI: <http://www.quadrodeititoli.it/index.aspx?IDL=1>

Table 2 Referencing framework of Italian national qualifications

EQF levels	Qualifications
8	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>
7	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>
	Higher specialisation diploma or master (I) <i>Diploma di perfezionamento o Master (I)</i>
6	Bachelor's degree <i>Laurea</i>
	First level academic diploma <i>Diploma accademico di primo livello</i>
5	Higher technical education diploma <i>Diploma di tecnico superiore</i>

EQF levels	Qualifications
4	Professional technician diploma <i>Diploma professionale di tecnico</i> ⁽⁵⁾ 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>
3	Professional operator certificate <i>Attestato di qualifica di operatore professionale</i> ⁽⁶⁾
2	Compulsory education certificate <i>Certificato delle competenze di base acquisite in esito all'assolvimento dell'obbligo di istruzione</i> ⁽⁷⁾
1	Lower secondary school-leaving diploma Diploma di licenza conclusiva del primo ciclo di istruzione

Source: Italian technical working group, 2012.

⁽⁵⁾ Competent authority: regions.

⁽⁶⁾ Competent authority: regions.

⁽⁷⁾ Competent authority: Ministry of Education, University and Research [*Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca*] or regions, according to type of education pathway.

List of abbreviations

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

References

[URLs accessed 24.7.2014]

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http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2014/csr2014_italy_en.pdf
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