

LATVIA

European inventory on NQF 2014

Introduction

Latvia has introduced an eight-level classification framework. Nationally-recognised educational programmes from the formal education system (primary, secondary and higher education) are referred to a Latvian qualifications framework (LQF) level and linked to a European qualifications framework (EQF) level. Master of crafts, journeyman and qualifications acquired in non-formal and informal learning will be attributed levels in a second phase (2013-15) of national qualifications framework (NQF) implementation and consequently referenced to the EQF.

Present developments build on reforms initiated in the 1990s and, in particular, introduction of a five-level structure of professional qualifications in 1999 (through the Vocational Education Law).

In October 2010, amendments to cabinet regulations on classification of Latvian education were approved. A new column was added to the table included in these regulations, outlining Latvian education stages and respective programmes, and referencing each education programme to a LQF/EQF level. Additionally, eight-level descriptors, based on learning outcomes and developed in line with EQF descriptors, were outlined.

Further developments are planned in the European Social Fund (ESF) supported projects (see 'Framework implementation' below). The Vocational Education Law is in preparation, further supporting implementation of an eight-level NQF.

Main policy objectives

The framework, based on learning outcomes, is seen as an import tool for describing the Latvian education system both for international and national stakeholders, and for ensuring greater lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals according to their needs. Adult participation in lifelong learning in Latvia is with 7% in 2012 below the European Union average (9%) (European Commission, 2013).

- Development and implementation of a comprehensive LQF aims to:
- (a) increase transparency and consistency of qualifications;
 - (b) develop a comprehensive NQF in line with needs of lifelong learning;

- (c) strengthen the link between the labour market and education;
- (d) strengthen cooperation of those involved in design and award of qualifications;
- (e) increase public understanding of national qualifications and ease their linking to the EQF.

The qualifications framework is based on classification of education programmes in formal education and current education provision. Implicit levels of education have been made explicit and linked to level descriptors, which describe expected levels of learning outcomes.

Stakeholder involvement

The Ministry of Education and Science has the leading role in developing and implementing the LQF. However, the ministry delegated responsibility for coordinating the referencing to the Academic Information Centre. In September 2009, a working group was set up to link Latvian qualifications to the EQF in accordance with the recommendation. The working group included representatives from ministries, national agencies, employer organisations, trade unions, student organisations and education quality agencies. This working group mostly acted as a consulting and supervisory group, reviewing and approving materials prepared by experts with overall support from key institutions.

The Academic Information Centre was appointed as the national coordination point (NCP) and played a key role in coordination of the referencing process, preparing and updating the referencing report, and communication and dissemination of information among all stakeholders.

Framework implementation

The framework has been formally adopted and is being implemented. Implementation is organised in two phases:

- (a) in the first (2009-11), formal Latvian education qualifications were included in the LQF and linked to the EQF;
- (b) in the second (2013-15), several large ESF projects have supported further implementation of the LQF. For example, the ESF project 'development of sectoral qualification system and increasing efficiency and quality of vocational education' (2010-14), has explored professions in 12 sectors by identifying relevant knowledge, skills and competences for professions and placed them on the relevant LQF/EQF levels.

A total of 12 sectoral experts' councils were established for the main economic sectors. They involve representatives of sectoral employers' organisations, trade unions, Ministry of Education and Science and respective ministries. Their main tasks are developing occupational standards; defining content of vocational qualifications and vocational examination requirements, enrolment of students in vocational education programmes, etc. In the projects, detailed investigation of occupations and required competences in respective branches was carried out and sectoral qualification structures were elaborated.

Development and implementation of LQF has also reinforced work on validation of non-formal and informal learning as well as implementation of learning outcomes.

In April 2013, amendments to cabinet regulations' procedures on State-recognised higher education certifying documents were approved. As a result, LQF/EQF levels should be indicated in diploma supplements of higher education qualifications.

There was a general need to communicate results of the LQF and its linking to the EQF to a wider audience and strengthen ownership of the framework and commitment to implement it. The leading organisation in raising awareness of the LQF is the Academic Information Centre (EQF NCP). It organises discussions, seminars and conferences, involving stakeholders from all education levels and social partners. Main topics discussed are: definition and use of learning outcomes at different education and qualification levels, development of LQF levels 1 to 4, opening LQF levels 5 to 8 to non-Bologna qualifications and complementing the LQF with qualifications awarded outside formal education.

To promote quality and efficiency of higher education, an ESF project for evaluating higher education programmes and developing recommendations was conducted (2011-13). The study evaluated quality, sustainability and international competitiveness of higher education programmes. These results were used for accreditation of higher education programmes in 2013.

Level descriptors and use of learning outcomes

An eight-level framework with level descriptors based on learning outcomes was adopted. Level descriptors for each of these levels are defined as knowledge (knowledge and comprehension), skills (ability to apply knowledge, communication and general skills) and competence (analysis, synthesis and assessment). When developing level descriptors, relevant State education standards, EQF and Dublin level descriptors, and Bloom's taxonomy were used to provide evidence.

There is growing emphasis on learning outcomes in Latvia at policy and practice levels, although the term is not widely used and there is not yet a systematic approach. Skills and knowledge or learning results are commonly used terms.

Subject-based outcomes in general education have been defined in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Compulsory education content is stated in cabinet regulations on State standards and subjects in basic education (2006). Content of general secondary education is regulated by cabinet regulations on State general secondary education standards and subjects (2008). Further work is needed to ensure that learning outcomes are incorporated in day-to-day teaching practice (Cedefop, forthcoming).

Content of vocational education is regulated by State vocational education standards, occupational standards and vocational education programmes. State vocational education standards determine strategic aims of educational programmes, compulsory education content and assessment principles and procedures for the education obtained. Occupational standards stipulate the basic tasks and obligations for the respective professional activities, basic requirements of professional qualifications and the general and professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences needed to fulfil them. Their revision is ongoing. Vocational education programmes include objectives and content of vocational education, an implementation plan, previous education requirements and the necessary personal, financial and material resources. Programmes are developed by education establishments in line with State education and occupational standards.

The framework for higher education is founded on three Bologna cycles, based on learning outcomes. They are defined as results of study programmes expected from an average student (Academic Information Centre; Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, 2012). Content of professional higher education programmes is determined by relevant occupational standards and State education standards, outlined in cabinet regulations on the State first level professional higher education standard (2001). In July 2011, parliament (*Saeima*) adopted amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions which introduced the term 'learning outcomes'. Latvian higher education and high school development national conception (2013-20) states that learning outcomes of all Latvian higher education study programmes have been completely linked to the LQF (Higher Education Council, 2013).

Validating non-formal and informal learning and links to the NQF ⁽¹⁾

NQF developments are closely related to opening up the qualification system to competences acquired outside the formal system.

The system on validating professional competence obtained outside formal education is new in Latvia and was legally introduced in February 2011. Regulations stipulate the procedure on how professional competence (except for regulated professions) that corresponds to NQF levels 3 and 4 can be assessed, validated and recognised. In June 2011, the first qualifications were awarded using this procedure. For levels 5 to 8, in January 2012, cabinet regulations on recognising learning outcomes acquired in previous education and professional experience were approved to determine the procedures for assessing and recognising learning outcomes (for higher education) obtained during previous education or professional experience, as well as criteria for recognition.

In vocational education, a vocational qualification (not educational qualification) can be awarded through a validation procedure identical to the qualification that can be obtained by studying any vocational education programme (LQF levels 3 to 4). In the higher education sector several limitations to validation exist: prior experiential learning can be validated in both academic and professional programmes, but only using up to 30% of the credit points intended for studying the whole academic or professional study programme.

Referencing to the EQF

Latvia referenced its national qualifications levels to the EQF and self-certified to the qualifications framework for the European higher education area in October 2011.

⁽¹⁾ This section draws mainly on input from European Commission et al., 2014.

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

| LQF | EQF |
|---------|---------|
| Level 8 | Level 8 |
| Level 7 | Level 7 |
| Level 6 | Level 6 |
| Level 5 | Level 5 |
| Level 4 | Level 4 |
| Level 3 | Level 3 |
| Level 2 | Level 2 |
| Level 1 | Level 1 |

Source: Academic Information Centre and Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, 2012.

Important lessons and future plans

The present NQF and the referencing report include qualifications awarded within the formal education system; second phase of referencing is planned for 2013-15. The referencing report will be revised in light of new laws and results of ESF projects (focusing on development of sectoral qualifications, evaluation of programmes, etc.). The LQF is expected to experience revision and introduction of new qualifications, also awarded outside the formal education system.

The second important issue is implementation of the NQF in qualifications, curricula, assessment and teaching practice. Here, implementation of NQF is highly dependent on involvement and contribution of practitioners. They need to understand the concepts and have tools to engage actively. Experiences from first generation framework implementation show that understanding concepts and promoting cultural change takes time. In Latvia's case, transition processes were relatively hurried in the past five years. Therefore, continuous work on transition and LQF implementation needs to be carefully monitored and improved. In particular, feedback loops and processes need to be in place to ensure that learning outcomes implementation and assignment of qualifications to levels is systematically reviewed and renewed. Capacity-building on the ground seems to be the key. Views and expectations of different stakeholders need to feed back into policy development and implementation. As reported in the country fiche for the Cedefop study on learning outcomes, educational experts in Latvia admit that

'teacher/lecturers are thrown into a fast transition process leading to objections raised about purpose and usefulness of such a change' (Cedefop, forthcoming). Further work seems to be necessary to implement policies, support teachers and include learning outcomes in their continuous professional development.

Main sources of information

Information on the referencing process and the self-assessment report is available on the Latvian NCP website (Academic Information Centre): <http://nki-latvija.lv> or <http://nqf-latvia.lv> [accessed 4.11.2014].

Table 2 **Latvian qualifications framework**

| LQF levels | Qualifications | EQF levels |
|------------|---|------------|
| 8 | Doctoral diploma (<i>doktora diploms</i>) | 8 |
| 7 | Master diploma (<i>maģistra diploms</i>) Professional master diploma (<i>profesionālā maģistra diploms</i>) Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher education (<i>profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms</i>) diploma of higher professional qualification (<i>augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms</i>), second level professional higher education, total length of full-time studies – at least five years | 7 |
| 6 | Bachelor diploma (<i>bakalaura diploms</i>) Professional bachelor diploma (<i>profesionālā bakalaura diploms</i>) Diploma of professional higher education (<i>profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms</i>), diploma of higher professional qualification (<i>augstākās profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms</i>), second level professional higher education, length of full-time studies – at least four years | 6 |
| 5 | Diploma of first level professional higher education (<i>pirmā līmeņa profesionālās augstākās izglītības diploms</i>), first level professional higher (college) education, length of full-time studies – two to three years | 5 |
| 4 | Certificate of general secondary education (<i>atestāts par vispārējo vidējo izglītību</i>) Certificate of vocational education (<i>atestāts par arodizglītību</i>) Diploma of vocational secondary education (<i>diploms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību</i>) | 4 |
| 3 | Certificate of general basic education (<i>apliecība par vispārējo pamatizglītību</i>) Certificate of vocational basic education (<i>apliecība par profesionālo pamatizglītību</i>) | 3 |
| 2 | Certificate of general basic education (<i>apliecība par vispārējo pamatizglītību</i>) (for students in special educational programmes for students with mental development disorders) | 2 |
| 1 | Certificate of general basic education (<i>apliecība par vispārējo pamatizglītību</i>) (for students in special educational programmes for students with severe mental development disorders or several severe development disorders) | 1 |

Source: Academic Information Centre and Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, 2012.

List of abbreviations

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|-----|-----------------------------------|
| ESF | European Social Fund |
| EQF | European qualifications framework |
| LQF | Latvian qualifications framework |
| NQF | national qualifications framework |
| NCP | national coordination point |
| VET | vocational education and training |

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