

LITHUANIA

European inventory on NQF 2014

Introduction

An eight-level Lithuanian qualifications framework (LTQF) was formally adopted through a government resolution on 4 May 2010 (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2010). The LTQF is based on eight learning outcomes levels and covers all officially recognised qualifications in primary and secondary general education, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education. The formal framework has been further strengthened through two amendments to the Law on Education (17 March and 24 August 2011) clarifying its role and function. A joint referencing/self-certification to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) was completed in late 2011, underlining the comprehensive character of the framework. The LTQF has now entered an early operational stage.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

Development of the LTQF is part of a decade-long effort to reform and modernise Lithuanian education and training. The national education strategy for 2003-12 stressed the need for flexible and open education structures, for better coordination between general education and VET, and for stronger links to non-formal and informal learning (Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 2003). The LTQF emerged from this strategy and addresses five main objectives:

- (a) the framework should play a role in better adapting qualifications to the needs of the labour market and society;
- (b) it should help to improve clarity of design of qualifications for better assessment and recognition;
- (c) it should increase transparency of qualifications and assist individuals in using them;
- (d) it should support national and international mobility;
- (e) it should encourage lifelong learning and allow individuals to build on outcomes of non-formal and informal learning.

The Lithuanian national qualifications framework (NQF) is based on complete (full) qualifications. However, work is currently in process to introduce

qualifications units, defined as combinations of the competences needed for executing certain tasks. The LTQF includes qualifications awarded by formal education and training. There are currently no plans to open the framework up to qualifications offered by the private or non-formal sector.

Stakeholder involvement

Work on the NQF was initiated by the Labour Market Training Authority of Lithuania, which launched a European social fund project to design the NQF in 2006. Following extensive technical work, a National Authority of Qualifications was established in 2008 to coordinate NQF implementation. This authority was abolished in 2009, following the election of new parliament in late 2008; the Ministry of Education and Science then took over the main responsibility for NQF development in 2009 and has retained this role since. The Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC) has been appointed as the national coordination point for EQF and will take on day-to-day responsibility for promoting and implementing the LTQF.

Development of the LTQF since 2009 has been dominated by stakeholders from education and training. Both the vocational and higher education sectors have contributed actively and jointly to the process, paving the way for one comprehensive framework. The limited direct involvement of social partners in the process does not mean, however, that the link to the labour market has been overlooked. The framework has a clear labour market orientation, for example defining qualification 'as the ability and right to engage in a certain professional activity recognised under the procedure established by laws, legal acts adopted by the government or an institution authorised by the government' (QVETDC, 2012). This orientation is also reflected in the activity focused level descriptors (see 'Level descriptors and use of learning outcomes' below), referring back to the work on VET-standards developed since the late 1990s.

The influence of labour market stakeholders has been strengthened by the involvement of the Central Professional Committee in referencing the LTQF to the EQF. This is a tripartite committee, established under the Law on VET, signalling that an operational LTQF will require active involvement of stakeholders outside education and training. This broadening of the LTQF base is also reflected in the fact that the Ministry of Economy (responsible for human resource development strategy in Lithuania) was involved in referencing the LTQF to the EQF.

Framework implementation

While the LTQF entered an early operational stage following referencing to the EQF in 2011, continuous deepening of the work is being carried out. A decision has been made to update the 2011 referencing report by the end of 2014. In preparation, work is being prioritised in a limited number of areas, notably general education qualifications and higher education qualifications. In both areas the need for increased consistency has been observed. Seminars have been organised with representatives of the two sectors and guidance material is being developed. This process will be summarised in the revised referencing report, which will be formally approved by the Ministry of Education.

The Lithuanian national coordination point has organised several events addressing the different stakeholders seeking to disseminate information on the NQF. Focus has been directed towards the social partners and their involvement in, and commitment to, the framework.

Lithuania started to indicate NQF and EQF levels in vocational qualification certificates from January 2013. This means the framework and its levels now are increasingly visible to individual learners and citizens.

Level descriptors and use of learning outcomes

The eight levels of the LTQF combine the existing structure of the Lithuanian qualifications system with principles introduced by the EQF. The group of experts involved in designing the framework took as their starting point the two existing level arrangements, the five vocational education levels introduced in 1997 (and updated in 2001), and the three levels of higher education introduced in 1992. Combined with the priority attributed to referencing to the EQF, it was decided that eight levels would be the optimal number for the LTQF. Although qualifications equivalent to level 5 were awarded by vocational colleges until 2004, there are currently no qualifications being awarded at this level but this may change as the potential for developing advanced VET is of particular interest.

The level descriptors are defined according to two parameters: characteristics of activities and types of competences.

While the distinction between cognitive, functional and general competences broadly reflects the EQF distinction between knowledge, skills and competence, the criteria on activity can be seen as further development and specification of the autonomy, responsibility and context aspects introduced – explicitly and implicitly – in the EQF descriptors. The combination of the two parameters results

in detailed description of each level. The slightly different descriptor logic of the LTQF and the EQF was not considered to create difficulties for the referencing, which was generally considered transparent by the EQF advisory group in 2011.

Table 1 **Level descriptor in the Lithuanian NQF**

Parameters		
	Characteristics of activities	Types of competences
Criteria	(a) complexity of activities (b) autonomy of activities (c) variability of activities	(d) functional competences (e) cognitive competences (f) general competences

Source: QVETDC, 2012.

The learning outcomes (competence) approach is broadly accepted and implemented in Lithuanian VET, which uses a learning-outcomes (competences)-based approach both for definition of standards and for their translation into curricula.

The university sector is still at an early stage in using learning outcomes for defining and describing degrees and qualifications. A national project for implementing the European credit transfer and accumulation system has been launched recently; this may support the use of learning outcomes in defining higher education degrees and qualifications. In vocationally oriented higher education, standards are already defined and described in terms of competences.

The current learning outcomes situation reflects different traditions and approaches. While VET has made some progress in standards and curriculum design, provision of training is mostly oriented to subject and time/duration; learners are only partly able to tailor their own learning programme or pathway.

The implementation of the LTQF is seen as part of a strategy to move towards a more consistent and comprehensive use of learning outcomes across education and training levels and types. The initiatives taken during 2012-13 to address the use of learning outcomes in general education and higher education show how the framework is playing a role in this area.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning ⁽¹⁾

Lithuania is building a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Several laws have been amended in the last few years to pave the way for validation of non-formal and informal learning, both at national and sectoral levels. Building a system for validation is seen as a priority and related measures have been included in recent policy documents: national education strategy for 2013-22 ⁽²⁾; programme for increasing employment for 2014-20 ⁽³⁾; draft non-formal adult education development action plan ⁽⁴⁾. There is currently no formal strategy in place, but the laws referred above enable people to validate their learning in the VET and higher education sectors, and employment (though the latter option is not fully developed yet). The conceptual model of the NQF includes the possibility of acquiring qualifications through validation of non-formal and informal learning; however, there are no concrete measures in place to support take-up. The regulations for validation and recognition of qualifications include three main elements: assessment regulations, assessment methods, and assessment and accreditation of institutions. The system of standards is still incomplete and only VET standards are in place, so procedures for validation are mainly developed within VET.

An accredited competence assessment institution has the right to assess the competences acquired in formal and non-formal education programmes, employment activities or informally. The list of accredited competence assessment institutions is published on the website of the QVETDC ⁽⁵⁾. Further, a representative from formal VET (a VET teacher) is one of the three assessors on the competence assessment panel that operates in each of the accredited institutions.

The 2010 order on recommendations on the assessment and recognition of non-formally acquired competences in higher education institutions only very

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

⁽²⁾ National education strategy 2013-22, 23 December, 2013, No XII-745. http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=463390&p_tr2=2 [accessed 10.11.2014].

⁽³⁾ Programme for increasing employment for the period 2014-20, 25 September, 2013, No 878. http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=456810&p_tr2=2 [accessed 10.11.2014].

⁽⁴⁾ Draft non-formal adult education development action plan for 2014-16 (*Neformaliojo suaugusiųjų švietimo plėtros 2014-16 metų veiksmų planas*). <http://www.smm.lt/web/lt/teisesaktai/teisesaktuprojektai> [accessed 10.11.2014].

⁽⁵⁾ http://www.kpmc.lt/kpmc/?page_id=1488 [accessed 10.11.2014].

briefly outlines this process for higher education, leaving full responsibility for the development of validation (including methodologies and the process) to higher education institutions themselves.

Referencing to the EQF

The Lithuanian NQF was referenced to the EQF in November 2011, with one integrated report covering both the EQF and QF-EHEA. The report outlines a one-to-one relationship between LQF and EQF levels.

Table 2 **Level correspondences established between the LTQF and the EQF**

LTQF	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: QVETDC, 2012.

Important lessons and challenges ahead

The LTQF has now moved into an early operational stage and its relevance to education and training and labour market stakeholders will have to be demonstrated in the coming years. It will be even more important to demonstrate the relevance of the framework to ordinary citizens and learners, a challenging task as the framework and its potential usefulness is relatively little known outside those committees and institutions that have developed it. In this sense Lithuania faces many of the same challenges as other emerging NQFs.

Main sources of information

QVETDC has been appointed as the EQF national coordination point.
 More information to be found at <http://www.lnks.lt> [accessed 11.11.2014].

Table 3 **Lithuanian qualifications framework**

NQF levels	Qualifications types	EQF levels
8	Doctoral degree	8
7	Master degree	7
6	Bachelor degree Professional bachelor degree	6
5		5
4	Maturity certificate (on completion of the secondary education programme and passing <i>matura</i> examinations) VET diploma (completion of initial and/or continuing VET at attainment level 3)	4
3	Vocational qualification certificate (completion of initial and/or continuing VET at attainment level 2)	3
2	Basic education certificate (completion of basic education programme and testing learning outcomes) (grades 5 to 10)	2
1	Primary education certificate (on completion of primary education programme) (grades 1 to 4) Qualification certificate (completion of continuing VET at attainment level 1)	1

Source: QVETDC, 2012.

List of abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework
LTQF	Lithuanian qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
QVETDC	Qualifications and VET Development Centre
VET	vocational education and training

References

[URLs accessed 10.11.2014]

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