

SLOVENIA

European inventory on NQF 2014

Introduction

Slovenia has reached an advanced stage of national qualifications framework (NQF) development. A 10-level comprehensive Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF) was developed by the steering committee in April 2011 (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2011) and discussed with stakeholders. Agreement was reached on bringing major national qualifications into NQF levels, including qualifications from formal education and training (in vocational education and training (VET), higher education, general education, adult education) and the system of national vocational qualifications under remit of the Ministry of Labour. A draft law on the Slovenian qualifications framework was prepared and widely discussed. It serves as a legal basis for SQF implementation. It has yet to come into force.

SQF development builds on a series of education and training reforms since the mid-1990s (in VET, higher education, general education and adult education) and introduction of certification and validation of non-formal learning in 2000.

Main policy objectives

All subsystems of education and training in Slovenia have been reformed since the mid-1990s. There is a general view that the system functions well in terms of permeability; there are almost no dead-ends at upper secondary level and individuals can move vertically and horizontally without major obstacles. However, there is a need to strengthen cooperation and coordination between different education and training subsystems and increase participation in lifelong learning. It is necessary to improve the link between education and certification and responsiveness of qualifications to labour market and individual needs, and have a reliable tool for assessing and recognising non-formal and informal knowledge and skills. Slovenia has achieved good results in educational indicators in recent years (participation of adults aged 25 to 64 was 13.8% in 2012 and dropout is one of the lowest in Europe). However, making VET more attractive and improving transition from education to work remains a challenge. (European Commission, 2013).

SQF's main objective is 'to integrate and harmonise Slovenian qualifications subsystems and improve transparency, accessibility, progress and quality of qualifications being responsive to labour market and civil society needs' (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2011).

The following policy objectives are addressed in more detail:

- (a) improving transnational understanding and comparability of Slovenian qualifications as well as the potential for transfer and recognition;
- (b) supporting coherent approaches to lifelong learning by providing access, progression, recognition of learning, coherence and better use of qualifications;
- (c) ensuring capacity to certify knowledge, skills and competences not yet incorporated into formal education and training and providing better links and transferability between education and training and certification systems;
- (d) improving efficiency in achieving qualifications focused on labour market needs (such as requalification);
- (e) providing individualised pathways mainly for adults and dropouts.

Stakeholder involvement

Work was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Sport in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, in 2005 through the EQF consultation process.

In January 2010, a national steering committee for referencing SQF levels to the EQF was nominated by the government. It is composed of representatives from the Ministry of Education and Sport (chair), the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, the Statistical Office, the National Institute for VET and social partners. The group prepared a proposal for the SQF, which was broadly debated in national consultation processes.

Framework implementation

The SQF is not yet operational. A draft law on SQF ⁽¹⁾ was prepared and widely discussed. However, adoption has been delayed due to a change of government. This is a technical law which summarises stakeholders' and ministries' main

⁽¹⁾ https://e-uprava.gov.si/e-uprava/zakonodajalskanje.euprava?zadeva_id=4904
[accessed 19.9.2014].

responsibilities in designing and awarding qualifications at different levels, and defines tasks of the EQF national coordination point (NCP). It refers to procedures and methods of allocation of qualifications from formal education and training and national vocational qualifications as defined in sectoral legislation. It defines inclusion of supplementary qualifications, referencing NQF levels to the EQF and qualification frameworks in the European higher education area (QF EHEA). It also defines maintenance of a SQF register and funding. The SQF register ⁽²⁾ describes qualifications in accordance with SQF and EQF parameters (title, type and category of a qualification, credit points, access requirements, SQF/EQF level, ISCED level, learning outcomes, awarding body and transition possibilities). In the EQF portal testing phase, Slovenia contributed to testing compatibility of a national register with the EQF portal. The SQF register still needs to be further developed and more qualifications included in the register. Once fully developed, the SQF register will significantly increase transparency of qualifications and the national qualifications system.

The EQF NCP was set up at the National Institute for VET. Its main role is to support development and implementation of the SQF, establish and maintain the SQF register and become the main information desk for citizens and institutions.

Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The SQF has 10 levels. The descriptor for each level contains three categories of learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and competences. Each qualification in the framework includes all three categories, although it is not necessarily the case that each category has equal weight within the qualification. Such a selection of categories allows 'capture' of the full diversity of learning outcomes and qualifications that, though acquired in different settings and for different purposes, are comparable in terms of learning outcomes.

The SQF is a framework of communication that also includes elements of reform. The starting points for classification of qualifications in the SQF are relevant sectoral legislation and the classification system of education and training (*Klasius*). The SQF aims to establish a flexible connection between education and qualification structures. It links two concepts: educational activities/programmes and learning outcomes.

For qualifications acquired after completion of nationally accredited programmes, additional input criteria are used: access requirements, typical

⁽²⁾ <http://www.nok.si/en/qualifications-framework-register.aspx> [accessed 15.9.2014].

length of the programme, and input in terms of volume of learning activities in VET and higher education defined also in credit points.

SQF includes three categories of qualifications:

- (a) educational qualifications awarded after completion of formal education programmes at all levels (general, vocational or higher);
- (b) national vocational qualifications defined as work-related vocational or professional capacity to perform an occupation at a certain level of complexity; these can be achieved through recognition of non-formal and informal learning in line with national standards;
- (c) supplementary qualifications acquired in further and supplementary training (tied to supplementing abilities and competences) and not issued by the national authorities, widely debated in the national consultation process and strongly supported by stakeholders. It was decided to deal with this issue in the second stage of NQF implementation.

The learning outcomes approach, following reforms carried out since the 1990s, is already embedded in the Slovene education system and well accepted.

Education programmes have moved from a content-based to an objectives-based approach. Reforms have supported and broadened assessment of learning outcomes. A balance is sought in emphasising the role played by general knowledge and acquired key competences, sufficiently broad technical knowledge and certain pedagogical processes in defining educational outcomes.

In VET, the learning outcomes approach is seen as a very useful way of bringing vocational programmes and schools closer to 'real life' and labour market needs. The basis for all VET qualifications is a system of occupational profiles and standards, identifying knowledge and skills required in the labour market. National VET framework curricula define expected knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired by students. The school curriculum was also introduced and is an important innovation in Slovenia, giving schools increased autonomy in curriculum planning, especially in taking the local environment and employers' needs into account when developing the curriculum.

Assessment in VET (at NQF levels 4 and 5) is in project work, testing practical skills and underpinning knowledge; written tests are also used at level 5 to test theoretical professional knowledge and knowledge of general subjects (Slovenian language, foreign languages, mathematics), which are tested externally.

New programmes in general education (compulsory and upper secondary) include learning outcomes to be achieved either at the end of the three stages in compulsory education or at the end of upper secondary education tested in the external *matura* examination.

In higher education reform and introduction of study programmes in accordance with guidelines of the Bologna declaration has taken place gradually. The old, pre-Bologna courses were last published in 2008/09, and students in these courses must complete their studies no later than 2015/16. Starting with 2009/10, only new study programmes for all three cycles were available. Students entering higher education after 2009/10 thus pursue their education in courses of the first, second and third cycles in line with the guidelines of the Bologna declaration. Learning outcomes in higher education are described in terms of general and professional competences. The course credits system (ECTS) has been obligatory since 2002.

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

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been an important issue on the Slovenian education policy agenda in the past decade. Since 2006, it covers all education subsystems, regulated by sector-specific acts. An overall strategy applying to all levels of education is, however, not yet implemented. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is most advanced in VET, but other subsystems allow certain validation possibilities. For example, people over 21 can take the *matura* exam without being enrolled in formal education. There are two types of VET qualification in Slovenia: first, educational VET qualifications are awarded after completion of formal vocational programmes; non-formally acquired knowledge and skills are taken into account to shorten the length of studies. Second, national vocational qualifications (NVQ) can be acquired through recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The National Professional Qualifications Act (amended 2009 ⁽⁴⁾) connects both systems; occupational standards are the basis for qualification and assessment standards and national VET programmes. Master craftsman qualification can also be acquired through validation, though participation in preparatory programmes is possible and common. Since 2010, most developments can be observed in higher education. The Act on Higher Education (2012) ⁽⁵⁾ obliges institutions to prepare validation measures and form a committee for validation of non-formal

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

⁽⁴⁾ Zakon o nacionih poklicnih kvalifikacijah (*National Professional Qualifications Act*), <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1626> [accessed 19.9.2014].

⁽⁵⁾ Zakon o visokem šolstvu [Higher Education Act], <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=108446> [accessed 19.9.2014].

and informal learning. Universities are autonomous and can decide on their own procedures for validation. They normally use professional assessors or committees.

Referencing to the EQF

One joint report to link national qualification levels to the EQF and QF-EHEA was presented to the EQF advisory group at end May 2013.

The group discussed in some detail use of the best-fit principle for the master craftsman qualification and the legacy award *magister znanosti*.

The title 'master craftsman' is used across Europe, and most countries place this qualification at level 5 (France, Croatia and Luxembourg) or level 6 of the EQF (Germany, Austria). As stated in the Slovenian report, some skills and competences of this qualification are at SQF level 6, but based on existing regulatory arrangements, a decision was taken to place it at SQF level 5 and link it to EQF level 4. Discussions with all relevant stakeholders are planned on future developments.

The group also discussed levelling SQF level 9 to EQF level 8. Research master qualification (*magister znanosti*) assigned to this level is a legacy award (not part of the three-degree structure established by Bologna) and is being phased out (last students to complete it by 2015). The best-fit principle was applied to link this qualification to EQF level 8.

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

SQF	EQF
Level 10	Level 8
Level 9	
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: Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2013.

Important lessons and future plans

Developments in Slovenia are based on an incremental approach and reforms under way since the mid-1990s, and a good situation in education, training and qualification developments compared to EU benchmarks.

However, at system level some drawbacks have been identified, for example, better linking/bridging between formal education and training governed by the Ministry of Education and the certification system, steered by the Ministry of Labour, to allow individuals to combine learning outcomes better from different settings; opening up the qualification system to supplementary qualifications is planned. Quality assurance is regarded as essential and is being focused increasingly on outputs, for example testing quality indicators like destination of graduates. One weakest point of the system is communication between education and the labour market and the mismatch between skills and knowledge obtained in education and training and labour market needs. The current second stage of the VET curriculum and qualification reforms, based on learning outcomes, provides this sector with an opportunity to improve its attractiveness and strengthen links to the labour market.

Further planned developments will focus on strengthening cooperation between different stakeholders in developing and implementing effective lifelong learning.

Main sources of information

[URLs accessed 15.9.2014]

National Institute for VET: <http://www.cpi.si>

Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET: SQF register:
<http://www.nok.si/en/qualifications-framework-register.aspx>

Table 2 **The Slovenian qualifications framework**

NQF levels	Qualifications obtained within the formal education system	Qualifications obtained outside the formal education system		EQF levels
	Educational qualifications	National vocational qualifications	Supplementary qualifications (*)	
10	Doctorate <i>Diploma o doktoratu znanosti</i>			8
9	(**) Post-graduate research Master of science diploma <i>Diploma o magisteriju znanosti</i> (**) Specialisation diploma following academic higher education <i>Diploma o specializaciji</i>			8
8	Master degree <i>Diploma o strokovnem magisteriju</i> (**) Specialisation diploma following pre-Bologna professional higher education <i>Diploma o specializaciji</i> (**) Pre-Bologna diploma of academic higher education <i>Diploma o univerzitetnem izobraževanju</i> (**) Higher education diploma <i>Diploma o visoki izobrazbi</i>			7
7	Academic bachelor diploma <i>Diploma o izobraževanju prve stopnje – univerzitetna, UN</i> Professional bachelor diploma <i>Diploma o izobrazevanju visokem strokovnem, VS</i> (**) Pre-Bologna professional higher education diploma <i>Diploma o visokem strokovnem izobraževanju</i> (**) Specialisation diploma following old short cycle higher education <i>Diploma o specializaciji</i>			6
6	Short-cycle higher vocational diploma <i>Diploma o višji strokovni izobrazbi</i> (**) Old short-cycle higher vocational diploma <i>Diploma o višješolski izobrazbi</i>		NVQ certificate (level 6) Hotel reception manager; travel agency manager.	5

NQF levels	Qualifications obtained within the formal education system	Qualifications obtained outside the formal education system		EQF levels
	Educational qualifications	National vocational qualifications	Supplementary qualifications (*)	
5	<p>Vocational matura certificate (Secondary technical education, four years) <i>Spričevalo o poklicni mature</i></p> <p>General matura certificate <i>Spričevalo o splošni mature</i></p> <p>Master craftsman's examination certificate <i>Spričevalo o opravljenem mojstrskem izpitu</i></p> <p>Foreman's examination certificate <i>Spričevalo o opravljenem delovodskem izpitu</i></p> <p>Managerial examination certificate <i>Spričevalo o opravljenem poslovodskem izpitu</i></p>	<p>NVQ certificate (level 5) Dental assistant; analyst in pharmaceutical laboratories.</p>		4
4	<p>Final examination certificate (Secondary vocational education, three years) <i>Spričevalo o zaključnem izpitu, Srednja poklicna izobrazba</i></p>	<p>NVQ (level 4) Pharmaceutical logistics process worker; process worker in the production of pharmaceutical ingredients.</p>		4
3	<p>Final examination certificate (Lower vocational education, two years) <i>Spričevalo o zaključnem izpitu</i></p>	<p>NVQ (level 3) Biomedical laboratory assistant; operator in pharmaceutical ingredients manufacture.</p>		3
2	<p>Elementary school leaving certificate (nine years) <i>Zaključno spričevalo osnovne šole</i></p>	<p>NVQ (level 2)</p>		2
1	<p>Certificate of completing grades 7 or 8 of elementary education <i>Potrdilo o izpolnjeni osnovnošolski obveznosti</i></p> <p>Elementary school leaving certificate <i>Zaključno spričevalo osnovne šole</i></p>	<p>NVQ (level 1)</p>		1

(*) Since the accreditation procedure of supplementary qualifications has not been approved yet, these qualifications have not been included in the framework.

(**) Pre-Bologna diplomas.

Source: Adapted from Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2013.

List of abbreviations

ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
EQF	European qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualification frameworks in the European higher education area
SQF	Slovenian qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

References

[URLs accessed 15.9.2014]

European Commission (2013). *Education and training monitor 2013*.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/monitor13_en.pdf

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Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET (2011). *Slovenian qualifications framework: proposal by the steering committee group on the preparation of the national qualifications framework*.

http://www.nok.si/en/files/nok/userfiles/datoteke/68_file_path.pdf

Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET (2013). *Referencing the SQF to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area* [unpublished].