TURKEY
European inventory on NQF 2014

Introduction

A comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) (Turkish qualifications framework (TQF)) has been developed and is awaiting formal adoption, planned for November 2014. The framework aims to bring together a national vocational qualification system (NVQS), led by the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA), a qualifications framework for higher education, developed in the Bologna process ([1]), and integrate them with the qualifications awarded by the Ministry of National Education. The framework will be open for all quality assured qualifications.

Passing the VQA Law (No 5544, 2006) ([2]) was the first important step in developing an NVQS of labour market oriented qualifications. Through the law amendment (November 2011), the framework became more broadly defined as 'principles of qualification designed in compliance with the European qualifications framework (EQF) and gained through vocational, general and academic education and training programmes including primary, secondary and higher education as well as other learning routes'.

The main current challenge is to link the different qualification systems and processes in a coherent and comprehensive NQF. Turkey's education and training system is continuously expanding to provide access for its growing population, while at the same time raising attainment levels. The TQF should support recognition, relevance and quality enhancement. Development of national standards and cooperation and coordination between the VQA, the Ministry of National Education and the CoHE is crucial to development of a more coherent national qualification system. The TQF paper (MYK, 2014), which is the basis of the TQF legislation, specifies modalities for cooperation between the three key bodies.

([1]) The qualifications framework for higher education was developed and adopted in January 2010 by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE).

([2]) Law 5544 was published in the Official Journal No 26312.

Main policy objectives

Setting up a national qualification system and NQF is seen as an important instrument to support national education and qualifications reforms. According to government programme documents, including the 'action plan for the strengthening of relationship between education and employment', one of the main objectives of creating an NQF is to reduce mismatches and increase effective employment and training programmes.

Compared to the European Union (EU) Member States, employment in Turkey is still low, especially among women; at 30.8% (July, 2014) ([3]), this is well below the lowest EU performers. Also, educational attainment of the population is still low compared to EU Member States. But participation in education and lifelong learning and attainment levels have been improving year by year over the past 10 years. Moreover, in 2012, 12 years of education became compulsory.

Vocational education and training (VET) is undergoing major reform with substantial EU support. Since 1992, Turkey has worked on development of occupational standards to identify the needs of the labour market. Since the establishment of VQA in 2006, 569 national occupational standards (NOS) have been developed and adopted. These are being used as a basis for development of national vocational qualifications for validating non-formal learning through accredited and authorised certification bodies. Occupational standards are used to define journeyman and mastery certificates issued by the Ministry of National Education (non-formal education) and for developing modules for school-based secondary vocational education ([4]), but these modules do not have assessment components yet. After aligning national curricula with occupational standards and the quality assurance of training institutions is completed, schools will be allowed not only to issue the school certificate, but also vocational qualification certificates at various levels.

The policy objectives are defined in the TQF as:

(a) to provide a clear and consistent means of describing, classifying and comparing qualifications;

(b) to provide one integrated framework including all quality assured qualifications, (achieved in general, vocational and academic education and training programmes and in other learning environments);

([3]) http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=16012 [accessed 7.11.2014].

([4]) 569 NOS according to the database on the website of the VQA (www.myk.org.tk) [accessed 7.11.2014] entered at 15.10.2014.

(c) to improve Turkish qualifications continuously so that the system can provide appropriate recognition of qualifications achieved in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts;

(d) to contribute to training individuals who are employable and equipped with defined and measurable qualifications, and thus to reducing unemployment;

(e) to strengthen institutional cooperation among all parties, primarily awarding bodies, industry and social partners;

(f) to provide a benchmark for recognition in Turkey of foreign qualifications and for recognition of Turkish qualifications abroad and serve as an instrument of comparison.

All VQA qualifications developed according to the new legislation (Law 5544) are included in the database of qualifications on the website of the authority. Currently 255 national vocational qualifications are published ([5]). A total of 149 of these can be used by the 32 accredited and authorised certification bodies, but only 62 are currently in use.

In the medium-term, it is expected that they will become part of a single database with all formal qualifications (secondary and higher education diplomas and other qualifications) for the TQF, consisting of three subframeworks; progression between all qualifications will be possible. One of the expected benefits is that, through the TQF, the qualifications will be more labour-market oriented and dynamic. For individuals, the TQF will provide career mobility, flexibility, all kinds of learning activities to be valued and progression routes to be clearly defined.

Stakeholder involvement

TQF development was initiated by the Ministry of National Education in 2005 through the EQF consultation process. Since the VQA was established in 2006, it has been coordinating the process together with the Ministry of National Education, the CoHE and other stakeholders.

Passing the VQA Law (No 5544, 2006) was the most important legal stage for developing an NVQS and framework. A tripartite VQA was established in 2006, coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security with a wider range of stakeholders, including the Ministry of National Education. Its main objective was to develop the NVQS and framework, based on occupational

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([5]) According to the database on the website of the VQA (www.myk.org.tk) [accessed 7.11.2014] entered at 15.10.2014.

standards and with sectoral involvement. It is being developed parallel to existing formal education under the responsibility of Ministry of National Education ([6]).

The VQA become operational in 2007, governed by an assembly and executive board. Employee, employer and professional organisations are members of the executive board of the VQA with representatives from the Ministries of Labour and Education and the CoHE.

The CoHE is in charge of developing and implementing a qualifications framework for higher education.

As Turkey has decided to adopt a more comprehensive approach and to link better initial VET and the emerging NVQS, an NQF preparation commission was established in August 2010. Its main task was to prepare a proposal for a comprehensive NQF. Various institutions and experts were consulted on the proposal and comments and advice taken into consideration. An updated version of the TQF concept paper was completed in June 2013 and further elaborated in 2014. Based on this, the draft regulation on TQF (the secondary legislation) was prepared in cooperation with the responsible institutions, with further extensive consultation. It is anticipated it will be approved by the cabinet in November 2014 and will regulate the principles for inclusion of qualifications achieved in all education and training programmes, higher education as well as in other types of learning environment. It will cover quality assurance of qualifications, designation of institutions/organisations to assure the quality of qualifications, and determination of quality assurance structures; recognition of prior learning and progression among qualifications; and duties, tasks and the mandate of relevant institutions.

Framework implementation

Although the framework is not yet legislated, it is already partially implemented. Levels have been in use for some time in higher education, the Ministry of National Education and VQA. The VQA is responsible for developing NOS and vocational qualifications at levels 2 to 8, except for the regulated occupations

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([6]) The certificates awarded under the VQA system are different from awards in formal education and can be provided via a process of validation. The process of aligning formal and non-formal curricula with the standards in this system continues. Once the system of standards is developed, qualifications in the formal system will be aligned with those used in the VQA system. For more information see European Commission et al., 2010, p.1.

defined in the law, Article 1 ([7]). The Ministry of National Education is responsible for developing qualifications up to the fifth level and the CoHE is an autonomous public body responsible for planning, steering, governing and supervising higher education institutions and qualifications.

There is strong cooperation between different actors. The higher education qualification framework and the VQA pillars are already populated with qualifications and new quality assurance arrangements have been put in place in both sectors; they are under development for initial vocational education. The TQF paper foresees establishing the TQF Coordination Council, consisting of the CoHE president, the Ministry of National Education undersecretary and VQA president, who are responsible for the strategic decisions for implementing and supervising the framework, including approving all procedures and decisions and dealing with resource implications. A 22-member TQF Council with stakeholders from all institutions and social partners is in charge of detailed planning for the TQF: they will work closely together with the TQF secretariat in VQA and the TQF consultation committee.

Level descriptors and use of learning outcomes

The proposed draft of the TQF comprises eight levels defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Knowledge is defined as theoretical and/or factual, involving the comprehension of facts, principles, theories and practice. Skill is defined as utilisation of knowledge and problem-solving which requires the ability to use logical, intuitive and creative thinking and dexterity, method, material, tools and instruments. Competence is defined as utilisation of knowledge and skills in an area of work and/or learning by taking responsibility and/or displaying autonomy, determination and satisfaction in learning requirements, consideration of social and moral issues and responsibilities.

Higher education has determined descriptors in terms of learning outcomes, which are compatible with EQF and the qualification framework in the European higher education area. Competence is further divided into four components: autonomy and responsibility, learning to learn, field-specific competences and

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([7]) VQA Law, Article 1, paragraph 2 defines these professions: medical doctors, dentists, nurses, midwives, pharmacists, veterinary doctors, engineers and architects as well as any other professions requiring education on a graduate level as a minimum, for which conditions for inception of respective professions are regulated by law.

social and communication skills with an emphasis on foreign language competences and information communication technology.

The learning outcomes approach is seen as an essential part of the development of the TQF and is the stated intention of current reform in all subsystems of education and training, supported by main stakeholders. The Ministry of National Education has launched curriculum reform in secondary education, for both general and vocational and technical schools. Vocational qualifications will be learning outcomes-based.

A format for NOS was determined and describes labour market needs in terms of duties and tasks with corresponding performance criteria. At present, 569 occupational standards ([8]) have been approved, mainly at levels 2 to 7: an important positive aspect is that labour market actors have been significantly involved in these processes. Qualifications developed from occupational standards are described in terms of learning outcomes and 255 national qualifications were recently approved by the VQA. Awarding criteria for bodies setting vocational qualifications were established.

The learning outcome approach is an essential part of implementation of the NQF for higher education.

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

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is implemented under the VQA. Currently 32 accredited and authorised certification bodies are operational. These include sectoral organisations that are employer led, trade-union-led or bipartite, chamber affiliated centres as well as some universities and private companies. For each individual qualification certification bodies need to undergo accreditation based on ISO-17024 standard for personnel certification by the Turkish Accreditation Agency (TURKAK) and authorisation by VQA. Both VQA and TURKAK receive a contribution for each certificate issued: this increases validation costs. So far 19 505 certificates have been issued, but 13 850 of these are only for one qualification, the career counsellor; 4 000 certified career counsellors have been employed by the government. Construction has approximately 4 800 certificates issued with the remaining sectors accounting for the remaining certificates. The existing centres complain about a lack of demand for validation and are waiting for government incentives (the waiving of social

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([8]) http:///www.myk.gov.tr [accessed 15.10.2014].

security contributions) that have been promised will become law. The new EU project for the VQA foresees a grant scheme for candidates. In the meantime, the lifelong learning department of the Ministry of National Education has also piloted the validation of non-formal and informal learning for three occupations within the framework of the EU-funded lifelong project. Validation guidelines have also been developed. Much attention is paid in the Ministry of National Education approach to the role of the counsellors and assessors for validation. The new lifelong learning strategy 2014-17 has a strong focus on non-formal and informal learning and will promote wider use of validation.

Validation for higher education degrees is currently not possible, but there is a network of validation experts in the higher education sector.

Processes for recognition of prior learning within the scope of lifelong learning aim to ensure that the knowledge, skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning at all levels of the TQF are described and recognised.

Recognition of prior learning provides learners with:
(a) access to programmes;
(b) access to exams;
(c) exemptions;
(d) certification of units;
(e) credit accumulation and transfer;
(f) recognition of qualifications.

TQF supports the processes for recognition of prior learning, helping clarify the meaning of the qualifications and make visible which learning outcomes are necessary to achieve the qualifications. The purpose of policies supporting the recognition of prior learning is to prepare an environment in which all qualifications in the TQF have facilities enabling such recognition.

The TQF Coordination Council will publish the overall principles on the recognition of prior learning. The designated institutions/bodies will then be responsible for publishing the procedures on how these principles will be applied to the respective qualifications.

Referencing to the EQF

One of the important steps in the TQF implementation is referencing the TQF to the EQF and the framework of qualifications for the European higher education area. It is expected that both will be within a single process. The referencing

report is planned to be published and submitted to the Council of Europe and EQF advisory group in the beginning of 2015.

Important lessons and the way forward

An important condition for establishing an NQF is to have clear responsibilities, defined roles and a coordination body which has a clear mandate. The first step was reaching agreement on establishing the VQA in Turkey, in charge of developing and implementing the NVQS. Higher level representatives from the VQA, the Higher Education Council, and the Ministry of national Education have agreed on the TQF legislation; there are also issues to be further discussed and agreed when the TQF implementation has started.

As the ultimate goal is to introduce a single comprehensive national framework, encompassing all stages of formal and all kinds of informal learning, it will also be important to develop effective and sustainable cooperation between stakeholders across all three sectors. Strengthening and adjusting governance structures are also needed and are being discussed. The TQF regulation deals with the issues mentioned above and strengthens the basis for TQF.

One important objective of the TQF is to use it as vehicle for developing new occupational standards and qualifications, required by the labour market, and to use them for validation and reform of curricula. To retrain employer engagement in qualifications development seems crucial.

Another challenge is to develop the quality assurance in education and training outcomes underpinning the whole TQF. This would require development of comprehensive quality assurance approaches and mechanisms.

Main sources of information
[URLs accessed 7.11.2014]

The VQA is the national coordination point. Information is available on its website:
www.myk.gov.tr
For qualifications framework for higher education detailed information is available on its website: http://www.tyyc.yok.gov.tr/

Table 1   **Turkish qualifications framework**

TQF levels	Qualifications types awarded in formal education and training system	NVQ	Anticipated EQF levels
8	Doctoral degree (PhD, proficiency in arts, specialisation in medicine)	Level 8 vocational qualification certificate	8
7	Master degree (with thesis)	Level 7 vocational qualification certificate	7
7	Master degree (without thesis)	Level 7 vocational qualification certificate	7
6	Bachelor degree	Level 6 vocational qualification certificate	6
5	Associate degree (academic)	Level 5 vocational qualification certificate	5
5	Associate degree (vocational)	Level 5 vocational qualification certificate	5
4	High school diploma	Level 4 vocational qualification certificate	4
4	Vocational and technical high school diploma	Level 4 vocational qualification certificate	4
4	Skilled worker certificate	Level 4 vocational qualification certificate	4
3	Semi-skilled worker certificate	Level 3 vocational qualification certificate	3
3	Lower secondary school education certificate	Level 3 vocational qualification certificate	3
2	Primary school education certificate	Level 2 vocational qualification certificate	2
1	Pre-school participation certificate		1

Source: Adapted from MYK, 2014.

List of abbreviations

EU	European Union
CoHE	Council of Higher Education
MYK	Mesleki Yeterlilik Kurumu [Vocational Qualifications Authority]
NQF	national qualifications framework
NOS	national occupational standards
NVQS	national vocational qualification system
TQF	Turkish qualifications framework
TURKAK	Turkish Accreditation Agency
VET	vocational education and training
VQA	Vocational Qualifications Authority

References

[URLs accessed 4.11.2014]

European Commission; Cedefop; GHK (2010). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010. Country report: Turkey.* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77657.pdf

MYK (2014). *A description of the TQF* [unpublished].