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Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	National context	1
2.1.	Policy context	1
2.2.	NQF legal basis	3
3.	NQF objectives	3
4.	Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications	4
4.1.	NQF structure and level descriptors	4
4.2.	NQF scope and coverage	4
4.3.	Use of learning outcomes	5
4.4.	Quality assurance arrangements	7
5.	Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement	7
6.	Recognition and validation of prior learning	8
6.1.	Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways	8
6.2.	Credit systems	8
7.	NQF implementation and impact	9
7.1.	Stage of implementation	9
7.2.	Referencing qualifications in the QNQ	9
7.3.	Indicating EQF/NQF levels	10
7.4.	NQF dissemination	10
7.5.	Qualifications databases and registers	10
7.6.	Awareness and use of the NQF	11
7.7.	Monitoring and evaluating the NQF	12
7.8.	Impact of the NQF	12
8.	Referencing to the EQF	13
9.	Reflections and plans	13
	Acronyms	14
	References	15
	Web pages and databases	15

1. Introduction

Cedefop's work on qualifications frameworks dates back to 2003. The Centre has contributed to the conceptual development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and has supported its further implementation, working alongside national authorities and stakeholders to introduce and develop national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). This report is part of the European inventory of NQFs, which systematically maps and analyses NQF developments in countries participating in the EQF process. The inventory is updated biennially in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group, the European Commission and the European Training Foundation. The report provides a detailed description of the structure of the Portuguese NQF and its institutional arrangements. It also examines the framework's implementation and its impact on broader policy areas, focusing on key developments since 2022.

The Portuguese NQF (*Quadro Nacional de Qualificações, QNQ*) is a comprehensive framework at the operational stage which includes qualifications awarded through formal, non-formal, and informal learning. It was legally adopted in 2009 and comprises eight levels with level descriptors defined in terms of knowledge, skills (cognitive or practical), and attitudes. The QNQ was referenced to the EQF in 2011, while the framework for higher education qualifications, which is part of the QNQ, was self-certified against the qualifications framework in the European higher education area in the same year.

2. National context

2.1. Policy context

In 2023, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product in Portugal was 4.3% (slightly below the EU average of 4.7 %). The country has reached the 2030 target of at least a 96% average level of participation in early childhood education and care (96.9 % in 2023), as well as that of early leaving from education and training (less than 9% by 2030), thus continuing the declining trend observed in recent years (from 18.9 % in 2013 to 8.1 % in 2023). This means that today, early leaving is well below the EU average (9.7 % in 2023). In 2023, tertiary education attainment (age 25-34) (41.5 %) is lower than in the EU-27 (43.1 %), although it has increased by 11.5 % compared to 2013 (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport & Culture, 2024). Participation in upper secondary vocational education and training (VET) is relatively low (37.9 % against an EU average of 49.1% in 2023) with a declining trend in the last decade (45.8% in 2013). However, in post-secondary and short-cycle tertiary education, vocational pathways are the only option for learners ⁽¹⁾. In 2023, the employment rate of VET graduates (25–34 years old) was 76.5% (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport & Culture, 2024).

(1) More information available on the [Eurostat website](#).

The National Qualifications System (*Sistema Nacional de Qualificações – SNQ*) ⁽²⁾ has several elements, including the national qualifications catalogue (CNQ), the QNQ, the national credit system for VET, a network of adult learning centres (*Qualifica* centres) and an instrument for lifelong development that records individual qualifications and competences (*Qualifica* passport) (Section 7.5). The national system for recognising non-formal and informal learning (RVCC) was integrated into the QNQ and reformed, to better address training, guidance and skills validation.

Since 2021, with the [vocational training and qualification agreement](#), Portugal has placed a special focus on boosting post-secondary training at QNQ level 5, aiming to promote social, professional and academic mobility. In 2022, apprenticeships ⁽³⁾ and certified modular training ⁽⁴⁾ were introduced at this level. Moreover, since 2022, it has also been possible for post-secondary qualifications to be obtained through an RVCC process ⁽⁵⁾. The [Ativar.PT programme](#) supports the expansion of apprenticeships; the revision, flexibilisation and relaunch of technological specialisation courses (CETs) at QNQ level 5 ⁽⁶⁾; and the hiring of young people holding a qualification at this or a higher level ⁽⁷⁾.

The QNQ is mentioned in broader policy documents. For example, the aims of the Portuguese recovery and resilience plan (*Recuperar Portugal, Construindo o futuro*), are to reduce the rate of adults, including young people, with low qualifications (below QNQ levels 3 and 4), to ensure that 60% of 20-year-olds attend higher education and 50% of those aged 30–34 have a higher education qualification, and to increase the participation rate of adults in lifelong learning. The revised national recovery and resilience plan of [26 May 2023](#)) includes investments to support the aims of the green and digital transition and measures to ensure inclusive education for all (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

Adult education and training (EFA) programmes lead to QNQ diplomas and certificates ⁽⁸⁾. In training programmes linked to the digital ⁽⁹⁾ and the green ⁽¹⁰⁾ transitions, units of competences (UNs) and training units (UFCDs) in the CNQ can be stacked leading to a QNQ qualification. Active employment policies, such as the employment insertion contract and the active youth employment measure, define the training cost per unit according to the level of the qualification targeted. Similarly, financial incentives are calculated differently, depending on the QNQ level of the qualification pursued:

- (a) the monthly internship grant in the Ativar.PT internships for PES-registered young unemployed with qualification levels 3 to 8;
- (b) the salary amount for beneficiaries of the [Green Skills and Jobs training programme](#);

⁽²⁾ The system was launched as part of the 2007 VET reform.

⁽³⁾ [Ordinance No 70/2022](#) introduced apprenticeship+ courses at QNQ level 5.

⁽⁴⁾ [Ordinance No 66/2022](#) introduced certified modular training at QNQ level 5. This type of training, which uses competence units (UC) and short-duration training units (UFCD), is part of adult learning or of RVCC.

⁽⁵⁾ [Ordinance No 61/2022](#) and [Ordinance No 62/2022](#), [regulating the functioning of the Qualifica Centres](#).

⁽⁶⁾ Introduced by [Decree-Law No 39/2022](#) and [Ordinance No 206/2022](#).

⁽⁷⁾ Additionally, [Ordinance No 174/2020](#) helps young people holding a qualification at QNQ level 5 to enter the labour market.

⁽⁸⁾ regulated by ordinance [86/2022](#), Ministerial dispatch No [691/2022](#)

⁽⁹⁾ Ministerial [implementing order No 8/2024](#) amending the Order No 246/2022 establishing the second phase of the Employment + Digital 2025 vocational programme for the requalification of workers in businesses.

⁽¹⁰⁾ [Ordinance No. 21/2023](#) establishing a professional retraining programme in the energy area

- (c) the financial support for setting up a new business within the *Empreende XXI* entrepreneurship programme ⁽¹¹⁾ (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

2.2. NQF legal basis

The 2007 and 2017 decree-laws on the national qualifications system ⁽¹²⁾ define the governance structure, processes and main elements regarding qualifications in Portugal. The QNQ was adopted in 2009 by [Ordinance No 782/2009](#) and came into force in October 2010. It is well integrated into the legislation governing education and training. Since 2021, legislation has been adopted introducing diploma and certificate templates (in electronic format) for basic education (QNQ/EQF level 2), secondary education (QNQ/EQF levels 3 and 4), adult education and training courses (leading to QNQ levels 1 to 4 (EFA), CETs (QNQ level 5) and qualifications awarded through an RVCC process. They include the obligation for the QNQ/EQF levels to be mentioned on the diplomas and certificates of all these qualifications, and of apprenticeships at QNQ levels 4 and 5 ⁽¹³⁾ (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

3. NQF objectives

Developed within the context of reforms aiming to raise the qualification levels of the whole population, the QNQ is seen as ‘both a central anchoring device and a mechanism that drives forward the process of reform’ (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação, 2011). It responds to the need to integrate and coordinate qualifications from the various education and training subsystems (general education, VET, higher education and those awarded through the validation of non-formal learning) into a single classification and the need to promote lifelong learning and improve their labour market relevance.

The framework’s specific objectives include:

- (a) strengthening the integration between general education and VET (programmes leading to double certification) through permeability mechanisms and coordination;
- (b) developing and promoting RVCC mechanisms, and supporting flexible training pathways and participation in lifelong learning;
- (c) organising education and training pathways into short modular units that can be certified independently, aiming to increase adult learners’ participation and education attainment;
- (d) developing monitoring, coordination and quality control mechanisms for education and training (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

⁽¹¹⁾ [Ordinance No. 293/2022](#), [Dispatch No. 691/2022](#), [Ordinance No. 21/2023](#), [Ordinance No 44/2023](#) and [Dispatch No. 2972/2024](#).

⁽¹²⁾ [Decree-Law No 396/2007](#), amended by [Decree-Law No 14/2017](#). The 2017 updates refer to the introduction of the national credit system for VET, new developments relating to the *Qualifica* programme (the *Qualifica* passport and the new *Qualifica* centres) and the processes for updating standards in the national qualifications catalogue.

⁽¹³⁾ [Ordinance No 2194/2021](#), [Ordinance No 39/2022](#), [Ordinance No 61/2022](#), [Ordinance No 66/2022](#), [Ordinance No 70/2022](#), [Ordinance No. 86/2022](#) and [Ordinance No 206/2022](#).

4. Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills (cognitive or practical) and attitudes. The term ‘competence’ is used as an overarching concept within the national qualifications system, defined as the ‘recognised capacity to mobilise knowledge, skills and attitudes in contexts of work, professional development, education and personal development’ (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação, 2011). The attitudes descriptor is defined as ‘the ability to carry out tasks and solve problems of lesser or greater degrees of complexity and involving various levels of autonomy and responsibility’; it is divided into the subdomains of responsibility and autonomy ([Ordinance No 782/2009](#)).

The upper secondary general education school leaving certificate, giving access to higher education, has been assigned to QNQ/EQF level 3, to distinguish it from QNQ/EQF level 4 secondary education qualifications obtained through programmes leading to double certification or through secondary education programmes including a professional internship of at least 6 months (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

4.2. NQF scope and coverage

The QNQ is a comprehensive framework with eight levels, including all qualifications from the various education and training subsystems, regardless of means of access: basic, upper secondary and higher education; vocational training; and RVCC⁽¹⁴⁾. Private/non-regulated qualifications (*formação profissional não integrada no CNQ*) have not yet been included (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

In recent years, the framework was expanded with the introduction of QNQ level 5 qualifications (Section 2.1). There are currently four modalities leading to diplomas at this level: technological specialisation courses (CET) that lead to the post-secondary non-tertiary diploma⁽¹⁵⁾, new apprenticeship+ programmes⁽¹⁶⁾, RVCC processes, and certified modular training courses in adult pathways (*Formações Modulares Certificadas*, [FMC](#)). Specialised advanced technical courses (CTeSP)⁽¹⁷⁾ are considered to be short-cycle higher education. They are designed using the learning-outcomes approach, but no level has yet been assigned.

The QNQ is open to micro-credentials, but currently does not include them. Within the national qualification system (SNQ) (section 2.1) the competence units (UCs), the short-term training units (UFCD) of double certification qualifications (Section 4.3), as well as the short and medium duration pathways for adults (*percursos de curta e média duração*, [PCMD](#)) in the CNQ can be considered micro-credentials, however no QNQ level is assigned to them (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

⁽¹⁴⁾ Reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências, RVCC (recognition, validation and certification of competences obtained through formal, non-formal or informal learning).

⁽¹⁵⁾ CET graduates have access to higher education through a special competition. More information can be found on the [Cedefop website](#).

⁽¹⁶⁾ Aprendizagem+, the apprenticeship+ qualification does not appear in Table 1 because the relevant legal arrangements have not yet been finalised. *Source*: Internal communication with ANQEP.

⁽¹⁷⁾ These courses aim to promote links between higher education and the business sector; they have a strong technical and vocational component, including on-the-job training.

Table 1. Portuguese national qualifications framework (QNQ)

NQF level	Qualification type	EQF level
8	Doctoral degree (<i>Doutoramento</i>)	8
7	Master's degree (<i>Mestrado</i>)	7
6	Bachelor's degree (<i>Licenciatura</i>)	6
5	Diploma in technological specialisation – post-secondary non tertiary education (<i>Diploma de Especialização Tecnológica – Qualificação de nível pós secundário não superior</i>)	5
4	Upper secondary education and professional certification (<i>Ensino secundário obtido por percursos de dupla certificação</i>) Upper secondary education and professional internship – minimum 6 months (<i>Ensino secundário vocacionado para prosseguimento de estudos de nível superior acrescido de estágio profissional – mínimo de seis meses</i>)	4
3	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate (<i>Ensino secundário vocacionado para prosseguimento de estudos de nível superior</i>)	3
2	Third cycle of basic education (<i>3º ciclo do ensino básico obtido no ensino geral</i>) Third cycle of basic education and professional certification (<i>3º ciclo do ensino básico obtido por percursos de dupla certificação</i>)	2
1	Second cycle of basic education (<i>2º ciclo do ensino básico</i>)	1

NB: Adult learning and validation of prior learning can lead to qualifications levelled to the QNQ. Certified modular training and RVCC can lead to qualifications at levels 1 to 5, while adult education and training courses (EFA) lead to qualifications at levels 1 to 4.

Source: Agência Nacional para a Qualificação (2011); European Commission & Cedefop (2024).

4.3. Use of learning outcomes

The QNQ has been a driving force in incorporating the learning-outcomes approach into education and training. Fine-tuning qualifications' learning outcomes with the QNQ level descriptors is a challenging task and is a work in progress; it includes upgrading general education qualifications and VET qualifications at QNQ levels 2, 4 and 5.

In 2017, the '[Students' profile](#)' at the end of compulsory education was introduced, promoting transversal and interdisciplinary competences that are interrelated and mobilise a solid set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. The profile concerns general and VET programmes, apart from apprenticeship programmes (Cedefop & DG Employment and

Industrial Relations, 2023) ⁽¹⁸⁾. [Decree-Law No 55/2018](#) has fostered school autonomy and curriculum flexibility. It introduced a new paradigm for student-centred learning consistent with the learning-outcomes approach in qualification design, promoting inclusive education and linking VET with general education. This approach is increasingly taken in compulsory general education and VET (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025) ⁽¹⁹⁾.

In basic and secondary general education, the curriculum outcome targets are focuses on the knowledge and essential skills students need to master in the different school years and cycles. The ‘essential learning’ of each school subject, the reference for delivering new curricula, are in line with the students’ profile at the end of compulsory education and expressed in terms of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and attitudes), allowing for learner-centred and inclusive teaching and learning practices (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

The VET sector has seen the most progress, with reforms aimed at developing qualifications standards and curriculum development. According to the [methodological guide](#) for the design and revision of qualifications, updated in 2021, double certification qualifications are organised into units of competence (UC) ⁽²⁰⁾ that are described in learning outcomes and correspond to credit points ⁽²¹⁾. Since 2022, Anqep has been running diagnostic studies at sectoral level to identify skill needs and (re)design qualifications in line with the new methodology. Moreover, since 2024, new VET qualifications in the CNQ consist of a competence standard (that include the main professional activities) and the assessment instruments to run the professional RVCC process (see Section 6.1) ⁽²²⁾. A comprehensive update of the CNQ with an emphasis on the learning outcomes approach is ongoing (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). Since 2020, the ‘essential learning’ for professional and for specialised artistic teaching courses have also been developed and approved. They are described in terms of learning outcomes, by year/cycle and module.

Higher education institutions are responsible for implementing learning outcomes within their study programmes, so the process differs from one institution to another. The assessment and accreditation agency A3ES for the higher education sector (Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior, A3ES) publishes a series of guides for the assessment and accreditation of study programmes in operation. In these guides, the learning objectives of the curricular units are expressed in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences ⁽²³⁾.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Compulsory education lasts 12 school years, comprising basic and secondary education. Secondary education corresponds to what is referred to internationally as upper secondary education.

⁽¹⁹⁾ More information can be found on the [Cedefop website](#).

⁽²⁰⁾ there are mandatory or optional UCs; transversal UCs within an area of education and training may cover up to 10% of optional UCs (ANQEP, 2021).

⁽²¹⁾ The guide defines, at each QNQ level, the overall UC workload expressed in hours, the workload of the technological/professional component, defined in short-term training units (*unidades de formacao de curta duracao*, UFCD), and the corresponding credit points per UFCD/UC (ANQEP, 2021).

⁽²²⁾ Prior to 2024, the standards of VET qualifications integrated in the CNQ at levels 2, 4 and 5 consisted of a professional profile (knowledge and skills required to perform a set of work tasks), a training standard (basic/general and technological/professional competences needed to acquire double certification) and an RVCC standard for recognition of prior learning (Cedefop & DG Employment and Industrial Relations, 2023; ANQEP, 2021)

⁽²³⁾ [2023 and 2024 guidelines for the assessment of Study programmes in operation 2023-2028](#) (in Portuguese).

4.4. Quality assurance arrangements

Quality assurance arrangements for QNQ qualifications have been put in place. The authorities responsible are ANQEP, the General Directorate for Higher Education, the General Directorate for Education, the General Directorate for Employment and Labour Relations and the Agency for the Accreditation and Assessment of Higher Education (A3ES). The involvement of sector qualification councils in the redesign/revision of qualifications supports quality assurance (Cedefop, 2020).

5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The QNQ is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security ⁽²⁴⁾.

QNQ coordination is shared between the National Agency for Qualifications and VET (ANQEP) and the General Directorate for Higher Education for qualifications at levels 5 to 8. The General Directorate for Education is consulted on general education qualifications. ANQEP has been nominated as the EQF national coordination point (NCP), the leading structure for QNQ implementation. Its responsibilities include referencing the QNQ to the EQF, providing access to information and guidance on how national qualifications are levelled to the QNQ and encouraging the participation of all relevant stakeholders (higher education and VET representatives, social partners and sectoral representatives). There are no human resources dedicated exclusively to the EQF NCP; the staff working on the QNQ are also involved in other ANQEP technical departments and services. This arrangement allows for flexibility and the development of synergies (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

ANQEP, operating under the labour and education ministries, coordinates the national qualifications system ⁽²⁵⁾ and is responsible for the implementation of education and training policies and the RVCC system.

ANQEP is supported by 18 sectoral councils for qualification (CSQ) ⁽²⁶⁾, which are involved in defining qualifications and competences, including new qualifications in the qualifications catalogue, and updating existing ones (Section 7.2).

⁽²⁴⁾ Source: Internal communication with ANQEP.

⁽²⁵⁾ The national qualifications system includes the following bodies, under the terms of the specific legislation applicable to them: the Directorate-General for Education, the Directorate-General for Employment and Labor Relations, the Institute of Employment and Professional Training, structures relating to financing education training policies, the sectoral qualification councils, the network of adult education centres, basic and secondary education providers, the poles of excellence and other entities with structures for certified training.

⁽²⁶⁾ *Conselhos Sectoriais para a Qualificação* (CSQ) have been set up in 18 sectors ([Dispatch 6345/2020](#)). The councils are composed of social partners, training providers, bodies responsible for regulating professions, public structures that oversee business sectors, technology and innovation centres, professional associations, companies, competitiveness clusters and independent experts. They can also include representatives of the Directorate-General for Higher Education, and higher education establishments.

6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

6.1. Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The comprehensive national system for recognition, validation and certification of competences (*Reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências*, RVCC) was introduced in 2001 to increase education and training attainment and employability. The RVCC system has been incorporated into the national qualifications system and framework (Guimarães, 2019). The RVCC process can lead to the acquisition of QNQ qualifications at levels 1 to 5 and/or give credits towards the acquisition of VET qualifications at levels 2, 4 and 5; ⁽²⁷⁾ (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). RVCC certificates can be registered in the Qualifica passport. Qualifications acquired through an RVCC process have the same value as those awarded in formal education and training.

RVCC has the following two main pathways (regulated by [Ordinance No 61/2022](#)):

- (a) the education RVCC process, leading to a school leaving certificate (levels 1, 2 and 3 of the QNQ/EQF), which is based on the key competences standards used in formal education and training for adult pathways;
- (b) the professional RVCC process, leading to double certification (school and professional certification at levels 2, 4 and 5 of the QNQ/EQF). Professional RVCC uses a competence and a training standard based on those used in the formal VET system, and are part of the CNQ.

Ordinance 61/2022 also regulates the RVCC process within the scope of the [Qualifica Programme](#), a strategic national upskilling initiative targeting primarily low skilled and/or unemployed adults. The programme is implemented through a network of local specialised centres that provide RVCC, combined with mandatory certified training with the final aim to acquire a QNQ qualification (levels 1 to 5). The RVCC candidate may certify one or more of the competence units that compose the qualifications of the CNQ; in case of partial certification, it is possible to follow a number of training modules to complete the remaining competence units (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2025; Menitra, 2024). By end 2024, there were 176 qualifications with professional RVCC (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

In higher education (levels 6 to 8 of the QNQ/EQF), validation is generally linked to the credit system and the module-based structure of courses and degrees. Students can obtain European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credits through validation that can be used to grant exemptions from part of a degree course. These credits are valid only in the programme of studies in which a student is enrolled. There is a limit to validation processes of up to one third of the total number of ECTS credits relevant for a particular course (Guimarães, 2019) ⁽²⁸⁾.

6.2. Credit systems

The use of learning outcomes in qualification design also enabled the creation of the national credit system for VET ([Ordinance No 47/2017](#)), aligned with some of the ECVET principles

⁽²⁷⁾ Ordinance No 61/2022 established the possibility to acquire QNQ level 5 qualifications through RVCC.

⁽²⁸⁾ [More information](#) (in Portuguese).

and aimed at increasing the permeability between VET pathways and higher education. This enables the allocation of credit points to QNQ qualifications at levels 2, 4, and 5, and to certified training included in the integrated information system for the management of education and training provision (SIGO), compliant with the quality criteria in place ⁽²⁹⁾ (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7. NQF implementation and impact

7.1. Stage of implementation

The QNQ has reached the operational stage. The framework provides a map of all nationally recognised qualifications; a platform for cooperation by stakeholders across education, training and employment; and a reference point for the development and review of standards and curricula and for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Important work has been done to indicate QNQ/EQF levels on qualifications and promote learning outcomes. No comprehensive qualifications database has yet been developed (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

7.2. Referencing qualifications in the QNQ

The National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP) has the overall responsibility for the inclusion and revision of VET qualifications at levels 2, 4, and 5 in the CNQ catalogue ⁽³⁰⁾; the levelling of qualifications is free of charge. VET providers may consult the methodological guide (Section 4.3) to develop and submit proposals to ANQEP through the members of the sectoral councils for qualification (CSQ) ⁽³¹⁾. The agency, in collaboration with the CSQ, analyses the submitted standards and decides on the need for a new or the update of an existing VET qualification. ANQEP drafts, or updates, the qualification standards and, after considering the opinion of the respective CSQ sent the records for publication in the *Official Bulletin For Labour And Employment* and includes it in the catalogue (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Inclusion in the QNQ of qualifications developed through the general education path, at basic (level 1 and 2) and secondary (level 3) levels, is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation. Proposals to develop new or update a general education qualification and associated curricula are prepared by the Ministry's General Directorate for

⁽²⁹⁾ The national credit system for VET is based on three complementary dimensions: (a) the attribution of credit points to formally certified units of qualifications in the national qualifications catalogue; (b) the accumulation of credit points; and (c) the transfer of credit points.

⁽³⁰⁾ Third cycle of basic education and professional certification (QNQ/EQF level 2); Upper secondary education and professional certification (QNQ/EQF level 4); Upper secondary education and professional internship – minimum 6 months (QNQ/EQF level 4); Diploma in technological specialisation – post-secondary non tertiary education QNQ/EQF level 5.

⁽³¹⁾ Since 2022, the submission of proposals to ANQEP is carried out predominantly by CSQ members.

Education (DGE), which submits them to the ministry for approval (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação, 2011).

Higher education qualifications at levels 6, 7, and 8 are under the responsibility of higher education institutions which may create, amend, or discontinue study programmes leading to academic degrees and higher education diplomas under their responsibility. Each study programme must be registered by the General Directorate for Higher Education (DGES), which is the sufficient condition for the recognition and the general validity of the qualification concerned (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7.3. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

Since 2021, there have been significant legal developments (Section 2.2), with the introduction of an obligation for QNQ/EQF levels to be mentioned on the diplomas and certificates of qualifications in basic and secondary education (QNQ/EQF levels 1 to 5), apprenticeships (at QNQ levels 4 and 5), CETs (QNQ level 5) and adult education and training courses (EFA), and on those of qualifications awarded through an RVCC process ⁽³²⁾. QNQ/EQF levels are indicated on some higher education qualifications. It is mandatory for QNQ/EQF levels to be indicated on certificate and diploma supplements, such as Europass supplements, QNQ/EQF levels are indicated in certificate supplements of all upper secondary double certifications (level 4). In databases, QNQ/EQF levels are indicated on all VET and some general education qualifications, while they are not indicated on higher education qualifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7.4. NQF dissemination

The EQF NCP has developed a [methodological guide](#) ⁽³³⁾ to assist stakeholders and education and training providers in using the QNQ. It offers guidance on allocating qualifications to the adequate QNQ/EQF and is used as a handbook for the update of all qualifications listed in the CNQ, in line with the learning outcomes approach, new competency standards and RVCC instruments. The EQF NCP also disseminates leaflets and flyers aiming to reach a wider audience, including employers. Cooperation between the EQF NCP, the National Europass Centre, and the Euroguidance Centre has been increased. The website of the national qualifications catalogue has been updated and includes information on the QNQ/EQF ⁽³⁴⁾.

7.5. Qualifications databases and registers

No comprehensive database that includes all QNQ qualifications has yet been set up.

The national qualifications catalogue (*Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações*, [CNQ](#)) ⁽³⁵⁾ has been developed as a strategic management tool for VET provision and adult learning with strong links to the QNQ, targeting education and training providers, learners and parents (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). In 2024, CNQ includes 392 QNQ-levelled VET

⁽³²⁾ Prior to this, QNQ levels were indicated mainly on VET qualifications.

⁽³³⁾ *Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações - Metodologia de atualização e de desenho de Qualificações*

⁽³⁴⁾ Source: Internal communication with ANQEP.

⁽³⁵⁾ The structure and organisation of the CNQ and its model for skills-based qualifications were established by Order No 781/2009.

qualifications ⁽³⁶⁾ 3 858 competence units (UN) and 8 668 short-term training units (UFCD); it also includes international qualifications, which are partial qualifications ⁽³⁷⁾. It offers information in Portuguese on the title, field of study, QNQ/EQF level, learning outcomes, credit points, and ways to acquire each qualification. The catalogue is continually updated by ANQEP; the active involvement of sectoral councils ensures that the catalogue is quality assured updated content-wise (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The CNQ is connected to the Integrated system of information and management of the education and training programmes (*Sistema Integrado de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Educativa e Formativa – SIGO*), which is the basis for a [portal displaying learning opportunities](#). Users of the portal searching for a learning opportunity related to a CNQ qualification are redirected to the catalogue. All certificates and diplomas awarded at QNQ levels 1 to 5 are registered by the relevant bodies in SIGO. Consequently, individuals' competences and qualifications are displayed in a *Qualifica* passport, which is each user's interface in SIGO. The Qualifica Passport is a digital tool for recording qualifications and skills acquired or developed throughout an adult's life and a tool for guidance on learning paths. By capitalizing on the learning outcomes already achieved and the skills acquired by the adult, the tool simulates several possible qualification paths (usually the six most relevant to the user profile) for obtaining new qualifications and/or educational and professional progression. SIGO is also used by the employment services for job searches, by the education ministry to plan upper secondary level 4 vocational programmes and national education and employment statistical services. SIGO and the CNQ are connected to the Europass platform ⁽³⁸⁾. The CNQ has started migrating the datasets using the European learning model (ELMv3) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

A [database of higher education qualifications](#) is provided by the Directorate-General for Higher Education, disseminating up-to-date information in English and Portuguese on higher education institutions and recognised programmes. The database targets higher education institutions, learners and other stakeholders, and contains a total of 6522 qualifications, at QNQ levels 6 to 8 (bachelors, masters, integrated master degrees and PhDs) along with short-cycle specialised advanced technical CTeSP courses, that have not yet been assigned to a level (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7.6. Awareness and use of the NQF

The QNQ levels are widely used in policy documents, for instance in describing qualifications and levels ⁽³⁹⁾. Though participation in the annual Euroguidance network event, guidance practitioners, psychologists and VET tutors are increasingly informed on the framework levels. NQF levels and terminology are also used in labour market and transversal policy

⁽³⁶⁾ In 2024, the CNQ includes 392 VET qualifications (110 qualifications at level 2, 231 at level 4 and 51 qualifications at level 5) covering 47 education and training areas;

⁽³⁷⁾ Although international qualifications are included in the CNQ, they are not included and thus levelled to the QNQ, since partial qualifications are not levelled to the framework.

⁽³⁸⁾ Portugal was among the first countries to connect the learning outcomes database to Europass in 2019. Both, the qualifications dataset and the learning opportunities dataset are connected and updated every year in December.

⁽³⁹⁾ '[Recuperar Portugal, Construindo o futuro](#)' (the Portuguese recovery and resilience plan).

documents – for example, internship grants, paid by the public employment service, differ depending on the beneficiary’s QNQ qualification level. Trade Union representatives are becoming familiar with the QNQ through participation in the General Board of ANQEP and the work of CSQ; NQF levels are also increasingly used in collective bargaining and industrial relations. ANQEP disseminates information on qualifications levels to VET and HE institutions through email and phone contacts, and through its work with guidance practitioners and VET tutors. QNQ levels are increasingly used by education and training providers when advertising courses (on their websites and on certificates), by young students when completing their [Europass mobility](#) record, as well as by public employment services and (tentatively) employers when advertising job offers. This has contributed to raising awareness of the QNQ among learners, workers, and jobseekers. Non-higher education and training providers are aware of the QNQ, as they must use the CNQ and [SIGO](#). The learning outcomes approach is systematically used in general education ‘essential learning’ descriptions, and HE CTeSP courses. NQF/EQF levels are methodically used by ANQEP in VET qualifications; to a less extent in qualifications at levels 6 to 8 (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7.7. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

Although the need for an evaluation study has been discussed since 2019, it has not yet been launched. In the same period, ANQEP has invested in modernising the CNQ; for this reason, it was decided that the evaluation should also monitor the impact of the CNQ modernisation (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

7.8. Impact of the NQF

The QNQ is considered to have improved the legibility, transparency and comparability of qualifications ⁽⁴⁰⁾ at the national and international levels and to contribute to and drive innovation and reforms at national level, along with public confidence in the quality of qualifications offered and achieved. The framework continues to be the gatekeeper of qualifications assured quality. The main functions of the QNQ are to improve the transparency and comparability of qualifications at the national and international levels, and to contribute to and drive innovation and reforms at national level. The incorporation of the RVCC system into the QNQ has significantly aided the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and helped raising parity of esteem between competences developed in different subsystems. This, in turn, promotes lifelong learning and contributes to a better functioning of the labour market in terms of supporting employability. The QNQ has been crucial in incorporating the learning-outcomes approach into education and training, including short-cycle HE qualifications, and particularly VET. Through its connection with the national credit system for VET, it has also supported the fostering of permeability among VET pathways and higher education, along with mobility within Europe (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The QNQ has been a key factor in facilitating the organisation and recognition of learning achieved during mobility. Recognition of foreign qualifications is granted by reference to NQF

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Comparability is ensured through the [CNQ](#) catalogue at national level and more broadly, through the LOQ portal, now incorporated into the [Europass tool](#) for comparing qualification frameworks and levels across countries.

level 2, 3, 4 and 5 qualifications; the QNQ/EQF level descriptors are used when analysing the recognition of VET qualifications acquired abroad. In the future, it will be possible to grant automatic recognition of a foreigner qualification, if the qualification in question is integrated in the CNQ. The QNQ promotes dialogue between stakeholders in education and training and in the labour market via the sectoral councils for qualification (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

ANQEP launched an international study for the update of the QNQ in all economic sectors and in key education and training areas for social and economic development, and revised in 2021, [the methodology](#) for setting up competency standards and respective RVCC instruments, focusing more on skills and learning outcomes, and less on training content (Section 4.3). A profound restructuring of the CNQ in line with the new methodology principles, is ongoing and the CNQ catalogue is under restructuring to accommodate all necessary changes.

8. Referencing to the EQF

In 2011, the QNQ was referenced to the EQF, while higher education qualification levels were self-certified against the qualifications framework in the European higher education area. The process started in 2009, and two separate reports were developed: the first addressed qualifications at levels 1 to 5 of the QNQ (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação, 2011); the second addressed those at levels 5 to 8 (Portuguese Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2011). There are no plans to update the referencing report.

9. Reflections and plans

One main enabling factor for the QNQ's development and implementation is the coherent policy approach adopted by Portugal. The launching of the framework was part of a major reform of education and training that has built up the national qualifications system. This institutional model has ensured better coordination and a more active participation of stakeholders. The development of the CNQ and the reform and incorporation into it of the RVCC system were major steps in this process, along with communication and dissemination activities that contributed to the NQF implementation (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Raising awareness of learning outcomes and QNQ/EQF levels among different stakeholders (particularly employers) remains a challenge, as does aligning qualifications and curricula with QNQ/EQF descriptors, especially in higher and general education. Work is needed to establish a model for comparing and recognising foreign qualifications not included in the CNQ, and to increase the offer of training for teachers and trainers as part of the implementation of the learning outcomes approach. (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The country is planning to:

- (a) further disseminate QNQ to and raise awareness among different stakeholders and broaden the implementation of the learning outcomes approach in the general education system, in compulsory schooling;
- (b) continue the reflections and discussions on QNQ qualifications at level 5 and define the level of short-cycle specialisation courses (CTeSP);
- (c) continue the restructuring of the national qualifications catalogue, expected to be completed in 2025/26. This involves also the update of the SIGO system (section 7.5), to provide large-scale training to teachers and trainers and a communication campaign.
- (d) launch a QNQ impact assessment study.

Acronyms

ANQEP	Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional (National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training)
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
CNQ	Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações (national qualifications catalogue)
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NCP	National Coordination Point
QNQ	Quadro Nacional de Qualificações (Portuguese qualifications framework)
RVCC	<i>Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências</i> (recognition, validation and certification of competences obtained through formal, non-formal or informal learning)
SIGO	Sistema Integrado de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Educativa e Formativa (integrated information system for the management of education and training provision)
VET	Vocational Education and Training

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