PORTUGAL
European inventory on NQF 2018

Introduction and context

Over recent years, the performance of the Portuguese education and training system has improved, as shown by a number of key indicators. The rate of early school leaving has decreased significantly from 28.3% in 2010 to 12.6% in 2017. Tertiary education attainment has followed a similar positive trend, up to 33.5% in 2017 (but below the EU average of 39.9%). The 2015 results of the Programme for international student assessment (PISA) indicate improvements in students' basic skills in reading, mathematics and science. The government seeks to encourage school autonomy, to promote new quality assurance systems at school level, and student participation in policy making and school governance. The employment rate of recent graduates has increased to 80.7% in 2017, now above the EU average of 80.2%. Recent measures in higher education are aimed at increasing efficiency, attractiveness and completion rate. Cooperation between higher education and the business sector is not sufficiently incentivised. Government efforts are also focused on increasing transparency and attractiveness of the vocational education and training (VET) system and a national credit system in line with the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) has been developed ([1]). Adult participation in adult education and training is just below the EU average, at 9.8% in 2017, and is supported through implementation of the national skills strategy (European Commission, 2018).

In the context of a need for curricular reorganisation, recent legislative developments include the endorsement of the Legislative Order on the students' profile by the end of compulsory schooling ([2]); a common matrix for all schools and education providers in compulsory education for planning, implementation and evaluation of teaching and learning; and Decree-Law No 55 of 6 July 2018 establishing the curriculum of basic and secondary education, the guiding principles of its conception, and operationalisation and evaluation of learning, to ensure that all students achieve the competences foreseen in the *Students'*

([1]) Order No 47/2017 regulates the National credit system of vocational education and training and defines the model for an instrument of orientation and individual registration of qualifications and competences, the *Qualifica* passport.

([2]) Legislative Order No 6478 of 26 July 2017.

profile by the end of compulsory schooling. Legislative orders ([3]) approving the *Essential learning of basic education* (1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles) and the *Essential learning of secondary education* were also adopted in 2018 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Major reforms in the country, starting in 2007 with the *Agenda for the reform of vocational training* ([4]), led to the development of a national qualifications system whose main aim was to promote widespread attainment of secondary education as a minimum level of qualification. Development of the national qualifications system has been underpinned by several elements aiming to help achieve its objectives: a new institutional model, now consisting of the National Agency for Qualifications and VET (ANQEP) and the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of higher education (A3ES); a network of adult learning centres ([5]); the national qualifications catalogue (a strategic management instrument for non-higher national qualifications and a central reference tool for VET provision) ([6]); and the national qualifications framework (NQF) (ANQ, 2011). The national system for recognising non-formal and informal learning was integrated into the NQF and reformed in 2012 to address better the validation, training and guidance of young people and adults.

The comprehensive national qualifications framework (*Quadro nacional de qualificações*, QNQ) is a single reference for classifying all qualifications awarded in the Portuguese education and training system, and acquired in formal, non-formal and informal learning. Introduced by Decree-Law No 396/2007 ([7]), which established the national qualifications system and the structures ensuring its

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([3]) Legislative Order No 6944-A of 19 July 2018 and, respectively, Legislative Order No 8476-A of 31 August 2018.

([4]) Resolution of the Council of Ministers no. 173/2007 approved the reform of vocational training and the draft decree-law establishing the national qualifications system and creating the national qualifications framework, the national qualifications catalogue (CNQ) and the *Individual skills handbook*.

([5]) Initially developed as new opportunities centres, replaced in 2013 by the centres for qualification and vocational education (CQEP), and since 2016 replaced by the *Qualifica* centres. More information on the *Qualifica* programme, an integrated strategy to support the training and qualification of low qualified adults, unemployed people and NEETs, is available at: https://www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/

([6]) The structure and organisation of the national qualifications catalogue (CNQ) and its model for skills-based qualifications were established by Order No 781 of 23 July 2009.

([7]) Decree-Law No 396/2007 on the national qualification system is available in Portuguese at: https://dre.pt/application/dir/pdf1s/2007/12/25100/0916509173.pdf and was amended by Decree-Law No 14 of 26 January 2017, available at: https://dre.pt/home/-/dre/105808927/details/maximized

operation, the framework was published in 2009 by ministerial order ([8]) and came into force in October 2010. It includes eight levels, with level descriptors defined in terms of learning outcomes in three categories: knowledge, skills (cognitive or practical) and attitudes. Higher education qualifications were included in the more detailed framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ-Portugal), which is part of the comprehensive framework. The NQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certified against the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2011.

Policy objectives

The NQF is seen as 'both a central anchoring device and a mechanism that drives forward the process of reform' (ANQ, 2011). Development of the national qualifications system and of the NQF forms part of a broader education and training reform programme initiated in 2007 ([9]), the *New opportunities* initiative and the *Agenda for the reform of vocational training*. These reforms aimed to raise low qualification levels of the whole population.

The development of the NQF was seen as a response to the need to integrate and coordinate qualifications from the different education and training subsystems (general education, vocational training and higher education) into a single classification framework. It also aims to improve the quality, relevance, transparency and comparability of Portuguese qualifications, along with their understanding abroad, by linking them to the EQF, to promote access to lifelong learning, and recognition of knowledge and skills (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The NQF is also seen as a crucial element in creating the conditions for a focus on learning outcomes.

Specific objectives to which the development of the national qualifications system and framework are expected to contribute include (ANQ, 2011):

(a) integration between general and vocational education and training offers, based on the principle of double certification, expected to lead to both secondary education attainment and increased employability;

(b) developing mechanisms for the certification and recognition of informal and non-formal learning, allowing flexible training pathways aimed at increasing participation in lifelong learning; the mechanism for the recognition,

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([8]) Ministerial Order No 782/2009 on the NQF.
http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/boDocumentos/getDocumentos/163

([9]) Decree-Law No 396/2007.

validation and certification of competences (RVCC) was strengthened and more people have benefitted from the process;

(c) organising education and training pathways into short modular units that can be certified independently, aimed at increasing adult learner participation and qualification levels;

(d) developing an oversight framework and quality control mechanisms, aimed at integrating education and training subsystems; this took the form of the National Agency for Qualifications (now the National Agency for Qualifications and VET (ANQEP)) ([10]), which coordinates the implementation of education and vocational training policies for both young people and adults, and manages the system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences;

(e) promoting the relevance, certification and recognition of the education and training offer in line with the needs of the labour market; the national qualifications catalogue and the sector qualification councils are among the solutions linked to this objective;

(f) strengthening integration between academic and double certification pathways through permeability mechanisms and coordination.

In parallel to the NQF, a framework for higher education was established and used as a tool to support reforms and development. The main aims were to set up clear learning standards and identify progression routes through levels of learning (MCTES, 2011).

Levels and use of learning outcomes

The NQF is a comprehensive framework, including all qualifications from the different education and training subsystems, regardless of means of access: basic, secondary and higher education, vocational training and the processes of recognition, validation and certification of competences obtained through formal, non-formal or informal learning. An eight-level structure was adopted, following the principles and categories of the EQF.

Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills (cognitive or practical) and attitudes. As the term 'competence' was already used as an overarching concept within the national qualifications system (defined as 'recognised capacity to mobilise knowledge, skills and attitudes in contexts of

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([10]) Under the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security and the Ministry of Education.

work, professional development, education and personal development'), the choice was made to use 'attitudes' for the third category of descriptors in the NQF. This 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', and is divided into the subdomains responsibility and autonomy ([11]).

While currently there are no types of qualification that raise specific challenges in terms of levelling to the NQF, one of the areas for attention is level 5. A non-higher level qualification has already been placed at NQF level 5, the diploma in technological specialisation ([12]), and there is a modality of short-cycle higher education, specialised advanced technical courses (CTeSP) ([13]), designed using the learning outcomes approach but, as yet, with no assigned level. In addition, the upper secondary general education school leaving certificate giving access to higher education has been assigned to NQF/EQF level 3, to distinguish it from secondary education qualifications obtained through double certificated pathways or secondary education qualifications plus a professional internship of at least six months aimed at further study, assigned to level 4. The fact that similar qualifications in other countries have been referenced to EQF level 4 may reopen discussions on the characteristics of levels 3 and 4 in Portugal.

The learning outcomes approach plays an important role in reforming Portuguese education and training and was an underlying principle in the development of the national qualifications catalogue ([14]). It is seen as a more adequate response to competence needs in the labour market and of critical importance to recognition of qualifications and understanding their value. The NQF has been a driving force behind incorporation of the learning outcomes approach into the education and training system.

However, although learning outcomes are formally present in the NQF, there is a diversity of approaches and concepts and the level of implementation varies across subsystems (Cedefop, 2016). Fine-tuning learning outcomes in qualifications design with the NQF level descriptors is a challenging task and is

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([11]) Ministerial Order No 782/2009.

([12]) Obtained through technological specialisation courses (CET).

([13]) TeSP are short-cycle higher technical courses launched during the 2014/15 academic year. Aiming to promote links between higher education and the business sector, they have a strong technical and vocational component, including on-the-job training.

([14]) The national qualifications catalogue is available at:
http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes

work in progress: it includes upgrading both the national qualifications catalogue and general education qualifications.

VET has been the sector driving the introduction of learning outcomes in Portugal, with reforms aimed at developing qualifications standards and curriculum development. Qualifications obtained in VET are included in the national qualifications catalogue at levels 2, 4 and 5, and are organised in units. Each qualification at levels 2 and 4 includes a training standard (that awards a double certification) and a recognition, validation and certification of competences standard. Level 5 qualifications (diploma in technological specialisation) include a training standard. A new methodological guidebook for the design of qualifications based on learning outcomes ([15]) has been developed to be used for design of new qualifications and revision of existing ones. It applies to VET qualifications at levels 2, 4 and 5 of the NQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). Adjusting qualifications standards to the level descriptors is work in progress, with about 50% of qualifications having been updated.

The design of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes also enabled the creation of the National credit system for vocational education and training, aligned with ECVET principles and aimed at increasing permeability between VET pathways and higher education. This enables the allocation of credit points to level 2, 4 and 5 NQF qualifications included in the national qualifications catalogue, and to certified training included in the integrated information system for the management of education and training provision *(Sistema integrado de informação e gestão da oferta educativa e formativa*, SIGO), compliant with the quality criteria in place ([16]) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

In general education, revision of the curriculum structure for basic and secondary education over recent years led to the definition of new programmes and curriculum outcome targets (*metas curriculares*) for several subjects, introduced gradually starting with 2013/14. The curriculum outcome targets are focused on knowledge and essential skills students need to master in different

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([15]) ANQEP; DGCNQ (2015). *New methodological guidebook: design of qualifications based on learning outcomes.*
http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/boDocumentos/getDocumentos/561

([16]) The development of the national credit system for VET is based on three complementary dimensions: (a) the attribution of credit points to formally certified learning organised in units of qualifications in the national qualifications catalogue; (b) the accumulation of credit points related to that learning; and (c) the transfer of credit points obtained through training courses.

school years and cycles. More recently, the 'essential learning' ([17]) of each school subject, the reference for delivering new curricula in general education, is expressed in terms of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and attitudes) allowing for learner-centred and inclusive teaching and learning practices. The 'essential learning' is based on the goals delineated in the *Students' profile by the end of compulsory schooling*, a guiding document that describes the principles, vision, values and competences that students should have on completion of compulsory schooling. A pilot project for autonomy and curricular flexibility, voluntarily undertaken by 235 Portuguese schools in the 2017/18 school year, represents a new paradigm for student-centred learning consistent with the learning outcomes approach in qualification design, and suggests that the approach is increasingly taken up in compulsory general education.

Higher education institutions are responsible for implementing the framework and learning outcomes within their study programmes, so the process differs from one institution to another. According to a Cedefop study (Cedefop, 2016), the accreditation agency A3ES for the higher education sector does not emphasise the importance of learning outcomes in the accreditation process.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

A new institutional model was developed in Portugal to support setting up the national qualifications system and framework. Initial work on the NQF was carried out by the former Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, with support from the Ministry of Education. In 2007, Decree-Law No 396/2007 was adopted, establishing the legal basis and defining the structures for implementation. An agreement was signed between the government and the social partners on key elements, tools and regulatory systems. The National Agency for Qualifications (ANQ) (now the National Agency for Qualifications and VET (ANQEP), under the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security and the Ministry of Education) was established in 2007 to coordinate implementation of education and training policies for young people and adults, and to develop the system for recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC). The National Council for Vocational Training (no longer operational) was set up as a tripartite body responsible for approving profiles and the referential system for training. At the

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([17]) Legislative Order No 6944-A/2018 approving the *Essential learning of basic education* (1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles) and the Legislative Order No 8476-A/2018 approving the *Essential learning of secondary education*.

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same time, the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) was set up with quality assurance functions in higher education.

The process of referencing the NQF to the EQF brought about increased collaboration between stakeholders from the different education and training subsystems. Work during the process was coordinated by a steering committee chaired by the then ANQ and comprising bodies involved in the regulation of qualifications and quality assurance in education and training ([18]). There was also a technical working group led by ANQ and composed of staff drawn from the bodies represented in the steering committee. Other stakeholders were involved or consulted in the process ([19]).

The NQF is currently under the responsibility of three ministries: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education. NQF coordination is now shared between ANQEP and the General Directorate for Higher Education, involved in qualifications at levels 5 to 8 ([20]). ANQEP has been nominated to host the national coordination point for the European qualifications framework (EQF NCP), the leading structure for NQF implementation. The responsibilities of the EQF NCP include:

(a) referencing the national qualification levels to the EQF and ensuring transparency in methodology used;
(b) providing access to information and guidance on how national qualifications are referenced to the EQF;
(c) encouraging participation of all interested parties (higher education and vocational training and education establishments, social partners, sectors and experts).

Depending on the issue, the EQF NCP collaborates horizontally with other relevant bodies (such as the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training and the General Directorate for Employment and Labour Relations), working

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([18]) The General Directorate for Higher Education; the former General Directorate for Curriculum Innovation and Development; the General Directorate for Employment and Labour Relations; and the Agency for the Accreditation and Assessment of Higher Education (A3ES) were also part of the steering committee.

([19]) Other stakeholders involved in the referencing process were the central coordination unit of the Employment and Vocational Training Observatory; the oversight committee for the *New opportunities* initiative and the national qualification system; other public bodies, education and training providers, practitioners and experts (ANQ, 2011).

([20]) The General Directorate for Higher Education is under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education.

flexibly and through consultation. The body consulted on the general education qualifications is the General Directorate for Education. The current governance structure does not foresee any human resources dedicated exclusively to the EQF NCP; the staff working on the NQF are also involved in other ANQEP technical departments and services and the General Directorate for Higher Education. This arrangement allows flexibility and for synergies to develop, though the disadvantage is that it may lead to less commitment from the relevant parties (Cedefop, 2015).

ANQEP is also supported by 16 sector qualifications councils involved in defining qualifications and competences, as well as in including new qualifications in the national qualifications catalogue and updating existing ones. The councils are composed of social partners, training providers from the national qualifications system, bodies responsible for regulating professions; public structures that oversee business sectors; technology and innovation centres; and companies.

The authorities currently responsible for quality assurance of qualifications 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 legal basis of the national qualifications system and framework was updated in 2017 (Decree-Law no. 14 of 26 January 2017). Amendments are related to the establishment of the national credit system for VET, the introduction of the *Qualifica* passport and the new *Qualifica* centres, and the updating of standards in the national qualifications catalogue.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways ([21])

A comprehensive national system for validation of prior learning, called the national system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences (*Reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências*, RVCC) was introduced in Portugal in 2001; it aimed to increase the levels of school education and of vocational qualification in the country. At the time, only competences

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([21]) This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

equivalent to the ninth year of schooling could be validated and the system was intended for adults aged 18 or over (Cedefop, 2018a). During 2012-13, major changes were introduced into the system, which is now seen as a process of identification of formal, non-formal and informal competences developed across the lifespan (Cedefop, 2018b). In early 2014, 450 new opportunities centres, in charge of validation and recognition of competences (for people over 18), were replaced by a new network of centres for qualification and vocational training (*Centros para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional*, CQEP). These, in turn, were replaced in 2016 by *Qualifica* centres [22] that reinforce RVCC as part of a public educational and professional offer that values learning acquired throughout life in a variety of contexts. There are currently around 300 such centres carrying out RVCC, with their activity managed by ANQEP. The new network assumes similar functions as the previous new opportunities centres, but also targets young people (age 15 or over), provides guidance, counselling and validation activities to low-skilled adults, and guides/orients young people completing nine years of basic education.

The RVCC system is incorporated in the national qualifications system and framework. It integrates two main processes:

(a) education RVCC process, aimed at obtaining a school leaving qualification (levels 1, 2 and 3 of the NQF/EQF) and allowing learners to pursue further studies in the education and training system; this is based on key competences standards, which are different from those used in the formal education and training system: one specific to basic education established in 2001 and updated in 2002 and 2004, and another specific to secondary education established in 2006;

(b) professional RVCC process, aimed at obtaining a vocational qualification (offers school and professional certification at levels 2 and 4 of the NQF/EQF); the professional competences standards used for validation are part of the national qualifications catalogue and are updated as necessary. The national qualifications catalogue includes more than 300 qualifications from 41 education and training areas [23] in accordance with the National classification of education and training areas.

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[22] Order No 232/2016.

[23] Data from October 2018:
http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes?Page=1&CurrentPerPage=999999&Designacao=&AreasFormacaoId=&CodigoArea=&Nivel=&NivelQEQ=&RVCC=false&Parciais=false

The main strength of the validation approach in Portugal is its inclusion in a national policy/strategy that covers all sectors and levels of learning. Learners can acquire basic or upper secondary level education certificates and vocational qualifications from levels 1 to 4 in the NQF that have the same value as those awarded in formal education and training.

At higher education level (levels 5 to 8 of the NQF/EQF), validation is generally linked to the credit system and module-based structure of courses and degrees. It is up to each institution to set the specific validation procedures and these must be validated by the scientific boards of universities and polytechnics. Students can obtain European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credits through validation that can be used for granting exemptions from part of a course in the first, second or third cycles of Bologna degrees. These credits are valid only in the programme of studies in which a student is enrolled in. Legislation from 2013 ([24]) sets a limit for validation processes up to one third of the total number of ECTS credits relevant for a particular course ([25]). General rules for validation apply to all higher education institutions, complemented by specific validation procedures established by each institution.

While validation of non-formal and informal learning is widely considered as an alternative route to qualifications, those obtained through RVCC are less likely to lead to an increase in salary or to finding a higher qualified job. The number of adult learners obtaining qualification through RVCC and applying for validation in higher education is relatively low compared to figures 10 years ago, but it has been increasing recently.

NQF implementation

Three main steps were taken to support the development and implementation of the national qualifications system and framework in Portugal. First, a new institutional model was developed, as described above. Second, a national qualifications catalogue was created in 2007 as a strategic management tool for non-higher national qualifications and as a central reference tool for VET provision. Third, the national system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences (*Reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências*, RVCC) that had been introduced in general and vocational

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([24]) Decree-Law No 115/2013.

([25]) According to Decree-Law No 65/2018, a limit for validation processes up to one third of the total number of ECTS credits applies to the accreditation/validation of professional experience.

education in 2001 was incorporated into the NQF from the beginning and was reformed starting in 2012.

The NQF has now reached an operational stage, and is considered a permanent feature of the national qualifications system (Cedefop, 2015). The legal framework is in place, qualifications have been assigned to levels, and quality assurance arrangements have been implemented. All VET is already organised around the NQF and access to financial support also takes the framework into consideration ([26]).

While a comprehensive database including all qualifications within the NQF has not been set up, the national qualifications catalogue ([27]) acts as a database for non-higher national qualifications. It includes more than 300 qualifications from 41 education and training areas at NQF/EQF levels 2, 4 and 5. It also includes international qualifications, which are partial qualifications. The catalogue is continuously updated by ANQEP, in a process supported by the 16 sector qualifications councils. A database for higher education qualifications ([28]) has also been created, containing information about the institution, type of education, area and course of study. NQF and EQF levels are indicated in the national qualifications catalogue, but they are not included in the database for higher education qualifications.

In VET and for qualifications acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning, the NQF level is indicated in all certificates and diplomas, while EQF levels are indicated only on some qualifications ([29]). In general education, diploma and certificate templates follow an identical layout for primary, lower and upper secondary education; NQF and EQF levels are not yet indicated. One of the priorities of the EQF NCP has been the inclusion of both NQF and EQF levels on all new qualification documents in both VET and general education. A draft legislative proposal has been prepared but, following the adoption of new legislation on basic and secondary education, this proposal requires updating. As higher education institutions can autonomously approve models for their

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([26]) For instance, in order to access certain professional traineeships, it is mandatory to have a certain NQF level.

([27]) The national qualifications catalogue is available at:
http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes

([28]) The database for higher education qualifications is available at:
http://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pesquisa_cursos_instituicoes?plid=372

([29]) EQF levels are indicated on qualification documents issued for professional courses, specialised artistic education, vocational courses, and certificates and diplomas issued on the basis of certificates of professional capacity (certificates of competence) from the previous certification system.

diplomas, NQF levels are indicated on some qualification documents, but this is not usually the case. It is mandatory to indicate NQF and EQF levels on certificate and diploma supplements such as Europass, though whether EQF levels are indicated is not being monitored.

The framework has become increasingly visible to, and used by, education and training institutions and providers, regulatory authorities and bodies and by the *Qualifica* centres. The main channels used by the EQF NCP to disseminate the framework have been the ANQEP website, which contains a section devoted to the European instruments, the ANQEP newsletter, leaflets and flyers, and conferences and workshops. The website of the national qualifications catalogue is currently being renewed, and a dedicated website for the NQF / EQF is expected to be developed in 2019.

A first assessment study of the impact of the NQF on the national education and training system is planned to be conducted by the EQF NCP within the scope of the 2018-20 EQF grant. It aims to analyse to what extent the NQF and related policy instruments have contributed to:

(a) improving legibility, transparency and comparability of qualifications;
(b) enhancing dual certification qualifications;
(c) changes in school culture and training practices through the introduction of learning outcomes-based qualifications;
(d) improving access to formal qualifications and recognition of skills;
(e) increase in the visibility and recognition of qualifications on the labour market and in society in general.

The key challenges for further NQF implementation include the integration of international qualifications in the framework, the continuing challenge to raise awareness of key concepts, such as learning outcomes, among different stakeholders, and the need to disseminate the NQF to a wider spectrum of stakeholders, especially on the labour market, where it is not yet well-known. Revision of NQF level 5 is another issue that will require attention.

Referencing to the EQF

Portugal referenced its national qualifications levels to the EQF and self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2011. The process started in 2009 and the results were presented in two separate reports: the *Report on the referencing of the national qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework* (ANQ, 2011) addressed qualifications at levels 1 to 5 of the NQF, and the *Report on the referencing of the*

framework for higher education qualifications in Portugal (FHEQ-Portugal) (MCTES, 2011) addressed levels 5 to 8.

There are currently no plans to present an updated referencing report to the EQF Advisory Group.

Important lessons and future plans

Portugal took the decision to adopt the eight EQF levels and the EQF level descriptors in setting up the comprehensive NQF. Aiming to integrate and coordinate qualifications from all education and training subsystems into a single framework, to aid the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, to improve transparency and comparability of qualifications and to facilitate double certification, the NQF is believed to have reduced barriers between the different subsystems. The process of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) has been linked to the NQF from the beginning, promoting equal value of qualifications placed at the same level, regardless of how competences are acquired.

The NQF has been a crucial element in reorienting focus in the education and training system on learning outcomes. A new methodology for designing VET qualifications, based on learning outcomes, has been created and the country is in the process of reviewing and renewing VET qualifications in the national qualifications catalogue. Implementation of the learning outcomes approach could be further supported by providing adequate training to teachers and trainers ([30]) to assist them in designing curricula and assessment methods based on learning outcomes, and by developing common understanding of learning outcomes among different education and training subsystems and stakeholders (Cedefop, 2016). In 2017, a national credit system for vocational education and training was created, aligned with ECVET principles. This enables allocation of credit points to qualifications at NQF level 2, 4 and 5, included in the national qualifications catalogue, and to quality-assured and certified training.

There is a need to disseminate the framework to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, especially improving acceptance and use of the NQF by the labour market. In this context, the relationship between the higher education framework and other parts of the NQF (levels 1 to 5) needs to be made explicit, especially

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([30]) Between 2016 and 2018, ANQEP organised 10 training courses for VET teachers and trainers from 66 VET schools, and two workshops with the schools that attended these training courses, discussing the successes and challenges in the implementation of learning outcomes.

for level 5 programmes where different ministries are involved. One of the issues to be tackled in the near future may be the review of the NQF level 5, which currently includes a non-higher level qualification (the diploma in technological specialisation), while a modality of short-cycle higher education (specialised advanced technical courses, CTeSP) has not yet been assigned to a level. Another key challenge is integration of international qualifications in the framework.

A priority area of the EQF NCP's work has been the inclusion of both NQF and EQF levels on all qualification documents from general education and VET. A draft proposal has been put forward, but the adoption of new legislation in general education has made it necessary for this proposal to be updated/renewed. The inclusion of NQF/EQF levels on all certificates and diplomas at all levels of education and training could increase awareness of the framework among end-users.

Main sources of information
- The National Agency for Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training is the EQF NCP in Portugal: http://www.anqep.gov.pt/default.aspx
- National qualifications catalogue: http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/Qualificacoes
- Qualification database for higher education: http://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pesquisa_cursos_instituicoes?plid=372
- ANQ (2011). *Report on the referencing of the national qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework:* https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/PT%20EQF%20Referencing%20Report.pdf

Portuguese national qualifications framework (QNQ)

NQF levels	Qualification types	EQF levels
8	Doctoral degree (*Doutoramento*)	8
7	Master degree (*Mestrado*)	7
6	Bachelor degree (*Licenciatura*)	6
5	Diploma in technological specialisation (*Diploma de Especialização Tecnológica*)	5
4	Upper secondary education and professional certification (*Ensino secundário obtido por percursos de dupla certificação*) Upper secondary education and professional internship – minimum six months (*Ensino secundário vocacionado para prosseguimento de estudos de nível superior acrescido de estágio profissional – mínimo de seis meses*)	4
3	Upper secondary general education school leaving certificate (*Ensino secundário vocacionado para prosseguimento de estudos de nível superior*)	3
2	Third cycle of basic education (*3º ciclo do ensino básico obtido no ensino regular*) Third cycle of basic education and professional certification (*3º ciclo do ensino básico obtido por percursos de dupla certificação*)	2
1	Second cycle of basic education (*2º ciclo do ensino básico*)	1

Source: Portuguese National Agency for Qualifications and VET, 2016.

Abbreviations

A3ES	Agency for the Accreditation and Assessment of Higher Education
ANQ	National Agency for Qualifications [*Agência Nacional para a Qualificação*]
ANQEP	National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training [*Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional*]
CQEP	centres for qualification and vocational training [*Centros para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional]*
ECTS	European credit transfer system
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
EQF NCP	national coordination point for the EQF

FHEQ	framework of higher education qualifications
MCTES	Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education *[Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Ensino Superior]*
NQF	national qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework of the European higher education area
QNQ	Portuguese qualifications framework [*Quadro Nacional de Qualificações]*
RVCC	system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences [*reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências*]
VET	vocational education and training

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