



EUROPEAN  
INVENTORY  
OF NQFs 2020  
**PORTUGAL**

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# PORTUGAL

## European inventory of NQFs 2020

### Introduction and context

The performance of Portuguese education and training has improved in several areas over recent years. The rate of early school leaving has decreased significantly from 30.9% in 2009 to 10.6% in 2019 <sup>(1)</sup>. The 2018 results of the Programme for international student assessment (PISA) <sup>(2)</sup> indicate an increase in the percentage of 15-year-olds who underperform in reading and science, similar to the EU trend; however, there was a slight improvement in maths compared to 2015, and regional differences in education outcomes have reduced. Reorganisation of basic education <sup>(3)</sup> by merging its first and second cycle has been recommended to smooth transitions but is considered complex to implement. Curricular autonomy and flexibility (up to 25% of teaching load) has been introduced in all schools, expected to impact positively both general education and vocational education and training (VET) pathways. Government efforts to develop VET aim to increase its relevance to labour market demand. The percentages of upper secondary students enrolled in VET and of recent VET graduates in employment have declined. Tertiary education attainment follows an upward trend, though it is below the national target of 40%, at 36.2% in 2019 <sup>(4)</sup>. Recent measures in higher education are aimed at promoting access through an expanded offer of two-year short-cycle higher education professional courses (*Cursos Técnicos Superiores Profissionais*) and master programmes, and more support for students. Cooperation between higher education and the business sector in student mobility, dual programmes, curriculum shared design and delivery, and lifelong learning is above EU averages. The employment rate of recent graduates (ISCED 3 to 8) was 80.3% in 2019. Adult participation in education and training is just below the EU average, at 10.5% in 2019 <sup>(5)</sup>. Adult learning is supported through implementation of the national skills strategy and the *Qualifica* programme

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<sup>(1)</sup> Data from European Commission, 2020.

<sup>(2)</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/pisa-2018\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/pisa-2018_en)

<sup>(3)</sup> Basic education in Portugal is currently organised in three cycles (nine years in total) and covers primary and lower secondary (ISCED level 1 and 2) (Cedefop; Directorate-General of Employment and Industrial Relations, 2019).

<sup>(4)</sup> Data from European Commission, 2020.

<sup>(5)</sup> Idem.

launched in 2017 <sup>(6)</sup>. A national information campaign is under way, targeting businesses, the creation of local qualification networks, and increased awareness of skills development among at-risk groups (European Commission, 2019).

Development of a national qualifications system started part of VET reform in 2007, aiming to promote attainment of secondary education as a minimum level of qualification. The national qualifications system has several elements, including the national qualifications catalogue (NQC); the national qualifications framework (NQF) (*Quadro nacional de qualificações*, QNQ); the national credit system for VET; a network of adult learning centres (*Qualifica* centres); and an instrument for lifelong development, recording individual qualifications and competences (*Qualifica* passport). The national system for recognising non-formal and informal learning (RVCC) was integrated into the NQF and reformed, to address training, guidance, and skills validation better.

The comprehensive NQF is a single reference for classifying all qualifications awarded in the Portuguese education and training system, acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. The framework was legally adopted in 2009. It includes eight levels, with level descriptors defined in terms of 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 is operational and has promoted the introduction of a learning-outcomes approach in all education subsystems. National qualifications and curricula have been progressively aligned with the NQF level descriptors. Over 300 qualifications at NQF/EQF levels 2, 4 and 5 are included in the national qualifications catalogue (September 2020); higher education qualifications are included in a separate database.

The NQF is well integrated in the legislation governing the education and training system. A key competence framework based on EQF principles, related to the 'Students' profile at the end of compulsory education' <sup>(7)</sup>, is being implemented. The NQF and the EQF are referred to in new legislation in the context of curricular

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<sup>(6)</sup> The *Qualifica* programme is an integrated strategy to support the training and qualification of low qualified adults, unemployed people and NEETs.  
<https://www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/>

<sup>(7)</sup> Legislative Order 6478/2017 on the students' profile by the end of compulsory schooling: <https://dre.pt/application/file/a/107756793>

reorganisation and admission to higher education <sup>(8)</sup>. NQF levels and terminology are also mentioned in labour market and transversal policy documents <sup>(9)</sup>.

The NQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in 2011, and the framework for higher education qualifications was self-certified against the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in the same year.

## Policy objectives

Developed as part of reforms aiming to raise qualification levels of the whole population, the NQF is seen as ‘both a central anchoring device and a mechanism that drives forward the process of reform’ (ANQ, 2011). It responds to the need to integrate and coordinate qualifications from the different education and training subsystems (general education, VET, higher education, and those awarded through validation of non-formal learning) into a single classification. It aims to improve the transparency and comparability of Portuguese qualifications, their quality and relevance, and 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 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):

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- <sup>(8)</sup> Decree-Law 55/2018 establishing the curriculum of basic and secondary education and principles for its operationalisation: <https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/136.html>  
Legislative Order 6944-A/2018 approving the Essential learning of basic education: <https://dre.pt/application/conteudo/116279697>  
Ministerial Ordinance No. 223-A/2018 regulating the educational offers of basic education: <https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/147.html>  
Decree-Law No. 11/2020 on special admission contests for secondary double certification holders and specialised artistic course graduates: <https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/447.html>
- <sup>(9)</sup> The Social and economic stabilisation programme: <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc22/comunicacao/documento?i=programa-de-estabilizacao-economica-e-social>  
The Dynamic reference framework of digital competence for Portugal: [https://www.incode2030.gov.pt/sites/default/files/qdracd\\_set2019.pdf](https://www.incode2030.gov.pt/sites/default/files/qdracd_set2019.pdf)  
ATIVAR.PT – Reinforced employment and professional training support programme: <https://pees.gov.pt/emprego/>  
the Professional internships initiative: [https://www.iefp.pt/documents/10181/7118590/FS\\_Est%C3%A1gios+Profissionais\\_19-05-2020/73cffe1-a844-47ba-8aa6-761ed24ef139](https://www.iefp.pt/documents/10181/7118590/FS_Est%C3%A1gios+Profissionais_19-05-2020/73cffe1-a844-47ba-8aa6-761ed24ef139)

- (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, 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 and coordination solution and quality control mechanisms for education and training pathways;
- (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.

## Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The NQF is a comprehensive framework with eight levels, including all qualifications from the different education and training subsystems, regardless of means of access: basic, upper secondary and higher education, vocational training and the processes of recognition, validation and certification of competences obtained through formal, non-formal or informal learning.

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 ‘recognised capacity to mobilise knowledge, skills and attitudes in contexts of work, professional development, education and personal development’. 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 responsibility and autonomy <sup>(10)</sup>.

The upper secondary general education school leaving certificate giving access to higher education has been assigned to NQF/EQF level 3, to distinguish

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<sup>(10)</sup> Ministerial Order No 782/2009.

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. Discussion on NQF level 5 may also be necessary; a post-secondary non-tertiary qualification has already been placed at NQF level 5, the diploma in technological specialisation <sup>(11)</sup>, which gives access to higher education through a special competition for holders of the diploma; there is also a modality of short-cycle higher education, specialised advanced technical courses (CTeSP) <sup>(12)</sup>, designed using the learning outcomes approach but, as yet, with no assigned level.

The NQF has been a driving force behind incorporation of the learning-outcomes approach into the education and training system. Fine-tuning learning outcomes in qualifications with the NQF level descriptors is a challenging task and is work in progress: it includes upgrading both the NQC and general education qualifications. The VET sector has seen most progress, with reforms aimed at developing qualifications standards and curriculum development. VET qualifications are included in the NQC at levels 2, 4 and 5, and are organised in units of competence. Each qualification at levels 2 and 4 includes a professional profile, a training standard (that awards a double certification) and a recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) standard. Level 5 qualifications include a training standard. A methodological guidebook for the design of qualifications at levels 2, 4 and 5 of the NQF and revision of existing ones was developed in 2015 <sup>(13)</sup>. Following curricular reforms and diversification of qualifications included in the NQC, a new methodology for the design of qualifications was published in 2020 (ANQEP, 2020), re-emphasising the focus on skills and learning outcomes. Involvement of both sector qualification councils and the National Agency for Qualifications and VET (ANQEP) in the redesign/revision of qualifications serves as quality assurance (Cedefop, 2020).

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<sup>(11)</sup> Obtained through technological specialisation courses (CET). Through agreements with higher tertiary institutions CET graduates are credited 60 to 90 ECTS points.  
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/portugal>

<sup>(12)</sup> CTeSP are short-cycle higher technical courses launched in 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.

<sup>(13)</sup> ANQEP (2015). *New methodological guidebook: design of qualifications based on learning outcomes*.  
<http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/boDocumentos/getDocumentos/561>

The use of learning outcomes in qualification design also enabled the creation of the National credit system for vocational education and training <sup>(14)</sup>, aligned with some 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 NQC, 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 <sup>(15)</sup> (European Commission; Cedefop, 2020).

In general education, revision of the curriculum structure for basic and secondary education led to the definition of new programmes and curriculum outcome targets (*metas curriculares*) for several subjects, introduced gradually starting in 2013/14. The curriculum outcome targets are focused on knowledge and essential skills students need to master in different school years and cycles. The ‘essential learning’ of each school subject, the reference for delivering new curricula, 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.

Since 2020, the ‘essential learning’ for professional and for specialised artistic teaching courses have also been elaborated and approved. They are described in 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. 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.

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<sup>(14)</sup> 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.

<sup>(15)</sup> 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.

## Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

A new governance model was created in Portugal in 2007 to develop the national qualifications system and its main instruments, the NQF and the national qualifications catalogue (NQC), established through Decree-Law No 396/2007 <sup>(16)</sup>. The legal basis was amended in 2017 (Decree-Law no. 14/2017), updating the governance structure, processes and main elements <sup>(17)</sup>. The National Agency for Qualifications and VET (ANQEP), previously the National Agency for Qualifications (ANQ), under the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security and the Ministry of Education, continues to assume a central role <sup>(18)</sup> coordinating implementation of education and training policies for young people and adults and the system for recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC).

The NQF was published by Ministerial Order No 782/2009 <sup>(19)</sup> and came into force in October 2010. It is currently under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education <sup>(20)</sup>. NQF coordination is shared between ANQEP and the General Directorate for Higher Education (under the latter ministry), involved in qualifications at levels 5 to 8. ANQEP has been nominated as national coordination point for the EQF (EQF NCP), the leading structure for NQF implementation. Its responsibilities include: referencing the national qualification levels to the EQF; providing access to information and guidance on how national qualifications are referenced to the EQF; and

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<sup>(16)</sup> Decree-Law No 396/2007 on the national qualification system:

<https://dre.pt/application/dir/pdf1s/2007/12/25100/0916509173.pdf> amended by Decree-Law No 14/2017: <https://dre.pt/home/-/dre/105808927/details/maximized>

<sup>(17)</sup> Updates refer to the introduction of the national credit system for VET, new developments related to the *Qualifica* programme (the *Qualifica* passport and the new *Qualifica* centres), and the processes for updating standards in the national qualifications catalogue.

<sup>(18)</sup> ANQEP coordinates the work of other bodies involved in the qualifications system: the Directorate-General for Education; the Directorate-General for Employment and Labor Relations; the Institute of Employment and Professional Training; structures related to financing education training policies; the sectoral qualification councils; the network of adult education centres; basic and secondary education establishments; the 'poles of excellence'; and other entities with structures for certified training (Decree-Law No 14/2017).

<sup>(19)</sup> Ministerial Order No 782/2009 on the NQF:

<http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/boDocumentos/getDocumentos/163>

<sup>(20)</sup> Initial work on the NQF was carried out by the former Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, with support from the Ministry of Education. It was coordinated by ANQ through a steering committee representing bodies involved in the regulation of qualifications and quality assurance in education and training. A technical working group supported the process. Other stakeholders were also consulted (ANQ, 2011).

encouraging participation of all relevant parties (higher education and VET, social partners, sectors and experts).

The EQF NCP collaborates horizontally with other bodies (such as the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training and the General Directorate for Employment and Labour Relations), working flexibly and through consultation. The General Directorate for Education is consulted on general education qualifications. Currently, there are no human resources dedicated exclusively to the EQF NCP; the staff working on the NQF are involved in other ANQEP technical departments and services. This arrangement allows flexibility and development of synergies (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

ANQEP is supported by 18 sector qualifications councils <sup>(21)</sup> involved in defining qualifications and competences, including new qualifications in the NQC and updating existing ones. If an accepted proposal concerns a new qualification, a three-stage process takes place leading to the publication of the new qualification in the official *Bulletin for labour and employment* and inclusion in the NQC (Cedefop; Directorate-General of Employment and Industrial Relations, 2019).

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).

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways <sup>(22)</sup>

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is an important element in Portugal of the comprehensive national system for recognition, validation and certification of competences (*Reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências*, RVCC) it was introduced in 2001 to increase levels of school education and vocational qualification of adults, to facilitate employability. Initially, only competences equivalent to the ninth year of schooling (basic education) could be validated. The RVCC system has undergone major changes since its establishment. It was expanded to promote upper secondary qualifications as a

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<sup>(21)</sup> 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. Two new sector councils were created in June 2020, in addition to the previous 16.

<sup>(22)</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (Guimarães, 2019).

minimum level of qualification for the population. It currently operates through a new network of adult learning centres introduced in 2016 (*Qualifica* centres) <sup>(23)</sup>, which 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; their activity is managed by ANQEP. They have similar functions as the previous new opportunities centres, and include a focus on people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) and other disadvantaged groups. An online instrument was created for recording education and training experiences and providing guidance to obtaining a qualification, the *Qualifica* passport, replacing the previous Individual skills booklet. Individuals under 23 years of age need to have three years of professional experience to access RVCC processes. Since 2016, adult learners must attend a minimum of 50 hours of training to acquire the competences in the key competences standard, and another 25 hours in preparation for the final examination for certification.

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

- (a) education RVCC process, aimed at obtaining a school leaving certificate (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 the key competences standards used in formal education and training for adult pathways: one for basic education established in 2001 and updated in 2002 and 2004, and another for secondary education established in 2006. Separate key competences standards have been developed for adults with special education needs and other disadvantaged groups;
- (b) professional RVCC process, aimed at obtaining a professional qualification (offers school and professional certification at levels 2 and 4 of the NQF/EQF); the professional competences standards used for validation are based on training standards used in the formal VET system, and are part of the national qualifications catalogue (NQC), updated as necessary. The NQC includes more than 300 qualifications from 45 education and training areas (December, 2020).

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. Using the RVCC system is free of

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<sup>(23)</sup> *Qualifica* centres were introduced by Ordinance No 232/2016. They replaced the centres for qualification and vocational training (CQEP), which in turn replaced the previous new opportunities centres.

charge. Between 2000 and 2017, 600 272 adults obtained certification through RVCC, most of them at lower secondary level (ANQEP, 2018); however, numbers have dropped significantly compared to those 10 years ago. While validation is 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.

In higher education (levels 6 to 8 of the NQF/EQF), validation is generally linked to the credit system and module-based structure of courses and degrees. Students can obtain European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credits through validation that can be used for granting 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 for validation processes up to one third of the total number of ECTS credits relevant for a particular course. General rules for validation apply to all higher education institutions, complemented by specific validation procedures established by each institution, that have to be published in the government's official journal.

## NQF implementation and impact

The Portuguese NQF has reached an operational stage. Qualifications from general education, VET, higher education, and those awarded through RVCC have been assigned to levels, and quality assurance arrangements have been put in place. Private/non-regulated qualifications have not yet been included. All VET is already organised around the NQF and access to financial support also takes the framework into consideration <sup>(24)</sup>. The national qualifications catalogue (NQC) <sup>(25)</sup> has been developed as a strategic management tool for non-higher national qualifications and a central reference tool for VET provision, linked to NQF levels. It is based on the principle of double certification and aims to bridge the gap between education and training and the labour market; it therefore excludes general education pathways that lead only to an education certificate. The NQC includes more than 300 qualifications from 45 education and training areas at NQF/EQF levels 2, 4 and 5. It also includes international qualifications, which are partial qualifications. Since January 2018, 22 new qualifications (levels 2 and 4) were included, 307 qualifications were updated (level 2, 4 and 5) and 6 were excluded (level 4); eight professional RVCC standards were included (levels 2 and 4), 25 professional RVCC standards were updated (levels 2 and 4) and three

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<sup>(24)</sup> For instance, in order to access certain professional traineeships, it is mandatory to have a certain NQF level.

<sup>(25)</sup> The structure and organisation of the national qualifications catalogue (CNQ) and its model for skills-based qualifications were established by Order No 781/2009.

professional RVCC standards were excluded (levels 2 and 4). NQF and EQF levels are indicated in the NQC. The catalogue is continuously updated by ANQEP, in a process supported by the 18 sector qualifications councils. A range of sectoral studies are being launched to diagnose qualifications and competence needs and to develop qualifications standards for the NQC, based on the new methodology for designing qualifications published in 2020 (ANQEP, 2020).

A database for higher education qualifications has also been created, containing information about the institution, type of education, area and course of study. A comprehensive database including all qualifications within the NQF has not yet been set up.

Qualification documents from VET and those acquired through RVCC indicate the corresponding NQF level. EQF levels are indicated only on some qualifications <sup>(26)</sup>. NQF and EQF levels are not yet indicated in general education, and are indicated on some higher education qualifications. 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. It is mandatory to indicate NQF and EQF levels on certificate and diploma supplements, such as Europass supplements.

The NQF NCP has developed a guide (*Understanding the NQF – User support guide*) to support stakeholders in using the NQF, and leaflets and flyers aim to reach a wider audience, including employers. The framework has become increasingly used by education and training institutions and providers (in advertising courses and in certification), the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training, and by employers (in advertising job offers). Cooperation between the NQF NCP and the Euroguidance Centre has been increased. Since 2019 ANQEP has invested in the modernisation of the National catalogue framework. The website of the national qualifications catalogue is currently being renewed, and will integrate information about the NQF / EQF. An assessment study on the implementation and impact of the NQF has not yet been conducted, but it has been discussed. It is considered necessary to monitor the impacts of these actions (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Key challenges for further NQF implementation include: the alignment of the national qualifications and curricula in all education sectors with NQF descriptors

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<sup>(26)</sup> 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.

(there is a diversity of approaches and concepts and the level of implementation varies across subsystems); increasing awareness of learning outcomes among different stakeholders; and the dissemination of information to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, especially on the labour market (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

## 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

Several steps were taken in Portugal to develop the national qualifications system and to reach its aims: a new institutional model was developed to maximise coordination and participation of stakeholders and quality assurance; the national qualifications framework (NQF) and the national qualifications catalogue (NCQ) were established; and the national system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) was incorporated into the NQF and reformed, promoting equal value of qualifications placed at the same level, regardless of how competences are acquired. The NQF brings together qualifications from all education and training subsystems into a single framework. It is considered to have improved the transparency and comparability of qualifications, public trust in the quality of qualifications, and to have reduced barriers between subsystems. Qualification levels provide insight into the relative position and value of certificates and diplomas. The NQF has aided the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and has showed that certificates and diplomas obtained through RVCC have the same legal value as those obtained in any other way.

The NQF has been a crucial element in orienting focus in the education and training system on learning outcomes. A new methodology for designing VET qualifications, based on learning outcomes, has recently been created and the

process of reviewing and renewing VET qualifications continues. However, further encouraging discussion and raising awareness of learning outcomes among different stakeholders is needed. One issue that may be addressed in the near future is the review of NQF level 5, which currently includes a post-secondary non-tertiary level qualification (the diploma in technological specialisation, CET), while a short-cycle higher education qualification (specialised advanced technical courses, CTeSP) has not yet been assigned to a level. Another key challenge is the integration of international qualifications in the framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

There is a need to disseminate the framework to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including those from the labour market. The indication of NQF/EQF levels on all certificates and diplomas at all levels of education and training could increase awareness of the NQF among end-users and this has been a priority in the NQF NCP's work.

In the context of Covid-19, the Ministry of Education issued guidelines for professional schools on attendance, training plans, assessment, final exams and work-based learning, to ensure continuity in the delivery of qualifications. Specific guidelines were made available also for *Qualifica* centres, and use of digital technologies made possible the continuation of school and professional RVCC processes, distance learning and lifelong guidance (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

**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: [https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pesquisa\\_cursos\\_instituicoes?canal=sou-futuro-estudante](https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pesquisa_cursos_instituicoes?canal=sou-futuro-estudante)
- ANQ (2011). *Report on the referencing of the national qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework*: <https://europa.eu/europass/en/reports-referencing-national-qualifications-frameworks-eqf>
- MCTES (2011). *The framework for higher education qualifications in Portugal – Report of the international committee on the verification of compatibility with the qualifications framework of the European higher education area*. [https://wwwcdn.dges.gov.pt/sites/default/files/referencing\\_report\\_higher\\_education\\_portugal\\_qf-ehea.pdf](https://wwwcdn.dges.gov.pt/sites/default/files/referencing_report_higher_education_portugal_qf-ehea.pdf)

**Portuguese national qualifications framework (QNQ)**

NQF levels	Qualification types	EQF levels
8	Doctoral degree ( <i>Doutoramento</i> )	8
7	Master degree ( <i>Mestrado</i> )	7
6	Bachelor degree ( <i>Licenciatura</i> )	6
5	Diploma in technological specialisation – post-secondary non tertiary education ( <i>Diploma de Especialização Tecnológica</i> )	5
4	Upper secondary education and professional certification ( <i>Ensino secundário obtido por percursos de dupla certificação</i> )	4
	Upper secondary education and professional internship – minimum six months ( <i>Ensino secundário vocacionado para prosseguimento de estudos de nível superior acrescido de estágio profissional – mínimo de seis meses</i> )	
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 regular</i> )	2
	Third cycle of basic education and professional certification ( <i>3º ciclo do ensino básico obtido por percursos de dupla certificação</i> )	
1	Second cycle of basic education ( <i>2º ciclo do ensino básico</i> )	1

Source: ANQ (2011); ANQEP (2020) (email communication).

## Acronyms

A3ES	Agency for the Accreditation and Assessment of Higher Education
ANQ	National Agency for Qualifications [ <i>Agência Nacional para a Qualificação</i> ]
ANQEP	National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training [ <i>Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional</i> ]
CQEP	centres for qualification and vocational training [ <i>Centros para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional</i> ]
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 [ <i>Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Ensino Superior</i> ]
NQC	national qualifications catalogue
NQF	national qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NEETs	people not in education, employment or training
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework of the European higher education area
QNQ	Portuguese qualifications framework [ <i>Quadro Nacional de Qualificações</i> ]
RVCC	system for the recognition, validation and certification of competences [ <i>reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências</i> ]
SIGO	integrated information system for the management of education and training provision [ <i>Sistema integrado de informação e gestão da oferta educativa e formativa</i> ]
VET	vocational education and training

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