

SLOVENIA

European inventory on NQF 2016

Introduction and context

Slovenia is well situated in relation to most European benchmarks for education and training. The country has exceeded EU targets for tertiary education attainment, rate of early leavers from education and training, and student achievement in science; student achievement in maths and the rate of adult participation in lifelong learning ⁽¹⁾ are slightly above EU average. Areas where the country has not yet reached average performance are employability of recent graduates, participation of children in early education and care, and proportion of students with underachievement in reading. Reforms are under way in higher education, with internationalisation, quality assurance and financing of institutions as the main lines of action. Modernisation of vocational education and training (VET) is also on the agenda, aiming at the promotion of adult learning and (re)introduction of apprenticeships (European Commission, 2016).

Following a broad national debate, Slovenia started the development of a national qualifications framework (NQF) in 2005. NQF development builds on a series of education and training reforms since the mid-1990s (in VET, higher education, general education and adult education), including the introduction of certification and validation of non-formal learning in 2000.

The 10-level comprehensive Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF) was developed by an interdepartmental working group, discussed with stakeholders, and finalised in May 2011 (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2014). Agreement was reached on assigning major national qualifications to SQF levels, including qualifications from formal education and training (vocational education and training (VET), higher education, general education, adult education) and the system of national vocational qualifications under the remit of the Ministry of Labour. The SQF was linked to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-referenced to the qualifications framework for the European higher education

⁽¹⁾ 11.9% of adults participated in adult education in 2015 (compared to the EU average of 10.7%), but this percentage has been gradually decreasing since 2010.

area (QF-EHEA) in May 2013. The Slovenian Qualifications Framework Act ⁽²⁾ came into force in January 2016, serving as the legal basis for SQF implementation and full operationalisation.

Policy objectives

All subsystems of education and training in Slovenia have been reformed since the mid-1990s. There is a general view that the system functions well in terms of permeability; there are almost no dead-ends at upper secondary level and individuals can move vertically and horizontally without major obstacles. However, there is a need to strengthen cooperation and coordination between different education and training subsystems and increase participation in lifelong learning. It is necessary to improve the link between education and certification and responsiveness of qualifications to labour market and individual needs, and to have a reliable tool for assessing and recognising non-formal and informal knowledge and skills.

The SQF is primarily a communication framework whose purpose is to achieve transparency and recognisability of qualifications in Slovenia and the EU. Its fundamental objectives are to support lifelong learning; to connect and coordinate the Slovenian qualifications subsystems; and to improve the transparency, accessibility and quality of qualifications with regard to the labour market and civil society.

The framework brings added value at several levels. Along with the register of SQF qualifications, it ensures increased transparency of the qualifications system, benefitting end-users: learners, employees, employers, education providers, and career advisers. Although the SQF is not a tool for major reform, level descriptors are used in accreditation procedures for new education programmes or in their reaccreditation. The inclusion of supplementary qualifications in the SQF brings added value to employees and employers, making it easier to choose qualifications and to select candidates (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2014).

⁽²⁾ The SQF Act is available in Slovenian at: <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=124645#!/Zakon-o-slovenskem-ogrodju-kvalifikacij-%28ZSOK%29>

Levels and use of learning outcomes

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

The starting points for classification of qualifications in the SQF are the relevant sectoral legislation and the classification system of education and training (KLASIUS). The SQF aims to establish a flexible connection between education and qualification structures. It links two concepts: educational activities/programmes and learning outcomes.

The SQF includes three categories of qualifications covering all subsystems of formal education and training, as well as further learning:

- (a) educational qualifications awarded after completion of formal education programmes at all levels (general, vocational and higher);
- (b) vocational qualifications awarded by an NVQ certificate issued in accordance with the regulations governing NVQs or another document certifying completion of training or continuing education, issued in accordance with the regulations governing technical and higher education;
- (c) supplementary qualifications acquired in further and supplementary training on the labour market (linked to supplementing abilities and competences) and not issued by national authorities.

Additionally to learning outcomes, input criteria are used for educational qualifications acquired after completion of nationally accredited programmes: these include access requirements, typical programme length, and input in terms of volume of learning activities in VET and higher education (defined also in credit points). For NVQs, only standards of learning outcomes are defined, and not the programmes or pathways that lead to the NVQ.

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

Education programmes have moved from content-based to an objective-based approach. Reforms have supported and broadened assessment of learning outcomes. A balance is sought in emphasising the role played by

general knowledge and acquired key competences, sufficiently broad technical knowledge and certain pedagogical processes in defining educational outcomes.

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

Assessment in VET (at NQF levels 4 and 5) is in the form of project work, testing practical skills and underpinning knowledge; written tests are also used at level 5 to test theoretical professional knowledge and knowledge of general subjects (Slovenian language, foreign languages, mathematics), which are tested externally. An accumulation and transfer credit system, compatible with the European credit system for VET (ECVET) is used in vocational education to describe the volume and weight of programmes and units/modules.

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

Reform and introduction of study programmes according to the Bologna declaration guidelines has taken place gradually in higher education. Starting with 2009/10, only new study programmes were made available for all three cycles. Students entering higher education in 2009/10 pursued their education in courses of the first, second and third cycles in line with the Bologna guidelines. Learning outcomes in higher education are described in terms of general and professional competences. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) has been obligatory in higher education since 2002.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Work on establishing an NQF was initiated in 2005 through the EQF consultation process by the (then) Ministry of Education and Sport in cooperation with the

Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology ⁽³⁾ and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. In 2009, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) was appointed to manage the Slovenian qualifications framework project ⁽⁴⁾, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. CPI was also appointed as national coordination point for the EQF (EQF NCP), providing technical assistance and coordinating the work of stakeholders involved in developing the SQF and during the referencing. The institute continues to be in charge of coordinating the implementation of the framework and its roles and responsibilities have now been stipulated in the Slovenian Qualifications Framework Act ⁽⁵⁾. They include information and communication on matters related to the SQF and EQF, managing the process of placing qualifications in the framework, coordinating the work of other stakeholders involved in linking qualifications to the EQF via the SQF, and maintaining the register of SQF qualifications.

In its role as NCP for the EQF, CPI collaborates with the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (NAKVIS) – the institution responsible for the quality of higher education qualifications – on all issues relating to higher education. This cooperation is based on a written agreement signed by the two agencies in 2012.

The highest decision-making body in establishing the SQF and referencing to the EQF and QF-EHEA is the interdepartmental working group (IWG) nominated by the government in January 2010 ⁽⁶⁾. The proposals for the SQF, for placing qualifications in the SQF, and referencing SQF levels to the EQF and the QF-EHEA were prepared by an expert group appointed by the IWG, and were

⁽³⁾ The Ministry of Education and Sport and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology have been merged into one body, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

⁽⁴⁾ The SQF project (2009-14) was jointly financed by the European Social Fund.

⁽⁵⁾ The SQF Act is available in Slovenian at: <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=124645#!/Zakon-o-slovenskem-ogrodju-kvalifikacij-%28ZSOK%29>

⁽⁶⁾ Government Decision 02401-28/2009/3 of 14 January 2010. The interdepartmental working group is composed of representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport; the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; CPI; the National Education Institute; the Statistical Office; social partners and students.

broadly debated in national consultation. Two other expert groups were appointed in 2012 to prepare the technical background for the Law on the SQF and the final report on referencing the SQF to the EQF (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2014). The composition of the IWG is a positive aspect of the governance structure of the SQF, as it guarantees that the main issues are discussed and decided in social partnership. This helps ensure consistency and trust in the NQF. There is also a proposition to include a representative of NAKVIS in the IWG, to ensure better representation of higher education.

The 2016 SQF Act ⁽⁷⁾ stipulates the creation of the NCP SQF-EQF expert committee, under the coordination of the NCP, to implement the system of supplementary qualifications. This comprises seven members, appointed by the Minister for Labour on a four-year basis: three members proposed by the Ministry of Labour, one member proposed by the Ministry of Education, one member proposed by the Ministry of Economy, and two members proposed by the Economic and Social Council (one representing the employers and the other representing the trade unions). Its responsibilities are to set out the criteria and to prepare proposals for inclusion of supplementary qualifications in the SQF, to monitor developments related to the SQF, EQF and QF-EHEA and to carry out other tasks necessary for placing qualifications in the framework.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways ⁽⁸⁾

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been an important issue on the Slovenian education policy agenda in the past decade. Since 2006 it has covered all education subsystems, regulated by sector-specific acts. An overall strategy applying to all levels of education has not yet been implemented; however, the Minister for Education has issued tasks to all bodies responsible for validation ⁽⁹⁾

⁽⁷⁾ The SQF Act is available in Slovenian at: <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=124645#!/Zakon-o-slovenskem-ogrodju-kvalifikacij-%28ZSOK%29>

⁽⁸⁾ This section draws mainly on input from the 2016 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

⁽⁹⁾ Different bodies are in charge of validation at different levels of education: centres for vocational education for ISCED levels 2, 3 and 4; ENIC-NARIC for learning acquired

to prepare a national system that will include common standards, processes and quality assurance for all levels. The first step in developing an overarching national validation system is to collect ideas, examples of good practice and working solutions, and to identify the problems in existing validation practice. The entry into force of the 2016 SQF Act is seen as a step in this direction.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is most advanced in VET, but other subsystems allow certain validation possibilities. For example, people over 21 can take the *matura* exam without being enrolled in formal education. There are two types of VET qualification in Slovenia. First, educational VET qualifications are awarded after completion of formal vocational programmes; non-formally acquired knowledge and skills are taken into account to shorten the length of studies. Second, national vocational qualifications (NVQ) can be entirely acquired through recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The National Professional Qualifications Act (amended 2009) ⁽¹⁰⁾ connects the two systems; occupational standards are the basis for qualification and assessment standards, and national VET programmes. The 'master craftsman' qualification can also be acquired through validation, though participation in preparatory programmes is possible and common.

Since 2010, most development has taken place in higher education. The Higher Education Act (2012) ⁽¹¹⁾ obliges institutions to prepare validation measures and form a committee for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Universities are autonomous and can decide on their own procedures for this; they normally use professional assessors or committees. The result of validation in higher education can be the award of ECTS credit points for a single course or a module within a study programme.

in a different country; individual higher education institutions (universities and faculties) for validation in the higher education sector.

⁽¹⁰⁾ The National Professional Qualifications Act:
<http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1626>

⁽¹¹⁾ The Higher Education Act: <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=108446>

NQF implementation

The SQF has reached full operational stage with the entry into force of the SQF Act, in January 2016 ⁽¹²⁾. This law summarises the main responsibilities of stakeholders in designing and awarding qualifications at different levels, and defines the tasks of the national coordination point (NCP) for EQF-SQF and the NCP expert committee. It refers to procedures and methods of allocation of qualifications from formal education and training and national vocational qualifications as defined in sectoral legislation. One important development brought by the SQF Act is the definition of procedures for inclusion of supplementary qualifications in the SQF. This had been strongly advocated by stakeholders during public consultations and debates on the SQF, but supplementary qualifications were not included in the framework in the first phase as accreditation procedures were still under development at that time. Other aspects covered by the SQF Act are the referencing of NQF levels to the EQF and the QF EHEA, funding provisions, and the maintenance of the SQF register.

The register ⁽¹³⁾ describes qualifications in accordance with SQF and EQF parameters: title, type and category of a qualification, credit points, access requirements, SQF/EQF level, ISCED level, learning outcomes, awarding body and transition possibilities. It is currently linked to the EQF portal ⁽¹⁴⁾, as Slovenia contributed to testing compatibility of a national register with the EQF portal. The SQF register already contains 1 435 qualifications (1 209 educational qualifications and 226 national vocational qualifications). Once fully developed, the SQF register will significantly increase transparency of qualifications and of the national qualifications system.

The SQF is a permanent feature of the national qualifications system ⁽¹⁵⁾. Currently the framework is visible mainly among learners and employees, but some employers are using NQF levels in calls for job vacancies. Broader

⁽¹²⁾ The SQF Act is available in Slovenian at: <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=124645#!/Zakon-o-slovenskem-ogrodju-kvalifikacij-%28ZSOK%29>

⁽¹³⁾ The SQF register: <http://www.nok.si/slovenian-qualifications-framework-register/>

⁽¹⁴⁾ The EQF portal: [http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f\[0\]=im_field_entity_type%3A97](http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f[0]=im_field_entity_type%3A97)

⁽¹⁵⁾ Cedefop (2015). *Survey on the sustainability and visibility of NQFs* [unpublished].

promotion among the general public would be of value. Guidelines ⁽¹⁶⁾ for implementation of the NQF were produced and discussed with stakeholders in December 2015. They are intended to help education providers, guidance practitioners and sectoral bodies to use the SQF and learning outcome-based level descriptors in their work. The indication of SQF and EQF levels on certificates, diplomas, and Europass certificate and diploma supplement has been stipulated in the SQF Act, and the levels are already indicated in the online SQF register ⁽¹⁷⁾.

Referencing to the EQF

Slovenia has completed referencing of SQF levels to the EQF and the self-certification to QF-EHEA. One joint report was presented and endorsed by the EQF advisory group in May 2013. Referencing to the two European frameworks was legislated through the 2016 SQF Act.

Important lessons and future plans

Developments in Slovenia are based on an incremental approach, reforms under way since the mid-1990s, and a good situation in education, training and qualification developments compared to EU benchmarks. However, drawbacks have been identified at system level. For example, there is a need for better linking/bridging between formal education and training governed by the Ministry of Education and the certification system (NVQ), steered by the Ministry of Labour, to help individuals to combine learning outcomes from different settings. One weak point of the system is communication between education and the labour market, and the mismatch between skills and knowledge obtained in education and training and labour market needs. Quality assurance is regarded as essential in this respect, and is increasingly focused on outputs, as in testing quality indicators such as graduate destinations. The SQF is expected to strengthen the quality assurance of learning outcomes.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The guidelines can be found at: <http://www.nok.si/assets/datoteke/SOK-smernice-koncna1.pdf>

⁽¹⁷⁾ The SQF register: <http://www.nok.si/slovenian-qualifications-framework-register/>

The adoption of the SQF Act in January 2016, setting out the practical aspects of framework implementation, has been one of the major developments of the recent period. It opens up the qualification system to supplementary qualifications awarded on the labour market, establishing accreditation procedures and the criteria for placement into the SQF. It also stipulates the inclusion of SQF and EQF levels on certificates, diplomas and Europass documents, enabling the country to meet the second milestone of EQF implementation.

One remaining question on the placement of qualifications in the SQF is the decision to place the 'master craftsman' qualification at SQF level 5 / EQF level 4. In most other European countries, this qualification is placed at a higher level (EQF level 5 or 6), and the EQF advisory group raised the question of whether Slovenia is considering an upgrade of this qualification to bring it more in line with similar qualifications in Europe. Activities in connection with reform of the 'master craftsman' qualification were undertaken by the Chamber of Crafts and Small Business of Slovenia in conjunction with the CPI, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, and other social partners. As part of this reform, changes to the first occupational standards for the 'master craftsman' qualification were prepared in 2016, though the decision was to keep the same qualification level (SQF level 5 / EQF level 4).

Challenges that lie ahead for the SQF now that it entered its operational stage include: further development of the SQF register; inclusion of supplementary qualifications into the framework according to the procedures defined in the SQF Act; better dissemination of information about the SQF among the general and professional public; and further development of meaningful links between the SQF and related national and European tools (such as the Slovenian classification system of education and training (KLASIUS) and the EQF). The development of an overarching national validation system for non-formal and informal learning is also on the agenda.

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

Further source of information

The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET (EQF NCP): <http://www.cpi.si/en/>

The website of the Slovenian qualifications framework: <http://www.nok.si/en/>

[URLs accessed 1.12.2016]

Slovenian qualifications framework

NQF levels	Educational qualifications	Vocational qualifications	Supplementary qualifications (*)	EQF levels
10	Doctoral diploma <i>Diploma o doktoratu znanosti</i>			8
9	(**) Post-graduate research Master of science diploma <i>Diploma o magisteriju znanosti</i> (**) Specialisation diploma following academic higher education <i>Diploma o specializaciji</i>			8
8	Master degree <i>Diploma o strokovnem magisteriju</i> (**) Specialisation diploma following pre-Bologna professional higher education <i>Diploma o specializaciji</i> (**) Pre-Bologna diploma of academic higher education <i>Diploma o univerzitetnem izobraževanju</i> (**) Higher education diploma <i>Diploma o visoki izobrazbi</i>			7
7	Academic bachelor diploma <i>Diploma o izobraževanju prve stopnje – univerzitetna, UN</i> Professional bachelor diploma <i>Diploma o izobraževanju visokem strokovnem, VS</i> (**) Pre-Bologna professional higher education diploma <i>Diploma o visokem strokovnem izobraževanju</i> (**) Specialisation diploma following old short cycle higher education			6

NQF levels	Educational qualifications	Vocational qualifications	Supplementary qualifications (*)	EQF levels
	<i>Diploma o specializaciji</i>			
6	Short-cycle higher vocational diploma <i>Diploma o višji strokovni izobrazbi</i> (**) Old short-cycle higher vocational diploma <i>Diploma o višješolski izobrazbi</i>	NVQ certificate (level 6)		5
5	Vocational <i>matura</i> certificate (Secondary technical education, four years) <i>Spričevalo o poklicni mature</i> General <i>matura</i> certificate <i>Spričevalo o splošni mature</i> Master craftsman's examination certificate <i>Spričevalo o opravljenem mojstrskem izpitu</i> Foreman's examination certificate <i>Spričevalo o opravljenem delovodskem izpitu</i> Managerial examination certificate <i>Spričevalo o opravljenem poslovodskem izpitu</i>	NVQ certificate (level 5)		4
4	Final examination certificate (Secondary vocational education, three years) <i>Spričevalo o zaključnem izpitu, Srednja poklicna izobrazba</i>	NVQ (level 4)		4
3	Final examination certificate (Lower vocational education, two years) <i>Spričevalo o zaključnem izpitu</i>	NVQ (level 3)		3
2	Elementary school leaving certificate (nine years) <i>Zaključno spričevalo osnovne šole</i>	NVQ (level 2)		2
1	Certificate of completing grades 7 or 8 of elementary education <i>Potrdilo o izpolnjeni osnovnošolski obveznosti</i> Elementary school leaving certificate <i>Zaključno spričevalo osnovne šole</i>			

(*) The inclusion of supplementary qualifications in the framework was legislated in 2016. Currently there are no supplementary qualifications in the SQF register.

(**) Pre-Bologna diplomas.

Source: Adapted from: Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2014.

List of abbreviations

CPI	Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
ECVET	European credit system for VET
EQF	European qualifications framework
IWG	interdepartmental working group
NAKVIS	Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area
SQF	Slovenian qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

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