

SLOVENIA

European inventory on NQF 2018

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: at 46.4% in 2017 it is above the national and Europe target of 40% and the 2017 EU average of 39.9 %. However there is a wide gap between men and women. It has one of the lowest rates of early leavers from education and training (4.3% in 2017, compared to the EU average of 10.6%). Student achievements in reading, mathematics and science are among the best in Europe and have followed a strong positive trend over recent years, according to several international comparative assessments. Improvements in equity in education have also been recorded, though disparities in performance linked to socioeconomic status and migrant background persist and the socioeconomic impact in primary school is growing. Slovenia has significantly improved the employment rate of recent graduates from upper secondary vocational education and training and from tertiary education; in 2017 these were 80.8% and 82.45% respectively, above the EU average. Participation of children in early education and care has increased and reached 90.9%, though it is still below the EU average of 95.3%. One important development in school education is the introduction of mandatory foreign language teaching starting from the second grade of primary education; this was fully implemented starting with the 2016/17 school year. Reforms are under way in higher education, with changes in accreditation procedures and quality assurance; reform of tertiary education financing has been successfully implemented. The proportion of students in vocational education and training (VET) is high and has increased from 65.9% in 2013 to 70.4% in 2016 (EU average is 49%). The (re)introduction of apprenticeship schemes, piloted from the 2017/18 school year, is expected to expand the sector further and create opportunities for the unemployed. Population aging is accentuating the need to increase participation in adult learning, in particular for the low-skilled. A total of 12% of Slovenian adults participated in adult education in 2017, slightly above the EU average of 10.9%, but at only 2.9 % it is still low among the low-skilled. A national skills strategy has been prepared in cooperation with the OECD and has entered the second phase of implementation, including an action plan (European Commission, 2018).

Following a broad national debate, Slovenia started the development of a national qualifications framework (NQF) in 2005. This 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 (VET, higher education, general education, adult learning) and the system of national vocational qualifications under the remit of the Ministry of Labour. The Slovenian qualifications framework Act ⁽¹⁾ came into force in July 2016, serving as the legal basis for SQF implementation and full operationalisation.

The SQF was linked to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-referenced to the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in May 2013.

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 the responsiveness of qualifications to the 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

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

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 in 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).

Levels and use of learning outcomes

The SQF is a comprehensive framework with 10 qualification levels. The descriptor for each level has three categories of learning outcome: 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 education and training classification system (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 qualification 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.

Input criteria are used additional to learning outcomes 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, 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 in 1990's. 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.

The learning outcomes approach is seen in VET 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 developed at provider level 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, are 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

NQF supports cooperation between stakeholders across subsystems and institutions with the use of NQF levels and the learning outcomes approach as a common language for describing qualifications.

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 ⁽²⁾ 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 ⁽³⁾, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. CPI was also appointed as national coordination point (NCP) for the EQF, 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: its roles and responsibilities have been stipulated in the Slovenian qualifications framework Act. 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 quality in 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 2016 SQF Act establishes the NCP SQF-EQF expert committee, under the coordination of the NCP, which is appointed on a term of four years. This comprises seven members, appointed by the Minister for Labour for four-years:

⁽²⁾ 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.

⁽³⁾ The SQF project (2009-14) was jointly financed by the European Social Fund.

three members proposed by the Ministry of Labour, one proposed by the Ministry of Education, one proposed by the Ministry of Economy, and two proposed by the Economic and Social Council (one representing employers and the other representing 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 ⁽⁴⁾

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 and regulations. The legal basis for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the system of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) has been in place since 2000.

As yet there is no overall strategy with focus on common processes and quality assurance across all levels of education. In 2017, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training and the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education published the *Report on strategic and legal foundations for validation of non-formal and informal learning* ⁽⁵⁾. The publication presents a comprehensive overview and a detailed description of developments at national level. It provides an analysis of validation at all levels of education and qualifications, and outlines further conceptual challenges and proposals for developments. The full implementation of the SQF, including all formal qualifications, the system of NVQ and supplementary qualifications, will strengthen validation. Validation arrangements are measured against the learning outcomes of education programmes in VET, higher education and general education. National vocational qualifications (NVQ) can be entirely acquired through recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

⁽⁴⁾ 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).

⁽⁵⁾ CPI; SIAE (2017). *Report on strategic and legal foundations for validation of non-formal and informal learning*.
http://www.cpi.si/files/cpi/userfiles/Publikacije/CPI_vrednotenje-ucenja_3korektura.pdf

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is most advanced in VET, higher VET and adult education, 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) ⁽⁶⁾ 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.

In higher education, the Higher Education Act (2012) ⁽⁷⁾ obliges institutions to prepare validation measures and form a committee for validating non-formal and informal learning. Universities are autonomous and can decide their own procedures for this; they normally use professional assessors or committees. There is evidence of universities creating frameworks to support validation measures. 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.

NQF implementation

The SQF has reached full operational stage with the entry into force of the SQF Act, in July 2016. 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 and quality criteria for inclusion of supplementary qualifications in the SQF.

⁽⁶⁾ The National Professional Qualifications Act, amended in 2009: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO1626>

⁽⁷⁾ The Higher Education Act, 2012: <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=108446>

According to the SQF act, applications to place supplementary qualification into the SQF may be submitted by an employer/group of employers or by the Employment Service of Slovenia. An application shall contain at least the following details:

- (a) needs in the labour market;
- (b) the standard of the qualification and learning outcomes;
- (c) the training programme leading to the supplementary qualification;
- (d) a description of the procedure of assuring quality through self-evaluation;
- (e) references in a relevant field of work;
- (f) the contracted provider of the training programme, if this is not the proposer itself.

The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET assesses the completed application placing the supplementary qualification in the SQF and prepares opinion on the suitability of the application and training programme.

If the assessment is positive, the expert panel, nominated by ministry responsible for labour makes a decision on the application and drafts a proposal for the placing of the supplementary qualification into SQF.

The supplementary qualification proposal is adopted by an expert panel and the minister responsible for labour decides on placing the supplementary qualification in the SQF. The supplementary qualification is placed in the SQF for five years; three months before this period expires, the proposer may submit an application to extend the validity of the placement.

The criteria for including supplementary qualifications into the SQF include the suitability of the applicant, relations to existing qualifications, description of the learning outcomes, consistency and feasibility of the training programme, quality assurance of the training programme, and labour market needs.

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 ⁽⁸⁾ 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 linked to the EQF portal ⁽⁹⁾, as Slovenia contributed to testing compatibility of a national register with the EQF portal. The

⁽⁸⁾ SQF register: <https://www.nok.si>

⁽⁹⁾ 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)

SQF register already contains around 1 570 qualifications (1 248 educational qualifications, 311 national vocational qualifications and six supplementary qualifications).

The SQF is an integral part of the national qualifications system and is well integrated into national legislation in the area of education and training that defines SQF and EQF levels on public documents, according to the SQF law ⁽¹⁰⁾. An NQF/EQF communication strategy has been developed for different target groups to raise awareness about NQF and EQF among students, education and training institutions, employees, career counsellors, professional and recognition bodies.

Increasingly, the framework is visible and used by education and training institutions and learners with NQF/EQF levels indicated on certificates, diplomas and supplements and when preparing and renewing education programmes. There is some evidence that employers use NQF/EQF levels in recruitment, procedures and vacancies notices; interest among the general public is spreading. The SQF and EQF levels are indicated on certificates, diplomas, and Europass certificate and diploma supplements for general education, VET, higher education, supplementary qualifications and in the online SQF register.

SQF has not yet been systematically evaluated; only an evaluation of the SQF database has been carried out ⁽¹¹⁾. Using a number of different research tools (focus groups and semi-structured interviews with key national stakeholders) the results of the evaluation have already been integrated into the establishment of the new NQF portal ⁽¹²⁾. A more comprehensive evaluation of the understanding, awareness and use of the framework among main national stakeholders is under way and to be completed in 2020. The results will feed into the updated referencing report.

Referencing to the EQF

Slovenia has completed referencing of SQF levels to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and self-certification to QF-EHEA. A joint report was presented

⁽¹⁰⁾ European Commission; Cedefop (2018). *Survey on implementation, communication and use of NQF/EQF* [unpublished].

⁽¹¹⁾ Prepared by Dr Borut Mikulec. Unedited text available at: https://www.nok.si/sites/www.nok.si/files/dokumenti/evalvacija_registra_kvalifikacij_sok_z_vidika_strokovne_javnosti.pdf (in Slovenian).

⁽¹²⁾ www.nok.si

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 using on an incremental approach, with reform 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. A further point to be improved is communication between education and the labour market. 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.

Adopting and putting into force the SQF Act in July 2016, setting out the practical aspects of framework implementation, has been an important milestone. 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. The first six qualifications have been already included. It also stipulates the inclusion of SQF and EQF levels on certificates, diplomas and Europass documents, enabling the country to reach the second milestone of EQF implementation. The SQF register is fully operational.

One remaining question 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). More is being done on this.

Entering a full operational stage, the SQF is facing new challenges. The question has been raised of the contribution and added value of the SQF for

different groups of stakeholders. An evaluation study – in process – will collect views and evidence on the understanding, awareness and use among main groups of stakeholders to support further implementation.

Another challenge is further development of meaningful links between the SQF and related European and national tools, such as the classification system of education and training, KLASIUS. The development of an overarching national validation strategy for non-formal and informal learning is also on the agenda.

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

Main sources of information

- The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET is the EQF NCP: <http://www.cpi.si/en/>
- SQF portal: <https://www.nok.si/en>
- SQF register: <https://www.nok.si>
- Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET (2014). *Referencing the Slovenian qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area: final report*. https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/Final%20Report%20SI_2014.pdf

Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF)

NQF levels	Educational qualifications	NVQs	Supplementary qualifications (*)	EQF levels
10	Doctoral degree (<i>Diploma o doktoratu znanosti</i>)			8
9	(**) Post-graduate research Master of science degree (<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 (<i>Diploma o specializaciji</i>)		Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF level 7)	6
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)	Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF level 6)	5

NQF levels	Educational qualifications	NVQs	Supplementary qualifications (*)	EQF levels
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)	Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF level 5)	4
4	Final examination certificate (Secondary vocational education, three years) <i>(Spričevalo o zaključnem izpitu, Srednja poklicna izobrazba)</i>	NVQ (level 4)	Certificate of supplementary qualification (SQF 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>			1

(*) The inclusion of supplementary qualifications in the framework was legislated in 2016.

(**) Pre-Bologna diplomas.

Source: Adapted from Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET, 2014; EQF NCP, 2018.

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
KLASIUS	classification system of education and training
NAKVIS	Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
NVQ	national vocational qualification
QF-EHEA	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area
SIAE	Slovenian Institute for Adult Education
SQF	Slovenian qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

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