



EUROPEAN
INVENTORY
OF NQFs 2022
SPAIN



European Inventory of National Qualifications Frameworks 2022 – Spain

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1. Introduction

This report is part of the European inventory of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). Since 2009, Cedefop has been carrying out a systematic mapping and analysis of NQF developments in countries participating in the European qualifications framework (EQF) process. These reviews, done in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group, the European Commission and the European Training Foundation, have directly supported the development of operational and sustainable NQFs. The report offers a detailed description of the structure and scope of the Spanish NQF, and its objectives, functions and institutional arrangements, along with data on the framework's implementation and its impact on broader policy areas.

The Spanish qualifications framework for lifelong learning (*Marco Español de Cualificaciones*, MECU) was adopted in 2022 as a royal decree. It is structured into eight levels, and includes all levels and types of formal education and training. It is in the adoption stage. In 2014, the qualifications framework for higher education (*Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior*, MECES) was set up and self-certified against the qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) (European Commission and DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022).

2. National context

2.1. Policy context

In Spain in 2020, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product was 4.6 %, slightly lower than the EU average. The rate of early school leaving has fallen steadily in recent years (from 26.3 % in 2011 to 13.3 % in 2021), but rates still vary between regions. In 2020, participation in early childhood education was 97.2 % (compared to an EU-27 average of 93.0 %). Tertiary educational attainment (age 25–34) is high (48.7 % in 2021), while participation in vocational education and training (VET) remains rather limited. In 2020, 36.6 % of upper secondary learners were attending VET programmes. The employment rate of recent VET graduates was significantly increased when compared to 2020 (67.1 % and 50.3 % respectively) (European Commission and DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022).

[Organic Law 3/2020 on education](#) (amending Organic Law 2/2006) aims to respond to the challenges posed by the digital transition, ease access to education and improve the quality of education by improving learners' educational outcomes and combating persistent regional differences. It also aims to boost vocational

training ⁽¹⁾, give schools further flexibility on curriculum design and focus on competence-based learning. Since January 2020, the education ministry ⁽²⁾ has been responsible for the initial and continuous regulation of VET ⁽³⁾. [Organic Law 3/2022 on the organisation and integration of vocational training](#) provides for a single, modular and flexible formal vocational training system with a lifelong-learning perspective. It also promotes dual training and fosters the validation of non-formal and informal learning and career guidance ⁽⁴⁾.

2.2. NQF legal basis

The organic laws on education and on the integration and organisation of vocational training established the structure setting up MECU and introduced a 4-year plan for its development. The framework was adopted on the basis of [Royal Decree 272/2022 on the Spanish qualifications framework for lifelong learning](#). This decree constitutes the first stage in the development of MECU. The framework covers formal education and training, not including non-formal training, which will be incorporated in a second phase (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). MECES was set up by the Royal Decree 2027/2011.

3. NQF objectives and functions

The overall aim of MECU is to guide the classification, comparability and transparency of officially recognised qualifications. The specific objectives of the framework include (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022):

- (a) easing the understanding of qualifications by describing them in terms of learning outcomes;
- (b) promoting citizens' mobility;
- (c) supporting lifelong learning, linking initial and continuing VET, and increasing participation in such training, especially for vulnerable groups;
- (d) promoting the identification, validation and recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- (e) fostering permeability among education and training sectors;
- (f) reducing early leaving from education and training.

⁽¹⁾ Access and admission conditions have become more flexible, establishing links with the rest of the education system.

⁽²⁾ The official title is Ministry of Education and Vocational Training

⁽³⁾ Overall responsibility was transferred from the labour ministry, including training within the national qualifications system (linked to professional certificates and dual VET) (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

⁽⁴⁾ Cedefop [news item](#) on the organic law on vocational training.

The purpose of MECES is to allow the classification, comparability and transparency of higher education qualifications.

4. Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

MECU is based on learning outcomes and has eight levels, with descriptors defined, in accordance with the EQF, in terms of knowledge, skills, and autonomy and responsibility. The framework provides a clear link between the qualifications included and the corresponding level descriptors, which are based on EQF level descriptors, adapted to suit the national context. This is particularly the case for skills, where analytical skills and the ability to communicate in different languages are emphasised. Competence is defined as autonomy and responsibility, including learning skills and attitudes. The four highest levels are compatible with the Spanish qualifications framework for higher education, based on the level descriptors of cycles for the QF-EHEA. Levels 4 and 5 include sublevels A, B and C. Sublevels 4A and 5A include qualifications combining general and vocational education; they lead to the next MECU level ⁽⁵⁾. Professional qualifications that do not lead to the next MECU level are included in sublevels 4B and 5B. Sublevels 4C and 5C include specialisation courses that do not lead to the next MECU levels, and learners should hold a qualification at sublevel 4A or 5A respectively to attend them. MECU level 3 includes only sublevels 3A and 3B ⁽⁶⁾.

4.2. NQF scope and coverage

MECU covers the eight EQF levels; levels 5 to 8 are equivalent to the four levels of MECES. It includes formal qualifications from general education, initial VET and higher education, along with professional certificates (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The latter can be obtained through adult learning / continuing training and through the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Advanced VET at MECU level 5 is considered non-university higher education, and is included in the framework to promote lifelong learning. It operates outside the university system; however, where subjects/learning outcomes are properly aligned, such studies may be recognised not only for admission to university but also as ECTS credits.

⁽⁵⁾ Sublevel 4A also includes the baccalaureate degree (*Título de Bachiller*).

⁽⁶⁾ *Source:* Internal communication with the General Secretariat for VET.

Table 1. **Spanish qualifications framework (MECU)**

MECU level	MECES level	Qualification	QF-EHEA
8	4	Doctoral degree (<i>Título de Doctor</i>)	Third cycle
7	3	<p>Master's degree (<i>Título de Máster universitario</i>)</p> <p>Master's degree in artistic education (<i>Título de Máster en Enseñanzas Artísticas</i>)</p> <p>Bachelor's degree of at least 300 ECTS credits comprising at least 60 ECTS credits at master's level, obtaining the level of qualification through the Council of Universities (<i>Título de Graduado de al menos 300 créditos ECTS que comprenda al menos 60 créditos ECTS de Nivel de Máster, que haya obtenido este nivel de cualificación mediante resolución del Consejo de Universidades</i>)</p>	Second cycle
6	2	<p>Bachelor's degree (<i>Título de Graduado</i>)</p> <p>Advanced degree in higher artistic education (<i>Título Superior de la Enseñanzas Artísticas Superiores</i>)</p>	First cycle
5	1	<p>A – Advanced professional technician's degree (<i>Técnico Superior de Formación Profesional</i>).</p> <p>A – Advanced sports technician's degree (<i>Título de Técnico Superior Deportivo</i>)</p> <p>A – Advanced visual arts and design technician's degree (<i>Título de Técnico Superior de Artes Plásticas y Diseño</i>)</p> <p>B – Professional certificate level 3 (<i>Certificado de Profesionalidad nivel 3</i>)</p> <p>C – Specialisation courses in vocational training in the education system that requires holding an advanced professional technician's degree (<i>Cursos de Especialización de Formación Profesional del sistema educativo cuyo requisito de acceso sea estar en posesión de un título de Técnico Superior de Formación Profesional</i>)</p>	Short cycle
4		<p>A – Baccalaureate degree (<i>Título de Bachiller</i>)</p> <p>A – Professional technician's degree (<i>Título de Técnico de Formación Profesional</i>)</p> <p>A – Professional music teaching technician's degree (<i>Título de Técnico de Enseñanzas Profesionales de Música</i>)</p> <p>A – Professional dance teaching technician's degree (<i>Título de Técnico de Enseñanzas Profesionales de Danza</i>)</p> <p>A – Visual arts and design technician's degree (<i>Título de Técnico de Artes Plásticas y Diseño</i>)</p> <p>A – Degree of Technician in Sports (<i>Título de Técnico Deportivo</i>)</p> <p>B – Professional Certificate level 2 (<i>Certificado de Profesionalidad nivel 2</i>)</p>	

MECU level	MECES level	Qualification	QF-EHEA
		C – Specialization courses in vocational training of the educational system that requires holding a Degree of Professional Technician (<i>Cursos de Especialización de Formación Profesional del sistema educativo cuyo requisito de acceso sea estar en posesión de un título de Técnico de Formación Profesional</i>)	
3		A – Graduate Degree in Compulsory Secondary Education (<i>Título de graduado en Educación Secundaria Obligatoria</i>) A – Basic Professional Technician Degree (<i>Título de Técnico Profesional Básico</i>) B – Professional Certificate level 1 (<i>Certificado de Profesionalidad nivel 1</i>)	
2		Official certificate of passing the second year of compulsory secondary education (<i>Certificado oficial de superación de 2.º de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria</i>) Certificate of vocational training programmes for pupils with special educational needs or other vulnerable groups, regulated under the provisions of Royal Decree 127/2014 (<i>Certificado de programas formativos de formación profesional para alumnos y alumnas con necesidades educativas especiales o colectivos específicos, regulados al amparo de la disposición adicional cuarta del Real Decreto 127/2014, de 28 de febrero</i>)	
1		Certification of primary education (<i>Certificación correspondiente a la enseñanza primaria</i>)	

Source: European Commission and Cedefop, 2022.

Qualifications were assigned to MECU levels based on three criteria:

- the comparability of qualifications' learning outcomes with the MECU level descriptors;
- the implementation of common quality assurance criteria for qualifications in line with Annex IV to the 2017 EQF recommendation;
- public consultation with bodies involved in the design, award and use of qualifications in a relevant field.

The 2022 organic law on VET classifies formal vocational training from grade A (micro-training) to grades D and E (degrees and specialisation courses). Micro-training represents the partial accreditation of competences that can be accumulated leading to modules (both can be considered microcredentials) and eventually to VET qualifications levelled to MECU (Cedefop, 2023).

4.3. Use of learning outcomes

The use of learning outcomes varies across education sectors. The education ministry has established, through legislation, national core curricula for the various levels of education: pre-primary, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and vocational training. These are determined by the central government, though regional administrations and schools take responsibility for developing part of the curriculum ⁽⁷⁾. The core curricula determine the general objectives for each education level, along with the specific objectives for each area or subject. They also establish the content and evaluation criteria for each area and the basic skills for each level of compulsory education.

The most developed and detailed implementation of learning outcomes is in VET. The organic law on the organisation and integration of vocational training reinforces the learning-outcome-based modular structure of all VET cycles. The learning outcomes of VET qualifications are in line with the relevant occupational standard, while VET programmes include learning units on career guidance, entrepreneurship and transversal competences for socio-professional maturity (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

The [National catalogue of occupational standards](#) (*Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales*, CNCP) lists 756 occupational standards ⁽⁸⁾ defined in 2 512 units of competences. Professional modules for each standard describe the learning outcomes and the corresponding assessment criteria ⁽⁹⁾. The National Institute of Qualifications (INCUAL), which is responsible for defining, updating and adapting the national catalogue, focused in 2019 on designing the new occupational standards and redefining learning outcomes. The 2020 organic law on education has also promoted a more competence-based approach to curriculum design. In addition, learners who complete a basic VET programme receive a compulsory secondary education graduate degree (ESO), which grants access to upper secondary education. Thus, basic VET programmes integrate general and vocational subjects. For those over the age of 17 who left the education system without a qualification, vocational programmes are organised to allow them to obtain a general education certificate or technician's qualification.

(7) The central government is responsible for designing 65 % of the curriculum (55 % in those autonomous communities that have their own language). The remaining part of the curriculum at the regional level differs among autonomous communities.

(8) Occupational standards inform the development of both initial VET programmes that lead to vocational diplomas and continuing VET programmes that lead to professional certificates. Vocational diplomas and professional certificates include a compulsory on-the-job training module (their learning outcomes must be assessed in the workplace) (Cedefop and Fundae, 2019).

(9) Learning outcomes are closely related to work activities and required professional competences.

MECES refers directly to learning outcomes (*resultados de aprendizaje* and *competencias*). Higher education study programmes should include the expected learning outcomes and how they should be achieved. The professional training technician's degree allows access to higher VET programmes and higher arts and design programmes. Learners who complete the necessary studies are able to obtain a bachelor's degree in advanced artistic education.

4.4. Quality assurance arrangements

The [National Institute for Educational Evaluation](#) is the body of the education ministry responsible for the evaluation of education and training, in collaboration with education authorities.

External quality assurance in higher education is undertaken by the [National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation](#) and a number of agencies within specific autonomous regions. The competences of the quality assurance agencies vary. All study programmes must be accredited in accordance with national guidelines. Linked to MECES levels, learning outcomes are a specific requirement in, for example, the *ex post* external evaluation of study programmes required for the formal accreditation of all official degrees (or the renewal of this accreditation). Consideration of the use of learning outcomes is also a specific requirement in the external evaluation of a higher education institution or unit's internal quality assurance systems during audit procedures.

5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The General Secretariat for VET of the education ministry is responsible for the overall coordination and oversight of MECU, and for its development and day-to-day running. It is the designated EQF national coordination point. The need to give a lifelong perspective to VET has led to the reform of the organic law on education, a ministerial restructuring and the setting-up of the General Secretariat for VET. Employees from the secretariat are involved in the day-to-day implementation of MECU, which is supported by the regular budget of the ministry (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

A wide range of stakeholders were involved and consulted in the development phase of MECU, including:

- (a) ministries (e.g. for labour, industry, health and economy);
- (b) social partners (i.e. the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations, Spanish Confederation of Small and Medium Enterprises);

- (c) institutional coordination bodies (e.g. Sectoral Education Conference, General Conference for University Policy);
- (d) consultative bodies (e.g. State School Council, Vocational Training Council, Arts Education Council, University Council);
- (e) evaluation agencies, professional associations and regional education councils.

Spain is seeking to create a simple and practical system, which is robust but also flexible enough to respond to the requirements of regional autonomy. In 2020, the Sectoral Education Conference of the National System of Qualifications and Vocational Training for Employment was set up, together with the regional authorities from the autonomous communities. This is the new body for cooperation between the General State Administration and the autonomous communities to coordinate policies on vocational training for employment (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

Cooperation with the Bologna process is ensured, with members represented in both the committee for MECU and in the group for MECES to achieve methodological and structural coherence, making it possible to align the two frameworks ⁽¹⁰⁾.

6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

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

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is regulated by [Royal Decree 1224/2009](#) on the recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience, modified by [Royal Decree 143/2021](#). The 2021 decree put in place a permanent cumulative accreditation system for assessing professional competences, applied to all economic sectors, leading to a professional training title or professional certificate ⁽¹¹⁾ (Gonzalez-Yubero, forthcoming; Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023). The organic law on education and the organic law on universities incorporate measures to validate non-formal and informal learning, such as access exams for VET and university studies targeting those who do not have the required qualifications. In general, validation is an important element in legislative and

⁽¹⁰⁾ MECES was developed by a formal committee of stakeholders set up by [Royal Decree 900/2007](#).

⁽¹¹⁾ The procedure only validates professional competences acquired through work experience or non-formal learning pertaining to all units of competences registered in the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications. Validation procedures lead to either full or partial qualifications, and give access to education and training programmes.

strategic policy documents. For instance, the organic law on the organisation and integration of vocational training includes an article on the accreditation of competences introducing a national registry of accreditations of the professional competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning (Gonzalez-Yubero, forthcoming; Cedefop and ReferNet, 2023).

The royal decree on the Spanish qualifications framework for lifelong learning links MECU with validation and lifelong learning. Validation can lead to a qualification levelled to MECU. Validation is integrated into the qualification system, and allows individuals to progress and access different levels and types of education. According to the 2022 organic law on vocational training, validation credentials can be combined to obtain a VET qualification (Gonzalez-Yubero, forthcoming). In February 2020, a one-off report on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Spain was presented to the EQF advisory group (Ministry of Education and VET, 2020).

The national system of validation covers secondary education for adults, VET and university education using various procedures (Gonzalez-Yubero, forthcoming). Progress has been achieved in higher education; universities have developed procedures to validate and recognise working experience to access study programmes (for people over 40 years of age) or gain credits towards a degree.

The [Reconoce project](#) ⁽¹²⁾ has created a new recognition system for non-formal education, covering the youth sector in the country. The project was very active in 2022, as it almost doubled the number (485) of participating public and private entities that certify skills.

7. NQF implementation and impact

7.1. Stage of implementation

MECU is at the adoption stage; it was formally adopted through Royal Decree 272/2022. Specific financial and human resources are used for its development and implementation, and a 4-year development plan is being carried out, while the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders have formally been agreed (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

⁽¹²⁾ Through this project, the network organised an online system for the accreditation of volunteering.

7.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

It is planned that MECU and EQF levels will be indicated on all new and reviewed qualifications. EQF levels are indicated on some qualifications at EQF level 4 and above on the diploma, diploma supplement or Europass supplement (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.3. NQF dissemination

A new website was developed with the adoption of MECU. The website provides information on the new framework and its structure, and a comparison with the EQF. It also includes links to the main legal documents relating to MECU (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.4. Qualifications databases and registers

A single NQF database is under development. Individuals have access to three websites that are not interconnected: the [Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees \(RUCT\)](#), the [State Register of Non-University Educational Centres \(RCD\)](#) ⁽¹³⁾, and the [website todoFP](#), which provides data on vocational qualifications and professional certificates and on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, along with career guidance. The RUCT provides information on qualifications regarding the field of study, the learning outcomes, the awarding body and the region in which they are offered (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

7.5. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

MECU was adopted in 2022, and it needs time to be implemented before conducting an evaluation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

8. Referencing to the EQF

MECES has been self-certified against the QF-EHEA (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (2014)). The referencing of MECU to the EQF is in progress, and is expected to be completed in 2023 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

⁽¹³⁾ This register is hosted on the website of the education ministry. Individuals can find information on all non-university education and training providers by region, and on the field of studies and type of learning they offer.

9. Reflections and plans

The adoption of MECU through Royal Decree 272/2022 is a major milestone in the development and implementation process of the framework. MECU has incorporated MECES, and has improved the transparency and comparability of qualifications by providing a comprehensive map of formal qualifications. The framework is adequately embedded into national legislation through the organic laws on education and vocational training, while the royal decree links it to validation. MECU has provided a platform that has promoted cooperation among various stakeholders, including labour market representatives. MECU and MECES are also used in the recognition of foreign qualifications ⁽¹⁴⁾.

The dissemination of the framework is a major priority, as it is considered essential in order for MECU to become a useful tool for end users. At the same time, reaching end users and enabling them to use it is one of the main challenges in the day-to-day implementation of MECU (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Plans include levelling non-formal and informal qualifications to MECU during the second phase of its implementation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). However, this is regarded as a complex and challenging process.

Acronyms

EQF	European qualifications framework
MECU	Marco Español de Cualificaciones (Spanish qualifications framework)
MECES	Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior (Spanish qualifications framework for higher education)
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area
VET	vocational education and training

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[MECU](#).

[Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales](#) (National Catalogue of Occupational Standards).

[Repertorio Nacional de Certificados de Profesionalidad](#) (National Repertoire of Professional Certificates).