



# Project EQF-Ref



## National Case Studies: Bulgaria

The EQF-Ref project has been funded with support from the European. The content of this report does not necessarily reflect the position of the European Commission, nor does it involve any responsibility on their part.



## 1. Introduction

This report is based on the interviews with five stakeholders, actively involved in the VET policies and practices in the country:

- one representative of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, member of the NQF working group
- two representatives of the national Agency for Vocational Education and training (NAVET)
- two representatives of the social partners: a trade union and a training provider.

## 2. NQF Development and Implementation: Status quo of the development of the NQF

The launching of the EQF and the development of a National Qualifications Framework is considered as an important step of the Bulgarian education and training system towards increasing transparency of qualifications and mutual trust in an European context.

The first communications between the stakeholders on developing the NQF started in 2007, with workshops and communication events organised by NAVET and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science.

In 2008 was established a specialised workgroup - task force under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, and a National Coordination Point. The workgroup is working actively on linking the levels of the national qualification systems (VET and HE) to the EQF levels, based also on particular examples, but an official document is not published yet.

## 3. EQF Implementation

### **3.1 General information**

The linking between NQF and EQF is planned to be realised on the basis of the existing national qualifications framework (qualification degrees from 1 to 4 in VET and the Bachelor - Master - PhD stages in Higher education). At this stage, after a communication process with all stakeholders, a representative working group is working on developing a table of concordance of the national qualification degrees to the EQF. The table for HE is already developed, the table for VET is at an advanced stage. There are still some difficulties in linking the stages of general education to EQF.

### **3.2 "Experiences and available results"**

There are no national pilot projects in the context of EQF referencing. Important experience was gained by the NAVET during its participation in the TransEQFrame project, where testing of the referencing of some qualifications to EQF also took place. The experience from the TransEQFrame project was shared with stakeholders at different levels.

### **3.3 Information related to the criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF developed by the EQF Advisory Group**

#### **Criterion 1**

*The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.*

#### *Already accomplished activities:*

The responsibilities and the legal competences of the relevant bodies included in the referencing process in BG are clearly determined by their Rules of Procedure, which are officially published.

The working group dealing with the referencing process is a task force set by an Order of the Minister of Education and Science in April 2008. Its appointments are clearly set in the Minister's Order - to develop a table of concordance of the national qualification degrees to the EQF, a plan for further activities concerning the Sectoral qualifications development with respect to the EQF, and to submit a proposal for changes in the national legislation concerning introduction of the requirement the documents issues within the national education and the higher education system to contain information about the correspondence with the EQF.

The NCP has been nominated by a Resolution of the Minister of Education and Science in 2008. It is the European Integration and International Cooperation Directorate, Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (since July 2009, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science has been renamed to Ministry of Education, Youth and Science). The NCP's role and the responsibilities are to coordinate all institutions working with the NQF and to prepare changes in Bulgarian legislation. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (MEYS) is the responsible body. The members of the NCP come from all ministries and social partners. The NCP is represented in public by its president (who comes from the MEYS)

#### *Intentions and expectations:*

It is expected that in the next period the information about the results of the work on the NQF will be better disseminated amongst the social partners and other stakeholders. Information concerning the NCP will also be published soon on the Ministry's website.

#### *Personal views of the respondents:*

- All institutions involved in the referencing process are clearly determined according to their legal competences in the field of the national qualifications. Their role and responsibilities regarding to the NQF referencing process are clearly set at a national level.
- It is necessary that more information about the NCP is published and available for the public.

## **Criterion 2**

*There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework.*

### *Already accomplished activities:*

Bulgaria has an experience in this field related to the NQF draft related to both VET and higher education sector.

The part of the NQF draft related to higher education levels has already been designed by a separated task force set also by an Order of the Minister of Education and Science and completed its job in December 2007. Its assignment was to develop a draft project of more precise alignment of the existing NQF for higher education both to Qualifications Framework (QF) in the EHEA and to the EQF. This task force has done a self-evaluation of the national descriptors of the currently acting (since 1995) structure of the educational and qualification degrees Bachelor, Master and Doctor introduced by the Higher Education Act (1995 , further amended and supplemented) in the context of the QF in the EHEA. A draft of national descriptors for each educational and qualification degree has been elaborated as well. By this way the current NQF draft for higher education is compatible both with the QF in the EHEA and the EQF for LLL. The same number of levels covering the higher education system (3) has used as to the EQF and the QF in the EHEA.

In the area of VET, several discussions and reports were made for determining the links between the Stages of Vocational Qualification 1 to 4 in the National qualifications system, and the EQF level descriptors. Important experience was collected during the researches within the frames of the TransEQFrame European project, where NAVET was a partner.

### *Intentions and expectations:*

It has been decided by the task force responsible for drafting the NQF to use the same number of levels as of the EQF and to describe the expected learning outcomes using similar descriptors in terms of knowledge, skills and competences. It was considered as the most optimal solution. It fits well with the specific features of the Bulgarian national educational system and is in line with ESCED – 97 levels as well.

### *Personal views of the respondents:*

- it would be a good idea similar approach to be used in describing the correspondence between the national qualifications framework or system and the EQF – using the same features and terminology. In such a case development of a table of concordance seems to be the clearest solution.

## **Criterion 3**

*The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems.*

*Already accomplished activities:*

Concerning the work of the task force responsible for drafting the NQF, the following could be mentioned:

1. It was agreed by the task force responsible for drafting the NQF the learning outcomes approach to be used for all levels of the NQF draft. The higher education levels in the NQF draft (this part is ready) are described according to the descriptors of the EQF and the QF in the EHEA.
2. Currently the learning outcomes oriented approach is applying with respect to the draft NQF levels covering the VET. The correspondence between the NQF levels and degrees of qualification is taken into account. The description of the expected learning outcomes is done according to the requirements (standards) set in the State Educational Requirements for Acquisition of Qualification by Professions (all of them have been designed using learning outcomes approach).

Concerning the current state of the art (the NQF draft is under elaboration, but the acting legal provision provided possibilities for use of learning outcomes approach), the learning outcomes approach has been used in all documents in the national legislation related to describing the expected results at the output of the educational and training system related to acquisition of a degree of education / vocational qualification.

In the area of VET, there are several important issues that have to be considered regarding the principle of learning outcomes.

In 2007 started a process of redesigning the State Educational Requirements for basing them on the principles and objectives of learning outcomes. The structure of the State Educational Requirements was reformulated, and a process of revising the SER for all professions started. All the newly developed SER are also based on learning outcomes.

Concerning the validation of non-formal and informal learning issue, the arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET are stated in the Law for Vocational Education and Training, article 40. This article arranges the regulations for validation of results from non-formal and informal learning, following the State Educational requirements.

SERs are currently considered as a tool for validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired by non-formal and informal learning. Regarding the higher education system, validation of non-formal and informal learning is applied in limited fields of study, mostly in the field of Arts, using learning outcomes approach.

A project NP 2003.8-001 "Promoting adults' vocational training and employability in Bulgaria" has been developed in cooperation with GOPA Consulting and with participation of representatives from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Branch Chamber of Wood-Processing and Furniture Manufacturing, the Branch Chamber for

Tailoring Manufacturing, the “Support” Labour Confederation , and the Independent Trade Unions Confederation in Bulgaria. The objectives of this project are oriented towards development of a framework and procedures for assessment and validation of competences acquired by non-formal and informal learning. A package of documents has been developed as a result of the project in 2008/2009, incl. a model of a system for validation of competences acquired by non-formal and informal learning. This model is tested by its applying for three mass professions with first degree of vocational qualification in the following fields: manufacturing of textile wearing, shoes and leather articles, and social activities.

In the area of HE, the current higher education system in BG is based on the learning outcomes approach and is linked to the credit accumulation and transfer system, which is compatible to the ETCS.

State Requirements for Acquisition of Higher Education at educational and qualification degrees of Bachelor, Master, and ‘Specialist in...’ (2003) exist. They set the expected learning outcomes for each of these degrees. At higher education institution level there are qualification descriptions for each specialty (by educational and qualification degrees). They describe the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired by the graduates. So Bulgaria already has an experience in developing the NQF draft for higher education – learning outcomes approach and links with the credit system.

*Intentions and expectations:*

1. Regarding the general education levels in the NQF draft (this part is forthcoming to be developed), the learning outcomes approach is also to be used taking into account ISCED – 97 and the standards set by the State Educational Requirements on the Educational Contents, which are also based on learning outcomes approach.
2. After adoption of the NQF it will be used as a tool in validation of non-formal and informal learning as well.

*Personal views of the respondents:*

It is a good idea the NQF or system to be based on learning outcomes approach and to be used in the process of validation of learning outcomes acquired by non-formal or informal way linked to the credit system where applicable.

**Criterion 4**

*The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.*

*Already accomplished activities:*

The places of the national qualifications in BG are clearly and transparently set both by means of the national legislation and at an institutional level. The procedures for including new qualifications in the national qualifications structures are published at the website of the NAVET.

The initiative is usually taken by the stakeholders or social partners, and a specialised commission of the NAVET is appointed to make the decision.

Concerning the NQF draft, they are also clear at elaboration stage of the NQF. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications are legislatively set.

*Personal views of the respondents:*

It would be a good idea the procedures for inclusion of qualifications to be more precisely set by legislative means, to be developed with participation of the stakeholders, to be a subject of national consultations, and to be transparent for all stakeholders and the wider public as well.

**Criterion 5**

*The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer (s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation).*

*Already accomplished activities:*

In the area of VET, the training providers in continuing VET are licensed by the NAVET. The licensing procedures are designed in a way to assure that the performance of the training providers is in accordance with all the national legislations and the State Educational requirements, which are the backbone of the national qualifications framework. NAVET also performs some follow-up control

Concerning the higher education, the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) to the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria is the national authority responsible for quality evaluation and accreditation of the higher education institutions. The Agency is a member of the ENQA. The criteria and procedures used by NEAA for evaluation and accreditation at institutional and programme level, as well as its criteria and recommendations for post-accreditation monitoring and control are developed according to the Higher Education Act and are to a great extend in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA.

*Intentions and expectations:*

After the official adoption of the Recommendation for Quality Assurance in VET it is expected the necessary measures and actions to be undertaken at national and institutional level targeted to implementing the recommendation towards the VET qualifications and they to be linked to the national qualifications system and the NQF as well.

*Personal views of the respondents:*

- the quality assurance systems for all sectors of the national education and training system should be improved, taking in account the existing European standards, guidelines, recommendations, and good practices at European level

- the links between the QA systems for all education and training sectors will be more clearly linked to the national qualifications system

#### **Criterion 6**

*The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.*

*Already accomplished activities:*

Not yet available

*Intentions and expectations:*

After completion of the work of the task force responsible for drafting the NQF, the NQF draft together with the referencing report will be a subject of national consultations, incl. participation of all national authorities in quality assurance and accreditation. After completion of this stage, the expectations of the stakeholders are that such as agreement with the relevant quality assurance bodies will be signed.

*Personal views of the respondents:*

The stated agreement with the relevant quality assurance bodies will assure the referencing to the NQF to be provided by all educational and training institutions, for all qualifications, and will ensure this to be set as a requirement in the criteria for quality assurance as well.

#### **Criterion 7**

*The referencing process shall involve international experts.*

*Already accomplished activities:*

Not yet available

*Intentions and expectations:*

Bulgaria plans to invite international experts to participate in the referencing process and in drafting the NQF self-certification report.

#### **Criterion 8**

*The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting*

*it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria.*

*Already accomplished activities:*

Not yet available

*Intentions and expectations:*

The task force responsible for drafting the NQF will provide the table of concordance between the NQF draft and the EQF together with the self-certification report, with assistance of external national and international experts. The intention of the workgroup is all the criteria to be addressed separately. The NQF draft and the draft of the referencing report will be published on the website of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (as a national authority) for national consultations.

*Personal views of the respondents:*

- the referencing report should be developed by the national authorities with wider participation of the stakeholders and international experts.

#### **Criterion 9**

*The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports.*

*Already accomplished activities:*

Not yet available

*Intentions and expectations:*

The Bulgarian referencing report and other relevant materials should be published on the EQF web platform from CEDEFOP after its official adoption.

*Personal views of the respondents:*

- the availability of the reports of all countries on the EQF web platform from CEDEFOP will be quite useful database.

#### **Criterion 10**

*Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.*

*Already accomplished activities:*

Not yet available

*Intentions and expectations:*

It is planned that the task force responsible for drafting the NQF shall submit a proposal for changes in the national legislation concerning introduction the requirement the documents issues within the national education, VET and the higher education system to contain information about the correspondence with the EQF.

*Personal views of the respondents:*

- the reference between the obtained education and qualification degree and the appropriate EQF level is important and should be introduced as soon as possible
- this reference will be an important step for the better European labour market mobility
- while this reference will be applied for the new-issued documents, the problem will still stay open for the qualifications obtained and documents issued in previous years, and needs to be clarified further.

*Overall view of the criteria*

All the respondents find the criteria clear and applicable, and do not find missing issues.

### **3.4 Referencing Report**

*Already accomplished activities:*

Not yet available

*Intentions and expectations:*

The task force responsible for drafting the NQF will provide the table of concordance between the NQF draft and the EQF together with the self-certification report, with assistance of external national and international experts.

At the present moment the number of pages and the volume of information to be included in the self-certification report have not been decided yet.

The task force has agreed to address separately each of the criteria. The good practices of the other countries that have already adopted their NQFs could be very useful concerning the degree of details and extent of the information to be included in the self-certification report.

### ***3.5 Organisation of the process for preparing the referencing report***

It is decided that the organization of the EQF referencing report is to be performed by the task force responsible for drafting the NQF, with participation of external and international experts.

#### *Intentions and expectations:*

Challenges in this process have not been identified so far. It is possible any challenges to emerge at later stage.

It would be quite useful and reasonable a “pool of international experts” to be developed. It would provide more options for choice, because at the present the countries can use their personal and professional contacts and recommendations by third parties concerning the professionals - international experts in EQF/NQF issues. It would also shorten the time for orientation and will facilitate the process of choosing who to be attracted to join the referencing process in a given country.

For developing “pool of international experts” it would be important to set clear and transparent criteria for including national experts in this data base and these criteria to be agreed at European level.

Concerning the feedback at European level, the members of the EQF Advisory Group may provide feedback of the reference reports and it is agreed by the Group. Feedback could be provided on seminars organised at European level as well. The European feedback could be further taken into account by the national authorities at a national level with participation of the stakeholders and the social partners.