

NQF state of play



Lithuania 2018

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Introduction and context

Key indicators for education and training show a mixed picture in Lithuania. On the one hand, the country has the one of the lowest percentages of early leavers from education and training in the EU (5.4% in 2017, compared to the 10.6% EU average) and the highest rate of tertiary education attainment (58.0% in 2017, compared to the 39.9% EU average). The employment rate of recent graduates is also above the EU average, and one of the highest in the EU for tertiary education graduates (91.5% in 2017). In contrast, rates of investment on education and training that are among the highest in Europe are not translated into excellence and equity. The school system and the higher education sector are faced with quality and efficiency challenges, especially in light of a shrinking school population. The proportion of 15 year-old students with underachievement in mathematics, reading and science is relatively high and the share of top performers has declined.

Student performance is strongly linked to school location and socioeconomic status, with especially large disparities between urban and rural areas. Participation in vocational education and training (VET) is substantially below the EU average. Among the points of focus in the country are increasing the quality of teaching and the attractiveness of the teaching profession, reforming VET curricula to increase their labour market relevance, and increasing participation in adult learning. Reforming the tertiary education sector is also high on the agenda, including a plan for restructuring and consolidation of universities and measures to promote quality and efficiency, adopted in 2017 (European Commission, 2018).

The Lithuanian qualifications framework (LTQF) was formally adopted through a government resolution on 4 May 2010 ([1]). The LTQF is based on eight learning- outcomes-based levels, and covers all officially recognised qualifications in general (primary and secondary) education, vocational education and training and higher education. Two amendments to the resolution (June and August 2011) clarified the role and function of the framework. A joint referencing/self-certification to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) was completed in late 2011 and the referencing report was published in 2012.

Policy objectives

The development of the LTQF forms part of a (more than) decade-long effort to reform and modernise Lithuanian education and training. The national education strategy for 2003-12 stressed the need for flexible and open education structures, for better coordination between general and vocational education and training, and for stronger links to non-formal and informal learning ([2]). The LTQF supports this strategy and addresses five main objectives:

- a. the framework should play a role in better adapting qualifications to the needs of the labour market and society;
- b. it should help to improve the clarity of qualifications design to improve assessment and recognition;
- c. it should increase transparency of qualifications and assist individuals in using them;
- d. it should support national and international mobility;
- e. it should encourage lifelong learning and allow individuals to build on outcomes of non-formal and informal learning (QVETDC, 2012:33).

The LTQF aims have not changed over time (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The eight levels of the LTQF combine the existing structure of the Lithuanian qualifications system with the descriptor principles introduced by the EQF. Two existing level arrangements (the five vocational education levels introduced in 1997 and the three levels (cycles) of higher education introduced in 1992) directly influenced the design of the LTQF. The level descriptors are defined according to two parameters: focusing on activity characteristics and on types of competence.

Table 1. **Level descriptors in the Lithuanian NQF**

Parameters		
	Characteristics of activities	Types of competence
Criteria	• complexity of activities • autonomy of activities • variability of activities	• cognitive competences • functional competences • general competences

Source: Adapted from QVETDC, 2012

While the distinction between cognitive, functional and general competences broadly reflects the EQF distinction between knowledge, skills and competence, now autonomy and responsibility, the activity criteria can be seen as a further development and specification of the third EQF pillar, focusing on autonomy and responsibility. The combination of the two parameters allows for detailed description of each level ([3]).

The learning outcomes (competence) approach is broadly accepted and implemented in all areas of Lithuanian vocational education and training (Lauzackas et al, 2009). VET has used a learning outcomes or competence approach for several decades, partly linked to the introduction of VET standards in the early 1990s ([4]). Sectoral qualifications standards and descriptions of study fields aim to improve education's link to labour market needs and they are linked to the LTQF (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

During 2010-15 the Centre for Development of Qualifications and

Vocational Education and Training carried out the ESF-funded project *Development of qualifications and creation of the modular VET system*. This had the goal of developing the national system of qualifications through sector-based occupational standards and corresponding national modular VET curricula. Ten sectoral standards have been designed. Project follow-up was launched at the end of 2016, aiming for the development of occupational standards for the remaining 14 economic sectors.

The methodology for designing occupational standards has been based on a combination of competence and work-process analysis approaches. It involved an important shift from functional analysis, which was previously applied in the design of initial VET standards, to work-process analysis. One of the key advantages of this latter approach is potentially identifying and covering all qualifications required for the execution of work processes in the economic sector, as well as mapping the links and interrelationships between the qualifications inside the sector and between the sectors.

At the beginning of 2018, only one standard had been officially approved, with nine (already developed earlier with ESF support) undergoing revision and 14 still needing to be developed. It is planned that standards revision and design of new ones will be completed by mid-2019. Adoption of a modular approach to VET curricula has gained speed, with 27% of VET learners enrolled in modular programmes in 2017 compared to just 11% the year before. However, challenges remain: ensuring the timely update of standards; completing the corresponding revision of VET programmes; and promptly launching the programmes' implementation (European Commission, 2018).

This revision of standards also covers professional qualifications at levels 6 and 7, signalling that the learning outcomes approach is being adopted in higher education as well as in traditional VET. The level descriptors of the LTQF are used as an explicit reference point for this exercise and help to improve consistency between single qualifications and across the different sectors.

The traditional university sector is also progressing in adopting the learning outcomes approach. LTQF descriptors are taken into account when designing study field descriptors and are used as reference points for the development, review and renewal of university programmes and qualifications. Descriptions of study fields aim to link higher education and labour market needs better ([5]). Implementation of the LTQF is seen as an important part of a strategy to move towards a more consistent

and comprehensive use of learning outcomes across education and training levels and types. Initiatives taken to address the use of learning outcomes in general education exemplify this. In 2015, a description of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary programmes was approved (with changes in April 2016); work continues to develop general education curricula statements at levels 1-4 in accordance to LTQF. This is one of the reasons that levelling of general education qualifications at these levels remains unfinished.

Until recently there was no political consensus on level 5 qualifications, considering if they should be attributed to VET or to short-cycle programmes within EHEA, or to both (European Commission; Cedefop, 2018). In November 2018 the Law on Science and Higher Education legitimated short-cycle studies that should lead to level 5 qualifications. Implementation issues remain unclear, as well as the relationship to level 5 VET qualifications and programmes.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Work on the LTQF was initiated by the Labour Market Training Authority of Lithuania, which launched an ESF-funded project for NQF design in 2006. Following extensive technical work, a National Authority of Qualifications was established in 2008 to coordinate LTQF implementation. This authority was abolished in 2009, following the election of a new Parliament in late 2008. The Ministry of Education and Science then took over the main responsibility for LTQF development in 2009 and has retained this role since. The Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC) ([6]) has been responsible for day-to-day coordination since 2009 and was also appointed as national coordination point for the EQF at this point. NCPs tasks are:

- a. to reference existing national qualifications levels to the eight levels of the European qualifications framework;
- b. to ensure that a transparent methodology is used to reference the national qualifications levels to the EQF;
- c. to provide access to information and guidance to stakeholders concerning issues on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through the national qualifications systems;
- d. to promote the participation of stakeholders (education institutions, social partners, sectors and experts) in the process.

The QVETDC is also the ReferNet contact point and the quality assurance reference point for VET in Lithuania. A current ESF-funded project for 2016-20 is developing a framework of sectoral qualification standards and vocational training curricula in line with the Lithuanian and European qualifications frameworks. In 2013, the Centre for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (SKVC) ([7]) was officially delegated to take part in the coordination and implementation of the LTQF, with a particular focus on universities and universities of applied sciences. SKVC is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and listed in the European assurance register for higher education (EQAR).

The influence of labour market stakeholders has been strengthened by the involvement of the Central Professional Committee (CPC) (abolished in 2018 following a change to the Law on VET) in referencing the LTQF to the EQF. The CPC played a key role in LTQF implementation, notably in

planning a framework of sector-based occupational standards. The CPS was a tripartite committee, established under the Law on VET in 2007, signalling the need for active involvement of stakeholders outside education and training. There were also established sectoral professional committees: multilateral bodies at economic sector level, mainly responsible for the assessment and quality assurance of occupational standards and qualifications. With an amendment to the law on VET in 2017, the role of sectoral professional committees has increased and they have overtaken the functions of the central professional committee.

While some progress has been made in coordinating VET and higher education, general education involvement in the LTQF is limited and needs to be strengthened.

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

[8]

Validation in Lithuania is an integral part of the lifelong learning system and is covered by national strategies and programmes. In 2014, a national framework was set up, with implementation decentralised at training provider level. A number of Lithuanian laws recognise the rights of individuals to access validation initiatives. In VET the law on vocational education and training amended in 2017 defines that the competence acquired outside formal education may be recognised as a qualification of an appropriate LTQF level or part thereof. In higher education prior learning may be recognised as part of a programme; the maximum credit is 75% of a total study programme volume.

Since 2012 significant progress has been achieved in validation of non-formal and informal learning. Lithuania has put in place validation arrangements which make it possible to assess non-formal or informal learning in VET and HE. The skills and competences acquired outside formal education are assessed against standards or programmes used in formal education. The results of validation are recognised by the education system and may lead to a formal qualification linked to the national qualifications framework. Those wishing to formalise their non-formal and informal learning must apply to an appropriate VET or HE provider; each of these has an internal quality system which also applies to the assessment of learning outcomes. Arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET and higher education include all the elements specified in the Council recommendation of 2012 ([9]) (identification, documentation, assessment and certification).

However, there is still room for improvement. There is no evidence that validation is used in general education. Although the level of awareness of validation of non-formal and informal learning amongst the public is rather poor, it is not currently among strategic priorities and lacks necessary funding. Information about validation users is not monitored. There is also a lack of validation reference material, methodologies and tools. There is no provision for the development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process. The quality of VET student competences assessment, which also covers validation of non-formal and informal learning, is insufficient (QVETDC , 2017).

Further developments of the validation system include the introduction of a new cumulative assessment approach (that shall cover learning outcomes outside formal education) into general education (Lithuanian Government, 2017). It is also planned to create a digital tool to inform about the possibilities to validate non-formal and informal learning and direct an applicant to a certain validation provider. This tool shall also allow initial testing and monitoring of applicant competences.

NQF implementation and impact

LTQF was formally adopted through a government resolution in 2010 and further refined with amendments in 2011. It has been embedded in the relevant strategies (the 2017-20 Action plan for the development of lifelong learning system; the 2014-20 Employment development programme; the 2013-22 National education strategy) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The LTQF level descriptors are considered as the basis for formulating qualifications and ensuring their integrity among different levels. Qualification standards, modular programmes, and higher education benchmark statements are written in line with qualification level descriptors. The LTQF has had positive impact on the parity of esteem between types of education and training and qualifications. The framework contributes to increasing the integrity, comparability and transparency of qualifications. Qualifications standards define titles, levels and content of qualifications (in terms of units of qualifications and competences) and also provide a clear landscape of qualifications in a particular sector, with mobility options for holders of qualifications. However, there is a lack of coordination on other initiatives: application of the LTQF in access, transfer and progression policies; quality assurance; and validation of non-formal and informal learning policies. The influence on support to recognition of foreign qualifications has also been minor.

To achieve full operation of the LTQF, revision and update of all VET programmes, study programmes and the qualifications register has to be finalised. In addition, the revision of general education curriculum statements in line with the LTQF level descriptors is to be finalised and the issues of level 5 qualifications (including their implementation provisions) need to be solved. Award of qualifications using validation of non-formal and informal learning still needs to be developed to function on a larger scale. (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018)

Lithuania was one of the first countries (together with Denmark) to start indicating NQF and EQF levels in the annexes of VET certificates and diplomas, starting in 2016. As of today LTQF and EQF levels are included on certificates and diplomas for VET and higher education qualifications and Europass supplements.

A national register of qualifications and programmes has been set up, including VET and HE qualifications and indicating LTQF and EQF levels ([10]).

The LTQF has been used as a reference point for developing post-secondary VET qualifications at level 5 of the framework. The development and implementation of the LTQF demonstrated this missing link in the national education and training system and has directly influenced reform and modernisation of the system. Only VET qualifications for ballet and modern dance are presently awarded at LTQF level 5. Discussions on whether these qualifications should be awarded solely within the European higher education area or outside it have strengthened in 2017-18; at the end of 2018 the law on science and higher education legitimated short-cycle qualifications leading to level 5 qualifications. Still, implementation provisions for qualifications at this level have not been clarified.

The LTQF is well known to education and training providers but to a lesser extent to other sectors and stakeholders. The main communication channels and tools used for disseminating information on LTQF and EQF are the NCP website and newsletter, seminars, conferences, training events and production of informal material. Education and training institutions and employer representatives have been the prioritised target groups but no communication strategy has been developed. Though no analysis of awareness has been done, the general public needs to be more informed about the LTQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Discussions about opening up the framework to qualifications outside the formal education system were initiated, and Ministry of Economy and Innovation plans to create and pilot schemes for including non-formal labour market qualifications into LTQF in 2019-20.

Referencing to the EQF

The Lithuanian NQF was referenced to the EQF in November 2011, with one integrated report covering both the EQF and QF-EHEA, published in 2012. The report outlines a one-to-one relationship between TLQF and EQF levels.

Important lessons and future plans

No evaluation has so far been carried out. There have been discussions about the need for such activity, but no final decision has been reached. Implementation of qualification standards, revision of VET curricula and reform of the framework of higher education qualifications degrees might call for an updated referencing report, but no such update is planned as yet.

The key challenges have been level 5 qualifications and systemic coordination of efforts among different departments of the Ministry of Education and Science, Qualifications and VET Development Centre and Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. The Qualifications and VET Development Centre has been delegated a managing function for the LTQF, but it has no real power on higher education issues (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Main sources of information

- The Qualification and VET Development Centre was appointed EQF national coordination point: <http://www.kpmmpc.lt/kpmmpc/en/> [accessed 21.1.2019].
- LTQF/EQF website: <https://www.kpmmpc.lt/kpmmpc/en/information/qualifications-framework-2> [accessed 5.2.2019].
- Qualifications register: <https://www.aikos.smm.lt/Puslapiai/Pradinis.aspx> [assessed 6.2.2019].
- QVETDC (2012). Referencing the Lithuanian qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area: national report.

https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/LTQF_EQF_report_ENG.pdf [accessed 6.2.2019].

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	Doctoral diploma (Daktaro diplomas)	8
7	Master diploma (Magistro diplomas) Certificate of residency (Rezidentūros pažymėjimas)	7
6	Bachelor diploma (Bakalauro diplomas) Professional bachelor diploma (Profesinio bakalauro diplomas)	6
5	VET diploma (Profesinio mokymo diplomas) Presently only VET qualifications for ballet and modern dance are awarded at NQF level 5. Study certificate - short-cycle HE programmes (Studijų pažymėjimas)	5
4	VET diploma (Profesinio mokymo diplomas) Matura diploma (on completion of the upper secondary education programme and passing matura examinations) (Brandos atestatas) The legislation defining provisions for general education curricula stipulates that learning outcomes of lower secondary education programmes are referenced to NQF level 3, whereas learning outcomes of upper secondary education programmes are referenced to NQF level 4.	4

3	VET diploma (Profesinio mokymo diplomas) Lower secondary education certificate (completion of lower secondary education programme and testing learning outcomes) (grades 5 to10) (Pagrindinio išsilavinimo pažymėjimas) The legislation defining provisions for general education curricula stipulates that learning outcomes of lower secondary education programmes are referenced with a third NQF level, whereas learning outcomes of upper secondary education programmes are referenced with a fourth NQF level.	3
2	VET diploma (Profesinio mokymo diplomas)	2
1	VET diploma (Profesinio mokymo diplomas)	1

Acronyms

EQF	European qualifications framework
LTQF	Lithuanian qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
QVETDC	Qualifications and VET Development Centre
SKVC	Centre for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
VET	vocational education and training
CPC	Central Professional Committee

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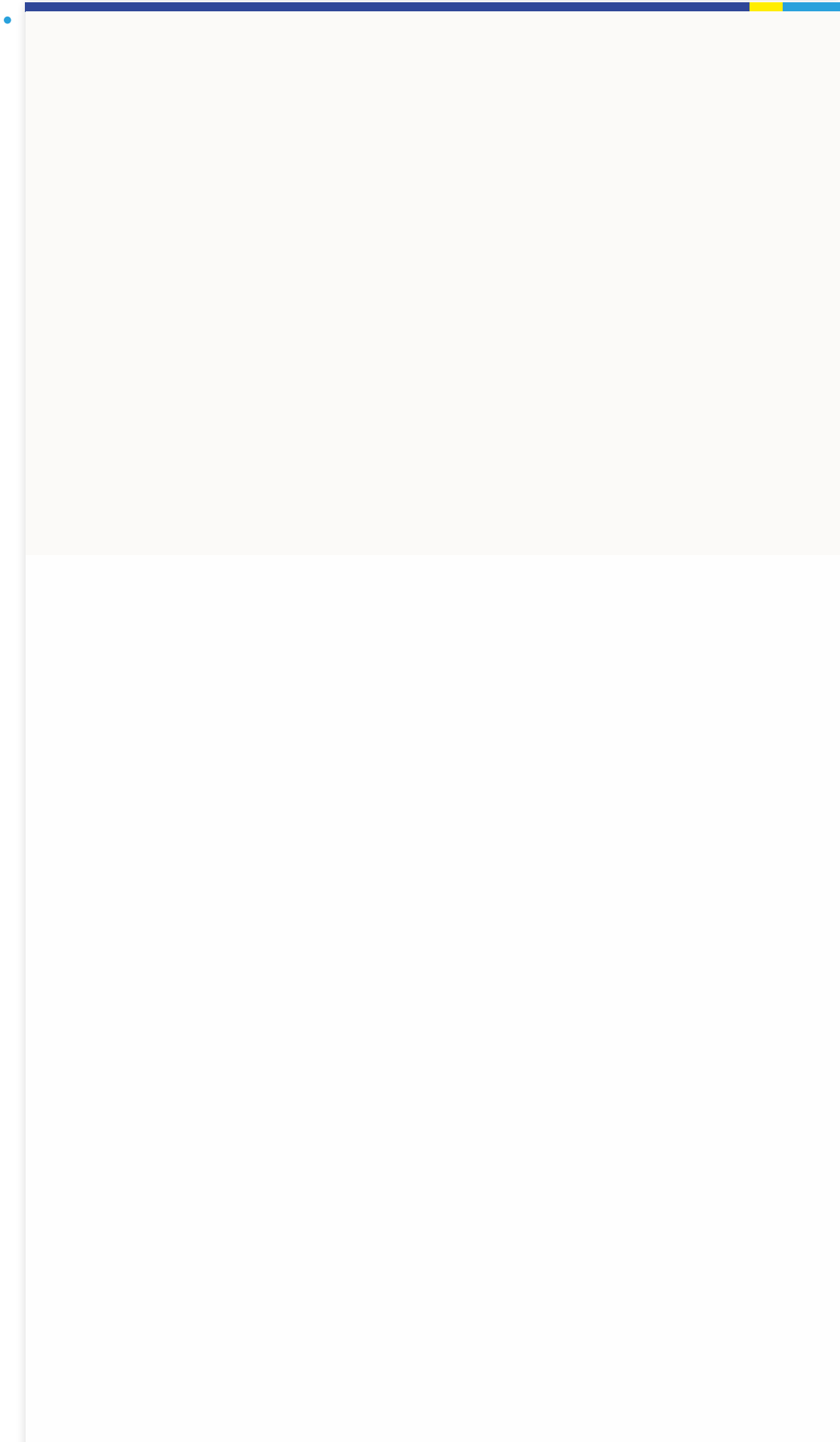
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2018

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European inventory of NQF



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