

NQF state of play

 **Belgium-FR 2020**

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Overview

Stage of development: Activation stage

NQF linked to EQF: ✓

Scope of the framework:

Designed as a comprehensive framework; including all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training and from the professional qualifications system. It currently includes vocational and secondary general education qualifications and qualifications awarded through validation at levels 2, 3, 4 and 5, as well as HE qualifications at levels 6 and 7.

Number of levels:

Eight

Legal basis/stage of development:

Decree on cooperation agreement between the three francophone governments on the creation and management of CFC (2015) (in French)

NQF/EQF website:

[Website](#)

Qualifications register/database:

[Qualifications register](#)

Introduction and context

The French Community of Belgium has developed a qualifications framework for lifelong learning (*Cadre francophone des certifications pour l'éducation et la formation tout au long de la vie*, CFC). Although initial work started in 2006, the current framework dates back to 2010, when the French Community (Federation Wallonia-Brussels), the Walloon Region (Wallonia) and the French Community Commission (COCOF) ([1]) agreed on the principles of the framework and on a structure similar to that applied by the Flemish Community of Belgium.

The CFC was formally adopted in 2015, through a decree operationalising the agreement between the three francophone governments ([2]). It is an eight-level, learning-outcomes-based framework with double entry: one for educational qualifications and one for professional qualifications, placed into eight levels and consistent with the descriptors of the European qualifications framework. The proposed framework structure is close to that applied by the Flemish Community of Belgium. The CFC was referenced to the EQF in December 2013. Self-certification to the QF-EHEA is in progress. An updated referencing report is expected in 2022-23.

Policy objectives

The CFC seeks to improve transparency and comparability of qualifications across regional and national borders, to ease mobility and support learner progression, and to help bridge the different parts of the education and training system (Cedefop, 2020b).

While the framework does not have a regulatory role and is not an instrument for reform, the CFC aims to strengthen the quality of teaching and training, to support the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and to facilitate job seeking, recruitment and staff development processes. Through its focus on learning outcomes, it supports equal opportunities for citizens. The framework is also not seen as a control device for the validation of qualifications but rather a support instrument aiming at the continuous improvement of qualifications (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonia and COCOF, 2018).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The CFC is based on learning outcomes, giving rise to arrangements for validation and credit transfer. An eight-level structure has been adopted, using two blocks of terms: knowledge/skills and context/autonomy/responsibility ([3]). The descriptors developed by the Flemish qualifications framework have been used as a basis but adjusted according to the conditions of the community. In the first stage of implementation, only qualifications delivered by public providers are included.

A competence-based approach is established in compulsory education and training. Learning outcomes are described in terms of *socles de compétences* and *compétences terminales*. For adult education the term used is *capacités terminales*. A team has been appointed within the Ministry of Education to coordinate the 'cross-diagnostics of schools, training centres and validation of skills providers' ([4]). Among the items under revision is the evaluation of learning outcomes, the material resources, the monitoring of quality in the assessment of learning outcomes and of the staff who carry out this process ([5]) (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

Regional providers of continuous vocational education and training (CVET) have developed a common certification procedure (*reconnaissance des acquis de formation*, RECAF) based on common qualifications and assessment standards, with a competence-based approach, since 2010. The French service for trades and qualifications (*Service francophone des métiers et qualifications* (SFMQ)) plays an important role for learning outcomes, both for initial vocational education and training (IVET) and for CVET. The descriptions of qualifications are based on the occupational profiles (occupational standards) defined by the social partners. Common training profiles, described in units of learning outcomes, in line with the reality of trades to ensure the labour market relevance of training, are then defined by providers. This will support learner mobility by ensuring that prior learning is taken into account; it will also increase education and training system transparency and improve validation opportunities (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019). Progress has also been made in the implementation of certification by units (*certification par unités d'apprentissage*, CPU) in formal IVET programmes. In this system, the Qualification Board is

responsible for validating units of learning outcomes (*unités d'acquis d'apprentissage*, UAA). Each validation test of a unit is assimilated to a qualification test and the board issues a certificate. As of September 2017, CPU was put in place for three optional subjects in post-secondary education ([6]). The aim is to organise the three years of vocational education and training in the form of learning outcomes units. The experimentation and developments are carried out in the framework of the *Pact for excellence in education* or *Teaching excellence pact* which is a 2015 action plan to reform education that has paved the way for improving accessibility of all to VET and qualifications. The pact aims to improve education quality and reduce inequalities (between schools, students and genders) in the Wallonia-Brussels federation. In the context of a largely participatory approach and the collective ownership of the pact, this process is conducted in four phases. The implementation of the pact will be at phase 5 and will extend on a multi-year basis (2015-25) ([7]).

Although higher education institutions are autonomous in designing their curriculum, they are required to align their programmes in accordance with the *competences communes* developed by ARES (*Académie de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur*) ([8]). A guide has been produced to help higher education institutions define their learning outcomes to fit into common competence reference systems. There is little information on the extent of use of learning outcomes in higher education in practice, apart from in the university colleges.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The CFC was formally adopted in 2015, through a decree operationalising the agreement between the three francophone governments ([9]). The three executive bodies of French-speaking Belgium (Federation Wallonia-Brussels, Wallonia and COCOF) ([10]) initiated the CFC development and consulted all CFC stakeholders (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonie and COCOF, 2018).

The CFC Forum (*Instance CFC*) was established with the 2015 decree ([11]) as a steering and allocation authority, responsible for managing the inclusion of qualifications in the framework and for disseminating the added value of the CFC and of the EQF to citizens, social partners, and education and training providers. It has four constitutive substructures ([12]), the Executive Committee ([13]), the Management Committee ([14]), the Committee of Experts ([15]), and the Board of Appeal ([16]). The secretariat supporting the implementation bodies of the CFC is hosted in the Francophone Agency for Education and Lifelong Training ([17]) but the budget is received from the three French-speaking Governments (the French Community, the Walloon Region and the French Community Commission).

The division of the framework into two main strands – educational and professional qualifications – had implications for stakeholder involvement. The Ministry of the French Community regulates formal education and is responsible for defining and positioning educational qualifications at levels 1 to 4 in the framework. The *Service francophone des métiers et qualifications* (SFMQ) ([18]) plays a key role in defining and positioning professional qualifications at levels 1 to 4. The SFMQ is well placed to play this role as its overall task is to develop occupational profiles based on the inputs from the social partners and in collaboration with employment services. Its role is also to develop training profiles for these occupational profiles, in liaison with education and training providers. The Academy of Research and Higher Education (ARES) is responsible for defining and positioning educational higher education qualifications at levels 6 to 8: this is still in process. ARES and SFMQ share responsibility for qualifications at level 5, reflecting the extensive 'mix' of professional and educational qualifications at this level.

The quality assurance system in French-speaking Belgium involves an

external and formative assessment approach for higher education programmes, implemented by the Agency for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (AEQES) ([19]). In addition, a legal assessment and inspection procedure is implemented by the General Inspectorate for basic, secondary, special and social promotion education in particular. This approach is also used by the IFAPME/SFPME through the Training Directorate whose role is to inspect training centres.

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

[20]

In French-speaking Belgium, the system for validating non-formal and informal learning has undergone important developments and is the result of initiatives supported nationally and framed by important pieces of legislation. Policy strategies ([21]) confirm that validating non-formal and informal learning is a key element of employment and education policies. There are two types of VNFIL in Belgium: the validation of competences (*validation des compétences*, VDC) in the CVET sector, leading to the award of a recognised skills certificate (*titre de compétence*) following an assessment procedure; and the 'valorisation' of prior experience (*valorisation des acquis de l'expérience*, VAE) in adult education and higher education, leading to the validation of learning units or exemptions from certain parts of a study pathway ([22]).

The most significant developments have been in adult education, where the decree ([23]) published in January 2018, promoted a unified approach to admission, exemption and certification of formal, non-formal and informal prior learning. It also sought coordination between EPS providers, further development of validation procedures, transparency, clear routes and further transferability of certificates, as well as close cooperation with the CVET sector. In higher education, with a regulatory framework in place since 2014 (Decree on the organisation of higher education), VAE has a stronger institutional basis and is used to grant admission to education pathways (all cycles of higher education) or exemptions. At secondary level (vocational or non-vocational), VAE is used to grant admission into education pathways or exemptions, but it can also lead to a certificate of achievement (*attestation de réussite*) when the student passes the integrated final test (*épreuve intégrée*). The Validation Skills Consortium grants skills credentials on behalf of the three governments. They can be used on the job market and are recognised by public services for employment and adult education schools. It allows navigation between all the vocational training providers as long as they are members of the consortium (Cedefop and Bruxelles Formation, 2019).

Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is also embedded in the NQF decree, which makes facilitation of VNFIL part of

the NQF's objectives. It defines 'certification' as the formal result of an evaluation and validation carried out by a competent authority, establishing that an individual possesses the learning outcomes corresponding to determined standards, either at the end of an education or training pathway or following validation of his/her competences.

Challenges need to be addressed, particularly in terms of widening the profile of VAE users and reaching out to disadvantaged communities such as migrants and refugees. While awareness of the value of validation procedures for the labour market has been increasing, additional investment and strategies in visibility efforts are to be put in place. However, the scheme today is generally considered effective and robust.

NQF implementation and impact

The CFC reflects the federal structure of the country and coexists with the qualifications frameworks of the Flemish and German-speaking Communities. The CFC is seen as an integral part of an evolving education and training system and is at an activation stage. Introducing the distinction between educational and professional qualifications was instrumental in bringing the NQF process forward. This distinction made it possible to open-up the framework for professional qualifications at higher levels. In principle, both types can be placed at any level in the framework. Allocation of qualifications to CFC levels started in 2017 and continues.

A qualification register ([24]) has been developed and 174 qualifications have been included in the register to date (January 2021), at levels 2 to 7. These are vocational and secondary general education qualifications, qualifications awarded through validation and higher education qualifications (see above). The register is linked to the Europass portal ([25]). It is possible to position qualifications for a period of two years under a transitional procedure, after which a new application will have to be submitted for final allocation of level. The need for this progressive approach comes from the differences between the systems of the competent authorities, which imply agreements for criteria shared by all providers.

CFC/EQF levels are indicated in the register and on Europass certificate and diploma supplements ([26]). One of the main objectives of the CFC Forum is to indicate the NQF/EQF level on all qualifications in the future.

The main challenges in implementing the CFC have been to include more qualifications in the framework to enhance comparability and disseminate the benefits of the framework to citizens and beneficiary institutions (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). However, the competent authorities have no obligation to file an application for positioning qualifications. Another reason for the lack of inclusion of more qualifications is that such qualifications might not fully meet the prerequisites for inclusion. To address this issue, the EQF NCP has held three meetings presenting recommendations on the systems of the competent authorities and procedures of external quality agencies or mechanisms (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF, 2018).

The EQF NCP is planning to disseminate information about the framework

using its website, video clips, brochures and guidance documents. The target group that will be prioritised will be the general public, as the framework is currently less known among labour market actors at regional and local level. Employers, guidance counsellors of education and training providers, employment counsellors of public employment services, teachers, trainers, trade union representatives and human resources managers will also be informed, as they will be able to disseminate the benefits of the framework to the end-users. To date there has been no evaluation study on the different aspects of the framework and its impact (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Referencing to the EQF

The CFC levels were referenced to the EQF levels in 2013 (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonie and COCOF, 2013). Self-certification to the QF-EHEA is in progress. An updated referencing report is foreseen for 2021.

Important lessons and future plans

Important steps have been taken so far in developing the framework: the framework is firmly legally embedded, implementation bodies have been set up, criteria and procedures for inclusion of qualifications have been adopted and around 180 qualifications have been included in the qualifications register.

The development of the CFC also demonstrates the importance of finding a workable link between higher education and the other forms of education and training. Distinguishing between educational and professional qualifications at all levels has been instrumental in making progress. Whether this structure can be used to open up for future developments of professional qualifications at higher levels and for establishing stronger links between educational and professional sectors remains to be seen.

However, for the framework to act as a credible reference point and improve transparency and comparability of qualifications, a higher percentage of qualifications from all types of providers needs to be included and levelled. In this way, the CFC can guarantee their comparability in the French-speaking part of Belgium. Strengthening the communication plan regarding the CFC is needed as the framework is currently less known or used by the general public.

Main sources of information

- CFC Forum (Instance CFC) acts as EQF NCP:
<http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/>
- CFC website: <http://www.cfc.cfwb.be/>
- *Register of qualifications*: <https://cfc.cfwb.be/index.php?id=certifications>
- Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; Wallonie; COCOF (2013). *Report on referencing the French-speaking qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*. <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/referencing-reports-and-contacts>

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	(not available)	8
7	Master degree (Grade générique de Master de l'enseignement supérieur) Category Educational qualification types	7
6	Bachelor degree (Grade générique de bachelier de l'enseignement supérieur) Category Educational qualification types	6

5	Professional diploma, level 5 (Diplôme de formation, niveau 5) Category Professional qualifications e.g. diploma for business managers commercial agents [Diplôme de chef d'entreprise agent(e) commercial(e)]	5
	Professional foundation diploma for police officers, level 5 (Diplôme de formation de base d'aspirant.e inspecteur.rice de police)] Category Professional qualifications	
	Skills certificate, level 5 (Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 5) Category Professional qualifications e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for professional trainers for adults [Certificat de compétences acquises en formation de formateur.rice professionnel.le d'adultes]	
4	Upper secondary education certificate (Certificat de l'enseignement secondaire supérieur (CESS)) Category Educational qualification types	4
	Upper secondary vocational education certificate (level 4) (Certificat de qualification en plein exercice ou en alternance) Category Educational qualification types	
	Qualification certificate for technical qualifying post-secondary education - 7th year (Certification de qualification de septième année technique) Category Educational qualification types	

Qualification certificate for vocational qualifying post-secondary education - 7th year (Certificat de qualification de septième année professionnelle)

Category

Educational qualification types

Qualification certificate (level 4) - education for social promotion

Category

Educational qualification types

e.g. qualification certificate for laboratory technicians [Certificat de qualification de technicien.ne chimiste]

Certificate of apprenticeship (level 4) offered by regional training services (Certificat d'apprentissage, niveau 4)

Category

Professional qualifications

e.g. certificate of apprenticeship for machining technicians [Certificat d'apprentissage de technicien.ne en système d'usinage]

Professional diploma, level 4 (Diplôme de formation, niveau 4)

Category

Professional qualifications

e.g. diploma for coordination and supervision – hairdresser manager [Diplôme de coordination et d'encadrement de coiffeur.euse manager]

Skills certificate (level 4) offered by public employment/training services (Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 4)

Category

Professional qualifications

e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for graphic designers [Certificat de compétences acquises en formation de graphic designer]

Skills certificate (level 4) awarded by a consortium for validation (Titre de compétence, niveau 4)

Category

Professional qualifications

e.g. skills certificate – Sales of second hand cars as part of the profession of automobile salesperson [Titre de compétence assurer la vente de véhicules d'occasion faisant partie du métier de vendeur.euse automobile]

3

Upper secondary vocational qualification certificate (level 3) (Certificat de qualification en plein exercice ou en alternance)

Category

Educational qualification types

Upper secondary vocational qualification certificate for special and alternance education (level 3) (Certificat de qualification spécifique (CQ S) à l'enseignement spécialisé et en alternance)

Category

Educational qualification types

Qualification certificate (level 3) - education for social promotion

Category

Educational qualification types

e.g. qualification certificate for hairdressers [Certificat de Qualification de Coiffeur.euse]

Certificate of apprenticeship (level 3) offered by regional training services (Certificat d'apprentissage, niveau 3)

Category

Professional qualifications

e.g. certificate of apprenticeship for hairdressers [Certificat d'apprentissage de Coiffeur.euse]

3

Professional diploma (level 3) (Diplôme de formation, niveau 3)

Category

Professional qualifications

e.g. diploma for coordination and supervision – supervisor bartender [Diplôme de coordination et d'encadrement de chef barman/barmaid]

Skills certificate (level 3) offered by public employment/training services (Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 3)

Category

Professional qualifications

e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for administrative employees [Certificat de compétences acquises en formation d'employé.e administratif.ive]

Skills certificate (level 3) awarded by a consortium for validation (Titre de compétence, niveau 3)

Category

Professional qualifications

e.g. skills certificate – managing incoming and outgoing contacts as part of the profession of call centre operator [Titre de compétence gérer les contacts entrants et sortants constituant le métier d'opérateur.rice call center]

Lower secondary vocational qualification certificate for special and alternance education (Certificat de qualification spécifique (CQS) à l'enseignement spécialisé et en alternance)

Category

Educational qualification types

Qualification certificate (level 2) - education for social promotion

Category

Educational qualification types

e.g. qualification certificate for electrician fitters

[Certificat de Qualification de Monteur électricien]

Certificate of apprenticeship (level 2) offered by regional training services (Certificat d'apprentissage, niveau 2)

Category

Professional qualifications

e.g. certificate of apprenticeship for manufacturing

agents in the food industry [Certificat d'apprentissage

d'Agent de fabrication du secteur alimentaire]

Skills certificate (level 2) offered by public employment/training services (Certificat de compétences acquises en formation, niveau 2)

Category

Professional qualifications

e.g. certificate of skills acquired in training for

production operators in the food industry [Certificat de

compétences acquises en formation d'opérateur de

production en industrie alimentaire]

Skills certificate (level 2) awarded by a consortium for validation (Titre de compétence, niveau 2)

e.g. skills certificate – transporting and placing theatre

equipment as part of the profession of assistant

theatre technician [Titre de compétence transporter et

placer le matériel de spectacle faisant partie du métier

d'auxiliaire technique de spectacle]

Acronyms

AEQES	<i>Agence pour l'évaluation de la qualité dans l'enseignement supérieur</i> [Agency for quality assessment in higher education]
ARES	<i>Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement supérieur</i> [Academy of Research and Higher Education]
CFC	<i>Cadre francophone des certifications pour l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie</i> [French-speaking qualifications framework for lifelong learning]
COCOF	<i>Commission communautaire française de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale</i> [French Community commission in the Brussels-capital Region]
CPU	<i>certification par unités (certification per units)</i>
CVET	continuous vocational education and training
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EEA	European economic area
EPS	<i>Enseignement de promotion sociale</i> [Education for Social Promotion]
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EQF	European qualifications framework
FOREM	<i>Office Régional wallon pour l'emploi et la formation professionnelle</i> [Walloon Regional office for employment and vocational training]
FWG	Walloon- Brussels Federation [Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles]
IFAPME	<i>Institut de formation en alternance des petites et moyennes entreprises</i> [SME work/study training institute]

IFPME	<i>Institut de Formation Permanente pour les Classes moyennes et les petites et moyennes entreprises</i> [training institute for SMEs, for the French Community] (Community institution preceding the IFAPME and the SFPME)
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
QDG	<i>Qualifikationsrahmen Deutschsprachiger Gemeinschaft</i> [qualifications framework German-speaking Community]
RECAF	<i>Reconnaissance des acquis de formation</i> [recognition of prior learning]
SFPME	Service Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises [Training service for SMEs]
SFMQ	<i>Service francophone des métiers et qualifications</i> [French service for trades and qualifications]
UAA	<i>Unités d'Acquis d'Apprentissage</i> [validating units of learning outcomes]
VAE	<i>validation des acquis de l'expérience</i> [valorisation of prior experience]
VDC	<i>validation des compétences</i> [valorisation of competences]
VET	vocational education and training

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Related content

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2020

Belgium - European inventory of NQFs 2020

European inventory of NQF

 Belgium