

## **NQF state of play**



**Cyprus 2024**

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# Overview

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**Stage of development:** [Operational stage](#)

**NQF linked to EQF:** ✓

**Scope of the framework:**

The NQF includes all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training and qualifications from the system of vocational qualifications; the latter are awarded through non-formal and informal learning.

**Number of levels:**

Eight

**Legal basis/stage of development:**

Decision of the CoM, No 67445 on establishing the CyQF (2008)

**NQF/EQF website:**

[Website](#)

**Qualifications register/database:**

[SVQ website](#)

# Introduction and context

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## 1.1. Policy context

In 2022 the public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) was decreased compared to 2020 from 5.7% to 5.1%, but still it remained above the EU-27 average which for 2022 was 4.7% ([1]). In 2023, the percentage of tertiary education attainment (age 25-34) (61.6 %) was well above the EU-27 average (43.1%) ([2]). On the contrary, the participation in upper secondary vocational education and training (VET) remained low in 2022 (17.9%) compared to the EU average (49.0%) ([3]). In 2023, the employment rate of VET graduates reached at 73.9%, below the EU average of 81% (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport & Culture, 2024). The participation in early childhood education in 2022 was 84.4% ([4]) and for the same year the share of early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) was 8.1%, below the EU average (9.7%) ([5]).

## 1.2. NQF legal basis

In 2008, the Council of Ministers decided to establish a national committee for the development and creation of the CyQF ([6]). In May 2012 the council approved the establishment of the framework based on the eight levels of the EQF ([7]), and in 2017 the Advisory Body of the European Qualifications Framework approved the referencing of CyQF to the EQF. In May 2017, the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) was set up ([8]), with the powers to improve quality assurance systems in education and training, to monitor and integrate the scheme for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the CyQF after its completion, to monitor the CyQF/EQF levels on the certificates, diplomas and Europass documents, to strengthen the legal aspect of the CyQF and to develop a registry (Cedefop & Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus, 2023). The NQA is partially operational with a secretariat. Currently, its role is the dissemination of information from the EQF AG and other information related to this area ([9]). Furthermore, based on the authorities provided by the HRDA laws from 1999 to 2007, the HRDA has developed the System of Vocational Qualification (SVQ) and since 2017 it is an integral part of the CyQF.

In January 2023, the Council of Ministers amended ([10]) the CyQF referencing report to include joint study programmes offered by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of Cyprus which have succeeded in

becoming full members of the [European University Networks](#).

## Policy objectives

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The CyQF aims to have an impact specifically on the promotion of lifelong learning, enable the recognition and validation of qualifications, enhance learners' opportunities by creating an education and training system with vertical and horizontal permeability, and support workers' mobility (Cedefop, 2020). Another aim was to develop an inclusive framework of qualifications, including those awarded outside formal education and enhance the quality assurance of education and training programmes. This is primarily achieved by including the SVQ within the framework (levels three-six) to allow comparability and better correlation of qualifications acquired through formal and non-formal learning. The reform potential of the framework is being acknowledged by linking it to wider reforms and procedures for quality assurance, assessment and award of qualifications.

# Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

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## 3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The CyQF consists of two distinct strands: one for formal education (primary education, lower and upper secondary education, tertiary education and apprenticeship schemes) and one for non-formal and informal learning (the SVQ). Level descriptors were defined using three categories (knowledge, skills and competence) ([11]), inspired by those of the EQF but further expanding them, with an emphasis on problem solving, communication, cooperation, learning skills, and understanding and application of knowledge. The SVQ system also uses the same level descriptors.

Levels five and seven have been divided into three hierarchical sublevels (a, b and c) to better represent the diversity of qualifications in the country ([12]). Qualifications in sublevel 'a' cover fewer elements of each level descriptor (e.g. knowledge) than those in sublevels 'b' and 'c'; only sublevel 'c' qualifications cover all elements of level descriptors. Developing three sublevels for EQF levels five and seven was necessary to represent the awarded qualifications in accordance with how they are described by law and the current state of the country's labour market. For example, CyQF level 7 covers completed master's degrees carrying at least 90 European credit transfer and accumulation system points (sublevel 7c), but some study programmes also allow for two other exit points: sublevels 7a and 7b (Table 1) (Ministry of Education & Culture, 2017).

## 3.2. NQF scope and coverage

The CyQF is a comprehensive framework, including qualifications from all levels and types of formal education and training and the [SVQ](#). Competence-based vocational qualifications in the SVQ are based on occupational standards. In 2022, a total of 167 vocational qualifications standards in nine sectors were developed and/or have been revised in line with the CyQF. (Cedefop & Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus, 2023), making it possible to award qualifications to candidates irrespective of how and where they acquired the knowledge, skills and competences, for instance through non-formal and informal learning. The SVQ can lead to full or partial qualifications; the latter could be considered microcredentials (Cedefop, 2023).

### 3.3. Use of learning outcomes

The qualification system has traditionally been based on input (quality of teachers, infrastructure, and length of education and training programmes), but there has been a move towards an outcome-based approach with the SVQ system, the emphasis on learning outcomes and the validation of non-formal learning. The term 'learning outcomes' usually has a uniform interpretation across all education levels (Ministry of Education & Culture, 2017). Attention is increasingly being directed to the need to focus on 21st-century skills and key competences, and to revise curricula, learning programmes and assessment methodologies in line with learning outcomes. Implementation of the learning outcomes approach has coincided with Cyprus's national reform programme for 2020, which it is still under discussion ([13]). In education, the programme proposed comprehensive changes and innovations at all levels and in all aspects of the system; its main objectives were to create a democratic and learner-centred education system, improve teacher competences, and establish and monitor the quality of learning outcomes.

In programmes leading to qualifications up to CyQF level four, intended learning outcomes are set out in national core curricula (Ministry of Education & Culture, 2017). The Advisory Committee for the Implementation of Curricula, Assessment and Teaching (*Συντονιστική Επιτροπή Αναλυτικών Προγραμμάτων*) at the education ministry is the body responsible for the implementation of learning outcomes in all grades across education departments in formal education (EQF/CyQF levels one-four). The modernisation of pre-primary and upper secondary curricula is ongoing. Since 2019/2020, an integrated student evaluation system has been in place. It aims to emphasise formative assessment, to diagnose student needs in relation to specific expected outcomes, and to offer at an early stage the educational interventions required for improvement.

In VET, the 2015-20 strategic plan for technical and vocational education and training set as a goal the development of modularised curricula based on learning outcomes (with particular emphasis on key competences) and units of the European credit system for vocational education and training. The curricula were introduced in the school year 2016/2017. Starting from the same school year, the country has been updating or introducing new specialisations to increase VET's attractiveness and relevance to labour market needs. The 2015-20 strategic plan was completed in 2020.

The HRDA is responsible for the SVQ and the development/revision of the Vocational Qualification Standards (VQS). The HRDA has the right to define VQS for any category or categories of employed persons. The study of the labour market needs in relation to occupational groups ([14]) was taken into consideration for the latest revision/creation of VQS, as those should be compatible with the needs of the labour market. The study defined the main task areas which are included in each occupation as well as the relationship with the other occupations in terms of content and level of competence. The VQS are described in terms of learning outcomes and follow the CyQF descriptive indicators for each level of knowledge, skills and competence. The drafts VQS are studied, discussed and finalised by the members of the Technical Committees of Vocational Qualifications which are comprised by relevant stakeholders, including social partners and sectoral representatives. The resulting list of VQS is sent for public consultation and the final list of new and existing VQS is approved by the HRDA's Board of Directors (Manoudi, 2024).

### **3.4. Quality assurance arrangements**

Two bodies are responsible for ensuring the quality of higher education in Cyprus. The first is the Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications ([KYSATS](#)), an independent body responsible for the recognition of diplomas awarded by higher education institutions within the country and abroad. The second is the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education ([CyQAA](#)), an independent body responsible for accrediting higher education institutions and programmes, and assessing the conditions for the provision of cross-border education from foreign institutions ([15]) (Cedefop, & Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus, 2023). CyQAA is fully aligned with the processes and procedures of the CyQF authority (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). For the SVQ, the body responsible is the HRDA.

The CyQF supports the development and implementation of the procedures for quality assurance and qualifications award. Legislation provides a quality assurance framework for higher education, within which higher education institutions will be driven to improve quality and develop an internal quality culture ([16]). The HRDA has a robust quality assurance process in place for monitoring the SVQ. The quality of all aspects of the system and those participating in it is assured by the HRDA, which holds the registers of assessment centres and assessors for each vocational field and region. The HRDA has also introduced a system for evaluating and certifying training.

# Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

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In 2017, it was decided to set up the NQA, as the main body for CyQF implementation and the EQF national coordination point (NCP). The authority will have the power to improve quality assurance systems in education and training; to monitor the scheme for validating non-formal and informal learning and integrate it into the CyQF; to monitor the CyQF/EQF levels on certificates, diplomas and Europass documents; to strengthen the legal aspect of CyQF; and to develop a registry for it.

The main stakeholders in CyQF implementation are the labour ministry and the HRDA. A permanent advisory body - the CyQF Council - has been established as a forum for collaboration between stakeholders, including the Permanent Secretary of the education ministry (President of the Council), the Permanent Secretary of the labour ministry, the General Director of the HRDA (or their representatives), and representatives of employer and employee organisations and the academic community. Apart from being the consultative body for the CyQF referencing report, its main tasks are advisory and focus on:

- a. consulting with stakeholders on CyQF development and implementation;
- b. developing, implementing and reviewing CyQF procedures;
- c. disseminating public information on the CyQF;
- d. advising the education ministry on policy and resource implications.

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

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## 5.1. Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

Cyprus does not have a national framework for validating non-formal and informal learning. The CyQF operates as a reference framework, enabling the validation and comparability of qualifications, and hence the mobility of workers and learners.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is mainly done by the HRDA through the SVQ. The validation procedure consisting of four phases, and it is aligned with the Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning ([17]). The four stages of validation are identification, documentation, assessment, and certification (Manoudi, 2024). The standards used in the vocational qualifications system relate not only to occupational skills, but also to soft skills developed through work experience (such as teamwork and collaboration), they are different from those used in apprenticeship or school-based VET qualifications and are not recognised in formal education. However, ways of linking the two VET systems are being considered as the CyQF is developed, and a link may be possible once the process is completed ([18]).

Since 2017, the education ministry has coordinated the implementation of the project 'Establishing a mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning'. The project was partly funded through the Structural Funds 2014-20, and it was concluded in 2022 with the decision that any further actions for the setting up of an overall validation mechanism, will be undertaken by the NQA. According to the results derived by this project, the validation process will have five stages: information-individualised counselling, identification, recognition of learning outcomes, assessment of learning outcomes, and certification. (Manoudi, 2024).

Validation of non-formal or informal learning in higher education is done by KYSATS, which recognises work experience credits and credit transfers from recognised examinations of foreign education systems, provided that all necessary certificates will be submitted (e.g. A levels) as part of an individual's qualification. Such credits from non-formal or informal learning can only comprise up to 10% of the qualification in question (Manoudi, 2024).

## **5.2. Credit systems**

The autonomous nature of higher education institutions enables them to accept credits from prior learning. KYSATS also recognises work experience credits and credit transfers.

## **5.3. Promoting lifelong learning**

The purpose of the SVQ is to upgrade the country's human resources through the evaluation and certification of the vocational qualifications of the candidates. The VQS of the system, are designed in task areas, compulsory and optional. A candidate has to choose a number of optional task areas over and above the compulsory task areas of the qualification. Through the results of identification and documentation, the individual can also decide whether further training is necessary (Manoudi, 2024).

In 2022, the [Cyprus Lifelong learning strategy \(CyLLLS\) 2021-27](#) was developed. The coordination for the development of the strategy was undertaken by the European and International Affairs, Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Office of the education ministry, with the financial support of the European Union and was approved by the Council of Ministers ([19]). One of its strategic horizontal pillars, is the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, European and International Affairs, Lifelong Learning & Adult Education Office, 2022).

# NQF implementation and impact

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## 6.1. Stage of implementation

The CyQF implementation structures, criteria and procedures for allocating qualifications to levels are in place, and end users are being made aware of the existence of the NQF and related services. The CyQF has fulfilled the criteria of the activation stage and, as Cyprus reports, the framework is at an operational stage. The CyQF provides a map of and references to all nationally recognised qualifications; however, further action is needed regarding strengthening its legal basis, indicating NQF/EQF levels on certificates and diplomas, and developing qualifications registers or databases.

## 6.2. Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF

The NQA's responsibilities encompass the development of the 'CyQF Guidelines Handbook' that will include the guidelines, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the CyQF registry. The authority will also be responsible for the revision, development and inclusion of new qualifications in the NQF (Ministry of Education, Sport & Youth, 2019).

Currently, the NQA steers and approves the development of the CyQF with the accompanying standards, learning pathways and quality assurance procedures ([20]).

The operational responsibility for the CyQF NCP is shared between the following authorised institutions:

- a. Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth for technical/vocational and general education qualifications from primary to post-secondary level;
- b. KYSATS, for the academic recognition of higher education qualifications, awarded by recognised institutions of higher education by the competent authorities of the country they operate;
- c. CyQAA for the qualifications in higher education in Cyprus and
- d. The HRDA for the SVQ.

The procedure for registering in the CyQF is for the interested party to apply to the CyQF NCP and the NCP team directs the application to one of the abovementioned bodies, which evaluates, accredits and specifies the

level of the qualification within the CyQF (Ministry of Education & Culture, 2017).

### **6.3. Indicating EQF/NQF levels**

Some institutions have begun to indicate CyQF and EQF levels in national qualifications databases, on VET certificates and on Europass certificate and diploma supplements (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020) ([21]). Higher education programmes approved by the CyQAA can use the CyQF logo on their diplomas and supplements ([22]). The CyQF Council is responsible for approving the use of the CyQF logo on diplomas and supplements issued by institutions. The CyQF/EQF level is indicated on the certifications issued through the SVQ, by the HRDA.

### **6.4. NQF dissemination**

An NQF/EQF communication strategy has not yet been developed in Cyprus due to budget limitations. However, the main communication channels and tools used for disseminating information on the NQF/EQF are leaflets (a leaflet is circulated in all schools and higher institutions every school/academic year) ([23]), school-based seminars (for counselling practitioners) and conferences organised in the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry and by the Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020; 2022). Although education and training institutions and providers, labour market stakeholders and recognition bodies are aware of the framework, interaction and constant dialogue are needed. The development of the CyQF website, providing citizens with updates on news and changes, has been very helpful.

To support CyQF implementation, guidelines, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the national register were developed in consultation with stakeholders. The comprehensive and inclusive nature of the new framework requires systematic collaboration between stakeholders.

### **6.5. Qualifications databases and registers**

The NQA's responsibilities also encompass the development of the 'CyQF Registry'. Currently, the CyQF NCP is responsible for the future development the CyQF registry (Ministry of Education & Culture, 2017). A national qualifications register is under development ([24]) and will cover qualifications from general education, VET and higher education; it will cover the SVQ at a later stage. Currently, the end-users can find information on the available VQS in [HRDA's website](#).

## **6.6. Awareness and use of the NQF**

CyQF awareness is increased through its day-to-day implementation and use. For instance, learners and education providers are often aware of it, as its levels are mentioned on certificates, while employers, workers and jobseekers often use CyQF because levels are specified in job advertisements. CyQF levels are also used by recognition authorities and quality assurance bodies in their evaluation processes. Labour market stakeholders make use of CyQF levels in their analyses, for instance on skills mismatches (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

## **6.7. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF**

An evaluation of the framework is not yet planned. However, in 2021, the HRDA published an evaluation of the impact of the SVQ (2013-19) (HRDA, 2021). The evaluation showed that the SVQ is mostly used by employed people; unemployed people participated to a far lesser extent. Approximately eight out of 10 employed participants reported that the acquisition of an SVQ qualification was positively recognised by enterprises, and that the SVQ had a very positive or positive impact on their career progress. Almost 85% of them consider the connection between their current tasks and the knowledge acquired from the SVQ to be very good or good. More than 85% of enterprises reported that employees who have obtained an SVQ qualification perform better, and 66.7% reported that holding an SVQ qualification is considered during the recruitment process. Over seven out of 10 enterprises reward employees who have been certified, mainly through professional development (33.3%) and upgrading their duties (28.6%) (HRDA, 2021).

## **Referencing to the EQF**

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The CyQF was referenced to the EQF in February 2017. An updated referencing report will be submitted once the system for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is in place and its links to the CyQF are defined.

## Important lessons and future plans

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Development of the NQF and the SVQ, which is an integral part of the NQF, is expected to strengthen the ties between VET for young people and vocational training for adults, and to improve their knowledge and skills. Consequently, one of the main objectives of the CyQF - to include qualifications awarded outside formal education in the framework - was fulfilled, supporting the comparability and better correlation of qualifications acquired in formal and non-formal learning. However, the comprehensive and inclusive nature of the new framework requires stakeholders to work together.

The work of the HRDA and the setting up of the NQA, as well as contribution of the CyQAA, have been very important elements in implementing the CyQF. In the same vein, setting up a CyQF council was important in establishing a permanent forum for collaboration between stakeholders. The main success factor to date is the use of the CyQF as a comparison tool for qualifications within and outside the country and as a guideline for new developments in the education field. The CyQF and the SVQ have also supported the use of learning outcomes, development and implementation of quality assurance procedures in education and training, transparency of qualifications, and mobility of learners and employees (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020; 2022).

Plans for future actions include strengthening the legal basis of the CyQF. Once the reformation process relating to the national qualifications authority is completed, and following approval by the Council of Ministers, the CyQF will be regulated by law by the House of Representatives. The possibility of changing the three sublevels to a single level 7 will be studied carefully and will be considered in the next updates of the CyQF (Ministry of Education & Culture, 2017). Including microcredentials in the CyQF is a priority (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). In future it will be necessary to develop a national register and establish the criteria and procedures for including qualifications in this register.

# Main sources of information

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[URLs accessed 20/1/2025]

[CyQE](#) website.

[SVQ](#) website.

Ministry of Education & Culture. (2017). *The referencing of the Cyprus qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*

# National qualification framework (NQF)

| NQF LEVEL | QUALIFICATION TYPES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | EQF LEVEL |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 8         | <b>Doctoral degree (Διδακτορικός Τίτλος)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 8         |
| 7c        | <b>Master's degree (Μεταπτυχιακός Τίτλος)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 7         |
| 7b        | <b>Postgraduate diploma (Μεταπτυχιακό Δίπλωμα)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                        |           |
| 7a        | <b>Postgraduate certificate (Μεταπτυχιακό Πιστοποιητικό)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                              |           |
| 6         | <b>Bachelor's degree (Πτυχίο)</b><br><b>Qualifications at SVQ level 6</b><br>The system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) is an integral, but distinct, part of the CyQF, incorporating qualifications awarded through non-formal and informal learning. | 6         |
| 5c        | <b>Higher certificates and diplomas - 3 years (Ανώτερα Διπλώματα και Πιστοποιητικά)</b>                                                                                                                                                                   | 5         |
| 5b        | <b>Post-secondary certificates and diplomas - 2 years (Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Διετούς Διάρκειας)</b>                                                                                                                                                      |           |
| 5a        | <b>Post-secondary certificates and diplomas - 1 year (Μεταλυκειακά Διπλώματα Μονοετούς Διάρκειας)</b>                                                                                                                                                     |           |
| 5         | <b>Qualifications at SVQ level 5</b><br>The system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) is an integral, but distinct, part of the CyQF, incorporating qualifications awarded through non-formal and informal learning.                                      |           |

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|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 4 | <b>Upper secondary general education and evening school certificates - 12th grade or 12th and 13th for some private schools (Απολυτήριο Μέσης Γενικής Εκπαίδευσης)</b><br><b>Upper secondary technical and vocational education and evening technical school certificates - 12th grade (Απολυτήριο Μέσης Τεχνικής Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης)</b><br><b>Qualifications at SVQ level 4</b><br>The system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) is an integral, but distinct, part of the CyQF, incorporating qualifications awarded through non-formal and informal learning. | 4 |
| 3 | <b>Lower secondary education certificate - 10th grade - preparatory year for upper secondary education</b><br><b>New modern apprenticeship certificate - 10th grade (Απολυτήριο Πρώτου Κύκλου Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης - 10η τάξη)</b><br><b>Qualifications at SVQ level 3</b><br>The system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) is an integral, but distinct, part of the CyQF, incorporating qualifications awarded through non-formal and informal learning.                                                                                                          | 3 |
| 2 | <b>Compulsory lower secondary education certificate - 9th grade (Απολυτήριο Πρώτου Κύκλου Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης - 9η τάξη)</b><br><b>Preparatory programme - New modern apprenticeship (Προπαρασκευαστικό Πρόγραμμα Νέας Σύγχρονης Μαθητείας)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 2 |
| 1 | <b>Compulsory education certificate - elementary school certificate, or graduates of 7th and/or 8th grade (Υποχρεωτική Εκπαίδευση)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 1 |

# Acronyms

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|        |                                                                                 |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CyQAA  | Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education        |
| CyQF   | Cypriot qualifications framework                                                |
| EQF    | European qualifications framework                                               |
| HRDA   | Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus                                  |
| KYSATS | Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications                |
| NQA    | National Qualifications Authority                                               |
| NQF    | national qualifications framework                                               |
| SVQ    | system of vocational qualifications ( <i>Σύστημα Επαγγελματικών Προσόντων</i> ) |
| VET    | vocational education and training                                               |
| VQS    | Vocational Qualification Standards                                              |

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# Related content

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2024

Cyprus - European inventory of NQFs 2024

European inventory of NQF

 Cyprus