

Connection

The NCP NLQF is part of the Netherlands Partnership of Life Long Learning (Nederlands Partnerschap Leven Lang Leren). Alongside the NLQF, in this context, there are two other employment market instruments, i.e. validation of non-formal and informal learning and ECVET (European Credit System Vocational Education and Training).

Within the Netherlands Partnership for Life Long Learning, pilots are enabling work to be carried out on connecting these validation instruments in order to help people find a job or move between jobs efficiently and effectively. This contribution towards employment mobility is realised via the combination of a transparent indication of level, the validation of previously obtained knowledge and skills and the provision of partial qualifications.

More information in the English language can be found here:
<http://www.nlqf.nl/information-in-english>



NLQF
increases visibility of learning

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Objective

The Dutch Qualification Framework (Nederlands Kwalificatieraamwerk or NLQF) is a framework for classifying all possible qualifications. From basic education to doctorates, and from company training to long-term evening classes.

Classifying the qualifications within a framework means that levels become comparable. This concerns government regulated qualifications (formal qualifications that lead to legally recognised certificates) and non-formal qualifications that are not regulated by the government, e.g. from private training providers, companies, sectors and examination bodies.

The NLQF was set up to support life-long learning and aims to contribute towards the national and international mobility of employees and students. The framework clarifies the level at which a person can learn or function in the Netherlands or in another European country. In order to encourage international mobility and the comparability of educational levels in the European Member States, the NLQF refers back to the European qualification framework (EQF).

Development of NLQF

The classification of formal qualifications into one of the levels of the NLQF and referencing to the EQF took place under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education Culture and Science. In 2011 the NLQF and the referencing to the EQF was sent to the Dutch Parliament.

The referencing to EQF by the EQF Advisory group of the European Commission was approved in January 2012.

In the Netherlands the 17 Ministry-regulated qualifications were related to the eight levels (plus Entry Level) of the NLQF. This was achieved by working with experts from the different educational sectors and the main stakeholders (including social partners) in education and by consultation with a wider public, including providers of education and training. The NLQF has been operational since 2011; this means that, since then, it is possible for non formal qualifications to apply for a classification into the EQF/NLQF. Procedures for quality assurance have been developed in order to back-up the classification of non-formal qualifications.

From EQF to NLQF

The NLQF is an elaboration of the EQF in line with the levels of the Dutch education and labour market. The differences between the EQF and the NLQF are as follows: the EQF descriptors are further elaborated in the NLQF, the NLQF has an entry level below EQF level 1. The NLQF also includes a level 4 and 4+.

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Descriptors

The EQF deals with knowledge, skills and competencies. In the NLQF the specific context in which the learning outcomes are achieved is mentioned additionally for each level. This extra 'Context' descriptor in the NLQF is used to obtain information about a qualification, but has no direct impact on the assessment of the classification.

In the NLQF, the EQF-descriptor 'skills' is divided into five skill descriptors: application of knowledge, problem-solving skills, learning and development skills, informative skills and communicative skills. The concept of competence is translated in Dutch into the concepts of responsibility and autonomy.

Intake level

At the entry level, only basic education 1 for adults with a learning disability has been classified. Here, the focus lies on the development of social skills and basic abilities in terms of reading, writing and numeracy. The fact that the intake level is lower than EQF level 1 means that qualifications that are classified at this level cannot be allocated an EQF level.

NLQF level 4+

Higher Academic Education (vwo), one of the aspects of Dutch secondary education, is positioned at level 4+ because of the substantially higher level of the 'vwo' (preparation for university) compared to the 'havo' qualification (preparing for higher vocational education) which was classified at level 4.

More about the referencing process can be found in the Referencing document (2012) which can be downloaded from the NLQF website.





NCP NLQF

The National Coordination Point (NCP) NLQF has various tasks which are intended to support the target groups: employers, employees, students and training providers.

Here, we will limit ourselves to the two most important tasks. Primarily, the NCP has the task of classifying non-formal qualifications in an NLQF level so that they become comparable with the levels of formal qualifications. The second task of the NCP is communicating with and providing information to the NLQF's target groups. The NCP is doing this by organising meetings and workshops, and disseminating newsletters and explanatory folders and brochures, among other things.

The Programme Council and the Quality and Classification Commissions of the NCP are also involved in classifying non-formal qualifications. More about their role in this process is set out under 'Classification process'. The NCP NLQF has fallen under the Netherlands Partnership of Life Long Learning (Nederlands Partnerschap Leven Lang Leren) since 2014.

Classification of governmental regulated qualifications

The education of youngsters in the Netherlands is almost entirely regulated by the government. The responsibility for these qualifications lies with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The 17 qualifications regulated by the government are generically classified in the NLQF/EQF. The diagram shows how the 17 Ministry-regulated qualifications relate to the NLQF/EQF levels.

In the Netherlands there is a legislative project underway to report NLQF/EQF levels on certificates issued for government regulated qualifications.

Entry Level	Basic Education 1 (for adults)
NLQF Level 1	Basic Education 2 (for adults)
	Pre-vocational secondary education - basic vocational pathway (vmbo bb)
	VET level 1 (mbo1)
NLQF Level 2	Basic Education 3 (for adults)
	Pre-vocational secondary education - advanced vocational pathway (vmbo kb)
	Prevocational secondary education - combined theoretical pathway (vmbo gl)
	Pre-vocational secondary education - theoretical pathway (vmbo tl)
	VET level 2 (mbo 2)
NLQF Level 3	VET level 3 (mbo 3)
NLQF Level 4	VET level 4 (mbo 4)
	Higher general secondary education (havo)
	Higher general secondary education for adults (vavo-havo)
NLQF Level 4+	Pre-university education (vwo)
	Pre-university education for adults (vavo-vwo)
NLQF Level 5	Associate Degree
NLQF Level 6	Bachelor Degreee
NLQF Level 7	Master Degree
NLQF Level 8	Doctorate
	Designer
	Medical specialist





Classification of not by the government regulated qualifications

Non-formal qualifications that are not regulated by the government are offered by private training providers, companies, sectors or examination bodies and often focus on additional education for adults. Compared to other countries, there is a large range of this type of qualification in the Netherlands. 84% of adult learning takes place in this sector (ECBO, 2011). The turnover in this context amounts to 3.2 billion (SEO, 2012).

The owners of non-governmental regulated qualifications can submit an application to the NCP NLQF to have their qualification classified in the NLQF. The owner of a qualification maintains the qualification and/or issues the certificates. At the end of 2014, a total of 11 qualifications from the private sector were classified, including qualifications for the Military Police, Psychosocial Counsellor, Swim teacher, Operation assistant, International Flight Attendant and Interior Designer.

Classification process

The owners of a non-formal qualification can submit an application to NCP NLQF to classify the qualification in the NLQF. This classification covers two stages:

Validity check

The validity check ensures that the organisation is eligible for a classification application. This ensures that only trustworthy organisations can indicate an NLQF/ EQF level on certificates and diplomas. This check evaluates the legal personality, the ownership of the qualification, the continuity of the organisation and the organisation's examination and quality assurance process.

If the owner has an externally validated quality assurance system (e.g. accreditation by the Dutch/Flemish Accreditation Organisation or NVAO, or is supervised by the Education Inspectorate), it is eligible for a limited validity check. This means that an organisational audit will not take place. This validity lasts for five years. During these five years, the owner can submit the qualification for classification.

The Quality Commission assesses the application independently and then the Programme Council of the NCP NLQF accepts or rejects the validity of the organisation.

Classification application

If the validity of an organisation is assessed positively, the applicant can have their qualifications classified in the NLQF. The applicant justifies the level of the qualification via self-evaluation on the basis of learning results.

The best-fit method is applied for this evaluation. This means that all descriptors are reviewed individually and the level that best fits the qualification is then determined. For example: a qualification may equate to level 5 in terms of problem-solving skills but only level 4 in relation to knowledge. Ultimately, the evaluations per descriptor are combined into a single evaluation of the level of the entire qualification. The classification is then valid for 5 years.

A team of independent experts assesses the application and the supporting documents; the Classification Commission then issues a recommendation to the Programme Council. In the event of a positive recommendation from the Programme Council and the allocation of a level, the classified qualification is added to the NCP NLQF register.





Examples

Below are two examples of organisations that have first-hand experience of the advantages of NLQF.

NOC*NSF

NOC*NSF would like to assure the quality of sports-based training. Take the trainer of an amateur hockey team, for example. Is he/she a well-meaning volunteer or a well-trained sportsman/woman that knows exactly what a trainer must do? Well, both, in fact; just like a professional coach in football or table tennis, for example. The sporting umbrella organisation NOC*NSF would like the underlying qualifications to be allocated an NLQF level so that they are (internationally) comparable and enable us to estimate the level of the coach that comes from Romania, for example.

Psychodidact

Training institute Psychodidact sometimes receives registrations by students that claim to have completed their education at 'hbo' (higher vocational) level. 'When we ask them why they are basing it on an 'hbo' level, they say: because the training director said so.' But this is not enough. 'As an institution, you cannot assess the level of your training or qualification yourself. You must have this done by independent specialists.' Psychodidact did so by having their qualification classified in the NLQF.

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