

AHOVOKS

AGENTSCHAP VOOR HOGER ONDERWIJS,
VOLWASSENENONDERWIJS, KWALIFICATIES
& STUDIETOELAGEN



Vlaanderen
is onderwijs & vorming

REFERENCING REPORT FLANDERS

Referencing of the Flemish
Qualifications Framework to the
European Qualifications Framework

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Second update of the initial referencing report of 2011

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List of abbreviations

AHOVOKS	<i>Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs, Kwalificaties en Studietoelagen</i> (Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Grants)	manama	<i>master na master</i> (advanced master degree programmes)
aso	<i>algemeen secundair onderwijs</i> (general secondary education, gse)	NQF	national qualifications framework
banaba	<i>bachelor na bachelor</i> (advanced bachelor degree programme)	NVAO	<i>Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie</i> (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders)
bso	<i>beroepssecundair onderwijs</i> (vocational secondary education, vse)	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
CLB	<i>Centra voor Leerlingenbegeleiding</i> (Pupil Guidance Centres)	PQ	professional qualification
CPD	continuous professional development	PQD	professional qualification dossier
dko	<i>deeltijds kunstonderwijs</i> (part-time artistic education)	QF-EHEA	Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area
DSLO	domain specific learning outcomes	RFQE	Reference Framework for Quality Education (<i>Referentiekader voor Onderwijskwaliteit</i>)
EHEA	European Higher Education Area	SAS	School Advisory Services
EI	Education Inspectorate	sea	secondary education in the arts (<i>kunstsecundair onderwijs, kso</i>)
EQ	Educational qualification	SERV	Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen (<i>Social and Economic Council of Flanders</i>)
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education	tse	<i>technical secondary education</i> (technisch secundair onderwijs, tso)
EQF	European Qualifications Framework	tso	technisch secundair onderwijs (<i>technical secondary education, tse</i>)
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area	VDAB	<i>Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling</i> , (Flemish Employment Services and Vocational Training Agency)
EVC	<i>Erkennen van Verworven Competenties</i> (Recognition of Acquired Competences)	VKS	<i>Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur</i> (Flemish Qualifications Structure)
FQF	Flemish Qualification Framework	VLAIO	<i>Agentschap Innoveren en Ondernemen</i> (Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship)
FQS	Flemish Qualifications Structure	VLHORA	<i>Vlaamse Hogescholenraad</i> (Flemish Council of University Colleges)
FSI	Flemish Social Inspectorate	VLIR	<i>Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad</i> (Flemish Interuniversity Council)
GKK	<i>Gemeenschappelijk Kwaliteitskader</i> (Common Quality Framework)	Vlor	<i>Vlaamse Onderwijsraad</i> (Flemish Education Council)
gse	general secondary education (algemeen secundair onderwijs, aso)	VLUHR	<i>Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad</i> (Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges)
kso	<i>kunstsecundair onderwijs</i> (secondary education in the arts, sea)	vse	vocational secondary education (<i>beroepssecundair onderwijs, bso</i>)
KWDB	<i>Kwalificatiedatabank</i> (Flemish Qualifications Database)		
LED	<i>Leer- en Ervaringsbewijzendatabank</i> (Flemish Database of Qualifications and Certificates)		

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Executive summary

The **Flemish Qualifications Framework** (FQF) was designed in 2009 under the name of Flemish Qualification Structure (FQS - *Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur*, VKS). The development of the FQF was inspired by evolutions at the European level, in particular the creation of the **European Qualifications Framework** (EQF). In 2011 the levels of the Flemish Qualification Framework were linked to the levels of the European framework and presented in a **referencing report**. An update of this report was made in 2014, and offered a state of play with regard to the actual implementation of the Flemish national qualification framework.

Until today the foundations of the Flemish Qualifications Framework, as established in 2009, remain unchanged. Since the last update (2014) of the referencing report however a number of **evolutions** can be identified that had an impact on the implementation of the FQF, on the education, training and validation programmes linked to the framework, and on the organisation of quality assurance in Flanders. In 2017 also the **EQF Recommendation** was subject of a **revision**. These internal and European evolutions lie at the basis of the need for a second **update** of the referencing report.

Relevant recent evolutions with regard to the development of qualifications include the possibility of demarcating **partial qualifications** to certify smaller units with a labour market value. **Updating** procedures were put in place to allow for qualifications to evolve in parallel with labour market needs. **Professional qualifications for social roles** were introduced, broadening the FQF to include leisure and voluntary work.

At the start the FQF was theoretically an 'empty' framework. Since its creation a large number of **educational and professional qualifications** was developed and implemented in education and training programmes. Professional qualifications are to a varying degree included in programmes offered in secondary education (incl. dual learning), adult education, special needs education and part-time artistic education and in associate degree programmes.

The adoption of the Parliamentary Act on the **Common Quality Framework** and the Parliamentary Act on the **Recognition of Acquired Competences** in 2019 allowed for public and private providers to establish professionally qualifying training or validation programmes leading to a certificate of professional qualification, a certificate of a partial qualification, or a certificate of competences.

Quality assurance on the design of educational and professional qualifications is incorporated in the Parliamentary Act on the Flemish Qualifications Structure. In recent years, the quality assurance of the education and learning pathways was refined and adapted to the evolutions in the field. The **Education Inspectorate** implemented a new methodology and assessment framework that assigns responsibility to the institutions while at the same time assessing, amongst a range of other indicators, whether the learning objectives from the qualification are achieved. In higher education, the **NVAO** plays a key role by validating the domain specific learning outcomes, in addition to organising the external quality assessment in higher education. Through the procedure developed by the Department of Work and Social Economy on the basis of the Common Quality Framework, a number of programmes have already been recognised. On-site quality assurance, coordinated by the **Flemish Social Inspectorate**, became fully operational in 2022.

Over the years a number of relevant **databases** has been developed to provide information and to support policy development in Flanders.

Relevant **stakeholders** have been involved when writing the update of the referencing report. The recommendations issued by the relevant advisory councils are addressed in the update report. Insights from round table discussions with labour market representatives, and from a report evaluating the practice of professional qualifications from a user perspective, are included in the report.

Qualifications, education and training programmes, and quality assurance are the three sides of a quality education and training offer that supports lifelong learning in Flanders. The three pillars are sufficiently robust while at the same time evolving along the needs in the field.

Although recent changes have been implemented in the Flemish education and training system, the core of the Flemish Qualification Structure did not alter since the framework was created. As a result the **alignment** between the levels of the FQF and the levels of the EQF, as defined in the Flemish referencing report in 2011 and confirmed in its update in 2014, holds up until today.

Introduction: development of a national qualifications framework in Flanders

The Flemish Qualifications Framework was designed in 2009. Evolutions at the European level, in particular the development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), inspired the development of a national qualifications framework (NQF) in Flanders.

The European Qualifications Framework

In 2008 the European Union established the European Qualifications Framework in line with the priorities of the Lisbon Strategy (2000) and the Copenhagen Process (2002). The EQF is a common reference framework used to improve transparency, comparability, and portability of qualifications throughout Europe. The framework stimulates lifelong learning by being comprehensive and covering qualifications at all levels and in all sub-systems of education and training. It also includes a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning, where competences acquired on the shop floor, as a volunteer, through hobbies, or in other contexts can be valorised.

The EQF Recommendation invited member states to reference their national qualifications frameworks to the EQF, in order to establish a clear and transparent relationship between their national qualifications levels and the EQF levels. This invitation triggered NQF developments in various European education and training systems, including the Flemish one. The EQF currently acts as a bridge between the qualifications of 38 European countries.

More recent European initiatives in the field of education and training (European Education Area, new Europass, Osnabrück Declaration, European Skills Agenda, ...) will further stimulate debate on the development of qualifications frameworks, both at the European and at the national level. Flanders maintains its engagement to these and other European initiatives.

A Flemish National Qualifications Framework

The Flemish Parliament approved the Parliamentary Act on the Flemish Qualifications Structure in 2009. This act laid down the definitions, the qualification levels and level

descriptors, and the procedures for the recognition of professional and educational qualifications. In addition, it laid the foundations for the development of a Flemish Qualifications Database (*Kwalificatiedatabank*, KWDB) and the Flemish Database of Qualifications and Certificates (*Leer- en Ervaringsbewijzendatabank*, LED) (see chapter 7).

The procedure, method, and use of the Flemish Qualifications Framework were described in more detail and laid down in two decisions:

- » The Decision of the Flemish Government of 11 January 2013 on the implementation of the Parliamentary Act of 30 April 2009 on the qualifications structure with regard to the recognition of professional qualifications and on the recognition of educational qualifications for secondary after secondary education and higher vocational education.¹
- » The Decision of the Flemish Government of 10 January 2014 on the implementation of the Parliamentary Act of 30 April 2009 on the qualifications structure, on the recognition of educational qualifications from level 1 to level 4, and to amend the decision of the Flemish Government of 11 January 2013 on the implementation of the Parliamentary Act of 30 April 2009 on the qualifications structure with regard to the recognition of professional qualifications and on the recognition of educational qualifications for secondary after secondary education and higher vocational education.²

Following adoption of the two decisions, the Flemish Qualifications Framework became fully operational in 2013. The Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Grants (*Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs, Kwalificaties en Studietoelagen*, AHOVOKS) was appointed as the main entity responsible for the Flemish Qualifications Framework.

As of 2012 the first professional qualifications were developed, validated, assigned a level, recognised, and registered. Although the foundations of the Parliamentary Act regarding the qualifications structure remained unchanged, there have been some **changes in the regulations** that reflect national and international evolutions and needs.

1. Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering houdende de uitvoering van het decreet betreffende de kwalificatiestructuur van 30 april 2009 inzake de erkenning van beroepskwalificaties en inzake de erkenning van onderwijskwalificaties voor het secundair na secundair onderwijs en het hoger beroepsonderwijs.

2. Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering houdende de uitvoering van het decreet van 30 april 2009 betreffende de kwalificatiestructuur, wat betreft de erkenning van onderwijskwalificaties van niveau 1 tot en met niveau 4, en tot wijziging van het besluit van de Vlaamse Regering van 11 januari 2013 houdende de uitvoering van het decreet betreffende de kwalificatiestructuur van 30 april 2009 inzake de erkenning van onderwijskwalificaties voor het secundair na secundair onderwijs en het hoger beroepsonderwijs.

- » in 2017 a detailed procedure for **updating** and **removing** professional qualifications and **describing partial qualifications** was added to the Parliamentary Act (see subchapter 2.2)
- » in 2018 changes were made to accommodate regulations regarding **associate degree programmes** in universities of applied sciences
- » in 2018, as a result of the process of **modernising secondary education**, adjustments were made that relate to the composition of educational qualifications of levels 1 to 4
- » in 2018 an Act of the Flemish Government was approved which laid down the procedure for the recognition of **professional qualifications for social roles** (see subchapter 1.1.1)

In recent years, changes have taken place with regard to the **use** of the Flemish Qualifications Framework in the context of education, training and validation programmes.

Decisions taken with regard to the modernisation of secondary education determined the position and content of the qualifications. Modularisation was further implemented in adult education. Associate degree programmes becoming part of higher education had an impact on the description of learning outcomes. Procedures for validation programmes were designed to better fit the principles of the Flemish Qualifications Framework.

In addition, changes were made to the methods for **quality assurance** applied in Flanders. The Education Inspectorate developed and introduced the Reference Framework for Quality Education (RFQE, *Referentiekader voor Onderwijskwaliteit*, OK). For higher education the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie*, NVAO) carries out institutional reviews in addition to (initial) programme accreditations. The Common Quality Framework (*Gemeenschappelijk Kwaliteitskader*, GKK) was set up, which outlines the quality assurance of programmes offered by public or private partners.

In 2011 Flanders drafted a report referencing the Flemish Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework. In 2014 an update of this report presented information on the procedures in practice, including the recognition of professional qualifications. Both the original report as well as the update were presented to the Europass Advisory Group. Nine years have passed since the update of the report and meanwhile 571 professional qualifications have been assigned an FQF level. In addition, professional qualifications were embedded in training and education programmes, both within formal and non-formal learning.

The changes as presented above, both in the design and the scope of the Flemish Qualifications Framework, justify a new update of the referencing report. The update at hand presents the Flemish framework and the recent changes in the following sections:

- » **Part 1** presents the Flemish Qualifications Framework itself, including the design and update procedures of professional and educational qualifications (chapter 1 to 4). We demonstrate how qualifications are introduced in the education and training landscape in Flanders (chapter 5). The quality assurance procedures of the various education, training, and validation programmes are discussed in a separate chapter (chapter 6). We finalise the first part with a presentation of the relevant databases in Flanders (chapter 7).
- » In **part 2** we offer a current state of affairs with regard to the development of professional qualifications (chapter 8) and expand on stakeholder involvement (chapter 9).
- » **Part 3** discusses the ten referencing criteria as set out in the 2017 EQF Recommendation (chapter 10).
- » Annexes finalise the report in **part 4**.

1. The Flemish Qualifications Framework

1.1 Two types of qualifications

Before we describe the Flemish Qualifications Framework, a number of concepts and their interpretation in the context of the FQF are defined.

A first concept which needs clarification is the term **competence**. The interpretation of the concept in Flanders relates to the definition of the OECD, which states that a competence includes knowledge, skills and attitudes. The Flemish Education Council (*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad*, Vlor) and the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen*, SERV)³ use definitions that, in addition to the three elements mentioned, also refer to the fact that competences allow people to act effectively in different situations. The Parliamentary Act on the Flemish Qualifications Framework describes a competence as ‘the ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes when performing social activities, and integrate these into one’s actions.’

All definitions suggest that one has to undergo a learning process to acquire competences. In Flanders competences and their compiling elements are interpreted as the learning outcomes one has achieved. Learning outcomes and competences are in that sense interchangeable terms in Flanders.

The Flemish Qualifications Framework consists of eight levels and offers a classification of qualifications recognised by the Flemish Government. A **qualification**, as defined in the Parliamentary Act, is a complete and classified set of competences for which people can obtain a certificate recognised by the Flemish Government.

Complete implies that the entire set of competences is relevant to exercise a profession or to continue in education. *Classified* refers to the fact that the qualification has been assigned an FQF level. The number of competences that is included in a qualification is not fixed, but the total set has to comprise all relevant aspects.

A qualification is not to be confused with a certificate which is granted to an individual upon successful completion of an education or training programme. Qualifications define (parts of) the competences / learning outcomes which are offered in a programme, regardless of the fact whether these have been reached by an individual pupil, student, or course participant. In this sense they can

be interpreted as qualification standards.

Qualifications in Flanders are used to define the content of the programmes offered in formal education. But also informal education providers can base themselves on these qualifications to design their offer (see subchapter 5.2.7).

The Parliamentary Act on the establishment of the Flemish Qualifications Framework distinguishes between **professional qualifications** and **educational qualifications**.

1.1.1. Professional qualifications

A **professional qualification** (PQ) is a complete and classified set of competences that allows an individual to exercise a profession or to take on a social role. Professional qualifications can be developed at all levels of the qualifications framework.

A professional qualification has the following characteristics:

- » A professional qualification represents the **required competences of a fully-fledged professional practitioner**.
- » A professional qualification defines the required competences for a profession from the position of an **employee**, not for a profession as practiced by someone who is self-employed.
- » A professional qualification is **uniformly defined for a given profession**. This profession can be intersectoral or sector-specific. The choice for either an intersectoral or a sector-specific approach depends on the importance of the sector-specific competences.
- » A professional qualification is by preference **singular**, since it is difficult to assign a level to composite professional qualification dossiers.

Since 2018 a Decision of the Flemish Government allows for the assignment of an FQF level to **professional qualifications for social roles**. We define a social role as a coherent set of tasks with associated competences aimed at a specific social functioning in the context of voluntary work or leisure work. Examples of this are Amateur Performing Actor and Amateur Visual Artist.

All professional qualifications have the same structure and impact, regardless whether they prepare for a profession on the labour market or for a social role in voluntary or leisure work (see also annex I).

In 2018 the possibility was introduced to define a **partial qualification** within a full professional qualification.

3. The Vlor and SERV are two advisory councils to the Flemish Government and the Flemish Parliament. While the Vlor drafts strategic advice on all important domains of the education ministry, the SERV advises the Flemish Government and the Flemish Parliament on socio-economic issues.

Partial qualifications are coherent sets of competences from one and the same professional qualification that offer opportunities in a narrower segment of the labour market than the full professional qualification does. Partial qualifications are delineated during the preparation of a professional qualification. They do not have their own classification level, but are part of a full PQ with an FQF level. The full PQ and its level is always mentioned on the certificate which is granted upon acquisition of the competences as described in a partial qualification.

For example: The professional qualification Technician Renewable Energy Techniques contains competences related to different renewable energy systems and installations (photovoltaic systems, heat pumps, biomass boilers and solar thermal systems). In this professional qualification, four partial qualifications were distinguished, each comprising a part of the competences.

With a certificate of partial qualification of e.g. Photovoltaic Systems Technician, a learner can start working in a narrower segment of the labour market. This certificate confirms that the individual has obtained all competences of the partial qualification of Photovoltaic Systems Technician, which is part of the professional qualification Technician Renewable Energy Techniques with FQF level 4.

Individuals can obtain professional qualifications upon completion of an **education and training programme** or via a procedure for the **validation of acquired competences** (see subchapter 5.2).

1.1.2. Educational qualifications

An **educational qualification** (EQ) is a set of competences an individual needs to participate in society, to start further education and/or to exercise professional activities. An individual can only acquire an educational qualification through education and only educational institutions recognised by the Flemish Ministry of Education can grant certificates for educational qualifications.

Educational qualifications consist of learning outcomes. Vocationally oriented educational qualifications include the competences of the relevant professional qualifications (see chapter 4).

For example: In secondary education a student can take the programme of carpenter. In this programme the educational qualification of carpenter is offered. Part of the content of this EQ is determined by the competences as included in both the PQ of interior carpenter and the PQ of exterior carpenter. These competences are supplemented with attainment targets to complete the content of the educational qualification of carpenter.

1.2 Level descriptors

The Flemish Qualifications Framework distinguishes between eight levels, ranging from level 1 to level 8. Each level within the framework is described by means of a level descriptor. A level descriptor offers a generic description of the characteristics of the competences typical for a qualification at that level, and consists of five descriptor elements: knowledge, skills, context, autonomy and responsibility. These elements determine the level of the qualification.

The levels and the level descriptors are laid down in the Parliamentary Act on the Flemish Qualifications Structure. The level descriptors apply to both professional and educational qualifications. Professional and educational qualifications can be developed at all levels of the Flemish Qualifications Framework (i.e. at level 1, or at level 2, ..., or at level 8).

FQF level	LEVEL DESCRIPTOR ELEMENTS	
	SKILLS KNOWLEDGE	CONTEXT AUTONOMY RESPONSIBILITY
FQF 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » recognise materials, concise, unambiguous information, and simple, concrete basic concepts and rules of a part of a specific area » apply one or more of the following skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › cognitive skills: retrieve information from one's memory, remember and apply it › motor skills: use automatisms and imitate practical actions » perform repetitive and recognisable actions in routine tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » act in a stable, familiar, simple and well-structured context, in which time pressure is of little importance » act with non-delicate objects » functioning under direct supervision » show personal effectiveness
FQF 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » understand information, concrete concepts and standard procedures within a specific area » apply one or more of the following skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › cognitive skills: analyse information by distinguishing and relating elements › motor skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · transform sensory perceptions into motor actions · perform acquired practical-technical actions » apply a selected number of standard procedures when performing tasks; apply prescribed strategies to solve a limited number of recognisable, concrete problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » act in a limited number of comparable, simple, familiar contexts » act with delicate, passive objects » functioning under supervision with limited autonomy » take limited executive responsibility for one's work
FQF 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » understand a number of abstract concepts, laws, formulas and methods within a specific area; distinguishing between major and minor issues in information » apply one or more of the following skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › cognitive skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · analyse information using deduction and induction · synthesize information › motor skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · make constructions based on a plan · perform actions which require tactical and strategic insight · apply artistic-creative skills » choose, combine and apply standard procedures and methods to perform tasks and solve a variety of well-defined, concrete problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » act in comparable contexts in which a number of factors change » act with delicate, active objects » function with a certain autonomy within a well-defined set of tasks » take limited organisational responsibility for one's work

FQF 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » interpret concrete and abstract data (information and concepts) within a specific area » apply reflective cognitive and productive motor skills » evaluate and integrate data and develop strategies to perform diverse tasks and solve diverse, concrete, non-familiar (but subject-specific) problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » act in a combination of changing contexts » functioning autonomously with some initiative » take full responsibility for one's work; evaluate and adjust one's actions with a view to obtaining collective results
FQF 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » extend the information from a specific subject with concrete and abstract data, or complete it with missing data; use frameworks of concepts; be aware of the scope of subject specific knowledge » apply integrated cognitive and motor skills » transfer knowledge and apply procedures flexibly and inventively when performing tasks and to find strategic solutions to concrete and abstract problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » act in a range of new, complex contexts » operate autonomously with initiative » take responsibility for the achievement of personal outcomes and for the stimulation of collective results
FQF 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » critically evaluate and combine knowledge and understanding in a specific area » apply complex specialised skills, linked to research outcomes » gather and interpret relevant data and make innovative use of selected methods and resources to solve non-familiar complex problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » act in complex and specialized contexts » operate with complete autonomy and considerable initiative » take shared responsibility for the definition of collective results
FQF 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » integrate and reformulate knowledge and understanding of a specific subject or at the interface between different areas » apply complex new skills, linked to autonomous, standardised research » critically evaluate and apply complex, advanced and/or innovative problem solving techniques and methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » act in unpredictable, complex and specialised contexts » operate with complete autonomy and a right of decision » take final responsibility for the definition of collective results
FQF 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » extend and/or redefine existing knowledge of a substantial part of a specific subject or at the interface between different areas » interpret and create new knowledge through original research or advanced scientific study » design and execute projects which extend and redefine existing procedural knowledge, aimed at the development of new skills, techniques, applications, practices and/or materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » act in particularly complex contexts with broad, innovative implications » take responsibility for the development of professional practice or scientific research whilst adopting a highly critical stance and showing managerial capacity

Table 1: Level descriptor elements of the Flemish Qualifications Framework

2. Procedure for professional qualifications

In what follows we describe the procedure to recognise professional qualifications, as laid out in the Parliamentary Act on the Flemish Qualifications Structure.

The procedure for a PQ aimed at the labour market differs from the procedure for a PQ leading to a social role only with regard to the composition of the validation and classification committee. For the remaining part the procedures are identical. The specificities of each procedure are included in the chapter at hand.

2.1 Developing new professional qualifications

STEP 1: Initiative

Labour market actors or social organisations indicate and motivate their need for a professional qualification. Labour market actors are understood here as sectoral and/or interprofessional social partners, or the Flemish public employment service VDAB (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling*, Flemish Employment Services and Vocational Training Agency).

STEP 2: Drafting the professional qualification dossier

AHOVOKS coordinates the process and supports the labour market actors or social organisations (= the authors)

in preparing a professional qualification dossier (PQD). The labour market actors or social organisations hold the final responsibility for drawing up the files. A manual, guidelines and process manager from AHOVOKS facilitate the drafting of a quality dossier.

To start a professional qualification dossier is compiled on the basis of one or more professional competence profiles as contained in Competent. Competent is a database of professions, managed by the VDAB. Competent is the standard competence language for professions and competences, based on the Rome v3-competences of the French PES Pôle Emploi. In addition to Competent, other reference frameworks can be used, such as sectoral profiles, regulations, competence studies, etc.

The various components of a professional qualification dossier are listed in the Parliamentary Act of the Flemish Government on the qualifications structure:

- » title and definition of the professional qualification
- » indication of the sectors involved and of the sectors submitting the dossier
- » the competences described according to the descriptor elements and with reference to the reference frameworks used
- » if applicable: the title of the partial qualification(s) and the competences which it (they) contain(s)
- » an analysis of the labour market relevance and/or

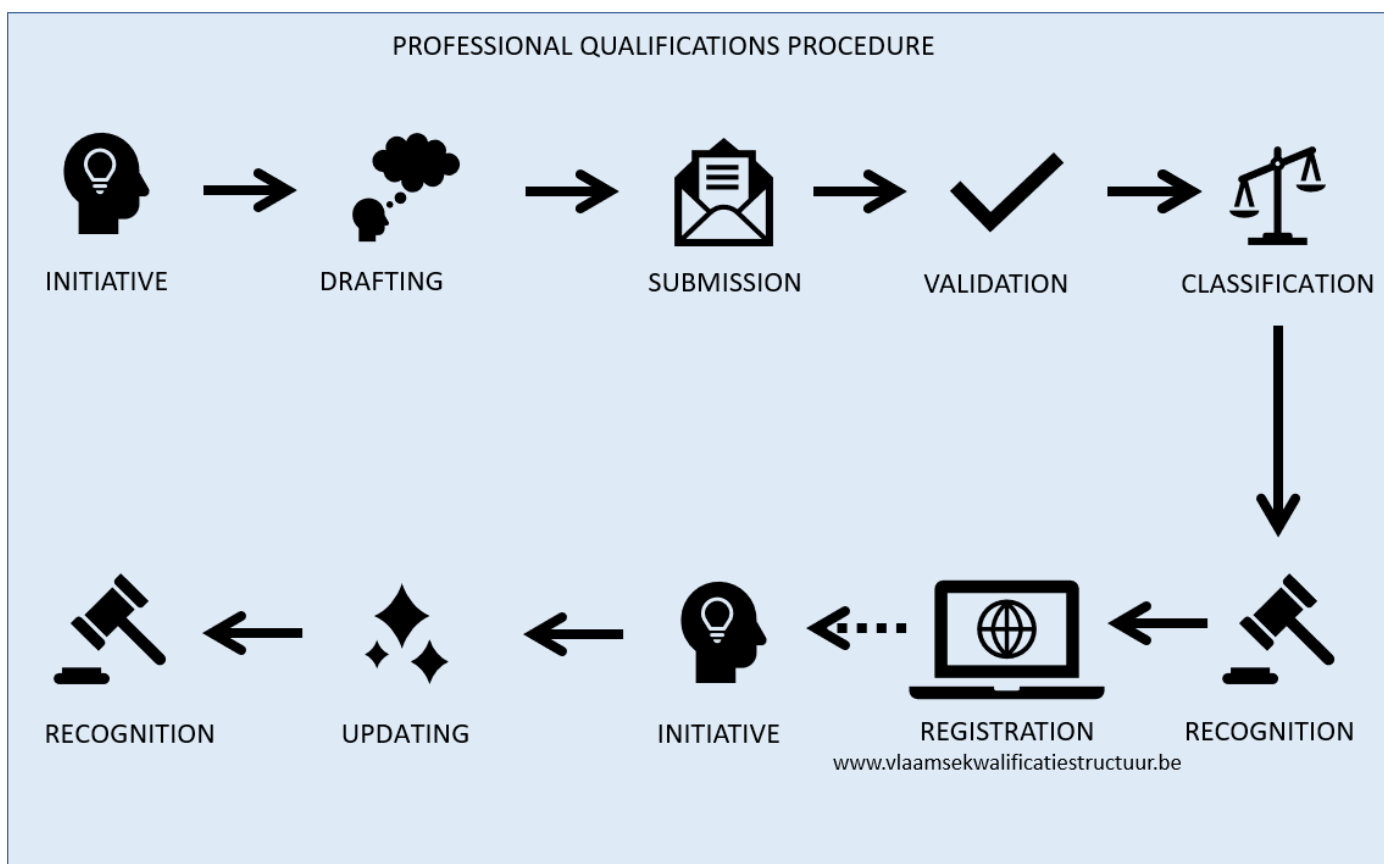


Figure 1: Procedure for the development and update of a professional qualification

social relevance of the professional qualification, and its partial qualification(s) (if any)

- » the coherence with other professional qualification dossiers and with other, already recognised professional and educational qualifications

A manual and a fixed template (see annex I) guide the development of a professional qualification dossier.

STEP 3: Submission of the professional qualification dossier

The main labour market actor(s) or social actor(s) officially submit the dossier to AHOVOKS. A quality check is then performed by a process manager.

STEP 4: Validation of the professional qualification dossier: Can a relevant profession or social role be exercised on the basis of the competences listed in the dossier?

What

The validation committee examines whether the professional qualification dossier sufficiently describes which competences are needed and whether these competences are relevant to both society and the labour market. The method and procedure for the validation of professional qualifications are laid down in internal rules of operations, which contain criteria on:

- » the support of relevant actors in the field for the submitted dossier
- » the use of reference framework(s)
- » the internal coherence of the competences and their comprehensiveness
- » the labour market relevance (for the fully fledged profession) or social relevance (to take up a social role) of the professional qualification

Who

The validation committee consists of two representatives of the interprofessional social partners appointed by the SERV, one representative of the VDAB, and one representative appointed by the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (*Agentschap Innoveren en Ondernemen*, Vlaio). As members of the committee two employees of AHOVOKS are responsible for the secretariat and quality assurance. The validation committee is presided by an independent chairman.

The validation committee for qualifications for social roles is composed by representatives from leisure and voluntary work, two employees of AHOVOKS (secretariat and quality assurance), and an independent chairman.

Decision

The validation committee can decide to validate the PQD, to postpone validation (e.g. ask the authors for revision), or to reject validation.

Internal rules of operation determine the competences of the chairman and the secretariat, the organisation of the secretariat by AHOVOKS, the content and frequency of the meetings, the convening and attendance of meetings, the publication of the validation decision, and a code of ethics.

The validation committee decides by consensus. In the absence of consensus, decisions are taken by majority vote.

STEP 5: Classification: At what level of the Flemish Qualifications Framework is the professional qualification situated?

Who

The level of a qualification is determined by a **classification committee**.

The classification committee that decides on the level of professional qualifications for the **labour market** is composed as follows:

- » 7 representatives of employers' organisations and trade unions, appointed by the SERV
- » 5 representatives of education providers appointed by the Vlor
- » 2 representatives of public training providers, appointed by the VDAB and Vlaio
- » 2 independent classification experts from AHOVOKS - these experts have no right to vote and are responsible for the secretariat and quality assurance/consistency check.

The classification committee for PQs for **social roles** is composed by representatives from leisure and voluntary work, the Vlor, VDAB, Vlaio, and AHOVOKS (secretariat and quality assurance/consistency check).

A maximum of three alternates can be appointed for each effective member of the classification committee. A number of classification guidelines are formulated for an efficient and qualitative functioning of the commission:

- » Attending a training to learn to work with the classification method is a precondition for becoming a member of the classification committee.
- » Because of inter-rater-reliability, every member has to prepare the classification prior to the meeting of the committee, based on the classification method and the professional qualification dossier(s) under consideration.
- » Every member of the classification committee is a

classification expert. He/she is expected not to act as a representative of his/her organisation nor to defend the point of view of his/her rank.

- » A classification is based on the content of the professional qualification dossier. Free interpretations based on general background knowledge and/or casuistry are no valid basis for classification.
- » The members of the committee adopt a responsible, honourable, objective, loyal and reliable attitude with regard to the other committee members and with regard to the activities of the classification committee.
- » A stable group of classification experts is necessary.

A detailed description of the roles and responsibilities of the chairman and the secretary of the classification commission, the content and periodicity of meetings, invitations and attendance to meetings, and the classification decision is laid down in the internal rules of operation of the classification commission.

What

A Flemish qualification classification method has been developed in order to have a transparent and consistent, but at the same time objective way to assign a level to professional qualifications.

Flemish Qualification Classification Method

The Flemish Parliamentary Act on the qualifications structure requires the use of a 'scientifically calibrated method for classification, which leads to a consensus, to determine the level of a qualification'. AHOVOKS

relied on an external consultant for the development of this classification method. The scientific value of the classification method was assessed by two independent academic experts. Their comments and recommendations were incorporated in the final elaboration of the classification method.

Based on an analysis of the Flemish Qualifications Framework and the five descriptor elements (knowledge, skills, context, autonomy, responsibility) a matrix was developed. The descriptor elements of skills and context were split, resulting in 8 descriptor elements: knowledge, cognitive skills, problem-solving skills, motor skills, operational context, environmental context, autonomy and responsibility.

The members of the classification committee evaluate the eight descriptor elements on a five-point scale (A-E). In a manual on the Flemish Classification Method decision trees and more detailed descriptions are given for each of the eight descriptors, so each descriptor can be scored on the scale from A to E. A committee member however can also assign an intermediate score, e.g. A+ or B-.

The evaluation of the eight descriptor elements is weighted in the Classification Tool. This results into a level that is allocated to the qualification.

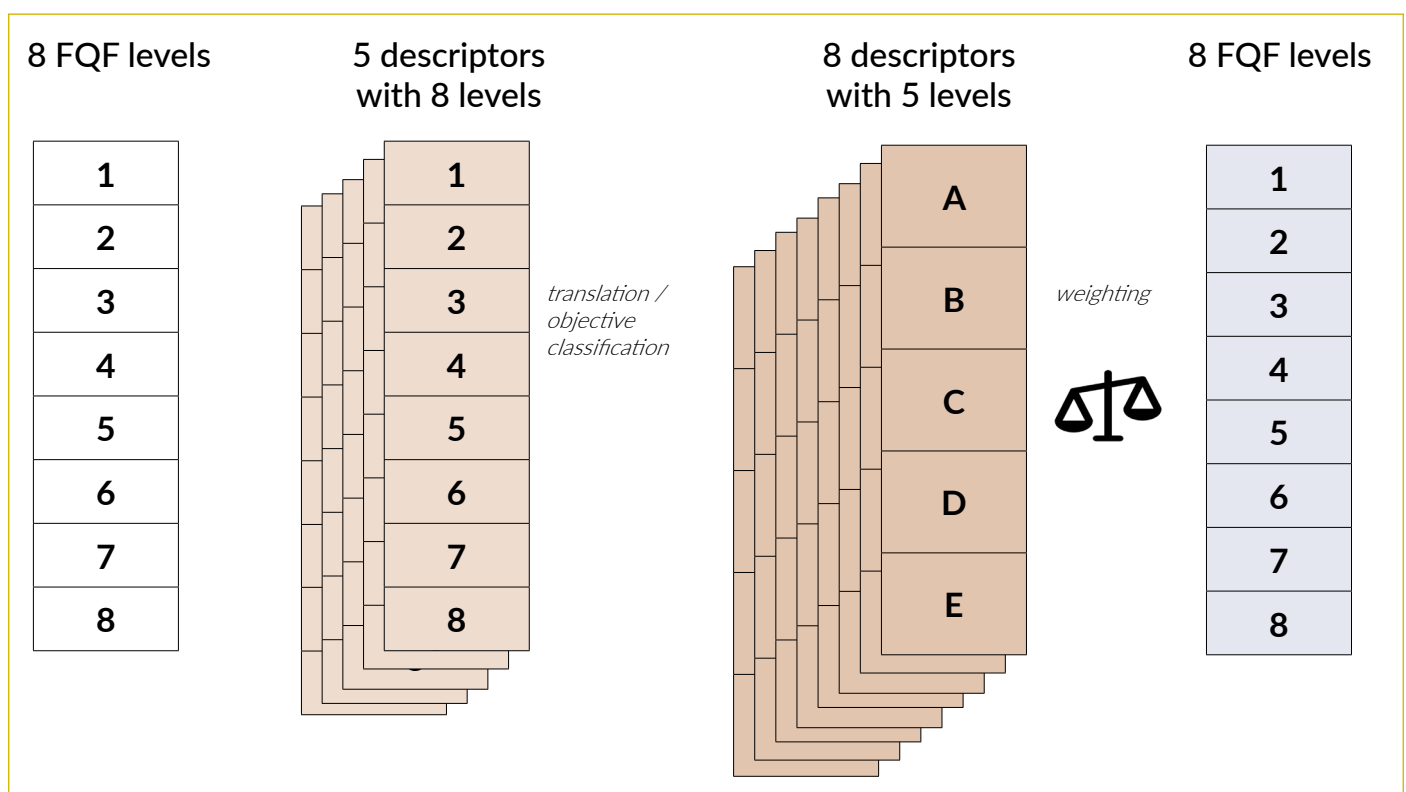


Figure 2: The Flemish qualification classification method

The classification process thus comprises a qualitative and quantitative part:

» **Qualitative:**

In preparation of the meeting, the members of the classification committee allocate individually, on the basis of the manual, a score on the five-point-scale to each of the eight descriptors. In a meeting the classification committee then reaches consensus about the final score for each of the eight descriptor elements. An argumentation is drafted for every final score allocated.

» **Quantitative:**

After the classification commission has reached consensus the final scores for each descriptor element are put in a weighting tool, which determines the FQF level of the professional qualification. The qualitative classification is thus converted into a quantitative classification.

When assigning a level to a professional qualification, the level is determined for the qualification as a whole. While it is possible that individual competences/ learning outcomes relate to the level descriptor(s) of a preceding or subsequent level, it is important that the level is assigned to the whole of the competences/ learning outcomes that together constituting the professional qualification.

Decision

The classification committee decides by consensus. In the absence of consensus, decisions are taken by majority vote. The classification commission is authorised to make minor changes in the dossier in case of consensus. Minor changes are understood as changes of a rather technical nature or changes without any impact on the content of the dossier.

After the meeting a classification advice with a qualitative argumentation per descriptor element is drafted. This advice is sent to the members of the committee for their approval. The members can suggest adjustments to the arguments, not to the level which was agreed in the meeting of the committee.

STEP 6: Recognition

The recognition of a professional qualification contains various formal parts.

» **Marginal review**

AHOVOKS monitors the entire process of the elaboration of a professional qualification dossier, including its classification, in a marginal review. A marginal review is a quality assurance technique used to review the content requirements

and the reasonableness of the evaluated process and its outcome. This does not entail that AHOVOKS takes the place of the authors submitting the professional qualification dossier, nor that the agency repeats the commission's classification work. It does however mean that AHOVOKS will check whether all the formal requirements have been met, whether the process was reasonable, and whether the outcome is not manifestly unreasonable. AHOVOKS relies on a list of defined criteria to carry out the marginal review.

» **Financial, linguistic and legal advice** are given.

After the marginal review, AHOVOKS draws up a recommendation regarding recognition for the Flemish Government. Such a recommendation consists of a the professional qualification itself, together with four annexes: the professional qualification dossier, the validation decision, the classification recommendation, and the outcome of the marginal review.

» **The Flemish Government recognises** every professional qualification in a separate decision. These decisions are registered in the Belgian Official Gazette.

» **Registration:** The recognised professional qualifications are registered in the qualification database and made public on www.vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be (see chapter 7).

2.2 Updating a professional qualification

Although professional qualifications are written as futureproof as possible, factual errors, new techniques, changes in legislation, evolutions in the professional field,... may require a qualification to be updated. The possibility of updating professional qualifications has been introduced in 2017 with the adoption of a Decision of the Flemish Government⁴.

Any labour market actor can indicate the **need to update or remove a professional qualification** of which he is the main submitter. The labour market actor can do this on his own initiative or at the request of AHOVOKS or another government entity. The decision to update can be based on both qualitative and quantitative data: labour market studies, competence studies, graduate tracking, feedback from employers, etc.

Once the adjustments have been made, the nature and scope of the changes is assessed in order to decide whether it entails a purely technical or a more substantive update.

Technical modifications include one of the following

4. Decision of the Flemish Government of 7 July 2017 to amend the decision of the Flemish Government of 11 January 2013 on the implementation of the Parliamentary Act on the qualifications structure of 30 April 2009 with regard to the recognition of professional qualifications and on the recognition of educational qualifications for secondary after secondary education and higher vocational education, with regard to the introduction of a procedure to amend or remove professional qualifications.

modifications:

- 1° editorial changes of a linguistic, grammatical, or formal nature, that do alter the substantive content of the recognised professional qualification;
- 2° rectification of inaccuracies, that do alter the substantive content of the recognised professional qualification;
- 3° changes to the professional qualification dossier, which are not included in the recognised professional qualification itself.

If an update of a recognised professional qualification only comprises a technical adjustment, AHOVOKS submits the updated file for a decision to the Flemish Minister of Education and the Flemish Minister of Work. This procedure is labelled a **track 1 update**.

If an update of a recognised professional qualification is **not limited to a technical adjustment** the agency submits the file to the validation committee.

The **validation committee** assesses the file in accordance with the same criteria used for the validation of a new PQ (see above).

After the validation of the substantive update of a recognised professional qualification, AHOVOKS submits the file to the **classification committee**. The classification committee assesses whether the update of a recognised professional qualification could result in a classification at a different level of the qualifications structure. To do so the committee examines whether the update could lead to the awarding of a different weighting score for one or more of the eight descriptor elements of the classification methodology.

If the classification committee holds the opinion that the **update does not give rise to a new classification**, it returns the file to AHOVOKS, which submits it for a decision to the Flemish Minister of Education and the Flemish Minister of Work. This procedure is labelled a **track 2 update**.

If the classification committee believes that updating the recognised professional qualification can lead to a **classification at a different level** of the qualifications structure, it will **reallocate a level** to the dossier. This will be done in a subsequent meeting of the classification committee and by using the same method as the method applied for assigning a level to a new professional qualification. The remaining steps of the procedure for the recognition of the updated professional qualification are exactly the same as those for a new professional qualification. This procedure is labelled a **track 3 update**.

If the update pertains to the **complete removal** of

a recognised professional qualification, AHOVOKS will send the PQD to the validation committee. The validation committee assesses the dossier and the request for removal on the basis of the validation criteria. The validation committee then returns the dossier to AHOVOKS. The Flemish Government takes a decision on the proposed removal of the recognised professional qualification. This procedure is labelled a **track 4 update**.

3. Procedure for educational qualifications

The composition of educational qualifications from level 1 up to level 8 is laid down in the Parliamentary Act on the Flemish Qualifications Structure.

A **separate procedure** is used for developing qualifications from **level 1 to 4**, qualifications at **level 5**, and qualifications from **level 6 to 8**. Different regulation applies for the organisation of education and training in the various levels covered by the different procedures.

A procedure for the development of qualifications from level 6 to 8 was already developed in the context of the introduction of the Bologna structure in Flanders. At a later point in time a qualification structure and accompanying procedures were developed for the levels 1 to 5. Higher education has been incorporated in this qualification structure, but the procedure for developing EQs of level 6 to 8 was left unaltered.

3.1 Level 1 to 4

The Flemish Government determines the criteria for the development of educational qualifications. These reflect the goal of establishing an up-to-date and rational educational offer.

AHOVOKS develops **educational qualifications proposals**

on its own initiative or at the request of any stakeholder who provides the necessary information to do so. The same applies for the update of an educational qualification.

A proposal for (the update of) an educational qualification describes its attainment targets, specific attainment targets, and professional qualifications or partial qualifications. It also contains information indicating the need and relevance of a new/updated educational qualification and its place in the educational structure.

AHOVOKS draws up an **opinion on the desirability** of developing the educational qualification, taking into account the following questions:

- » is there a social, economic or cultural need for the development of the EQ?
- » is the EQ adapted to the target group, the profile of the type and stage of education (educational and pedagogical context)?
- » what enrolment rates and graduation rates are to be expected?
- » are material, financial resources, and expertise available to organise the EQF?
- » is collaboration with other institutions or the labour market/the world of business possible, if so required?
- » is there coordination with the existing educational offer, with follow-up courses and/or employment opportunities (continuity in studies and career)?

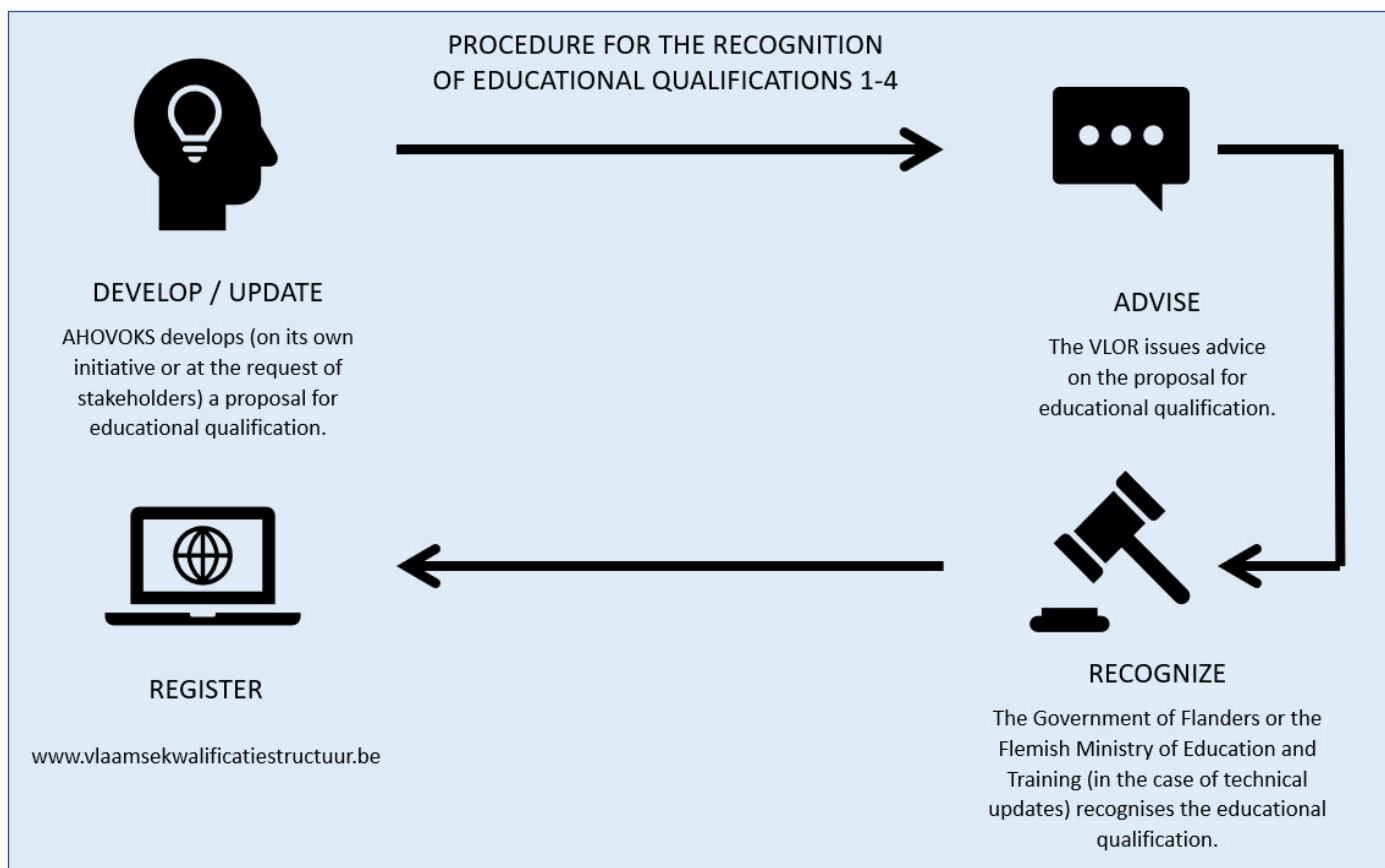


Figure 3: Procedure for the recognition of educational qualifications at FQF level 1 to 4

The Flemish Education Council **issues an advice** on the proposal for an educational qualification based on certain criteria. This step is not applicable in case the update of an educational qualification is limited to technical adjustments.

The Flemish Government **recognises** (the update of) the educational qualification upon a joint proposal from the Minister for Education and the Minister of Work. Updates of a technical nature are recognised by the Flemish Minister responsible for Education.

AHOVOKS **registers** the recognised educational qualifications in a the Qualifications Database (see chapter 7).

3.2 Level 5

When one or more professional qualifications have been recognised at FQF level 5, AHOVOKS examines whether an educational qualification can be developed which contains the professional qualification(s). The Flemish Council of University Colleges (*Vlaamse Hogescholenraad, VLHORA*) is consulted to give an advice on the study load, expressed in credits, and to suggest a name and possible fields of study.

AHOVOKS draws up an advice on the desirability of the development of an EQ at level 5 on the basis of criteria parallel to the ones applied for the development of an

EQ at level 1 to 4 (see above). In case development is deemed desirable, the advice of AHOVOKS also includes a **recommendation on the study load**, expressed in credits, of the programme leading to the relevant educational qualification. If the study load can be set at 90 or 120 credits, the advice offers information on the professional qualification(s) which the educational qualification comprises, possibly options for (future) specialisations, and the name of the higher education programme and the field of study to which it belongs.

AHOVOKS can grant a positive advice on the development of an educational qualification with different specialisations based on the expectation that some of the professional qualifications underlying those specialisations will be recognised at a later point in time.

On the basis of the advice issued by AHOVOKS, the Government of Flanders **decides** whether or not to develop the educational qualification.

Following the decision of the Flemish Government to recognise an educational qualification, the university colleges jointly define the **domain specific learning outcomes (DSLOs)** within a period of six months. The DSLOs describe the educational qualification and define a common set of competences which all students throughout Flanders are expected to master upon completion of a certain programme. VLHORA develops the learning outcomes on the basis of structural mutual consultation

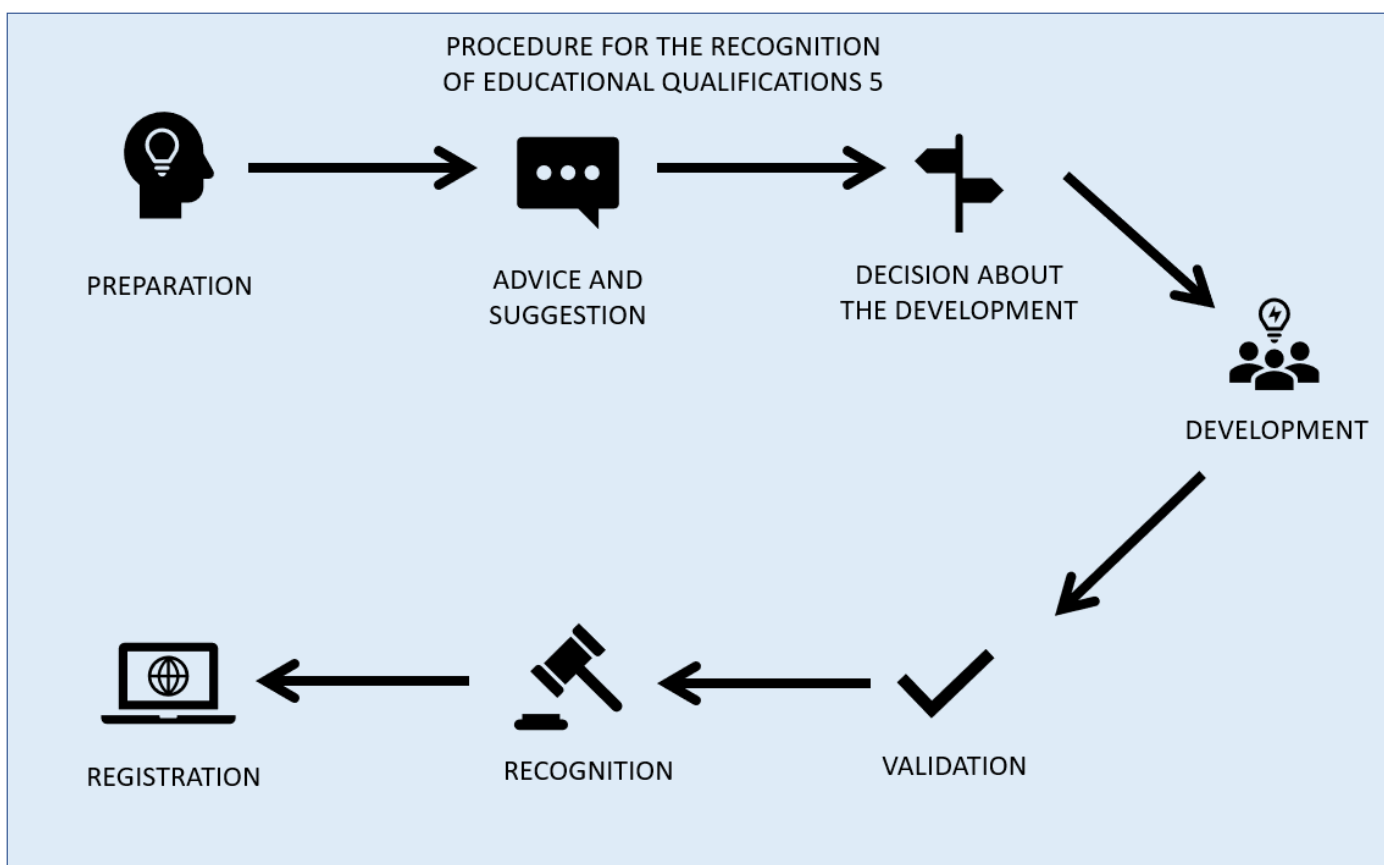


Figure 4: Procedure for the recognition of educational qualifications at FQF level 5

with various stakeholders, including AHOVOKS. The university colleges can also invite external experts (e.g. the sectors that designed the related professional qualification) to take part in the consultations.

In a level 5 educational qualification the learning outcomes are formulated and linked to the competences of a level 5 professional qualifications. This entails that the EQ has to be **based on the professional qualification**, but there is no obligation to literally include (all) competences of the professional qualification in the educational qualification.

The NVAO **validates** the domain specific learning outcomes. In doing so, the organisation checks whether a set of DSLOs answers to all the regulations' criteria and whether the submitted application contains all necessary elements to move along with the validation. The criteria which apply are the following:

- » Are the DSLOs drafted together by the institutions who (want to) offer the education qualification?
- » Have the DSLOs and table of convergence been checked by domain experts within the field of study?
- » Have the DSLOs been checked by students (or recently graduated students)?
- » Have the DSLOs been checked by representatives from the field of work?
- » Are the representative of the field of work which have been contacted relevant for the sector(s) in question?
- » Are the DSLOs in line with the Flemish and/or (inter) national regulations and standards with regard to the professional practice?
- » Are the DSLOs based on international sources (frames of reference)?
- » Have the DSLOs been checked by at least two international experts?
- » Has a description model, agreed with the NVAO, been used as a methodological frame for the formulation of the DSLOs? If not, a clarification must be offered for the methodological frame that has been applied.
- » Has AHOVOKS endorsed (with a signature) the DSLOs of the associate degree programme?

The domain specific learning outcomes and their link with the qualification level are validated autonomously by the NVAO without intervention of the Flemish government.

The validated learning outcomes are automatically recognised as educational **qualifications** and registered by AHOVOKS in the Qualifications Database (see chapter 7).

3.3 Level 6 to 8

The development of an educational qualification at level 6 to 8 starts with a description by the higher education institutions of the **domain specific learning outcomes** of the higher education programmes. The Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (*Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad*, VLUHR) coordinates this process.

The higher education institutions are not obliged to take the professional qualifications of level 6 to 8 into account when drafting educational qualifications of the corresponding levels. In addition to their institutional autonomy, this leeway has to be linked to the fact that the content of educational qualifications at levels 6, 7 and 8 is considered more generic in nature than the competences as laid down in a professional qualification.

The procedure for educational qualifications at levels 6 to 8 continues with the **validation** of the domain specific learning outcomes by the NVAO. Parallel to the procedure for level 5, the organisation checks whether the set of domain specific learning outcomes answers all the regulations' criteria (see above) and whether the submitted application contains all necessary elements to move along with the validation.

Since the learning outcomes are such an important element in the educational quality assurance system, NVAO will never accredit an educational programme at level 5, 6, 7 or 8 without a validated set of domain specific learning outcomes.

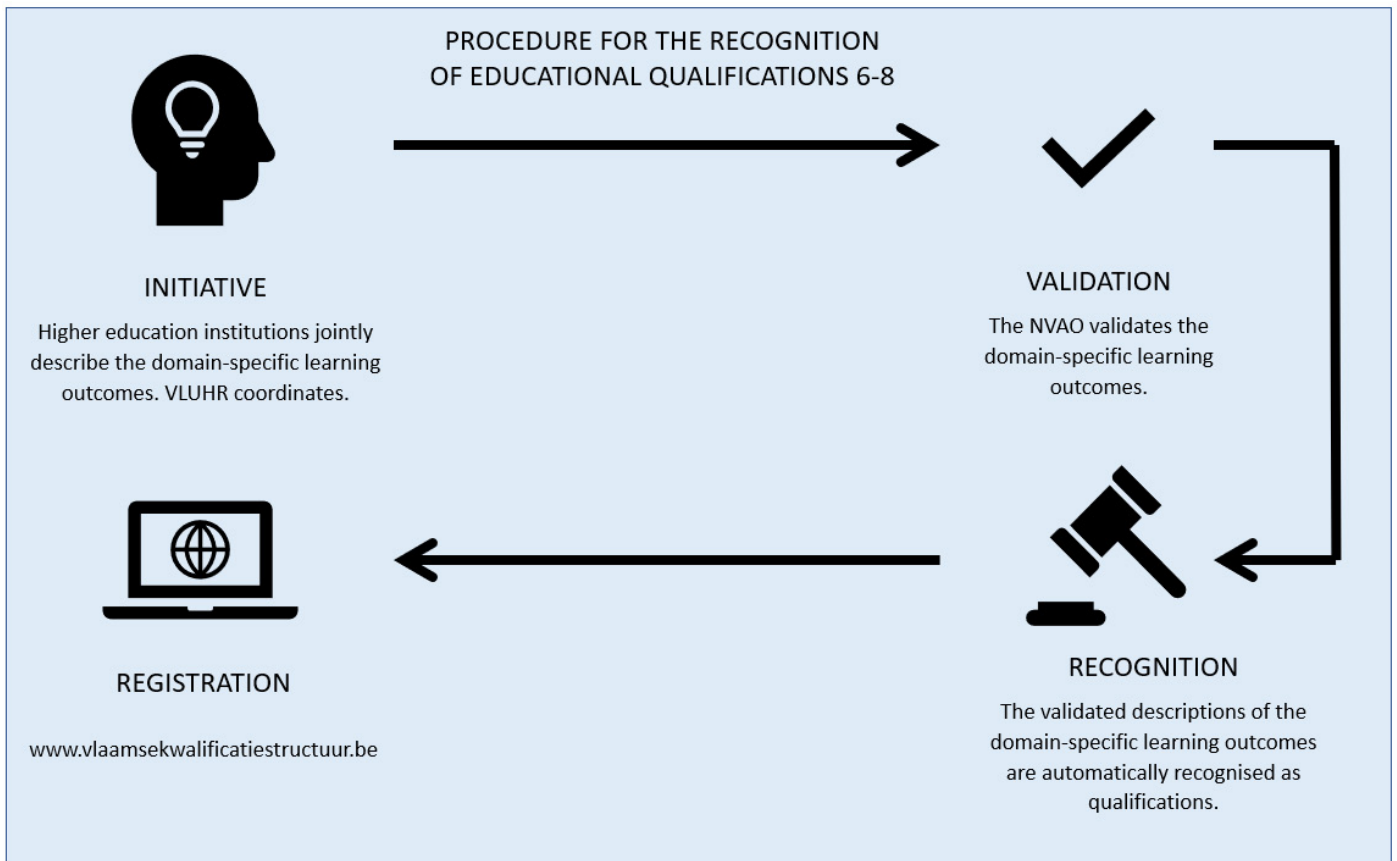


Figure 5: Procedure for the recognition of educational qualifications at FQF level 6 to 8

The validated learning outcomes are **automatically recognised** as educational qualifications. The validated descriptions of a bachelor's or master's degree are recognised as respectively level 6 and 7 educational qualifications. The descriptors mentioned in the Codex of Higher Education for level 8 serve as learning outcomes for a doctoral degree.

To conclude the qualifications are **registered** by AHOVOKS in the Qualifications Database (see chapter 7).

The domain specific learning outcomes of educational qualifications of levels 5 to 8 must comply with the relevant level descriptors as set out in the Codex of Higher Education.

A detailed alignment between the level descriptors as set out in the Codex of Higher Education, the Dublin descriptors of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), and the levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the FQF is presented in Annex II.

4. The relationship between professional and educational qualifications

Educational qualifications describe the competences a learner needs in order to participate in society, to start further education and/or to exercise professional activities. Professional qualifications describe what a person must be able to do and know to practice a profession.

As described in chapter 2, the competences needed to practice a certain profession are described by labour market actors in a professional qualification. The professional qualifications then determine to a varying degree the content of educational qualifications. While there are educational qualifications that only contain the competences as described in a PQ, other EQs combine the competences of a PQ with (general) learning outcomes. Still others are only linked to the competences as laid down in a professional qualification (no requirement to literally include all PQ competences). To conclude there exist EQs which are not based on a PQ at all. The possible relations between educational qualifications and professional qualifications are illustrated in figure 6.

The degree to which a professional qualification determines the content of an educational qualification depends on the focus of the programme (focus on generic learning outcomes or focus on professional competences).

If a learning pathway is highly focused on generic learning outcomes, the educational qualification will primarily consist of generic educational objectives⁵ or learning outcomes. This applies to secondary education programmes with orientation to higher education, and in Bachelor and Master degree programmes. **These programmes do not contain a PQ.**

In associate degree programmes, the learning outcomes are formulated and linked to the competences of the professional qualifications. This entails that an **educational qualification has to be based on a professional qualification**, but there is no obligation to literally include (all) competences of the professional qualification in the educational qualification.

Educational qualifications that include both general goals and the competences from professional qualifications can be found in secondary education programmes that prepare for the labour market and in secondary education programmes that prepare for both the labour market and higher education.

To conclude **professional qualifications determine the entire content** of purely professional programmes, both in formal (adult education, continuous secondary education) as well as non-formal settings (professionally qualifying training programmes, trajectories for the validation of acquired competences).

A detailed overview of the composition of educational qualifications in relation to the education levels is included in figure 7 in chapter 5.

5. Educational objectives is the overarching concept used to refer to basic competences, attainment targets, basic literacy targets, development goals, caesura targets, specific attainment targets and additional attainment targets that apply in primary education, secondary education (including dual learning), part-time artistic education, adult education and higher education.



Figure 6: Relationship between professional and educational qualifications

In case an educational qualification contains a professional qualification as one of its building blocks, a **certificate of professional qualification** can be awarded if the student upon completion of the learning path does not successfully master the (general) learning outcomes but has only acquired the professional competences of the EQ. If a professional qualification contains (a) partial qualification(s), a **certificate of a partial PQ** can be awarded if the student only masters the competences of the partial qualification(s).

This building-block method of educational qualifications, professional qualifications, and partial qualifications contributes to:

- » Qualifications (and courses) with transparent learning outcomes, which facilitates programme choice or recruitment.
- » Professional courses that are clearly focused on the required competences in the (work) field so as to ease the transition between periods of learning and working.

- » Flexible pathways in lifelong learning that meet the needs of today's learners.
- » The possibility of detailed certification of educational qualifications, professional qualifications, partial qualifications and competences, both within formal and non-formal learning pathways.

5. Pathways to qualifications: the Flemish education and training system

In the chapter at hand we discuss in more detail the composition of qualifications, certification, and the various education and learning pathways in Flanders.

Before doing so we briefly present a number of key features of the Flemish educational system.

5.1 Key features of the Flemish educational system

A number of key features characterise the education and training system in Flanders. In this subchapter we briefly discuss the division of competences for education and training, the stipulations with regard to compulsory education, the constitutional rights of freedom of education and school choice, and the Educational Networks in Flanders.

5.1.1. Educational competence

Belgium is a federal state with three regions and three communities. Both the regions and communities each have their own parliament and government.

A constitutional revision dd. 15 July 1988 transferred the responsibilities regarding education and training to the **Communities**, i.e. to the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-Speaking Community of Belgium.

All responsibilities regarding education and training were transferred, with the exception of determining the age at which compulsory education starts and ends, the minimum requirements for the issuing of diplomas, and the regulation of retirement for employees in the educational system.

5.1.2. Compulsory education

Belgium does not use a system of compulsory school attendance (*schoolplicht*) but one of compulsory education (*leerplicht*). Compulsory education spans a period of **13 years**. It starts in the school year in which a child reaches the age of five and ends at the end of the school year in which the young adult becomes 18 years old, or when a secondary education certificate has been obtained.

There is an obligation to follow **one year of pre-primary education** (290 half days of a total of 320/330 half days), followed by six years of primary education and six years of secondary education.

Students can also engage in **home tuition**.

5.1.3. Freedom of education and school choice

In Belgium freedom of education is a **constitutional right**. Every (legal) person may organise education and establish schools to that aim. The government has the duty to organise non-denominational education.

A consequence of this freedom of education is that the government may **only determine the minimum contents/objectives** for education. The pedagogical-didactic method is completely open to interpretation by the schools themselves. The government is not entitled to comment on this aspect.

The constitution also guarantees a freedom of school choice for the parents. This entails that parents and children must have access to a school of their choice within reasonable distance to their residence.

5.1.4. Educational Networks

Flanders' elementary and secondary education system is organised in three distinct educational networks:

- » **GO!**, (*Onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap*), **Flemish-Community Education**, which is funded by the Flemish Community and organised by a board and 28 school groups, composed of elementary and secondary schools.
- » **Subsidised official education** is organised by cities, municipalities and provinces and is subsidised by the Flemish Community. The municipal and provincial councils act as organising bodies. In the Brussels-Capital Region, the Flemish Community Commission pursues a cross-network education policy which complements the Flemish Community policy. It also acts as the organising body for a number of subsidised Flemish schools located within the Brussels-Capital Region;
- » **Subsidised private education** is organised by private-law organising bodies and is based on a specific denomination (Catholicism, Judaism, Protestantism, Islam) or on a non-confessional philosophy of life or even on a specific pedagogical or educational principle (e.g. Steiner and Freinet schools). These schools are recognised and subsidised by the Flemish Community. The overall majority of the schools within subsidised private education belong to the Catholic educational network. As a network subsidised private education counts for the majority of pupils.

A small number of schools are **not recognised** by the government. These private schools do not receive funding from the government and the Education Inspection does not assess whether they reach the norms with regard to quality assurance. Qualifications or certificates granted

by private schools are not recognised by the Flemish Government.

The school boards of an educational network may join an **umbrella organisation**. These associations represent the school boards in government consultations and offer services to their schools such as drafting curricula and timetables.

5.2 Qualifications in programmes at the different levels of the Flemish Qualifications Framework

Professional and educational qualifications have a guiding and structuring role in the Flemish education and training landscape. Figure 7 offers a schematic illustration of the education and training system in Flanders. Each box includes the highest qualification which can be obtained via the programme in question.

5.2.1. Composition of educational programmes

In Flanders a diploma or certificate is granted upon successful completion of an educational programme. While all programmes are rounded off with a certificate, only part of them include the granting of an education qualification. The certificates and diplomas that include an EQ refer to the level of the EQ in their title (e.g. Certificate of Secondary Education – Educational Qualification 4).

The composition of the various programmes in education, and the EQ which can be obtained via this programme – if any – are presented in detail in table 2. Column 3 includes the highest educational qualification which can be obtained via the programme in question. In case the programme does not result in an education qualification, but a certificate of professional qualification can be granted, the level of PQ which can be obtained is indicated in column 3.

The composition of the educational qualifications is laid down in the Parliamentary Act on the Flemish Qualification Structure.

In the following sections we briefly describe the structure and objectives, content, and certification of the different education programmes and their relation to the FQF. The various learning outcomes and their use in the Flemish education system are clarified in table 3.

5.2.2. Elementary education

Structure and objective

Elementary education (*basisonderwijs*) comprises both pre-primary education (*kleuteronderwijs*) and primary education (*lager onderwijs*). It can be offered by accredited (pre-)primary schools.

Pre-primary education is accessible for children from two and a half to six years old. Although it is not obligatory for children up until 5 years old, almost all children participate in pre-primary education. Pre-primary education supports the versatile formation of children and stimulates their cognitive, language, motor and affective development.

Primary education is targeted at children from six to twelve years old and comprises six subsequent school years. A child usually starts primary education when it is six years old. Primary education usually consists of six grades. Based on their pedagogical project, schools have to create an education and learning environment where pupils can experience a continuous learning process. This environment is adapted to the progression and development of the pupils. Primary education has to see to the pupils' wider personality development and has to lay the foundations for further education and social integration.

Content

In pre-primary education development goals define the minimal targets a school needs to strive for with its pupils.

Development goals are subdivided in learning areas:

- » physical education
- » human and society
- » musical education
- » Dutch
- » science and technique
- » initiation in mathematics

For primary education the Qualifications and Curriculum Unit of AHOVOKS has formulated attainment targets for five areas-of-learning and a set of cross-curricular attainment targets. Both have been laid down in regulation in 1997 and became mandatory for all schools since 1 September 1998.

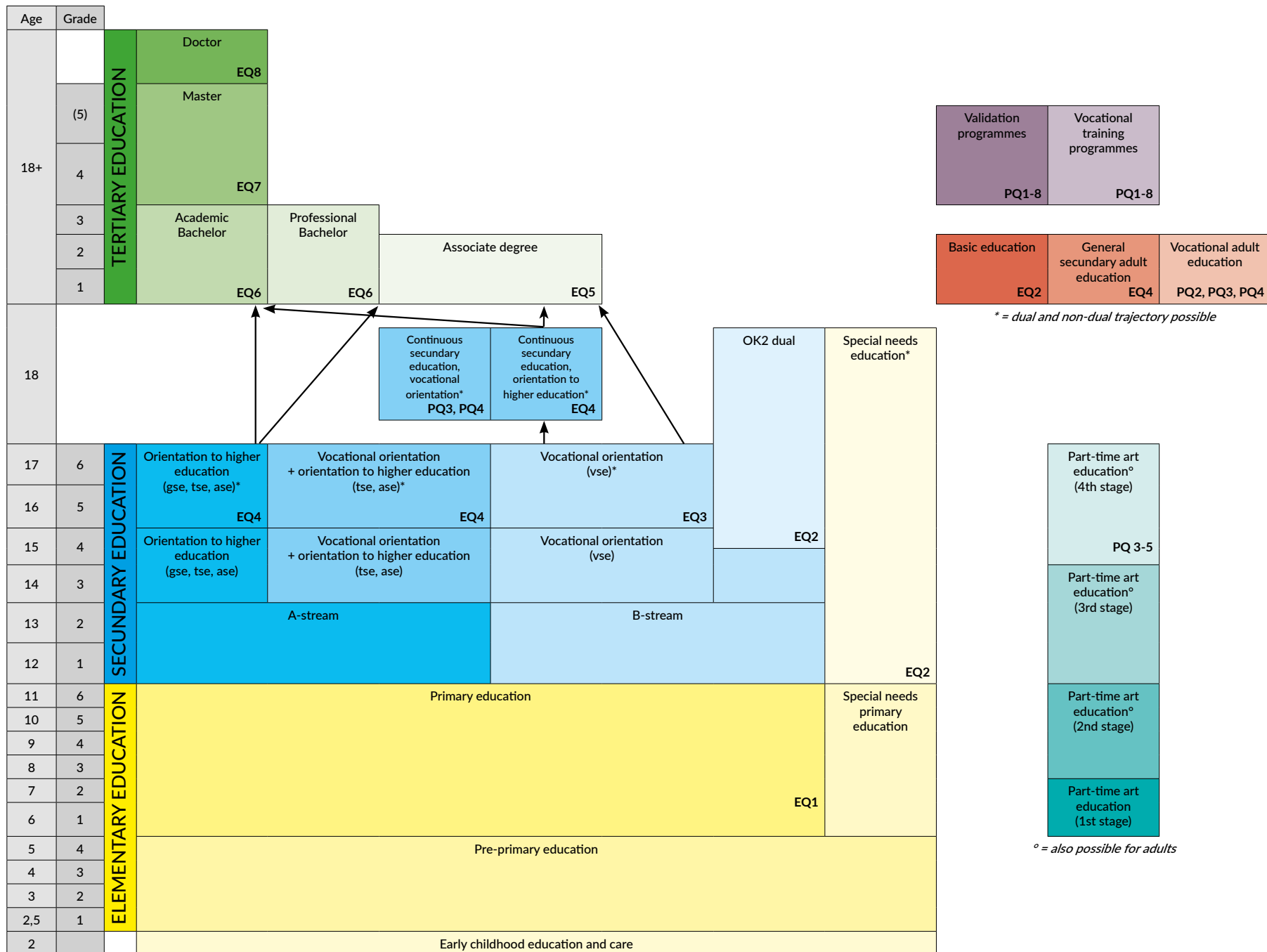


Figure 7: The education and training landscape in Flanders

Name of the programme	Contents	EQ / PQ Level
Pre-primary education	Developmental goals	
Primary education	Attainment goals	EQ Level 1
Special needs primary education	Developmental goals	EQ Level 1
Special needs education	Attainment goals + professional qualifications	EQ Level 2
A-stream	Attainment goals	
B-stream	Attainment goals	
Orientation to higher education (3rd + 4th grade)	Attainment goals + learning objectives derived from the specific learning objectives in the 3rd stage	EQ Level 4
Vocational orientation + orientation to higher education (3rd + 4th grade)	Attainment goals + learning objectives derived from the specific learning objectives in the 3rd stage + professional qualifications	EQ Level 4
Vocational orientation (3rd + 4th grade)	Attainment goals + professional qualifications	
Orientation to higher education (5th + 6th grade)	Attainment goals + specific learning objectives	EQ level 4
Vocational orientation + orientation to higher education (5th + 6th grade)	Attainment goals + specific learning objectives + professional qualifications	EQ level 4
Vocational orientation (5th + 6th grade)	Attainment goals + professional qualifications	EQ level 3
OK2 dual	Attainment goals + professional qualifications	EQ Level 2
Continuous secondary education, vocational orientation	Professional qualifications	EQ level 4
Continuous secondary education, orientation to higher education	Attainment goals	PQ level 3 or 4
Associate degree	Discipline specific learning outcomes	EQ level 5
Professional Bachelor	Discipline specific learning outcomes	EQ level 6
Academic Bachelor	Discipline specific learning outcomes	EQ level 6
Master	Discipline specific learning outcomes	EQ level 7
Doctor	---	EQ level 8
Basic education	Attainment goals	EQ level 2
General secondary adult education	Attainment goals	EQ level 4
Vocational adult education	Professional qualifications	PQ level 2, 3 or 4
Validation programmes	Professional qualifications	PQ level 1 to 8
Vocational training programmes	Professional qualifications	PQ level 1 to 8
Part-time art education 1st stage	Basic competencies	
Part-time art education 2nd stage	Basic competencies	
Part-time art education 3rd stage	Basic competencies	
Part-time art education 4th stage	Professional qualifications or specific learning objectives	PQ Level 3 tot 5

Table 2: Composition of educational programmes

Over the years, the number of learning areas has been adjusted from five to seven, and currently contains:

- » physical education
- » music education
- » Dutch
- » science and technology
- » people and society
- » mathematical initiation (pre-primary education) or mathematics (primary education)
- » French

The (cross-curricular) attainment targets for certain learning areas have been adapted or updated over the years.

The government considers the attainment targets related to the areas-of-learning to be a minimum level of knowledge, understanding and skills that is peremptory and attainable for the pupil population of the level in question.

The attainment targets of primary education have to be acquired at the end of the sixth year of primary education.

Certification

In order to obtain the **Certificate of Primary Education or an educational qualification level 1**, the attainment targets of primary education have to be reached.

Learning outcome (EN)	Learning outcome (NL)	Use in education system
Additional attainment targets	Uitbreidingsdoelen	Additional attainment targets are extra targets, in addition to the existing attainment targets, that can be reached by a certain group of students. They are only used in the first stage of secondary education .
Attainment targets	Eindtermen	This concept is used for the education targets in mainstream primary and secondary education and for Education Form 4⁶ in special needs secondary education . Attainment targets are minimal targets defined by the Flemish Parliament as necessary and attainable for a specific group of students. Some attainment targets are attitudes . Reaching these targets is not obligatory, but schools need to strive for the obtainment by their students of these attitudes.
Basic competences	Basiscompetenties	This concept is used in the first, second and third stage of part-time education in the arts . Basic competences refer to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that a pupil must apply, in an integrated way, for performing social activities. Basic competences are not defined per subject but for a programme in its entirety. Also in adult education the concept of basic competences is used to refer to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes a course participant must master with a view to its personal development, social functioning, engagement in further education, or to start practicing a profession.
Basic literacy targets	Eindtermen basisgeletterdheid	The basic literacy targets are to be reached by every pupil individually by the end of the first stage of secondary education . The basic literacy targets are the targets one needs to master to be able to participate in society.
Caesura targets	Cesuurdoelen	Caesura targets are minimal targets that apply for the specific part of the curriculum in the second stage of secondary education . They are developed for all programmes with an orientation to higher education and for all programmes with a dual orientation (higher education and labour market).
Cross-curricular attainment targets	Vakoverschrijdende eindtermenx	Cross-curricular attainment targets are minimal targets with regard to knowledge, insight, skills, and attitudes that are not linked to one specific subject , but that are pursued by means of e.g. a number of subjects together, educational projects, or other activities. Each school has the social assignment to strive for the mastering of the cross-curricular targets by its pupils.
Development goals	Ontwikkelingsdoelen	Development goals for mainstream pre-primary education are minimal targets defined by the Flemish Parliament as desirable for pupils within that education level. Minimal targets are interpreted as a minimum of knowledge, insight, skills, and attitudes for a particular group of pupils. Development goals for special needs primary and secondary education are minimal targets with regard to knowledge, insight, skills, and attitudes, defined by the Flemish Parliament as desirable for as many as possible within a distinct group of pupils.

6. Special needs secondary education in Flanders is divided in 8 types and 4 forms. The types are defined according to the special needs of the children, while the forms vary with regard to the goals the programmes pursue. Education form 4 offers a curriculum similar to the one in mainstream secondary education, but with adapted objectives and additional support for the pupils.

Domain specific learning outcomes	Domeinspecifieke leerresultaten	The content of higher education is defined in domain specific learning outcomes (DSLOs). These DSLOs determine a common set of skills that all students enrolled in a certain higher education programme in Flanders are expected master upon finishing that programme.
Educational objectives	Onderwijsdoel	Educational objectives is the overarching concept used to refer to basic competences, attainment targets, basic literacy targets, development goals, caesura targets, specific attainment targets, and additional attainment targets that apply in primary education, secondary education (including dual learning), part-time artistic education, adult education, and higher education.
Programme specific learning outcomes	Opleidingspecifieke leerresultaten	Programme specific learning outcomes are the translation of the domain specific learning outcomes by a particular institution of higher education.
Specific attainment targets	Specifieke eindtermen	Specific attainment targets are minimal targets with regard to specific knowledge, skills, insights, and attitudes, that a student of fulltime secondary education must master in order to pursue further studies. They are defined for all programmes with an orientation to higher education and for all programmes with a dual orientation (higher education and labour market) from the third stage of secondary education.

Table 3: Learning outcomes and their use in the Flemish education system

5.2.3. Secondary education

Flanders is currently in the process of gradually implementing a modernisation of its secondary education. The modernised system was introduced in the first grade of the first stage of secondary education on 1 September 2019. The reforms in the second stage took effect on 1 September 2021. The modernisation of the third stage will start on 1 September 2023, while continuous secondary education courses will follow on 1 September 2025.

In what follows we describe the situation in secondary education as it will be once the modernisation process has been fully implemented. The modernisation process is partly a structural change, partly a change in content⁷.

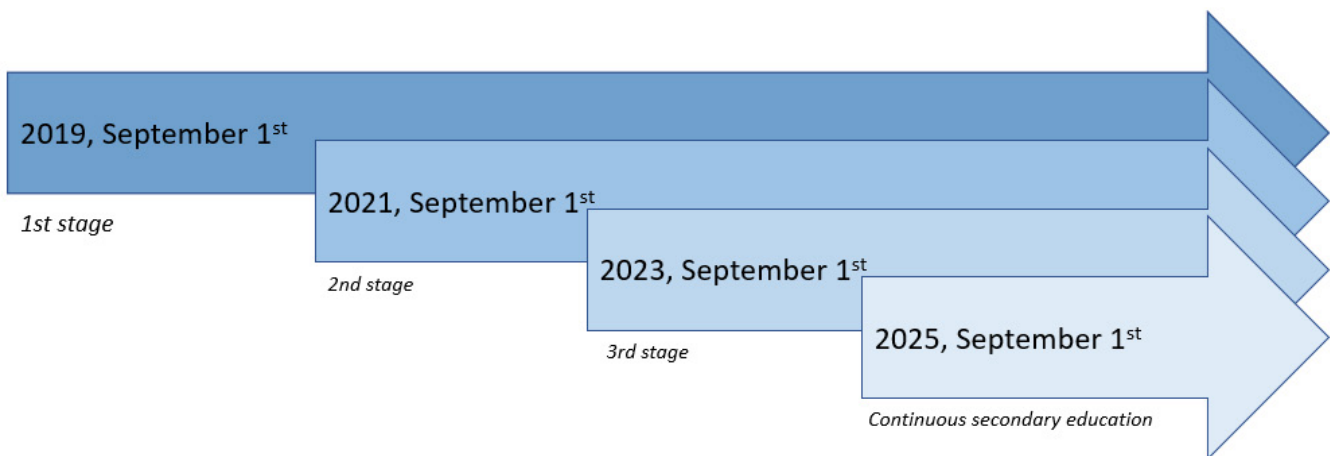


Figure 8: Timeline of the implementation of the modernisation of secondary education

7. On June 16, 2022, the Constitutional Court annulled the new attainment targets for the second and third stage of secondary education. The development of the attainment targets in question was resumed. Approval of the targets is expected before 1 September 2023.

Structure and objective⁸

Full-time secondary education is subdivided into three stages of two grades each. The aim of secondary education is to provide young people the necessary competences for personal development, social participation, further education or a profession.

Secondary education can be offered by recognised secondary education institutions.

With regard to the structure of secondary education a distinction is made in the second and third stages between education types, orientations, and study domains. Each programme in these stages is defined by these three features.

The four **education types** are

- » General secondary education (*gse - algemeen secundair onderwijs, aso*), which focuses on broad general education. It does not prepare pupils for a specific profession, but rather lays a firm foundation for higher education.
- » Technical secondary education (*tse - technisch secundair onderwijs, tso*). In tso attention goes in particular to general and technical-theoretical subjects. After technical secondary education a youngster may practice a profession or transfer to higher education. This type of education also contains practical training.
- » Secondary education in the arts (*sea - kunstsecundair onderwijs, kso*) combines a broad general education with an active practice of art. After completing secondary education in the arts a youngster may practice a profession or transfer to higher education.
- » Vocational secondary education (*vse - beroepssecundair onderwijs, bso*) is a practically-oriented type of education in which the youngster receives general education, but where the focus primarily lies on learning a specific profession.

Orientations relate to the paths which pupils can choose after finalising a programme in secondary education. There are three different orientations:

- » Orientation to higher education (*gse/tse/sea*): prepares pupils for a smooth transition to higher education
- » Double orientation (*gse/tse/sea*): prepares pupils for a smooth transition to higher education or the labour market
- » Vocational orientation (*tse/sea/vse*): prepares pupils for a smooth transition to the labour market

To conclude the technical vocational secondary education programmes organised in the second and third stage are linked to one of the following **study domains**:

1. language and culture
2. STEM
3. art and creation
4. agriculture and horticulture
5. economy and organisation
6. society and welfare
7. sport
8. food and catering

Courses in gse are all oriented to higher education and not linked to one single study domain. Courses in vse are labour market-oriented and linked to a single study domain. Programmes in tse and sea are oriented to higher education, or have a double orientation (higher education or labour market) and are also linked to a single study domain.

In tse, sea and vse specialising programmes can be organised for students that have obtained the certificate of the third stage of secondary education. This form of **continuous secondary education** further prepares students to engage in higher education or to take part in the labour market.

Next to mainstream education **special needs (pre-)primary and secondary education** exists in Flanders. Special needs education (*buitengewoon onderwijs*) is organised for children who need temporary or permanent specific support because of a physical or mental disability, serious behavioural or emotional problems, or severe learning disabilities. Special needs education is organised in four education forms:

- » Education form 1 focuses mainly on developing self-reliance, communication skills, sensomotor skills and social skills. This education form offers the pupil a social formation that leads to integration in a protected living and/or working environment.
- » Education form 2 focuses on social functioning, participation, and employment in an environment where support is provided.

Neither in education form 1, nor in education form 2 a qualification linked to the Flemish Qualifications Framework can be obtained.

- » Education form 3 provides learners with general, social and professional skills. The aim is to enable social functioning and participation, as well as employment in an ordinary working environment.

8. More information on the structure and learning objectives of secondary education, is available at www.kwalificatiesencurriculum.be.

- » Education form 4 follows the structure and content of regular secondary education.

Courses in the third stage of mainstream secondary education, in continuous secondary education, and some courses in special needs education (education form 3) can be set up as **dual learning programmes**. In dual learning a workplace is responsible together with the school for realising the competences included in the programme. From school year 2016-2017 onwards these programmes were gradually developed within pilot projects.

For a dual learning programme a standard programme is drawn up in consultation with the sector and the education providers. A standard programme contains clusters of competences based on attainment targets and/or one or more professional qualifications. It also determines a.o. the entry conditions, the organisation (linear and/or modular) of the trajectory, and whether the pupil will on average spend more or less than 20 hours per week on the job. The last aspect will determine the contract with which the pupil is employed and related to this, whether the pupil will be paid.

Young people who have completed full-time compulsory education, but who do not yet have a 2nd stage certificate, can join an **OK2 dual** programme (= education qualification 2 dual programme). These pathways aim at the acquisition of competences from a professional qualification and/or partial qualification exclusively through a dual education path.

Content

In the **first stage** of secondary education a basic curriculum is provided, supplemented with a smaller optional part.

The **basic curriculum** supports the acquisition of a number of educational objectives:

- » Basic literacy: these are minimal requirements for basic competences such as mathematics and digital literacy and Dutch. They have to be obtained by every student individually by the end of the first stage.
- » Minimum goals: these goals need to be obtained by most students by the end of the first stage.
- » Additional goals: these are educational objectives with a higher level of abstraction, or a higher level of complexity, and must be obtained by as many students as possible.

The attainment targets of the basic curriculum are not linked to subjects but to **16 key competences**⁹. These are clusters of competences with a related content, which have to be acquired by students with a view to their personal

development and ability to function in society. The key competences have been established after a societal debate on the question what schools should teach the next generation. They are also based on the European key competences that offer a frame of reference for European policy on lifelong learning and participation in our rapidly changing society.

The **optional part** in the first stage is used to offer remediation, to offer more related content or to offer more in depth content. The optional hours can also be used to support orientation towards the second stage.

In the **second and third stage** of secondary education a **basic curriculum** is supplemented with a **specific curriculum**, that contains the education objectives specific to a certain field of study or programme. The specific curriculum prepares students for higher education, for the labour market, or for both.

In the third stage of secondary education a basic curriculum, defined in attainment targets, is supplemented with content which is determined by the orientation of the programme in question:

- » Programmes preparing for higher education or for both higher education and the labour market contain specific attainment targets. These contain skills, specific knowledge, insights and attitudes which a student needs to master in order to continue education after secondary education.
- » Programmes preparing for higher education and the labour market, or solely for the labour market, prescribe the acquisition of competences as described in one or more professional qualifications or partial qualifications.

Also the programmes from **special needs education** (education form 3) and **OK2 dual learning** programmes include at least the competences as described in a partial qualification.

A more detailed interpretation of educational qualifications is included in table 2.

Certification

In secondary education certification a **diploma or certificate** is granted upon successful completion of an educational programme. As mentioned above, some diplomas and certificates contain an educational qualification (see also table 2).

In case all educational objectives have been obtained, a diploma of secondary education is awarded. If this is not the case, a certificate is granted depending on those

9. The 16 clusters of key competences are foreign languages, citizenship, cultural awareness, digital competences, sustainability, financial-economic competences, historical awareness, judicial competences, learning competences, physical and psychological health, Dutch, spirit of enterprise, environmental awareness, socio-relational competences, mathematics – natural science – technology – STEM, and self-awareness.

competences which have been acquired by the student. Possible certificates are a certificate of professional qualification, a certificate of partial qualification and a certificate of competences.

Due to the gradual introduction of the modernisation of secondary education, educational qualifications of level 2 will be issued by June 2023 at the earliest and levels 3 and 4 by June 2025 at the earliest via a non-dual programme. The dual learning pathways already allow for the awarding of educational qualifications at levels 2, 3 and 4.

5.2.4. Part-time artistic education

Structure and objective

Part-time artistic education (*deeltijds kunstonderwijs*, dko) is an optional education offer that allows both young people and adults to develop their artistic talents throughout live.

Dko consists of four stages:

- » the first stage focuses on discovering one's own form of artistic expression
- » the second stage aims at a broad exploration of the chosen form of artistic expression
- » the third stage offers specialisation within the chosen form of expression
- » the fourth stage focuses on the full attainment of a professional qualification and the exploration of further potential development outside of school (amateur arts, local workshops set up by municipalities and cities, etc.)

Content

The long-term pathways or fourth stage pathways use the **professional qualifications for social roles** to shape the curriculum.

Certification

After successfully completing a long-term programme in dko a certificate of **professional qualification** is awarded.

5.2.5. Adult education

Adult education is open to anyone who has fulfilled the conditions of full-time compulsory education. Specific admission requirements apply for students under 18 years of age.

For courses in general education and supplementary general education, one must have fulfilled the part-time compulsory education requirement (i.e. be 15 years old and have completed the first stage, or be 16 years old).

In adult education we distinguish between adult basic education and secondary adult education.

Adult basic education

Adult basic education offers programmes at primary

education level and at the level of the first stage of secondary education: Dutch (NT1 Dutch-as-a-first-language), ICT, social orientation, mathematics, and languages (basic French and English). The educational objectives for adult basic education are in part specifically developed for this type of learning and in part based on those used in primary education and the first stage of secondary education. These programmes can lead to a certification.

The Centres for Basic Education also organise programmes in the area of study Dutch-as-a-second-language (*Nederlands als Tweede Taal*, NT2) at orientation grade level 1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Secondary adult education

Structure and objective

Secondary adult education is subdivided into 51 study areas and is organised in a modular way, which supports a flexible learning programme and organisation. Classes can be organised in the evening, during the day or in the weekend.

Training in Adult Education Centres can be attended from different perspectives:

- » professional programmes
- » ICT, language and entrepreneurship training courses
- » 'second-chance education' gives learners the opportunity to obtain a secondary education diploma
- » training in personal development and lifelong learning

Since 1 September 2022 vocational training on a dual programme basis is also possible in secondary adult education. In close consultation with key stakeholders, such as the professional sectors, dual learning programmes are selected and their workplace component is defined. The workplace component of a dual learning programme in adult education comprises at least 50% of the total number of teaching periods of the course.

Content

In secondary adult education training profiles cluster the attainment targets, specific attainment targets and basic competences of a particular programme. When it concerns a vocational adult education programme the training profiles also include the competences from the relevant professional qualification(s).

A training profile indicates a. o. the minimal number of teaching hours and the number of modules within a programme. The attainment targets, specific attainment targets and basic competences are divided amongst the modules.

The training profiles in secondary adult education are developed on the basis of reference frameworks.

- » **Vocational adult education**

Vocational adult education programmes are labour market oriented and use the qualifications from the Flemish Qualifications Framework as a reference framework.

Adult education can develop programmes based on the **professional qualifications** from levels 1 to 4. In exceptional cases it may also offer a programme based on a level 5 professional qualification.¹⁰

Per training profile all competences of one **professional qualification** are clustered in modules. Each module is composed of a coherent set of one or more competences, on the basis of which the number of teaching periods is determined.

» **General secondary adult education**

The content of courses in general secondary adult education depends on the objective of the course:

- › The objectives of **second-chance education** are based on and equivalent to the attainment targets of the second and third stage of secondary education.
- › **ICT, language, and entrepreneurship programmes** respectively use DIGICOMP, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and ENTRECOMP as a reference framework to determine the content of the programmes.
- › Training with regard to **personal development** (e.g. domestic cooking, sewing, etc.) is not based on a particular reference framework.

Certification

» **Vocational adult education**

After passing a module a course participant obtains a partial certificate of the module in question. Course participants who pass all the modules of a partial qualification are awarded a **certificate of partial qualification**. Course participant who pass the full certificate programme are awarded a **certificate of the learning programme indicating the professional qualification**.

» **General adult education**

In secondary adult education course participants receive a diploma of secondary education after successfully completing (1) a general education course (e.g. economics/modern languages or science/mathematics), or (2) a diploma-oriented professional training course supplemented by the Supplementary General Education course.

5.2.6. Higher education

Structure and objective

The structure of higher education is laid down in the Codex of Higher Education of 11 October 2013. The same legislative text creates one legal framework for university colleges and universities.

- » **FQF level 5 Associate degree programmes** have a strong professional orientation and are mainly organised by university colleges. The programmes have a study load of 90 or 120 credits. For associate degree programmes workplace learning amounts to at least one third of the study load. Graduates can practice a specific profession on the labour market or can enrol in a professionally oriented bachelor degree programme.
- » **Professionally oriented bachelor degree programmes** have the objective to bring students to a level of general and specific knowledge and competences required to perform independently a particular profession or group of professions. A professionally oriented bachelor degree programme can therefore lead directly to a place on the labour market.
- » The main objective of **academically oriented bachelor degree programmes** is to bring students to a certain level of scientific or artistic knowledge and competences, required for scientific or artistic work in general or for a specific domain of sciences or arts in particular. The programmes aim at offering access to a master degree programme or to the labour market.
- » **Master degree programmes** are offered by universities, with the exception of master degree programmes in arts, which are offered by university colleges. Master degree studies have the objective to bring students to an advanced level of scientific or artistic knowledge and competences required for scientific or artistic work in general or for a specific domain of sciences and arts in particular. This level of knowledge and competences is required for autonomous scientific or artistic work or to apply this scientific or artistic knowledge independently in one or a group of professions.
- » For further in-depth-study students can follow advanced bachelor degree programmes, advanced master degree programmes, and postgraduate studies. Each **advanced bachelor degree programme** (*bachelor na bachelor – banaba*) builds on a professionally oriented bachelor degree programme. The programme aims at a broadening of or specializing in competences acquired during the initial bachelor degree programme.

10. A professional qualification of FQF level 5 will form the basis for an associate degree programme if the competences of the PQ can be acquired in a programme of 90 to 120 credits. In case the competences can be acquired in a programme of less than 90 to 120 credits, the professional qualification can be offered in adult education.

Advanced master degree programmes (*master na master – manama*) are developed to further explore the knowledge and/or competences acquired within a particular area of study. **Postgraduate programmes** can be taken up after acquiring an associate degree, a bachelor degree, or a master degree. A postgraduate programme has the same goal as an advanced programme, namely specializing in a certain study area.

- » The highest level of scientific specialisation is the **doctoral programme**. Doctoral theses are based on original scientific research. Doctoral studies culminate in the candidate defending his/her doctoral dissertation in public.

The education programmes of higher education are listed in the Higher Education Register (see also chapter 7).

Content

A programme in higher education consists of a number of course components. For programmes at FQF level 5, 6 and 7 the higher education institutions define learning objectives that are aimed at acquiring programme specific learning outcomes.

The domain specific learning outcomes apply to all institutions, while the programme specific learning outcomes are the translation of the DSLOs by a particular institution.

The DSLOs of an Educational Qualification level 5 or the Associate degree programmes that stem from it, are linked to the competences of one or more professional qualifications at level 5).

Certification

The competent authority of a higher education institution confers the **degrees of Associate Degree (EQ5), Bachelor (EQ6) or Master (EQ7)** when the student has successfully completed respectively the level 5 Associate degree programme, Bachelor degree programme or Master degree programme.

When a student passes the exam of an individual course component, the board of an institution awards him/her a certificate, known as a **credit certificate** for the subject in question.

The title of **doctor** (EQ8) is awarded by a university jury after a public presentation and defence of a doctoral dissertation which confirms the capability of the creation of new scientific knowledge based upon independent scientific research. A doctoral dissertation should have the potential to lead to publications in scientific journals.

5.2.7. Professionally Qualifying Pathways

Structure and objective

In a professionally qualifying pathway (PQP) you learn what you need to know and be able to do to practice a certain profession. After successfully completing a PQF a professional qualification certificate, a partial qualification certificate, or a certificate of acquired competences is granted (see below, *Certification*).

There are two types of professionally qualifying pathways:

- » In a **professionally qualifying training pathway** a learner is taught the competences of a professionally qualification.
- » In a **professionally qualifying validation pathway** the competences one has acquired via a job, volunteering, a hobby, ... are officially recognised after successfully passing an assessment.

Professionally qualifying pathways can be organised both within and outside education.

- » **Within education** the vocational programmes of adult education (see subchapter 5.2.5) are professionally qualifying training pathways. The external quality assurance on these programmes is a responsibility of the Education Inspectorate (see subchapter 6.1).
- » **Outside education** also public institutions or private organisations, when meeting certain conditions, can organise professionally qualifying training pathways. The quality assurance on these pathways is regulated via the Parliamentary Act on Quality supervision for professionally qualifying programmes based on a Common Quality Framework (see subchapter 6.3).
- » Via a **validation procedure** (see subchapter 5.2.8) an individual can give prove of his experience for a certain profession. Also the validation procedure, which grants you, upon successful completion of a validation assessment, a certificate of (partial) qualification, is considered a professionally qualifying pathway. The quality assurance of the validation programmes depends on the entity organising the validation pathway. If validation is organised by a Centre for Adult Education the external quality assurance will be carried out by the Education Inspectorate (see subchapter 6.1). The validation programmes set up by public or private organisations are subject to the stipulations of the Common Quality Framework (see subchapter 6.3).

The Register of Professionally Qualifying Pathways (<https://cresco-app.onderwijs-apps.vlaanderen.be/home>) (see also chapter 7) offers an overview of the recognised professionally qualifying training and validation pathways and their providers. The overview contains both the offer that can be organised within as well as outside education.

Content

A professionally qualifying pathway can only be organised for professions for which a **professional qualification** exists. All competences from the professional qualification must be addressed in the trajectory, in the sense that all competences can be taught and/or assessed. When organising a validation pathway, an additional validation standard must be available (see also subchapter 5.2.8).

Professionally qualifying pathways can be organised for professional qualifications at all levels of the FQF (1 to 8).

Certification

The successful completion of a professionally qualifying programme leads to a **professional qualification certificate**. When a partial qualification exists and the individual has acquired the competences of the partial qualification only, instead of all competences of the full PQ, a **partial qualification certificate** is awarded. When a learner has not acquired all competences of the (partial) qualification, but masters a set of relevant competences, a **certificate of acquired competences** is awarded.

The certificates of a professional qualification granted after the completion of a professionally qualifying programme and those granted after the completion of a programme in adult education have the exact same value on the labour market.

5.2.8. Validation of Acquired Competences

Structure and objective

In Flanders the term EVC (*Erkennen van Verworven Competenties*) is used to refer to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Since EVC refers to the recognition of acquired competences it extends beyond the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and also takes into account what was learned in a formal setting but not awarded with a formal (partial) qualification.

Validation can be used to get admission to an education and training programme, to request exemptions from (parts of) a study programme, and to obtain a professional qualification. The aim of validation is to help individuals to achieve personal development, to contribute to a higher level of employment, to improve access to formal education systems, and to stimulate lifelong learning. In general, validation contributes to the flexibility of the Flemish education and training system.

Since long validation procedures linked to the FQF are organised by:

- » Higher education institutions: Each association in higher education has elaborated validation rules of procedure. The procedures result in a proof of acquired competences, credit certificates and/or a

specific degree. The procedures start from a portfolio and typically include additional elements such as assessments, structured interviews and/or behavioural observation.

- » Centres for Adult Education, which can organise assessments to evaluate the competences a person has acquired through formal or informal learning. The way the admission tests are organised is determined in the rules of procedure of each centre individually.
- » Exam Committee: People not having obtained a diploma of secondary education can pass an exam to obtain their diploma via the Exam Committee (<https://examencommissiesecundaironderwijs.be/>). This is possible for each educational programme offered in secondary education (gse, sea, tse, vse).

In addition to these procedures, a new **validation system** was set up in 2019 that allows people to obtain a **professional qualification**. In April 2019 the **Parliamentary Act on Validation** was adopted. This act promotes an integrated policy on validation, regulates the role of validation bodies, and determines the organisation of quality assurance for validation.

The Parliamentary Act on Validation starts with a broad definition of validation, based on the definition incorporated in the 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation. It refers to and briefly describes the four successive phases of validation, i.e. identification, documentation, assessment and certification. The inclusion of this (4-stages) definition offers the stakeholders within all relevant policy fields a common and shared understanding of validation.

To continue the act narrows its application to the last two steps (assessment and certification of professional competences) or the formal phases of the validation process. This means that the rules do not apply to the first two steps, the more informal 'recognition' of competences.

The Parliamentary Act on Validations focuses on the validation of competences of professional qualifications, which are formally linked to the Flemish Qualifications Framework. Validation procedures can be set up by educational institutions or public or private organisations that have been recognised as a validation body, when four conditions are fulfilled:

- » the competences they assess are part of a recognised professional qualification
- » the validation instruments are developed in line with the validation standards
- » the organisations have a quality label at the organisational level
- » the validation bodies accept a regular quality assurance

The quality assurance of the validation programmes depends on the organisation organising the validation path. If validation is organised by a Centre for Adult Education the external quality assurance will be carried out by the Education Inspectorate (see subchapter 6.1). Public or private organisations, which organise trajectories recognised by the Department of Work and Social economy, are subject to the Common Quality Framework. They will be audited by the Inspectorate of the Department of Work and Social Economy (Flemish Social Inspectorate, FSI). The Parliamentary Act on the Common Quality Framework applies to all professionally qualifying training and validation programmes outside education. This procedure is described in detail in chapter 6.3.

Content

Based on a professional qualification, a unique **validation standard** is developed. The content of a validation standard is extensively documented in the Ministerial Decision which lays down the standard in law. A standard includes the most appropriate methods for assessing the competences of the professional qualification, the situations addressed in the assessment, relevant infrastructure and materials, an indication of the assessment duration, the certificate that is granted, and general quality indications for the assessment. The validation standard is developed by a committee with experts from educational or training providers, sectors or organisations. Before approval, the Education Inspectorate issues an advice on the validation standard. In a final step the standard is adopted by the Minister of Work and the Minister of Education.

The **validation instruments** used by the validation bodies have to be based on the validation standards. The instruments are subject to a quality check by AHOVOKS. Once this quality check has been carried out, the instruments can be shared and used by all validation bodies assessing the same qualification.

Certification

A successful assessment of competences leads to a **professional qualification certificate**. In some cases a **partial qualification** certificate can be awarded. When a learner has not acquired all competences of the (partial) qualification, but masters a set of relevant competences, a **certificate of acquired competences** is awarded.

The certificates are fully equivalent with the certificates granted after finishing a professionally qualifying training project or a programme in adult education.

6. Quality assurance of the programmes leading to qualifications

Education and training institutions decide autonomously on their educational methods, timetables and the recruitment of their personnel. The government ensures the quality of education by imposing conditions to be met by the schools to receive accreditation and financial support.

The system and promotion of quality assurance in Flanders is founded on three pillars:

» Quality assurance by government services

The Qualifications and Curriculum unit of AHOVOKS determines and supervises the processes for the development of quality learning content used by the institutions (attainment targets, competences from professional qualifications, domain specific learning outcomes, validation standards).

The domain specific learning outcomes from qualifications at FQF level 5 to 7 are validated by the NVAO (see subchapter 6.2).

» Educational guidance

Each educational network has its own School Advisory Services (SAS, *Pedagogische Begeleidingsdiensten*, PBD) which offer professional support to schools and centres. Institutions in elementary education, secondary education, part-time arts education and adult education can call on the services for educational and methodological advice. The SAS work across institutions to provide in-service training and support to teachers. They also play an important role in the establishment of new curricula and their implementation. An institution can also call on the School Advisory Services to address shortcomings which might have been detected by the Education Inspectorate.

» External quality assurance

The Educational Inspectorate (EI) is responsible for the external quality assurance of education, training and validation programmes in all educational institutions, with the exception of the programmes in higher education. The NVAO carries the responsibility of the external quality assurance of higher education. The Inspectorate of the Department of Work and Social Economy (Flemish Social Inspectorate, FSI) carries out the external quality assurance of the workplace component of dual learning programmes and of the professionally qualifying training and validation programmes that are organised by public or private partners within the regulations of the Common Quality Framework.

In what follows we will describe in more detail the quality assurance systems which are used in the Flemish education and training system. In doing so we emphasize a number of characteristics that show that the current quality assurance systems are consistent with the European principles and guidelines that are included in annex 3 of the EQF Recommendation. This chapter is structured per level or type of education and/or training.

6.1 The Educational Inspectorate (FQF 1 to 4, educational institutions)

6.1.1. Scope and objective

In Flanders the Educational Inspectorate is responsible for monitoring the quality of the educational offer. The inspectorate performs audits at all levels of education, with the exception of higher education, for which separate quality assurance rules and regulations exist (see subchapter 6.2).

The Parliamentary Act on Quality Assurance in Education of 1 September 2009 explicitly states that **schools** are responsible for their **own quality**. This led to a number of changes in the inspection approach. The most important change was the introduction of differentiated audits. This means that the teams of inspectors select a number of aspects to be evaluated per school based on a pre-analysis of that school. Since school year 2016-2017 the Reference Framework for Quality in Education (RFQE, *Referentiekader voor Onderwijskwaliteit*) guides the inspections.

The **Reference Framework for Quality in Education** (see annex III) has been developed in a process of co-creation, incorporating valuable input of many stakeholders such as pupils and students, parents, teachers, school inspectors, education experts and trade unions. It is also based on scientific research on the characteristics of effective classroom and school practices and on practice-oriented literature.

The RFQE sets out expectations for quality education, meanwhile respecting the autonomy and professionalism of school teams. It applies to all levels and forms of education, with the exception of higher education. It describes a number of context and input characteristics which institutions are invited to take into account when designing their education offer. The core of the reference framework consists of quality expectations, divided into four categories: 'results and effects', 'development of learners', 'quality development' and 'policy'.

The Education Inspectorate carries out methodologically sound audits and shares the RFQE with the educational institutions and School Advisory Services at least

once every six years. The audits grant the Education Inspectorate both a controlling as well as a stimulating role.

The Inspectorate puts the development of the **learner at the centre** of an audit. The inspectors engage in a dialogue with the educational institution on its quality development, while making a connection with the institution's in-house quality assurance system.

The Education Inspectorate is responsible for auditing the following institutions:

- » Schools in mainstream primary education
- » Schools in mainstream secondary education
- » Schools in special needs education
- » Centres for Pupil Guidance (*Centra voor Leerlingenbegeleiding, CLB*)¹¹
- » Academies of part-time artistic education
- » Centres for Adult Education
- » Adult Basic Education Centres
- » Syntra training centres¹²
- » Boarding schools
- » Schools organising higher vocational education programmes in nursing

The Education Inspectorate and the Flemish Social Inspectorate are jointly responsible for the external quality assurance on **dual learning pathways in secondary education**. The Education Inspection takes on a coordinating role for the entire dual learning pathway, and coordinates the assessment of the part of the programme which is offered in school. The Flemish Social Inspectorate (policy domain of work) coordinates the assessment of the quality of the learning environment at the workplace.

6.1.2. Content

Two key questions guide each audit by the Education Inspectorate:

- » To what extent does the educational institution develop its own quality, with a special focus on the management and quality assurance of the teaching and learning practice?
- » To what extent does the institution provide education that meets the quality expectations of the Reference Framework for Quality in Education and does it abide by the regulations?

To answer these questions, the inspectors carry out four enquiries:

1. Inspection of the quality development

When inspecting how an institution develops quality the audit team takes the following aspects into account: the institution's vision and strategic policy, organisational policy, educational policy, quality management, the systematic and reliable evaluation of its quality, and how quality is assured and adjusted.

2. Inspection of one or more quality areas

A quality area is a coherent set of quality expectations of the Reference Framework for Quality in Education. When 'Inspection 2.0' was launched in January 2018, four quality areas were defined: reporting and orientation, guidance of the learner, approach to diversity, personnel management and professionalisation.

3. Inspection of teaching and learning practice

This enquiry focuses on the teaching and learning practice and on the quality expectations of the RFQE which have a direct impact on this practice. The audit team inspects a. o. whether the educational offer is geared towards reaching the educational objectives, the practice of evaluating students and course participants, the learning and living environment, and the learning effects.

4. Inspection of habitability, safety and hygiene

This inquiry focuses on one out of nine processes¹³ that relate to risk control in terms of habitability, safety and hygiene. The institution chooses one of the processes on which the audit will focus, and the Education Inspectorate chooses the remaining two. On the basis of findings during the audit itself, the inspection team can decide to examine a fourth process.

6.1.3. Method

The inspections take place on the basis of:

- » Document analysis: only existing and relevant documents need to be presented by the school
- » Observations: the inspectors attend classes within or outside the selected school subjects
- » Discussions: the RFQE offers a common language to engage in a development oriented dialogue with teachers and school management

11. Every recognised school in Flanders works together with a Centre for Pupil Guidance. A CPG offers support for questions with regard to learning (e.g. problems in reading, writing, ...), the educational career of students, the psychological and social functioning of students, and preventive health care.

12. SYNTRA is part of the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and organises courses with a focus on innovation and entrepreneurship.

13. The nine processes in question are electricity; buildings and maintenance; emergency planning; accidents and assistance; reception, purchase and control of work equipment; hazardous products; falling hazards and accessibility; heating and ventilation; and food safety.

For each inspection a cluster of **development scales** is available. By using development scales, the school team is encouraged to (continue to) develop its own quality. The development scales are based on the Reference Framework for Quality in Education.

The development scales consist of four levels each:

- » below expectation: several key features can be improved
- » approximates expectations: in addition to a number of strengths, several flaws can be identified
- » meets the expectations of the RFQE: a lot of strengths and no major points or areas for improvement can be identified
- » exceeds expectations: mainly strengths, which can inspire as examples of good practice

After an audit the inspection team formulates an **advice** on the further recognition of the school:

1. In case a school meets all conditions for recognition, the inspection team formulates a favourable advice.
2. In case a school does not meet all conditions for recognition, the inspection team can formulate a negative advice. It takes account of the quality development and specific context factors in doing so.

Both a favourable and unfavourable advice come in two versions:

1. Favourable advice:

- a) Favourable advice without major shortcomings.
- b) Favourable advice with the obligation to address shortcomings that have been identified. While there is no deadline to address the shortcomings, and no follow-up is planned by the Education Inspectorate, the shortcomings can form the focus of a subsequent audit.

2. Unfavourable advice:

- a) Unfavourable advice with the possibility of not starting the procedure for withdrawal of the recognition, provided the school board commits to request assistance from external parties to address the shortcomings. If the school board invokes the right not to initiate this procedure and to call on external parties for assistance, a new audit will be carried out after a term specified by the Inspectorate in its audit report. This term depends on the seriousness and nature of the shortcomings.
- b) Unfavourable advice with the obligation to undergo the procedure for withdrawal of the recognition. The school board can appeal this obligation. Within 60 calendar days following submission of the appeal, an appeal audit is

carried out by a new audit team.

6.2 The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (FQ 5 to 8, educational institutions)

Higher education programmes have their own quality assurance rules and regulations. The principles of the quality assurance approach for higher education have been determined in the Codex of Higher Education.

6.2.1. Scope and objective

Each higher education institution is expected to continuously assess the quality of the education it provides and the research it carries out. The Codex of Higher Education therefore states that higher **education institutions** have to permanently **monitor at their own initiative the quality** of their research and educational activities.

A Flemish quality assurance system (2019-2025) defines the organisation of **external quality assurance** of higher education institutions in Flanders. This system focuses on the quality of individual programmes and the accountability thereof. The system aims at bringing all accredited higher education programs at an internationally benchmarked quality level and answering to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESGs, 2015). This is achieved either through an institutional review (see below) that allows universities and university colleges to account for the quality of their programmes themselves, or through the involvement of an external body. As an external body counts a quality assurance agency registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR, www.eqar.eu), or recognised by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). External, independent experts (peers) are involved in each assessment of educational quality, either by the institution itself or in the assessment panel convened by the NVAO or quality assurance agency (see also subchapter 6.2.3).

The Flemish quality assurance system requires recognised universities and university colleges to guarantee the quality of their own programmes. They give account to society by publishing information on the quality of each NVAO accredited programme on their website.

» The institutional review

The institutional review assesses the way in which a university or university college pursues its educational policy. Part of this policy determines how the institution guarantees the quality of its accredited programmes according to the ESGs.

New or non-accredited programmes are subjected to programme accreditations.

» **(Initial) programme accreditation**

Each new programme to be launched is first subjected to an initial accreditation, a procedure in which an external panel assesses the potential quality of the programme. After being recognised as a new programme, a fully-fledged programme accreditation follows, which entails a formal confirmation by the NVAO that the programme complies with minimal quality criteria. Following such programme accreditation (with a positive outcome) the universities and university colleges themselves become responsible for guaranteeing the quality of the programme.

Should an institutional review reveal a university's or university college's inability to guarantee the quality of its accredited programmes, the NVAO will regain this responsibility. In that case the NVAO will assume quality assurance of the institution on a programme-by-programme basis.

Other recognised higher education institutions – that are not universities or university-colleges - account for the quality of their programmes through the involvement of an external body. Each new programme to be launched is first subjected to an initial accreditation, to be followed by periodic programme accreditations.

Non-recognised education providers may be registered by the Flemish Government as providers of recognised higher education programmes. Such recognition is based on a registration file, supplemented by a positive NVAO decision regarding the (potential) quality of the education they provide following the comprehensive initial accreditation of (at least one of) their programmes.

6.2.2. *Content*

Programme accreditation entails the formal recognition by the NVAO that a study program meets the predetermined minimum quality and level requirements of the assessment framework. **Eight quality features** are laid down in the Flemish Parliamentary Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (see next paragraph). These criteria are in line with the ESGs. The learning outcomes are an unmistakable part of the criteria.

- » The learning outcomes of the programme constitute a clear and programme-specific interpretation of the international requirements regarding level, content and orientation;
- » The curriculum of the programme is in line with the most recent developments in the field, takes into account the developments in the professional field, and is socially relevant;
- » The teachers assigned to the programme offer

students in the best possible way the opportunity to achieve the learning outcomes;

- » The programme provides students with adequate and easily accessible facilities and tutoring;
- » The teaching and learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the learning process and contributes to a smooth learning process;
- » Student assessment reflects the learning process and makes the intended learning outcomes concrete;
- » The programme provides comprehensive and easy-to-read information on all phases of the education career;
- » Information on the quality of the programme is publicly accessible.

6.2.3. *Method*

The accreditation of a study programme is based on an assessment of the programme in question. The assessment procedure consists of 9 steps:

- 1. Prior consultation (optional).** Ultimately three months before the possible date of submission of the application dossier a consultation with the NVAO can be organised to address pending questions of the higher education institution.
- 2. Self-evaluation report.** The institution drafts a self-evaluation report on the objectives of the programmes and its quality development. The report pays attention to the involvement of internal and external stakeholders, peers and experts in the organisation of the programme.
- 3. Application.** The assessment procedure starts when the NVAO receives an application for a programme assessment. Institutions jointly organising a programme submit a joint application.
- 4. Admissibility.** The NVAO checks the admissibility of the application. In case the application is admissible, the institutions is informed within a period of 15 calendar days. Thereupon the institution must complete the application within a period of 30 calendar days.
- 5. Payment procedure.** After an application has been deemed admissible, the institution receives a request to pay the costs of the assessment procedure in one payment. The costs for the procedure are determined by the Flemish Minister for Education.
- 6. Composition of the assessment commission.** The NVAO lays down the composition of the commission that will carry out the assessment of the programme. A commission consists of a number of external and independent experts and peers who can pass a judgment on the quality of the programme. A minimum of four members is selected, amongst

whom a student. Support and guidance is offered by a process coordinator from the NVAO and possibly an external secretary. All members of the commission are bound by a code of ethics and must take part in a training organised by the NVAO.

The NVAO always takes the initiative to involve the programme (institution) when deciding on the composition of the assessment commission. The institution however has the right to lodge a complaint within a period of 15 calendar days against the composition of the assessment committee.

7. Dialogue with the programme (institution). In the context of the examination by the assessment commission the NVAO sets up a dialogue between the commission and the programme (institution). In general this includes an on-site visit. On the basis of a proposal by the NVAO the commission determines the content of the discussions with the programme (institution).

At least the following partners must be involved in the dialogue: persons in charge of the programme, lecturers, students taking the programme, and representatives from the professional field.

8. Assessment report. In its assessment report the committee formulates an advice for the NVAO on the quality of the programme as a whole. The final assessment is based on a three-point scale: 'positive accreditation decision', 'positive accreditation decision with limited period of validity' or 'negative accreditation decision'. A draft of the assessment report is delivered by the commission to the NVAO within a period of four weeks upon finalising the assessment, and to the institution within a period of six weeks upon finalising the assessment. The institution may report factual mistakes and substantive objections within a period of 15 calendar days.

9. Publication. Once the commission has laid down the final version of the assessment report, the NVAO publishes the report on its website.

The assessment procedure is followed by an **accreditation** procedure, in which the NVAO takes an accreditation decision (positive – limited period of validity – negative positive – limited period of validity – negative) on the basis of the report of the assessment committee.

6.3 External quality assurance according to the Common Quality Framework (FQF 1 to 8, professional qualifications in public/private institutions)

6.3.1. Scope and objective

On 26 April 2019 the Parliamentary Act on Quality supervision for professionally qualifying programmes based on a Common Quality Framework (GKK) was approved (see also 5.2.7). Together with the Decision of the Government of Flanders of 19 July 2019 on the implementation of this act, it establishes the contours for **common quality assurance** of training or validation programmes leading to a certificate of professional qualification. The act applies to all programmes, with the exception of those offered by an educational institution recognised, financed or subsidised by the Flemish Community (i.e. the programmes described in subchapters 5.2.2 to 5.2.6).

The Parliamentary Act on a Common Quality Framework is a so-called framework act. This entails that each policy area or field can set up a system of recognition and quality assurance based on the Common Quality Framework.

Until today, the domain of **Work and Social Economy** is the only policy area that, on the basis of the general quality requirements imposed by the GKK, has developed a procedure which allows public or private organisations (e.g. companies, VDAB, Syntra, non-profit organisations, etc.) to offer professionally qualifying training or validation programmes. In what follows the presentation of the Common Quality Framework is illustrated by referring to this procedure of the policy domain of Work and Social Economy.

6.3.2. Content

The system of quality assurance as laid down in the 2019 Parliamentary Act is based on a quality framework, which includes all of the following **five quality areas**:

1. Objectives: the **objectives** of the professionally qualifying training offer correspond to the competences of the intended professional qualification;
2. Design: the professionally qualifying training programme is **developed and organised** in such a way that learners can acquire or demonstrate the competences of the intended professional qualification;
3. Guidance: the **guidance** of the learners in the framework of the professionally qualifying training programme leads to them being offered optimal opportunities to acquire or reveal the competences

of the intended professional qualification;

4. **Evaluation:** the **evaluation** of the learners in the framework of the professionally qualifying training programme makes it possible to ascertain whether they have acquired the competences of the intended professional qualification;
5. **Quality assurance:** the issues identified in connection with the objectives, design, guidance and evaluation are converted into **improvement actions**.

The quality framework as laid down in the Act has been further refined in subsequent legislation. The Decision of the Flemish Government of 19 July 2019 on the implementation of the Parliamentary Act of 26 April 2019 on Quality supervision for professionally qualifying programmes based on a Common Quality Framework lays down a more detailed **quality assurance framework** for professionally qualifying training pathways and one for professionally qualifying validation pathways.

In these detailed frameworks the five more general quality areas of the Common Quality Framework are translated into five descriptors, 11 (validation programmes) or 12 (training programmes) indicators, and accompanying development scales. The quality frameworks of both the training and validation pathways are included in annex IV to this report.

6.3.3. Method

The Common Quality Framework allows for organisations outside education to offer a professionally qualifying programme. These organisations must meet quality criteria at both organisational and programme level.

Quality criteria at organisational level

Organisations that want to offer a professionally qualifying pathway must meet concrete quality assurance conditions with regard to customer orientation, human resources management and financial management. To demonstrate that these conditions are met, the organisations must be in the possession of a quality label issued by the government or private providers (e.g. ISO). With this label the organisation must register with the Quality and Registration Model for Service Providers of the policy domain of Work and Social Economy.

Once registered with the model an organisation can submit an **application for recognition** as an organisation qualified to offer a particular professionally qualifying training or validation pathway. The application is supported by a dossier, in which the organisation expands on the concrete organisation of the professionally qualifying pathway. Information is provided on its design, objective(s), guidance,

evaluation, etc.

After a first **admissibility check** by the Department of Work and Social Economy, the quality of the content of the application is evaluated by two experts from DWSE, who have received special training to this end. The content is evaluated on the basis of the stipulations of the Common Quality Framework, and is carried out within a period of max. 40 (training pathways) or 45 (validation pathway) days.

In a next and final step the dossier, together with an advice by the content evaluators, is submitted to a **Recognition Committee**. This committee consists of representatives of the Department of Work and Social Economy, the Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB), VLAIO (Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship) and AHOVOKS.¹⁴ The Recognition Committee decides within a period of 44 days whether the applicant is entitled to organise the professionally qualifying pathway.

In case of a positive decision by the Recognition Committee, the trajectory and organisation are registered in the Register of Professionally Qualifying Pathways (<https://cresco-app.onderwijs-apps.vlaanderen.be/home>). In case of a negative decision, the applicant can appeal both the admissibility decision by the Department of Work and Social Economy as the refusal for recognition by the Recognition Committee.

Quality criteria at programme level

The training and validation programmes that are recognised in the framework of the Parliamentary Act on the Common Quality Framework are subject to quality assurance at **programme level**. A first quality assessment is carried out within a year after a programme or validation trajectory has been fully organised for a first time. Subsequent on-site quality assurance takes place every six years.

The decree on the Common Quality Framework foresees in **three procedures** to organise quality assurance on professionally qualifying pathways organised outside education:

1. a policy domain or field always organises the quality assurance on the trajectories together with the Education Inspectorate. This option is only possible for PQPs at level FQF 1 to FQF4.
2. a policy domain or field puts out the entire quality assurance process to the Education Inspectorate. This option is only possible for PQPs at level FQF 1 to FQF4.
3. a policy domain or field organises the quality assurance autonomously. The first three years the policy domain or field is supported by the

14. All members of the Recognition Committee qualify to vote, with the exception of the representatives of AHOVOKS.

Education Inspection, with a view to exchanging expertise and good practices.

A policy domain or field decides according to which procedure the quality assurance on the professionally qualifying pathways is organised for those organisations resorting under its competences.

When the quality assurance process is carried out by or together with the Education Inspectorate, the certificates of professional qualification or certificates of partial qualification granted by the organisation automatically resort in **exemptions** for a professionally qualifying pathway which is part of an educational qualification pathway offered in adult education and for which the same certificate of professional qualification or certificate of partial qualification is issued. When quality assurance is organised autonomously by the policy domain or field, the certificates do not automatically resort in exemptions in function of obtaining an educational qualification.

In the implementation of the Common Quality Framework by the Department of Work and Social Economy, on-site quality assurance is coordinated by the **Flemish Social Inspectorate** and carried out together with the public employment service **VDAB**. Higher education experts may join quality assurance assessments of professional qualifications at level 5 or higher.

Since the policy domain of Work and Social Economy opted to carry out quality assurance autonomously, the Education Inspectorate participates in the quality assurances during the first three years, with the aim of sharing its expertise with the FSI.

Steps of an on-site quality assurance visit

The content of an on-site quality assurance visit is based on the stipulations of the common quality assurance framework (see above, Content). The visit consists of four:

1. On desk preparation

The first stage of an on-site visit consists of on desk preparation. Assessors examine documents on the professionally qualifying pathway that have been provided by the organisation prior to the on-site visit. In this stage there is room for discussion with the provider.

2. On-site quality assurance visit

The assessment team engages in on-site conversations (a. o. with teachers, instructors, guidance practitioners, course-participants, validation candidates, evaluators, ...). In addition the assessors observe (parts of) instruction periods or validation assessments. To conclude a number of documents is consulted (e.g. evaluation forms, documents on apprenticeships, granted certificates of professional qualification, ...).

At the end of the day the assessment team briefly expands

on its first observations linked to the quality areas of the quality assurance framework.

3. Drafting of final report

In a final report the assessors address per quality area the strong points and points for improvement, and draft an advice for the recognition committee. The final report (incl. advice) is presented to the recognition committee.

4. Decision recognition committee

The recognition committee takes a decision on the prolongation of the recognition (in case needed upon condition of addressing a number of points for improvement) or on ending the recognition. Within a period of 104 days after the on-site visit the decision and final report or presented to the provider of the professionally qualifying pathway.

7. Databases

Over the years a number of education and training databases have been developed with the aim of providing information and supporting policy development in Flanders. The relevant databases are briefly presented in the chapter at hand.

The various databases are complementary to one another. Their target audience consists in the first place of professionals (intermediary players) rather than individual end-users.

Individual end-users (pupils, students, parents, teachers, ...) can find a clear and user-friendly overview of the Flemish education offer at www.onderwijskiezer.be. This website was set up in 2011 as an initiative of the Pupil Guidance Centres, supported by the Flemish Department of Education and Training. Onderwijskiezer.be serves as a single access point for individuals to information on the entire educational landscape in Flanders and Brussels.

» **Qualifications Database**

The Qualifications Database was developed to provide information to individuals, institutions and government services about the Flemish qualifications policy. In addition, the database must support further policy development.

The Qualifications Database includes all recognised professional and educational qualifications from level FQF1 to FQF8. The competences and FQF level are shown per qualification. In addition, metadata are recorded on the process and the stakeholders involved.

The Qualifications Database is available at www.vlaamsekwalficatiestructuur.be. The data from this database (qualifications, learning outcomes, levels) are shared with the Europass platform via QDR.

» **Database of Educational Objectives**

All educational objectives and principles of educational objectives are listed in the Database of Educational Objectives.

Educational objectives is the overarching concept used to refer to basic competences, attainment targets, basic literacy targets, development goals, caesura targets, specific attainment targets and additional attainment targets that apply in primary education, secondary education (including dual learning), part-time artistic education, adult education and higher education.

In the database the educational objectives are linked to metadata such as key competence(s), educational level, stage, degree, etc. which allow to consult the educational objectives on the educational objectives

website via multiple search filters.

The Database of Educational Objectives is available at www.onderwijsdoelen.be.

» **Programme Database**

The Programme Database contains all programmes and training profiles which resort under the responsibility of the Flemish government.

The training profiles cluster the attainment targets, specific attainment targets and basic competences of a particular programme. For programmes with a vocational component and/or orientation, the training profiles also include the competences of (a) professional qualification(s). This is the case for dual learning programmes in mainstream and special needs education (education form 3), and adult education. A training profile also indicates a. o. the minimal number of teaching hours and the number of modules within a programme.

The database is in part fed with data from the Qualifications Database and the Database of Educational Objectives. The Programme Database does not contain information on the providers of individual programmes.

The Programme Database has been built with financial support from the European Union. The database is accessible via www.opleidingsinhouden-app.onderwijs-apps.vlaanderen.be.

» **Higher Education Register**

The Higher Education Register contains all recognised associate degree programmes, bachelor degree programmes and master degree programmes in Flanders. The database offers a number of predefined data for each programme individually, such as the size of the programme (in credits), the language of instruction, field of study and the place where the programme is organised, ...).

The Higher Education Register can be consulted at <https://hogeronderwijsregister.be>.

» **Register of Professionally Qualifying Pathways**

All training and validation programmes leading to a certificate of professional qualification are listed in the Register of Professionally Qualifying Pathways. Users can search by title, FQF level, type of programme, or provider.

The register displays the programmes organised both within education (i.e. via Adult Education Centres) as well as outside education (via public or private providers recognised via the procedures of the Common Quality Framework, see also 6.3.3).

The Register of Professionally Qualifying Pathways is available at <https://cresco-app.onderwijs-apps.vlaanderen.be/home>.

» **Flemish Database of Qualifications and Certificates (LED)**

All qualifications and certificates recognised or declared equivalent by the Flemish Community, together with the corresponding minimal identification details of the holder of the qualifications and certificates in question, are registered in a database. Registration of the qualifications and certificates is managed by the entity that has issued them, if so desired through an intermediary partner.

Citizens can log in to their profile to consult their own qualifications and certificates via <https://leerenervaringsbewijzendatabank.be>

PART 2

8. The development of qualifications in Flanders: current state of play

The development of qualifications in Flanders is monitored on a permanent basis. In this chapter we present a current state of play and highlight some trends which characterise the developments of the recent years.

8.1 Current data on the development of professional qualifications

Since the start of the implementation of the Flemish Qualifications Framework the number of recognised

professional qualifications has increased on a yearly basis. By the end of 2022 a total of 571 professional qualifications was recognised.

Since the introduction of the option to update professional qualifications in 2019, 427 professional qualifications have been updated. The majority of these were updates of track 1 that entailed changes of a mere technical nature.

By the end of 2022 75 partial qualifications had been developed, and 10 qualifications had been removed.

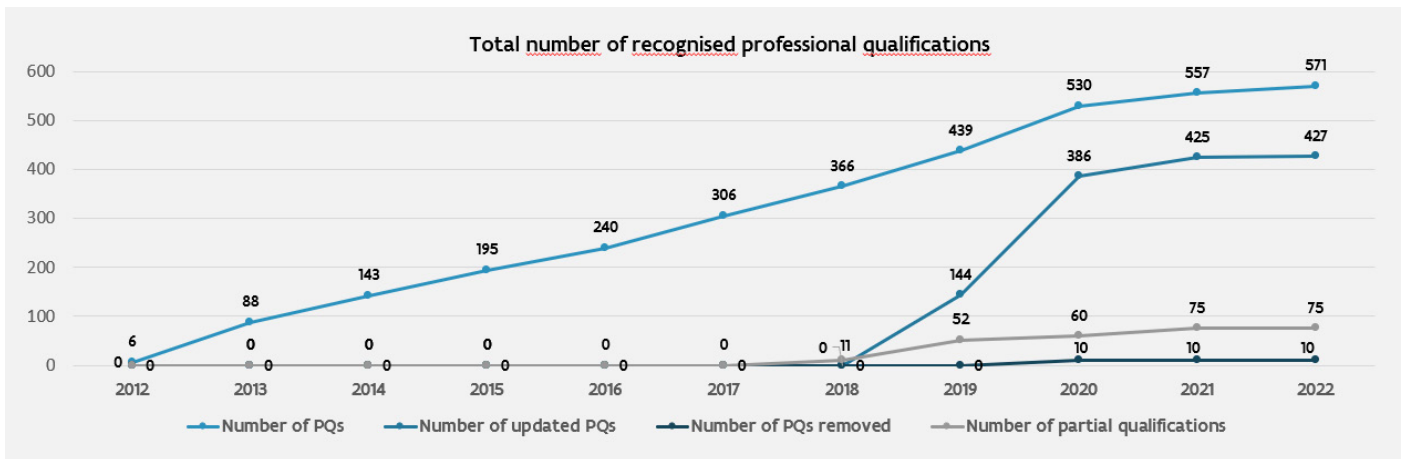


Figure 9: Development of professional qualifications: state of play

Most professional qualifications in Flanders were developed and recognised up to level 5 of the Flemish Qualifications Framework.

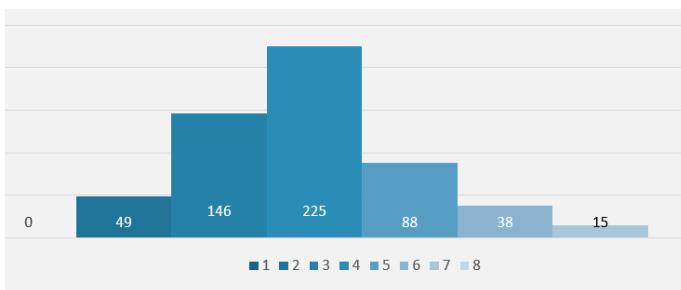


Figure 10: Development of professional qualifications per FQF level

When drafting educational qualifications of level 6, 7 and 8 the higher education institutions are not obliged to take the corresponding professional qualification into account.

The existing professional qualifications of level 6 and 7 are therefore primarily used for the validation of prior learning and in the context of the programmes offered under the Common Quality Framework.

8.2 Educational pathways based on a professional qualification: state of play

Professional qualifications form the basis for the vocational part of the following education programmes:

- » Secondary education, programmes with an orientation towards higher education and the labour market – dual and non-dual offer
- » Secondary education, programmes with an orientation towards the labour market – dual and non-dual offer
- » Adult education
- » Short cycle programmes

The data offered here below represent the state of play at the end of 2022.

- » Within **secondary education**, 353 programs (second stage, third stage and continuous secondary education) with an orientation towards both higher education and the labour market (tse, sea) or an orientation to the labour market only (vse) are based on professional qualifications.
- » Also in special needs education (education form 3) the professional qualifications are integrated in the training courses. To date they have been integrated in 89 courses.
- » 301 standard **dual learning** pathways were developed for mainstream and special needs secondary education. This concerns 243 courses in mainstream secondary education, 19 in education form 4 of special needs education, and 39 in education form 3 of special needs education.
- » In **adult education**, 133 training profiles lead to a certificate of professional qualification. 69 training profiles can be taken up in a dual programme.
- » 30 **short-cycle programmes** developed domain specific learning outcomes based on professional

qualifications.

Professional qualifications also form the basis for professionally qualifying pathways (see also subchapters 5.2.7 and 6.3). To date 33 pathways have been set up around 15 professional qualifications. When distinguishing between professionally qualifying training programmes on the one hand and validation programmes on the other, the following data can be offered:

- » 28 **validation standards** based on a professional qualification were developed. The standards provide the basis for 42 validation trajectories, 35 of which are offered by Centres for Adult Education and 7 by public and private providers, recognised within the GKK procedure of the Department of Work.
- » To date, 26 **training programs** have been recognised within the procedure of the professionally qualifying training pathways recognised through the procedure of the Department of Work.

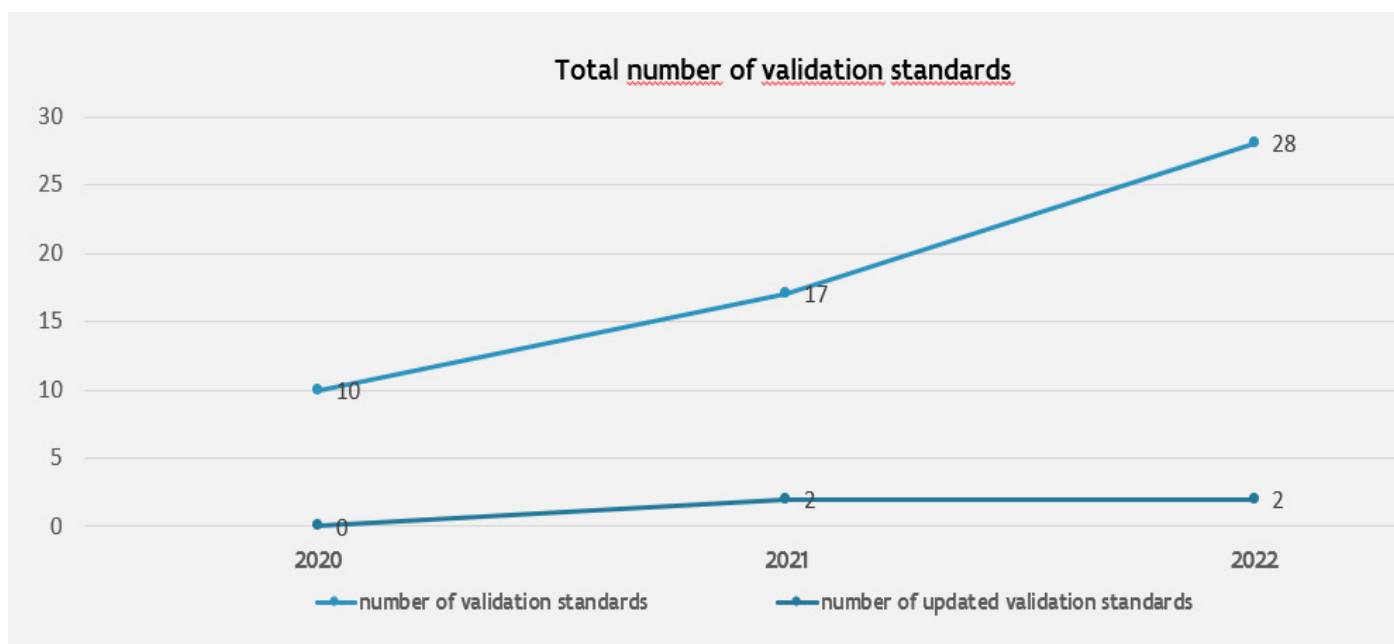


Figure 11: Development of validation standards

9. Stakeholder involvement in the Flemish Qualification Structure

In chapter nine we expand upon the involvement of stakeholders in the Flemish Qualification Structure. In successive subchapters we present 1. recommendations by the two relevant strategic advisory councils, 2. the insights from round table discussions with labour market sector representatives, and 3. the findings from an evaluation of the practice of professional qualifications from a user perspective. To conclude we touch upon a number of action points formulated for the near future in order to address the recommendations and insights presented in this chapter.

9.1 Advisory councils

When new legislation is developed the strategic advisory councils Vlor (educational partners) and SERV (labour market partners) issue an advice on the draft parliamentary acts and ministerial decisions.

In what follows we limit ourselves to an overview of the relevant pieces of advice issued after the last update of the Flemish Referencing Report (i.e. 2014). Our response to the topics raised by the advisory councils are added in blue.

9.1.1. A procedure for updating and removing professional qualifications

On 30 March 2017 the Vlor published an advice on the procedure for developing professional qualifications. In this advice the council points to the need for the creation of an update procedure for professional qualifications. The Vlor considers such a procedure essential for a well performing qualifications structure.

The council formulates the following five considerations:

- » Support for the professional qualifications is important, and efforts should also be made to achieve and maintain this support when adapting and removing professional qualifications.
- » Education and training providers have an important role in identifying necessary adjustments to existing PQs. These signals have to be taken into account when updating a qualification.
- » While professional qualifications must reflect ongoing developments (i.e. be up to date), it is important to ensure that they are sufficiently stable at the same time. Changing a professional qualification has consequences for, for example, the educational curriculum.

- » The update or removal of professional qualifications should not merely depend on signals from alert actors. The Vlor calls for an evaluation cycle to be set up for all professional qualifications.
- » An adjustment of a professional qualification dossier can have consequences for its classification. The involvement of education and training providers must be guaranteed when assessing whether a new classification is needed.

On 24 March 2017 the **SERV** issued an opinion on the updating of professional qualifications. The council applauds the elaboration of a procedure to update professional qualifications. Such a procedure contributes to a good connection between education and the labour market and ensures that the Flemish Qualifications Framework remains up to date. According to the SERV, the initiative for an update lies in the first place with the submitters of a professional qualification dossier, who should commit to regularly screen their professional qualification(s) and to initiate an update when needed. The Council ask to anchor the involvement of the submitters of a PQD in the ministerial decision. Being responsible for quality assurance, AHOVOKS also has an important, supporting and facilitating role to play in the updating process.

The concerns of the advisory councils have been addressed in the legislation.

AHOVOKS acts as a process supervisor and quality monitor in the process of developing and updating professional qualifications. The agency watches whether the PQs and updates are sufficiently stable since they form the foundation for a stable curriculum.

Any partner can identify the need for an update of a professional qualification, including education providers. It remains the responsibility of the labour market actors however to determine whether an update of a professional qualification is actually carried out. Adjustments and removals of professional qualifications are submitted to the validation committee, that assesses a. o. the support for the (new or updated) PQ.

The classification committee evaluates whether an update could have an impact on the classification level. Education and training providers are represented in the classification committee via the commission members delegated by the Vlor.

AHOVOKS is currently elaborating a more structural and data-informed approach with regard to (the timing of) the updating of professional qualifications.

9.1.2. Educational curricula and professional qualifications

On 28 September 2017 the **Vlor** issued, on its own initiative, an advice on the relationship between educational curricula and professional qualifications. In this advice, the Vlor offers suggestions for a pragmatic approach to clarify the relationship between educational curricula and professional qualifications.

Before issuing its advice in September 2017, the Vlor had warned at previous occasions against too tight a link between professional qualifications and educational curricula. According to the council this concern remains an issue at various levels of education: the interpretation of the matrix of a modernised secondary education, the drawing up of the standard pathways for dual learning, the development of training profiles for vocational secondary adult education, the modular training structures of part-time vocational secondary education, the reform of part-time artistic education and the development of domain specific learning outcomes in associate degree programmes.

Although the existing regulation allows for some margin, implementation shows that professional qualifications are incorporated in their entirety in educational curricula. The Vlor however considers professional qualifications not suitable to function as an educational curriculum. The council does not argue in favour of writing the professional qualifications in such a way that they can be adopted in full, but rather to provide sufficient scope to adapt the professional qualifications when there are included in the educational curricula. This process should take into account the concerns of both educational and social partners.

The Education Council argues that in the short term, and without amending existing legislation, an important step forward can be taken by adapting the implementation of the Flemish Qualifications Framework. The council asks for the competent government service to limit itself to supervise whether a professional qualification has been included in the educational curricula in a recognisable way. In addition, education providers should be given the opportunity to formulate additional educational objectives. In that light, the Council recognises the function of professional qualifications as a frame of reference for the content of labour market-oriented training.

In previous advisory reports, the Vlor already pointed to the advantages of working with domain specific learning outcomes in associate degree programmes. The council deems that lessons can be drawn from this process for the development of the curricula. In addition, it points to the great advantages of consultation between education and labour market partners when drawing up professional qualification dossiers and education curricula.

Professional qualifications are anchored in law. A shared framework for both education and training providers in the context of lifelong learning has been set up.

A certain degree of freedom exists in the translation of the competences from professional qualifications to educational programmes. Small textual adjustments can be made. Furthermore, the competences can be organised in clusters or modules to allow for a logical sequence of learning.

When developing the curricula for the programmes of the second and third stage of secondary education, a matching table between the goals that lead to one or more recognised professional qualifications and the competences as included in the relevant professional qualification(s) or partial qualification(s) must be included rather than literally copying the competences of the professional qualification into the curricula.

9.1.3. The Common Quality Framework and validation procedures

On 28 June 2018 the Vlor issued an advice on the draft Parliamentary Acts on an integrated policy for the recognition of acquired competences and the quality assurance for professionally qualifying pathways based on a common quality framework.

The Vlor welcomes the focus on professionally qualifying processes as a way to stimulate lifelong learning among employees and job seekers. However, it does not support the way in which the government aims to achieve this. According to the council the proposals in the two draft acts will result in fragmented policies with a negative impact on learners, the professional field, and education.

The Common Quality Framework was set up to be the final piece of the Flemish Qualifications Framework by ensuring the transparency and interchangeability of qualifications. According to the Vlor however, exactly the opposite will be achieved when implementing the acts. It will become nearly impossible for learners and employers to correctly assess the value of their qualification.

The Education Council advises to establish one and the same threshold for quality assurance for all training providers that can award a recognised professional qualification. This implies, amongst others, that:

- a) quality supervision at organisational level is provided for everyone
- b) quality supervision is carried out at least at the level of the study programmes by a joint team of supervisors of education and the policy domain concerned
- c) a macro-efficiency test is provided for both validation test centres and for the range of professionally qualifying pathways

According to the Vlor the draft acts do not offer a perspective for a clear validation policy in education. Clarity is missing with regard to e.g. the organisation of guidance and supervision, the costs for the validation applicant, or the financing of the validation test centres. The council sees this lack of perspective as a missed opportunity, taking into account the importance of validation for adult education and higher education.

Since more training providers will be able to issue a professional qualification in the future, it will become all the more important for professionally qualifying programmes in education to distinguish themselves in terms of content. For this reason the Vlor again calls to break the tight link between the educational curriculum and the professional qualifications.

On 2 July 2018 also the **SERV** issued an opinion on the draft acts on an integrated policy for the recognition of acquired competences and quality supervision for professionally qualifying pathways based on a common quality framework.

The advisory council welcomes the renewed focus on the recognition of acquired competences and the associated quality assurance of professionally qualifying processes based on the GKK. In view of their substantive coherence, one advice was drafted addressing both draft acts together.

While fully endorsing the objective of establishing an integrated policy approach, the SERV questions whether this objective can be reached on the basis of the stipulations in the draft acts. The acts provide for the establishment of a general framework on which each policy area concerned must graft its own approach. Differentiation between policy domains therefore remains possible and is even encouraged on a number of crucial points.

In its advice, the SERV puts forward a nine-point program for the establishment of a truly integrated policy with social impact:

- » Both the world of work and the worlds of education fully recognise and endorse the importance of validation.
- » The scope of the Validation Act will be extended to include individuals over eighteen year olds in compulsory education.
- » From its start a validation trajectory strives for the acquisition of at least a partial qualification.
- » The sectors are actively involved in drafting and assessing the validation standards.
- » The same rights apply across all policy areas and a single and transparent scheme for financial

contributions from validation candidates is applied.

- » There is one common quality framework with neutral and independent external quality supervision for all policy areas.
- » Exemptions for entire professional qualifications will be extended to level 5 (and by extension to level 8).
- » Regardless of the quality assurance procedure, there is automatic exemption for a PQ from level 1 to level 5 (and by extension up to and including level 8).
- » A uniform treatment applies to both public and private providers of professionally qualifying pathway.

On 28 February 2019, the **Vlor** issued an advice on the implementing acts for the acts on the recognition of acquired competences and the integrated quality framework of vocational qualification pathways.

In its advice the Vlor states that too little account was taken of the very fundamental comments formulated on both draft acts. It regrets a. o. the fact that the various policy areas are given the autonomy to develop their own policy without the application of one and the same quality assurance approach. While at the same time maintaining the strict(er) rules that apply to education providers, uneven conditions are created for the different provides.

The council also regrets the fact that the acts do not await the findings from the pilot projects that started on 1 September 2018. Initial findings point to the benefits of abandoning the instrument of validation standards. Taking into account a number of fundamental reasons for abandoning the standards, the Vlor proposes an alternative method.

The advisory council calls for quickly providing clarity on the financing of validation providers, covering their administrative, personnel and infrastructure costs. In addition, one single financial contribution should be demanded from every validation candidate. At the same time the option of a 50% reduction of the rate for specific groups of employees should be explored.

With regard to part-time artistic education, the Vlor calls for the installation of a validation system that takes into account the specificities of the educational offer. As for now a framework for validation of part-time artistic education does not exist, although professional qualifications can also be awarded in some of the programmes it offers.

In its advice the Education Council states that it is hard to assess the impact of the draft acts on the level of higher education. The acts do not describe how the quality assurance for professional qualifications of FQF levels 5 to 8 can be aligned with the quality assurance system in higher education. This primarily constitutes a problem

for associate degree programs because the link with professional qualifications is strongest there. As long as there is no comprehensive quality assurance system, the Vlor asks that no validation processes be recognised for levels 5 to 8.

The Vlor also stresses that it is crucial for the civil effect of the trajectories for which a learner applies to be clear in advance.

On 5 March 2019 also the **SERV** issued an advice on the implementing acts for the acts on the recognition of acquired competences and the integrated quality framework of professionally qualification pathways.

In their advice the social partners call for one financial contribution for all validation candidates, instead of differentiating on the basis of criteria such as duration, infrastructure and equipment. A lower financial contribution should only apply to individuals who belong to certain vulnerable groups.

The SERV fears that few organisations, especially few or no private providers, will become a validation test centre because of the ongoing unclarity with regard to their funding.

The social partners call for a user-friendly and general overview of all possible programmes to be provided to potential learners. In addition a campaign to promote professional qualifications should be set up.

The objective of a process of validation of acquired competences is to evaluate and certify in an integrated manner professional competences acquired outside formal training. A validation standard and instruments are always developed for a full professional qualification; validation standards or instruments for e.g. partial qualifications do not exist.

A candidate can register for validation with a view to acquiring a full professional qualification or a partial qualification. In case a candidate does not pass the assessment in full, a certificate of competences can be granted for those competences (s)he did reach.

Professionally qualifying training programmes and validation pathways can also be developed for professional qualifications at the levels 5 to 8. During the first three years of their organisation experts from higher education can join the on-site quality assurance audits.

Guarantees for transparent communication are integrated in the regulations. One of the indicators in the common quality framework for professionally qualifying training pathways reads: "The learner receives targeted information about the training pathway, the opportunities on the labour market and the possibilities of progression to courses leading to an educational qualification and

other further training". The Validation Act states that the validation test centre must provide the individual with all necessary information and guidance to be able to go through the validation process.

Sectors are involved in drawing up validation standards.

The Education Inspectorate remains the only quality assurance authority for educational pathways that lead to a certificate of professional qualification (e.g. secondary education, adult education). The Common Quality Framework focuses on all other policy areas outside of education.

The regulations stipulate that acquired competences, partial qualifications and professional qualifications could only result in an automatic exemption in secondary adult education if the Education Inspectorate is involved in on-site quality assurance supervision.

Within the Common Quality Framework public and private providers can develop a training or validation trajectory meeting the demands of the market. A validation trajectory however can only be developed if a validation standard is available. Certain criteria are taken into account when selecting the standards to be developed, giving priority to professions for which there is a mismatch in supply and demand, or in case there is a qualification requirement from the sector.

All professionally qualifying training and validation pathways, offered in adult education or by public and private providers, are listed in a public register (see chapter 7). This allows for citizens to quickly find an offer that meets their demands.

The contributions to be paid by validation candidates have been clarified. Differentiated rates for specific target groups were taken into account. Each policy area can make its own arrangements for financing the validation test centres.

9.2 Roundtable discussions with sector representatives

Round table discussions were set up with representatives of 12 labour market sectors, in which representatives from the sector were asked to share their experiences with the Flemish Qualifications Framework in general and the professional qualifications in particular.

In its day to day functioning AHOVOKS keeps in close touch with representatives from the various labour market sectors. This close contact has revealed that the sectors unanimously support the principle that professional qualifications function as reference framework for education, training and validation pathways. In order to optimise flexibility and interchangeability of qualifications, the content of the professional qualifications would have

to be described in a more sustainable manner. Increased standardisation with regard to transversal and sector-specific competences and decreasing the level of detail of the descriptions should contribute to this. At the same time however AHOVOKS want to retain a certain level of freedom for education and training providers to adapt their offer to specific target groups. Guaranteeing at all times transparency, equivalence, quality and interchangeability remains essential.

In what follows we present the reflections of the labour market sector representatives that took part in the round tables.

The sectors value professional qualifications as an opportunity to describe the competences needed on the labour market. Professional qualifications describe the professions (and accompanying competences) that can be found on the labour market at a certain point in time. It is very difficult to describe the 'professions of the future' as there are many influencing factors at stake. Moreover, certain occupations and/or competences can be temporary trends that should be accommodated through short company training courses rather than recognised qualifications in education and training systems.

Selecting the competences to be included in a professional qualification always constitutes a delicate balancing act. The fact that competences should be future proof and stable at the same time results in choices to be made: e.g. should competences that are required in 20% of the companies be included in the professional qualification?

On the one hand, there is a tendency to describe competences in **detail** in order to establish clear objectives and guidelines for programmes leading to the qualification in question. A detailed description provides a sense of clarity and security, both for the sector and for the teachers who design a programme. On the other hand, professional qualifications also include more generic descriptions of competences, which are more future-proof. These descriptions leave more room for **interpretation** which allows to tailor a learning trajectory to the target groups of the programmes (young people, adults, job seekers, etc.). It is essential that interpretations are subject to consultation with the sector, that takes on an advisory role. A tense relationship exists between **literally** adopting the competences of a PQ versus giving **space to adjustments** in relation to the training logic. Equality, rather than equity, must be guaranteed between the various (parts of) training pathways leading to a professional qualification.

Communication with education and training providers is seen as an essential element in the process of interpreting the competences of a professional qualification. A second

crucial element is **trust**. The labour market must have confidence in the quality of the end result, regardless of the education or training path a learner has chosen.

The sectors indicate that, if we aim for the establishment of real lifelong learning in which periods of working and learning can be flexibly alternated and even integrated, that there is a need to train and qualify **smaller entities**. The sectors support the idea of qualifying or recognising such smaller entities. For certain target groups (e.g. people with a greater distance from the labour market or employees) obtaining a full qualification in the short run is often impossible. Qualifying and/or recognising smaller units would allow them to obtain parts of a full qualification, and to continue on their acquisition of the full qualification in a different context (e.g. a company). Smaller entities could be stacked into full or partial qualifications.

The sectors do however point to the fact that such smaller entities should still remain relevant in order to be certified. Relevance on the labour market is currently a defining criteria when delineating partial qualification within a full professional qualification. Partial qualifications still lead to the labour market, albeit in a narrower segment.

In terms of the **content** of professional qualifications, the sectors still see room for improvement with regard to the inclusion of soft skills and innovations.

According to the sector it is essential to include **soft skills**, which gain in importance on the labour market. The professional qualifications allow for the inclusion of soft skills as competences: the skill of teamwork for example is included as the competence 'works in a team', while the skill of accuracy can be included as the competence 'works accurately according to plans'.

Innovative evolutions, such as an increased focus on sustainability, digitalisation and agility, define many sectors and professions. Flanders strives to equip VET learners with the ability to deal with these evolutions. The question arises however where these competences should be included: should they form part of the content of a professional qualifications, or should they be incorporated when designing the programmes based on a PQ? Initial attention for innovations can be included in a professional qualification, e.g. via a competence such as 'keeps track of developments in the sector'. The sectors however suggest to inform teachers and trainers by including ongoing innovations and evolutions within a sector in the professional qualification dossiers. This would provide them with concrete starting points for introducing the aspect of innovation into the concrete curriculum.

When defining the content of a programme, education and training providers have the **freedom** to add elements with regard to soft skills and innovations within the

contours of the professional qualifications. In addition, in the educational programmes professional qualifications are linked to attainment targets, which contributes to complementarity of the competences addressed. It is unclear in how far this freedom (to include innovation, for example) is taken up by the providers.

AHOVOKS will explore whether and how the extra informative sections suggested by the sector representatives can be added to the professional qualification dossier.

AHOVOKS provides **process guidance** during the development of professional qualification dossiers. Some sectors expect more initiative and advice in the development of professional qualifications, in particular regarding the demarcation of partial qualifications. In the future the sectors would also appreciate to be timely addressed by AHOVOKS to reflect on the possible need for an update of their qualification(s).

When describing the competences of a professional qualification, a sector can test the description of the competences in practice, e.g. by entering into discussion with companies in which the profession of the PQ is practiced. While a large number of sectors already voluntarily engages in such practical tests, the sectors are in favour of structurally including the test in the development of every professional qualification.

When touching upon the processes of developing or updating professional qualifications, it is worth mentioning that AHOVOKS wants to initiate more of a **feedback loop**, in which research and data on skills forecasts, employment, and learning careers are taken into account. On the basis of the data which are currently available we can e.g. not indicate how many people are employed within certain profession, let alone the relationship with the education and/or training path which they followed. Within the agency we elaborate a monitoring of learning careers, which would provide interesting information with regard to bottlenecks in the offer, support, and guidance in, through and after education and training. This proves to be a challenging exercise however, due to the technicality and taxonomies of different databases, and the GDPR regulations.

All the sectors surveyed fully reconfirm their support to the fact that professional qualifications are used as a basis for professional training at different levels of education. By doing so a **connection** between **education and training** on the one hand side and the **labour market** on the other is facilitated. The sectors explicitly stress the fact that professional qualifications are not to be tailored to existing programmes. The professional qualifications must offer opportunities for outflow onto the labour market.

Professional qualifications in non-formal settings

The approval of the Parliamentary Act on the Common Quality Framework allowed for the set up by public and private partners for the organisation of professionally qualifying training and validation pathways. One of the sectors taking part in the round table already had a professionally training pathway recognised. The representatives of the various sectors do think that the Common Quality Framework offers opportunities to stimulate competence development in companies. Trajectories that focus on smaller, stackable, entities are regarded as most interesting in this regard.

The sectors indicated that validation trajectories are still complex and labour- and cost-intensive processes for individual companies. Some sectors examine whether their existing internal sectoral assessment procedures can be converted into validation trajectories. Graduates would then receive a certificate of professional qualification, instead of a sectoral certificate, which would generate more opportunities with regard to lifelong learning. The sectors also support an approximation between the validation trajectories and the practice of granting exemptions which is applied in certain study programmes. This would also offer a possible stepping stone to shortened qualifying processes for the VDAB that focus on job seekers.

Because there is no direct nor automatic civil effect associated with obtaining a certificate of professional qualification (e.g. higher wage or opportunities for promotion), interest from the employees' side remains low for the time being. From the employers' side there is a fear that by promoting qualifications they run the risk of their employees altering their career goals and leaving the company. For this reason the sectors call for the set-up of a clear communication about the civil effect of (professional) qualifications.

This brings us to clear **communication** about the Flemish Qualifications Framework (and professional qualifications). At the moment, communication about the FQF focuses mainly on intermediaries: sectors, educational umbrella organisations and the VDAB. Some sectors use the existing communication products and translate them to the context of companies, so the products really match their needs.

With regard to communication, the sectors also call to clarify the objectives and scope of professional qualifications, as well as the relationship between professional qualifications and education pathways. Communication to companies should be based on their needs. Today professional qualifications are sometimes used for recruiting or the drafting of vacancies, but not to develop policies with regard to competence development,

training and retention. The sectors agree that they can play a role in this communication.

The obtained qualification certificates are included in the LED database. This is a concrete tool that makes qualifications (and their civil effect) visible in a way that is relevant to companies.

AHOVOKS agrees that a diversified communication strategy on the Flemish Qualification Framework and professional qualifications is essential. Various communication products are currently developed to address the communication concerns expressed by the sectors in the round tables.

9.3 Evaluation of the practice of professional qualifications from a user perspective

In the spring of 2022 an evaluation was carried out by the consultancy organisation Idea Consult of the practice of professional qualifications and the products derived from the PQs:

- » standard programmes for dual learning
- » training profiles¹⁵ in special needs education - education form 3
- » training profiles in adult education
- » validation standards

On the basis of both exploratory and in-depth interviews and workshops, 94 unique participants were surveyed on how and for what purposes professional qualifications, training profiles, standard pathways and validation standards are used. An analysis was made of how end users perceive and evaluate these products.

The final report provides an overview of the findings, both in general as per product, and offers concrete recommendations. Both the findings and recommendations are presented in the subsequent subchapters.

9.3.1. General findings

The experiences and **opinions** of the end users of the various reference frameworks (i.e. the derived products as presented above) can **vary** to a great extent. The report therefore points to the fact that the findings with regard to the reference frameworks do not apply to all training profiles, validation standards, standard pathways, or professional qualifications.

The report uncovered that the end users in general agree that the different reference frameworks **achieve their intended objectives**:

- » they lead to **transparency** and **uniformity**

- » they provide a good **basis** to determine the form and **content** of education and training programmes
- » they create the **right expectations** among the actors involved
- » they **transcend institutions**
- » they guarantee a better **connection to the labour market**

When a reference framework is developed, the various institutions usually make a **translation** of the framework that is tailored to the vision and target group of the institution, their own expertise, infrastructure and material. The institutions then specify how they interpret, teach, and evaluate the competences of the framework.

- » The frame of reference itself is in general only used for the development of the translation (e.g. a validation instrument) or until a cross-institutional translation (e.g. a curriculum) is available. Several respondents indicate there exists little difference between the frames of reference and the respective curricula.
- » The institution-specific translation can start from the frame of reference itself or from a curriculum.
- » The person(s) in charge of making the translations differs from institution to institution.
- » The extent and form of a translation can differ substantively per institution. As a result, there are still differences between the programmes offered by the institutions.

It takes **time and energy** to translate a reference framework to meet the context of the institution. This task is complicated when the reference framework is not ready in time, which grants the institutions too little time to make the translation and to implement it before the school year starts. In other words, there is often too little time between the moment when the reference framework is completed and communicated, and the moment when pupils or course participants effectively register and start the training.

A tense relationship exists between on the one hand developing **sufficiently clear or concrete reference frameworks** and leaving **sufficient space and (pedagogical) freedom for the institutions** on the other. The reference frameworks describe 'what' has to be learned and evaluated and not 'how'. How something should be taught and to what extent something should be evaluated belongs to the pedagogical freedom of the institutions.

- » The opinion of the end users differs with regard to the clarity and concreteness of the reference frameworks.
- » End users often refer to a lack of clarity with regard to the extent to which the competences of a reference

15. A training profile is the overarching term used to refer to the attainment targets, specific attainment targets and basic competences of an education or training programme.

framework must be acquired and how they must be evaluated.

- » It is not clear to all respondents where (pedagogical) freedom begins and where it ends. Some dare to go quite far in their interpretation, while others try to follow the reference frameworks to the letter, often out of fear of the Education Inspectorate. Various end users ask for more clarity about how they should use the reference frameworks (within their pedagogical freedom).

Many critical concerns about the frames of reference can be traced back to problems with regard to **language and complexity**:

- » The language is sometimes too general or vague.
- » The language is sometimes too detailed or concrete. Too much detail can make reference frameworks not flexible enough or outdated too quickly.
- » The language is sometimes too complex or not attuned to the end users.
- » The articulation of the same competences can differ in related programmes.
- » At times one and the same competence is repeated too often.
- » These concerns can differ from one reference framework to another: the reference frameworks are not sufficiently consistent.
- » In general, the end users are positive about the form of the reference frameworks. They do indicate that versions in Excel or adapted to import into Smartschool (specialized school software) would be useful.

There is sometimes a **mismatch** between the **demands in the reference frameworks** and what **institutions can offer**. End users often indicate that they cannot always meet the requirements in the reference frameworks with regard to infrastructure, resources, expertise, workplaces or time.

With regard to **communication and support**, most end users are positive, but there are major differences between the institutions and end users. Not all institutions or end users have access to the same level of support, and the necessary information does not reach everyone.

- » There are differences across the umbrella organisations and School Support Services in the interpretation of the reference frameworks and support for their use.
- » In schools where the management team supports the reference frameworks and integrates them into the school policy, there seems to be a better flow of information and guidance to teachers or counsellors.

- » Respondents find it overwhelmingly positive that one can learn from partners or colleagues in learning networks (across networks), focus groups or development committees¹⁶.
- » Persons who are a member of a development committee often have an advantage in knowledge and understanding of the reference frameworks.
- » The use of the reference frameworks has strengthened competence-oriented thinking in the various institutions.

It is noticeable that the **general knowledge** about the reference frameworks, the processes and procedures which exist to develop them, and the use of the frames of reference, is in general **low**.

- » End users do not always know where to get the right information or who to turn to.
- » The different roles or competences of AHOVOKS, the Flemish Department of Education and Training, School Advisory Services, Education Inspectorate, etc. are not sufficiently clear to the end users. As a result, they do not always know who to turn to in case of questions.
- » End users receive at times conflicting information via different channels.

9.3.2. Recommendations

Given the diverse nature of the findings, the recommendations are grouped under different headings with multiple actions. Idea Consult emphasizes the fact that the actions must be taken up (jointly) by several stakeholders.

Communication and information

Necessary **information** about the reference frameworks must reach everyone in a timely manner, unambiguously and unequivocally. A good **communication strategy** is needed to bridge the gap with the end users.

- » AHOVOKS can share the necessary information directly with the institutions so information is not interpreted and communicated differently by intermediaries and swiftly reaches all end users. The agency must ensure that sufficient information sessions or training courses about the reference frameworks are organised for the end users. These can touch upon issues such as the process of drawing up and/or adjusting reference frameworks, how to use the reference frameworks, what information can be requested from which authority, who can provide support when needed, etc.
- » AHOVOKS can critically evaluate its own communication material and communication tools to

16. The various training profiles are developed in working groups called development committees.

check for transparency and accessibility. This material must be adapted to the actual end-users, with special attention for teachers. Attention must also be paid to sharing the (existing) manual with the end users.

- » AHOVOKS can indicate which adjustments were made in a reference framework so it is immediately clear to the end users where changes have been made.

Language and level of complexity in frames of reference

AHOVOKS can also focus on a number of actions in terms of **language** and **level of complexity**.

- » Within each type of reference framework, AHOVOKS must strive for the same level of language complexity as much as possible. However, there must still be room for differences between the programmes when necessary. In addition, repetitions of competences are to be avoided as much as possible.
- » Concepts which are often used by AHOVOKS (such as, for example, 'competence') can be clearly explained.

Clarity/Concreteness vs. Freedom/Interpretation

In terms of **clarity/concreteness versus freedom/interpretation**, it is recommended that AHOVOKS, in consultation with the partners involved, ensures that:

- » existing and future reference frameworks offer a good balance between concreteness and freedom. On the one hand, it must be checked whether the competences are sufficiently clear and concrete. On the other hand, freedom with regard to how the competences are taught and evaluated must remain.
- » it is clear to all end users where the freedom of institutions applies and how this freedom can be implemented. Together with the institutions and the School Advisory Services, specific attention must be paid to a transparent evaluation policy, in which it is clear to what extent the competences must be evaluated and what freedom institutions have in this regard. In addition, there must also be more clarity about what the institutions are allowed to offer and evaluate. For the end users, there would be more clarity and peace of mind if the Education Inspectorate's vision with regard to the correct implementation of the reference frameworks is made explicit and disseminated, without its role as an inspection body fading.

Facilitate and support the translation or implementation

Various end users wish to receive the reference frameworks, in addition to the word files, in an **Excel format**. An Excel file would make it easier to convert the reference framework into own documents, templates and tools, especially for evaluations. For some it would

be useful if the reference frameworks could be imported directly into Smartschool.

The **timing** of the **development** of the reference frameworks must be geared better to the schedules of the education and training institutions. In general, people want to receive the frameworks faster or they want more time for their implementation. In concrete terms, one year of implementation time must be provided for in the planning when drawing up the reference frameworks.

In order to meet the requirements of the reference frameworks, institutions can be encouraged to set up more **collaborations** with companies and other institutions to share infrastructure, material or expertise. Possibilities to do so can be discussed with e.g. the Flemish Department of Education and Training or the Flemish Department of Work and Social Economy.

Involvement in development committees

Together with the School Advisory Services sufficient variation in the profiles and expertise of the members of the **development committees** must be guaranteed. For the degree programmes, it is considered useful to have both pedagogical and substantive expertise in the committees. The presence of someone from the sector is also seen as an added value. In general the number of committee members who are in the field on a daily basis should increase. They can help to ensure that the reference frameworks are clear and user-friendly for the end users. For a balanced composition, AHOVOKS must actively search for the right profiles with the School Advisory Services and motivate more end users to participate.

The chairmen and members of the development committees must receive additional support with regard to the bottlenecks mentioned. They must at least be aware of the necessary information and manuals.

Professionalisation of teachers and lecturers

In **teacher training courses**, sufficient attention must be paid to working with the different reference frameworks, even if curricula are available.

Teachers and lecturers must receive regular and adequate **training** on specific topics, skills and developments in their field. From the very beginning of the development of the professional qualifications, the institutions, supported by the School Advisory Services, should have an idea of how these competences have been acquired by the teachers and assessors. Institutions should also be able to respond appropriately to shortages by organising CPD courses or attracting external expertise. The institutions must be given the necessary resources and time to do so. Support must be offered in mapping the existing competences of teachers, lecturers and assessors and their future competence needs.

9.4 Conclusions and plans for the future

The recommendations from the advisory councils, the information collected in the round tables with the sector representatives, and the findings of the evaluation report, are taken into account by AHOVOKS to define the developments on which the agency will focus more strongly in the near future. This focus will include a. o. the following actions:

- » Within professional qualifications, we are moving towards more cross-disciplinary and less detailed competences. This can be addressed in the update procedure, which we would like to approach in a more structured way (per cluster), based on evidence and data.
- » The qualifications are currently very extensive, which makes them less suitable with regard to communication. Flanders is developing short descriptions of its professional qualifications, which will include the guidelines currently drafted by the EQF/Europass project group on short descriptions.
- » Communication products on the Flemish Qualification Structure, tailored to the needs of various target groups, are elaborated.
- » Qualifications and learning opportunities are linked to the new Europass portal.
- » In the LED the registration of smaller qualifications acquired by individuals (partial qualifications, certificates of competences) is introduced in the context of lifelong learning.

PART 3

10. Referencing criteria

In what follows we discuss the ten criteria for (re-)referencing as included in annex III of the EQF Recommendation.

10.1 Criterion 1

The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the competent authorities.

AHOVOKS is responsible for the processes that lead to the establishment of educational objectives and qualifications, in close collaboration with stakeholders in the educational field and partners at the labour market. The agency is appointed as **EQF National Coordination Point for Flanders**. In this capacity AHOVOKS is responsible for (re-)referencing the Flemish Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework.

An extensive stakeholder survey was conducted when drafting the first referencing reports (2011, 2014). For the update at hand **structural consultation** was guaranteed via various forums and advisory bodies of the various partners:

- » To ensure the involvement of policy stakeholders in the referencing process, AHOVOKS created a steering committee to guide and monitor the update process. The committee consisted of representatives of the Flemish Department of Education and Training, the Flemish Department of Work and Social Economy, and the Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (VDAB). This representation is a logical consequence of the fact that (legal) provisions on the Flemish Qualifications Framework, but also on e.g. validation and the Common Quality Framework, were developed and adopted by both policy areas of education and work.
- » The updated report has been submitted to the Management Committee Education – Work¹⁷ for notification on 25 May 2023.
- » The opinions and official advice of the Vlor and the SERV advisory bodies on recently developed regulations related to the FQF have been included in chapter 9.1.
- » Round table discussions were organised with sectors.

A brief report of these discussions is included in chapter 9.2.

- » The results of an evaluation of the practice of professional qualifications from a user perspective have been incorporated (chapter 9.3).
- » The quality assurance agencies (NVAO, Flemish Social Inspectorate and Education Inspectorate) were consulted on the draft of the update report. Annex V includes their stated agreement on the final referencing report.
- » International experts from the Netherlands and Luxemburg were actively involved (see also criterion 7).
- » A draft of the update of the referencing report was presented to the French Community and the German-Speaking Community of Belgium for feedback.

10.2 Criterion 2

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications frameworks or systems and the level descriptors of the EQF.

This chapter offers the actual comparison between the Flemish Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework. The objective of this comparison is to establish the correspondence between the qualifications levels in the FQF and the level descriptors of the EQF. In this regard, the concept of “best fit” is applied. This means that a perfect fit between two sets of qualification levels is probably not possible and some judgement or approximation is necessary to be able to draw conclusions regarding their alignment. A level from one framework will be referenced to the level of the other framework that matches best.

Since the core of the Flemish Qualifications Framework was not altered, the description of criterion 2 did not change in comparison to the previous versions of the referencing report.

The following approach was used to compare the FQF with the EQF:

- » First, a **general comparison** is made between the two frameworks and the purposes for which they were designed. Elements such as the structure of the frameworks, the basic principles, and the way levels are described are analysed.

17. In the Flemish administration there is one management committee per policy domain. The committee consists of the managers of the department and agencies of the policy domain in question. The forum discusses common managerial issues and looks after the integration of policy support and policy implementation at the administrative level. The heads of administration of policy domains with adjoining competences can convene in a joint management committee, as is the case for the policy domains of Education and Work.

- » Secondly, a more detailed analysis based on a direct, **linguistic comparison of the level descriptors of both frameworks** is carried out. In this analysis we compare the relation between level descriptors in both frameworks as well as the way they evolve.

The **Flemish Qualifications Framework** aims at:

- » offering an overarching classification of qualifications
- » enhancing the clarity of qualifications and the way they are related to each other
- » improving communication about qualifications between different actors, more precisely between the educational field and the field of work

The FQF is comprehensive and clarifies what competences can be expected from a person having achieved a certain qualification. The creation of the FQF is an important step in the further alignment of the areas of education and work. It allows for expressing the needs of the labour market in terms of qualifications and competences, in addition to required diplomas or education. Education and training providers on the other hand will start from the qualifications framework to develop education, training, and validation programmes, that lead towards the competences the labour market and society needs.

Enhanced clarity about the content of qualifications and their interrelationship supports the study and career choices of individuals. This turns the FQF into an essential element in the promotion and support of lifelong learning.

The **European Qualifications Framework** is reference framework which allows comparing countries' qualifications systems. It serves as a translation device to make qualifications more understandable across different countries and systems throughout Europe. The EQF serves two principal aims: to promote citizens' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning.

Regarding the basic principles of both frameworks, a number of similarities can be identified:

- » Both frameworks are based on the concept of learning outcomes.
- » Each framework has a hierarchical structure, in the sense that each level builds upon the underlying level.
- » Both frameworks are comprehensive, incorporating qualifications from all kinds of learning experiences, whether acquired through formal, non-formal or informal processes, or through general education, VET or higher education programmes.
- » In both frameworks, the descriptors that define the levels are completely neutral in terms of field(s) of learning.

Both frameworks make use of 8 level descriptors to describe qualifications and the relation between them. Each level descriptor is based on several **descriptor elements** that contain aspects of knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy. The way these descriptor elements are composed and defined however is different in both frameworks. The FQF makes use of five descriptor elements: knowledge, skills, context, autonomy and responsibility. The EQF only use three descriptor elements: knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy.

The FQF does not use the term **competence** as a separate descriptor element. The FQF defines competence as 'the ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes when performing social activities, and integrate these into one's actions' (definition in the Parliamentary act on the Flemish Qualifications Framework, see also chapter 1). The FQF sees competence and learning outcome as interchangeable terms. The EQF on the other hand uses a specific definition for competence: 'the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development' (EQF Recommendation, 2017).

Similarities and differences in the interpretation of the descriptor elements of both the FQF and ERQF are presented in table 4. This table shows that the FQF uses a more extended definition of **knowledge** than the EQF. Both definitions however mention elements regarding factual aspects on the one hand (events, facts, theories, ...) and more practical knowledge (techniques, methods, practices) on the other.

In both frameworks the basic interpretation of **skills** is comparable, being defined as 'the ability to use knowledge'. In the EQF the term 'skills' is further detailed in cognitive and practical aspects. The FQF does not make this distinction in the definition of skills, but uses three different concepts to describe the level descriptors: cognitive, problem solving and motor skills. The content of motor skills and practical skills is similar: EQF's practical skills mention 'manual dexterity', where the FQF's motor skills refer to practical and technical aspects.

	FQF	EQF
Context	<p>Environment context: describes the circumstances in which knowledge and skills have to be applied.</p> <p>Action context: describes the context that the professional practitioner must actively deal with/ work with. It describes the caution or special attention required to handle objects, people, machines, products,...</p>	
Knowledge	Describes declarative knowledge (events, facts, concepts, conceptual frameworks, principles and theories), as well as procedural knowledge (heuristics/rules of thinking, techniques, methods, procedures and strategies in a certain (part of an) area of knowledge) and the level to which extent the knowledge is mastered.	The outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.
Skills	The ability to effectively and efficiently use the acquired knowledge. The Flemish Qualifications Framework makes a distinction in its description of skills between motor, problem solving and cognitive skills.	The ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)
Autonomy	The possibility to take decisions independently (decision making authority/degree of independence)	The ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility
Responsibility	The obligation to ensure that something functions well and the willingness to be held accountable for it. This relates to the output of the activities or the impact of the professional practice on the whole (human level, financial level,...)	

Table 4: Similarities and differences in the FQF and EQF descriptor elements

In the FQF **autonomy and responsibility** are seen as two separate descriptor elements. In the description of the EQF according to the Recommendation of 2017, autonomy and responsibility are combined.

Although the FQF and the EQF are qualifications frameworks with some similarities, also a number of important **differences** between the two can be identified.

- » The main difference between both frameworks is the element '**context**' that is included in the FQF as a separate descriptor element and therefore strongly emphasized. While the context in which an individual is able to function is a clear element of a qualification in the FQF, this is not so explicit in the EQF. This difference in approach is a logical consequence of the difference in purpose of both qualifications frameworks. The FQF is a national framework that is used to determine qualifications and their level. In this regard the context is more relevant for a national framework than for a European meta-framework

that aims at comparing frameworks that are used in different contexts.

- » **Degree of detail:** The level descriptions are more elaborated in the FQF than in the EQF, mainly for the lower levels. FQF tries to describe terms such as 'basic/thorough knowledge' more concretely, which facilitates the process of assigning a level to learning outcomes.
- » **Use of verbs:** In the FQF a verb is used in each level descriptor. In the EQF this is only the case for the description of competences. The use of active verbs renders the descriptions more person-oriented. Moreover, these descriptions seem to be more behaviour-related, again focussing on qualifications that an individual can acquire.
- » Explicit mentioning of **work or study:** Although the Parliamentary Act on the Flemish Qualifications Structure explicitly distinguishes between educational and professional qualifications, these different

learning paths are not explicitly mentioned in the level descriptors. The FQF refers to areas, rather to be interpreted as fields, domains, sectors, etc. The EQF on the other hand consistently refers to “field of work or study” and therefore mentions explicitly both possible learning paths in the level descriptors.

Since the core of the Flemish Qualification Structure did not alter as a result of recent changes implemented in the Flemish education system, the **alignment** between the levels of the Flemish Qualification Structure and the levels of the European Qualification Framework, as defined in the Flemish referencing report in 2011 and confirmed in its update in 2014, holds up until today.

FQF	EQF
level 1	level 1
level 2	level 2
level 3	level 3
level 4	level 4
level 5	level 5
level 6	level 6
level 7	level 7
level 8	level 8

Table 5: Alignment of FQF and EQF levels

10.3 Criterion 3

The national qualifications frameworks or systems and their qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and related to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems.

Learning outcomes

The professional qualifications in the FQF describe the competences that a professional must possess on the basis of the descriptor elements (knowledge, skills, context, autonomy, responsibility). The competences from the professional qualifications are to be seen as learning outcomes. All competences/learning outcomes together determine the level of a qualification (see chapter 2). A manual provides clear guidelines so learning outcomes are described according to the same structure. These competences are used to design various vocationally-oriented education, training or validation trajectories, such as vocational training in adult education and professionally qualifying programmes.

In educational qualifications of levels 1 to 4, attainment targets and specific attainment targets are described as competence-oriented learning outcomes structured by a fixed format. In addition, the competences (learning outcomes) from the professional qualifications are

added to vocational education programmes. Educational qualifications in higher education (FQF 5 to 8) describe domain specific learning outcomes which must meet the criteria set out in the Codex of Higher Education (see also annex II).

Validation of non-formal or informal learning

With the adoption of the Parliamentary Act on the Common Quality Framework and the Parliamentary Act on Validation (2019) a new procedure for recognition of acquired competences was put in place. The professional qualifications are the basis for formal vocational education, professional training and validation procedures. They offer a validated and unambiguous framework for required competences.

The validation system in Flanders (see subchapter 5.2.8) focuses on the validation of professional qualifications, which are formally linked to the Flemish Qualifications Framework. Validation standards are based on the (competences/learning outcomes of the) professional qualification. The validation instruments developed by the validation bodies have to be based on these validation standards.

In this way an individual can acquire a professional qualification through education, training or through a validation procedure. Public as well as private education and training providers can apply for accreditation to become a validation body.

An alternative validation procedure are the exemptions procedures in higher education and adult education. These procedures are also linked to the Flemish Qualifications Framework. Education institutions can determine the exemptions procedures at their own discretion. In this way a learner can request exemptions from (parts of) a study programme.

Credit system

In higher education, the school year system has been replaced by a credit system. The workload of the different higher education programmes is expressed in credits, on the basis of the ECTS credit system:

- » EQF level 5 associate degree programmes comprise 90 or 120 credits.
- » Professionally and academically oriented bachelor degree programmes comprise a minimum of 180 credits (which more or less corresponds to three study years of 60 credits each);
- » Master degree programmes succeed a bachelor's degree programme and comprise at least 60 credits: When describing the learning outcomes of qualifications an abstraction is made of the context where the learning outcomes will be acquired, i.e. the provider of the programme, the time needed

to acquire the outcomes, ... Adding credits is an assignment of the programme providers, who depart from the 'average' student to do so. Credits only provide information with regard to the work load of a programme.

10.4 Criterion 4

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

The description of procedures and principles that are determined by the Flemish Government to recognise and register qualifications, as described above in chapters 2 and 3, show that the Flemish Government has created a transparent system in which relevant stakeholders are involved.

The procedures to include professional and educational qualifications in the Flemish Qualifications Framework are determined in the Parliamentary Act on the Flemish Qualifications Structure. Some changes have been made to these regulations since 2014, regarding the inclusion of partial qualifications and a procedure for updating professional qualifications. With regard to the composition of educational qualifications, changes were made in line with the modernisation of secondary education (FQF 1 to 4) and in accordance with the evolutions in higher education (FQF 5).

AHOVOKS assists the labour market parties submitting a **professional qualification** dossier by offering process management. The members of the validation commission validate the professional qualification dossiers based on criteria which are operationalized in objective indicators. The validation decision is taken in consensus. After validation, the classification commission applies a scientifically classification method, consisting of a qualitative and quantitative part. AHOVOKS then reviews the entire elaboration process of the professional qualification including its classification during a marginal review. A marginal review is a quality assurance technique whereby content requirements and the reasonableness of the evaluated process and its outcome are reviewed. AHOVOKS draws up a recommendation regarding recognition for the Flemish Government after the professional qualification dossier is validated and classified and the marginal review has been carried out. To conclude, AHOVOKS registers the qualifications in the Qualifications Database.

The procedures for the recognition of **educational qualifications** are also defined in the Parliamentary Act.

A distinction is made between educational qualifications at levels 1 to 4, level 5, and levels 6 to 8.

Educational qualifications from level 1 to 4 are based on attainment targets, and specific attainment targets and/or professional qualifications. A detailed overview of the different levels and types of educational qualifications is included in subchapter 3.1.

The Parliamentary Act states that AHOVOKS elaborates proposals or updates for educational qualifications on its own initiative or at any interested party's request. A proposal for an educational qualification describes the attainment targets, specific attainment targets, professional qualifications or partial qualifications that are part of it and describes the necessity and relevance on the basis of established criteria. All proposals and requests, converted into proposals or not, are then submitted to the Vlor for advice. The Flemish Government will recognise educational qualifications on a joint proposal of the minister responsible for Education and the minister responsible for Work.

The procedure for educational qualifications **level 5** is described in subchapter 3.2.

The competent service of the Flemish Government determines whether the development of an educational qualification on level 5 is eligible on the basis of certain criteria. Each level 5 associate degree programme is based on one or more professional qualifications with EQF level 5. The subject specific learning outcomes have to comprise the competences and knowledge as described in the professional qualification(s) on which the level 5 associate degree programme is based. AHOVOKS is involved in the development of level 5 associate degree programme subject specific learning outcomes to guarantee that the competences and knowledge of the professional qualification are recognizably comprised in the learning outcomes.

The subject specific learning outcomes and the link with the qualification level will be validated autonomously by the NVAO without intervention of the Flemish government. The validated learning outcomes are automatically recognised as educational qualifications and registered by AHOVOKS in a Qualifications Database.

Regarding the **levels 6 to 8** (see subchapter 3.3), the Parliamentary Act states that higher education institutions will jointly describe the domain specific learning outcomes for the higher education courses. The validated descriptions of the domain specific learning outcomes are automatically recognised as qualifications. NVAO submits the recognised qualifications, with the corresponding competences, to AHOVOKS for their registration in the Qualifications Database.

To maximise transparency, the Flemish Government decided to create two central **databases**: a Qualifications Database and a Flemish Database of Qualifications and Certificates (see chapter 7).

With a view to information provision to individuals, institutions and government bodies, and to support policy development, AHOVOKS registers all recognised qualifications in a **Qualifications Database**. In this database all recognised educational and professional qualifications, with the corresponding competences/learning outcomes, are documented. The required fields in annex 4 of the EQF Recommendation of 22 May 2017 are included in this database. AHOVOKS is responsible for the management of the database and for data exchange, e.g. with Europass.

With a view to service provision or policy development, all qualifications and certificates recognised or declared equivalent by the Flemish Community, together with minimal identification data of the holder of the certificate in question, are registered in a **Flemish Database of Qualifications and Certificates** (*Leer- en Ervaringsbewijzendatabank, LED*).

Individual citizens can enter the database via a personal profile and consult their own qualifications and certificates. The LED is an authentic and trusted source of data, which can be consulted by trusted third parties (e.g. Public Employment Service), which are bound to privacy and user agreements.

10.5 Criterion 5

The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications frameworks or systems and are consistent with the principles on quality assurance as specified in Annex IV to this recommendation.

The quality assurance system for education and training is described in chapter 6. In this subchapter we emphasize a number of characteristics that illustrate how the quality assurance system is consistent with the European principles and guidelines with regard to national contexts as included in annex 4 of the EQF Recommendation.

Quality assurance of the design of qualifications is included in the procedure for the development of educational and professional qualifications.

Professional qualifications (see chapter 2) are developed on the basis of a manual. The qualifications are then tested against a number of predefined criteria by the validation committee. In the classification committee, AHOVOKS takes on quality assurance to a. o. ensure consistency with other qualifications. A marginal review is carried out by the agency to review the content requirements and the

reasonableness of the evaluated process and its outcome.

AHOVOKS recommends the development or updating of educational qualifications (see chapter 3) of levels 1 to 4 based on certain criteria. Also the Flemish Education Council (Vlor) issues recommendations also based on these criteria.

Also for education qualifications at level 5, AHOVOKS bases itself on predefined criteria to issue an advice on the desirability of their development. Because of the relationship with the corresponding professional qualification(s), AHOVOKS is involved in the process of describing the domain specific learning outcomes.

The NVAO validates the domain specific learning outcomes for educational qualifications of levels 5 to 7.

The **Education Inspectorate** is responsible for the external quality assurance of education, training and validations programmes in all educational institutions, with the exception of the programmes offered in higher education.

The Inspectorate (see subchapter 6.1) uses the Reference Framework for Quality in Education. In addition to 'policy' and 'quality development', the framework focuses on 'results and effects' and 'stimulating development'. Development scales of relevance in this context include: the alignment of the offer with the validated target framework, the learning effects and their focus on the validated target framework.

Institutions are expected to develop their own quality assurance policy, possibly in collaboration with the School Advisory Services. They are encouraged, both before and after the inspection visit, to reflect on and develop their own (quality assurance) practices on the basis of the development scales.

The Education Inspectorate checks whether the institution meets the quality expectations of the Reference Framework for Quality in Education on the basis of relevant samples. The inspections are always based on a triangulation of research methods and sources (quantitative and qualitative data, documents, observations, interviews and case studies). The Education Inspectorate also involves relevant stakeholders (students, parents, etc.) in its assessments.

Based on the findings, and linked to the development scales, the inspection team determines whether to assign a pass or fail. Reflection meetings are held with policy teams, the school team and the team of teachers. During the synthesis discussion, the inspection team communicates the final scores of its evaluations and a recommendation, while also motivating its decisions. Possible objectives and actions for the further development of quality can also be discussed.

The **Flemish Social Inspectorate** (see subchapter 6.3) uses the quality areas from the Common Quality Framework in its external quality assurance of professionally qualifying training programmes or validation programmes. These form the basis for development scales and indicators. The quality areas check whether the objectives, the design, the support, the evaluation and the internal quality assurance processes put into practice by the organisation actually help the learner to obtain the learning outcomes (i.e. the competences of the professional qualification). Document analysis, interviews and observations are used to assess the quality of the processes.

The **Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders** is responsible for quality assurance in higher education (see subchapter 6.2). Higher education institutions must closely monitor their internal quality. External quality assurance is carried out on two levels: an institutional review and a programme accreditation. Strong emphasis lies on autonomy, self-reflection and internal quality assurance of the institutions, which must involve a large number of internal and external stakeholders. The criteria and the assessment framework are transparent and in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015). The quality assurance reports are publicly accessible via the Higher Education Register.

10.6 Criterion 6

The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies that the referencing report is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.

This updated report on the referencing of the Flemish Qualifications Framework to the EQF has been approved by the following quality assurance bodies, by means of stated agreement in annex V.

- » The Educational Inspectorate of the Flemish Ministry of Education
- » The Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders
- » The Flemish Social Inspectorate

10.7 Criterion 7

The referencing process shall involve international experts and the referencing reports shall contain the written statement of at least two international experts from two different countries on the referencing process.

Two international experts were involved in the update of the referencing report:

- » Jos Noesen (expert Qualifications, Luxembourg)
- » Tijs Pijls (programme director NCP NLQF)

A pre-final draft of the update report was presented to the international experts for feedback. Their comments were addressed when finalising the report. The written statements of the international experts are included in annex IV.

Table 6 summarises the conclusions of the international experts:

Criterion	Mr. Thijs Pijls	Mr. Jos Noesen
1	addressed	addressed
2	partially addressed	addressed
3	addressed	addressed
4	addressed	addressed
5	addressed	addressed
6	addressed	addressed
7	addressed	addressed
8	addressed	addressed
9	addressed	addressed
10	addressed	addressed

Table 6: Conclusions of the international experts on addressing the 10 criteria of the EQF Recommendation

In addition to the international experts, the report was presented to the French and German Speaking Communities of Belgium. Ms. Clara Jacquemart and Mr. Patrick Bergmans of the German Speaking Community drafted feedback on the update of the Flemish referencing report.

10.8 Criterion 8

The competent authority or authorities shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications frameworks or systems with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing, and the evidence supporting it, shall be published by the competent authorities, including the EQF National Coordination Points, and shall address separately each of the criteria. The same report can be used for self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, in accordance with the self-certification criteria of the latter.

The report at hand has been drafted and coordinated by the Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education,

Qualifications and Study Grants. Moreover, it has been approved by the steering committee that guided and monitored the referencing process and consisted (apart from four international experts and members of AHOVOKS) of experts of the Flemish Department of Education and Training, the Department of Work and Social Economy, the Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (VDAB) and Vlaio.

This is the single, comprehensive report setting out the referencing, and supporting evidence of the Flemish Qualifications Framework to the EQF. Besides the necessary background information on the Flemish situation regarding qualifications and the related frameworks, it clearly addresses each of the referencing criteria.

The report will be made publicly available through publication by AHOVOKS on www.vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be.

The relationship between the Flemish Higher Education Reform Act, the Flemish Qualifications System (levels 5, 6, 7 and 8) and the Dublin descriptors (QF-EHEA) is presented in annex II.

10.9 Criterion 9

Within 6 months from having referenced or updated the referencing report, Member States and other participating countries shall publish the referencing report and provide relevant information for comparison purposes on the relevant European portal.

Upon completion of the referencing report in 2011 and its first update in January 2014, AHOVOKS informed the European Commission that the referencing process had been completed, and provided a link to the published referencing report. The same procedure will be followed for the update at hand.

10.10 Criterion 10

Further to the referencing process, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements) and/or qualification registers issued by the competent authorities should contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications frameworks or systems, to the appropriate EQF level.

The EQF Recommendation requires member states to 'where appropriate, take measures, so that all newly issued qualification documents by the competent authorities

(e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements), and/or registers of qualifications contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level'.

The diplomas and certificates of programmes that are already officially based on qualifications as described in the Flemish Qualifications Framework both contain the FQF and EQF levels.

As systems are gradually introduced (e.g. modularisation of adult education, transformation of associate degree programmes and modernisation of secondary education), the proportion of certificates with an FQF/EQF level will steadily increase. The current situation is included in table 7.

In Flanders **diploma supplements** (with FQF/EQF levels) are issued together with every associate, bachelor or master degree¹⁸. Diploma supplements are automatically delivered in Dutch, but upon request every student can, free of charge, receive an English version from the higher education institution. People who have obtained a higher education degree before the Bologna structure was introduced, can request a translation of their old diploma supplement.

A similar service exists for vocational education in the form of certificate supplements.

Currently, **certificate supplements** are available in Flanders for a number of certificates of work experience and certificates handed out by the Public Employment Service (VDAB). The National Europass Centre (Belgium - Flanders) is responsible for the follow-up and the developments on certificate supplements (www.europass-vlaanderen.be). In Flanders, the EQF NCP, together with Europass Flanders, closely monitors the developments in the context of the Europass Platform and certificate supplements and will take action accordingly.

18. When issuing a doctoral diploma, some higher education institutions also hand out a supplement which lists the (educational) activities in which the doctoral student took part.

Qualification level	Certificate	Inclusion of FQF/EQF level
Educational qualification FQF/EQF1	Primary education certificate	No yet FQF/EQF level on certificate yet
Educational qualification FQF/EQF2	Basic education certificate Proof of education qualification level 2	No FQF/EQF level on certificate yet FQF/EQF levels on certificate
Educational qualification FQF/EQF3	Vocational secondary education diploma	FQF/EQF levels included on diplomas issued in dual learning system From September 2024: FQF/EQF levels included on certificates of all training courses
Educational qualification FQF/EQF4	Diploma of secondary education (general secondary education, secondary education in the arts, technical secondary education) Adult education	In dual learning pathways: FQF/EQF levels on diplomas From 1/9/24: all training courses No FQF/EQF level on diploma yet
Educational qualification FQF/EQF5	Associate degree	FQF/EQF levels on diplomas
Educational qualification FQF/EQF6	Bachelor's degree	FQF/EQF levels on diplomas
Educational qualification FQF/EQF7	Master's degree	FQF/EQF levels on diplomas
Educational qualification FQF/EQF8	PhD programme	FQF/EQF levels on diplomas
Professional qualification FQF/EQF 1-8	Through common quality assurance (validation programme or training) Validation programmes in education Adult education: Basic education, General secondary adult education, Vocational adult education Part-time artistic education	FQF/EQF levels on certificates FQF/EQF levels on certificates For training based on professional qualification: FQF/EQF levels on certificates FQF/EQF levels on certificates

Table 7: Inclusion of FQF and EQF qualifications level on diplomas and certificates

Annex I. Format of a professional qualification dossier

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION DOSSIER

Title



BK-number-version

1. Global

1.1 TITLE

1.2 DEFINITION

1.3 DEMARCATION (OPTIONAL)

1.4 PARTIAL QUALIFICATIONS (OPTIONAL)

The professional qualification 'x' includes partial qualification 'y' that consists of the following competences: 1, 2, 3,...

1.5 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (OPTIONAL)

1.6 SECTORS

1.7 (LABOUR MARKET) ACTORS INVOLVED

Principal submitters

Co-submitters

1.8 REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

Reference framework

Relation to the reference framework

2. Competences

2.1 COMPETENCES

2.2 DESCRIPTION OF COMPETENCES ON THE BASIS OF DESCRIPTORS

Knowledge

- » basic knowledge A
- » knowledge B
- » knowledge D
- » advanced knowledge C
- » advanced knowledge E

Cognitive skills

- » skill A

Problem solving skills

- » skill B
- » skill D

Motor skills

- » skill C

Environmental context

		skills			knowledge (per competence)
		Cognitive	Problem solving	Motor	
Competence title 1	skill A	√			basic knowledge A
	skill B		√		knowledge B
	skill C			√	advanced knowledge C
Competence title 2	skill C		√		knowledge D
					advanced knowledge E

Action context

Autonomy

- » Is independent in
- » Is bound by
- » Appeals to

Responsibility

- » Competence 1
- » Competence 2

2.3 CERTIFICATES AND PRECONDITIONS

Legal certificates and preconditions

Additional certificates

3. Labour market relevance/ Social relevance

3.1 LABOUR MARKET RELEVANCE

Employment information and data

Vacancies information and data

3.2 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RELEVANCE

Importance from the cultural-historical perspective

Importance for leisure time

Importance from a socio-cultural perspective

Importance from an artistic perspective

4. Relation to other qualifications

Annex II. Relationship between the Flemish Higher Education Reform Act (i.e. the Flemish Parliamentary Act of 4 April 2003 on higher education reform in Flanders, as amended), the Flemish Qualifications System (levels 5, 6, 7 and 8), and the Dublin descriptors (QF-EHEA)

Both the level descriptors specified in the 2003 Flemish Higher Education Reform Act and the 2008 EQF descriptors were taken into account for the description of the qualification levels for the Flemish qualifications system. In this way, it was ensured that there exists a relationship between the descriptors of the Flemish and the European framework for higher education (also called the Dublin descriptors) and the descriptors of the Flemish and European framework for lifelong learning (EQF).

Table 8 offers a comparison of the Flemish and European level descriptors. The first column includes the level descriptors of the Flemish qualifications system. The second column shows the level descriptions of higher education, as specified in the Codex of Higher Education and which serve as a basis for accreditation. The third column lists the Dublin descriptors for the levels of Short cycle Bachelor, Master and Doctor of the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area. The EQF descriptors of levels 5 to 8 are compatible with these Dublin descriptors

Flemish Qualifications System (30 April 2009 Flemish Parliamentary act)	Codex of Higher Education (Art II.141 - as amended)	QF-EHEA (Dublin descriptors)
Level 5	Associate degree	Short cycle descriptors
<p>A level 5 qualification includes the ability to extend the information from a specific domain with concrete and abstract data (extrapolation) or to supplement it with missing data (interpolation) and to use conceptual frameworks. On the other hand, people are aware of the scope of domain specific knowledge. Integrated cognitive and/or motor skills are applied. Theoretical and practical knowledge are transferred. Procedures and strategic thinking are used flexibly and inventively when performing tasks and solving problems. Acquired knowledge and skills are used in a range of new, complex contexts. The autonomy, initiative and responsibility extend beyond one's own work and actions; group results are also encouraged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » expanding or supplementing with missing data the information from a specific domain with concrete and abstract data; using conceptual frameworks and being aware of the scope of the domain specific knowledge; » applying integrated cognitive and motor skills; » transferring knowledge and applying procedures flexibly and inventively for the execution of tasks and for the strategic solution of concrete and abstract problems; » acting in a series of new, complex contexts; » autonomous functioning with initiative; » taking responsibility for achieving personal results and for promoting collective results. 	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the higher education short cycle are awarded to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon general secondary education and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks; such knowledge provides an underpinning for a field of work or vocation, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle » Can apply their knowledge and understanding in occupational contexts. » Have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems » Can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients. » Have the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy

Level 6	Bachelor	First cycle - Bachelor level
<p>A level 6 qualification requires the ability to solve unfamiliar complex problems by interpreting a relevant collection of data and making innovative use of selected methods and means. The knowledge and insights into a specific area needed for this are critically evaluated and combined. Such qualifications ask for a considerable ability to make abstractions and to apply complex and specialised skills linked to research outcomes. Holders of this qualification level will have the qualities necessary to act independently and exercise initiative in complex and specialised contexts. They are able to take shared responsibility for the definition of collective results.</p>	<p>Professional bachelor</p> <p>In the courses leading to the degree of bachelor in higher professional education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » mastery of general competences such as the capacity for logical thought and reasoning, the ability to acquire and process information, the ability for critical reflection and project-based work, creativity, the ability to perform simple supervision tasks, the ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialists as well as laymen, and a positive attitude towards lifelong learning; » mastery of general professional competences like the ability to work together as part of a team, a solution-oriented attitude in the sense of being able to define and analyse independently complex problematic situations in professional practice, and the ability to develop and apply effective strategies to solve them, and to develop a sense of social responsibility in connection with the professional practice; » mastery of specific professional competences at the level of a newly-qualified professional. 	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle are awarded to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study; » can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study; » have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues; » can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both a specialist and non-specialist public; » have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.

(The FQF does not make a distinction between qualifications within the same level of the VKS. Therefore, the descriptor is repeated here.)

A level 6 qualification requires the ability to solve unfamiliar complex problems by interpreting a relevant collection of data and making innovative use of selected methods and means. The knowledge and insights into a specific area needed for this are critically evaluated and combined. Such qualifications ask for a considerable ability to make abstractions and to apply complex and specialised skills linked to research outcomes. Holders of this qualification level will have the qualities necessary to act independently and exercise initiative in complex and specialised contexts. They are able to take shared responsibility for the definition of collective results.

Academic bachelor

In the courses leading to the degree of bachelor in academic education:

- » mastery of general competences such as the capacity for logical thought and reasoning, the ability to acquire and process information, the capacity for critical reflection, creativity, being able to perform simple management tasks, entrepreneurial acting, the ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialists as well as laymen and a positive attitude towards life-long learning
- » mastery of general academic competences such as a research attitude, knowledge of research methodologies and techniques and the ability to apply them adequately, the ability to collect the relevant data that can influence the formation of an opinion about social, scientific and ethical issues, appreciation of uncertainty, ambiguity and the limits of knowledge, and the ability to initiate problem-driven research
- » an understanding of basic academic, discipline-related knowledge inherent to a certain domain of the sciences or the arts, systematic understanding of the key elements of a discipline which includes acquiring coherent and detailed knowledge that is inspired partly by the most recent developments in the discipline, and an understanding of the structure of the specialisation and its inter-relatedness with other specialities.

(The Dublin descriptors do not make a distinction between qualifications within the cycle). Therefore, the Dublin descriptor for the Bachelor cycle is repeated here.)

- » have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;
- » can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;
- » have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;
- » can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both a specialist and non-specialist public;
- » have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.

Level 7	Master	Second cycle - Level of Master
<p>A level 7 qualification requires the ability to integrate and reformulate knowledge and insights from a specific field or at the interface between different fields. Complex new skills, linked to autonomous, standardised research are used to act with full autonomy and right of decision in unpredictable, complex and specialised contexts. This signifies an impulse to original and creative thinking. This level is characterised by the fact that advanced and/or innovative problem-solving techniques and methods are subjected to critical assessment and applied. This allows for taking the final responsibility for the definition of collective outcomes.</p>	<p>In the courses leading to a master degree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » mastery of general competences at an advanced level such as the ability to reason and act in an academic manner, the ability to handle complex problems, the ability to reflect on one's own thoughts and work, and the ability to convert this reflection into the development of more effective solutions, the ability to communicate one's own research and solutions to professional colleagues and laymen, and the ability to develop an opinion in an uncertain context; » mastery of general academic competences at an advanced level such as the ability to apply research methods and techniques, the ability to design research, the ability to apply paradigms in the domain of the sciences or the arts and the ability to indicate the limits of paradigms, originality and creativity regarding the continuously expanding body of knowledge and insight, and the ability to collaborate in a multidisciplinary environment; » advanced understanding and insight in scientific, discipline- specific knowledge inherent to a certain domain of the sciences or the arts, insight in the most recent knowledge in the subject/discipline or parts of it, the ability to follow and interpret the direction in which theory formation is developing, the ability to make an original contribution towards the body of knowledge of one or several parts of the subject/discipline, and display specific competences characteristic for the subject/discipline such as designing, researching, analysing and diagnosing; or the competences needed for either independent research or the independent practice of the arts at the level of a newly-qualified researcher (in the arts), or the general and specific professional competences needed for independent application of academic or artistic knowledge at the level of a newly-qualified professional whether or not as an entrepreneur. 	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with Bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context; » can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study; » have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but this includes reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements; » can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously; » have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.

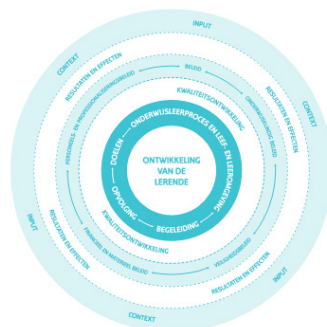
Level 8	Doctorate	Third cycle - Doctorate level
<p>A level 8 qualification represents knowledge of a substantial part of a specific field or knowledge at the interface of different fields. Existing knowledge is extended or redefined. Furthermore, new knowledge is interpreted and created through original research or advanced scientific study. The context is extremely complex and has broad, innovating implications. Level 8 qualifications expect the design and execution of projects which expand and redefine existing procedural knowledge, aimed at the development of new skills, techniques, applications, practices and/or materials. Responsibility is taken for the development of the professional practice or scientific research whilst adopting a highly critical stance and showing managerial capacity.</p>	<p>The preparation of dissertations leading to a doctoral degree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » systematically understanding a discipline and mastering the skills and methods of research in that subject area; » ability to design, develop, carry out and adjust a large-scale research process with the integrity appropriate to a researcher; » making a contribution to the expansion of knowledge by carrying out a considerable amount of original research, part of which is worthy of a nationally or internationally reviewed publication; » being able to carry out a critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas; » being able to communicate with peers and the broader national and international scientific community, as well as with society at large, about one's field of expertise; » making an innovative contribution within the academic and professional context, leading to technological, social or cultural progress in a knowledge society. 	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field; » have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity; » have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication; » are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas; » can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise; » can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.

Table 8: Comparison of the Flemish and European level descriptors for higher education

Annex III. The Reference Framework for Quality in Education



The reference framework for Quality in Education



	section
	subsection
	quality expectation

Results and effects						Policy	
R1	The school reached the minimum desired output with the widest possible range of learners.						
R2	The school aims for the well-being and involvement of all learners and the school team and for the satisfaction of parents and other relevant partners.						
R3	The school strives to ensure that the learner benefits as much as possible from what he/she learns.	Stimulating development					
		Goals/objectives		Guidance			
R4	The school stimulates every learner's progress in his/her studies.	D1	The school team achieves a goal-oriented, broad and harmonious education which is meaningful.	B1	The school team gives shape to the guidance based on a supported vision and system, and monitors the effects of the guidance.		
R5	The school guarantees access to education for every learner.	D2	The school team adopts goals that accord with the validated framework of goals and ensures coherence between the goals.	B2	The school team provides guidance with regard to learning, learning career, social-emotional development and physical well-being.	BL7	The school develops and pursues an effective policy in the area of teaching and learning.
R6	The school is committed to fostering long-term effects among all the learners.	D3	The school team adopts challenging and achievable goals.	B3	The school team offers every learner appropriate guidance with a view to equal educational opportunities.	BL8	The school develops and pursues an effective staffing policy that is integral and cohesive.
		D4	The school team makes the goals and assessment criteria explicit.	B4	The school team gives shape to the guidance together with the learner, the parents/home environment and other relevant partners.	BL9	The school develops and pursues an effective professionalisation policy and in this regard, pays particular attention to novice team members.
Quality development		Educational process and living and learning environment		Monitoring		Financial and material policy	
K1	The school develops its quality based on a supported vision that is translated into the teaching/learning practice.	V1	The school team and the learners together create a positive and stimulating school and classroom climate.	O1	The school team gives the learners adequate feedback to ensure progress in the learning and development process.	BL10	The school develops and pursues an effective financial and material policy.
K2	The school evaluates its work cyclically, systematically and reliably based on the results and effects among the learners.	V2	The school team and the learners deal positively with diversity.	O2	The school team evaluates the teaching/learning process and the achievement of the goals in a broad and informed manner.	BL11	The school manages the costs for all learners.
		V3	The living and learning environment and the educational organisation support the achievement of the goals.	O3	The school team adjusts the teaching/learning process in accordance with the feedback and evaluation information.	Safety policy	
K3	The school guarantees and develops the quality of the teaching/learning practice.	V4	The school team offers an appropriate, active and coherent range of teaching subjects.	O4	The school team decides and reports in an informed manner on the attainment of the objectives by the learner.	BL12	The school develops and pursues an effective policy for the physical and mental safety of the living, learning and working environment.

Annex IV. Common quality frameworks for professionally qualifying pathways offered outside education

Common quality framework for professionally qualifying training programmes

Quality area 1: OBJECTIVES

Descriptor 1: The training programme corresponds to the content and proficiency level of the competences as laid down in the professional qualification.

I. 1 The training programme contains all competences as laid down in the professional qualification. The training programme is balanced and tailored to the expected level of proficiency. The providers/partners who offer a certain training programme together define the programme in question.

Quality area 2: DESIGN

Descriptor 2: The training programme is designed, organised and tailored to the capacities of the learner in such a way that the competences can be acquired.

Customisation

I.2 The provider uses the relevant starting competences of the learner. When designing the training programme, the possibilities, progress and (career) perspectives of each learner are taken into account. Exemptions for certain pathway components are granted on the basis of transparent procedures and valid criteria.

Organisation offer

I.3 The training pathway is logically structured and coherent. The training time is optimally used for learning, practicing and evaluating the competences. The providers/partners who offer a certain training programme together define the design of the programme in question.

Method

I.4 The training programme and the competences to be acquired are made explicit for the learner. There is a variety of learning activities that enable the acquisition of competences. Working methods are used that allow the learner to get acquainted with the reality at the shop floor.

Material infrastructure

I.5 The material infrastructure and learning resources support the acquisition of competences and are used efficiently.

Quality area 3: GUIDANCE

Descriptor 3: The learner is guided in such a way that he has optimal opportunities to acquire the competences of the professional qualification.

Information

I.6 The learner receives targeted information about the training pathway, the options on the labour market and the options to progress to programmes that lead to an educational qualification and other further training.

Support

I.7 During the training programme the provider tailors its guidance to the learning progress, care needs, and possibilities of the learner. The providers/partners who offer a certain training programme agree on the guidance offered for the programme in question.

I. 8 The learning climate is positive and stimulating. The learner receives targeted and systematic feedback about his learning process in relation to the competences to be acquired during his training programme.

Quality area 4: EVALUATION

Descriptor 4: The competences to be acquired are evaluated in a valid and reliable manner. The reporting shows in a transparent way whether the competences have been effectively acquired.

I.9 The evaluation is representative of the content and proficiency level of the competences in the professional qualification.

I.10 The evaluation criteria are unambiguous, objective and clear to all involved. The evaluation procedures and instruments guarantee a valid and reliable evaluation. The providers/partners who offer a certain training programme agree on the evaluation practice of the programme in question.

I.11 The evaluation results are communicated clearly and timely to the learner. The provider uses transparent decision rules for awarding qualification certificates. The reporting contains evaluation data that transparently substantiate the decision. The providers/partners who offer a certain training programme agree on the reporting practice.

Quality area 5: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ADJUSTMENT

Descriptor 5: Points for improvement that are established in connection with the quality areas are adjusted. Strong points are safeguarded.

I.12 Points for improvement that are established in connection with the objectives, design, guidance and evaluation are adjusted by the providers. Strong points are safeguarded. The providers/partners who offer a certain training programme agree on this.

Common quality framework for professionally qualifying validation programmes

Quality area 1: OBJECTIVES

Descriptor 1: The assessment corresponds to the competences as laid down in the professional qualification.

I. 1 The validation assessment contains all competences as laid down in the professional qualification. The validation assessment is balanced and tailored to the expected level of proficiency. The providers/partners who assess a certain validation programme, will coordinate on this.

Quality area 2: DESIGN

Descriptor 2: The validation assessment is designed and organised in such a way that the competences can be assessed for every validation candidate.

I.2 Exemptions for partial qualifications are granted on the basis of transparent procedures and valid criteria.

I.3 The various parts of the assessment are logically structured and coordinated so that the assessment forms a coherent whole. The time available is in accordance with the validation standard and is optimally used to make the competences visible and to evaluate them. The providers/partners who assess a certain validation pathway agree on the design of that validation pathway.

I.4 The candidate is made familiar with the setting and the course of the assessment. At the start, the candidate receives targeted information about the validation assessment and the competences to be assessed. The design guarantees that the competences are assessed based on authentic and realistic contexts.

I.5 The material infrastructure is in accordance with the validation standard, supports the assessment of competences and is used efficiently.

Quality area 3: GUIDANCE

Descriptor 3: The validation candidate is guided during the validation assessment in such a way that the candidate is given optimal opportunities to make the competences visible for evaluation.

I.6 The provider gives the candidate targeted instructions during the validation assessment so that the candidate correctly understands the assignments or tasks. The provider creates the opportunity for the candidate to request additional information. The providers/partners who assess a certain validation pathway agree on the guidance of the validation pathway in question.

Quality area 4: EVALUATION

Descriptor 4: The competences are evaluated validly and reliably. The reporting shows transparently whether the competences have been effectively acquired.

I.7 The assessment is consistent with the content of the validation standard.

I.8 The assessment criteria are unambiguous, objective and clear to all involved. The assessment is valid and reliable. The

providers/partners who assess a certain validation pathway agree on the assessment practice of the validation pathway in question.

I.9 After the assessment, the candidate receives targeted feedback about the assessment.

I.10 The evaluation results are communicated clearly and timely to the candidate. The provider uses transparent decision rules for awarding qualification certificates. The reporting contains evaluation data that transparently substantiate the decision. The providers/partners who assess a certain validation pathway agree on the reporting practice of the validation process in question.

Quality area 5: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ADJUSTMENT

Descriptor 5: Points for improvement that are established in connection with the quality areas are adjusted. Strong points are safeguarded.

I.11 Points for improvement that are established in connection with the objectives, design, guidance and evaluation are adjusted by the providers. Strong points are safeguarded. The providers/partners who assess a certain validation pathway agree on this.

Annex V. Written statements of quality assurance organisations and international experts

Statement by Jos Noessen, Luxembourg

This update report is interesting from several points of view. It reflects the changes in the Flemish education and training landscape since the last referencing report.

It shows the ongoing reform process in the formal sector. However, this does not mean that the report describes an unfinished situation. It outlines a modernisation process that is rather a structural and content-related change. This change affects the entire landscape from the professional qualifications, through general education to higher education. This state is clearly outlined through the different chapters. In this context two elements that illustrate this spirit of change have to be mentioned. On one side the inclusion of professional qualifications for social roles and on the other partial qualification, within a full professional qualification.

Another interesting description is the procedure for the recognition of the different qualifications in the different sectors. The procedures for each sector are clearly described respectively illustrated and give a good insight on how the different qualification types are aligned to the Flemish Qualification Framework taking into account the specificities of each sector.

Besides the ongoing monitoring of the development of qualifications, the involvement of the different stakeholders is a key factor. In addition to their concrete involvement in giving their advice on the draft decrees and decisions the round table discussions about their experiences with the Flemish Qualification Structure especially the professional qualifications, underline their involvement.

Finally, another element, the user perspective, makes it clear that the FQF is not only an instrument for fulfilling European requirements, but also pursues a practical goal.

Thus, after reading this updated report, it can be said that it not only serves the criteria and procedures defined in Annex III of the 2017 Recommendation, but also demonstrates that a qualification framework can indeed contribute to the modernising of the education and training system. Thus, it meets the objective of transparency of the users qualifications.

Statement by Tijjs Pijls, the Netherlands (NCP NLQF)

The FQF referencing report is a well-structured, readable and comprehensive report describing the process of the development of the FQF based on experiences of the first years of implementation and accompanied by several studies. The report shows the developments and changes the FQF has undergone in recent years. Relevant stakeholders have been involved as input for writing the update of the referencing report. The report sets out the extensive range of stakeholders central to the FQF and articulate their role in the development, implementation and governance of the FQF.

Much work has been done in Flanders since the last referencing report! The framework has provided some interesting developments. First, the possibility of partial qualifications to certify smaller units with labour market value. Secondly, the fact that qualifications are better aligned with the labour market. Third, vocational qualifications for social roles were introduced, extending the FQS to leisure and voluntary work. Fourth, the link with validation and informal learning. The introduction of the Validation Act allowed public and private providers to set up vocational qualification training or validation programmes leading to a certificate of professional qualification, a certificate of partial qualification or a certificate of competences. And finally, more qualifications were linked to the FQF.

The report reveals some interesting recommendations. In particular, the focus on communication towards end-users and involvement of teachers is appealing.

As one of the international experts, I am pleased to have been afforded the opportunity to comment on the report on the updating the referencing of the FQF. I thank the Flemish colleagues for giving me the opportunity to comment on the update report and wish them every success in further developing the FQF.

Den Bosch, 19-05-2023

Tijjs Pijls

Statement by the Education Inspectorate

The Educational Inspectorate is responsible for the external quality assurance of education, training and validation programmes in all educational institutions, with the exception of the programmes in higher education. The Inspectorate declares that the description of the quality assurance as presented in the update report is in line with national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.

Statement by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders

The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) is the quality assurance agency that independently safeguards the quality of higher education in Flanders. NVAO accredits existing and new programmes, and assesses the education policy of higher education institutions and its conduct to confirm the quality of its programmes. It is also responsible for the validation of the domain-specific learning outcomes at EQF-level 5 to 8. The NVAO declares that this update report provides a description of quality assurance in higher education that is in line with national quality assurance arrangements.

Statement by the Flemish Social Inspectorate

The Inspectorate of the Department of Work and Social Economy (Flemish Social Inspectorate, FSI) carries out the external quality assurance of the workplace component of dual learning programmes and of the professionally qualifying training and validation programmes that are organised by public or private partners within the regulations of the Common Quality Framework. The FSI declares that the description of quality assurance with regard to the professionally qualifying training and validation programmes, as presented in the update report, is in line with national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.