

**The referencing document of
The Dutch National
Qualification Framework to
the European Qualification
Framework
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Colofon

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Authors Karin van der Sanden, Wouter Smit and Marijke Dashorst

Translation John Hart

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Introduction

The Recommendation adopting the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) was approved by the European Parliament and the Council in April 2008 (Annex 2).

The Recommendation invites Member States to link their national qualifications systems to the EQF by referencing their national qualifications levels to the relevant EQF levels and, where applicable, to develop national qualification frameworks in line with national legislation and practice.

The success of the EQF will depend on the transparency of these national referencing processes and the credibility of the processes with national and international stakeholders.

The EQF Advisory Group, which comprises representatives of Member States, the social partners, CEDEFOP, ETF and the Council of Europe and other stakeholders, has formulated ten criteria for the alignment of the referencing processes and Member States have agreed to write referencing documents according to these ten criteria. In the interest of public accountability these documents will be discussed in the EQF Advisory Group and published on the EQF portal.

The Netherlands has decided to follow up the Recommendation and has started to develop the Dutch National Qualifications Framework (NLQF). The NLQF is a systematic classification of all qualification levels in The Netherlands. Qualifications will be classified at the appropriate level in the NLQF and, thus, will be aligned to an appropriate EQF level. On the one hand, there are qualifications regulated by the Ministry of Education Culture and Science, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation (qualifications concerning food and the natural and living environment) and the Ministry of Healthcare, Welfare and Sports (qualifications for medical specialists). On the other hand, there are many other qualifications which have significance and 'qualifying' power in the labour market. Registration in the NLQF will strengthen the value of these qualifications. Bringing these two different kinds of qualifications together in one qualifications framework provides insight through the NLQF into the levels of the main qualifications in The Netherlands.

On 11 May 2011, The Minister for Education, Culture and Science received the advice of the Committee established to oversee the development of the NLQF and referencing to the EQF (the NLQF-EQF Committee, also known as the Leijnse Committee).

In September, the Education Minister and the Government is expected to adopt the NLQF, the referencing to the EQF and the identification of a national coordination point (NCP) for the framework. The implementation phase has just started. This document will be presented at the meeting of the EQF Advisory Group in October 2011.

This referencing document consists of three parts:

- Part 1 is a description of Dutch education.
- Part 2 describes the development of the NLQF in the European context, the NLQF itself, the referencing of the NLQF to the EQF, and the maintenance and management of the NLQF.
- Part 3 shows how the Netherlands has responded to the ten criteria.

Summary

This document referencing the levels of the NLQF to the levels of the EQF needs to be considered as work in progress.

In The Netherlands most of our types of qualifications are based on learning outcomes and this has been taken as point of departure for the development of the NLQF. The 17 existing types of qualification have finally been merged in nine levels of learning: the entry level and levels 1 to 8 of the NLQF. Levels 1-8 are referenced to the eight levels in the EQF.

This has been done by working with experts from the different educational sectors and the main stakeholders in education and by consultation with a wider public, including providers of education and training.

The EQF has helped to stimulate this process and allowed us to carry it out in an efficient way.

In The Netherlands we developed the NLQF more or less at the same time as we referenced it to the EQF. The referencing process started when the NLQF was almost complete.

The classification of qualifications into the NLQF and referencing to the EQF took place under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education Culture and Sciences, which acted as the NCP for the framework (the NCP-NLQF) at that time.

The Dutch authorities will now carry out two years of field testing the classifications of the different types of qualification to ensure that they are at the right levels of the NLQF and to improve the procedures and criteria for getting access to the NLQF. In the meantime we are trying to establish where the NCP-NLQF can be best positioned.

1 Description of the Dutch education system

In this part of the report, the structure of Dutch education is described. Firstly the Dutch types of education are shown in a diagram and a detailed description of the compulsory education system is given. This is followed by short descriptions of the other types of education. Part 1 ends with a brief explanation of the accreditation of prior learning (APL) in the Netherlands.

1.1 Dutch education

Dutch education consists of different education sectors ranging from primary schooling to higher education (HE), and includes different kinds of education and training from compulsory education to courses and training offered to adults in the context of lifelong learning. The diagram below shows schematically how the different sectors and types are related to each other.

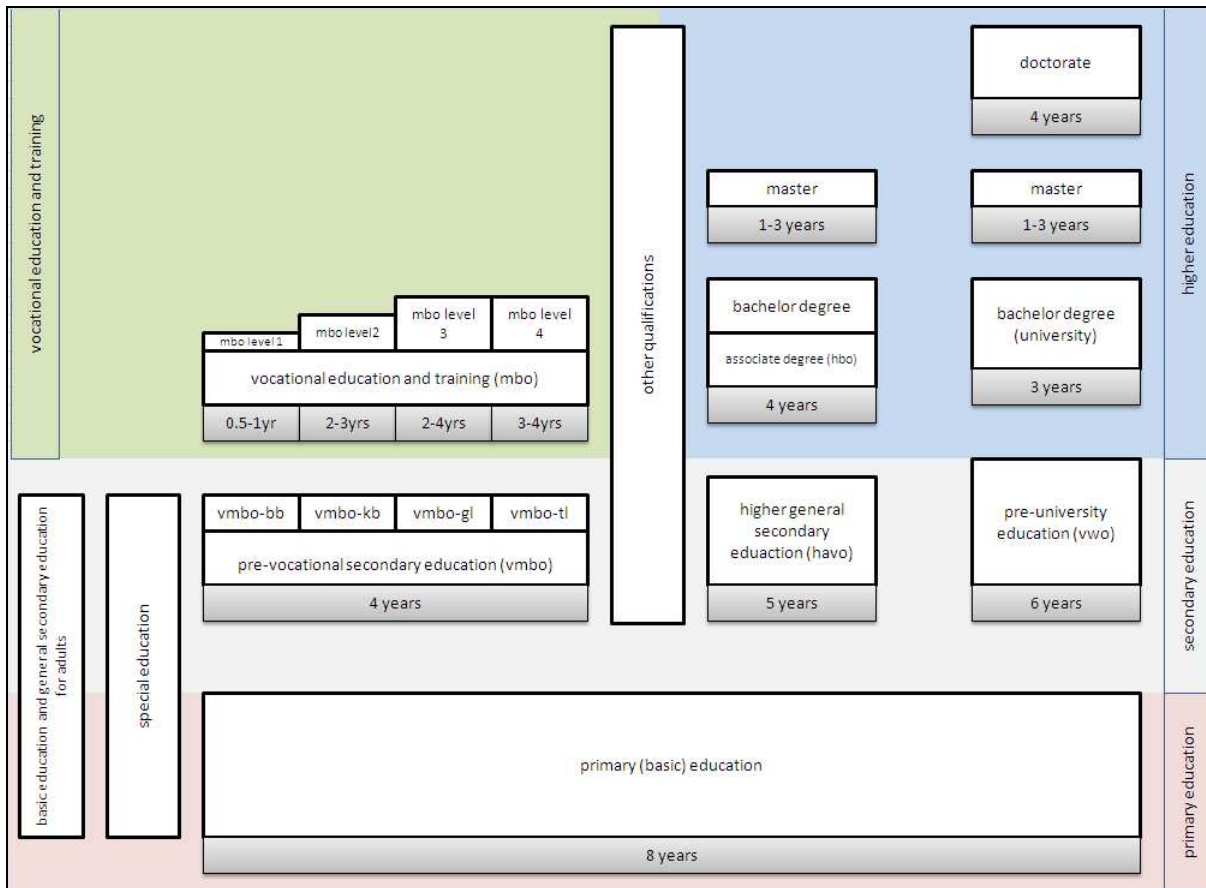


Diagram 1: the Dutch education system

In the following sections the different types of education are described: primary education; secondary education; vocational education and training (VET); HE; adult education; special education; and private education.

1.2 Compulsory education and qualifications

In the Netherlands full-day attendance at a school is required from the day when a pupil is 5 years old until the end of the school year in which the pupil is 16 years old. However, young people cannot leave school until they have obtained a basic qualification which will allow young people to enter the labour market (i.e. the HAVO, VWO or MBO at level 2 or above). This qualification requirement is one of a number of measures designed to combat early school leaving and to increase the chances of starting youngsters in the labour market. The qualification requirement is governed by the Compulsory Education Act.

1.3 Primary education

Target group/age	4–12 years
Options	Children who are unable to participate in primary education are placed in special education
Access criteria	None
Transition to	Pre-vocational education, higher general secondary education and pre-university education
Institutions	Primary schools (more than 7000)
Quality assurance and monitoring	Every year, the Inspectorate checks on the quality of the schools. Based on a risk analysis and possible further research it will be determined how much control a school needs
Numbers	+ 1.5 million children

Primary schools provide primary (or basic) education for children aged 4–12 years in mainstream education. A child can enter primary education at the age of 4, but compulsory attendance is from his/her fifth birthday. Children who are unable to participate in primary education may attend special education. Both types of education are governed by the Law on Primary Education. The national Government establishes the quality requirements for primary education and the Inspectorate of education monitors the quality. Primary education is not included in the NLQF because it does not lead to a qualification.

At the end of primary school education, guidance on the next step in education based on the results of a national test and the advice of the school is given to each pupil.

1.4 Secondary education

After primary school, pupils move to secondary education, which is divided into two different directions: (i) pre-vocational education (VMBO) and (ii) general secondary education and pre-university education (HAVO and VWO).

Secondary education in the Netherlands is split into lower years and upper years. The lower years are: the first and second years of pre-vocational education; (VMBO); the first, second and third

years of higher general secondary education (HAVO); and the first, second, and third years of pre-university education (VWO). The upper years are: the third and fourth years of VMBO; the fourth and fifth years of HAVO; and the fourth, the fifth and sixth years of VWO. In general secondary education these two stages are also called the first and second phase.

For the lower years a large part of the content of the curriculum is specified by attainment targets. For the upper years the curriculum is led by examination programmes.

The attainment targets for the lower years have an "offer obligation". Two thirds of the available class time is devoted to these targets. The remaining time is free and can be used by the school in its own way provided that the school:

- provides an uninterrupted learning pathway from the lower to the upper years;
- enables pupils finishing the second year of VMBO to choose from all the sectors available, and the pupils finishing the third year of HAVO and VWO to choose any of the recommended subject combinations.

The final terms (results to be achieved by the pupil) for the national examination in the upper years yield on liability. Final terms that do not belong to the central examination should be regarded as attainment targets.

1.4.1 Use of learning outcomes

In the lower years of secondary education there are 58 national attainment targets which must be met by all pupils. These are set out in the following seven domains:

- Dutch
- English
- Numeracy and mathematics
- People and nature
- People and society
- Art and Culture
- Movement and sport

Schools can elaborate the core targets in each domain at each level and for each learning style. Teachers can thus make better use of their expertise and tailor their lessons to the needs of the pupils. Parents, pupils and staff have a voice in determining the approach taken by the school through participation in a school council.

1.4.2 Examination

The leaving examination is divided in two parts: a school examination and a national examination. The elements to be tested in each part are specified in the national examination programme for each school subject, which is approved by the Education Minister. An examination syllabus, also approved by the Minister, specifies the content of the national examination, the number of tests which make up the national examination, and their length. Schools are responsible for setting the school examination. Every year, schools are required to send their school examination syllabus to the Inspectorate, showing what elements of the examination programme are tested when, and how marks are calculated, including the weighting allocated to tests, and opportunities to re-sit them. These final terms determine the content of the courses offered by individual institutions for the designated education type. The final terms describe the knowledge, insight and skills expected of the pupil in relation to the content of the syllabus.

For the central examination each subject has a syllabus containing a description of the requirements for the central examination.

Research has shown that the quality of some aspects of the use of the Dutch language and numeracy is decreasing. Therefore a set of reference levels for both Dutch language and numeracy have been introduced. The reference levels are descriptions of knowledge which pupils and students ought to have, ordered in an increasing level of difficulty, from primary to secondary and vocational education.

From 2013-2014 school year, new reference levels will serve as a standard for the examination programmes for the Dutch language of schools and for the numeracy test in secondary education.

The examination programmes describe what pupils should know and be able to do for a particular subject in one sector. The school examines the pupil in a number of examinations set by the school for each subject. At the end of the course all pupils must sit the same national written examination for each course. The inspectors ensure that the national examination runs as it is supposed to. In some cases the Inspectorate may take measures, such as declaring the examination of a candidate or a school invalid. Post-examination monitoring by the Inspectorate also takes place, using the examination data, or by checking whether schools have determined the right result for each pupil.

1.4.3 *Quality assurance*

Pupils and their parents must be confident that their school provides education of an appropriate quality. The Inspectorate therefore monitors the quality of education for VMBO, HAVO and VWO. The monitoring is risk-based – i.e. the Inspectorate looks every year, using a risk analysis, to see if there is any evidence that a school lacks quality.

If the analysis indicates no risk then the school receives a so-called 'basic supervision'. If the analysis indicates possible risk, the school will be required to provide additional information. The Inspectorate then examines the nature and background of the perceived risk and a more detailed analysis of both the additional information supplied and the original information gathered is carried out. If the result is positive (i.e. the school shows a high enough level of quality) then the inspectorate will return the school to basic supervision.

The findings of each inspection are public. The Inspectorate of Education uses a specific framework for each of the two different education sectors.

The school board is responsible for the quality of education at the school, the financial situation and the compliance with the laws and regulations. The board is accountable for the school's results.

1.4.4 *Switching between programmes in secondary education*

Sometimes, students want to change course. This could be the case if the level of VWO is clearly too high for a student. But there are also many students who, after obtaining their HAVO diploma, decide to do a pre-university education course, in order to be ready to enter university education. The switch from one course to another is possible under certain conditions. These conditions are not all determined by general rules, but also depend on specific factors, e.g. the curricula.

1.4.5 *Legislation*

For all secondary education the Law on Secondary Education identifies the location of secondary education in the Dutch education system in relation to both the preceding and the subsequent education.

1.4.6 Pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO)

Target group/age	12-16
Options	Basic vocational pathway (VMBO-bb) Advanced vocational pathway (VMBO-kb) Combined vocational and theoretical pathway (VMBO-gl) Theoretical pathway (VMBO-tl)
Access criteria	Primary school
Transition to	VMBO-bb move to VET level 1 or 2 VMBO-kb: move to VET level 2, 3 or 4 VMBO-gl and VMBO-tl: move to VET level 3 or 4 of higher general secondary education
Institutions	Schools for secondary education
Examination	School examinations + Central examinations
Quality assurance and monitoring	There is an annual monitoring of schools and their boards regarding compliance with legislation, regulations and accountability requirements
Numbers	+ 200.000 pupils

A learning pathway is a four-year route which will provide access to vocational education and training and to higher general secondary education. The first two years of pre-vocational secondary education are general and common to all pathways. The pupils learn about all sorts of subjects and explore their interests and abilities. Then each pupil chooses a sector and a pathway for the third and fourth years. The four learning pathways range from practical to theoretical:

a.1 Basic vocational pathway

The basic vocational pathway prepares pupils for entry to basic vocational education in the VET sector. This pathway is chosen by pupils who are more practically orientated. This pathway lasts for four years.

a.2 Advanced vocational pathway

The advanced vocational pathway is primarily practical and it prepares pupils for specialist and middle-management training courses in the VET sector. This pathway lasts for four years.

a.3 Combined vocational and theoretical pathway

The combined vocational and theoretical pathway also prepares pupils for specialist and middle-management training in the VET sector, but it is more theoretical than a.2.

This pathway also lasts for four years.

a.4 Theoretical pathway

The theoretical pathway, like a.2 and a.3, prepares pupils for entry to the VET sector. In addition, students who complete this pathway can progress to higher general secondary education.

This pathway lasts for four years.

The aforementioned pathways can be followed in the following four fields:

- 1 Health and Welfare
- 2 Engineering
- 3 Economy
- 4 Green sector¹

Pupils follow a curriculum that includes:

- A common component for all, independent of the field being followed. This comprises Dutch, English, social studies, physical education and arts. In addition, pupils can study one extra foreign language;
- A field-related component where pupils study a fixed combination of subjects for a specific occupational field;
- An optional component from which pupils choose one or two sector-related subjects. Apart from the a.1 Basic vocational pathway and a.2 Advanced vocational pathway where the component must be vocationally-orientated, the school is free to determine which subjects to offer for this component.

1.4.7 General secondary education (HAVO and VWO)

Target group/age	12-18 years
Options	Higher general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO)
Access criteria	HAVO: primary school or VMBO-tl. The last one gives access to class 4 VWO: primary school or HAVO. The last one gives access to class 5 Admission to HAVO and VWO is based on the results of national test in the last year of primary education and advice given by the school
Transition to	HAVO: Associate degree, professional Bachelor programme or labour market VWO: Associate degree, Bachelor of arts/science or labour market
Institutions	Schools for secondary education
Quality assurance and monitoring	There is an annual monitoring of schools and their boards regarding compliance with legislation, regulations and accountability requirements
Numbers	HAVO: 150,000+ students VWO: 160,000+ students

General secondary education comprises two types of education:

Higher general secondary education (HAVO) of five years' duration

¹ The green sector in secondary, vocational and higher education belongs to the responsibility of the ministry of Economy, Agriculture and Innovation.

5 Pre-university education (VWO): athenaeum and gymnasium of six years' duration each.

The HAVO prepares pupils to progress to universities of applied sciences (HBO), to take an Associate degree or a professionally-orientated Bachelor degree. The VWO prepares students to progress to a more academically-orientated Bachelor degree. VWO pupils can also progress to higher professional education and the Associate degree. Both types of education include general education. From the fourth year on in HAVO and in VWO pupils choose a particular combination of subjects (a 'profile choice'). This profile choice is designed to enable a smooth transition between secondary and HE. Students can choose one of the following four profiles:

- Natural Sciences and Technology - advanced mathematics, natural sciences and chemistry;
- Natural Sciences and Health - biology, physics/geography, advanced mathematics/mathematics and chemistry;
- Economy and Society - economics, advanced mathematics/mathematics, history and geography;
- Culture and Society - a modern foreign language, culture and arts, history, mathematics and economics.

A profile comprises six (HAVO) or seven (VWO) mandatory subjects and one or two subjects from the elective subjects offered by the school.

1.5 Vocational education and training (VET)

Target group/age	From 16 years onwards	
Options	VET levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 The school-based pathway (BOL) On-the-job training pathway (BBL)	
Access criteria	VET level 1	No requirements
	VET level 2	VET level 1 and Basic vocational pathway
	VET level 3	Transfer evidence of Advanced vocational pathway, Combined vocational and theoretical pathway, Theoretical pathway to HAVO/VWO year 4
	VET level 4	
Transition	VET level 1: VET level 2, the labour market VET levels 2 or 3: the next higher positioned VET level and the labour market VET level 4: the Associate degree, the professional Bachelor and the labour market	
Institutions	Regional education colleges (ROCs), training centres for agriculture (AOCs), a small number of specialised colleges and recognised private institutions	
Examinations	Institutional examinations (the introduction of partly central examinations has recently started)	
Quality assurance and monitoring	The Inspectorate of Education monitors the quality of education and the quality of examinations within VET for both public and private	

	providers
Numbers	+ 500.000 students

1.5.1 **General description**

Formal VET (MBO) prepares students for both work and further education. It also promotes general education and personal development. The link to practice is very important in all formal VET programmes. To ensure this link with the labour market VET schools have extensive contacts with the regional business community, municipalities and social organisations. On completion of a VET course, students who wish to continue their education may progress to further education in their own schools or in universities for applied sciences.

VET is offered by ROCs, AOCs, a small number of specialised colleges and private institutions. While these private institutions do not receive public funding, they have obtained recognition for their courses from the Education Minister. The AOCs are the responsibility of the Minister of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation. Forty percent (40%) of the Dutch workforce hold a VET diploma and every year in excess of 0.5 million people opt for a course in VET. Programmes are offered by 66 institutions throughout the country.

VET Levels

VET delivers education and training at four levels with programmes ranging from six months to four years.

VET level 1: training for simple practical work and for entry to the labour market as an assistant worker. There are no formal requirements for entry to this level. The level 1 diploma also gives admission to VET level 2. Programmes last six months to one year.

VET level 2: basic vocational training to carry out practical work. The level 2 diploma is an entry qualification for the labour market and also gives admission to VET level 3. Programmes last 2–3 years.

VET level 3: training to become an independent practitioner able to work independently across a range of activities related to the occupational area. The level 3 diploma gives admission to VET level 4. It is also an entry qualification for the labour market. Programmes last 2–4 years.

VET level 4: middle-management and specialist training able to execute work independently, as a generalist or specialist in an occupational area. The diploma gives access to higher professional education. It is also an entry qualification to the labour market. Programmes last 3–4 years.

Two Learning Pathways

VET has two learning pathways or routes. Practice, as said before, is an important element of all courses.

- *The school-based pathway (BOL)*
Students in BOL will have one or more periods of work placement during the course, ranging from a minimum of 20% to a maximum of 60% of course time.
- *On-the-job training pathway (BBL)*
Students in BBL work four days per week in a work placement and follow one day of theoretical education per week. Students on BBL courses are often older than those on the school-based pathway and have an average age of 25 years.

Both pathways lead to the same level of qualification and diploma.

Four fields

VET courses are divided into four fields:

- Health and Welfare
- Engineering
- Economy
- Green sector

ROCs offer training in the sectors Health and Welfare, Engineering and Economy. Specialist colleges focus on training for one professional branch, for example, graphic design or shipping.

AOCs provide training for the agriculture sector, including courses in the areas of plants, animals, green design and environment.

1.5.2 The use of learning outcomes

Qualifications structure

What a student should know and be able to do in order to get a diploma is determined in a qualification dossier which specifies the knowledge, skills and competences for the particular qualification. For a number of years schools and representatives of the four fields in the labour market have been working together to bring about an extensive renewal of the education system and the qualifications structure. The aim is to make the education system more competence-based and to streamline the qualifications structure. The law to bring about these changes is currently (in the first half of 2011) under discussion in the Dutch Parliament. In the qualification dossiers each occupation is determined on all the VET levels: what is the content of the occupation, what are the key activities and what should somebody be able to do to perform in the occupation.

The Role of the Centres of Expertise (CRAs)

Seventeen CRAs in VET and the labour market make a contribution to the education process in The Netherlands. Their role is to develop and maintain the qualification structure for each labour market field, to accredit workplaces for VET students and to ensure a sufficient supply of work placements.

Evaluating qualification dossiers

CRAs prepare qualification dossiers and submit them to the NCP for VET for evaluation. Evaluation is carried out periodically in different moments for testing and on the basis of this valuation it is decided whether the dossier receives the go-ahead to seek the approval of the Education Minister. Following approval by the Minister, the dossier is entered in the Central Register for VET (CREBO). Currently more than 600 qualifications have been registered in CREBO.

1.5.3 Examination

The students complete their VET education with more examinations in which they have to prove that they are able to practice the occupation for which they have been training. At present, VET schools develop these vocational examinations themselves, but the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science intends to standardise these. How this will be done has not yet been decided. The method of examination depends on the form which has been chosen by a VET school. A commonly

used kind of examination is the aptitude test which may use simulations, employment tests and observations of work activities to see whether students possess the necessary competences. Practical assessments in which students prepare a project or complete a practical assignment are also commonly used. In the near future central examinations for the Dutch language, mathematics (numeracy) and English will be introduced.

1.5.4 Quality assurance

The Inspectorate of Education monitors both public and private examination institutions in VET. The monitoring of the institutions comprises three phases.

- 1 In Phase 1, review of the institutions is undertaken to identify possible shortcomings in the quality of education or the management of the institute.
- 2 Where difficulties have been identified in Phase 1, the Inspectorate carries out further investigations into quality issues.
- 3 Where deficiencies are identified in Phase 2 (in delivery of programmes, examinations or financial or legal compliance) action is taken to address them as soon as possible on the basis of agreements reached with the institution concerned.

After one year the Inspectorate reviews the results of the agreed programme of quality improvement. Should there be no evidence of improvement in the institution the Inspectorate then informs the Education Minister of the situation. As a result the Minister may withdraw the institution's licence to deliver courses.

Finally, the Inspectorate monitors the examinations. The quality of examinations is assessed independently of the quality of education. This assessment is conducted annually based on a sample of programmes in each publicly funded school to decide whether the examination instruments meet the national requirements. Central to this is the appropriate level of qualification and the reliability of the examination.

1.5.5 The relationship with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET)

EQAVET enhances the quality of vocational and support individual Member States in promoting and monitoring continuous quality improvement of vocational education at both system and at the institutional level. The quality framework EQAVET is largely in line with the existing quality assurance in VET. Both use a model derived from the so-called "Deming Wheel" containing four phases: plan, do, check and act. The Dutch NCP for EQAVET (NLQAVET) is working on an action plan for quality in VET in the Netherlands to reference it to the EQAVET Framework. For this purpose a working group has been established, comprising representatives from VET, namely the Ministry of Education, the Council for vocational and adult education (MBO raad), the association of the seventeen CRAs (COLO), the association of private education providers (NRTO), the organisation of unions (FNV), the Youth Organisation for Vocational Education (JOB) the general association for education, and the Inspectorate.

1.5.6 Legislation

VET is regulated by the Law Education and Vocational Training, the WEB. This law regulates the various forms of vocational education. Adult basic education (general secondary education for adults - VAVO) also falls under this law.

1.6 Higher education (HE)

Target group/age	From 17 years onwards
Options	Associate degree, Bachelor, Master or Doctorate
Access criteria	VET, HAVO or VWO. For the academically- orientated Bachelor programme a pre-university diploma is required. The study of mandatory subjects is required for admission to some courses
Transition to	Associate degree, Bachelor (first cycle), Master (second cycle), designer, medical specialist, Doctorate (third cycle). All qualifications give access to the labour market
Institutions	Universities for applied sciences and universities
Examinations	Examinations are provided by the individual institutions
Quality assurance and monitoring	<p>The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) accredits all new and existing associate, bachelor and master degrees. Accreditation is a prerequisite for recognition of the diplomas by inclusion in the national register for higher education CROHO.</p> <p>The Inspectorate for HE monitors the quality assurance and the compliance with the Law on Higher Education and Scientific research</p> <p>Inspections do not examine the quality of specific programmes</p>
Numbers	+ 630.000 students

1.6.1 *General description*

HE is offered by two types of institution: universities and universities for applied sciences.

Universities (WO) include general universities, universities specialising in engineering and agriculture and the Open University. Universities of applied sciences (HBO) include comprehensive and specialised universities in fields such as agriculture, arts and teacher education. Universities are primarily responsible for offering academically-orientated programmes. But universities can provide programmes with professional orientation and universities of applied sciences can provide programmes with academic orientation if these are accredited by NVAO.

HE comprises three cycles, namely the Bachelor (first cycle), the Master (second cycle) and Doctorate (third cycle). The following diagram shows this schematically along with the duration of the cycles and the number of ECTS points to be obtained.

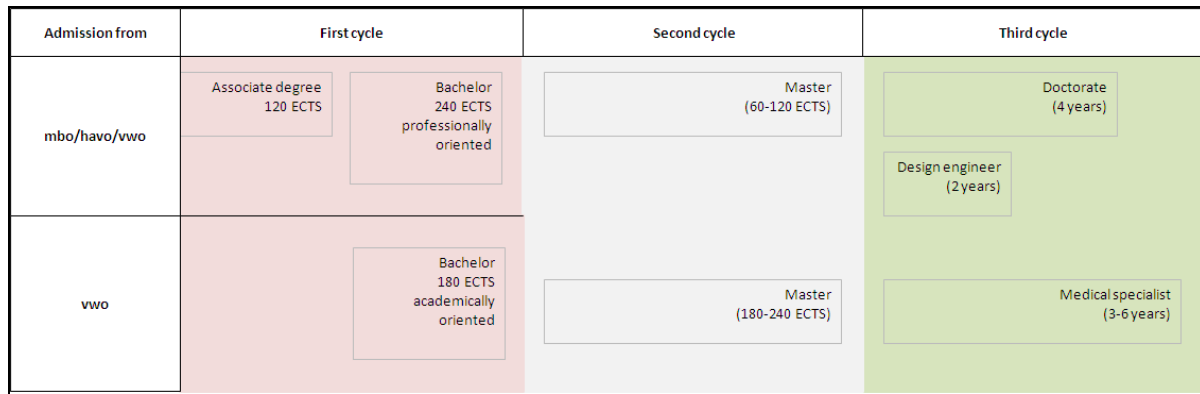


Diagram 2: the three cycles of HE

First cycle

Students who want to access a professionally-orientated Bachelor programme or to an Associate degree programme need to possess a VET, HAVO or VWO diploma. Entry to an academically-orientated Bachelor programme normally requires a VWO diploma.

Second cycle

The Bachelor degree gives access to Master programmes and Master degrees. The Master programme takes 1–2 years.

Third cycle

Education of the third cycle is only offered by universities. The most important requirement for a third cycle degree is the completion of a thesis based on original research and defended in public. All universities can provide the PhD. Besides the PhD the three universities for engineering offer a (technical) design programme for which, after the Master programme, more knowledge should be acquired and personal assignments in a number of engineering fields should be completed. The technical design programmes require two years study and graduates receive the degree Professional Doctorate in Engineering (PDEng). The training of medical specialists is the responsibility of the competent authority in a university hospital.

1.6.2 Transition within HE

Within HE, a student can either switch to a different level to another type of HE: for example, after the first year from HBO (the propaedeutic) to university education (WO) or from a WO to an HBO programme. Students with an Associate degree can transfer to the remaining part of a professionally-orientated Bachelor programme.

1.6.3 Quality assurance

Quality assurance in HE is primarily concerned with compliance on law and legislation, education policy and examination. The monitoring of HE is regulated by the Law on Higher Education and Scientific Research and by the Law on Education Inspection (WOT). The Inspectorate ensures that HE takes account of the law in the delivery of education, the applicability of admission criteria, the administration of examinations and doctorals and the awarding of diplomas. The Inspectorate also oversees the board's and the council's compliance with the laws.

At the request of the Education Minister, the Inspectorate also investigates specific aspects of HE, for example, the functioning of the Bachelor–Master structure, attention paid to specific groups of students, as handicapped people and migrants, the entry and transfer of students in engineering programmes and the quality of examinations.

Monitoring the quality

The quality of specific programmes in HE is monitored by the accreditation system managed by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO). The Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO) is a bi-national public accreditation organisation in both regions established by a treaty between the Netherlands and Flanders to ensure the quality of HE in both jurisdictions.

The NVAO:

- monitors Dutch and Flemish HE and independently ensures the quality of HE in The Netherlands and Flanders by assessing education and providing a quality mark. It also contributes to improving the quality of HE and it promotes the positioning of HE from both national and international perspectives. Only NVAO-accredited programmes are recognised by the Government and receive funding. The Dutch and Flemish ministers monitor the functioning of NVAO and the Dutch inspectorate monitors the Dutch accreditation system as a whole. Agreements are made between the Inspectorate, NVAO and the Ministry of Education Culture and Science.
- The accreditation is based on learning outcomes as formulated in the Dublin descriptors.

International HE framework

An important outcome of the Bologna process is the development of a 'Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area' (the QF-EHEA). This comprehensive reference framework provides a general structure for the qualifications of the EU Member States which have committed to the Bologna Declaration. The participating Member States aimed in 2010 (later, in line with the EQF in the European community the date has been postponed to 2012) to have developed national qualifications frameworks in HE in which the levels of the national system would relate to the level descriptors of the EQF.

The Netherlands was one of the first countries to draw up a national framework of this kind. It has been evaluated by the *Verification Committee* of independent international experts and has been shown to be compatible with the overarching QF-EHEA. Currently the Education Minister is proposing new measures to the Government to improve the quality of universities of applied sciences. Among these measures are the following: that all teachers should have at least a Master degree, a system of national examinations, and a strengthening of the role of the Inspectorate.

1.6.4 Legislation

The Law on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) provides for regular evaluation of the quality of the programmes offered by HEIs. As far as possible the evaluation of an HEI is carried out in cooperation with other HEIs and also includes evaluation by independent experts and by students. The results are public. The monitoring is regulated through accreditation.

Accreditation frameworks have been drawn up for this purpose and programmes are assessed and re-assessed every six years. Accreditation of HEIs and evaluation of programmes are carried out by NVOA. Their processes include the evaluation of learning outcomes, checks on qualification levels, and the regulation of examinations. The data on all accredited programmes are stored in the Central Register of Higher Education (CROHO). Privately funded but accredited programmes are also registered in CROHO; students can receive study funding for any accredited programme.

1.7 Special education

For children who are not able to follow the regular primary education a transfer to special education is possible. These schools are for children with less severe disabilities, but who require extra care and attention. In principle, the curriculum in special education is the same curriculum as in mainstream education. However classes are smaller and there are more experts assisting the children in their development. Only three percent of the total number of pupils in primary education is placed in a school for special education.

Apart from this kind of special primary education, there is special education for young people with physical, sensory or mental handicaps and pupils with psychiatric or behavioural problems. Schools for (secondary) special education work together in specialist regional centres. Education is divided into clusters of disability. After their twelfth year, pupils in special primary schools usually go to special secondary education. In principle they can stay at these schools until the age of twenty.

Legal provisions and provisions for quality assurance are the same as for primary education.

1.8 Adult education

1.8.1 *General description*

Within adult education six different levels of learning are provided. Levels 1, 2, and 3 are called basic education; levels 4, 5 and 6 are called General Secondary Education for Adults (VAVO).

Basic education

Basic education focuses on the acquisition of basic skills to equip people to:

- a** participate in society
- b** embark on a training course in preparation for entry to the labour market

The duration of the programmes depends on the entry level of the adult. The focus of the programmes is mainly on native language (reading and writing) and second language. There is also a focus on numeracy and computer skills, social skills and knowledge of Dutch society. Participants must be aged over 18 years. Education programmes may be linked to vocational education. On successful completion of a programme, participants receive a school certificate.

Municipalities which receive public funding are obliged to purchase their basic education courses from the ROCs. The provider is responsible for student assessment and the Inspectorate monitors the quality of the education and assessment provided. When courses are linked to vocational education the Inspectorate for VET monitors the quality of the provision.

General secondary education for adults (VAVO)

The programmes in VAVO correspond to initial general secondary education (VMBO-tl, HAVO and VWO). General secondary education for adults is different from HAVO and VWO in that a participant may combine subjects studied individually over time to receive a diploma. There are no subject certificates issued in initial education. The examinations for the diploma in higher general secondary education for adults are the same as in initial education.

1.8.2 Quality assurance

Adult education comes under the Inspectorate for Education (VET and adult education). For the examinations of VAVO the same rules are applicable as in the Law on Secondary Education and the frameworks of the Inspectorate of Education.

1.8.3 Legislation

Adult education is governed by the Law on Education and Professional Education (WEB).

1.9 Private education

Private education is the largest provider of continuing education and training in The Netherlands. Private providers make a substantial contribution to the promotion of (sustainable) employability and the retention of older workers in the workplace (lifelong learning). More than 1.3m people participate in private education. 84% of workers and job seekers engaging in post-initial training do so in private education with only 16% learning in a publicly-funded institution.

79% of the programmes offered in private education are work-related. A programme is work-related if it is attended for the following reasons: to keep updated (an obligation on the employer's side), to get promotion, to move to another job, and to strengthen employability.

There are 50 private HEIs and 138 private VET institutions in The Netherlands. Programmes lead to diplomas/degrees which are formally accredited by the Education Minister and private institutions have the right to conduct the examinations. Enterprises spend more than 3 billion Euros per annum on training employees. In addition, employees invested 199 million Euros on their own training in 2010. The Dutch Association for private training and education providers (NRTO) plays an important role, on behalf of their members, in placing private training and education on the policy agenda.

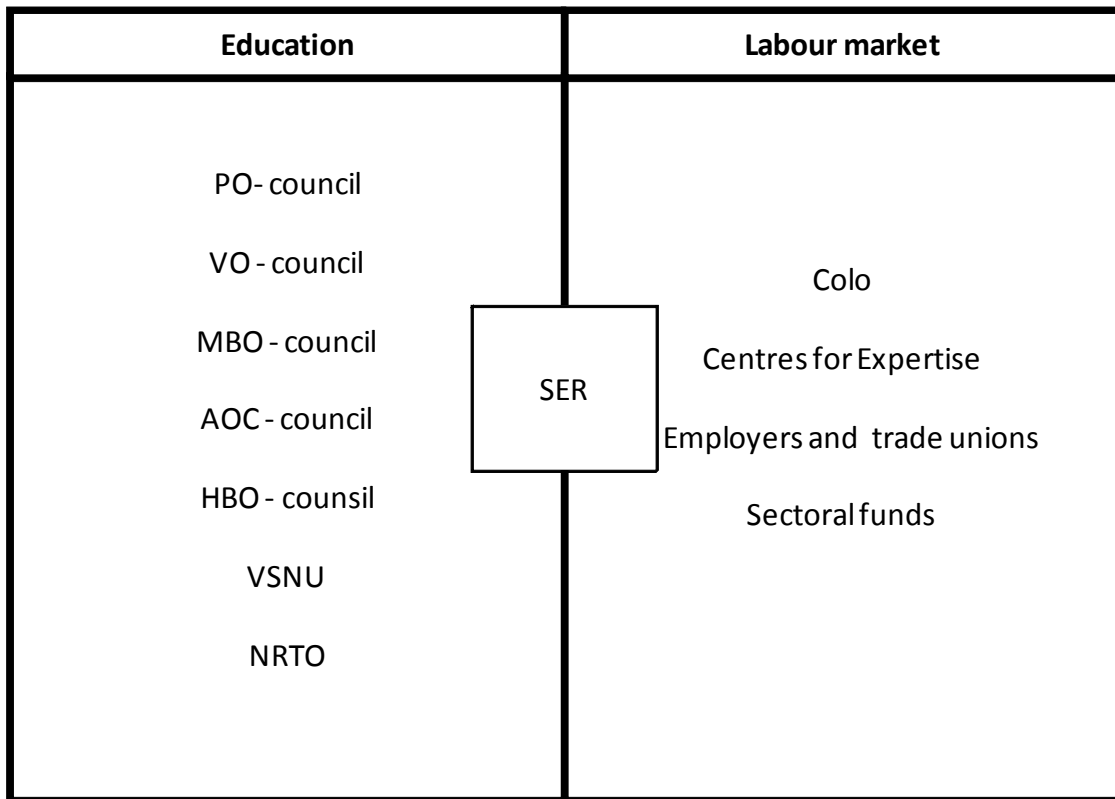
1.9.1 Quality assurance

Private education providers accredited by the Education Minister comply with the quality rules and requirements of funded institutions. In addition, professional and industry sectoral associations have formulated their own quality codes. NRTO members sign the Code of Conduct for Training and Education and are also obliged to use the Terms and Conditions as drawn up by the NRTO and the consumer organisation, "Consumentenbond". In case of a dispute the consumer or the training and education agency can make use of an out-of-court dispute resolution scheme (known as De Geschillencommissie). Any agency aspiring to become a member of the NRTO is assessed by the NRTO Committee on Quality. An evaluation is made of the degree of compliance with the requirements of the Code of Conduct. The Committee on Quality also investigates any indications of poor quality which they are aware of. Finally, the NRTO carries out an annual survey of all members on the degree of compliance to varying aspects of the code.

Among the members of the association you can find: BEPRO (education and training for the process industry), IVA (education and training in the automotive industry), Leidse onderwijsinstelling (one of the largest providers of distance learning), and Schoevers (education and training for secretariat and professions to support management).

1.10 The most important stakeholders in the Dutch education system

The stakeholders listed below influence the policy and developments in the Dutch education system and therefore play a role in the development of the NLQF and the reference to the EQF.



The Social and Economic Council (SER)

The Social and Economic Council (SER) comprises representatives of employers' and workers' organisations and government-appointed experts. SER advises the Dutch Government and the Dutch Parliament on socio-economic policy. SER also carries out administrative and supervisory functions, including the supervision of production and industry. According to the Law on Industrial Organisation, SER represents not only the special interests of industry (both employers and workers) but also encourages business in the context of the public interest.

The Education Council

The Education Council is an advisory body on education for the Education Minister, the Minister for Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation, the first and second chambers, the Government and the municipalities. The Council offers independent advice on headline policy and legislation in the field of education.

The Primary Education Council (PO-Council)

The Primary Education Council is the employers' organisation and the main advocate for school boards and primary education schools (including special schools) and special (secondary) education. The Council focuses on three main areas, namely, funding, employment in the sector and headline education policy.

The Secondary Education Council (VO-Council)

The Secondary Education Council is the employers' organisation and the main advocate for school boards and schools in secondary education. Over 334 school boards and 600 schools are members of the Council which covers more than 95% of schools funded by the Education Minister. The

Council negotiates with employee organisations on collective labour agreements for over 120,000 people.

The Council for VET and Adult Education (MBO-Council)

The Council for VET and Adult Education is the main association and advocate for secondary vocational and adult education. The Council has 66 member institutions funded by the Education Minister. The Council represents the common interests of its members and provides services and joint activities related to these interests. Almost 40% of the Dutch workforce is trained in VET annually, amounting to some 630,000 participants. The Council negotiates with employee organisations on the collective labour agreements for over 53,000 employees in VET and adult education.

The Agricultural Education (AOC) Council

The AOC Council is the association, employers' organisation and main advocate for agricultural education, including training in food and the natural and living environment. All the 13 institutions funded by the Department of Agriculture are members of the Council.

COLO

COLO is the association of the CRAs. Its primary role is advocacy, the promotion of cooperation between CRAs and reporting on behalf of CRAs.

The Higher Professional Education Council (HBO-Council)

The Higher Professional Education Council is the association and main advocate for HE. All 39 publicly-funded HEIs are members of the Council, which represents its members' interests to government, politics and civil society. The Council is also an employers' association which consults with government and unions on the working conditions in the Higher Professional Education sector.

The Association of Universities (VSNU)

The Association of Universities (VSNU), the association and main advocate for the 14 Dutch universities, represents its members' interests to government, politics and civil society. VSNU is also an employers' association which consults with government and employee organisations in the university sector (which employs c. 52,000 people). VSNU also provides service activities for its members.

The Social Partners (Employers and Trade Unions)

There is employer and employee representation in most sectors in The Netherlands. Employee and employer organisations take collective decisions in the field of industry, education and employment. This is achieved through joint committees such as the Collective Agreement Committee (CAO) and the Education and Training Committee.

1.11 Accreditation of prior learning (APL)

1.11.1 Introduction

With accreditation of prior learning (APL), an individual can validate the knowledge, skills and competences, which he or she has gathered over time. These competences can be acquired in various ways through formal, non-formal and informal learning. An APL procedure gives a picture of an individual's knowledge, skills and competences against a chosen (qualification) profile. To guarantee the civil effect of APL a (qualification) profile with recognised standards is used. These include all regulated qualifications in VET and HE. In addition sector qualifications requested and developed by branches of an occupational area can function as APL standards.

There are great differences between validation processes in different countries. Specific characteristics of APL in the Netherlands are:

- Determination and recognition of skills always takes place along the line of a national standard.
- It is an open market: public as well as private education and training institutions can offer APL.
- APL is orientated to the labour market (career development) as well as to education and training (to shorten the education programme)
- All people can follow an APL procedure. There are no specific target groups.
- An APL procedure always ends with a certificate of experience.

The use of APL is financially supported by tax measures for the employers as well as for individuals.

1.11.2 The APL procedure and results

An APL procedure consists of the following steps:

Intake

During the intake phase the APL candidate receives information concerning the APL process. Together with the candidate the targets of the APL procedure are set and an APL agreement is signed by both parties. An APL procedure has as its point of departure one specific standard.

Drafting the portfolio

The candidate fills in – under the supervision of a coach – his/her portfolio, including evidence of the knowledge, skills and/or competences acquired. Demonstrating the achieved skills can also take place in another way, e.g. through a criterion-orientated interview or on the basis of research at the workplace.

Judgement

The assessor (a professional reviewer) gives a judgment if the candidate complies with the given criteria for the chosen standard based on the evidence in the portfolio.

Experience certificate

The final result of an APL procedure is always a certificate of experience written by the assessor. This describes what the candidate knows and can do in relation to the chosen standard and how this is proofed.

1.11.3 Quality assurance

In 2006 a covenant between stakeholders was signed to increase the accessibility, secure the quality, promote the use and ensure the transparency of APL. The covenant partners included representatives of employers' and workers' organisations, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the umbrella organisations of providers of VET and HE and representatives of the private education sector.

To monitor progress on these goals, an APL Quality Code (Kwaliteitscode EVC) was developed by the covenant partners. All providers in the Netherlands must comply with this code. APL providers are controlled periodically by assessment agencies to receive an accreditation for a specific standard.

By the end of 2009 the Government had taken the initiative to give a quality impulse to APL. In relation with this initiative the policy regulation "Afgifte EVC-verklaringen" (Delivery of APL certificates") was published in April 2010, based on the APL Quality Code of APL. The policy regulation includes the "up-or-out" principle. This means that only those providers of APL providing the required quality will remain in the system. A consequence is that for an organisation which loses its recognition as an APL provider, the procedures for APL by the provider concerned are no longer tax-deductible. Besides the formal regulation, APL providers are supported by the APL Action Plan, which is implemented by the APL Knowledge Centre. Besides a style guide for writing the experience certificate, the Centre also offers training courses on different issues in running APL processes.

The five components of the APL Quality Code are:

- 1 *Objective APL*
The purpose of APL is to reveal, appreciate and recognise specific competences. The recognition of prior learning is a value in itself and contributes to employability. APL leads in many cases to further personal career development.
- 2 *Rights*
APL meets the needs of the individual. Rights and commitments are clearly articulated and assured.
- 3 *Research*
Procedures and instruments are reliable and based on recognised standards. "Trust" is a key word. Trust has to do with well-defined standards, civil effects and clear information about how assessments are conducted and what arguments conclusions are based on.
- 4 *Assessors and supervisors*
Assessors and supervisors are competent, independent and impartial. Independence and impartiality are key factors in the assessment and are embedded in the roles and responsibilities of the assessors. It is important to avoid confusion of roles. Impartiality can be strengthened through training and participation in learning networks.
- 5 *Quality*
The quality of the APL process is secured and constantly improved. The qualities of the APL procedure and of the instruments used during the procedure are assured through the quality arrangements. There are regular evaluations, following which results are incorporated into actions to secure improvements.

Part 2: the development of the NLQF

2 The NLQF in the European context

2.1 The NLQF in the European context

In March 2000, the Lisbon European Council formulated a number of ambitious targets, based on developments in the economy and society in Europe and in relation to global developments. The Council agreed on the goal of "Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world founded on sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs, increasing competitiveness and better social inclusion".

The Lisbon Declaration of 2000 has been replaced by the Declaration of 2010 and the development of the 2020 EU agenda. Training and education are crucial for achieving the goals of the Lisbon strategy and realising the EU's 2020 agenda. Since 2000 several initiatives have been undertaken under the name of "Education and Training 2010", now replaced by "Education and Training 2020".

Another important development was the 2002 Copenhagen Declaration, signed by 31 Member States. The Declaration calls for concrete action to increase transparency, establish mutual recognition, increase quality in the field of VET and strengthen European cooperation, with a view on achieving the Lisbon goals. Important steps in this framework have been the 2008 Recommendations on the EQF and the 2009 decisions on the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET).

The Bologna Declaration on the European dimension in HE was signed by 29 countries on June 19, 1999. This was a watershed in the development of European HE. The so-called Bologna Process, in which 45 countries now participate, is aimed at establishing a system of easily readable and comparable qualifications that will comprise a three-stage system of HE throughout Europe (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate). A system of credits, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has also been introduced, to stimulate and facilitate mobility and European cooperation in the quality assurance process.

2.2 The European Qualification Framework

Following the development of the EQF by the European Commission and the approval of the Recommendation adopting the EQF by the European Parliament and the Council in April 2008, The Netherlands began to develop a Dutch national qualification framework, the NLQF.

The EQF consists of eight levels defined by typical learning outcomes - what someone knows, understands and can do after completing a learning process. These learning outcomes are described in the EQF in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Through the EQF it is intended that the levels of qualifications from different countries will become more comparable. The (descriptors of the) eight levels serve as a reference for all levels of learning, in whatever form. The EQF will contribute to greater transparency in the various education systems of EU countries, to increase national mobility of individuals and participation in lifelong learning. And if qualifications from different countries within Europe can be compared by all relating to a single reference framework, then the EQF will contribute to facilitating the international mobility of students and workers.

For example, students should be more able to carry out a work placement in an international training company, or follow (part of) their education abroad. Workers with a diploma should find it easier to get work to another EU country. It is for these purposes that the EQF has been developed. Countries giving effect to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the EQF intend to link their national qualifications levels, on a voluntary basis, to the EQF by 2010. From 2012, the aim is to include a reference to the relevant EQF level of a qualification on any diploma or certificate awarded.

Currently, 31 European countries are working on the development or improvement of a national qualifications framework (NQF) with the aim of referencing the framework levels to the levels of the EQF.

To date, four countries have referenced their national framework(s) of qualifications to the EQF, namely, Ireland, Malta, UK and France. It is expected that in 2011 more than 20 Member States, including The Netherlands, will complete the referencing process. The other Member States will follow soon after. Besides the EU countries, at least 15 countries outside the EU are following the EQF developments, from exploration through to legislation.

3 The description of the NLQF

3.1 Objectives of the NLQF

The NLQF is a systematic arrangement of all existing qualifications in the Netherlands. It includes both qualifications regulated by three Ministries (the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation, and the Ministry of Healthcare, Welfare and Sports) and other qualifications.

On the one hand, there are qualifications regulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation, and the Ministry of Healthcare, Welfare and Sports. These regulated qualifications are classified generically in the levels of the NLQF.

On the other hand, there are many qualifications (diplomas, certificates etc.) which have a clear civil effect on the labour market but are not regulated by a ministry. The classification of these qualifications will take place at the request of the bodies responsible for awarding the diplomas and certificates, generally the body which provides the learning programme leading to the qualification. By bringing Ministry-regulated and "other qualifications" together in one framework, the NLQF gives insight into the levels of qualifications offered in The Netherlands and the relationship between them.

The NLQF provides transparency but there are also a lot of things that it does NOT do.

NLQF is a new description of the Dutch qualification levels, but it is **not** a revision of the Dutch education system. A NLQF level indicator does **not** give an entitlement to a title or a degree. The right to enter and transfer to education sectors is **not** regulated by NLQF. This depends on a multitude of factors such as the detailed content of a qualification and the NLQF is not suited to delivering this level of detail. An entry qualification to the labour market is the minimum educational level required for someone to have a real chance of getting sustainable work. A VMBO diploma gives access to further education in VET, but is not considered to be an entry qualification for the labour market. An MBO diploma is considered to be an entry qualification with the exception of Level 1 (assistant training). HAVO or VWO diplomas also meet the standard of an entry qualification to the labour market. However, it should not simply be assumed that these qualifications have the same levels; for example, VET level 2 does not reach the same final level of learning as HAVO and VWO.

The NLQF supports everybody in The Netherlands, including education and training institutions, social partners and employers and students, through:

- enabling people of all ages and in different situations to identify their level of education and training in order to find an appropriate education and training programme where they can use their abilities efficiently;
- enabling employers and individuals to understand the levels of existing national qualifications and international qualifications (through the EQF) and how they relate to each other;
- showing how the different qualifications contribute to improving workers' skills in the labour market.

The goals of the NLQF can be summarised as being to:

- increase transparency within the Dutch educational system;
- increase the understanding of qualifications within Europe;
- increase the comparability of levels of qualifications;
- stimulate thinking in terms of learning outcomes as building blocks of qualifications;
- promote lifelong learning;
- increase the transparency of learning routes;
- increase the understanding of the level of qualifications by players in the labour market;
- facilitate communication between all stakeholders in education and employment.

The NLQF covers a wide range of qualifications, and recognises that different educational sectors and providers involved in lifelong learning in the Netherlands use different terms and processes to describe the learning outcomes, curricula and examination requirements.

3.2 The project structure

In January 2009, the Director General of HE and VET, Science and Emancipation (DGHBWE) called for the development of a Dutch national qualification framework. In the summer of 2009 the project plan was completed and in autumn 2009 the development started. For this development, the Ministry of Education set the following project structure:

Role	Tasks and responsibility	Composition
Project leader	Responsible for the process leading to the NLQF and the referencing to the EQF	
Steering group	Guiding the whole process. Approving project proposals of the project leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director, VET • Director, HE and study financing • Director, secondary education • Director, Knowledge, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation • Director, former department of learning and working
Internal working group	Official support to the project leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy staff of the directorates for VET, HE, secondary education and learning
Expert Group	Choosing descriptor elements; creating (new) descriptions of regulated qualifications in terms of learning outcomes Developing level descriptors for the NLQF and referencing to the EQF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experts of secondary education, VET, HE, adult education, private education and sector qualifications

Role	Tasks and responsibility	Composition
NLQF-EQF Committee (the Leijnse Committee)	<p>Advice to the Minister in relation to the following questions:</p> <p>Is the NLQF an accurate reflection of existing qualifications in the Netherlands?</p> <p>Is the referencing of the NLQF to the EQF correct?</p> <p>Are the procedures for classification appropriate and complete?</p> <p>Are the conditions under which classification of the qualification which are not regulated by the three ministries complete and can they be implemented?</p> <p>How can the NCP-NLQF be established and what should its responsibilities be?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof. dr. F. Leijnse (chair) • Prof. dr. J.J.H. van den Akker • Prof. dr. H. P.M. Adriaansens • Em. prof. dr. W.J. Nijhof

The NLQF contains a representation of all levels of learning in the various sectors of education and training. Representatives from all these sectors with expertise relevant to their own sector's interests were involved in its construction and represented their sectors in the work. With such a wide coverage, the development of the NLQF was a complex process. In addition, the project considered the establishment of a suitable NCP-NLQF. This is an integral part of the implementation of the NLQF. Because of these complexities, the Minister decided to seek independent advice and appointed an NLQF-EQF Committee, chaired by Prof. F. Leijnse, to advise regarding the development of the NLQF, referencing to the EQF and the tasks and structure of the NCP-NLQF, and to report with recommendations. This Committee is known as the Leijnse Committee.

Working methods used in the different groups

Steering group

The steering group held 10 meetings. They discussed the developments during the whole process. Two of the meetings took place with the participation of the international experts. Comments from the different departments were taken into account in the different documents. Finally the department for VET in the Ministry of Education took the lead in developing a policy paper for the Government on the NLQF, referencing to the EQF and the development of the NCP-NLQF.

Internal working group

This group supported the project leader in the policy making process.

The Expert Group

This group met monthly. Its main tasks were to:

- determine the descriptor elements;

- development of the descriptor elements;
- merge the existing qualification levels to the nine levels of the NLQF;
- test the reliability and understanding of the proposals so far, with representatives of the different education sectors (including the private sector);
- participate in round table meetings with stakeholders and in the field testing;
- devise the documents as required in the light of feedback from stakeholders, field testing and internet consultation;
- give feedback during the drafting of the reference report.

In November the results were handed over to the Leijnse Committee.

The Leijnse Committee

The Leijnse Committee held eight meetings. To begin with they reviewed the documents and provided feedback in the form of ideas and comments. The feedback resulted in a number of changes which were presented to the field in a new consultation. Subsequently, the Committee arrived at an overall view. During its meetings the Committee discussed the developments and documents with international experts and with Jens Bjornavold from CEDEFOP. The Netherlands worked with three international experts, namely, Mike Coles (UK), one of the founders of the EQF, Wilfried Boomgaert (Flanders, Belgium) who is closely involved in the development of the EQF and Michael Schopf who has been involved in the development of the German NQF.

After refinement, the documents concerning the NLQF and the referencing to the EQF were subjected to a wide-ranging second round of consultation. This led the Committee to the stage of making a number of recommendations to the Education Minister on 11 May (see annex 6).

3.3 The process of establishing the NLQF

The existing Dutch qualifications structure is made up of qualifications regulated by the three Ministries (Education, Culture and Science, Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation and Healthcare, Welfare and Sports). These qualifications have general, fixed values based on decades of social recognition of the final level HAVO, MBO level 4 qualifications, and Doctorates. The learning outcomes of these qualifications were chosen as a starting point in developing the NLQF and the project started in 2009 by describing these fixed qualification in close cooperation and consultation with experts from the different education and training sectors. The Education Ministry already described the learning outcomes of regulated qualifications in a matrix which was developed and maintained in consultation with the field. This matrix was adjusted after the second consultation to become the "Descriptions of learning results for regulated qualifications" (annex 3).

This conceptual framework uses these descriptions and has examined the terms as they are used in the different education sectors. In addition, the descriptors used in the EQF and in other NQFs were examined. Finally, the existing qualifications were described in the following terms:

<p>Qualification</p> <p>The result of an assessment process validated by a competent authority stating that a set of learning outcomes to predetermined standards have been achieved.</p>
<p>Regulated qualifications</p> <p>The qualifications regulated by the Ministry of Education Culture and Science, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation (qualifications for food and the natural and living environment) and the Ministry of Healthcare, Welfare and Sports (qualifications for medical specialists). These include qualifications in secondary education, secondary VET, HE and adult education.</p>
<p>“Other qualifications”</p> <p>All qualifications other than qualifications regulated by the three Ministries (for example sector, branch qualifications and qualifications awarded by other ministries).</p>
<p>Competent body</p> <p>A body with the authority to sign the diploma or certificate, or otherwise responsible for assessing the learning outcomes of an individual to the standards of a qualification.</p>
<p>Learning outcomes</p> <p>Descriptions of what somebody knows and can do after completing a learning process. In the NLQF learning outcomes are described in terms of knowledge, skills, and responsibility and independence, all within a determined context.</p>
<p>Context</p> <p>The context descriptions of the levels are used along with the knowledge to determine the grade of difficulty of the skills.</p>
<p>Knowledge</p> <p>Knowledge is the totality of facts, principles, theories and ways of working related to an occupation or a knowledge domain.</p>
<p>Skills</p> <p>Cognitive Skills (logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical abilities (psychomotor skills applicable to using methods, materials, tools and instruments) within a given context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to reproduce, analyse, integrate, evaluate, combine and apply knowledge to an occupation or a knowledge domain • to recognise or identify and solve problems • to develop competences independently or with supervision • to obtain, collect, process, combine, analyse and evaluate information • to communicate based on the existing conventions in the context
<p>Responsibility and independence</p> <p>Responsibility and independence includes the proven ability to collaborate with others and to take responsibility for own work or study results and/or the work of others.</p>

The relevant stakeholders in the field of education and training were consulted continuously during the development of the NLQF to test and fine tune the documents. During autumn 2010, six round table meetings, attended by 200 representatives of all sectors, took place. The participants were members of the boards of institutions, policy makers, social partners, teachers and trainers both from providers of regulated qualifications and from providers of "other qualifications".

This information round was followed by a consultation through the website: www.nlqf.nl.

The results of this information and consultation round were incorporated into the first version of a number of documents which were presented to the Leijnse Committee. These documents are explained below.

Descriptions of types of regulated qualifications (see annex 3)

In general, Ministry-regulated qualifications have recognised fixed values and therefore chosen as a starting point in the development of the NLQF. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, in on-going consultation with the education sectors, described these socially recognised qualifications in terms of learning outcomes in a matrix. For the development of the conceptual framework the descriptions used in the different education sectors were taken into consideration. In addition, descriptions used in the EQF and in other foreign qualification frameworks were examined. Finally, the existing qualifications were described according to the following descriptors: context, knowledge, skills and responsibility and independence. Within skills the following skills are distinguished: applying knowledge, problem-solving skills, learning and development skills, information skills and communication skills.

NLQF Reader's Guide

After clear descriptions of the existing qualifications were made, it was possible to compare and group them into nine levels, namely, an entry level and levels 1–8. These level descriptions form together the NLQF levels. A Reader's Guide was written to explain the matrix and the NLQF.

Note on NCP-NLQF

The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union recommend Member States to support the referencing of qualifications systems to the EQF by the establishment of an NCP-NLQF. According to this recommendation the NCP-NLQF should be given the tasks of:

- referencing the national qualifications levels to the levels of the EQF;
- referencing in a transparent way and by publishing the results;
- ensuring access to information for stakeholders on how national qualifications via the national qualification systems are related to the EQF ;
- maintaining and evaluating the NLQF and thus the referencing to the EQF;
- encouraging the participation of all stakeholders regarding the referencing with the EQF.

The decision to open up the NLQF to qualifications not regulated by the three Ministries meant that criteria and procedures for the classification of these qualifications had to be developed. The consulting firm Cap Gemini was commissioned to set up a pilot study to be conducted by the Department of Learning and Working. This research, together with information available from other countries served as an input for the first version of a note on the establishment of the NCP-NLQF in the near future. Currently the NCP-NLQF is situated in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

3.4 Characteristics of the NLQF

The NLQF levels

The NLQF mirrors in a natural way the already existing levels of learning, based on learning outcomes, in the Netherlands. The NLQF levels give also an indication of the complexity of qualifications. The entry level is the least complex and Level 8 is the most complex level of learning. The levels are constructed in a way that a level of learning outcomes is built on lower levels. The results of the levels are not homogeneous and have no fixed pattern. The descriptor elements when combined together give an overview of the levels and describe within what context and with what type of knowledge a person can apply the knowledge, solve problems, learn and develop, acquire and use information and communicate and for what a person is responsible on the levels of responsibility.

"Best fit" classification

The descriptor elements together determine the level of the qualification.

The NLQF level descriptors constitute a reference point to determine the level which a qualification has. These levels are not meant to be a precise and comprehensive description of specific qualifications. The level descriptions open up the possibility of comparing qualifications achieved in a wide range of different contexts, describing the learning outcomes and including the required quality.

The classification of a qualification in an NLQF level is based on a comparison of the required learning outcomes of a qualification with the NLQF level descriptors. The classification is not based on the length of a study or the amount of time a person has invested to achieve the learning outcomes. The level of a qualification is not tied to a particular study load.

For the classification the "best fit" principle is used. This means that a qualification is not required to comply with of the whole descriptor for one level, but that it is positioned where the qualification best fits. This means qualifications of a more general character, such as HAVO, can be positioned at the same level as qualifications with a more vocationally- orientated character such as VET Level 4.

The fact that two or more qualifications are to be found at the same level in the NLQF indicates the grade of complexity of learning posed by these qualifications is more or less comparable. It does not necessarily mean that such qualifications have the same objectives, content and learning outcomes. Nor does it mean that the qualifications are equivalent or interchangeable.

The NLQF level, education sectors and the right to move

The NLQF is a new description of the existing qualification levels in The Netherlands. It does not replace the existing law and legislation concerning qualifications.

The NLQF levels are not referenced to an education sector. All NLQF levels are open to all qualifications of all education sectors. NLQF levels are not referenced to degrees or titles. This means, for example, that a qualification at Level 6 does not automatically belong to HE and the achievement of this qualification does not give automatic entitlement to a Bachelor degree.

The right to move within and between sectors is governed by existing laws and regulations. Achieving a qualification referenced to the NLQF does not mean automatic access to a qualification at the following higher level.

3.5 The NLQF in scheme

Qualifications regulated by the three Ministries are classified generically in the NLQF. This classification forms an integral part of the NLQF. All other qualifications can, on request of a competent body, be evaluated and classified at the appropriate level by the NCP-NLQF. Conditions and procedures for this classification are described in the note concerning the tasks and characteristics of the NLQF and can be found on www.nlqf.nl.

The diagram below shows how the Dutch types of qualification are placed into the levels of the NLQF.

EQF	NLQF	Volwassenenedu catie	Vmbo	Mbo	Havo/ Vwo	Ho	Overige kwalificaties
8	8					Doctoraat/ Ontwerper/ Medisch specialist	
7	7					Master	
6	6					Bachelor	
5	5					Associate Degree	
4	4+ 4	Vavo-Vwo Vavo-Havo		MBO - 4	Vwo Havo		
3	3			MBO-3			
2	2	Vavo-vmbo tl BasisEducatie 3	Vmbo kb, gl en tl	MBO-2			
1	1	BasisEducatie 2	Vmbo bb	MBO-1			
	In stroom niveau	BasisEducatie 1					

Adult education

Adult education comprises six levels. Levels 1, 2 and 3 cover basic education for indigenous and immigrant adults and educationally disadvantaged. The focus of this type of education is on obtaining social and basic skills.

The learning outcomes of Basic Education Level 1 are below the level of the learning outcomes of EQF level 1 and therefore cannot be referenced to EQF level 1. It was decided to designate this level in the NLQF as **Entry level**. This entry level is considered to be important for the following reasons: to facilitate entry to learning, to stimulate and motivate people and to increase self confidence. Levels 4, 5 and 6 cover general secondary education (VAVO). This is second-chance education and a second route education, where (young) adults can obtain a diploma or a partial certificate at the level of the theoretical programme of secondary education (VMBO-tl, general higher secondary education (HAVO) or pre-university education (VWO).

This means that these qualifications are classified at the level of VMBO-tl, HAVO and VWO.

Pre- vocational secondary education (VMBO)

VMBO has four learning pathways in different sectors. The basic vocational programme has been classified at Level 1. The outflow levels from the VMBO advanced vocational programme, the combined and the theoretical pathways, are so close together that they are positioned at one NLQF level (Level 2).

VET (MBO)

VET includes professional programmes belonging to the qualification structure of the Education Act, are offered by ROCs and AOCs and a small number of specialised colleges. This qualification structure has four levels. The MBO level determination is carried out by the Joint Committee of the CRAs and after being tested by the organisation of Vocational Education and Labour Market (SBB) is approved by the Education Minister or the Minister for Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation. Various studies show that the MBO levels have a high degree of consistency. This has led to a generic classification of the MBO levels in the NLQF. If a CRA considers there is a case for a different classification for a specific qualification, a request can be made to the NCP-NLQF. Conditions and procedures concerning the tasks and characteristics of the NLQF can be found on www.nlqf.nl.

Higher general secondary education/pre-university education

Based on the weighting of the levels of these qualifications, HAVO and VWO are respectively positioned at Level 4 and 4+, the latter after much discussion, both in The Netherlands and in the Advisory Group EQF. The positioning of the *highest school leaving certificate* is also a point of discussion in other European countries. In 2011 the European Commission and CEDEFOP have organised a *Peer Learning Activity* on this theme.

The expert committee had proposed to put VWO school leaving certificate on level 4 after public consultations of stakeholders in The Netherlands. Subsequently the Commission Leijnse advised The Minister to put VWO on level 5, because of the substantial higher level of the VWO qualification than the HAVO qualification which was put on level 4. The Minister initially accepted this advice, but she also mentioned that the position of VWO at EQF level 5 should be seen in European perspective. The referencing report was then presented in October 2011 in the Advisory Group EQF, and the group strongly objected to secondary school leaving certificate being positioned at level 5 as it would pose great problems with recognition, mobility and entrance of in- and outgoing students. Due to this problem and after consulting the Dutch expert group again the Minister decided to put the VWO school leaving certificate on level 4+.

For this ultimate decision in the Netherlands three considerations have been important:

- The Netherlands likes to use the eight levels for the national situation for easy comparison with the eight levels of the EQF.
- In the ISCED classification the secondary school leaving certificates are put on level 4.
- Compared to many other countries, the Dutch VWO is of a high level. Many countries have the practice of a *foundation year* in preparation for university studies. Such a *foundation year* is actually embedded in VWO. As it is considered fair to clearly show the distinction between HAVO en VWO school leaving certificate, the VWO level is put on 4+.

HE

In the context of the Bologna Process in which 47 countries are coordinating their HE, it was decided in 2005 to adopt the QF-EHEA. With the adoption of the EQF it has been determined that the descriptors of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework are consistent with the outcomes of EQF levels 5–8. In 2009 the Dutch National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education completed the self-certification process in relation to the QF-EHEA, and is thus positioned at the Levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the EQF and the NLQF.

For the purpose of being recognisable, the level descriptions of Level 5-8 of NLQF are tailored to the descriptors of the EQF and the Dublin descriptors of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework. This does not mean that Levels 5–8 are closed to qualifications that do not formally belong to the HE system. Indeed, the NLQF levels refer to learning outcomes and not to education classifications. The direct comparison between the NLQF levels 5-8 and the Dublin descriptors can be found in a diagram which is published and can be downloaded via www.nlqf.nl.

The classification of “other qualifications”

There are many qualifications not regulated by the three Ministries which have both labour market recognition and social recognition. An NLQF level indicator enhances the effect of these qualifications in both regards. The Government has therefore decided that, under certain conditions, it should be possible for these “other qualifications” to be classified on the NLQF. The classification of these qualifications will take place on a voluntary basis at the request of the body that has developed and approved these qualifications and is responsible for issuing diplomas and certificates. Examples of these qualifications are the education and training programmes delivered by the Ministry of Defence, the police academy, the financial and banking sector, or organisations offering distance learning or non-formal learning. In the Netherlands there are many private organisations that offer qualifications in field of life long learning or adult learning.

4 Referencing the NLQF levels to the EQF levels

In this chapter a comparison is made between the levels in the NLQF and the EQF. It describes the relationship between the Dutch and European frameworks. It was a great advantage that the types of qualifications in the Netherlands had already been described in learning outcomes. Firstly, all the types of qualifications were placed on a level of the NLQF, based on their learning outcomes and working within the descriptor elements defined for the framework. Due to the fact that the principle of learning outcomes already exists in the Netherlands we were able to work simultaneously on the development of the NLQF and the referencing of it to the levels of the EQF. To begin the process of referencing it is necessary to compare levels to the level descriptors in each framework. Then the levels of the NLQF were referenced to the levels of the EQF, according to the principle of 'best fit'. This implies that an NLQF level descriptor does not need to be aligned exactly with an EQF level descriptor, but that it is referenced to the EQF level with which it is most consistent. Nevertheless, in terms of transparency and efficiency, it is very helpful if the descriptions of the levels in the two frameworks are more or less compatible.

First, a general comparison was made between the Dutch and European frameworks based on the similarities and differences in the objectives, structure and method of description. Secondly, an analysis by NLQF level was made based on a comparison of the level descriptions of both NLQF and the EQF.

4.1 General similarities and differences

NLQF and EQF Concepts

Learning outcomes are descriptions of what somebody knows and can do after completion of a learning process. Both the EQF and NLQF, use learning outcomes in comparable ways (see diagram 3 on the next page).

NLQF and EQF Objectives

Both frameworks are developed to stimulate lifelong learning.

The objective of the NLQF is to function as a transparency and comparison instrument for the qualifications within Dutch education and training and to provide a basis for referencing the Dutch system to the EQF. The NLQF also helps support progression within the Dutch qualifications system. The EQF is a *meta-framework* and serves as translation instrument between diverse national qualification systems.

The difference in the objectives of the two frameworks means that there is some difference in how the levels are described. The NLQF describes the learning outcomes in more detail than the EQF and inevitable the learning outcomes in the NLQF are often described in a more specific context than in the EQF. In the NLQF the specific context in which the learning outcomes are achieved is mentioned for each level.

Levels

Another important distinction between NLQF and EQF is the number of levels. NLQF has an entry level. At this level the learning outcomes are below the level of the EQF level 1 and thus cannot be referenced to the EQF. The entry level serves a purpose in the Dutch system. It is meant to facilitate and stimulate people to enter into learning.

Because the objectives and principles of the EQF are broadly comparable to those of the NLQF, there is great similarity in the way the frameworks are designed:

- Both frameworks are based on learning outcomes.
- Both frameworks use a fixed set of descriptors.
- Both frameworks and their level descriptors can cover the whole field of education and training.
- Both frameworks have a hierarchical structure, each level is a further development of the previous level.

Also, in principle all qualifications can be classified in both frameworks, regardless how they have been achieved.

- The 'best fit' principle can be used to reference learning levels/qualifications to each framework.

NLQF descriptors		EQF descriptors
Context The context descriptions of the levels are used along with the described knowledge to determine the grade of difficulty of the skills		
Knowledge Knowledge is the totality of facts, principles, theories and ways of working related to an occupation or a knowledge domain		Knowledge Knowledge means 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 European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual
Skills Cognitive abilities (logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical abilities (psychomotor skills in applying methods, materials, tools and instruments) applied within a given context	<u>Applying knowledge</u> Reproduce, analyse, integrate, evaluate, combine and apply knowledge in an occupation or a knowledge domain	Skills Skills mean the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, 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)
	<u>Problem solving skills</u> Recognise or identify and solve problems	

	<u>Learning and development skills</u> Personal development, autonomously or under supervision	
	<u>Information skills</u> Obtain, collect, process, combine, analyse and assess information	
	<u>Communication skills</u> Communicate based on conventions relevant to the context	
Responsibility and independence The proven ability to collaborate with others and to take responsibility for own work or study results or of others		Competence Competence means 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 In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy

Diagram 3: comparing concepts NLQF and EQF

4.1.1 Linguistic comparison at each level

In this chapter the learning outcomes of each level in the NLQF and EQF are described. Each diagram is followed by a description of the most important similarities and differences.

4.1.2 Entry level

Entry level		EQF	
NLQF entry level		EQF	
Context	Context: a well known and stable daily living environment		
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of simple facts and ideas related to the living environment		
<i>Applying knowledge</i>	Reproduce and apply the knowledge Carry out simple and familiar (professional) tasks automatically		
Problem solving skills	Recognise and solve simple problems in daily life		
Learning and development skills	Work on personal development under supervision		
Information skills	Obtain and process information on simple facts and ideas related to the living environment		
Communication skills	Communicate with peers using conventions which are relevant to the context		
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers Have, under supervision, limited responsibility for the results of simple routine tasks or study		

Similarities and differences in the Entry level

NLQF has a level below the first level of the EQF. It has been decided to designate this level in the NLQF as "Entry level". Basic Education Level 1 is classified at this level in the NLQF.

- With Entry level, the emphasis in the descriptors of knowledge, problem solving skills and information literacy, is on functioning in an everyday environment. Thus there is no reference to a working domain or professional practice as is the case from level 1 EQF on.
- In terms of communication and cooperation Entry level is focused on peers and does not include other professional groups such as supervisors and clients.

As said before this level is an important level in the Dutch education system in terms of the first step on the education ladder. It is a starting level which shouldn't be too difficult in terms of learning outcomes in order to encourage individuals to stay on until they achieve this qualification.

Conclusion: No referencing to the EQF is possible at the moment.

4.1.3 NLQF level 1

Level 1			
NLQF		EQF	
Context	A familiar daily living or working environment		
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of simple facts and ideas related to an occupation or a knowledge domain	Basic general knowledge	Knowledge
<i>Applying knowledge</i>	Reproduce and apply this knowledge Carry out simple and familiar (professional) tasks automatically	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Skills
Problem-solving skills	Recognise and solve simple problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain		
Learning and development skills	Work under supervision on personal development		
Information skills	Obtain and process information, simple facts and ideas related to the occupation or knowledge domain		
Communication skills	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice		
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers, supervisors and clients Under supervision, take responsibility for the results of simple tasks or study	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context	Competence

Similarities at level 1

- Both in the NLQF and the EQF level 1 the focus is on the basic knowledge and skills required to perform simple tasks.
- Both the EQF as the NLQF involve using skills to perform simple tasks.
- In the EQF it is said that functioning at this level only can take place under direct supervision. In the NLQF the same is expressed but in different terms, namely “under supervision, take responsibility for the results of simple tasks or study”. In both cases, working independently or personal responsibility does not arise.

Differences at level 1

In the EQF it is about general knowledge, while the NLQF explicitly mention simple facts and ideas related to an occupation or a knowledge domain.

At level one there are no further significant differences between NLQF level 1 and EQF level 1.

4.1.4 NLQF level 2

Level 2			
NLQF		EQF	
Context	A familiar daily living or working environment		
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of facts and ideas, processes, materials, means and concepts of and related to an occupation or a knowledge domain	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	Knowledge
<i>Applying</i> knowledge	Reproduce and apply this knowledge Carry out simple (professional) tasks with the help of selected standard procedures	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Skills
Problem-solving skills	Recognise and systematically solve simple problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain		
Learning and development skills	Ask support for personal development after reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results		
Information skills	Obtain and process basic information – i.e. facts, ideas, processes, materials, means and concepts of and related to the occupation or knowledge domain		
Communication skills	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice		
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers, supervisors and clients Take responsibility for the results of simple tasks or study	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy	Competence

Similarities at level 2

- Both the EQF and NLQF involve basic knowledge of facts of a specific professional or knowledge domain.
- In both in the NLQF and the EQF, tasks performed at this level are "simple".
- In both frameworks routine problems are solved by using selected standard procedures.
- The EQF it concerns functioning under supervision with some autonomy, in the NLQF it is about taking responsibility for the results of simple tasks. These are judged to be comparable.

Differences at level 2

- Cooperation and communication with peers, supervisors and clients is described in the NLQF.
- The EQF is concerned with functioning under supervision with some autonomy; in the NLQF it is about taking responsibility for the results of simple tasks.
- It is mentioned in the NLQF that the person is not functioning independently in executing the tasks, but always with others and under supervision.

4.1.5 NLQF level 3

Level 3			
NLQF		EQF	
Context	A familiar but changeable living or working environment		
Knowledge	Possess knowledge of materials, means, facts, core concepts, simple theories, ideas, methods and processes of and related to an occupation or a knowledge domain	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	Knowledge
Applying knowledge	Reproduce and apply this knowledge	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Skills
	Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice or in the knowledge domain and take action to address this		
Problem-solving skills	Carry out (professional) tasks requiring tactical and strategic insight by making own choices from, and in combination with, standard procedures and methods		
Learning and development skills	Identify and systematically solve complicated problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain by selecting and using appropriate data		
	Ask support for further personal development after reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results		

Level 3			
NLQF		EQF	
Information skills	Obtain, process and combine information on materials, means, facts, core concepts, simple theories, ideas, methods and processes of and related to the occupation or knowledge domain		
Communication skills	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice		
Responsibility and independence	<p>Work with peers, supervisors and clients</p> <p>Take responsibility for the results of defined tasks or study</p> <p>Take shared responsibility for the results of the routine work of others</p>	<p>Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study</p> <p>Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems</p>	Competence

Similarities at level 3

- Both in the EQF and in the NLQF the focus is on the knowledge of an occupation and a knowledge domain. In the NLQF the knowledge is extended with materials, means, simple theories, ideas, methods and processes, this is not mentioned in the EQF, but it concerns the same level.
- Both the NLQF and EQF involve the responsibility for executing tasks by using standard procedures and methods.

Differences at level 3

- The NLQF mention on this level shared responsibility for the results of routine work of others. In the EQF it is also the responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study. In the EQF in the context of responsibility and independence it is called "adapting behaviour to circumstances".
- In the NLQF cooperation with peers, supervisors and clients is part of responsibility and independence.
- The NLQF puts more emphasis on complexity of problems.

4.1.6

NLQF level 4

Level 4						
NLQF		EQF				
Context	A familiar but changeable living or working environment, and in an international environment					
Knowledge	Possess broad and specialised knowledge of materials, means, facts, abstract concepts, theories, ideas, methods and processes of and related to an occupation or a knowledge domain	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	Knowledge			
Applying knowledge	Reproduce, analyse and apply this knowledge	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Skills			
	Evaluate and integrate data and develop strategies to carry out various (professional) tasks					
	Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice or in the knowledge domain and take action to address this					
Problem-solving skills	Analyse and carry out relatively complex (professional) tasks		A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study			
	Identify, analyse and systematically solve relatively complicated problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain in a creative way by selecting and using appropriate data					
Learning and development skills	Undertake personal development by reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results				A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	
Information skills	Obtain, process and combine broad and specialised information on materials, means, facts, abstract concepts, theories, ideas, methods and processes of and related to the occupation or knowledge domain					
	Communication skills	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice				

Level 4			
NLQF		EQF	
Responsibility and independence	<p>Work with peers, supervisors and clients</p> <p>Take responsibility for the results of own activities, work or study</p> <p>Share responsibility for the results of activities and work of others</p>	<p>Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change</p> <p>Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities</p>	Competence

Similarities at level 4

- In both the NLQF and the EQF, the focus is on knowledge in the broader context of an occupation or a knowledge domain. In the EQF at this level, more emphasis is put on solving specific problems, which corresponds with the descriptions of the various skills in the NLQF: analysing knowledge and relatively complex (professional) tasks, developing strategies, identifying limitations.
- The description in the NLQF, "Identify, analyse and systematically solve relatively complex problems in a creative way" are very similar to the description in the EQF, "to solve specific problems".
- In both the NLQF and the EQF the context in which responsibility is acquired is the same.
- Finally, the NLQF describes shared responsibility for the results of the work of others. The EQF states the same skill, i.e. "supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities".

Differences at level 4

- Taking responsibility for your own work is a clear aspect of this level in the NLQF. The EQF talks about self-management within an environment which is usually predictable but may be subject to change. In the NLQF the idea of change is contained under 'context', which is "familiar but changeable". So the NLQF put more emphasis on the changing environment.

4.1.7

NLQF level 5

Level 5			
NLQF		EQF	
Context	An unknown but changeable living or working environment, and in an international environment		
Knowledge	<p>Possess broad, specialised and in-depth knowledge of an occupation or a knowledge domain</p> <p>Possess detailed knowledge of some professions or knowledge domains and an understanding of a selected range of basic theories, principles and concepts</p> <p>Possess limited knowledge and understanding of some important current topics/issues and specialties related to the occupation or knowledge domain</p>	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	Knowledge
<i>Applying knowledge</i>	<p>Reproduce, analyse and apply the knowledge in a range of contexts in order to solve problems related to the occupation or knowledge domain</p> <p>Use procedures in a flexible and inventive way</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice or the knowledge domain and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out complex (professional) tasks</p>	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Skills
Problem-solving skills	Identify, analyse and solve complex problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain in a creative way by selecting and using relevant data		
Learning and development skills	Undertake personal development by reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results		

Level 5			
NLQF		EQF	
Information skills	Obtain, process, combine and analyse broad, in-depth and detailed information on a limited range of basic theories, principles and concepts of and related to the occupation or knowledge domain, as well as limited information on some important current subjects and specialities related to the occupation or knowledge domain, and present this information		
Communication skills	Communicate in a targeted way with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice		
Responsibility and independence	<p>Work with peers, supervisors and clients</p> <p>Take responsibility for the results of own activities, work or study</p> <p>Take shared responsibility for the results of activities and work of others and the management of processes</p>	<p>Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change</p> <p>Review and develop performance of self and others</p>	Competence

Similarities at level 5

- At this level, the EQF refers to broad, specialised and theoretical knowledge of an occupation or knowledge domain. Broad and specialised knowledge is also required in the NLQF, which adds that it concerns actual issues or topics which are current in the occupation or knowledge domain.
- Also, at this level, the NLQF refers to distinguishing, analysing and solving complex problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain "in a creative way"; while the EQF refers to developing "creative solutions to abstract problems".
- Finally, at this level the NLQF refers to taking "shared responsibility for the results of activities and work of others" and for "the management of processes". This appears to be compatible with the EQF wording, "exercise management and supervision" at the same level.

Differences at level 5

- The NLQF puts emphasis on the knowledge of occupations or knowledge domains which is limited to a set of basic theories, principles and concepts. In the EQF this is, "comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge".

- The NLQF describes individuals taking responsibility for their own activities, in the EQF responsibility for the performance of others also belongs to this level.
- The NLQF explicitly mentions reflection on personal performance under 'Learning and development skills'.

4.1.8 NLQF level 6

Level 6			
NLQF		EQF	
Context	A unknown but changeable living or working environment, and in an international environment		
Knowledge	<p>Possess an advanced, specialised knowledge of and critical insight into, theories and principles of an occupation, knowledge domain or broad field of science</p> <p>Possess broad, integrated knowledge and understanding of the scope and the most important fields and boundaries of the occupation, knowledge domain or broad field of science</p> <p>Possess knowledge and understanding of some important present-day issues, topics and specialties related to the occupation, knowledge domain or broad field of science</p>	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Knowledge
Applying knowledge	<p>Reproduce, analyse and apply the knowledge, in different contexts in a way that demonstrates a professional and scientific approach to the occupation or knowledge domain</p> <p>Apply complex specialised skills based on the results of research</p>	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	Skills

Complete applied or fundamental research, under supervision, based on methodological knowledge

Level 6			
NLQF		EQF	
	<p>knowledge and insights of a specific domain</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice or in the knowledge domain and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out complex professional or scientific tasks</p>		
Problem-solving skills	Identify and analyse complex problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain and solve these problems in a tactical, strategic and creative way by selecting and using relevant data		
Learning and development skills	Undertake personal development by reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results		
Information skills	Critically collect and analyse in a responsible way broad, in-depth and detailed professional or scientific information on a limited range of basic theories, principles and concepts of and related to the occupation or knowledge domain, as well as limited information on some important current issues, topics and specialties related to the occupation or knowledge domain and present this information		
Communication skills	Communicate in a targeted way with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice		

Level 6			
NLQF		EQF	
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups	Competence
	Take responsibility for the results of own work or study and for the results of the work or study of others		
	Take shared responsibility for the management of processes and the professional development of people and groups		
	Collect and interpret relevant data with the objective of forming an opinion based on considerations of relevant social, professional, scientific and ethical aspects		

Similarities at level 6

- Both frameworks are concerned with advanced knowledge of an occupation or a knowledge domain, implying a critical understanding of theories and principles. In the NLQF it also mentions specific advanced knowledge of a broad field of science.
- The NLQF mentions "complex specialised skills" and in the EQF refers to 'advanced skills'. In both frameworks problems and "tasks" (NLQF) or "activities" (EQF) are complex and unpredictable.
- The "mastery" referred to in the EQF is expressed in the NLQF in various descriptions such as "professional and scientific approach", "evaluates and combines knowledge and insights", "recognise the limitations of existing knowledge ... and take action to address this" and "solves problems in a tactical, strategic and creative way".
- The NLQF speaks about "managing processes", which corresponds to the EQF "Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects".
- Finally, both frameworks speak about the ability to take responsibility for managing the professional development of individual people and groups.

Differences at level 6

- "Innovative capacity" as stated in the EQF is not explicitly identified in the NLQF.
- In the EQF, making decisions is explicitly mentioned, while the NLQF this is just 'forming an opinion'.

4.1.9

NLQF level 7

Level 7			
NLQF		EQF	
Context	A unknown but changeable living or working environment with a high degree of uncertainty, including an international environment		
Knowledge	<p>Possess very specialised and advanced knowledge of an occupation, knowledge domain or field of science and at the interface between the different professions, knowledge domains and fields of sciences</p> <p>Possess a critical understanding of a range of theories, principles and concepts, including the most important relating to the occupation, knowledge domain or field of science</p> <p>Possess extensive, detailed knowledge and critical understanding of some important current issues, topics and specialties related to the occupation, knowledge domain or field of science</p>	<p>Highly specialised knowledge some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research</p> <p>Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields</p>	Knowledge
Applying knowledge	<p>Reproduce, analyse, integrate and apply the knowledge in a range of contexts. Use it to handle complex matters</p> <p>Use this knowledge as the basis of original ideas and research</p> <p>Use acquired knowledge at a high level of abstraction</p>	<p>Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields</p>	Skills

Think conceptually. Develop and deepen arguments

Complete, independently,

Level 7			
NLQF		EQF	
	<p>Provide an original contribution to the development and application of ideas, often in the area of research</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice or in the knowledge domain and at the interface between the different professions or knowledge domains and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out complex professional or scientific tasks</p>		
Problem-solving skills	<p>Identify and analyse complex problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain or field of science and solve the problems in a tactical, strategic and creative way</p> <p>Contribute to a (scientific) solution of complex problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain or field of science by identifying and using data</p>		
Learning and development skills	<p>Undertake personal development which is mostly autonomous</p>		
Information skills	<p>Critically collect and analyse in a responsible way broad, in-depth and detailed scientific information on a range of theories, principles and concepts of and related to the occupation, knowledge domain, or field of science, as well as limited information on some important current subjects and specialties related to an occupation, knowledge domain, or field of science, present this information</p>		
Communication skills	<p>Communicate in a targeted way with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to the professional field</p>		

Level 7			
NLQF		EQF	
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches	Competence
	Take responsibility for the results of own work or study and for the results of the work or study of others	Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of others	
	Take responsibility for the management of complex processes and the professional development of people and groups		
	Formulate judgements based on incomplete and limited information, taking into account social, scientific and ethical responsibilities related to the application of own knowledge and judgements		

Similarities and differences at level 7

- The NLQF and the EQF are both concerned at this level with possession of particularly specialised and advanced knowledge, and a critical understanding (awareness) of problems in the different levels of knowledge in a field and at the interface between fields (in the NLQF refers to different professions, knowledge domains or scientific domains).
- The EQF also speaks about the ability to "Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable". In the NLQF similar responsibilities are described in more detail, namely, "Formulate judgements based on incomplete and limited information, related to the application of own knowledge and judgements". In the EQF new strategic approaches are also required. This differs from the NLQF.
- The NLQF further speaks about being able to "Take responsibility for the management of complex processes and the professional development of people and groups". This is comparable to the description in the EQF of taking responsibility for "contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of others".

Differences at level 7

- In the NLQF, in contrast to the EQF, there is a reference to the possession of "extensive, detailed knowledge and critical understanding of some important current issues, topics and specialties".
- The EQF mentions specialised skills in problem solving. In the NLQF a more detailed description is given, namely "Distinguish and analyse complex problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain or field of science and solve the problems in a tactical, strategic and creative way". In the EQF it is specifically mentioned that problem solving is in the context of "Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields". This is not reflected in the NLQF.

4.1.10 Level 8

Level 8			
NLQF		EQF	
Context	A unknown but changeable living or working environment with a high degree of uncertainty, and in an international environment		
Knowledge	<p>Possess the most advanced knowledge of an occupation, knowledge domain or field of science and at the interface between the different occupations, knowledge domains or fields of science</p> <p>Possess knowledge acquired by personal research or work, leading to an important contribution to development in a vocational and scientific field</p> <p>Possess a critical insight into a vocational or scientific field, including a critical understanding of the most important and current theories, principles and concepts</p>	<p>Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields</p>	Knowledge
Applying knowledge	<p>Reproduce, analyse, integrate and apply this knowledge in an authoritative way and use this knowledge to handle complex matters in a range of contexts</p> <p>Use this knowledge as the basis of original ideas and research</p> <p>Use acquired knowledge at a high level of abstraction.</p>	<p>The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice</p>	Skills

Complete complex fundamental research based on methodological knowledge.
 Contribute through original research to move the boundaries of

Level 8			
NLQF		EQF	
	<p>Think conceptually. Develop and deepen arguments</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice or in the knowledge domain or field of science at the interface between the different professions or knowledge domains and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out complex professional or scientific tasks</p>		
Problem-solving skills	<p>Identify and analyse complex problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain or field of science and solve the problems in a tactical, strategic and creative way</p> <p>Contribute to a (scientific) solution of complex problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain or the field of science by identifying and using data</p>		
Learning and development skills	<p>Undertake personal development and engineering technological, social or cultural progression in society which is mostly autonomous</p>		

Level 8			
NLQF		EQF	
Information skills	Critically collect and analyse in a responsible and broad way in-depth and detailed scientific information about a range of theories, principles and concepts of and related to the occupation, knowledge domain, or field of science, as well as selected information on some important current subjects and specialties related to the occupation, knowledge domain, or field of science, and present this information		
Communication skills	Communicate in a targeted way with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients, the wider scientific community and society as a whole, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to the professional field		
Responsibility and independence	<p>Work with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients, the wider scientific community and society as a whole</p> <p>Take responsibility for the results of own work or study and for the results of the work of others</p> <p>Take responsibility for the management of complex processes and the professional development of people and groups</p> <p>Draft, develop, carry out and apply with academic integrity a complex fundamental research process</p>	<p>Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research</p>	Competence

Similarities at level 8

- Both the NLQF and the EQF are concerned with possessing the most advanced knowledge in a field and at the interface between fields (i.e. occupations, knowledge domains or fields of science).
- The EQF speaks about. "the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques ... required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation". The NLQF stresses the ability to contribute to (scientific) solutions to complex problems and the special skills and techniques required to do this: "Identify and analyse complex problems," and "solve the problems in a tactical, strategic and creative way".
- The EQF refers to "The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation". NLQF includes "Distinguish and analyse complex problems"; "solve the problems in a tactical, strategic and creative way"; "reproduce, analyse, integrate and apply this knowledge in a authoritative way", "use this knowledge to handle complex matters in a range of contexts"; "use the knowledge gained at a high level of abstraction"; "think conceptually" and use "methodological knowledge".
- At this level the EQF also describes applying "the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques" to existing knowledge or professional ways of working in order to extended or redefined it/them. In the NLQF, comparable skills are described in "Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice and in the knowledge domain at the interface between the different professions or knowledge domains and take action to address this".
- At this level in the EQF a high degree of professional integrity and authority in "developing new ideas or processes for work or study contexts" is mentioned. In the NLQF comparable responsibilities are describe as follows: "Reproduce, analyse, integrate and apply this knowledge in an authoritative way. Use this knowledge to handle complex matters in a range of contexts". Both descriptions show that at this level there should be major responsibility for the management of complex processes and the professional development of individuals and groups.

Differences at level 8

- In the NLQF it is explicitly specified that, at this level, knowledge is obtained through personal research or work, including a critical understanding of the most important and current theories, principles and concepts.

4.2 The relation of the NLQF to the Dublin descriptors

In the diagram below the descriptors for levels 5 – 8 of the NLQF and the Dublin descriptors are compared.

NLQF descriptors	Dublin descriptors	
<p>Context The context descriptions of the levels are used along with the described knowledge to determine the grade of difficulty of the skills</p>		
<p>Knowledge Knowledge is the totality of facts, principles, theories and ways of working related to an occupation or a knowledge domain</p>	<p>Knowledge and understanding</p>	<p><u>Bachelor</u> supported by advanced text books with some</p>

		aspects informed by knowledge at the forefront of a field of study
		<u>Master</u> provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing or applying ideas often in a research context
		<u>Doctorate</u> includes a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the methods of research associated with that field
	Applying knowledge and understanding	<u>Bachelor</u> through devising and sustaining arguments
		<u>Master</u> through problem solving abilities applied in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts
		<u>Doctorate</u> is demonstrated by the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity. Is in the context of a contribution that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work some of which merits national or international refereed publication
Skills Cognitive abilities (logical, intuitive and creative)	<u>Applying knowledge</u> Reproduce, analyse,	Learning skills
		<u>Bachelor</u> have developed those skills needed to study further

<p>thinking) and practical abilities (psychomotor skills in applying methods, materials, tools and instruments) within a given context</p>	<p>integrate, evaluate, combine and apply knowledge in an occupation or a knowledge domain</p>		<p>with a high level of autonomy</p>
	<p><u>Problem solving skills</u> Recognise or identify and solve problems</p>		<p><u>Master</u> study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous</p>
	<p><u>Learning and development skills</u> Personal development, autonomously or under supervision</p>		<p><u>Doctorate</u> expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement</p>
	<p><u>Information skills</u> Obtain, collect, process, combine, analyse and evaluate information</p>		
	<p><u>Communication skills</u> Communicate based on conventions relevant to the context</p>		
<p>Responsibility and independence The proven ability to collaborate with others and to take responsibility for own work or study results and/or the work or study results of others</p>			
		<p>Making judgments</p>	<p><u>Bachelor</u> in the context of using those skills needed to study further with a high level of autonomy</p>
			<p><u>Master</u> in the context of studying in a manner that may</p>

		be largely self-directed or autonomous
		<u>Doctorate</u> in the context of promoting technological, social or cultural advancement within academic and professional contexts,
	Communication	<u>Bachelor</u> of information, ideas, problems and solutions
		<u>Master</u> of their conclusions and the underpinning knowledge and rationale (restricted scope) to specialist and non-specialist audiences (monologue)
		<u>Doctorate</u> with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general (dialogue) about their areas of expertise (broad scope)

Part 3: responding to the EQF referencing criteria

5 Responding to the criteria

The EQF Advisory Group, an advisory committee composed of representatives from all Member States, social partners, CEDEFOP, ETF and the Council of Europe, formulated and adopted 10 criteria to facilitate the referencing process for Member States which have chosen to follow up the recommendation. The European Commission and CEDEFOP have followed this up with an explanatory Note that provides information largely based on the experience of other countries related to these criteria. The expansion of the criteria in this Note seeks to increase and guarantee the transparency of the referencing process, but also to contribute to building trust on both the national and international level. What follows is the Dutch interpretation of the criteria and, where relevant, recommendations and possible conclusions.

5.1 Criterion 1

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

Following the development of the EQF and the approval of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council in April 2008 adopting the Framework, The Netherlands began to develop a Dutch national qualification framework, the NLQF. In 2009, the Director General of Higher Education, Vocational Education and Training, Science and Emancipation was asked to carry out this task. During the development of the NLQF a number of different groups of stakeholders and experts were involved in different ways. Also during this process referencing to the EQF was continuously taken into account. Thus the Netherlands were able to undertake the development and the referencing in parallel, with the result that all parties involved in the development process have also been involved in the referencing process.

The **Steering Committee** which has guided the NLQF process comprises the Director of VET and adult education, who is also the chair; the Director for HE; the Deputy Director of secondary education, the Director of the Department of Learning and Working (later replaced by Head of the Lifelong Learning Unit), and the Director of Knowledge in the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation.

The **Expert Group** comprised experts from the different education sectors as well as those with expertise in both regulated and "other qualifications". This group worked on and contributed to the development of descriptions of the learning outcomes of the current regulated qualifications in relation to the NLQF levels and contributed to the testing of these descriptions with representatives/practitioners of their educational sector.

The Leijnse Committee (the NLQF-EQF Committee) was established by the Minister for Education, Culture and Science. It was composed of four professors, representing the different domains of education, with Professor Doctor Leijnse as its chair. The Committee was asked to give independent advice to the Minister concerning the design of the NLQF, referencing to the EQF, the procedures and criteria under which providers of qualifications not regulated by the three Ministries could access the NLQF, and the positioning and role of the NCP-NLQF.

Relevant stakeholders in the field of education and training were consulted continuously during the development of the NLQF. During these process specific activities involving stakeholders took place all over the country: round table meetings were held, information was delivered to different organisations and consultations were conducted through the website: www.nlqf.nl.

After this, the draft NLQF and the proposal for referencing to the EQF were discussed in the Leijnse Committee and a new draft proposed by the Committee was distributed to stakeholders for a second consultation. Based on comments received from stakeholders the Committee formulated their advice to the Education Minister.

In 2011, The Minister and the Government approved the NLQF and the referencing of the levels to the EQF, including relevant arrangements as maintenance and evaluation. At this time, the Minister also decided on the tasks for the future NCP-NLQF. The Centre for Prior Learning will act as the NCP-NLQF for the next two years and has started with further development of criteria and procedures for classification, registration, information and communication. At the moment the Education Ministry is acting as the NCP-NLQF. (More information on this can be found under criterion 4 and in the annex 5 the note on NCP-NLQF.)

For involvement of the competent bodies on quality assurance see criterion 5.

5.2 Criterion 2

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework.

The description of the learning outcomes of existing qualifications, the EQF level descriptors and the Dublin descriptors served as bases for the development of the NLQF. This process of translating already existing learning outcomes into the level descriptors of the NLQF was carried out by the Expert Group and tested by their colleagues. As noted above, this process and the process of referencing to the EQF were carried out concurrently. Referencing to the EQF was presented and discussed at all meetings and discussions with stakeholders. The technical analysis, carried out by the experts from the different education sectors, and the feedback from the field testing with practitioners, showed that there was a good match between the existing learning outcomes of the present Dutch qualification system and the EQF level descriptors. The learning outcomes in the entry level of the NLQF were an exception. For this level no reference could be matched with a level in the EQF. However, as explained earlier in this report, it is considered to be an important level in the NLQF. After this exercise the results were discussed in round table meetings, presentations and discussions with the stakeholders all over the country. Participants generally agreed on the positioning of the regulated qualifications in the levels of the NLQF and on the referencing with the EQF. Representatives of the private education sector were also content with the positioning of the levels in the NLQF. This was shown in some testing undertaken in the financial sector. It also emerged that NLQF will have a wider civil effect, for example to the education and training programmes of the army and by giving an NLQF level recognising the quality of these programmes.

One of the main issues for stakeholders has been the positioning of VWO at NLQF level 5 in the NLQF. The decision was taken by the Minister and the Government to place VWO at this level and the NCP-NLQF was asked to evaluate this positioning within two years, taking into account the results of discussion at EU level and the result of testing in the field.

Another issue was the positioning of pre-vocational secondary education and VET level 2 at the same level in the NLQF, due to the fact that the first one does not give access to the labour market. But as the NLQF is based on learning outcomes and not on the type of education and the positioning was clearly demonstrated by the work of the Expert Group, which contained representatives of both education sectors, it was judged that there was no real problem with this.

The generic classification of the Dutch level 4 VET was another problem, since it was argued that some of the qualifications in this grouping were at NLQF level 4 and some were at level NLQF level 5. The solution which has been adopted is that within one year the CRAs will be able to request the NCP to review the classification for some level 4 education programmes in order to obtain a level 5 classification for these qualifications based on the level of their learning outcomes.

The difference between professionally- and academically-orientated Bachelors doesn't affect the generic classification in the NLQF and thus in the EQF as both are positioned at level 6 in the NLQF and thus in the EQF.

The NCP-NLQF has the task of monitoring and evaluating the positioning of the levels of the NLQF and their alignment to the EQF. If a change is needed a proposal will be developed for the Minister to change the NLQF.

The further implementation of the NLQF and the referencing to the EQF is work in progress. Undoubtedly there will have to be changes in the future based on the feedback which emerges from the implementation.

5.3 Criterion 3

The national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems.

In the Netherlands the development of the NLQF did not start from scratch. The principle of learning outcomes was already developed and implemented; the qualification framework for VET was in place; and HE was making changes in accordance with the Bologna process. In the private sector, on both national and international levels (e.g. in the marketing sector), education and training programmes have already been described in learning outcomes. Based on that material levels of learning had already been indicated, and sometimes determined, by some sectors.

The NLQF includes many different types of qualifications from different educational sectors. As indicated above, they are all based on learning outcomes, but the different education sectors work differently with learning outcomes. The NLQF is also described in terms of learning outcomes in relation to the level descriptors - i.e. knowledge, skills, responsibility and independence. The NLQF

is open to all qualifications, both those regulated by the three Ministries and “other qualifications”. For qualifications to be classified in the NLQF a number of conditions and procedures have now been developed. The classification of qualifications other than those regulated by the three Ministries will take place under the responsibility of the NCP-NLQF, acting on behalf of the Government. One of the conditions for these qualifications to be classified in the NLQF is the description of the learning outcomes, which will have to be stated in terms similar to the level descriptors of the NLQF. From the side of the private sector no obstacles are foreseen in doing this. Classification in the NLQF will be based on a comparison of the learning outcomes of a qualification with the level descriptions in the NLQF. This applies to all qualifications. Whether qualifications are accepted in the labour market is also taken into account.

Secondary education is working with attainment targets and final terms which describe for each subject what a pupil should know and be able to do at the end of the whole educational process. The descriptors for each subject have been combined into generic descriptors for referencing secondary education qualification levels to the levels in the NLQF and thus referencing to the EQF levels.

Example VWO English:

The candidate can: respond appropriately in social contacts in English; ask for and provide relevant information; express feelings; describe things or people and express views and arguments and apply strategies to progress a discussion.

Secondary VET still works with two systems: work-based and theory-based. VET already has a framework of qualifications based on learning outcomes in which each qualification is described by defining what a student should know and be able to do at the end of the journey and at what level the student’s learning outcomes should be examined. These final terms or qualification dossiers are both the starting point for the school to organise its programmes and the benchmark against which examinations are set.

Example level 3 VET cook:

Role and responsibilities: depending on the company policy, the cook works alone or in a team. Sometimes he/she uses one or more assistant(s). In this case, he/she has a guiding and supervisory role. He/she is then responsible for the execution and the results of the tasks carried out by the assistant(s).

HE in the Netherlands has the Bachelor, Master and Doctorate structure. Accreditation of these courses takes also place on the basis of the description of learning outcomes appropriate to the Dublin Descriptors. Adherence to these standards is guaranteed by NVAO accreditation. The learning outcomes for the Doctoral level are determined and assessed by university commissions.

“Other qualifications”

The NLQF is also open for all “other qualifications” (i.e. those which are not regulated by the three Ministries) in order to enhance the transparency in the Dutch education and training system, improve the employability of individuals, and support lifelong learning. Providers need to meet the procedures and criteria to show that they have quality assurance mechanisms and that each qualification includes a description of the levels of learning in learning outcomes and requires a

substantial volume of learning effort. If the criteria are met, they can request recognition as an NLQF qualification and thus an indication of an EQF level.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

In the Netherlands, the term Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is used for validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning. The hallmark of APL in the Netherlands is that the competences of individuals are compared against a preselected measure: called a recognised APL standard.

All qualifications in VET and HE which are regulated by the three Ministries can function as APL recognised standards. Sector qualifications can also be recognised for this purpose. For more information see chapter 1.11.

Relation to the credit systems

The NLQF is not a credit-based qualifications framework. HE is working with ECTS according to European agreements. ECVET is starting to be developed in VET. How the Netherlands will further implement ECVET will be examined in the autumn of 2011.

5.4 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 European Parliament and the Council of the European Union recommend that Member States support the referencing of qualifications systems to the EQF by the establishment of a national coordination point (in The Netherlands, the NCP-NLQF). Regarding the positioning of the NCP-NLQF, The Netherlands has studied and taken into account the recommendations of the European Union and the experiences of countries that have gone before us. In particular information has been gathered by participating in the network on NCPs and the seminar in Vienna, June 2011. Besides the referencing of the levels of the NLQF to the levels in the EQF, the NCP-NLQF will have the tasks of maintaining the NLQF, classifying new qualifications and evaluating the way the NLQF contributes to more transparency in the world of education and training, stimulates student and labour mobility and increases participation in lifelong learning. The current NCP-NLQF is in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science: in due course it will hand over responsibility for the tasks to an independent organisation, which will execute the work on behalf of the Government.

Two procedures have been developed for registering qualifications in the NLQF: on the one hand for qualifications regulated by the Ministries (CREBO and CROHO), on the other hand for "other qualifications". CREBO stands for Central Register for VET. It lists all courses in VET which are recognised by the Education Ministry. CROHO is the abbreviation of Central Register of Higher Education. It lists all courses for HE which are recognised by the Ministry. Research will take place in order to see how the two procedures can lead to one register.

The criteria governing the classification of regulated and "other qualifications" are the same and will be applied in the same way. Regulated qualifications have already been through the process. Based on the learning outcomes of the descriptors in the NLQF the 17 existing levels of qualification have been placed at the nine levels of the NLQF. This work has been done by the Expert Group in close cooperation with representatives of the different education sectors. Meanwhile, representatives of other qualification have researched the possibilities for classification

and the process of classifying these qualifications will start in autumn 2011. The main difference between the two processes is the procedure for requesting a classification.

For a description of the procedures see annex 4, "The Management and maintenance of the NLQF and its relation to the EQF". At the moment the existing description of the learning outcomes of qualifications regulated by the three ministries are generically classified into the levels of the NLQF. The present NLQF will be evaluated after two years and, if needed, changes will be proposed to the Minister for the classification of the regulated qualifications.

"Other qualifications"

As noted above, "other qualifications" are all the qualifications not regulated by the three Ministries. They include: qualifications in the sectoral framework; qualifications developed by other ministries (such as the Ministry of Defence); and qualifications developed by private institutions which have a high recognition in the labour market.

This classification takes place as follows:

Competent bodies for "other qualifications" will be able to apply to the NCP-NLQF to have their qualifications classified in the NLQF. The preconditions for the application have been described already. A classification procedure is proposed as follows:

- Based on a format, the NCP-NLQF decides whether an application is complete and meets requirements and conditions.
- Where this is the case, the classification request is submitted to a team of independent experts.
- The team of independent experts advises on the appropriate classification level in the NLQF. In reaching a view on the appropriate level they will also look at the level below and above.
- The NCP-NLQF takes a decision based on the opinion of the expert team and provides the qualification with an NLQF level and a reference to the EQF level.
- The applicant can appeal this decision before a special Appeals Committee.
- Following the final determination, the classification level will be included in the register of the NLQF and published on the NCP-NLQF website.

5.5 Criterion 5

The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation).

In annex 3 of the recommendation on the EQF, ten Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in the context of the EQF are set out as follows:

When implementing the European Qualifications Framework, quality assurance — which is necessary to ensure accountability and the improvement in HE and VET — should be carried out in accordance with the following principles:

- Quality assurance policies and procedures should underpin all levels of the European Qualifications Framework.
- Quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions.
- Quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies.

- External monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review.
- Quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes.
- Quality assurance systems include the following elements:
 - clear and measurable objectives and standards;
 - guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement;
 - appropriate resources;
 - consistent evaluation methods, including self-assessment and external review;
 - feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement;
 - widely accessible evaluation results.
- Quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis.
- Quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the Community.
- Quality assurance orientations at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning.

These common principles are important to guarantee the quality of the classifications to promote mutual trust within and between Member States.

In accordance with these Common Principles for Quality, The Netherlands has organised its quality assurance in the following way:

- a For all levels in the NLQF, quality assurance policies and procedures are in place: by law; by the Inspectorate of Education; by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO); by university committees; and by the competent bodies for quality assurance concerning private education. For all levels of qualifications the quality assurance includes: that the level is appropriate; and that the quality of the management of education and training institutions is an integral part of the quality control by the Inspectorate of Education, or (for HE) the NVAO.
- b In the Netherlands the quality assurance partly takes place by self-evaluation of the institution, by evaluation by the students and the parents (where appropriate) and by the external bodies such as the Inspectorates, depending on the level of education (as explained below).

In **secondary education** an annual monitoring of schools and their management by the Inspectorate of Education takes place using evaluation criteria covering compliance with legislation, regulations, accountability and the level of achievement in relation to the established subject learning outcomes. Parents also monitor the quality of the school (this is established by law).

The results are public.

In **vocational education and training** the Inspectorate not only reviews the quality of the institutions and their management on an annual base, but also looks after the quality of the institutions which are responsible for examinations in the VET sector. Students also play a role in assessing the quality of the institutions (this is established by law). These results are public.

In **HE**, the NVAO ensures the quality and levels of HE by assessing the education and providing a quality mark (accreditation). Next to this the Inspectorate checks the compliance of HEIs in relation to legislation.

Quality assurance procedures are in place for the Bachelor and Master levels: these take the form of external peer reviews and internal self evaluation and student evaluation (this is established by law). The Doctoral level is examined by university committees.

Private education providers have to meet the quality code which has been set by the association of private providers and by their own professional bodies.

To conclude

The NCP-NLQF is an independent body, not belonging to the ministries or to a specific education sector. However the NCP-NLQF acts on behalf of the three regulating ministries.

Concerning the classification of the regulated qualifications awarded by institutions responsible for the quality of the qualification, the NCP-NLQF relies on and takes over the existing positioning of the qualifications. Concerning "other qualifications", the provider requesting for a classification, has to show how quality assurance is organised, the validity of the examinations and the description of the learning levels in learning outcomes.

5.6 Criterion 6

The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.

We received the following statements so far from the most important stakeholders:

Dutch – Flemish Accreditation Organization

The NLQF meets its principles. However, NVAO wishes to make the following points:

- 1 We look forward to the results of the discussions at European level on the classification of both vwo and the associate degree at Level 5 NLQF.
- 2 The international expert, Michael Schopf, says in his comments that the tasks of the NCP-NLQF appear to be relatively complete (compared to developments in Germany) and also that the classification done by the NCP-NLQF may differ from accreditation. This is a concern for us. Differences and uncertainty about the classification of levels should be avoided. The NCP_NLQF should use and benefit from the experiences of the NVAO.
- 3 It is stated that qualifications may be classified at Levels 5 to 8 in the NLQF. However providers or individuals should not be able to use these levels as "equivalent to the bachelor degree" or "equivalent to higher education level". Only those qualifications which have been recognized as HE qualifications should be included in the future register.

The Inspectorate of education

The Inspectorate of Education has followed with great interest the process of referencing. We especially have paid attention to the usefulness of descriptors for diplomas and for educational practice. We expect that the descriptors will stimulate quality of educational processes and diploma value, whether in continuing education or on the labour market. We also recognize the complexity of educational systems and that qualification levels can sometimes dissect and otherwise transcend educational levels. We trust that all relevant actors will use this characteristic for the better of education and pupils/students, and that future evaluation of the NLQF will safeguard this. The NCP

will look into the regulation of admission rights to further levels of education and the alignment of Dublin descriptors and NLQF descriptors.

Dutch association for Vocational Education and Training and Adult education

This Association agrees on the classification of the levels 1-4 in VET at the levels 1-4 of the NLQF and the EQF. They agree on the recommendations of the Leijnse Committee and are pleased in particular with the possibility, if proven, of a higher level NLQF classification for some of their programmes currently at level 4.

Dutch Association for private education and training providers

This Association is pleased that the NLQF is open for the classification of qualifications other than those regulated by the three ministries. They feel that this will increase the civil effect of the programmes offered by private providers and will contribute to the transparency of education and training programmes in The Netherlands.

VNO – NCW

The Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers, VNO – NCW and MKB Netherlands, supports the process in The Netherlands to reference the NLQF to the EQF and to begin its implementation. We hope that in the near future this instrument, in conjunction with APL and good quality assurance, will have a positive effect on labour mobility and to perform possibly better in lifelong learning through formal **and** private education and training. In the coming years we will follow progress and then, based on experience gained and improvements made, we will give our opinion on the added value of these instruments and their usefulness for the labour market.

The organization of unions in The Netherlands (FNV)

NLQF contributes to the promotion of lifelong learning and to the employability and mobility of individuals. NLQF could lead to greater transparency of non-formal education and training, both in terms of quality and level indication. It increases an employee's opportunities of choosing training appropriate to his/her existing level and it offers an employer a better guarantee of a good return on money spent on the education and training. In particular, NLQF is considered to be a tool that will open up opportunities for greater transparency in branch/sector qualifications. Classifying the levels of qualifications offered by branches/sectors to NLQF and EQF levels will increase the visibility of education and training offers. Thus, NLQF offers possibilities for strengthening career policy within sectors and transfer opportunities within and between sectors. However, EQF is just a tool and will be only effective if it is part of employability policy in which APL and career and education and training strategies are integrated. NLQF can also play an important role for low-skilled workers or job seekers who have difficulty using the formal route to a diploma/certificate. By giving them insight into the level of education they have already successfully completed it could stimulate them to undertake further education which could, ultimately, lead to a formal qualification.

5.7 Criterion 7

The referencing process shall involve international experts.
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In developing the NLQF and their reference to the EQF in the Netherlands, we counted on the critical appraisal of three experts from Europe. In choosing the experts their expertise was

obviously important, but also whether there was an opportunity to work with experts from countries with which most of The Netherlands' student and labour mobility takes place. The experts were: Mike Coles, UK, Michael Schopf, Germany, and, Wilfried Boomgaert, Belgium (Flanders).

The Netherlands invited these experts for the following reasons:

- Two of them are members of the EQF Advisory Group
- They come from neighbouring countries.

The experts discussed the following issues with the project team and the Steering Committee at two different meetings and by e-mail:

- The choice for the descriptors in the NLQF and how the different types of qualifications regulated by the three Ministries are described and sometimes placed together at the same NLQF level.
- Why and how the NLQF has been developed (this was at a meeting with members of the Leijnse Committee).

Based on the comments of the experts the referencing document and the annexes have been reviewed and again discussed with the Steering Committee in a final meeting. A rich exchange of views took place in this meeting. Based on the comments and recommendation the referencing report was further reviewed.

Statements of the three international experts:

Mike Coles

The referencing of the NLQF to the EQF has been completed in a professional way. The process has been open to critical international opinion from the beginning and through to the final meeting in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The benefit of starting the NLQF referencing with a sound basis in learning outcomes for qualifications has allowed the referencing to be straightforward in most places and has allowed open and constructive discussion of 'best fit' in other places. Even with a strong national consensus built up through extensive consultation, the NLQF is still seen as work in progress with regard to allocating some qualifications to levels (Criterion 4) - this underlines the importance of the NLQF and the EQF in supporting transparency and improving quality in the qualifications system.

Wilfried Boomgaert

Autumn 2010 I was invited by the Dutch representative in the EQF Advisory Group to participate as an international expert in the development of the Dutch National Qualifications Framework (NLQF) and in the NLQF-EQF referencing process. It was a pleasure for me to accept that proposal, being well acquainted with the education system of this neighbouring country after two decades of profound bilateral contacts between the Dutch and Flemish Ministries of Education. Together with the two other international experts we had the opportunity to meet and discuss with the Dutch Steering Committee on two crucial moments: when the first draft of the NLQF descriptors was available and when the pre-final version of the referencing report was ready. As the development and political agreement of the NLQF was partially overlapping with the referencing process, it was a big challenge for the authors of the referencing report to focus on the referencing and to make a clear distinction between three phases: the NLQF development, the NLQF-EQF referencing process and the plans for the future NCP-NLQF procedure for aligning "other qualifications" to the NLQF.

In particular I was very interested in the Dutch “bottom-up approach” connecting 17 descriptions of existing qualification types or groups to the EQF level descriptors by merging them into nine NLQF level descriptors. In the Dutch referencing report the relationship between the NLQF level descriptors and the EQF level descriptors is well documented, and referencing criterion 2 is thus fulfilled, although the complex structure of the skills column (with 5 sub-columns) in the NLQF makes the comparison rather complex.

By giving some illustrations of already existing learning outcomes of particular qualifications (for example the learning outcomes in the qualification file of an MBO-3 qualification that are available today), the report could be enriched and given more information under referencing criterion 3. This way it should also be possible to demonstrate how the specific learning outcomes/descriptors of a qualification type (like for example MBO-3) is based on evidence and to give insight in the underlying bottom-up methodology for aligning a NLQF level to a particular qualification. This means that the report could still be improved concerning referencing criterion 4. By giving more insight in this evidence, the criticism saying that the aligning of the VWO qualification to NLQF and EQF level 5 is too much based on political and social decisions not to place VWO and HAVO at the same level and rather on duration arguments than on the learning outcome approach could be countered.

At this moment, when the final version of the draft referencing report is almost ready and looking back to previous drafts, I must say that the balance is positive.

The report gives a very good and concise description of the Dutch education system, including the APL procedure, and the quality assurance arrangements in place on each education level. We get ample information on the consultation processes and the many stakeholder groups involved. The NLQF that has been developed recently has been adopted both by the stakeholders groups and at the political level, although it is not clear what (legal) status the NLQF has within the Dutch qualification system. On the basis of the referencing report we know that the NLQF is considered as a reference tool, not fixed in legislation, but “work in progress” and open for revision the coming years. A very important decision made is that the NLQF is an open tool, not only dedicated to formal education and training but also to “other qualifications” outside the formal education and training system. Consequently it has the potential to become a really comprehensive qualifications framework in the near future.

Michael Schopf

The following statement is based on the experiences with the development of the NLQF, the German QF and the European recommendations for a common education area, esp. EQF and ECVET. Involved also has been an oversight about National Qualification Frameworks in some EU-Member States and New Zealand. Some additional remarks might have been influenced by the updating of ISCED 2011 and the directive 2005/36/EG.

The international experts assisted with the development of the NLQF for about eighteen months. In that time all the meetings and written contacts took place in a very constructive and friendly atmosphere. A lot of their proposals were accepted, others it was jointly agreed to cancel (mostly after additional information about the specific situation in the Netherlands was made available), and only a very few were left unadopted. These will be described as open questions at the end of this statement. These questions may gain in importance and may be discussed again when the Referencing Report is presented to the EQF Advisory Group or later on, when the NLQF is validated.

The initial situation in the Netherlands for the development of the NLQF was rather comfortable. The decision to confine oneself in a first step to the 17 ministry regulated qualifications (or better: qualification groups) made the following processes not too complicated and the number of stakeholders manageable (compared e.g. to Germany). The system of the ministry regulated qualifications, as it is described in a very understandable way in the Referencing Report, is very transparent, the ranking of the qualifications had in nearly all cases not to be discussed and the EQF claim of outcome-orientated curricula had been realised already.

The project structure was practicable and clever. All institutions with responsibilities for ministry-regulated qualifications had a role in working or steering committees. They have been members of the Expert Group and we had close consultation with some of them and with the Leijnse Committee, which had been established by the Education Minister to report on the final draft version of the NLQF and to formulate advice on its implementation before it went to the Minister and the Parliament. The timetable was demanding, but at the end there was only a very small delay. (There are also ambitious plans to develop a Dutch version of ECVET, starting in autumn 2011.)

Because of the specific Dutch situation the process of establishing the NLQF was the reverse of that followed in many countries. These countries (e.g. Germany) developed a complete National Qualification Framework (NQF) in a first step with no direct connections to existing qualifications. As a second step they tried to relate all their existing qualifications to this draft NQF. In the Netherlands the 17 Ministry-regulated qualifications were related to the eight levels (plus Entry Level) of the NLQF and after that the columns, sub columns and descriptors were developed.

Therefore the formulation of the columns and descriptors did not seem to be so important because the structure of the Ministry-regulated qualifications was already fixed. Columns 1 (Knowledge) and 3 (Responsibility and independence) and the descriptors within them look very similar to the EQF. A decision was taken not to adopt the term "Competence" from the EQF for column 3 because of its ambiguity.) Column 2 ("Skills") seems at the first sight to be surprisingly broad, especially because it requires five sub columns. However, because the EQF is a meta-framework which must link to a range of national systems, the terms can be used broadly, while a national qualifications framework such as the NLQF can use the broad term, but also add detail, taking special features of the national system into account. Detailed descriptions already existed for the 17 regulated qualifications which were already outcome-orientated, and these could be taken over into the NLQF (but one not so important question at the end of this statement). To add a description of the "Context" at every level is a sensible decision, because the information about the contexts makes the understanding and relating of a qualification easier. (Germany has found a similar solution and has added to each level a "Niveau Descriptor")

It is only necessary that the NLQF should be compatible with the EQF and the Dublin Descriptors. And in chapter 4 of the Referencing Report it has been shown that these conditions have been met and that the eight levels of the NLQF correspond to the eight EQF levels. In addition an "Entry Level" has been developed for the NLQF, mostly for social and political reasons. Formally this is acceptable. The levelling of the qualifications seems to be satisfactory and the reasons to make a difference between VWO (level 5) and HAVO (level 4) are understandable. (At this point of the process Germany will make a similar difference for the same reasons.)

Formulating descriptors has proved problematic in many countries. This was also the case with the development of the EQF, where many discussions were held about the number of descriptors and

the graduation of the descriptors from level to level. Maybe at some point the ESCO project will find consensual and practical solutions, but until then the EQF descriptors need to be accepted in each national context even if they are not ideal. In the same way, Europe will have to live with the Dutch descriptors for the time being. At the moment they are as imprecise and far from being a proper taxonomy as all the others, and to use them to relate qualifications to levels will require a lot of good will (and often additional informal support and encouragement).

The responsibilities and the independence of the NCP-NLQF are reminiscent of an institution for the accreditation of university studies. Therefore the judgements of the NCP-NLQF will be as varied as the judgements of the accreditation system. In any case the Dutch NCP will need a lot of resources (manpower and money) to carry out their duties in an acceptable manner. (Other states have planned a much smaller role for their NCP – e.g., in Germany, levelling is the responsibility of competent bodies and the NCP collects and spreads information and can be asked for help, if competent bodies in one education area do not trust the levelling in another sector.)

Questions not yet addressed:

- What legal status will the NLQF have?
- In which areas are the “other qualifications” located and what significance will they have in the education sector?
- Has the outcome orientation principle been used too strictly?
- Is a specific “Entry Level” necessary?
- Should it be possible to classify and register specific qualifications as well as generic qualifications in the NLQF?
- Is it wise to limit the duration of qualifications?

5.8 Criterion 8

The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria.

The development of the NLQF and the referencing to the EQF has been carried out under the responsibility of the Education Ministry in collaboration with a large group of stakeholders. The referencing and the supporting evidence for this for all education sectors is outlined in this report. The approval of the NLQF, the referencing to the EQF, and the positioning of the NCP-NLQF were approved by the Minister and the Government in September 2011.

It is clearly stated that the NCP-NLQF has an important task in monitoring the NLQF, evaluating it with the support of stakeholders, and developing proposals for reviewing the NLQF as required. This report will be presented after the EQF Advisory Group and may be reviewed and then published on the website www.nlqf.nl. All criteria and procedures are explained in this report.

5.9 Criterion 9

The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports.

After completion of the report, the European Commission will be informed and will link the report to their site.

5.10 Criterion 10

Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.

In the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 2008 the following recommendation is stated that member States should:

Adopt Measures, as appropriate, so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and "Europass" documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the 'appropriate' European Qualifications Framework level.

All diplomas and certificates in the Netherlands mention, the qualification or degree obtained. In HE, the Diploma Supplement is always issued. For all qualifications in VET, Certificate Supplements are available.

At the moment we are discussing how the NLQF-EQF levels will be entered on diplomas and certificates. In the study for reviewing the diploma's and certificates the visibility of the NLQF and EQF levels are taken into account. The NCP-NLQF will be asked to develop a proposal for this development.

Annex 1: the European context

Lisbon objectives

General objectives

In March 2000 the European Council formulated ambitious objectives for the European Union during a special meeting in Lisbon. Because of economic and social developments, such as globalisation and the growing importance of ICT, the European Union had to adapt its existing strategy and the Council agreed to aim at “becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”.

One of the key components for a well-functioning knowledge-based economy is a modern education and training system. Therefore the Lisbon European Council set the objective for education and training in the European Union to increase transparency of qualifications in order to adapt to the demands of the knowledge society. By increasing the transparency of qualifications, lifelong learning should be stimulated and mobility between the different Member States should become more feasible for students as well as for employees.

Education and training 2010

In 2001 in Stockholm the Council agreed three strategic objectives to modernise the European education system:

- Improving quality & effectiveness
- Opening-up education and training systems to the wider world
- Facilitating the access of all to education and training systems

To attain these goals, a detailed work programme for education and training systems was introduced the next year. For the first time, a framework for European cooperation was developed concerning education and training, based on common objectives with, as its main purpose, optimising the national education and training systems supported by EU tools, mutual learning and sharing of good practice.

By executing this programme, Europe aims to be recognised as a worldwide reference for high quality education and training by 2010, in order to attract students, scholars and researchers from other world regions. Within the European Union this programme brings about compatible education and training systems and creates the opportunity to validate qualifications achieved in other countries, which should enable easier mobility between the Member States. Furthermore, Europe wants to stimulate lifelong learning by giving access to education and training systems at all ages.

Education and training 2020

The results of the work programme, in combination with efforts in line with the Bologna and Copenhagen processes have led to considerable progress in national reforms designed to stimulate lifelong learning, modernise HE, and develop common European tools to support quality, transparency and mobility.

Yet the Lisbon ambitions to become a competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy are not yet fully reached.

In 2009, the policy document, 'Education and training 2010' was replaced by 'Education and training 2020', which builds on its predecessor. This framework provides four common strategic objectives to support the Member States in further developing their educational and training systems:

- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Making lifelong learning a reality
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training

The Bologna process

In 1999, 29 countries engaged in a voluntary process to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by signing the Bologna Declaration. The emphasis in the Bologna Declaration was on a highly qualitative, attractive and competitive European HE system, where transparency and recognition of programmes would make students more mobile and employable within the different states that joined the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This area would be established by 2010 and now goes beyond Europe, with 47 member countries.

More concretely, the Declaration aimed at the following six objectives:

- 1 adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
- 2 adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate;
- 3 establishment of a system of credits, such as in the ECTS;
- 4 promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the free movement of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff;
- 5 promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance;
- 6 promotion of the necessary European dimensions in HE.

These six objectives are the essence of the Bologna process and have since been developed further (see below). Since 1999 ministerial meetings take place every two years to discuss the progress of the Bologna process. During these meetings the agenda was broadened and greater precision was given to the systems that had to be developed. One of the results of these meetings was that the undergraduate/postgraduate degree structure has been modified into a three-cycle system. The first cycle is often referred to as the Bachelor level. This cycle also includes 'short' programmes (including "Associate degrees") which provide access to the labour market as well as to other courses to continue studying for a Bachelor degree. This short cycle is integrated in the QF-EHEA since ministers agreed in Bergen (2005) that the framework would include the possibility of intermediate qualifications, within national contexts. The second cycle is now referred to as the Master level. The third cycle describes the Doctoral degree. This system includes the concept of qualifications frameworks, with an emphasis on learning outcomes.

To implement the decisions taken in the ministerial meetings, the Bologna Follow-up group (BFUG) was set up. This includes representatives of the participating countries as well as social partners. Their primary objective is to ensure and facilitate the comparability and the link between NQFs and the QF-EHEA, sustained by a relationship based on cooperation.

During the anniversary conference in March 2010 in Budapest-Vienna the European Higher Education Area was officially launched.

The Dublin descriptors

The first shared descriptors for Bachelor and Master degrees were proposed in March 2002. In 2004, a set of descriptors for the third cycle (Doctoral degree) and the short cycle (within the first cycle) was agreed upon. These descriptors, referred to as the Dublin descriptors were integrated into the QF-EHEA in 2005.

European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)

In the framework of the Bologna Declaration, the participants formulated the need for a system of credits. These credits correspond with learning outcomes and can be transferred between different Member States, in order to recognise periods of studying abroad. Since 2009 every HEI which applies ECTS provides course descriptions that contain learning outcomes and information about workload. The learning outcomes describe what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do, which is in turn expressed in terms of credits.

Having been developed as a credit transfer system, ECTS developed into a credit accumulation system, which means that students can obtain a degree by achieving a certain number of credits, normally within certain requirements for the content of the studies leading to the credits.

Because of the compatibility of credits in the European Member States teaching and learning across Europe is becoming more transparent and flexible, which is contributing to greater student mobility within the European Union.

European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Universities' Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) received the mandate to design a set of European standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG). As agreed on in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), the four associations explored which standards and guidelines would designate an adequate system for internal and external quality assurance and for quality assurance agencies.

The standards are divided in three parts:

- Internal quality assurance of HEIs
- External quality assurance of HE
- Quality assurance of external quality assurance agencies

The key principle of the ESG is that HEIs themselves are responsible for quality assurance and therefore they need to develop a 'quality culture', an institutional and individual attitude that strives for continuous enhancement of quality. Students and stakeholders will be involved in the quality assurance processes.

The Copenhagen process

General objectives

Besides cooperation concerning HE, the development of high quality VET is a crucial and integral part of the Lisbon strategy, in particular in terms of promoting social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability and competitiveness. In November 2002 this need was discussed by ministers of the Member States, with the Copenhagen Declaration as result. The objective of this declaration was to develop an enhanced European cooperation in VET by 2010.

The Copenhagen declaration formulates four priorities, which are in line with previous initiatives in the Lisbon strategy framework:

- Improving cooperation in order to make a world-wide reference for learners
- Transparency, information and guidance
- Recognition of competences and qualifications
- Quality assurance

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET)

In line with the renewed Lisbon strategy and the Copenhagen Process a major step forward for VET was taken in May 2009 with the development of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). EQAVET can be described as a 'toolbox', which can be used to monitor the improvement of the quality of the system and the governance of VET. EQAVET is designed to increase the transparency of, and consistency in, the development of VET in Member States and to enable comparable statements to be made in Member States about the status of quality assurance in VET. EQAVET takes developments of other European tools (e.g. NQFs, the EQF, RPL and ECVET) into consideration. Member States should develop approaches for improving their national quality assurance systems by 18 June 2011 at the latest.

In order to support the implementation of EQAVET, the European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) network has been installed, replacing the former ENQA-VET network in 2010. Besides supporting the implementation of EQAVET, the EQAVET network is used as an instrument for the communication process between the EU Member States, the social partners and the European Commission.

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

ECVET was launched with EQAVET on 20th May 2009 in order to create a European Credit System, like ECTS, for VET. ECVET can be defined as a (voluntary) framework describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes.

As with ECTS, each unit of learning outcomes can be associated with a certain number of points (ECVET points) developed on the basis of common European standards. 60 points correspond to the learning outcomes achieved in a year of full-time VET.

By making learning and qualification systems more open to each other, compatibility between general education and VET systems is increased. This allows individuals to build their own learning pathways to qualifications, which contributes to the principle of lifelong learning and increases mobility within Member States.

Annex 2: the European Qualification Framework

The European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)

With the development of the Dutch National Qualification Framework (NLQF) the Netherlands follows the development of the EQF, a qualifications framework consisting of eight levels of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are descriptions of what someone knows and can do after completion of a learning process. These learning outcomes are described in the EQF in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing the EQF came into force officially in April 2008.

Through the EQF, levels of qualifications from different countries are more comparable to each other. The (descriptors of the) eight levels serve as a reference for all levels of qualifications; in whatever form they are offered. The EQF will contribute to greater transparency in the various education systems of the EU Member States and to increasing participation in lifelong learning. In addition, the comparison of qualifications from different European countries within a reference framework, contributes to facilitating the international mobility of students and workers. For example, students can participate in a work placement in a training company in another country or follow (part of) their education abroad. Workers with a diploma or certificate can travel more easily for work to another EU country.

Countries giving effect to this Recommendation intend to link their national qualifications levels to the EQF, on a voluntary basis, by 2010. From 2012, the aim is to include a reference to the EQF level on any diploma or certificate.

To date, four countries have referenced their national framework(s) of qualifications to the EQF, namely, Ireland, Malta, UK and France. It is expected that in 2011 more than 20 Member States, including The Netherlands, will complete the referencing process. The other Member States will follow soon after. Besides the EU countries, at least 15 countries outside the EU are following the EQF developments, from exploration through to legislation.

Annex 3: learning outcomes of the Dutch regulated qualifications

Introduction

In this document you find the learning outcomes of the qualifications regulated by the Ministry of Education Culture and Science, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation (qualifications concerning food and the environment) and the Ministry of Healthcare, Welfare and Sports (qualifications for medical specialists). These learning outcomes describe what a learner must know, understand and be able to do to achieve the qualification.

These qualification levels are well established and recognised within the Dutch system. For example the HAVO diploma (Senior general secondary education), the qualification level MBO-4 (VET level 4, Middle management or Specialist training) or the Doctorate have all had decades of strong social recognition. This new description in learning outcomes of these diploma levels therefore is done to be used as the basis of development of the Dutch national qualifications framework, the NLQF. The NLQF and the relating documents will be published on the website www.NLQF.nl.

Development

The Ministry of Education Culture and Science, working in close cooperation with experts from the different educational sectors, set out these learning outcomes in a matrix and this matrix has been changed into this document after two rounds of public consultation.

The descriptor elements used are a result of a study into the terms used in the different Dutch educational sectors, terms used in the EQF and terms used in different foreign qualifications frameworks. The descriptor elements describing the Dutch qualification levels are:

Context	The descriptions of the contexts are, together with the described knowledge, determining the level of difficulty of the skills
Knowledge	Knowledge is the totality of facts, principles, theories and ways of practice, related to an occupation or a knowledge domain
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i> <i>Problem solving skills</i> <i>Learning and development skills</i> <i>Information skills</i> <i>Communication skills</i>	Cognitive capabilities (logic, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical capabilities (psychomotor skills in the use of methods, materials, aids and instruments) applied within a given context: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reproduce, analyse, integrate, evaluate, combine and apply knowledge in an occupation or a knowledge domain • comprehend, recognise or identify and solve problems • personal development, autonomously or under supervision • obtain, collect, process, combine, analyse and assess information • communicate based on context-relevant conventions
Responsibility and independence	The proven capability to collaborate with others and being responsible for own work or study results or of others

The level of a qualification is defined by the combination of all descriptor elements.

Classification of qualifications

All qualifications regulated by the three Ministries are given a classification based on their diploma type. For example all qualifications with a level 2 of the Dutch VET system are classified in the NLQF at level 2. All Bachelor degrees are classified at NLQF level 6. The NLQF level is mentioned in the table with the description of the learning outcomes.

NLQF levels

The NLQF levels indicate the complexity of a qualification. The Entry level is the least complex and level eight is the most complex level of learning. The levels are constructed in such a way that the description of a level at least contains the learning outcomes of that level.

The descriptor elements, when combined together, give an overview of the level and indicate within what context and with what type of knowledge one can apply the knowledge, solve problems, develop oneself, obtain information, communicate and take responsibility.

“Best fit”

A combination of the descriptor elements as they apply in a qualification define the level of the qualification. The “best fit” principle is used to classify a qualification in the NLQF. A qualification does not have to fit fully to all descriptor elements, so it will be classified at the level where there is the best fit of the descriptor elements which apply to the qualification. One of the results of this approach is that more general qualifications can be positioned at the same level as VET qualifications. The NLQF level descriptors are a reference point for determining the level of a qualification. The levels are not designed to give a full and comprehensive description of qualifications. The level descriptors facilitate a broad comparison of the levels of qualifications that can be obtained in different contexts; but all these qualifications must be described in learning outcomes and subject to quality assurance.

The classification of qualification in the NLQF is based on a comparison of the learning outcomes of a qualification and the NLQF level descriptors. The classification is independent of the length of study or other measure of the amount of time normally required to achieve the learning outcomes or credits.

The classification of two or more qualifications on the same level indicates that the level of complexity of learning of these qualifications is comparable. It does not necessarily mean that these qualifications have the same goals, content or learning outcomes. It does not mean that these qualifications are of the same value or interchangeable. (For more information please read the NLQF and Reading instructions on the website www.NLQF.nl.)

Formal Basic Adult Education (Entry level)	
Context	A well known daily living or working environment.
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of simple facts and ideas related to the living environment
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	Reproduce and apply the knowledge Carry out simple and familiar (professional) tasks automatically
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Recognise and solve simple problems in daily life
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Work on personal development under supervision
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain and process information on simple facts and ideas related to the living environment
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, using conventions which are relevant to the context
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers Have under supervision, limited responsibility for the results of simple routine tasks or study

Formal Basic Adult Education (NLQF level 1)	
Context	A familiar daily living or working environment.
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of simple facts and ideas related to an occupation or a knowledge domain
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	Reproduce and apply this knowledge Carry out simple and familiar (professional) tasks automatically
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Recognise and solve simple problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Work on personal development under supervision
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain and process information on simple facts and ideas related to the occupation or the knowledge domain
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers, supervisors and clients Under supervision, take responsibility for the results of simple tasks or study

Pre-vocational training, Basic vocational track (NLQF level 1)	
Context	A familiar daily living or working environment
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of simple facts and ideas related to an occupation or a knowledge domain
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	Reproduce and apply this knowledge Carry out simple and familiar (professional) tasks automatically
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Recognise and solve simple problems in professional practice or in the knowledge domain
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Work on personal development under supervision
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain and process information, simple facts and ideas related to the occupation or knowledge domain
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers, supervisors and clients Take responsibility for the results of simple tasks or study under supervision

VET Level 1, Assistant training (NLQF level 1)	
Context	A familiar daily living or working environment
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of simple facts and ideas related to an occupation or a knowledge domain
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	Reproduce and apply this knowledge Carry out simple and familiar (professional) tasks automatically
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Recognise and solve simple problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Work on personal development under supervision
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain and process information on simple facts and ideas related to the occupation or knowledge domain
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers, supervisors and clients Under supervision, take responsibility for the results of simple tasks or study

Formal Adult Education (NLQF Level 2)	
Context	A familiar living or working environment
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of facts and ideas of and related to an occupation or a knowledge domain
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	Reproduce and apply this knowledge
	Carry out simple (professional) tasks with the help of selected standard procedures
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Recognise and systematically solve simple problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Ask for support for personal development after reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain and process basic information on facts, ideas and concepts of and related to the occupation or knowledge domain
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers, supervisors and clients
	Take responsibility for the results of simple tasks or study

Pre-vocational training, Advanced vocational track (NLQF Level 2)	
Context	A familiar living or working environment
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of facts and ideas, processes, materials, means and concepts of and related to an occupation or a knowledge domain
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	Reproduce and apply this knowledge
	Carry out simple (professional) tasks with the help of selected standard procedures
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Recognise and systematically solve simple problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Undertake personal development with limited support
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain and process basic information on facts, ideas, processes, materials, means and concepts of and related to the occupation or knowledge domain
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	Collaborate with peers, supervisors and clients
	Take responsibility for the results of simple tasks or study

Pre-vocational training, Combined and theoretical track, including General Secondary Education for Adults (NLQF Level 2)	
Context	A familiar living or working environment
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of facts and ideas, processes, materials, means and concepts of and related to an occupation or a knowledge domain
Skills	Reproduce and apply this knowledge
<i>Applying knowledge</i>	Carry out simple (professional) tasks with the help of selected standard procedures
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Recognise and systematically solve simple problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Undertake personal development with limited support
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain and process basic information, facts, ideas, processes, materials, means and concepts of and related to the occupation or knowledge domain
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	Collaborate with peers, supervisors and clients
	Take responsibility for the results of simple tasks or study

VET Level 2, Basic vocational education (NLQF Level 2)	
Context	A familiar living or working environment
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of facts and ideas, processes, materials, means and concepts of and related to an occupation or a knowledge domain
Skills	Reproduce and apply this knowledge
<i>Applying knowledge</i>	Carry out simple (professional) tasks with the help of selected standard procedures
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Recognise and systematically solve simple problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Ask support for personal development after reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain and process basic information, facts, ideas, processes, materials, means and concepts of and related to the occupation or knowledge domain
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	Collaborate with peers, supervisors and clients
	Take responsibility for the results of simple tasks or study

VET Level 3, Professional training (NLQF level 3)	
Context	A familiar, but changeable, living or working environment.
Knowledge	Possess basic knowledge of materials, means, facts, core concepts, simple theories, ideas, methods and processes of and related to an occupation or knowledge domain
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	<p>Reproduce and apply this knowledge</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice and in the knowledge domain and take action to address this</p> <p>Carry out (professional) tasks requiring tactical and strategic insight by making own choices from, and in combination with, standard procedures and methods</p>
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Identify and systematically solve complicated problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain by selecting and using relevant data
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Ask for support for further personal development after reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain process and combine information on materials, means, facts, core concepts, simple theories, ideas, methods and processes of and related to an occupation or knowledge domain
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	<p>Work with peers, supervisors and clients</p> <p>Take responsibility for the results of defined tasks or study</p> <p>Take shared responsibility for the results of the routine work of others</p>

VET level 4, Middle management or Specialist training (NLQF level 4)	
Context	A familiar, but changeable living or working environment, and in an international environment
Knowledge	Possess broad and specialised knowledge of materials, means, processes, facts, abstract concepts, theories, ideas, and methods of and related to an occupation or knowledge domain
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	<p>Reproduce, analyse and apply this knowledge</p> <p>Evaluate and integrate data and develop strategies to carry out various (professional) tasks</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice and in the knowledge domain and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out relatively complex (professional) tasks</p>
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Identify, analyse and solve relatively complex problems in the knowledge domain and in professional practice in a creative way by selecting and using relevant data
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Undertake personal development by reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain, process and combine broad or specialised information on materials, means facts, abstract concepts, theories, ideas, methods and processes of and related to an occupation or knowledge domain
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	<p>Work with peers, supervisors and clients</p> <p>Take responsibility for the results of own work or study</p> <p>Take shared responsibility for the results of the work of others</p>

Senior general secondary education, including General Secondary Education for Adults (NLQF level 4)	
Context	A familiar, but changeable, living or working environment, and in an international environment
Knowledge	Possess broad and specialised knowledge facts, abstract concepts, theories, ideas, and methods of and related to an occupation or knowledge domain
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	<p>Reproduce, analyse and apply this knowledge</p> <p>Evaluate and integrate data and develop strategies to carry out various tasks</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in the knowledge domain and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out relatively complex tasks</p>
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Identify and systematically solve relatively complex problems in the knowledge domain by selecting and using relevant data
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Undertake personal development by reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain, process and combine general information on facts, abstract concepts, theories, ideas and methods related to a knowledge domain
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	<p>Work with peers and supervisors</p> <p>Take responsibility for the results of own activities and work</p> <p>Take shared responsibility for the results of the activities of others</p>

Pre-university education, including General Secondary Education for Adults (NLQF level 4+)	
Context	An unknown and changeable living or working environment, and in an international environment
Knowledge	<p>Possess broad and in-depth knowledge of a knowledge domain</p> <p>Possess detailed knowledge of some knowledge domains and understanding of a limited range of basic theories, principles and concepts</p> <p>Possess limited knowledge and understanding of some important current subjects and specialties</p>
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	<p>Reproduce, analyse and apply the knowledge in a range of contexts in order to answer problems related to a knowledge domain</p> <p>Use procedures in a flexible and inventive way</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in the knowledge domain and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out complex tasks</p>
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Identify, analyse and solve complex problems in the knowledge domain in a creative way by selecting and using relevant data
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Undertake personal development by reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain, process and combine broad, in-depth and detailed information on a limited range of basic theories, principles and concepts of a knowledge domain as well as limited information on some important current subjects and specialties and present this information
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	<p>Work with peers and supervisors</p> <p>Take responsibility for the results of own activities or study</p> <p>Take shared responsibility for the results of the activities of others</p>

Associate degree (Short Cycle) (NLQF level 5)	
Context	An unknown and changeable living or working environment, and in an international environment
Knowledge	<p>Possess broad specialised knowledge of an occupation or knowledge domain</p> <p>Possess detailed knowledge of some knowledge domains and some professions, and understanding of a limited range of basic theories, principles and concepts</p> <p>Possess limited knowledge and understanding of some important current subjects and specialties</p>
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	<p>Reproduce, analyse and apply the knowledge in a range of contexts in order to answer problems related to a knowledge domain and related to a professional practice</p> <p>Use procedures in a flexible and inventive way</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in the knowledge domain and in professional practice and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out complex (professional) tasks</p>
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Identify, analyse and solve complex problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain in a creative way by selecting and using relevant data
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Undertake personal development by reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results
<i>Information skills</i>	Obtain, process and analyse broad, in-depth and detailed information on a limited range of basic theories, principles and concepts of an occupation or knowledge domain, as well as limited information on some important current subjects and specialties and present this information
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate in a targeted way with peers, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	<p>Work with peers, supervisors and clients</p> <p>Take responsibility for the results of own activities or study</p> <p>Take shared responsibility for the results of the work of others and the management of processes</p>

Professional Bachelor (NLQF level 6)	
Context	An unknown and changeable living or working environment, and in an international environment
Knowledge	<p>Possess an advanced specialised knowledge of and critical insight into, theories and principles of an occupation or knowledge domain</p> <p>Possess broad, integrated knowledge and understanding of the scope and the most important field and the boundaries in an occupation or knowledge domain</p> <p>Possess knowledge and understanding of some important present-day subjects and specialties related to an occupation or knowledge domain</p>
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	<p>Reproduce, analyse and apply the knowledge in a range of contexts in a way that demonstrates a professional approach to the occupation</p> <p>Apply complex specialised skills based on the results of research</p> <p>Complete applied research based on limited methodological knowledge under supervision</p> <p>Develop and deepen arguments</p> <p>Critically evaluate and combine knowledge and insights of a specific knowledge domain</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in the knowledge domain and in professional practice and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out complex professional tasks</p>
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Identify and analyse complex problems in the knowledge domain and in professional practice and solve the problems in a tactical, strategic and creative way by selecting and using relevant data
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Undertake personal development by reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results
<i>Information skills</i>	Critically collect and analyse in a responsible way broad, in-depth and detailed information related to the occupation on a limited range of basic theories, principles and concepts of and related to a knowledge domain or occupation as well as limited information on some important current subjects and specialties and present this information
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate in a targeted way with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients

	<p>Take responsibility for the results of own work or study and for the results of the work of others</p> <p>Take shared responsibility for the management of processes and the professional development of people and groups</p> <p>Collect and interpret relevant data with the objective of forming an opinion, also based on considerations of relevant social, professional, scientific and ethical aspects</p>
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Scientific Bachelor (NLQF level 6)	
Context	An unknown and changeable, living or working environment, and in an international environment
Knowledge	<p>Possess an advanced specialised knowledge of and critical insight into theories and principles of a broad field of science</p> <p>Possess broad, integrated knowledge and understanding of the scope and the most important field and the boundaries in a broad field of science</p> <p>Possess knowledge and understanding of some important present-day subjects and specialties related to an occupation or knowledge domain</p>
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	<p>Reproduce, analyse and apply the knowledge in a range of contexts in a way that demonstrates a scientific approach in a knowledge domain</p> <p>Apply complex specialised skills based on the results of research</p> <p>Complete fundamental research based on methodological knowledge under supervision</p> <p>Develop and deepen arguments</p> <p>Critically evaluate and combine knowledge and insights of a specific knowledge domain</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in the knowledge domain and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out complex scientific tasks</p>
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	Identify and analyse complex problems in the knowledge domain and solve the problems in a tactical, strategic and creative way by selecting and using relevant data
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Undertake personal development by reflecting on and evaluating personal (learning) results
<i>Information skills</i>	Critically collect and analyse in a responsible way broad, in-depth and detailed scientific information on a limited range of basic theories, principles and concepts of and related to a knowledge domain as well as limited information on some important current subjects and specialties related to a knowledge domain and present this information
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate in a targeted way with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	Work with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients

	<p>Take responsibility for the results of own work or study and for the results of the work of others</p> <p>Take shared responsibility for the management of processes and the professional development of people and groups</p> <p>Collect and interpret relevant data with the objective of forming an opinion, also based on considerations of relevant social, professional, scientific and ethical aspects</p>
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Master (NLQF level 7)	
Context	An unknown and changeable living or working environment with a high degree of uncertainty, and in an international environment
Knowledge	<p>Possess particularly specialised and advanced knowledge of an occupation, knowledge domain and field of science and at the interface between the different professions, knowledge domains and fields of sciences</p> <p>Possess a critical understanding of a range of theories, principles and concepts, including the most important of an occupation, knowledge domain and field of science</p> <p>Possess extensive, detailed knowledge and critical understanding of some important current subjects and specialties related to an occupation or knowledge domain and field of sciences</p>
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	<p>Reproduce, analyse, integrate and apply the knowledge in a range of contexts and handle complex matters</p> <p>This knowledge forms the basis of original ideas and research</p> <p>Use acquired knowledge at a higher level of abstraction</p> <p>Think conceptually. Develop and deepen arguments</p> <p>Complete, independently, fundamental research based on methodological knowledge</p> <p>Provide an original contribution to the development and application of ideas, often in the area of research</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice and in the knowledge domain and at the interface of the different professions or knowledge domains and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out complex professional or scientific tasks</p>
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	<p>Identify and analyse complex problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain and solve the problems in a tactical, strategic and creative way</p> <p>Provide a contribution to a (scientific) solution of complex problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain by identifying and using data</p>
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	<p>Undertake personal development which is mostly autonomous</p>

<i>Information skills</i>	Critically collect and analyse in responsible way broad, in-depth and detailed scientific information on a range of theories, principles and concepts of and related to a professional or knowledge domain as well as information on some important current subjects and specialties related to an occupation or knowledge domain and present this information
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate in a targeted way with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients, appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	<p>Work with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients</p> <p>Take responsibility for the results of own work or study and for the results of the work of others</p> <p>Take responsibility for the management of complex processes and the professional development of people and groups</p> <p>Formulate judgments based on incomplete and limited information, taking into account social, scientific and ethical responsibilities related to the application of own knowledge and judgments</p>

Doctor (NLQF level 8)	
Context	An unknown and changeable living or working environment with a high degree of uncertainty, including an international environment
Knowledge	<p>Possess the most advanced knowledge of an occupation, knowledge domain and field of science and at the interface between the different professions, knowledge domains and fields of sciences</p> <p>Possess knowledge acquired by personal research or work, leading to an important contribution to development in a vocational and scientific field</p> <p>Possess a critical insight into a vocational and scientific field, including a critical understanding of the most important and current theories, principles and concepts</p>
Skills <i>Applying knowledge</i>	<p>Reproduce, analyse, integrate and apply this knowledge in an authoritative way in a range of contexts and handle complex matters</p> <p>This knowledge forms the basis of original ideas and research</p> <p>Use acquired knowledge at a higher level of abstraction</p> <p>Complete complex fundamental research based on methodological knowledge</p> <p>Contribute through original research to move the boundaries of knowledge by an extensive amount of work, of which a part deserves national or international approved publication</p> <p>Think conceptually. Develop and deepen arguments</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice and in the knowledge domain at the interface between the different professions or knowledge domains and take action to address this</p> <p>Analyse and carry out complex professional or scientific tasks</p>
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	<p>Identify and analyse complex problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain and solve the problems in a tactical, strategic and creative way</p> <p>Provide in professional practice and in the knowledge domain a contribution to a (scientific) solution of complex problems by identifying and using data</p>
<i>Learning and development skills</i>	Undertake personal development and engineering technological, social or cultural progression in society which is mostly autonomous

<i>Information skills</i>	Critically collect and analyse in a responsible way broad, in-depth and detailed scientific information about a range of theories, principles and concepts of and related to an occupation or knowledge domain, as well as limited information on some important current subjects and specialties related to an occupation or knowledge domain and present this information
<i>Communication skills</i>	Communicate in a targeted way with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients, the wider scientific community and society as a whole appropriately to the context, using conventions which are relevant to professional practice
Responsibility and independence	<p>Work with peers, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors, clients, the wider scientific community and society as a whole</p> <p>Take responsibility for the results of own work or study and for the results of the work of others</p> <p>Take responsibility for the management of complex processes and the professional development of people and groups</p> <p>Draft, develop, carry out and apply with academic integrity a complex fundamental research process</p>

Annex 4: the Management and maintenance of the NLQF and its relation to the EQF

Management and maintenance of the NLQF

The National Coordination Point for the NLQF (NCP-NLQF)

The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union recommend that Member States support the referencing of qualifications systems to the EQF by establishing a national coordination point (NCP). According to this recommendation an NCP will have the tasks of:

- referencing the national qualifications levels to the levels of the EQF;
- referencing in a transparent way and publishing the results;
- maintaining and evaluating the NQF and thus the referencing to the EQF
- ensuring access to information for stakeholders on how national qualifications are related to the EQF through the NQF;
- encouraging the participation of all stakeholders in referencing the NQF to the EQF.

The experience gained in Ireland, Scotland and France with the development of their NQFs and the experience gained through a pilot study commissioned by Cap Gemini show that, in addition to the tasks mentioned in the Recommendation, the national qualification framework needs to be managed to ensure that it is trustworthy. It is vital that international and national social partners, trade and industry, education and trainings institutions and individual learners have confidence in the NLQF and in the classification of qualifications at the different levels. This places demands on the NCP-NLQF regarding the procedures to be used and on the competent bodies as to the quality of the qualifications themselves. During this development period, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science acted as the NCP-NLQF. However, after the adoption of the NLQF by the Minister, the responsibilities of the NCP-NLQF will be located outside the Ministry. This re-location will take into account the existing structures and division of responsibilities in The Netherlands.

Positioning of the NCP-NLQF

The NCP-NLQF will classify both regulated and, on request of a competent body, "other qualifications" and specific qualifications. To carry out these tasks expertly and with authority, and to ensure neutrality, the organisation of the NCP NLQF should be independent of training providers, the organisations responsible for courses and qualifications and of the three regulating Ministries. This dual independence is necessary to guarantee the objectivity of the classification of qualifications at the various levels and to foster trust. It will best be ensured in new, independent, governing board (comparable with the NVAO).

The NCP-NLQF needs to meet a number of conditions. It needs to:

- possess deep expertise in education and training, including international education and training, and also to make extensive use of existing expertise in The Netherlands;
- be able to communicate clearly and efficiently with stakeholders, both national and international;
- have teams of experts in the various fields of qualifications;
- establish detailed procedures for the evaluation and classification of qualifications and for appeals.

After a period of five years the functioning of the NCP-NLQF will be evaluated.

Tasks of the NCP NLQF

It is proposed to give the following tasks to the NCP NLQF:

a Maintenance and evaluation of the NLQF

Qualifications and the structure of qualifications change over time. This implies that the NLQF needs to be maintained.

The following questions could be examined by the NCP-NLQF in carrying out this task:

- Are the descriptors of different levels captured in terms that correspond to the actual content of learning outcomes?
- Is the description of the different levels still adequate?
- Is the number of levels in the NLQF in line with the diversity of qualifications in The Netherlands?
- Is the generic classification of regulated qualifications valid and consistent?
- Have there been changes in the regulated qualifications which might justify a new generic classification or specific classification(s)?
- Is the procedure for the classification of “other qualifications” (i.e. those not regulated by the three Ministries) adequate?
- What are the effects of the NLQF on the dynamism and quality development of the education and training system?

b Classification of qualifications

The Leijne Committee proposes that the NCP-NLQF should classify qualification in the following way:

- Qualifications regulated by the three Ministries (diplomas) should be generically classified at NLQF levels. This classification forms an integral part of the NLQF.
- All “other qualifications” should be evaluated and classified at the appropriate level of the NLQF by the NCP-NLQF, at the request of the competent body, through a procedure which will be explained below.
- All specific qualifications (qualification profiles, programme profiles, diplomas etc) which are regulated and for which the competent body considers that the generic classification does not reflect the actual learning outcomes to be achieved can, at the request of the competent body, be evaluated and classified at the appropriate level in accordance with the procedure referred to below.

A register of classified qualifications will be maintained.

c Communication and information

To realise the goals of the NLQF, the NCP-NLQF needs to develop good communication with, and information for, all stakeholders, national and international.

d Registration

The NCP NLQF is responsible for the registration of classified qualifications at all levels of the NLQF. A register of classified qualifications will therefore be developed and maintained by the NCP NLQF.

Criteria and procedures for classification

Application procedure

Although the classification in the NLQF, in principle, is open to all qualifications awarded in The Netherlands it is obviously not the intention that every learning outcome, however minor, will receive a level classification. In principle an application for classification can be made only for qualifications which require a substantial volume of learning. This will normally mean a minimum of 400 hours learning effort.

The following conditions for the admissibility of an application for classification of a qualification require the competent body to prove that:

- it enjoys legal personality;
- the examination procedure leading to the qualification is validated by an independent authority;
- the underlying programme has recognised quality assurance and quality management systems and is in line with European principles of quality assurance in education and training;
- the qualification is described in terms of learning outcomes in such a way that they are comparable to learning outcomes as described in the NLQF;
- the classification includes assessment criteria that prove that the intended learning outcomes are achieved by an individual.

Criteria

The criteria governing the application for an evaluation and classification of regulated and “other qualifications” and the procedures that lead to classification are, in principle, the same. Differences may arise in elements relating to the review of the classification of a specific qualification.

Validity of a classification

The generic classification of regulated qualifications has, in principle, an unlimited validity. It is known that, as a rule, such qualifications have to be revised periodically. Thus, the vocational and education qualifications at Levels 1-4 are reviewed every four years and the Bachelor and Master are re-accredited every six years. Other qualifications, such as the final level HAVO and VWO, are regularly reviewed and calibrated.

It is proposed that where an existing regulated qualification is undergoing a periodic review this should not lead to an automatic review of its classification by the NCP-NLQF. Only where the reviewing institution or accreditation body is of the opinion that the content of the new (revised) qualification indicates the need for a higher or lower level indicator, a request for re-classification can be submitted to the NCP-NLQF. The NCP-NLQF will evaluate the proposal for a revised classification and a realistic classification will be arrived at.

The classification mentioned of “other qualifications” and specific qualifications will generally have a duration which matches the revision cycle of the qualification. For NLQF Levels 1-4 this is usually four years; at Levels 5-8 it is six years as a rule. The NCP-NLQF in establishment should develop a detailed procedure for the exceptional cases where a qualification is not revised after four to six years and for cases where a major revision of a qualification takes place.

Classification procedure of the regulated qualifications

Secondary education and adult learning

The Foundation for Curriculum Development commissioned by the Education Ministry to develop proposals for key objectives for secondary education. The Ministers of Education, Culture and Science and Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation shall then decide on these objectives.

It concerns qualifications for pre-vocational secondary education, adult education, higher general secondary education and pre-university education. Based on a broad discussion, these qualifications will be classified in the NLQF. If there is a significant change in the contents of one of these qualifications, the Education Minister will submit a request to the NCP-NLQF for its repositioning on the framework.

VET

As already stated, all MBO levels are being generically classified in the NLQF. During the four-yearly review of qualification profiles, the following procedure will be followed:

- Sectoral Joint Committees develop (new) qualifications and provide these with an MBO-level indication.
- The MBO Co-ordination Point decides whether the qualifications meet MBO level requirements.
- The CRAs, with the advice of the MBO coordination point, require the approval of the Minister.

Due to the unlimited validity of the generic level classification, the place of the revised qualification in the MBO NLQF will not change. If a CRA considers that a different classification is desirable for a specific qualification, a request can be made to the NCP-NLQF, which will evaluate such a qualification according to the criteria in place and decide on a realistic classification of the qualification in question. The NCP-NLQF will follow the usual procedure for these qualifications.

HE

The existing HE qualifications - Associate degree, Bachelor, Master and Doctorate levels - are classified in the NLQF at Levels 5, 6, 7 and 8, respectively. This is in conformity with European agreements on coordination between the European Higher Education Qualifications Framework and the EQF. Universities for applied sciences and universities already work to a system of accreditation to ensure the quality of their programmes. The accreditation system includes a focus on the quality of examinations and the assessment of learning outcomes. According to national regulations, every HE programme is accredited once every six years. In this system, a (substantial) revision of a programme and its qualification always leads to a re-accreditation process. In other words, a previous accreditation cannot be assumed by a programme when the programme content has been substantially modified.

Against this background, HE qualifications that are primarily generically referenced in the current NLQF are registered for an unlimited period. For a specific programme, however, the classification level (and the right to publish this on the certificate) expires if the programme has not been accredited by the NVAO. Re-accreditation is granted without further review if the existing level indicator is valid. In addition the competent body can request a re-evaluation and classification of a reviewed classification, provided that it has been re-accredited by the NVAO.

Classification procedure of "other qualifications"

Competent bodies for qualifications not regulated by the three Ministries may apply to the NCP-NLQF to have their qualifications classified in the NLQF. The preconditions for the application have been described already. A procedure for classification is proposed as follows:

- based on a format to be developed, the NCP-NLQF will decide whether an application is complete and meets requirements and conditions;
- where this is the case, the classification request will be submitted to a team of independent experts;
- the expert team will advise on the appropriate classification level in the NLQF;

- the NCP-NLQF will make a decision based on the opinion of the expert team and, if appropriate, give the qualification an NLQF level and a reference to the relevant EQF level;
- an applicant can appeal this decision before a special Appeals Committee;
- following the final decision, the classification level will be included in the register of the NLQF and published on the NCP-NLQF website.

Annex 5: results of the consultation on the NLQF and the EQF

Introduction

The Dutch national qualifications framework, NLQF, has been in development since November 2009. During this time cooperation has taken place with experts from all sectors of education and many stakeholders have been consulted. In addition, in the autumn of 2010, there were six regional briefings, followed by an initial consultation through the website www.NLQF.nl. The results of this round of briefings and consultation have been incorporated into the first versions of a number of documents supporting the framework. In particular, a matrix in which the existing formal qualification levels are described in an unequivocal manner in terms of knowledge, different skills, responsibility and independence has been adopted.

This matrix was the basis for the development of the nine NLQF levels and a referencing of these levels to the EQF. A diagram showing the NLQF and EQF levels at which the regulated qualifications are positioned, and a table comparing the NLQF and the EQF have also been developed and guidelines have been prepared explaining how these documents should be read and interpreted.

The documents were presented to the Leijnse Committee (the NLQF-EQF Committee established by the Education Minister and chaired by Prof. F. Leijnse). This Committee discussed the documents and foreign experts provided additional comments. This led to further revisions to the documents. These modified versions were offered to stakeholders in a second consultation and four hundred stakeholders were invited by mail to complete the consultation on the website and those invited were also requested to involve other interested parties in the consultation.

This document provides a summary of responses to the consultation. Each section gives a summary of responses to the questions in the consultation, followed by a section setting out general questions and comments which were received during the consultation.

Overview of participants in the consultation

In total, 128 people responded via the website and a total of 186 responses were received. This figure is explained by the fact that individuals could respond from more than one perspective if they worked in more than one sector. Of the people who work at an educational institution or an organisation focused on a specific education slightly more than half belong to the VET sector. The table shows how many replies have been received for a particular sector.

Education sector	Number	Percentage
Education	27	20%
Pre-vocational training	25	19%
Senior General Secondary Education	13	10%
VET	71	53%
HE	23	17%
Non-formal	27	20%
Others	14	11%
Not applicable	6	5%

Reaction to the descriptions of Qualification levels and level descriptors in the NLQF

The answers to the question of what respondents thought of the level descriptors are given here level by level:

a Entry level: Education 1

Respondents were satisfied that Education 1 was included in the framework. However, there was a suggestion that the level should be given another name, such as "Starting level" or "Base level 1", and there was also a suggestion that this level should be split into two levels in order to make it easier to achieve a full qualification step-by-step.

b NLQF 1: Education 2, basic vocational track and VET level 1

Regarding the qualification description

There were no comments on the description of the outcomes of these qualifications.

Regarding the positioning of the qualification

Comments were received questioning whether VET level 1 and basic vocational track should be placed on the same level. VET level 1 is considered to be more orientated to the labour market and it was suggested that the basic vocational track would be better placed at the same level as Education 1.

c NLQF 2: Education 3, education 4, advanced vocational track, and combined and theoretical track and VET level 2

Regarding the qualification description

Regarding the description of the learning outcomes of these qualifications respondents especially noted that too little distinction is made between technical and non-technical training.

Regarding the positioning of the qualification

Other remarks concerning the position of those qualifications in this NLQF level included:

- (i) whether the advanced vocational, combined and theoretical tracks should all be at the same level;
- (ii) how vocational and general educational qualifications can be placed at the same level;
- (iii) why the level 2 VET starting qualification for the labour market is placed at the same level as the prevocational tracks as they are not seen as an entry qualification for the labour market;
- (iv) the added value of education 4 if it can be placed at the same level as education 3.

d NLQF 3: VET level 3

Regarding the qualification description

Regarding the wording of the VET levels, it was noted that not many difference are made between the descriptions for VET levels 1, 2 and 3.

On the other hand, there were comments on the fact that VET level 3 is now shown in the descriptions to be more similar to VET level 4 than was previously understood.

However, in relation to the issues, the international environment, leadership, the ability to think abstractly, management skills, problem solving skills, and responsibility, respondents felt that the description for VET level 3 was not fully developed. In addition, respondents felt that the descriptions failed to make sufficient distinction between VET levels 3 and 4 in relation to learning and development skills and communication skills.

Regarding the positioning

There were no comments on the positioning of this qualification.

e NLQF 4: VET level 4 and senior general secondary education, education level 5

Regarding the qualification description

Regarding the formulation of the learning outcomes of these qualifications, respondents observed that the description of both the middle management and specialist training courses in VET are in a single column; this placing is based on the theoretical knowledge component of the two qualifications and was felt to create confusion.

Regarding the positioning of the qualification

Again, comments were received to the effect that vocational education and general education should not be placed at the same level. The comment was also made that VET level 4 qualifications should be able to be classified at either NLQF level 5 or NLQF level 6. Regarding the position of senior secondary general education, respondents generally agreed that it is not the same level as pre-university education.

f NLQF 4+: Pre-university education/education 6 and Associate degree

Regarding the qualification description

It was generally agreed by respondents that the description of senior general secondary education should be significantly different from the description of HAVO.

Regarding the positioning of the qualification

Respondents suggested that, as with professionally-orientated and academically-orientated Bachelors, two descriptions should be given at this level - one for pre-university education and one for senior general secondary education.

Respondents also claimed that general education and vocational education cannot be positioned at the same level. Associate Degrees should be at a higher level than pre-university education.

g NLQF 6: Professionally-orientated and academically-orientated Bachelors

Regarding the qualification description

On the one hand some respondents endorsed the distinction drawn between the professionally-orientated and academically-orientated Bachelors. On the other hand some respondents felt that the difference drawn between the two orientations is too great, particularly in the area of research.

There were also responses which said that absolutely no distinction should be drawn in the Bachelor column. A parallel is drawn with the Master degree where a difference in orientation exists in fact but is not described in the framework.

Another response was that the wording of the descriptions at this level is less suitable for the category of "other qualifications" because it places too much emphasis on research.

Regarding the positioning

There were no comments on the positioning of this qualification.

h NLQF 7: Master

Regarding the qualification description

Suggestions were made for a distinction to be made between professionally-orientated and academically-orientated Masters so that the description would clearly cover all Master degrees. In "applying knowledge" there is too much emphasis on research, which is not applicable for all professionally-orientated Masters.

It was suggested that a link to Dublin Descriptors should be made in the diagram or that the NLQF descriptors and the Dublin descriptors should be compared in the same way as the NLQF and EQF descriptors.

Regarding the positioning of the qualification

Respondents suggested that not all Masters belong to NLQF level 7: it depends on the complexity and responsibility.

i NLQF 8: Doctor

The question was raised whether this level would also be open to "other qualifications".

j General comments received regarding the formulation

- The description of communication skills for levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 is much the same and too general.
- There is too much focus on cognitive skills in the descriptions, and because of this weighting general education appears to be valued more highly than VET in the framework.
- It is sometimes a puzzle what word or phrase makes the difference between a level and the previous or next level in the framework.
- The concepts of "deepened" and "advanced" knowledge and of "specialised" versus "specialist" were queried. They cause the descriptions to say something about the level of the participant rather than the level of training.

Referencing the NLQF to the EQF

Number of NLQF levels

Do you agree with the number of levels	Number	Percentage
Yes	67	84%
No	13	16%
Total	80	100%

Most of the respondents considered it positive that the NLQF has eight main levels and that this is the same number of levels as the EQF. The reasons given for doubt about this, or the wish to add levels, was related to the positioning of senior general secondary education and pre-university education, as described in the previous section, and a feeling that clearer distinctions were needed between some of the lower levels.

Referencing NLQF levels to EQF levels

Feedback suggested that, once the EQF is fully established, it will be important to investigate whether the Dutch qualifications are correctly classified. Concern was expressed that the classifications given to Dutch courses/programmes may be lower than some European qualifications of the same name if the content of the Dutch courses is not given proper consideration.

Applicability and criticism on the NLQF

Possible uses of the NLQF

The following table shows the reactions of respondents to the consultation to possible uses of the NLQF:

Possible uses of the NLQF	Number	Percentage
To compare nationally levels of qualifications and courses	61	75%
To compare internationally levels of qualifications and courses	69	85%
To stimulate the use of the learning outcomes	33	41%
To stimulate quality in education and training	43	53%
To determine the level of what people learned outside initial education	56	69%
To facilitate the determination of learning routes	39	48%
To increase the insight of players in the labour market into the levels of the most important qualifications and courses	52	64%
To stimulate labour mobility	50	62%
Others	14	17%

A number of other uses were suggested:

- The NLQF could contribute to the classification of qualifications associated primarily with non-formal learning, making them more comparable with qualifications in mainstream education.
- The NLQF could play an important role in measuring the competence of people in employment. Beside competences acquired through training, the NLQF could be used to identify someone's particular work experience and what this means: APL certificates of experience could reference the outcomes of prior learning to NLQF and EQF levels.
- Through national and international comparability of qualifications, exchange of students and labour mobility will be promoted / facilitated. The NLQF should allow learning routes to be shortened, for example by use of APL procedures, and this would be a more efficient use of time and other resources.
- The NLQF could provide a single conceptual framework for the highly-fragmented field of training. It was hoped by respondents that competency-based education would be used in other programmes as it is currently used in VET.
- NLQF/EQF levels could be used on the qualification dossiers/course profiles and in the CREBO/CROHO list.

Most important criticism on the NLQF

Overall, the main criticisms of the NLQF were that:

- The formulations use the language of regular education too much and this is not sufficiently recognisable to business people. As a result it is possible that not enough applications for APL will be made.
- The added value NLQF to the EQF is not sufficiently explained.
- The NLQF provides rights for individuals to progress within/between the different levels and this cannot be implemented.

General remarks and questions

Several general comments were received. Key observations and questions which have not been addressed in the foregoing are listed below:

The category “other qualifications”

The category "other qualifications" is concerned with a number of elements. Some respondents had the impression that educational programmes would be given preference/priority. It was also felt that there had been too little communication with the field on this, and that there was a need for more involvement, including the experiences of pilots, which could be used to shape the framework. The NRTO reports that they would like to take the initiative to develop a quality assurance system for these qualifications.

Another issue concerns the legal requirements in different occupational groups. It was felt that these could be seen as learning outcomes and some respondents felt that it would be worth examining in a number of sectors whether and how such a set of qualifications might be related to the NLQF. They felt that at present the NLQF mainly reflects the language and structure of the existing education system rather than the occupational realities.

The NCP-NLQF

Some respondents asked how the NCP-NLQF will function, what tasks and powers it will be given and which parties will participate in its workings. NVAO, COLO, European Platform and Nuffic have sent a common letter to the Ministry of National Coordination proposal that they wish to take care of the NCP.

Classification of the qualifications on the appropriate NLQF level

Many questions were raised about the classification of qualifications at the appropriate level of the NLQF. Below is a brief summary:

- Who determines this and who will oversee the process?
- For VET qualifications, will the responsibility lie with the CRAs or with the NCP-NLQF?
- Will the NLQF and the corresponding level classifications be included in the evaluation of qualification dossiers?
- The guide states that when a VET qualification has been revised, a new classification of the NLQF level may have to be made. If the new classification is different from the old, there are two possible results:
 - The content of the qualification may have to be adjusted to ensure that it remains at the existing level.
 - The qualification may have to be placed at a new level which is higher/lower than before.The questions which arise are, who determines this and who will monitor the process and the decision-making?
- When will the results of the study concerning conditions and procedure for non-formal qualifications be available?

- There are various bodies looking in particular to the levels of formal qualifications (the Inspectorate of education, NVAO NLQF). How is guaranteed that no discrepancies and therefore lack of clarity is created between the ratings of the various bodies?

International comparisons

Some respondents asked whether there are ambitions to pursue an international system. There are international qualifications which, in a future system of evaluation (for example in the NLQF system), could be given a different EQF level indication in another country. Such developments cannot be ruled out, and they would make recognition by employers harder to achieve.

This issue could be addressed by:

- making sure that discussions about these qualifications, are conducted in a single forum;
- using the ENIC/NARIC in the comparison of the empirical data;
- providing a relationship with the accreditation when it comes to the classification of “other qualifications” at HE level.

Comments on the NLQF guidelines

A number of textual and substantive comments on the NLQF guidelines were received. The questions and comments make clear the need for more or clearer information about the implementation of the NLQF.

Annex 6: summary of the advice of the Leijnse Committee

Introduction

In this annex we summarise the advice of the Leijnse Committee, which was submitted to the Education Minister in May 2011. The development of the NLQF is a complex process. Therefore, it was considered necessary that independent expert advice be provided by an independent NLQF-EQF Commission, chaired by Professor F. Leijnse (the Leijnse Committee), before the Minister would take a decision on it.

The Minister asked the Leijnse Committee to give advice on the following topics:

- Is the NLQF a correct reflection of the existing qualifications in The Netherlands?
- Is the referencing of the NLQF to the EQF correct?
- Are the procedures for classification of qualifications adequate and complete?
- Are the conditions under which classification of unregulated qualifications complete and can they be implemented?
- How can the NCP-NLQF be established?
- How can the NLQF support improving the quality of education?

This advice forms the most important building block for the discussion in the Government and for the final approval of the NLQF, the referencing to the EQF and the positioning and tasks of the NCP-NLQF. In developing their recommendations, the Committee has discussed framework development in the Netherlands with the EQF Steering Group and international experts. Also the recommendations coming from the consultation have been taken into account by the Committee.

Advice in relation to the NLQF

Description of the learning outcomes of qualifications regulated by the three Ministries

The advice of the Committee is to give the NCP-NLQF the following responsibilities:

- to evaluate these descriptions after two years;
- to invite, for this evaluation, stakeholders including social partners and other providers of qualifications to indicate whether the descriptors are sufficiently recognisable in the field;
- to research, in this evaluation, whether research or technical skills are adequately reflected in the current descriptors;
- to carry out other evaluations and adjustments as deemed necessary.

The level descriptors of the NLQF

The Committee advises the Minister to approve the level descriptors of the NLQF and, following the recommendation above, to direct the NCP-NLQF to evaluate these level descriptors according to the steps proposed.

The classification of regulated qualifications

The Committee also advises the Minister to approve the generic classification of the regulated qualifications. The Committee suggests that even where a regulated qualification is already generically classified, a request may be made to the NCP-NLQF to have a specific qualification (qualification profile, training profile) evaluated for possible replacement on the NLQF. The NCP-NLQF may evaluate such a qualification according to the criteria in place and come to a realistic classification of the qualification in question.

The classification of “other qualifications”

For a request for classification of “other qualifications” to be admissible the competent body will have to prove that:

- the competent body is a legal entity;
- the competent body has sufficient resources to support the ongoing awarding of the qualification;
- the competent body has carried out research to show the labour market relevance of the qualification;
- the examination procedure leading to the qualification is validated by an independent authority;
- the underlying programme has recognised quality assurance and quality management systems in line with European principles of quality assurance in education and training;
- the qualification is described in terms of learning outcomes in such a way that they are comparable to the learning outcomes as described in the NLQF;
- the qualification includes assessment criteria which can be used to prove that the intended learning outcomes have been achieved by an individual.

Finally the Committee advises the Minister to register all NLQF-classified qualifications in a new NLQF-register.

The validity of the qualifications

The Committee advises the Minister to organise the validity of classification as follows:

- the classification of generic, regulated qualifications to be valid indefinitely;
- the existing periodic review of the levelling of regulated qualifications to be maintained unless; the reviewing authority or the accrediting authority find reasons to seek a revised classification by the NCP-NLQF;
- the validity of the classification of "other qualifications" and separately levelled regulated qualifications at NLQF Levels 1 - 4 to be four years;
- the validity of the classification of "other qualifications" and separately levelled regulated qualifications at NLQF Levels 5 - 8 to be eight years.

Advice concerning the referencing of the NLQF to the EQF

The Committee advises the Minister to approve the referencing of the levels of the NLQF and the EQF.

The NCP – NLQF

The Committee advises the Minister to assign to the NCP-NLQF:

- the responsibilities indicated in the recommendations;
- responsibility for the classification of qualifications;
- responsibility for the management of the NLQF.

The Committee advises the Minister that the following conditions should apply to the establishment of the NCP-NLQF.

The NCP-NLQF should:

- be independent of training providers, qualifications bodies and their organisations. In addition, it should be independent of the three regulating ministers (the Ministers of Education, Culture and Science, Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation and Healthcare, Welfare and Sports) in its judgements. This dual independence is necessary to guarantee the objectivity of the classification of qualifications at the various levels and to foster trust. This can best be guaranteed by a new independent body.
- possess deep expertise in the broad field of education and training, including international education and training, and should make extensive use of existing expertise in The Netherlands.
- be able to communicate clearly and efficiently with stakeholders, both national and international.
- have teams of experts in the various fields of qualifications.
- establish detailed procedures for the evaluation and classification of qualifications and for appeals.

The Committee advises the Minister

- to set up the NCP-NLQF on an ad hoc basis in preparation for its definitive establishment;
- to remit this ad hoc NCP-NLQF to test and refine all common procedures and criteria;
- to evaluate NCP-NLQF after a period of five years.

Will the NLQF support the improvement of the quality of education?

The Committee has the following opinion on the extent to which the NLQF should improve the quality of education:

- the actual level of differentiation in types of education will emerge more clearly. For many courses this may lead to more systematic work on quality improvement and to increasing the levels of qualifications. For others the level differences (including comparisons with international levels) will become more apparent where now they are hidden by the supposed homogeneity of education.
- The Committee is of the opinion that the NLQF has the potential to be a mechanism to make level differences more transparent in a field where it is appropriate, namely, that of the real learning outcomes and qualifications. This greater transparency and objectivity in relation to the differences in levels should promote efforts to improve quality in training and provide visible differentiation in the education system and, therefore, increases the dynamic of change.