

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK – AZERBAIJAN

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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.2 NQF snapshot

The Azerbaijan National Qualifications Framework (AzNQF) was officially adopted in July 2018 by Ministerial Decree. It is an eight-level, comprehensive framework spanning qualifications from general, vocational, higher and further education.

The framework aims to improve the quality and transparency of qualifications, to orient qualifications towards the needs of society and the labour market, and to facilitate lifelong learning by improving progression pathways and recognition of prior learning.

Azerbaijan joined the Bologna Process in 2005 but has not self-certified yet.

The governance of the AzNQF is still under development. The Education Institute currently coordinates overall AzNQF developments but there is not yet an established national platform such as a council or commission to ensure systematic involvement of stakeholders in the NQF's implementation.

Azerbaijan has formally adopted an NQF, is developing some tools such as a qualifications register, and is piloting validation. However, governance is not yet settled, procedures to allocate qualifications by level are still being developed and the framework does not yet shape curricula or teaching. Therefore, the AzNQF is in the late adoption stage.

1.2 Policy context

Azerbaijan's main trading partner and the largest foreign investor is the EU. Azerbaijan to EU relations are conducted via the EU-Azerbaijan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, in force since 1999. Since 2017 there have been discussions about a revised agreement.

The pillars of cooperation are the same as for all Eastern partnership countries i.e. achieving:

- a stronger economy
- stronger governance; and better access to justice; human rights;
- a stronger society, including Erasmus+, youth exchange, support to civil society;
- better connectivity; specific measures in Azerbaijan include capacity-building support to the Port of Baku, and the EU4Energy project that supports improved energy efficiency.

Azerbaijan is an important energy partner for the EU and plays a pivotal role in bringing Caspian energy resources to the EU market.

Much of the country's recent growth has been driven by its hydrocarbon reserves. However, responding to falling global prices in oil, the government is seeking to diversify its economy to reduce its over-reliance on raw materials.

Following a period of steady growth, in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic accompanied by an oil price drop resulted in a 3% contraction of the economy. The economy is expected to grow by 2.5% in 2021¹.

¹ EBRD, <https://www.ebrd.com/where-we-are/azerbaijan/overview.html>

The population of Azerbaijan is 10 million² with a large share of young people aged 15-24 (20.7%), over half of whom live in urban areas. Breakdown of employment in 2018 was as follows: 36% in agriculture, 15% in industry and 49% in services. A large proportion of the active population is self-employed (68%) with a high incidence of vulnerable employment.³

Azerbaijan has moderate levels of educational attainment among its adult population, aged 25-64. In 2019, 16.6% had completed higher education; 76.4% had a medium-level education; while 7.1% had primary education or lower.

PISA test results of students from the capital Baku indicate a need to raise the quality of the education system – in 2018, over 60% of learners were underachieving in reading, while the figures were over 50% in mathematics and over 57% in science, that is failing to complete even simple tasks in the tested domains (i.e. failing Level 2 on the PISA scale).⁴

In 2018, the unemployment level in Azerbaijan was 4.9% overall, 13% among youth. The country struggles to generate an adequate number of jobs for graduates⁵.

Tertiary education enrolment in Azerbaijan is relatively low at 32% in 2019, compared to neighbouring countries.⁶ The VET sector is small – only 14,5% of upper secondary students follow VET programmes and the range of adult and further training provision is limited. That said, the newly established and well-resourced VET centres receive more applications than they have places available.

During 2020, as worldwide, the education and training system was obliged to adapt to COVID. Schools shut down in March 2020, teaching via the web and supported by state television education programmes. A state-Microsoft collaborative project, “Virtual School,” provided homework to pupils nationwide via TV. Baku State Vocational Training Centre for Industry and Innovation used the system to provide tailored content for VET students, including teaching materials and video tutorials delivered via Microsoft Teams. In the VET system generally, assessment was carried out online where appropriate.

1.3 NQF legal basis

Decree 311 of the Cabinet of Ministers on the ‘National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan’⁷ approved on July 18, 2018, provides the main legal basis for the AzNQF. It includes general provisions, the objectives of the AzNQF, the level descriptors, responsibilities of institutions in the implementation of AzNQF and quality assurance provisions:

Since the adoption of AzNQF, the regulatory framework related to qualifications in Azerbaijan has been developing further with legislative documents adopted in 2019 and 2020. These include:

- the Charter of the Education Quality Assurance Agency approved by a Decree of the President in December 2019;

² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=AZ>

³ ‘Key indicators on education skills and employment 2019’, ETF, https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2019-12/kiese_2019.pdf

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Policies for Human Capital Development in Azerbaijan, An ETF Torino Process Assessment 2020, ETF

⁶ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR?locations=AZ>

⁷ <http://e-qanun.az/framework/39622>

- Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers: no. 474 on ‘Development, Improvement, Endorsement, Registration and Extension of Duration of Occupational and Qualification Standards’⁸ and no. 475 on ‘Sector Committees for Skills Development’⁹, approved in December 2019;
- Resolution of the Ministry of Education no. KQ-06, “Conducting attestation of learners at stage of vocational education”, adopted in March 2019¹⁰;
- State standards for vocational education, Resolution of Cabinet of Ministers no. 85, adopted in March 2019¹¹;
- the Charter of the ‘National Observatory on Labour Market and Social Protection Affairs’, approved by an order of the Cabinet of Ministers in March 2020;¹²
- Regulation no. 266 on “Provision of Career Guidance Services” approved by a Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers in June 2019¹³, laid the ground for provision of career guidance services, while a further resolution approved in May 2020 organised career guidance services in secondary schools¹⁴;
- in August 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted Resolution no. 279 on regulations which provide a framework for a validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) scheme in Azerbaijan¹⁵.

Both the 2009 Law on Education and the 2018 Law on Vocational Education 2018¹⁶ contain elements that apply to the AzNQF such as: curricula based on learning outcomes, the concepts of non-formal and informal learning, and the principle of lifelong learning. The Law on Employment, adopted in 2018,¹⁷ introduced provisions on occupational standards and the role of the trades unions in their development, further training, assessment of skills of employees, and vocational guidance.

2. POLICY OBJECTIVES

2.1 Education and training reforms

Azerbaijan’s government has prioritised development of human capital in numerous strategic documents including the National Strategy for the Development of Education (2013), which envisions the introduction of competence-based education, enabling access to lifelong learning, modernisation of the educational infrastructure, as well as reforms in education system management, governance, and financing. The NQF Decree issued in 2018 is intended to contribute to the Strategy’s targets.

In 2016, the Strategic Roadmap for VET 2016-2025 was adopted. It included targets related to the development of outcomes-based funding, involvement of employers in VET, development of sector-based and labour market-relevant training programmes, optimization of the school network, opening professional training programmes to adults and recognition of prior learning and implementation of the

⁸ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/43855>

⁹ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/43856>

¹⁰ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/41904>

¹¹ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/41741>

¹² <http://e-qanun.az/framework/44811>

¹³ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/42636>

¹⁴ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/45034>

¹⁵ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/45613>, ‘Rules for carrying out examination and issuing the document confirming professional qualification of citizens for the purpose of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal forms of vocational learning’,

¹⁶ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/39275>

¹⁷ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/39846>

NQF. It was followed by the establishment of the State Agency for Vocational Education (SAVE) in 2016 and the adoption of the new VET Law in 2018.

In 2005, Azerbaijan joined the Bologna Process which has triggered subsequent reforms in the higher education sector, e.g. the 2009 Law on Education introduced the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The new State Programme on Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019–2023, aims at modernising the content of higher education degree programmes and envisages the introduction of the latest scientific and innovative educational technology.

The Employment Strategy for 2017–30 sets 16 targets for 2030 aimed at reducing the share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), lowering unemployment rates, reducing informal employment and increasing employment in small and medium enterprises. To match the skills supply and demand, the implementation plan accompanying the Strategy included actions focused on increasing the scale and quality of training and the introduction of mechanisms for validation and recognition of prior learning. The Strategy envisaged revisions of several legislative documents relevant to the implementation of the AzNQF.

2.2 Aims of NQF

The primary objectives of the AzNQF are to improve the quality and transparency of qualifications through adoption of ‘unified requirements for education and assessment standards, based on learning outcomes’. AzNQF serves to facilitate the comparability between national and international qualifications. Furthermore, the AzNQF is intended to be an instrument for aligning the education and training systems with the needs of the labour market and society, supporting lifelong learning and enabling recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

The alignment of AzNQF with the QF-EHEA and the EQF is intended to improve the international recognition of qualifications awarded in Azerbaijan and support the national and international mobility of learners and workers.

3. LEVELS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND QUALIFICATIONS

3.1 NQF Scope and Structure

The AzNQF structure draws on the EQF and the Bologna Framework. It comprises 8 levels. The level descriptors provide learning outcome statements for three domains: knowledge and understanding, skills, and autonomy and responsibility.

Some elements of key competencies for lifelong learning such as communicating in mother tongue and foreign language, and mathematical competence are integrated in the level descriptors. The levels are aligned with the major formal qualifications of the country’s education system.

The NQF includes qualifications from general education, vocational education and training, secondary specialized education (the sub-bachelor’s degree), higher education and further education (adult learning).

Vocational education and training qualifications are placed between levels 3 and 5. Qualifications can be awarded through formal learning and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

3.2 Types of qualifications

By level, the framework accommodates the following qualifications types:

- Level 1, primary education qualifications and certificates from short courses;
- Level 2, secondary education qualifications and certificates for short courses;
- Level 3, initial vocational education and further vocational training qualifications, diplomas and certificates;
- Level 4, the certificate of full secondary education (school leaving certificate); vocational qualifications based on full secondary education (diploma), further vocational training qualifications (diplomas and certificates);
- Level 5, secondary specialized qualifications e.g. the sub-bachelor's degree; and further vocational training qualifications;
- Level 6, bachelor's degrees and further education and training qualifications;
- Level 7, master's degrees and further education and training qualifications;
- Level 8, PhDs, Doctor of science degree and further education and learning qualifications.

Qualifications for further education and training are placed between levels 3 and 8.

3.3 Quality assurance of qualifications

According to the AzNQF decree, the NQF is a framework of quality assured qualifications and the framework itself should be subject to regular review.

External quality arrangements are regulated by the rules for accreditation of educational institutions. The AzNQF envisages internal quality assurance processes but self-assessment and peer reviews are not widely used yet in the education sector. The Regulations on monitoring of vocational education institutions of 2 March 2018 provides for monitoring of VET institutions in the domains of curricula, personnel, educational infrastructure and teaching processes. The planned 2021 EU-funded Twinning Project will aim at quality improvement in vocational education through the introduction of self-assessment, peer reviews and performance monitoring mechanisms. It will support SAVE in development of policy and procedures for quality assurance in VET system.

The main body in charge of accreditation is the Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA). It was established in December 2019 by reorganising the former Accreditation and Nostrification¹⁸ Department of the Ministry of Education into a new public legal entity. The main tasks of the Agency are managing the processes of accreditation of education institutions, recognition of foreign credentials, recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and advice and methodological support for development of internal quality assurance systems in education institutions. Supporting the implementation of AzNQF and improvement of educational standards are also included in the mandate of the Agency.

External quality assurance guidelines on Higher Education have been drafted and corresponding guidelines for VET and general education are under preparation. In higher education guidelines on writing a self-evaluation report have been produced; plus, pilot accreditations of several study programmes.

¹⁸ Nostrification - the process of granting recognition to a degree from a foreign university.

The State Examination Centre organises and oversees central assessment in general education i.e. the final assessment at the end of secondary school; and centralized admission to undergraduate and graduate levels of higher education at universities.

The Higher Attestation Commission conducts external assessments of doctoral degrees.

In 2019, the MoE approved the regulation “Conducting attestation of vocational education students”, which introduced assessment based on learning outcomes. The regulation emphasizes assessing students’ knowledge, skills and competences based on learning outcomes and assessment criteria specified in curricula. The assessment processes include three stages: (1) ‘current’ (formative) assessment, (2) mid-term assessment and (3) final assessment. An EU-funded technical assistance project supporting the AzNQF developed assessment guidance standards for 41 modules in vocational education.

The regulatory and organization framework for quality assurance of assessment under the NQF requires further development. The missing element is the absence of a competent body which would provide overall coherent policy guidance and criteria against which the agencies responsible for the respective education and training sub-sectors could define their own procedures for quality assurance of assessment.

Quality assurance of the certification process will be addressed by the anticipated follow-up technical assistance project supporting further implementation of the AzNQF funded by the EU scheduled to commence in late 2021.

3.4 Use of learning outcomes and standards

The AzNQF is an outcomes-based framework, so learning outcomes form the basis for development, assessment and certification processes.

Quality assurance at the national level is regulated by educational standards which are important elements of the quality assurance of qualifications. Additionally, the current regulatory framework envisages parallel use of qualifications standards and the relationship between qualification standards and education standards must be further clarified to ensure that the process of developing and describing qualifications is efficient and free from overlaps. Currently, the MoE issues educational standards and the MoLSPP oversees development of qualifications standards.

The relevance of qualifications is assured by use of occupational standards which are developed by sector committees. Regulations for development and registration of occupational and qualification standards provide sector committees with a conducive framework to collaborate with public agencies, education and training providers, trade unions and employers’ associations. Qualification standards include key, core, and specific competences. So far, a few hundred occupational standards have been developed. They are available on the website of the MLSPP.¹⁹ Regular budget for development of occupational and qualification standards is assured through the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

A National Labour Market Observatory under the MoLSPP was established in 2019 to analyse trends in the labour market and to produce data that can be used in the development of occupational and qualifications standards. An EU-funded technical assistance project has been supporting the operationalisation of the Observatory.

In March 2019, the ‘State standard for vocational education’ was adopted. The standard defines expected learning outcomes in terms of learners’ knowledge, skills and competences. It specifies

¹⁹ <https://www.sosial.gov.az/en/specialty-standards>

learning content and requirements for trainers, training infrastructure and teaching material. The standard ensures modular structure of the curriculum. It also includes eight key competences for lifelong learning²⁰ adapted to local circumstances.

In May 2020 a new framework for all state standards for bachelor's degrees was adopted. It includes 13 general competences for all studies at this level. Universities now have scope to define the programmes up to 60 ECTS. State standards define the competencies required from graduates while the universities define learning outcomes for individual courses. Guidelines on implementing competence-based approaches have been developed and 15 pilot study programmes at bachelor's level were redefined. University teachers need training in more consistent use of the competence-based approach.

3.5 Credit systems

The 2009 Law on Education envisaged credit transfer and since 2013 qualifications of higher education and secondary specialised education (sub-bachelor's education) have been referenced to credits compatible with ECTS. However, there is no national credit system.

In general education, VET, and higher education, completion of related lower-level qualifications is a precondition to access higher level qualifications. In addition, to access secondary specialised education and degree programmes, learners must pass a centralised entrance exam administered by the State Examination Centre. Graduates of secondary specialised education can access higher education institutions without taking the central exam.

VET schools can provide short-term courses (up to six months) starting throughout the year, based on employer need or in line with agreements between the State Employment Service and SAVE. A system supporting vertical and horizontal mobility of learners and improved articulation between VET programmes, adult training, colleges and higher education, is needed.

In 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers approved rules which allow admission of college graduates (holders of the sub-bachelor's qualification) to bachelor's courses without participating in entrance exams. Based on these rules, the NQF technical assistance project proposed a methodology for testing credit transfer.

The planned EU Twinning Project aims at developing a technical framework for a credit system that enables accumulation, recognition and transfer of individuals' learning outcomes and supports development of flexible learning pathways in selected priority sectors.

4. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

4.1 Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The institutional and governance set-up of the AzNQF is under development. The NQF Decree stipulates that the Ministry of Education is responsible for the following functions:

- quality assurance;
- development of educational standards, curricula and assessment standards;

²⁰ The Council of the European Union adopted a recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning in May 2018: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/council-recommendation-on-key-competences-for-lifelong-learning_en

- development and management of the national register of qualifications;
- development, in collaboration with MoLSPP, of a system for validation and recognition of non-formal learning.

MoE carries out these functions through the following bodies:

1. The EQAA, which oversees the external quality assurance system and implements validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.
2. The NQLLL Department in the Institute of Education, which provides methodological support to the implementation of the AzNQF. It carries out the following services:
 - analysis and monitoring of AzNQF implementation, formulation of recommendations on regulatory amendments to the AzNQF; and drafting of proposals for development of lifelong learning policies;
 - making recommendations for development of new qualifications based on labour market analysis;
 - supporting development, approval and evaluation of outcomes-based educational programmes for all education sectors;
 - management of the national register of qualifications;
 - analysis and monitoring of the qualification system and its elements - qualifications and education standards, curricula, assessment, quality assurance, referencing, recognition of non-formal education, lifelong guidance;
 - information and awareness-raising activities.
3. Other relevant departments of the Ministry of Education involved in the implementation of AzNQF are the Department of General Education and the Department of Science, Higher and Secondary Specialised Education. They ensure approval and implementation of education standards in their respective subsectors. SAVE ensures development and implementation of policies and education standards for vocational education.

The Higher Attestation Commission under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan oversees the awarding of Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Science degrees.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population executes the functions of labour market analysis and coordinates the process of occupational and qualification standards development.

The National Labour Market Observatory established under MoLSPP in 2020 plays a main role in skills analysis and anticipation. It is expected that it will produce data that will feed occupational standards and qualifications standards development.

The Occupational Standards Development Unit in the MoLSPP oversees occupational standards development. Since the Unit has a limited number of staff, standards development has been subcontracted to a private company.

4.2 Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The Statute of “Sector Committees for Skills Development” provides for involvement of trades unions, employers, employers’ associations and training providers in development and validation of occupational and qualifications standards. Employers can request development or revision of occupational standards and can express their opinions, but they do not enjoy voting rights in the Committees (unlike representatives of education institutions), which may reduce the labour market relevance of new qualifications.

A notable gap in the AzNQF's governance is the absence of a national platform such as a council. Such a grouping or committee could provide oversight of the AzNQF's implementation and ensure that reform of the qualifications system is linked to the major national economic strategies. A proposal for a 'National Commission for the AzNQF', listing key functions and stakeholders, was developed by the EU-funded NQF project. It recommends involvement of representatives from all relevant education sectors, departments of the Ministry of Labour, the State Employment Services, the Ministry of the Economy, the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs Organizations, the Trades Unions Confederation and the Sector Committees.

5. RECOGNISING AND VALIDATING NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING AND LEARNING PATHWAYS

5.1 VNFIL arrangements

In August 2020, a regulation on assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning was approved by a Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers²¹. It gave the EQAA the mandate to implement the first validation scheme.

Citizens who have completed secondary education and have at least two years' work experience in a relevant specialty are eligible to undergo a validation process which involves the following stages:

- electronic registration of applicants and payment;
- initial review of documents and interview;
- assessment that includes theoretical and practical tests;
- certification.

An initial exchange of information is carried out through a personal account created on-line. Provision of guidance services is specified in the regulation.

Assessment methods are limited to theoretical and practical assessment. The regulation prescribes a multiple-choice test of 10 questions per module regardless of the occupation. Successful fulfilment of the theoretical part is a precondition for admission to the practical assessment. The practical assessment can be organized either in one of the vocational schools or in an enterprise. EQAA compiles the list of authorised assessment centres based on predefined criteria.

The assessment commission includes 3 members – representatives of EQAA, MoLSPP and employers. Independent assessors with a minimum of 5 years' experience in the assessed specialty can also be involved. The assessment is carried out based on the classification of specialties in vocational education and on the assessment criteria described in the educational programmes.

The certification awarded through validation is equivalent to an initial vocational qualification. It gives its holders the right to continue vocational education in the formal system.

²¹ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 279 of August 5, 2020 on 'The Rules of Carrying out examinations and issuing of the document confirming professional qualification of citizens for the purpose of an assessment and recognition of the knowledge, skills, competence and experience acquired by citizens through non-formal and informal forms of vocational education', <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/45613>

An appeal procedure is foreseen. Either full or partial recognition is possible; partial recognition is granted in cases when the candidate demonstrates fulfilment against standards in some but not all units.

The EU-funded NQF project supported training of assessors and development of an assessment items bank for piloting a validation scheme in two occupations. In addition, various tools and instruments supporting operationalisation of the validation scheme were developed including guidelines for validation, guidelines for external quality assurance of assessment, standards for assessors and standards for verifiers.

EQAA is planning a gradual roll-out of the scheme to five occupations during 2021. Further support to scaling up of the validation system is envisaged by the upcoming EU-funded technical assistance project.

6. NQF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

6.1 Key achievements and main findings

In the last two years, important milestones in implementation of the AzNQF have been reached. Agencies and units that will play important roles in the governance of the qualifications system have been formally established: EQAA, which provides oversight on quality assurance and the NQFLLL Department in the Education Institute, which has a mandate to support and monitor AzNQF implementation.

A labour market observatory and sector committees for skills development are operational to assure labour market relevance of national qualifications.

The first certificates have been awarded through the validation of non-formal learning scheme.

A regulatory framework is being consolidated and the adoption of the AzNQF Decree was followed by development and approval of several legal acts that together provide a conducive framework for development of qualifications described in clearly identified learning outcomes.

So, the framework is moving closer to the activation stage.

6.2 Qualifications registers and databases

The national register of qualifications was developed in 2019 and is available on the AzNQF website²². It contains 24 recently developed, outcomes-based qualifications. The register has a comprehensive structure and contains the following data fields: name of the qualification, AzNQF level, curriculum, qualifications standard, assessment standards, occupational standard, teaching and learning materials, awarding body, dates of preparation and revision.

Procedures to allocate qualifications, formal or non-formal, to the register have not yet been adopted. The NQF project supported development of a concept document which specified proposed inclusion criteria, which is still to be finalised and adopted.

²² <https://www.kvalifikasiya.az/az/qualifications>

It is not clear yet who will manage the register long term. Currently, the Education Institute fulfils this role.

The register will have to be linked with the database of occupational standards which is currently managed by the MoLSPP²³.

The AzNQF website provides useful information about the purposes and functions of the AzNQF and includes promotional materials as well as link to the validation scheme under EQAA.

A concept paper on career guidance and counselling, with recommendations and an implementation plan, has been developed with the support of the NQF project. The implementation of career guidance services in general education and vocational education school will be further supported by upcoming EU-funded projects.

6.3 Qualification documents

Procedures for inclusion of the AzQNF levels on certificates and diplomas have not yet been developed.

6.4 Recognition of foreign qualifications

Azerbaijan is a signatory to the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region.

EQQA oversees recognition and determination of equivalence for bachelor's and master's degrees awarded abroad (a process known as nostrification). Nostrification of doctorate degrees is within the mandate of the Higher Attestation Commission under the President of Azerbaijan.

7. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORK/ OTHER FRAMEWORKS

7.1 Referencing to regional frameworks

Azerbaijan joined the Bologna process in 2005. To further align the higher education system with the European Higher Education Area, an EU-Funded Twinning project running 2018-20 supported re-writing of higher education programmes in learning outcomes and development of procedures for evaluation and accreditation of higher education study programmes.

The AzNQF was designed and is being implemented in compliance with the QF-EHEA and the EQF. However, the AzNQF has not yet self-certified to the QF EHEA.

7.2 International cooperation

EQAA is a member of the ENIC-NARIC network and has observer status in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

Azerbaijan is a member of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

²³ <https://www.sosial.gov.az/en/specialty-standards>

The students of Azerbaijani universities and academic personnel participate in the EU Erasmus+ exchange programme. Between 2015 and 2019, over 1,600 Azerbaijani students and academic staff studied or taught in Europe and over 800 Europeans travelled to Azerbaijan via Erasmus + mobility schemes²⁴.

In 2020, Azerbaijan joined WorldSkills, an association which promotes professional skills worldwide, including organising international skills competitions for young people.

7.3 International donor support

The European Union, GIZ, UNDP, the British Council and the Korean Government have all been active in VET in Azerbaijan.

In the period 2017-2020, the EU supported the education sector in Azerbaijan with a package of projects worth €19 million. This included the technical assistance projects: 'Support to VET in Azerbaijan', 'Support to implementation of National Qualifications Framework in Azerbaijan', 'Support to workforce planning and skills anticipation' (Labour market observatory), and the Twinning project 'Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan'.

Further support by the EU is planned under the Annual Action Programme 2018 'Education for Employment in Azerbaijan' with a total budget of €14.4 million. The action focuses on creating an enabling environment for lifelong learning, consolidation of the qualification system reform, improvement of quality in VET and support to improving the teaching and learning environment in selected VET schools.

8. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The AZNQF has benefited both from the state's willingness to place it high on the policy agenda and the continuous support of international partners, in particular the EU.

European policies and tools, especially the EQF and Bologna QF are strong influences.

But to fulfil the goals intended for AzNQF, a regular dialogue engaging the various education sectors plus labour market representatives, is needed. Introduction of a national inter-ministerial council overseeing qualification systems reforms could address this gap. The NQFLLL Department in the Education Institute is the current focal point for the AzNQF, but its functions are methodological rather than coordinating. It could in the future take on such a guiding role, given a revised mandate and greater resources.

There is also a demand versus resources available issue – the NQFLLL Department handles a long list of tasks, but currently with just three staff, a departmental head plus two experts. This number is insufficient for the range and complexity of the undertakings required. In 2020, intensive capacity-building activities were delivered by the EU-funded NQF project and follow-up technical assistance will continue supporting the Department.

To reach the operational stage, the national stakeholders should finalise the institutional set-up for the AzNQF. Such a set-up should allocate clearly the who does what in : oversight, policy setting and day-to-day implementation roles for each of the main AzNQF functions, namely (1) development,

²⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/neighbourhood/azerbaijan_erasmusplus_2019.pdf

approval and review of qualifications, (2) quality assurance, (3) assessment and certification (4) registration of qualifications (5) and information and guidance.

Plans include consolidation of the regulatory framework and development of procedures, especially for quality assurance requirements for inclusion of qualifications in the national register.

There is a need to streamline the regulations on qualification standards and state education standards, and to revise the guidelines on curriculum development to align with these. The relevant databases of MoLSPP and MoE must be linked.

Teaching and assessment practices need to improve if the objectives set for the framework are to be reached. Competence-based teaching is new for most teachers and a regular system for in-service teacher training is needed.

To facilitate lifelong learning and flexible learning pathways, the introduction of credit accumulation and transfer system is planned, as well as scaling up validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Finally, establishing mechanisms for system monitoring and review, and implementing the Strategic Plan for lifelong guidance is anticipated.

9. MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

AzNQF website and register: www.kvalifikasiya.az

Education Quality Assurance Agency: www.tkta.edu.az

State Agency for Vocational Education: www.vet.edu.gov.az

Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population: www.sosial.gov.az

Ministry of Education: www.edu.gov.az

State Examination Centre: www.dim.gov.az

10. INFOGRAPHIC OF THE NQF



ABBREVIATIONS

AzNQF	Azerbaijan National Qualifications Framework
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EQAA	Education Quality Assurance Agency
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLSPP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SAVE	State Agency on Vocational Education
QF-EHEA	Qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area
VET	Vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning

REFERENCES

ETF (2020) Policies for human capital development in Azerbaijan - An ETF Torino Process Assessment, <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/trp-assessment-reports/azerbaijan-2020>

ETF (2019) Key indicators on education, skills and employment, <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/key-indicators-education-skills-and-employment-2019>

World Bank Data <https://data.worldbank.org/>

Where to find out more

Website

www.etf.europa.eu

Online platform

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