

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK – ISRAEL

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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 NQF snapshot

A government Resolution adopted in 2015 provided the legal basis to begin developing a national qualifications framework (NQF). It has not been adopted yet.

A working group of EU project and Israeli experts and officials are together undertaking technical development of the NQF. They advise and update an inter-ministerial steering committee, which provides strategic direction, and reports to ministers. No formal decision has been taken yet on the number of levels or the composition of the descriptors.

Israel is not a member of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) but participates in the Global Policy Dialogue of the EHEA.

A formal working group has been established and is operating. The rationale, purpose, and scope of the NQF are agreed. Israel has engaged an EU project and international experts. But drafting and testing of the level descriptors has only just begun. Israel is therefore in an early phase of the design stage of development.

1.2 Policy context

Israel and the EU signed an Association Agreement in 1995, which came into force in 2000.

GDP growth was 3.5% in 2019. The unemployment rate for those aged 15 and up was 3.8% in 2019, with no gender differences and, remarkably, almost no long-term unemployment, at only 0.3% in 2018. While it is estimated that COVID shrunk the economy by about 5% in 2020, it is expected that 2021 will see a GDP growth of about 8%, aided by a vaccination programme already globally unparalleled in its comprehensiveness.

The Covid-19 crisis has had an unprecedented impact on the labour force, with more than a quarter of workers either dismissed or put on unpaid leave during the economic closure in the first months of the outbreak. It is still unclear what percentage will be rehired, but it is estimated that 20%, or more, of the newly unemployed will not be able to return to their jobs.

A characteristic of the labour market is high digitalisation. The labour market in Israel is moving from a traditional economy based on manufacturing and production to one based on information technology and modern services. Israel scored 16.67 out of 25 points in Cisco's Digital Readiness Index ranking and is the OECD country with the highest share of people employed in high-tech industries, at 8.2% – more than double the OECD median.

Circa 41%¹ of the upper secondary cohort are in VET. The objective of the government is to reach 48% in the next few years.

A unique feature of the education and training system is the influence, direct and indirect, of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). Most Israelis perform two or three years of compulsory military service on completion of secondary schooling, thus delaying entry into further or higher education or the civilian workforce. At the same time, the IDF is itself a major provider of - often highly advanced - training to

¹ "Country Fiche Israel, Education, Training and Employment Developments 2020", ETF, 2020.

its members and offers approximately 2500 qualifications. While this skill training and acquisition is of course common, given that most Israelis undergo military service, it is not always understood as offering benefits in the civilian labour market, and so is frequently unrecognised or at least not formally certificated.

The education and training system reacted quickly to the COVID pandemic by increasing public investment and putting in place several new measures and approaches to facilitate 'hybrid learning'. These have included distance learning, training teachers in digital tools, emotional support for students, granting greater autonomy to schools and town councils, and equipping vulnerable groups with PCs for online learning.

1.3 NQF legal basis

Israeli government Resolution no. 147 of 28 June 2015, "Advancing the Strategic Matter of Developing and Utilizing Human Capital", provided the legal basis to begin developing the NQF. Article 4 of the Resolution authorised establishment of a working group to address the issue of better linkage of the various sectors of the country's education and training system, to facilitate progression and pathways between them.

Following consultations, the working group reported back to the Government, indeed recommending establishment of an NQF to achieve the objectives described in the Resolution. Currently, the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee (IMSC) is working on a government resolution which would adopt an Israeli NQF.

2. POLICY OBJECTIVES

2.1 Education and training reforms

Israel performs well in PISA. Over 90% of its population attain medium or high levels of education according to ISCED scales². For high levels of attainment, that is, attainment of a post-secondary qualification at ISCED levels 5-8, the figure is 56%. But there are persistent inequalities, as Haredi (ultra-orthodox Jews) and Arab Israelis perform less well overall.

Education and training expenditure is second only to defence in the state budget, paralleled by the size of the Education Ministry staff. The Government is investing more, both for qualitative ends, but also to increase provision and space for an expanding population, as Israel experiences a combination of high immigration, low emigration, and high birth rates.

Israel's unique population characteristics require a sophisticated education and training system. A downside is complexity and some resulting segmentation. There are distinct streams for Hebrew and Arab-language populations, plus one for the ultra-Orthodox.

The Ministry of Education oversees VET provided in: (i) high schools for those aged 16–18 at ISCED level 3; (ii) in schools offering post-secondary studies at 18 and above at ISCED level 4; and (iii) technological colleges.

2 Central Bureau of Statistics, cited in "Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training in Israel", ETF 2020.

Initial VET (IVET) is also provided in privately managed schools run by technological education networks and supervised by key ministries.

The MoE also supervises self-funded continuing vocational training (CVET) for adults.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs supervises:

1. vocational schools for young people, where courses include apprenticeships and one- or two-year courses combining study and practical experience;
2. the National Institute for Training in Technology and Science (NITTS/MAHAT) colleges for technicians/practical engineers;
3. pre-VET/IVET provision for specific youth populations in education network schools;
4. CVET, including training for jobseekers and employer-led training for adults.

VET providers have considerable local autonomy regarding curriculum requirements and partnerships/initiatives.

The strategic plan to strengthen professional technological education in Israel for the period 2017–2022 is being implemented. It responds to the impact of the pandemic on the economy by boosting technological education and builds on the results of the range of new experimental measures put in place in response to the pandemic. The plan aims to establish ‘education chains’, connecting the various school levels, from primary school to higher education and beyond, to support lifelong learning. Greater autonomy at local authority and school levels is also a likely long-term trend accelerated by COVID.

Resolution no. 147 also included instructions to ministries to pursue several other measures in the education and training domain intended to contribute to human capital development. These span actions aimed at increasing the pass rate in the school-leaving certificate, raising the attainment in the education system of Israeli Arabs, and identifying the obstacles faced by disadvantaged children in schooling. The state brought the Resolution forward because it is concerned about lost opportunities to individuals and the resulting impact on potential for economic growth.

2.2 Aims of NQF

The Government intends that the NQF be a tool to enhance transparency, comparability, and recognition of qualifications within Israel and with other countries, thus promoting lifelong learning, increasing national and international mobility, and facilitating the recognition of prior learning. Fostering the labour market relevance of qualifications through the introduction of learning outcomes in curricula and qualifications and the use of the NQF as a platform for social dialogue is a further objective.

Users will be ministries, schools and other providers, employers and trades unions, and learners.

Israeli ministries and stakeholders want to use the INQF to link and integrate better the national system of qualifications and their associated providers. Domestically, a specific concern is that its various qualifications and diverse provision are insufficiently linked, resulting in barriers between HE, VET and the IDF.

There are four main providers of education and training in the country: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Services, the Council for Higher Education and the IDF. They do not cooperate consistently enough to enable learners to navigate across their respective different systems’ schools and colleges. There is much high-quality curricula and several thousands of

qualifications available in the country, but not sufficient linkages among these. The IDF seeks recognition from academia and business of its qualifications, many of them attesting to advanced skills.

Providers should, using the INQF, be able to interpret better the qualifications presented to them by learners moving between streams. An INQF should, for example, facilitate a high-school graduate to move from the general track across to the preparatory stage of study at a technological institute e.g. to train to be a “practical engineer”.

There are also short adult training courses organised by government ministries, e.g. the Ministry of Health organises continuing courses in psychology leading to a certificate. Additionally, numerous private providers offer training to adults in e.g. personal fitness trainer skills, which is often uncertificated. Developing qualifications to recognise skills acquired, and levelled in the INQF, would support internal recognition.

An INQF should also support closer and stronger relations with other countries and regions. An explicit purpose of the current EU Twinning project and an aim of the Israeli Government is alignment and compatibility with the EQF. An INQF would facilitate recognition of qualifications of any type held by incoming migrants, including from the EU. It would also enable easier recognition of Israelis’ qualifications when seeking study or work abroad, in the EU but also in English-speaking countries, most of which (the USA excepted) indeed already have NQFs.

3. LEVELS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND QUALIFICATIONS

3.1 NQF scope and structure

Discussions within the Inter-ministerial Steering Committee, and with wider stakeholders, continue on the number of levels and descriptors that would best accommodate the range of qualifications in the country. Consensus currently leans to the 8-level model – Israeli actors are explicit that this choice has the advantage of allowing a future one to one level alignment with the EQF and they are also influenced by the prevalence of 8-level NQFs in the EU, especially its second-generation frameworks.

On composition of the descriptors, actors have debated the merits of education sector-specific descriptors i.e. different sets of descriptors for VET, general or higher education within the INQF, against one, generic, set. Current preference is for the latter option, a unified, all-sectors set. Column titles would be Knowledge, Skills and Responsibility and Autonomy.

The Council for Higher Education is reluctant that the sector’s qualifications should “share” the upper levels with VET.

The Project and Group are currently experimenting with qualifications descriptors, drafting outcomes for individual key qualifications. However, this is a challenge as Israel has no systematic practice of outcomes in its curricula or qualifications.

3.2 Types of qualifications

A qualification type is a group of titles or diplomas or certificates which share similar characteristics in level, duration of related programme pathway and level of labour market entry. They enable the

categorisation of different qualifications which are placed at the same level but differ significantly in terms of their functions, learning outcomes, volume and/or orientations.

An example of a qualification type in Israel is the Teudat Bagrut, the upper secondary matriculation qualification. In the EQF, such school leaving certificates typically place at equivalent to Level 4. The Bagrut certifies for both general and more technical streams.

Another qualification type is the ISCED level 3 vocational certificate, attainable via study and apprenticeship combined.

It is notable that Israel has a high volume of provision at short-cycle tertiary level i.e. at ISCED 5 and EQF Level 5-equivalent. Qualifications at this level typically equip people both for access to employment, including direct entry to the labour market on graduation, and progression on to higher education. As in many other countries, learners at this level are heterogenous. In Israel, providers at Level 5 span colleges run by the ministries and the government Institute for Technological Training (NITT/MAHAT). The Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour colleges offer certificates for practical engineers at this level. Paramedical and nursing qualifications are also popular at this level.

3.3 Quality assurance of qualifications

Ministries set standards, accredit providers, oversee, and inspect curricula, and measure attainment of individual providers and at national, system-level. Employers are engaged via ministry-chaired committees in designing curricula and qualifications.

However, there is no national mechanism for gathering and sharing labour market data to make it accessible to education and training policymakers to inform their provision.

The school matriculation certificate, the Bagrut, and the Level 5-equivalent practical engineer certificate are externally assessed.

3.4 Use of learning outcomes and standards

There is no definition of qualification in use in the country and in discussions stakeholders sometimes talk about qualifications in terms of an occupation they typically lead to, rather than in terms of a formal certificate issued for defined outcomes achieved against a standard and after an assessment process.

Most qualifications and programmes, whether in general, higher, or vocational, education, are not yet written in learning outcomes. However, there is voluntary development and use of outcomes in some universities, by teachers and programme managers on an individual basis. But this practice does not yet extend across any one university entirely, far less the whole HE sector.

The EU Twinning Project experts and Israeli experts are at the time of writing beginning to draft the NQF level descriptors and learning outcomes. They are experimenting with drafting qualifications descriptors for a limited number of reference qualifications, such as the level 3 professional qualifications and some Level 5 qualifications. The results of these tests will inform decisions on the text of the eventual NQF level descriptors.

In the Working Group and Steering Committee discussions there are sometimes differences of opinion as Higher Education opposes potential levelling of IDF-developed qualifications at upper levels of the planned NQF. As programmes have not been described in the language of learning outcomes, it is difficult to resolve this issue.

There is no systemic use of occupational standards i.e. documents which describe the tasks and activities carried out in an occupation, and which prescribe performance requirements. Use of such standards would make easier the task of developing and describing vocational qualifications.

3.5 Credit systems

Credit points indicate the volume of learning required to achieve a HE qualification, making studies and courses easier to understand. Credits acquired at one institution can be counted towards a qualification studied for at another.

Use of credits is not mandatory in Israel, and there is no nationwide credit system. Some Israeli universities do use credits in some programmes but calculated solely by the number of weekly hours a student will spend in class as part of the course – overall workload is not considered.

There is no credit system in VET.

4. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

4.1 Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

Coordination of the development of the INQF lies with the EU Twinning project³, a partnership between the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR) and the Israeli Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education's Department for Evaluation of Foreign Academic Degrees (DEFAD).

An Inter-Ministerial Working Group (WG) undertakes the technical work. It comprises the project staff, other Italian and EU experts, and Israeli experts drawn from, in addition to the Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of the Economy and Industry, the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Services, the Ministry of Defence, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) and the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics.

This group advises and updates an inter-ministerial steering committee (ISC), which is chaired by the Prime Minister's Office and includes the above ministries as well as the Ministry of Justice, the Civil Service Commissioner's Office, and the Israeli National Economic Council. The ISC provides strategic direction and reports to ministers; it has a mandate to adopt proposals related to establishment of the NQF. So, the WG proposes, the ISC adopts, and the Government decides.

Developing proposals for governance of the INQF, including what type of body should be in charge, is one of the Twinning Project's most important planned outputs. At the time of writing, these discussion have yet to start, but governance is one of the priorities for the remainder of 2021.

4.2 Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

VET is guided at policy level by the Ministries of Education and Labour. As indicated above, the Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education leads the NQF's development. About 90% of the

³ EU-funded TWINNING project IL15 ENI SO 01 17 (IL/14) "Establishment of the Israeli National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as a mechanism to foster the development of Israeli human capital".

country's VET students are under the Education Ministry's supervision, while the Labour Ministry supervises the remaining 10%.

There is strong social partner and wider stakeholder engagement and consultation in VET. Employers, including the Manufacturers' Association of Israel (MAI), have a strong voice in decision-making in education and training reforms. Histradut, the trades unions confederation, has a venerable history, dating back to 1920, the early years of the inter-war British mandate, and so predates the state's foundation in 1948. It was one of the founders of the Amal⁴ network of schools, a major education and training provider.

The national Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Committee, established in 2010, seeks to improve the governance of education and training. It is a platform for exchange, engaging stakeholders such as policy makers, TVET providers and social partners, including representatives from the Labour and Education Ministries, the IDF, the ORT⁵ schools network and AMAL educational network, the MAI and Histradut. There are 19 such committees.

The Torino Process Report 2016-17 found strong support from most stakeholders for introduction of an Israeli NQF.

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

5.1 VNFIL arrangements

No national system for validation exists yet, but establishment of one is an aim of the NQF. There would be ample scope to use validation - and so return on the "investment" of building such a system - to certify the skills of the many adults engaged in informal learning e.g. with private providers or in Ministry-run courses, and to recognise the skills of people who have completed their military service.

Validation would be facilitated by adoption of modular curricula and units of qualifications, both defined in learning outcomes.

6. NQF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

6.1 Key achievements and main findings

The Government Resolution was adopted in 2015. The EU-Israel Twinning Project and Working Group have progressed in their tasks on defining the scope of the framework, number of levels and level descriptors, and some supporting tools.

4The Amal Education Network, established in 1928, comprises 128 educational institutions across Israel, including high schools, junior high schools, and colleges, with a total enrolment of over 40,000 students. Technology, the sciences, and the arts are offered to all sections of the population.

5 An education NGO, founded in 1949, specialising in science and technology education. The network operates 210 educational institutions including engineering colleges, middle and high schools, and one elementary school, in over 55 local authorities. Some 100,000 students attend ORT Israel schools and colleges. Its students come from all sectors and populations of Israeli society.

6.2 Qualifications registers and databases

The EU Twinning Project plans to develop and propose a draft model register or database; discussions and technical work are ongoing.

6.3 Recognition of foreign qualifications

Israel adheres to the Lisbon Recognition Convention⁶ in higher education, which it ratified and brought into force in 2007. DEFAD in the Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education evaluates foreign degrees for purposes of establishing equivalence and granting recognition.

An INQF would also support recognition of qualifications of any type held by incoming migrants; Israel is a country of net inward migration.

7. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORK/ OTHER FRAMEWORKS

7.1 Referencing to regional frameworks

Israel is not a member of the Bologna Process in Higher Education, although it participates in the Global Policy Dialogue of the EHEA. Israel's higher education qualifications system is comparable, comprising the familiar structure of bachelor's, master's and doctorate (PhD) degrees.

7.2 International cooperation

Israel's preference to design its NQF on EQF principles, and so in cooperation with the EU Twinning project, signals its intent to align its future framework with the EQF. Israel participates extensively in EU education and training programmes, notably the international dimension of Erasmus Plus.

In higher education, a motive of international contact is to increase the academic quality of the Israeli higher education system and promote Israel as a leading study destination for international talent. Israel's Erasmus plus office reports impact in the country's participating universities especially in revised curricula and teaching and learning methods. In higher education, individual Israeli departments in universities have used Erasmus Plus support to revise programmes in learning outcomes terms. Israeli VET colleges and institutions also participate in the Erasmus Plus TVET networks e.g. to modernise VET teaching and strengthen links with the labour market.

DEFAD in the Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education represents Israel in ENIC-NARIC networks.

Israel participates in ETF's Quality Assurance Forum.

Israel is a member of the OECD. It participates in the OECD's Future of Education and Skills 2030 programme, which aims to ensure high-quality, comprehensive, and equal education and promote opportunities for lifelong learning by 2030. It participates in other informal OECD Working Groups, including the Working Group on Professional Tertiary Education, which runs from 2020 to 2022.

⁶ Formally, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (11/04/1997). It is an international convention jointly developed and adopted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, which binds signatory countries to adopt fair practices in recognising HE qualifications.

7.3 International donor support

Development of the INQF is currently coordinated by the EU Twinning project, a partnership between Italy's Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR) and the Israeli Ministry of Higher and Complementary Education. MIUR, the Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence, or CIMEA i.e. Italy's ENIC-NARIC representative, and Studiare Sviluppo, a consultancy subsidiary of the national Ministry of the Economy, comprise the Italian team.

ETF has been a partner from the launch of the Twinning project and had earlier, in 2011 and 2016, supported discussions in Israel on the possibility of establishing an NQF.

8. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The current EU Twinning Project expires in February 2022. The Project and Israeli actors have focussed so far on three components of the NQF's development: levels, governance, and legislation.

The next stage is development of level descriptors for the NQF. The country should consider development of standards, curricula, and qualifications in outcomes; and look at developing qualifications on a unit basis, which would aid implementation of validation of nonformal and informal learning, and lifelong learning more broadly.

A decision is required on governance. The Inter-Ministerial Working Group will need to look at options such as an inter-ministerial council-type body, or a dedicated agency.

A roadmap is needed, comprising components such as definition of level descriptors, procedures for levelling of qualifications, development of standards and guidelines for drafting learning outcomes in qualifications. Public and stakeholder consultations should be foreseen in any plan. Legislation will be needed to formally establish the NQF; define its role in the country's education and training system; define its functions; and define what a qualification is. Secondary legislation, or regulations, will be required for its implementation e.g. on procedures for levelling of qualifications, quality assurance procedures, stakeholder roles, RPL etc.

9. MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

<https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/regions-and-countries/countries/israel>

<https://edu.gov.il/sites/international-relations/nfq/Pages/nfq.aspx>

<https://www.facebook.com/Establishment-of-the-Israeli-NQF-Twinning-project-1863397977304421/>

ABBREVIATIONS

AMAL	School network
CHE	Council of Higher Education
CIMEA	Italian Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training
DEFAD	Department for Evaluation of Foreign Academic Degrees (Ministry of Education)
ENIC/NARIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Union/National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
GDP	Gross domestic product
HE	Higher Education
INQF	Israeli National Qualifications Framework
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
MAI	Manufacturers' Association of Israel
MAHAT/NITTS	(Government-run) Institute for Training in Technology and Science
MIUR	Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Services
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ORT	Association for Vocational Crafts (an education NGO)
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

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