

The NQF as a catalyst for qualification and quality development

On 1 March 2016 the Federal Act on the National Qualifications Framework entered into force in Austria ([more](#)). Following the establishment of the bodies specified in the NQF Act, since the beginning of 2017 qualification providers have been able to submit requests for NQF allocation. Basically such requests can be submitted both for formal qualifications (i.e. qualifications with a legal basis) and so-called non-formal qualifications (i.e. those which are not regulated by law but for which a non-state educational establishment is responsible).

Since mid-2017 the first formal qualifications have now been allocated; these are colleges for higher vocational education (*berufsbildende höhere Schulen*, i.e. five-year vocational schools granting access to HE institutions and enabling direct labour market entry), schools for intermediate vocational education (*berufsbildende mittlere Schulen*, three- or four-year vocational schools at intermediate qualification level) and apprenticeship diplomas (qualifications of dual VET programmes). In order to guarantee the transparency function of the NQF, information about all qualifications allocated to an NQF level is published in the qualification register (www.qualifikationsregister.at).

In the development phase it was already possible to “feel the influence” of the NQF, especially in the field of qualification and quality development. More and more often, the principles of the NQF are applied when new qualifications are introduced and existing ones modernised to ensure allocation is potentially possible. These principles include the drawing-up of a qualification profile, i.e. the overall description of the qualification (features distinguishing the qualification in terms of content, fields of employment of its holders, its sphere of action and scope for decision-making, etc.), the definition of learning outcomes and of the assessment procedure. The latter also comprises the standards which candidates need to prove as part of the assessment procedure in order to acquire the qualification (i.e. the certificate). The new “engineer” qualification can be mentioned as an example of the presentation of a qualification in this form. The qualification, which has existed since 1 May 2017, was structured and described in line with the NQF. At the basis there are the descriptors of level 6. Since September 2017 the “engineer” has also been allocated formally to this level. This qualification not only takes account of the rules of the NQF, it also serves as a good example of the validation of informally acquired competences because the learning outcomes which the applicant has acquired in the course of several years of professional practice are assessed as part of the assessment procedure.

The NQF has also provided important impetus as part of the quality development of qualifications. The fact that it is foreseen in the NQF request (cf. [template](#)) to report in detail about quality assurance measures in the assessment procedure and, where appropriate, also in the course of the training (where it is required for acquiring the qualification) has made many qualification providers think about their QA measures. The allocation of a qualification to an NQF level is linked with the expectation that the associated descriptors also correspond to reality. To ensure that the NQF can actually be a reliable and confidence-building instrument it must be guaranteed that the qualification contains all the “ingredients” listed on its “cover”, i.e. that the descriptors of a level also apply to the allocated qualification. In this respect, too, the new “engineer” qualification can be mentioned as an example. For all

stages in the development of a qualification – from needs analysis onto the preparation and implementation of the qualification and its evaluation – quality assurance measures have been defined which aim to safeguard trust in this qualification for its holders, the labour market and the general public.

More information:

National Coordination Office for the NQF in Austria: <https://www.qualifikationsregister.at/public/home>

Qualification register: <https://www.qualifikationsregister.at/public/NQR-Zuordnungen>

The new engineer qualification: <https://www.bmwf.gv.at/Berufsausbildung/Ingenieurwesen/Seiten/default.aspx>

Certifying bodies of the Austrian economic chambers:

<https://www.wko.at/site/ingenieurzertifizierung/startseite.html>