



NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA AND THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

The **National qualifications framework** (NQF) of the Republic of Bulgaria contains of nine levels of qualifications including zero (preparatory) level. The preparatory level covers preprimary educational system. The other eight levels comply with their equivalents in the **European qualifications framework (EQF)**. The preparatory level hasn't analogue in the EQF. It is included for completeness of the NQF with the entire educational system and all professional qualifications under the national legislation.

All levels in the National qualifications framework of Republic of Bulgaria are based on results-oriented learning approach and are described by:

1. **Knowledge - theoretical and / or factual;**
2. **Skills - cognitive** (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and **practical** (involving techniques and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);
3. **Competencies - personal and professional.** Competencies are described in terms of the level of responsibility and autonomy, and separated into four main groups:
 - Autonomy and responsibility;
 - Learning Competences;
 - Communication and social competencies;
 - Professional competencies;

The top three levels of the NQF, with numbers from 6 to 8 covering higher education degrees, are developed in accordance with the three cycles of the Bologna process ("bachelor", "master" and "doctor") and in accordance with the levels 6 to 8 of the EQF.

In the Bulgarian higher education there is no so-called "short cycle" as in the Bologna process. The educational qualifications degrees "**Professional bachelor of ...**" and "**Bachelor**" are located on level 6 of the NQF corresponding to level 6 of EQF and the first cycle of KREPVO. The educational qualification degree "**Master**" is at level 7 of NQF corresponding to the EQF level 7 and the second cycle of KREPVO. The educational scientific degree "**Doctor**" is located at NQF level 8 corresponding to the EQF level 8 and the third cycle of KREPVO.

In educational qualifications degrees "**professional bachelor of ...**" "**bachelor**" and "**master**" are used education credits as follows:

- "Professional bachelor of ..." – 180 credits to ECTS;
- "Bachelor" – 240 credits to ECTS;
- „Master” after „professional bachelor” – 120 credits to ECTS,
(The training carried out with subjects only in the professional field in which it is acquired educational qualification degree "professional bachelor");
- „Master” after „Bachelor” in the same professional field – 60 credits;

- „Master”after „Bachelor” in other professional field – 120 credits;
- "Master" in the majors, which provides training only in the same degree - 300 credits to ECTS.

The education with degree “Doctor” lasts three years in regular and private form of education and 4 years in part-time and distance with no educational credits.

For the purposes of the report in the following paragraphs we will focus on the VET system and the description of the different levels.

SECONDARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The vocational education provides the utilization of educational minimum and the acquisition of professional qualification in accordance with national educational requirements, the vocational training provides acquisition of qualification in accordance with professional requirements.

The vocational education and training system in Bulgaria prepares and help citizens to acquire skills and find jobs in industrial as well as in other sectors of public life through creating conditions for achievement of vocational qualification and its continuous improvement.

The structure, institutions, management and financing of vocational education and training system in Bulgaria is regulated by the Act on Vocational Education and Training (VETA) since 1999. This act regulates the social and public relations that are associated with the provision of the right to vocational education and training of citizens, with meeting the needs of the labor market and the provision of conditions for the functioning and development of vocational education and training.

When the vocational education and training system allows acquisition not only of vocational qualification but of primary and/or secondary school, the process is regulated by the National Education Act, The Act of levels of education, General education minimum, curriculum and the national educational requirements.

Vocational education and training system includes three main components - **vocational guidance, vocational training and vocational education**. Initial vocational education and training (IVET) is a component of both the two components of the system:

- Component of “**vocational education**” - the acquisition of professional qualifications and the utilization of educational minimum for secondary education.
- Component of “**vocational training**” - the acquisition of an initial professional qualification or part of the job. Under certain legislated conditions, vocational training can provide and completion of primary education or secondary education classes.

Whether an element of one either component of other, IVET is developed by professions and occupations regulated by the list of professions for vocational education and training. The list is approved by the Minister of Education and Science in consultation with the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, with the relevant sectorial ministries and with the representatives of organizations of employers and workers at the national level.

Professions and majors in this list are classified in two main characteristics - professional fields and level of qualification. The second feature - a level of qualification is linked to the degree of education. This fact determines the age appropriate for beginning of IVET.

Levels of vocational qualification are graded at four levels, depending on what professional competencies need to be developed in students.

The first level of vocational qualification required the acquisition of professional competencies to majors involving routine activities that take place in unchangeable conditions.

Professions with second degree of professional qualification require the acquisition of professional competencies that allow performing of complex activities in changing conditions. To professions with a third degree of professional qualification, unless the requirements needed for the second stage, students need to acquire competencies and related skills to take responsibility for the work of others.

The highest - fourth degree of professional qualification relevant to professions, including a broad range of complex activities conducted under changeable conditions, and assuming management responsibilities for the work of others and allocation of resources.

Upward grading of requirements for each level of qualification determines the required minimal educational level and achieving a specified output level of education as a condition for the acquisition of each of the levels.

The first level of vocational qualification required incoming minimum educational level of students with completed Class VI and the outputted level – primary education. This determines the age at which students can begin their initial vocational education and training - 13 years of age.

For inclusion in the vocational training by professions for acquiring second and third level of qualification is required completed VII class of education or primary education.

The requirements for acquisition of second degree are successfully completed X or XI classes of education and acquired right to take state exams for high school graduation or successfully completed class XII or secondary education.

The last two requirements define the output level of education and of third level qualification. Vocational training with the fourth level of vocational qualification is conducted with persons with completed secondary education.

Institutions providing initial vocational education and training (IVET) are vocational schools, art schools, vocational colleges and vocational training centers.

Vocational schools carry out initial training for acquiring first and second degree of professional qualification and / or qualifications of the job. The duration of training in vocational schools is up to 4 years after class VI or with students who are 13 years old. This is the earliest age at which people can begin IVET. In these schools, in addition to professional training, students must acquire primary education, but also can finish and class / classes in high school.

Vocational high schools provide vocational education with acquiring second and / or third level vocational qualification. The vocational training leading to a second degree is with duration four years and ends after successful completion of class XII. The duration of training for third degree is 5 years - IX - XIII class. In vocational highschools students enter post-secondary education or VII class. The typical age of students is 14-19 years old.

Besides vocational training, vocational highschools can carry out vocational training for acquiring first, second and third level of vocational qualification and qualification part of the profession to persons who are no longer of compulsory school age, aged 16 years. Based on regulation of the Minister of Education and Science and the national educational requirements the vocational highschools also may conduct vocational training for acquiring fourth level of qualification.

Completed vocational education is attested by a diploma of secondary education, certificate of professional qualification and / or a certificate for legal capacity for implementation, issued for jobs that require of legal capacity certificates, including regulated professions.

Vocational training after completed secondary education

Vocational colleges provide vocational training with acquiring fourth level of vocational qualification. They accept people with secondary education. Depending on whether they are

organized initial vocational training or continuing with students who have a lower level of qualification, duration of study is two years.

CONTINUING TRAINING IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

Vocational training centers provide vocational training for persons over 16 years old. Their licensing is carried out by the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training. Since 2002, vocational training for acquisition of vocational qualification is carried out in framework programs for vocational training as follows:

- **Framework programs “A”** for initial vocational training and first level of qualification;
- **Framework programs “B”** for vocational training and second level of vocational qualification;
- **Framework programs “C”** for vocational training and second or third level of vocational qualification;
- **Framework programs “D”** for vocational training and fourth level of vocational qualification;
- **Framework programs “E”** for initial vocational training and qualification in the job;
- **Framework programs "F"** for continuing vocational training to update or expand already acquire vocational qualification, and for a first, second and third level of qualification (2004).

Referencing the European qualification framework’s requirements to the Bulgarian national qualification framework.

Bellow are described only the levels targeted according to the SWFM-QF project.

- **LEVEL 4 OF NQF**

NQF LEVEL 4 (SECONDARY AND TTHIRD LEVEL OF VOCATIONAL QULIFICATION) CORRESPONDS TO LEVEL 4 OF THE EQF:

✓ ***In terms of general education:***

➤ ***Knowledge:***

"Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or education" part of EQF are defined as "depth" in the NQF, in view of the fact that it is possible, according to the specific field of education and work, some theoretical knowledge to be absorbed at the previous level 3. The broader context here is represented by "familiar ways of handling and use of complex information" and "depth knowledge of democracy, civil society and the international legal order."

➤ ***Skills:***

Cognitive and practical skills of the EQF in this level of NQF are deployed both in width ("broad range", "apply alternative methods and ways of activity") and in depth ("solving complex problems", "apply alternative methods and courses of action in a familiar or unfamiliar situation and / or the environment "). Deployed are the skills for making appropriate decisions after depth, arguing assessment of a school or work situation and successful transfer of knowledge and skills between different areas of education or work.

➤ ***Competences:***

At this level of NQF the autonomy is designed as a "show of initiative and ability to set goals, to plan and justify actions", related to the ability to self-assessment in making decisions about own personal development. The responsibility is interpreted in a broad range of behaviors and actions such as monitoring and managing the work of others, the use of ICT and personal participation in public life.

Autonomy and responsibility are the base of ability to successfully communication at different levels of learning and working with self-selection of means and ways as well as the ability for successful practical application of civic literacy and social responsibility.

✓ ***In terms of vocational education***

➤ ***Knowledge:***

Learning results related to knowledge in both frames are described by the "factual and theoretical knowledge. In NQF they are determined for "types of objects (...) from a specific area, their properties, structure (components), purpose and relationships (...) "and required sufficient depth of knowledge" in a particular field of work or study, "as they are described in the EQF.

The results can be compared with the "knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a certain field ..." of level 3 of the EQF. Much more accurate is the comparison with "factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a certain field of work or training" of level 4 of the EQF. However, "broad contexts within a field of work or training" includes "... properties, structure, function and relationships" in a much higher degree than "knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts."

➤ ***Skills:***

The cognitive and practical skills included in level 4 of NQF "organization of production process", "assessment of the quality" and "development of action plan" compared with the higher level of competence than using "a range of cognitive and practical skills needed to complete tasks and solve problems" of level 3 of the EQF. Certainly these kinds of skills aren't appropriate to the "development of creative solutions to abstract problems" of EQF level 5. The description of cognitive and practical skills from level 4 of NQF corresponds to the highest degree to these of the level 4 of EQF, although the difference with a much more general description in the EQF.

➤ ***Competences:***

Autonomy: „works independent“ of NQF corresponds to the “ability of self-management of level 4 of EQF; the term “predicted changing conditions” includes “work or study contexts” which is usually predictable but can be subject to change”, from level 4 of EQF.

Responsibility: the texts "...is responsible for the implementation ...of certain tasks ... "and" evaluate both the team members and the quality of implementation of tasks “ of NQF is fully consistent with the text "taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities' of Level 4 of EQF.

Competences for learning and communication and social competencies of NQF: the competence "Assess training needs of staff and offer appropriate opportunities" from NQF corresponds to "take some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities" of EQF.

Based on the comparison of the vocational qualifications from third level can be related with level 4 of EQF and level 4 of NQF.

• ***LEVEL 5 OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK***

Level 5 of NQF corresponds to level 5 of the EQF and covers only vocational training - the fourth level of vocational qualification.

➤ ***Knowledge:***

Factual and theoretical knowledge, described as "broad and deep" in this level of NQF are described as "comprehensive, specialized" in level 5 of EQF.

Their detailed description in the NQF as "object types (raw materials, tools, equipment, technical and technological documentation) from a specific area, their properties, structure (components), use and relations (technological sequence and performance requirements of

various activities) "actually represent a detailed description of "comprehensive, specialized "knowledge, such as the description of knowledge as learning outcomes of level 5 of EQF. "Analysis expertise" and "develop criteria for evaluation" of NQF determine the level of competence of learning outcomes corresponding to level 5 of the EQF.

➤ **Skills:**

"Make suggestions to improvement of the facilities, staff and activities in the enterprise" in the NQF corresponds to opportunities for "development of creative solutions to abstract problems" in level 5 of EQF. This level of competence is lower than the opportunity "to solve complex and unpredictable problems" from level 6 of the EQF.

Cognitive skills "plan, organize and control the production process" and "develop an action plan" corresponds to "comprehensive range of cognitive skills" in level 5 of EQF. "Perform complex operations "and "monitor and support staff" and "assess the quality" suggest "a comprehensive range of practical skills" in level 5 of EQF.

➤ **Competences:**

• **Skills for autonomy and responsibility:**

"Working alone in changing conditions" in NQF determines a high degree of autonomy, which is included in the meaning of "work or study activities where there is unpredictable change" in level 5 of EQF.

The skill "responsibility for tasks assigned to the certain team" corresponds to "management and monitoring" in level 5 of EQF.

- **Learning skills:**

"Assess the gaps in self-knowledge, skills and competencies and taking measures to improve skills" and "use a variety of ways to expand and update their professional skills" in level 5 of NQF corresponds to "review and development of own achievements," in level 5 of EQF. Description of competences "assess the need for training of staff and provides appropriate opportunities" in level 5 of NQF fully corresponds to the description of competencies "review and develop the achievements of others" in level 5 of EQF.

Based on the comparison between the two frameworks, qualifications of the fourth level of vocational qualification of NQF can be successfully correlated to level 5 of the NQF and level 5 of the EQF.

• **LEVEL 6 OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK**

Level 6 of NQF covers the educational qualifications "professional bachelor of ..." and "bachelor". Qualifications acquired with these educational qualifications correspond to these from level 6 of EQF and of those acquired in the first cycle of the Bologna process.

Expected knowledge, skills and competencies of the end of the training in these degrees are defined in the Higher Education Act (1995) and in the relevant government requirements. The results are tied with the requisite educational credits and duration of training in accordance with the requirements of Bologna process.

➤ **Knowledge:**

"Professional bachelor of ..." has and uses detailed, theoretical and practical knowledge in the field and makes a critical analysis of the principles and processes. The "Bachelor" owns advanced and comprehensive theoretical and factual knowledge in certain field, including those linked to the latest advances in it.

Knowledge, that graduates of these degrees possess, correspond to those required in level 6 of EQF advanced knowledge of a field of work or study and include critical understanding of theories and principles.

➤ **Skills**

"Professional Bachelor of ..." knows the methods and tools in the field and knows how to apply professional knowledge and practical experience through new, unconventional approaches, and well-reasoned decisions. The "Bachelor" knows proficient methods and tools that allow solving complex problems, apply logical thinking and demonstrates an innovative and creative approach to solve unusual problems.

The skills in level 6 of NQF on the one hand meet the requirements of EQF level 6 comprehensive ranges of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems.

➤ **Competences**

"Professional Bachelor of ..." "takes responsibility to manage the executive teams and resources, including in emergency situations in the operation of facilities and management structures with the effect of multiple factors. The "Bachelor" has the ability to manage complex administrative occupations, including teams and resources, bear the responsibility for decision-making in complex conditions under the influence of various interacting factors and difficult to predict, demonstrates creativity and initiative in management activities.

The above described competencies correspond to competences in level 6 of EQF related to management of complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts and taking responsibility for career management of persons and groups.

Expected knowledge, skills and competencies of the end of the education for the levels of "professional bachelor of ..." and "bachelor" correspond to the requirements of the first cycle of KREPVO - demonstration, understanding and use of knowledge in the field of learning. Those competences upgrade these in the secondary education – collection, processing and interpretation of data, knowledge on how to communicate with professionals and non-professionals required at this level, application of knowledge and understanding using a professional approach to their work and competence of argumentation and problem solving in the field of education. The duration of study in these two degrees and the necessary educational credits correspond to those for the first cycle of the Bologna process

• **LEVEL 7 OF NQF**

At level 7 of NQF is the educational qualification degree "Master". Qualifications obtained in this degree, meet the qualifications of EQF in level 7 and acquired in the second cycle of the Bologna process.

Expected knowledge, skills and competencies of the end of the training in these degrees are defined in the Higher Education Act (1995) and in the relevant state requirements.

➤ **Knowledge:**

People acquired the educational qualification degree "Master" have a wide range of theoretical and practical knowledge. Their knowledge is from specialized to highly specialized in certain areas, which upgrade those achieved in the preceding degree, specialized and intensify the training in the certain major.

They demonstrate critical awareness and evaluation of knowledge in the field and the links between different study areas. Knowledge gained on this educational degree, form the basis for originality in developing and implementing new ideas. Parts of the knowledge are advanced in nature and are the result of the latest advances in science.

Knowledge acquired in "Master" degree compliant with those described in level 7 of EQF - highly specialized knowledge which represent the latest knowledge in a field of work or study as basis for original thinking and / or research.

➤ **Skills**

People acquired the degree "Master" have a wide range of practical and cognitive skills and approaches needed to understanding of abstract problems and development of creative solutions. They are able not only to diagnose problems but to solve them based on current

research by integrating knowledge from new or interdisciplinary areas, demonstrate the ability to generate new knowledge and procedures related to the conduct of research and innovation. Masters can adequately act in situations characterized by incomplete or limited information, and unpredictability. They develop new and diverse skills in response to emerging knowledge and practices, as well as demonstrate the free application of innovative methods and tools, characterized by innovation in solving complex problems and unpredictable problems in a specialized field of work. Acquired the degree "Master" can find supported arguments in solving interdisciplinary problems. Masters show initiative in working and learning in complex and unpredictable environments that require problem solving with multiple interacting factors.

Skills that "Masters" possess compliant of level 7 of EQF specialized skills for problem solving needed in research and innovation to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields.

➤ **Competences:**

Acquired the degree "Master" possess the following summarized competencies

- **Autonomy and responsibility:**
 - ability to establish administrative structures and to manage teams to solve complex problems in an unpredictable environment with a multitude of interacting actors and intermodal opportunities;
 - Demonstrate knowledge in operational synergies in managing changes in a complex eco-environment;
 - Demonstrate creativity and innovation in the development of projects;
 - Initiate processes and organizes activities requiring a high degree of consistency;
 - Develop policies and demonstrate leadership qualities for their implementation;

Learning competences:

- systematically and deeply evaluation of knowledge and identification of needs for new knowledge;
- demonstrated a high level of autonomy and ability to orient on complex content, using their own methods and approaches to controlling it;
- use of variety of methods and techniques for utilizing of complex curriculum;
- Knowledge of rich notions and shows skills for conceptual and abstract thinking;

Communication and social competences

- Ability to present clear and accessible own ideas, formulations of problems and possible solutions to specialized and non-specialized audiences using a wide range of techniques and approaches;
- Development and explosions of justified beliefs about social processes and practices and ability to arguing proposals for their improvement or change;
- Speaking some of the most popular European languages;

Professional competences:

- Collect, process and interpret specific information needed to solve the complex problems in the field of study;
- Integrate a wide range of knowledge and sources of information in a new and relatively unfamiliar context;

- Make reasoned judgments and find solutions in complex ecoenvironment of diverse interactions;
- Demonstrate ability to adequately conduction and cooperation in business and / or professional sectors;
- Ability to solve problems by integrating complex sources of knowledge in terms of insufficient information available in a new unfamiliar environment;
- Ability to initiate changes and to manage development processes in complex conditions;
- Engagement with important scientific, social and ethical issues arising in the course of work or training;

Competences acquired with the degree "Master" compliant with competencies in level 7 of EQF for:

- Management and transformation of work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches;
- Responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and / or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams;

The expected knowledge, skills and competencies in the end of the training of level 7 of NQF - **degree "Master"** correspond to those required in the second cycle of KREPVO knowledge, skills and competencies as follows:

- Demonstration of knowledge and understanding, upgrading the knowledge learned in cycle I, which provide a basis for originality and application of ideas in a research fields;
- Ability to apply knowledge and understanding and to solve problems in new or unfamiliar area within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts in the field of study.