

## PROPOSAL FOR A SERBIAN NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

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### **Introduction**

1. This paper attempts, as plainly as possible, to make a proposal for a National Qualifications\* Framework for Serbia. It is designed to aid discussion by focussing on concrete proposals. It is expected, and hoped, that through such discussion more suitable features can be identified and genuine problems addressed.

2. To further aid discussion there is a complementary paper entitled *Commentary on Proposals for a Serbian NQF*. This comments on the rationale for the proposals, discusses potential difficulties and presents a range of alternatives for certain features. Such alternatives can be used without disturbing the essential framework presented here.

3. The paper builds on previous work in Serbia, in particular the following documents:

- Concept of VET in Serbia (2004);
- Policy and Strategy Development For VET in Serbia (2005) – The Green Paper;
- Policy And Strategy For The Development Of Vocational Education And Training In Serbia (2005) – The White Paper;
- Policy and Strategy of Accreditation and Certification in Secondary Vocational Education and the Continuous Education of Adults in Serbia, *Despotović* (2005);
- Methodology of Curriculum Development in Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education, *Van Engelshoven et al* (2005)

The *Commentary* notes when proposals here depart from what is said about Accreditation and Certification in these previous documents.

4. The proposal presented here aims to build so far as possible on existing institutions and responsibilities. These may not be theoretically ideal (in no country can they be said to be), but progress is more likely if existing institutions can be adapted to new roles as opposed to the creation of a multitude of new institutions.

5. The proposal is divided into the following sections:

- A. Reviewing the aims of an NQF.
- B. Proposing the levels which should be used.
- C. Proposing the types of qualification which should be included.
- D. Describing the functions that need to be performed for an NQF to operate.
- E. Proposing who might perform these functions.

The final section (F) outlines further actions that will be needed, if these proposals are acceptable.

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\* The term “qualification” used in this paper is as defined in the *Green Paper* (p, 31) “*Qualification is a formal admission that a person has the appropriate knowledge, skills and competencies that enable him/her to conduct certain working (professional) roles and functions or has achieved the learning outcomes defined by the accredited programmes/modules.*”

## **A. Aims of an NQF**

6. The aims of an NQF are well set out in *Policy and Strategy Development for VET in Serbia* (p, 18):

- Securing that qualifications are adequate and relevant to economic and social needs;
- Improvement of the approach, flexibility and development in vocational education;
- Improvement of the quality of formal and informal vocational education;
- Providing conditions for the definition and consistent application of educational standards;
- Providing conditions for the implementation of vocational education (in the formal and informal systems) based on quality standards;
- Securing international recognition of vocational qualification acquired in Serbia.

7. The White Paper *Policy And Strategy For The Development Of Vocational Education And Training In Serbia* (pp,15-16) was more specific:

“A National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a system whereby all qualifications that conform to nationally agreed quality criteria and procedures are registered at one level in a hierarchy of levels reflecting increasing demands or complexity. The NQF will include all qualifications acquired through VET programmes in the formal and non-formal systems.

The Framework should consist of a series of levels and an agreed terminology for describing learning outcomes and qualifications. The levels in the Framework will be defined by descriptors which describe typical outcomes at each level. ....Especially important is:

- Establishing a special body or institution responsible for managing the development of the national qualification framework;
- Adaptation of the classification system and agreement on the definition of qualification levels in a way that is compatible with the emerging European Qualifications Framework;
- Adopting regulations and procedures for the creation of qualifications;
- Adopting regulations and procedures for assessment and certification;
- Adopting regulations and procedures for the accreditation of institutions delivering training and non-formal education.”

8. We must accept, of course, that the *Green Paper* aims cannot be achieved by an NQF on its own, but that an NQF can assist in achieving these aims. The *White Paper* formulation gives a clear set of immediate targets, calling in particular for:

- levels which are compatible with the EQF;
- inclusion of non-formal education;
- clarity about responsibilities and procedures for the creation, assessment and certification of qualifications and the accreditation of institutions which train towards them.

The following proposals address each of these matters.

## B. Levels

9. The following four levels, with descriptors\* are proposed.

LEVEL	DESCRIPTOR
I	Recognizes functional knowledge and regularly used skills in a specific occupational field, including ability to understand detailed instructions and to identify common operational problems. Responsibility and reliability are exercised under supervision, or within a controlled environment. Pathways for further learning are clearly defined.
II	Recognizes systematic knowledge and specific skills in a defined vocational field, together with the application of necessary theory. Competence to undertake tasks independently, and to rectify common problems within a specific occupational field is required. Available pathways for further learning require choice and initiative.
III	Recognizes relevant knowledge in a wide vocational field together with technical skills and theoretical understanding of work processes. Competence to identify a wide range of problems and opportunities for improvement within a control or administrative system is required, together with the ability to propose the measures and resources needed to address them. The ability to guide and direct others may be required. Available pathways for further learning require commitment and a basis of theoretical understanding.
IV	Recognizes application of specialist or advanced knowledge and technical skills, together with appreciation of theoretical basis. Competence to direct skilled teams is required, together with anticipate critical problems within the field of specialism and to specify how they should be resolved. Available pathways for further learning require self-direction and the ability to develop further theoretical understanding.

10. A more elaborated version is in the Annex. At present it would seem that these would fit with EQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

11. These are proposed as the levels within Serbian VET; qualifications lying within these levels would be accredited by the bodies which are described later in this paper. In public presentations, however, there will often be advantage in presenting these levels together with those in the University system, which would mean – following *Bologna* – that a further 3 levels would be added.

12. Each qualification accredited as part of the NQF would state its level clearly in its title.

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\* These descriptors have been generated with the help of a Focus Group who are currently being consulted about them.

### **C. Types of qualification**

13. It is proposed that the current system of Diplomas is reflected in the accreditation criteria for an NQF. That is to say that they would not be required to radically alter their duration or aims (though of course individual Diplomas would need to conform to the NQF criteria. The features of the current system might be characterized as:

- being primarily designed for young people as stages in an initial VET (IVET) process;
- being of set duration (3 or 4 years for school diplomas, 2 years in respect of qualifications awarded through the *viša škola*);
- being centrally designed, with new or substantially amended profiles being piloted for a number of years before implementation;
- being capable of being integrated with general education in a planned programme of study;
- being delivered only through the recognized system of state schools.

14. However it is clear that such Diplomas are not, on their own, sufficient to meet the needs of Serbian people and the Serbian labour market for recognized skilled workers. This is particularly the case for adults wishing to train or retrain in specific occupations which are demanded in the labour market. The *Concept* paper talked of “Certification of short-term forms of vocational education” (p, 39), and the *Green Paper* more explicitly referred to a “framework of certificates and diplomas, compatible with national qualifications frame” (p, 31). Despotović (2005) envisaged two distinct types of qualification (p, 13).\*

15. It is therefore proposed that a second, distinct, type of VET qualification should be recognized within the NQF. These might be entitled National Certificates, and would have the following characteristics:

- they would only be available for adults over the age of 25;
- they would attest to necessary skills, knowledge and competence for particular occupations or important job functions;
- there would be no common durations of time for their completion, which would vary between Certificates;
- though some curricula might be centrally designed, there would be possibilities for local organizations and providers to present proposals for approval;
- while schools could (with the consent of the MoES) offer these National Certificates, other providers would also be eligible to be accredited to do so;
- it would be permissible, though not compulsory, for the specifications for individual National Certificates to include requirements for prior levels of qualification or of work experience to have been achieved by students.

16. Each qualification accredited as part of the NQF would state, in its title, whether it was a Diploma or a National Certificate.

17. There would be no presumption that National Certificates would be assigned to a lower level than Diplomas. The level to which they were assigned would depend on their intended outcomes and how these related to the descriptors in the levels, proposed above.

18. A Diploma and a National Certificate in a similar field, could have the same title (except of course for the designation of ‘Diploma’ or ‘National Certificate’). The determination of the appropriate title would be a matter for the Qualifications Authority (see below).

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\* Despotović saw the two types of qualification being linked through a (partially) common modular structure. This is discussed in the *Commentary*.

19. It is proposed that, at the start of an NQF, all current approved school VET profiles are included as approved Diplomas. Revisions to these, and any new Diplomas, would need to satisfy the procedures of the NQF.

#### ***D. Functions within an NQF***

20. Drawing on the previous documents it is clear that the following functions will need to be performed for a Serbian NQF to operate:

##### Establish levels and types of qualification

An authoritative description of the levels is needed, so that decisions can be taken to place different qualifications at the appropriate level. If different types of qualification are to be distinguished (as is proposed), then these too need to be clearly defined.

##### Determine which level and type to assign an individual qualification

Decisions need to be made about how to classify any particular qualification, as this will be part of its title.

##### Determine an acceptable and unique title for each individual qualification

Part of qualification's title will reflect its level, and what type it is, but a short, understandable and acceptable title is needed to prevent confusion.

##### Develop and maintain a sectoral classification

It is customary in Serbia to classify qualifications by broad sector, both in the school system and in the official 'nomenclature'. This will be helpful in presenting qualifications to the public and for involving social partners in discussion. This classification may need to be adapted from time to time, and some decisions about difficult cases will need to be made.

##### Elaborate VET standards

The training standards to which both Diplomas and National Certificates will lead need to be carefully formulated by those with expertise in the field, and social partners involved in the process.

##### Validate VET standards

Final decisions need to be made about whether training standards reflect the demands of the labour market, and when they need to be revised.

##### Develop curricula

Curricula which lead to the standards need to be developed, whether centrally or locally.

##### Establish assessment requirements

Procedures need to be developed for establishing that students have satisfactorily achieved the training standards. These may vary in the extent to which they are detailed or based on broader guidelines.

##### Accredit organizations able to deliver qualifications

Decisions need to be taken about which organizations can accept students for programmes leading to recognized qualifications, and issue successful students with Diplomas or National Certificates. Certain conditions for accreditation will be required to be met, and different conditions may apply to different qualifications (for example equipment and the experience or qualifications of teachers).

### Monitor accredited organizations

Measures will be needed to ensure that accredited organizations continue to meet the conditions of accreditation.

### Issue official papers for successful students (certification)

There needs to be clear authority as to who may certify that a student has, or has not, gained a qualification.

### Maintain a register of people who gain qualifications

Students will lose their papers from time to time, and there may be disputes about who has, and who has not, achieved a qualification. There needs to be a system for replacing or checking Diplomas and National Certificates.

### Investigate appeals

Students may appeal that they have been unfairly refused a Diploma or a Certificate. There needs to be an authority to whom they can appeal and who they can expect to investigate the matter fairly.

### Promote the NQF

There is little point in establishing an NQF if the general public and employers do not know about it, and understand its principles. Additionally international discussions about the comparability between a Serbian NQF and other European frameworks can be expected.

### E. Organizations which would perform these functions

21. The table below proposes the organizations which might perform the functions. As has already been said, the proposals aim, so far as possible, is to build on the functions already performed by existing organizations. However, the proposals do envisage the creation of a relatively small National Qualifications Authority (NQA), which has been envisaged in some form or another in all the previous policy papers, though in varying forms and with slightly different ideas of its executive authority.\* Some brief comments about the nature of the functions is contained in the *Remarks* column:

Function	Responsible Organizations	Remarks
Establish levels and types of qualification.	Would be done by legislation	We can expect that the levels and their descriptions will not change frequently over time. Establishing them in law gives authority and permanence.
Determine which level and type to assign a qualification.	The NQA would be responsible for interpreting the levels in the law, and assigning a title to the qualification.	A single authority doing this would ensure that there were similar procedures for Diplomas and National Certificates, so that equivalences and proper differences can be fairly maintained.
Develop and maintain a sectoral classification	The NQA would do this. Both Diplomas and Certificates in a given field would be placed within the same sectoral classification.	The sectoral classification may need to change over time, and there will be a few unclear cases. It is important that Diplomas and National Certificates related to the same, or similar, occupations are placed in the same grouping. The sectoral classification also provides a structured basis for the involvement of social partners.
Elaborate VET Standards (outcomes for VET)	The VET Centre would do this. Standards relevant to National Certificates would be a sub-set of those for Diplomas, focussed on the essential occupational requirements. For a discussion about whether these should be expressed in a common modular structure, see the <i>Commentary</i> .	Under these proposals the VET Centre is seen as a technical and developmental body, rather than one with the legal authority to make final decisions (see <i>Commentary</i> ). Experts from the social partners and teams of teachers would be involved in the elaboration of standards. General methodology would be agreed with the NQA.

\* The *Concept* paper envisaged a 'Centre for Accreditation' (p, 31). The *Green Paper* (p,34) seemed to assign this role to the VET centre, operating under the guidance of a National Council for Vocational Education, and the *White Paper* assigned this role (p, 33) to the proposed National Council for Vocational Education, supported by the VET centre. Professor Despotović, like the *Concept* Paper, envisaged a separate 'Centre for Accreditation', operating under the direction of a National Council for Vocational Education. A brief analysis of the different approaches is given in the *Commentary*, though plainly detailed work will need to be done on the constitution, authority and accountability of a Qualifications Authority.

Function	Responsible Organizations	Remarks
Validate Standards (VET outcomes)	Final decisions on whether standards are adequate would be taken by the NQA.	The NQA would be expected to convene panels of social partners to validate standards. These might develop into more permanent sectoral committees.
Develop curricula	The Curriculum Department of the Institute for Educational Development (IED) would do this for Diplomas. The VET Centre might propose model curricula for National Certificates in occupations considered to be of national importance (e.g. through project funding), but it would be open for accredited providers of National Certificates to propose their own curricula.	It is not proposed that the NQA would have the role of approving the curricula for Diplomas, which is a function currently performed by the MoES on advice from the Curriculum Division. It will not be economic for there to be centrally devised curricula for the entire range of possible National Certificates (see <i>Commentary</i> ). Instead of approving curricula of each adult provider, the NQA will exercise control for National Certificates through its accreditation and assessment requirements.
Establish assessment requirements	For Diplomas, the VET Centre, under general guidance from the NQA. For National Certificates, the VET Centre would specify the nature of assessment, again following guidance from the NQA.	The NQA would publish general guidelines on assessment, which might differ from sector to sector, and between qualification levels. The VET Centre would elaborate these in greater detail with respect to individual qualifications.
Accredit organizations able to offer certificates	The MoES for schools. The MoES would also accredit other providers in the case of National Certificates.	The NQA would publish accreditation criteria, in agreement with the MoES, for organizations other than schools. Amongst these would be a requirement to show their capability in developing proper curricula.
Monitor accredited organizations	As above. The MoES would have the power to delegate monitoring activities to other bodies, if it chose.	There may be instances where the MoES would wish to involve other Ministries or public bodies in monitoring providers other than schools.
Issue papers	This would be done by schools and adult providers, using formats set down by the NQA.	It will be more efficient for papers to be issued locally, though there need to be controls to ensure that only accredited organizations can issue them, and that the papers include the title approved by the NQA.



Function	Responsible Organizations	Remarks
Maintain a register of people who gain qualifications	The MoES for Diplomas. The NQA for National Certificates.	It will not be sensible to change the current arrangements for Diplomas, but there needs to be a central register for those who have obtained National Certificates, since adult providers may not be permanent.
Investigate appeals	The MoES for Diplomas and National Certificates.	It is customary in Serbia for serious complaints to go to Ministers. It would be expected that the Minister would ask the NQA to investigate an appeal, but they should not have the final word.
Promote the NQF	The NQA.	Of course it is to be hoped that all parties will help to promote the NQF, but the NQA should have a particular role in planning and maintaining an awareness campaign.

22. It will be seen that the general intention of these proposals is to:

- locate the control and monitoring of schools and authorized providers with the MoES;
- focus the work of the NQA on formal stages of approval of qualifications, involvement of social partners, and the publication of criteria;
- focus the work of the VET Centre (in relation to qualifications) on developmental work concerned with the formulation and organization of standards and associated assessment techniques;
- allow the Curriculum Division to focus on pedagogical approaches and the wider secondary curriculum.

#### **F Areas for immediate further work**

23. If these proposals are broadly accepted the following areas seem important to develop further:

- confirming or amending the descriptors of the NQF levels;
- discussing the nature of National Certificates, and in particular whether they should be restricted for students older than a certain age (25 was suggested above) or with certain existing levels of qualification;
- the constitution, governance and accountability of an NQA, together with its size and likely cost;
- preparing an initial sectoral classification, relating the current 'fields of work' used in the school system and the *Nomenclature* to commonly used international classifications (ISCO, ISIC);
- whether a particular organization of the format of training standards (outcomes) is helpful in providing links between Diplomas and National Certificates (see *Commentary*);
- proposing systems for the validation of training standards, and the role of social partners in this;

- formulating accreditation criteria for non-formal providers, both at the level of the organization and the level of particular programmes (building on earlier work by Professor Despotović);
- examining the resource requirements for MoES accreditation and monitoring of non-formal providers.

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## NQF LEVELS: ELABORATED (EXPLANATORY) VERSION

LEVEL	School/ Work Benchmarks*	EDUCATION	JOB ROLES	PROGRESSION
I	<i>Approximates to 2 years of vocational schooling</i>  <i>Operator/ Assistant</i>	Uses basic, functional, vocational knowledge and common manual skills in a specific occupational field in a systematic and reliable way. Able to understand oral and written instructions.	Reliably conducts routine job tasks in a structured situation as part of a team, or assists skilled workers. Able to identify when problems arise, and refer them to others appropriately.	Prepares student to develop further competence in a field, and, with further training and experience, to assume more responsibility.
II	<i>Approximates to 3 years of vocational schooling.</i>  <i>Skilled worker/craft</i>	Applies systematic vocational knowledge in a defined field, applying relevant theories, and selecting appropriate tools and methods. Uses well defined occupational skills, relevant key competences, and attitudes in a co-ordinated manner.	Independent and adaptable using a specific range of skills in varying contexts. Uses established procedures to identify, and specific skills to rectify, common problems which may arise at unpredictable times.	Enables student to benefit from experience leading to high levels of competence in a field, and to lead and direct less experienced workers. With interest and aptitude can lead to training and performance in wider, linked fields.
III	<i>Approximates to 4 years of vocational schooling</i>  <i>Technician</i>	Possesses knowledge of a wide vocational field enabling an understanding of technical and administrative processes. Applies knowledge together with technical skills and a range of key competences in appropriate circumstances.	Works independently and guides others within an established control system. Conducts scheduled inspections and identifies a wide range of problems, determining the resources for resolving them, adapting procedures as appropriate. Suggests improvements within an established process.	Enables progression to higher education and University. With experience and relevant training will develop specialist technician skills and/or takes responsibility for supervising teams and control processes.
IV	<i>Viša škola</i>  <i>Senior Technician</i>	Possesses and applies specialist or advanced vocational knowledge with a degree of depth of understanding of the theoretical basis, together with relevant technical skills.	Supervises others or intervenes with authority in work processes, or leads specific projects in field of specialism. Appreciates critical aspects of work and anticipates possible problems, using a range of techniques to resolve them.	Enables progression to University. With experience and training may advance to recognized expert in a specific field, to head of a technical department or to junior roles in general management.

\* For reference to current system only. Does not form part of the descriptors.