

DECISION

No. 427, dated 26.6.2019

ON THE APPROVAL OF CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR THE INCLUSION OF LIFELONG LEARNING QUALIFICATIONS, ACCORDING TO THE LEVELS OF THE ALBANIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK, FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING.

Based on Article 100 of the Constitution and letter "b", Article 6, of Law No. 10247, dated 4.3.2010, "On the Albanian Qualifications Framework", as amended, upon the proposal of the Minister of Education, Sports and Youth and the Minister of Finance and Economy, the Council of Ministers

DECIDED:

CHAPTER I

GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. The purpose of this decision is to define the level of qualifications for lifelong learning, aiming at their inclusion in the relevant levels of the Albanian Qualifications Framework (hereinafter, AQF), for professional education and training, in accordance with the criteria and procedures defined in this decision.
2. The object of this decision are the qualifications for lifelong learning, offered with no less than 125 (one hundred twenty-five) hours or 5 (five) ECTS credits (for higher education qualifications).
3. All qualifications for lifelong learning, according to the definitions in Appendix No. 1, of the AQF law, for which the provider requests the determination in the relevant diploma/certificate of the qualification level, according to the levels of the AQF, meet the criteria and procedures provided in this decision for their inclusion at the relevant level of the AQF.
4. These qualifications are assigned an AQF level as a result of comparing the declared learning outcomes for the given qualification with the detailed descriptors of the levels of the Albanian Qualifications Framework, according to the definitions in this decision.

CHAPTER II

CRITERIA FOR THE INCLUSION OF QUALIFICATIONS ACCORDING TO THE RELEVANT LEVELS OF THE AQF.

1. Decision-making, resulting from a process of evaluating the learning outcomes of the qualification with the AQF level descriptors, for the inclusion of qualifications, the object of this decision in the AQF, by determining the qualification level from the responsible ministry for education and/or the responsible ministry for professional education and training, according to the area of responsibility, is based on meeting the following criteria:
 - a) The qualification title must be clearly defined
 - b) The qualification provider must be licensed, in accordance with the legal framework in force, by the authority covering the relevant area of responsibility to offer this type of qualification, and must be authorized to offer the qualification for which the inclusion according to the AQF level is requested, before starting the offering of the qualification;

- c) The total number of credits (where applicable)/teaching load in hours, as well as the duration of the qualification, must be defined;
- ç) The need for the qualification in the labor market must be justified with factual data;
- d) The qualification must be based on learning outcomes;
- dh) The qualification must have clear goals and objectives, offer opportunities for progress, and have support from interest groups;
- e) The proposed qualification level in the AQF must be clearly defined according to the detailed descriptors of the AQF levels and be accompanied by the relevant justification, which argues the reason for positioning this qualification at the proposed level, the assessment of its importance and recognition within the relevant qualification sector, the presentation of broader knowledge, skills, and competencies, according to the relevant detailed descriptors of the AQF levels;
- ë) The minimum entry-level requirements for the qualification, in a specific qualification for lifelong learning, must be clear and refer to the definitions in Appendix No. 1, of the AQF law;
- f) In the case of qualifications offered under the law on professional education and training (hereinafter, PET), the description of the qualifications must be based on the descriptors/standards of the relevant professions;
- g) There must be clear criteria for assessing individual achievements at the end of the qualification for lifelong learning;
- gj) The document issued by the provider certifying the possession of the relevant qualification is issued only after achieving a positive result in the assessment of the required learning outcomes (assessment), defined and approved for the relevant qualification and matching the AQF level, approved for this qualification according to the provisions of this decision. It must clearly state that it refers to a qualification for lifelong learning;
- h) It must meet the necessary conditions for offering the respective qualification in accordance with the relevant instruction of the minister covering the relevant area of responsibility and must have successfully passed the external quality assurance process.

CHAPTER III

PROVIDERS AND DOCUMENTATION

1. Qualifications for lifelong learning included in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) are offered only by licensed/approved and accredited institutions for this purpose.
2. Providers include all legal entities, both public and non-public, which have foreseen in their activity objectives the offering of qualifications for lifelong learning, and meet the criteria established for this purpose, in accordance with this decision and other acts, as per the current legal framework.
3. The Minister responsible for education and the Minister responsible for professional education and training are responsible for supervising the offering of qualifications and ensuring quality, according to their respective areas of responsibility. If there are suspicions of irregularities regarding the criteria or procedures for offering qualifications by the provider, the responsible minister orders the relevant structures of the ministry and/or the

accrediting agency/body, depending on the observed irregularities, to carry out an ad hoc verification of the provider.

4. The Minister responsible for education and the Minister responsible for professional education and training determine the inspection procedures with a joint guideline, aiming to ensure impartiality in the inspection process. The inspection report includes, among other things, a description of the verified facts, including found irregularities, their purpose, causes, and effects, along with the names and functions of those responsible for causing them, and recommendations for corrective actions.
5. The applicant submits the legal documentation as follows:

a) A copy of the historical extract of the entity from the National Business Center (NBC), which foresees in its activity objective the offering of qualifications for lifelong learning;

b) A licensing/authorization document for the provider to operate in offering qualifications for lifelong learning, as well as a license to offer this type of qualification, in accordance with the current legal framework, issued by the authority covering the respective area of responsibility;

c) Certifications (for the administrator(s) and the company), certifying that the entity is not under criminal investigation by the prosecution office;

d) Self-declaration or criminal record for the administrator(s); e) Information on financial resources, accompanied by a bank document expressing the value of financial resources that the legal entity possesses, as well as the necessary material, library, and IT resources for new study programs;

f) Address of the entity, electronic address, and phone number.

6. Description of the qualification and the associated professional descriptors in the case of PET and other applicable cases include:

6. a) The title of the qualification;
- b) The justification for the need for the qualification in the context of labor market trends, the development of new technologies, and social needs;
- c) The name of the document issued upon completion and its validity;
- ç) The model of the diploma/certificate that will be issued to the individual who successfully completes the qualification by the provider;
- d) If it is foreseen that the qualification for lifelong learning is offered through a joint study program with other local or foreign institutions, an official cooperation document is presented, as well as the official accreditation document of the collaborating institution, if applicable;
- dh) A general and detailed description of the qualification, including information on the curriculum and the totality of learning outcomes, skills, and broader competencies that should be achieved upon completion of the qualification, clearly stated objectives and goals according to the detailed descriptors of the NQF levels, possibilities for further progress, support from interest groups, criteria for assessing the individual's achievements upon completion of the qualification, etc.;
- e) The approximate teaching load, defined in hours and ECTS credits (in the case of qualifications offered in the higher education system), necessary to obtain the qualification;
- ë) The requirements for the admission of the individual to the respective qualification, in particular, the required level of education, as referred to in Appendix 1 of the law on the NQF;
- f) In the case of PET and other applicable cases, a description of the profession, including the corresponding code from the national list of professions, as well as a detailed list of functions/duties and other necessary information related to the profession;

- g) Typical possibilities for the use of the qualification;
 - gj) The operating regulation of the respective qualification program;
 - h) The proposed NQF level, including the corresponding justification, which explains the reason for positioning this qualification at the proposed level, the assessment of the importance of the qualification and its recognition within the respective qualification sector, the correspondence of the declared knowledge, skills, and broader competencies;
 - i) The respective field of qualification according to International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2013-F;
 - j) A copy of the payment mandate.
7. For lifelong learning qualifications, foreseen at levels 5-8 in the higher education field, the document proving the accreditation of the provider and the respective qualification program is submitted before the completion of the procedures for the inclusion of qualifications according to the NQF levels, for education and professional training.

CHAPTER IV

RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTIONS AND PROCEDURES FOLLOWED BY PROVIDERS

1. The institutions responsible for determining the NQF levels for the respective qualification through the process of verifying learning outcomes with level descriptors are:
 - a) The National Agency for Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications;
 - b) The Ministry responsible for education for the subsector of higher education and lower and upper secondary education.
2. The institutions responsible for following the procedures for determining the NQF level for the respective qualification are:
 - a) The National Agency for Education, Professional Training and Qualifications (NAEPTQ) for the subsector of professional education and training;
 - b) The Center for Educational Services for the subsector of higher education and lower and upper secondary education.
3. To include lifelong learning qualifications in the NQF, a commission is established for the inclusion of qualifications, subject to this decision, by the responsible institutions for each NQF subsector.
4. The commission is assisted by a technical secretariat with members from the institutions responsible for following the procedures.
5. The institutions responsible for determining the NQF level cooperate in preparing the respective regulation for the functioning of the commission and the application, and propose a draft regulation for approval to the ministers responsible for education and vocational education and training. The regulation is approved by order of the minister responsible for education and the minister responsible for vocational education and training, no later than 1 (one) year from the entry into force of this decision.
6. The application to include lifelong learning qualifications in the NQF, to determine the respective level, is made through a request addressed to the responsible institutions for this purpose, according to this decision, which is accompanied by the documentation specified in this decision.
7. The commission, after reviewing the information submitted by the applicant, responds within 1 (one) month regarding the inclusion of the qualification, subject to this decision in the NQF, the refusal of the request, or the completion of the documentation. After a request

- for completion of documentation, if the documentation remains incomplete, the case is archived and the applicant reapplies according to the provisions of this decision.
8. The commission decides on the acceptance, refusal of the request, or archiving of the case. The responsible institutions for following the procedures, according to this decision, prepare the certificate for determining the respective NQF level for each application. In any case, the applicant is notified and, in case of refusal of the request, the respective reasons are provided.
 9. The approved qualification level and the number and type of credits earned (when these are approved) are specified in the certificate that will be issued upon completion of the qualification, specifying the type of qualification according to Appendix no. 1 of the law on the NQF.
 10. Lifelong learning qualifications, which have been assigned a level according to the NQF, are included in the national register for lifelong learning qualifications, which is compiled, administered, and maintained, according to the respective area of responsibility, by the respective responsible institutions. If the qualifications, subject to this decision, are not offered for a period of 4 years from the moment the NQF level is determined, they are removed from the aforementioned national register. For qualifications, subject to this decision, for which changes are made to the criteria declared at the time of determining the NQF level, the provider applies, no later than 1 (one) month from the change of criteria, for the redetermination of the level according to the NQF, according to the provisions of this decision, submitting the changes, including the corresponding justificatory documentation and reasoning. Otherwise, the qualification offered by this provider is removed from the national register.
 11. Lifelong learning qualifications, which have been assigned a level according to the NQF and have become part of the national register according to the providers, are removed from this register, except as foreseen above and in the following cases:
 12. a) Negative assessment in the quality assurance process. In this case, the institution/entity responsible for external quality assurance notifies the responsible institutions, according to the respective area of responsibility, to follow the procedures for removing the qualification from the national qualifications register; b) The provider issues diplomas/certificates to individuals who have not been positively assessed; c) Irregularities are observed in the offering of the qualification following an inspection or external evaluation; d) The provider has not taken corrective measures despite the given recommendations; e) The provider no longer meets the conditions foreseen in the current legal framework for offering qualifications and exercising the activity.
 13. The procedure for including lifelong learning qualifications in the NQF does not last more than 3 (three) months from the date of submission of the applicant's request.

CHAPTER V

CREDIT/ LEARNING OUTCOMES RECOGNITION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

1. The ECTS credits earned through lifelong learning qualifications, which have been assigned an NQF level, are recognized within similar lifelong learning qualifications of the same NQF level or within higher education study programs of the same NQF level.
2. Learning outcomes acquired through lifelong learning qualifications, which have been assigned an NQF level and are not offered with ECTS credits, are recognized within similar lifelong learning qualifications of the same NQF level or within other qualifications of the same NQF level that are not offered with ECTS.

3. The recognition, as specified in the above points, is based on the assessment of the learning outcomes against the study program for which recognition is sought.
4. The provider completes the quality assurance process before issuing the diplomas/certificates of the respective qualification, which includes internal and external quality assurance, in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), the standards for quality assurance in professional education and training (EQAPET), and the guidelines for validation (European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP 2009)).
5. Internal quality assurance by the provider is carried out through an established internal quality assurance system, which clearly defines the operational rules, procedures, methodology, and organization of this system. The purpose of the internal quality assurance system in the provider institution is to ensure that assessment and certification are conducted correctly and continuously improved.
6. The external quality assurance system periodically monitors and evaluates activities related to the issuance of the document certifying the possession of the qualification and is carried out by an external authority/entity from the provider, in accordance with the provisions of the current legal framework. This authority/entity evaluates the provision of the qualification according to the relevant standards and assists the provider in improving the assessment and certification processes.
7. In the external quality assurance process of higher education qualifications, the respective public authority/agency assigned for this purpose in the Republic of Albania, according to the level and type of qualification, or homologous foreign public authorities/agencies registered in EQAR may be engaged. The minister responsible for education and the minister responsible for professional education and training determine by joint order the list of authorized foreign entities for this purpose, according to the area of responsibility.
8. External quality assurance for lifelong learning qualifications in the field of higher education should consider the following:
 - a) The accreditation of the study program should include, among other things:
 - i. the evaluation of the alignment of the learning outcomes of the offered qualification with the respective NQF level descriptors.
 - ii. the ability to achieve these learning outcomes, considering the conditions in which the program is offered;
 - iii. the suitability of the assessment (validation) of the learning outcomes.
 - b) Institutional accreditation should consider, among other things:
 - i. the functioning and continuous improvement of the internal quality assurance system;
 - ii. the accreditations and certifications obtained by the provider or its constituent structures from international institutions;
 - iii. the results of the previous accreditation of programs.
9. External quality assurance must also consider, among other things, the provider's compliance with legal obligations and adherence to the criteria and documentation specified at the time of licensing.

10. For qualifications that include the number of ECTS credits, the accreditation of the qualification and the provider must also apply the quality criteria and standards foreseen for higher education programs and institutions. Upon successful completion of the accreditation procedures and the determination of the level according to the NQF, the provider must include in the diploma/certificate the number of ECTS credits and the relevant accreditation decision details.

11. Internal and external quality assurance for lifelong learning qualifications for levels 2-5 of the NQF, within the responsibility of professional education and training, must be conducted in accordance with the current legal framework for professional education and training.

12. External quality assessment is mandatory and periodic.

13. The minister responsible for education or the minister responsible for professional education and training, according to their respective area of responsibility, conducts verifications of the accrediting agency/entity concerning the implementation of obligations related to the external quality assurance process. In case of irregularities, the accrediting agency/entity is required to correct them or face removal from the relevant list.

14. Providers shall pay fees into the account of the responsible institutions, as determined by this decision, for processing providers' requests for the inclusion of qualifications, subject to this decision, in the NQF:

a) The fee for processing, reviewing the request, and including the qualification in the NQF is 50,000 (fifty thousand) ALL for qualifications lasting up to 6 (six) months/30 (thirty) ECTS credits and 100,000 (one hundred thousand) ALL for qualifications lasting more than 6 (six) months/30 (thirty) ECTS credits;

b) Providers must pay an annual fee, amounting to 3% of the revenues generated from the fees applied for lifelong learning qualifications, to the institution responsible for following the procedures for level determination according to the NQF, to facilitate the handling of various issues related to periodic assessment, service, and maintenance of the national register of lifelong learning qualifications and the online application program.

15. The fee for processing and reviewing the request for the inclusion of providers in the list of certified providers for offering lifelong learning qualifications and ensuring quality is approved by a joint order of the minister responsible for education and the minister responsible for finance.

CHAPTER VI

FINAL PROVISIONS

For lifelong learning qualifications offered as unified professional training courses by public entities under the ministry responsible for education and professional training, the content of which is developed by NAEPTQ, (National Agency for Education Professional Training and Qualifications) based on an internal quality assurance cycle, only the documentation specified in this decision is required, and they are exempt from fees.

The ministries responsible for managing the Albanian Qualification Framework (AQF), according to their respective areas of responsibility, no later than 1 (one) year from the entry into force of this decision, shall adapt the existing legal framework for licensing and accrediting providers and qualifications, with the appropriate criteria and procedures to license/approve and accredit the providing institutions and qualifications, which are the subject of this decision.

The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth, along with the Ministry of Finance and Economy and the providers of lifelong learning qualifications, are responsible for the implementation of this decision.

This decision enters into force after its publication in the Official Journal.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Erion Braçe