



Latvian
Qualifications
Framework



European
Qualifications
Framework



Lifelong Learning Programme

Referencing of the Latvian Education System to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area

Self-Assessment Report

Summary

Riga, August 2012

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Self-Assessment Report was prepared by the Academic Information Centre in cooperation with the Lifelong Learning Development Division of the Policy Coordination Department of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia.

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The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and should not be considered as representative of the European Commission’s official position.

Experts involved in the composing the Report and gathering information:

Baiba Ramiņa, *director of Academic Information Centre*

Dmitrijs Kuļšs, *deputy director of Policy Coordination Department – head of Lifelong Learning Development Division of the Ministry of Education and Science*

Gunta Kinta, *coordinator of NCP and ReferNet projects, Academic Information Centre*

Kristīne Strūberga, *director of Quality Evaluation Department of State Education Quality Service*

Andra Šenberga, *deputy head of State Education Quality Service and director of Licensing and Register Department*

Introduction

The Latvian referencing process and improvement of national qualifications is planned to implement in two phases:

- 1. Phase (2009-2011)** – the establishment of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF); and the referencing of the existing Latvian education system to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).
- 2. Phase (2013-2015)** – review of the Self-Assessment Report, on the basis of the new Vocational Education Law, Higher Education Law and the results of several current projects, e.g. ESF project “Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (2010-2013).

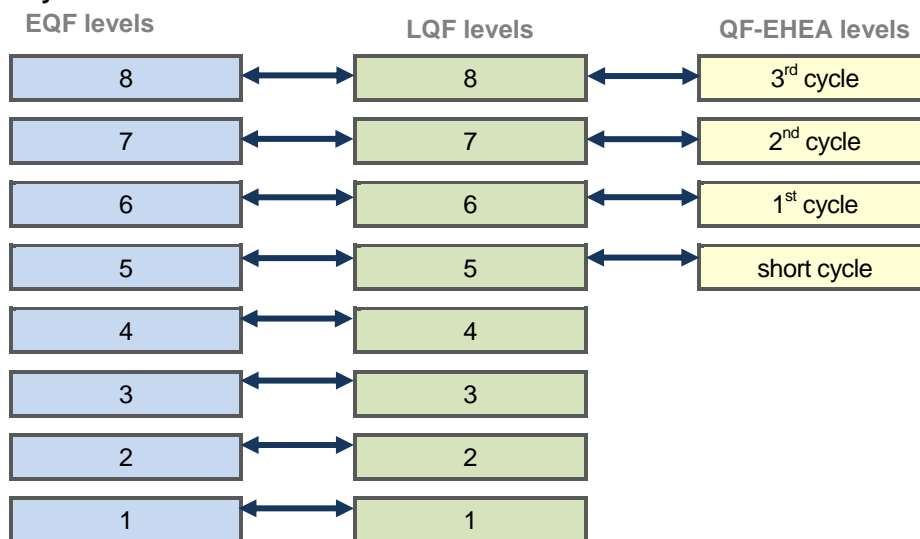
As result of 1st phase, 8-level Latvian Qualifications Framework was established. The developed level descriptors are based on learning outcomes, and formal education qualifications are linked with these levels. The level descriptors were elaborated regarding the state education and occupational standards, as well as the level descriptors of European Qualifications Framework. The Latvian Qualifications Framework comprises formal higher, vocational and general education sectors.

The placement of the Latvian formal qualifications in the LQF and EQF

Latvian education documents (qualifications)	LQF and EQF level
Certificate of general basic education (for students in special education programmes for students with severe mental development disorders or several severe development disorders)	1
Certificate of general basic education (for students in special education programmes for students with mental development disorders)	2
Certificate of general basic education Certificate of vocational basic education	3
Certificate of general secondary education Certificate of vocational education Diploma of vocational secondary education	4
Diploma of first level professional higher education (1 st level professional higher (college) education, the length of full-time studies 2-3 years)	5
Bachelor's diploma Professional Bachelor's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (2 nd level professional higher education, the length of full-time studies – at least 4 years)	6
Master's diploma Professional Master's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (2 nd level professional higher education, the total length of full-time studies – at least 5 years)	7
Doctor's diploma	8

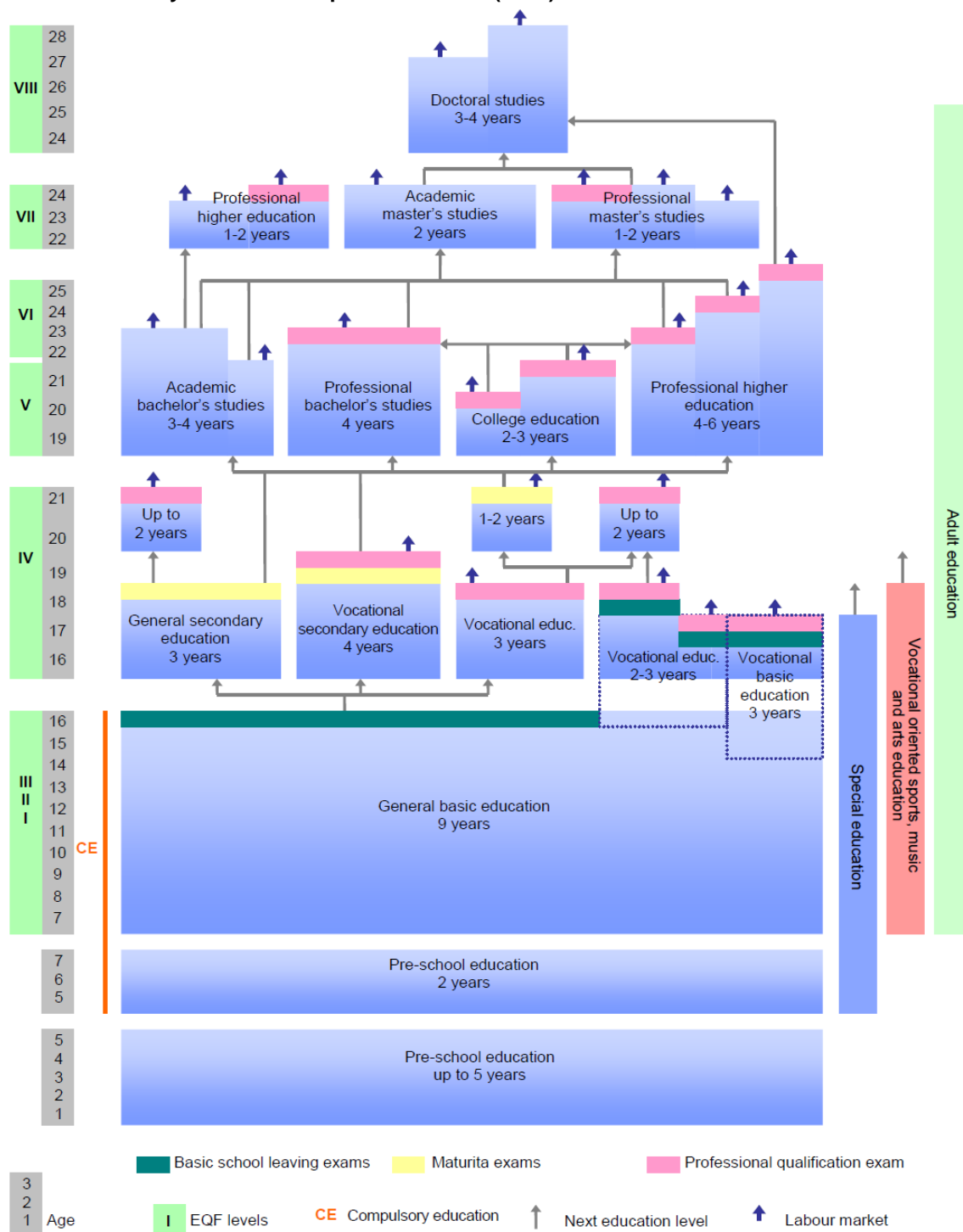
When developing the Latvian Qualifications Framework levels, they were made compatible with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area levels.

The compatibility of LQF/EQF levels with the QF-EHEA levels



Description of the Latvian Formal Education System

The education system of the Republic of Latvia (2012)



The Latvian education system consists of pre-school education, basic education, secondary education and higher education. General education in Latvia in total lasts 12 years consisting of compulsory 9-years basic education and 3-years secondary education. Additionally pre-school education at age of 5-6 is compulsory in Latvia. Basic education stage comprises general basic education (grades 1-9) and vocational basic education. Secondary education stage comprises general secondary education, vocational secondary education and vocational education. Higher education comprises both academic and professional study programmes.

Students' assessment is carried out in 10 point scale (10 – with distinction, 3-1 – unsatisfactory), or in a regular test teachers may use “pass” or “fail”.

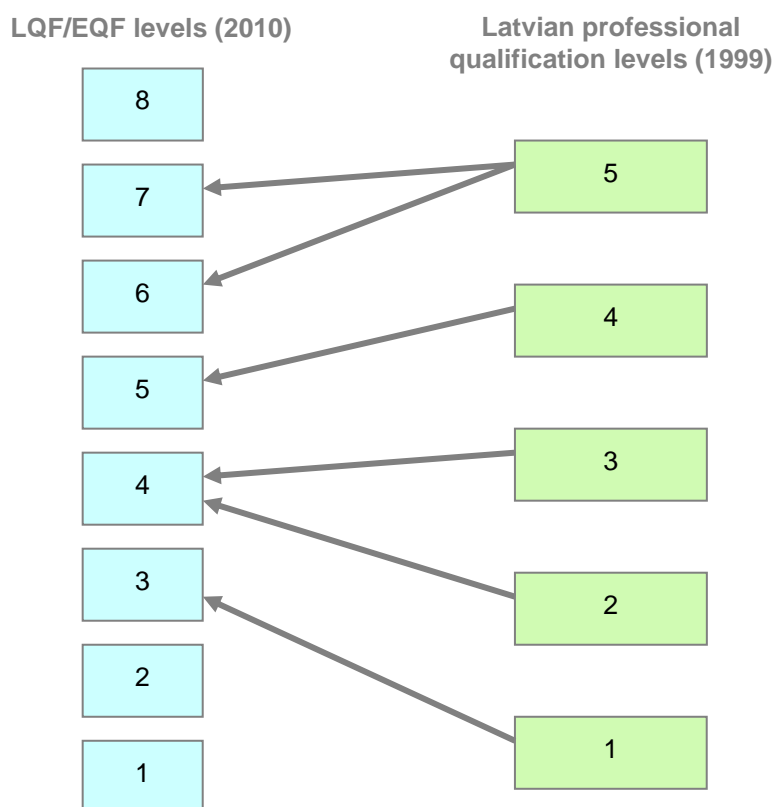
Referencing Latvian Professional Qualification Levels to the Latvian Qualifications Framework

The Vocational Education Law (1999) stipulates that there is a system of five professional qualification levels in the Latvian vocational education:

1. Level 1 – theoretical and practical training that prepares students for performing simple tasks in a certain area of practical activity (assistant cook, carpenter etc.);
2. Level 2 – theoretical and practical background that allows the holder to perform qualified work independently (carpenter, hairdresser, cook, welder etc.);
3. Level 3 – advanced theoretical and professional background which enables the holder to fulfil certain tasks, including planning and organising work (various technicians, car mechanics, hotel service specialist etc.);
4. Level 4 – theoretical and practical background that enables the holder to perform complicated tasks as well as to organise and manage others in their work;
5. Level 5 – the highest qualification of a specialist in a field that enables the holder to plan and perform research and scientific work in the field.

Professional qualification levels are reflected in all formal education documents issued in Latvia when awarding professional qualification. These professional qualification levels refer only to vocational education, and they are not automatically referred to the Latvian Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Framework levels.

The placement of five Latvian professional qualification levels¹ on eight LQF/EQF levels²



¹ Vocational Education Law (10.06.1999)

² Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 2 December 2008 No.990 "Regulations on the classification of Latvian education" (5.10.2010)

European Qualifications Framework Levels and the Latvian Qualifications Framework

The comparison of the EQF for lifelong learning and the Latvian Qualifications Framework

European level descriptors based on learning outcomes ³			Latvian level descriptors based on learning outcomes ⁴			Latvian education documents	LQF & EQF level
Knowledge	Skills	Competence	Knowledge	Skills	Competence		
Basic general knowledge	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context	Able to demonstrate elementary knowledge, which manifests itself in recognition and recollection	Able to use elementary practical and cognitive skills, able to execute them under direct supervision using simple tools Able to perform simple tasks, which are repetitive as to their content and predictable	Able to perform tasks in a structured environment, to function in a limited context Is able to perform elementary tasks, following a model, able to master basic self-care skills	Certificate of general basic education (for students in special education programmes for students with severe mental development disorders or several severe development disorders)	1
Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy	Able to demonstrate basic knowledge in concrete subject syllabi	Able to use basic cognitive and practical skills, which are necessary to solve everyday problems by using relevant information, perform tasks and using simple rules and means Able to understand the consequences of one's own actions with regard to self and others	Able to perform tasks individually or in a group under supervision or semi-independently Able to participate in setting some learning objectives and planning the course of actions	Certificate of general basic education (for students in special education programmes for students with mental development disorders)	2
Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish a task and solve problems by selecting and applying basic	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems	Able to demonstrate the knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts and to use them in the field of studies and professional	Able to use various cognitive and practical skills, which are necessary to perform tasks and to solve simple problems, by selecting and using basic methods, means, materials, information and technologies	Able to be aware of and assume responsibility for performing work or study tasks in a permanent and stable environment under the supervision of a specialist in the sector	Certificate of general basic education Certificate of vocational basic education	3

³ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (23.04.2008) on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

⁴ The Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.990 "Regulations on the Classification of Latvian education" (2.12.2008), Appendix 1, table 2 (with amendments 5.10.2010)

	methods, tools, materials and information		activities Able to understand various information about materials, technologies in the relevant field of studies or a concrete profession		When solving the tasks, is able to adjust one's actions to conditions and to be responsible for the result of work		
Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad context within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities	Able to demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of facts, theories and causalities, which are needed for personal growth and development, civic participation, social integration and continuous education Able to comprehend in detail and demonstrate knowledge of diverse facts, principles, processes and concepts in a specific field of studies or professional activities in standard and non-standard situations Has good knowledge of technologies and methods for performing study or work tasks in the profession	Able to plan and organise work, using various methods, technologies (including information and communication technologies), equipment, tools and materials for performing tasks Able to find, assess and creatively use information for performing study or professional work tasks and problem solving Able to communicate at least in two languages both in writing and orally in a known and unknown context Able to work independently in the profession, to learn and to improve professional qualifications Able to cooperate	Is motivated for further career development, continuous education, lifelong learning in a knowledge-oriented democratic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society in Europe and in the world Able to plan and perform study or work tasks in the profession individually, in a team or by managing the teamwork Able to assume responsibility for the quality and quantity of the outcomes of study or professional activities	Certificate of general secondary education Certificate of vocational education Diploma of vocational secondary education	4

Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change Review and develop performance of self and others	Able to demonstrate comprehensive and specialised knowledge and understanding of facts, theories, causalities and technologies of the concrete professional field	Able, on the basis of analytical approach, to perform practical tasks in the concrete profession, demonstrate skills, allowing to find creative solutions to professional problems, to discuss and provide arguments regarding practical issues and solutions in the concrete profession with colleagues, clients and management, able to, with an appropriate degree of independence, to engage in further learning, improving one's competences Able to assess and improve one's own actions and those of other people, to work in co-operation with others, to plan and to organise work to perform concrete tasks in one's profession or to supervise such work activities, in which unpredictable changes are possible	Able to define, describe and analyse practical problems in one's profession, select the necessary information and use it for solving clearly defined problems, to participate in the development of the concrete professional field, demonstrate understanding of the place of the concrete profession in a broader social context	Diploma of first level professional higher education (1 st level professional higher (college) education, the length of full-time studies 2-3 years)	5
Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups	Able to demonstrate the basic and specialised knowledge typical of the concrete branch of science or profession and a critical understanding of this knowledge, moreover, a part of this knowledge complies with the highest level of achievement in this branch of science or profession	Able, by using the mastered theoretical foundations and skills, perform professional, artistic, innovative or research activity, to define and describe analytically information, problems and solutions in one's own branch of science or profession, to explain them and to provide arguments when discussing these with both specialist and non-specialists Is able to structure independently one's own learning, to guide one's own and subordinates' further learning and improvement of professional qualification, to demonstrate	Able to obtain, select and analyse information independently and to use it, to take decisions and solve problems in the concrete branch of science or profession, demonstrate understanding of professional ethics, assess the impact of one's professional activities on environment and society and participate in the development of the concrete	Bachelor's diploma Professional Bachelor's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (2 nd level professional higher education, the length of full-time studies – at least 4 years)	6

			Able to demonstrate understanding of the most important concepts and causalities of the concrete branch of science or professional field	scientific approach to problem solving, to assume responsibility and take initiative when performing individual work, when working in a team or managing the work of other people, to take decisions and find creative solutions under changing or unclear conditions	professional field		
Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/ or research Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/ or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/ or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams	Able to demonstrate advanced or extensive knowledge and understanding, a part of which conforms with the most recent findings in the concrete branch of science or professional field and which provide the basis for creative thinking or research, inter alia, working in the interface of various fields	Able to use independently theory, methods and problem solving skills to perform research or artistic activities, or highly qualified professional functions Able to provide arguments when explaining or discussing complex or systemic aspects of the concrete branch of science or professional field both to specialists and non-specialists Able to guide independently the improvement of one's own competences and specialisation, to assume responsibility for the results of staff and group work and analyse them, to perform business activities, innovations in the concrete branch of science or profession, to perform work, research or further learning under complex or unpredictable conditions, if necessary, change them, using new approaches	Able to define independently and critically analyse complex scientific and professional problems, substantiate decisions and, if necessary, carry out additional analysis Able to integrate knowledge of various fields, contribute to the creation of new knowledge, research or the development of new professional working methods, demonstrate understanding and ethical responsibility for the possible impact of the scientific results or professional activity on environment and society	Master's diploma Professional Master's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (2 nd level professional higher education, the total length of full-time studies – at least 5 years)	7
Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained	Able to demonstrate that has knowledge of and understands most topical scientific theories and insights, has mastered research methodology and	Able to assess and select independently appropriate methods for scientific research, has contributed to the expansion of the limits of knowledge or given new understanding of the existing knowledge and its use in practice, by carrying out an original research of major scope,	Able, by performing independent critical analysis, synthesis and assessment, to solve significant research or innovation tasks, to set independently research idea, to plan, structure and manage large-	Doctor's diploma	8

	in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research	contemporary research methods in the concrete branch of science or professional field and in the interface of various fields	<p>part of which is on the level of internationally cited publications</p> <p>Able to communicate both orally and in writing about one's own field of scientific activity (one's own branch) with wider research community and the general public</p> <p>Able to improve one's scientific qualification independently, by implementing scientific projects, attaining achievements meeting the international criteria of the branch of science, to manage research or development tasks in companies, institutions and organisations, requiring extensive research knowledge and skills</p>	scale scientific projects, including projects in international context		
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Learning Outcomes and Bologna Cycles in Higher Education

The new Latvian framework for higher education, which belongs to the Latvian Qualifications Framework, is founded upon the three cycles of the Bologna Process – bachelor, master and doctor. The cycle descriptors are based on the learning outcomes, which, when completing a programme are expected from the majority of “average” students. In the elaboration of the cycle descriptors, so-called Dublin descriptors (2002-2004), Bloom’s taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) and the European Qualifications Framework descriptors (2008) were used, offering generalised definitions for learning outcomes, which are typical for the qualifications awarded at the completion of each Bologna cycle.

The elaboration of the qualifications framework in Latvian higher education started in 2004, when for each qualification type its place in the Bologna three-cycle structure was defined. The Ministry of Education and Science established Bologna Process working group for the fulfilment of this task, involving all major institutions of higher education. This group specified the levels for all types of qualifications in Latvian higher education and their place in the Bologna three-cycle system, as well as defined the general learning outcomes, conditions for enrolment and the further possibilities for all qualification types. Thereafter, the working group established by the Latvian Rectors’ Council (2009) improved and updated these level descriptors of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area for all Bologna cycle qualifications. The new descriptors were approved by the Higher Education Council.

The developed level descriptions for higher education, which due to the amendments of 5.10.2010 were integrated in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 990 “Regulations on the classification of Latvian education” (2.12.2008), correspond to the descriptions of the Latvian Qualifications Framework levels 5-8.

The cycle descriptors for higher education

	College qualification (LQF Level 5)	Bachelor (LQF Level 6)	Master (LQF Level 7)	Doctor (LQF Level 8)
<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>The competences conforming with the diploma of the 1st level professional higher education (college) comprise the competences of a secondary education graduate and are acquired through professional studies, which proceed in close contact with the relevant professional field</i>	<i>Bachelor’s competences comprise the competences of a secondary education graduate and are acquired in a branch through studies based upon the theoretical foundations of the branch of science or professional field</i>	<i>Master’s competences comprise the bachelor’s competences are acquired through science based studies, of which research work and making independent insights and conclusions are an important part</i>	<i>Doctor’s competences comprise the master’s competences</i>
	<i>In addition to the competences of a secondary school graduate, the holder of the 1st level professional higher education diploma IS ABLE TO:</i>	<i>In addition to the competences of a secondary school graduate, the holder of a Bachelor’s degree IS ABLE TO:</i>	<i>In addition to the bachelor’s competences the holder of a Master’s degree IS ABLE TO:</i>	<i>In addition to the master’s competences the holder of a Doctor’s degree IS ABLE TO:</i>

<i>Knowledge and understanding</i>	<p>demonstrate comprehensive and specialised knowledge and understanding of facts, theories, causalities and technologies of the concrete professional field</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate the basic and specialised knowledge typical of the concrete branch of science or profession and a critical understanding of this knowledge, moreover, a part of this knowledge complies with the highest level of achievement in this branch of science or profession • demonstrate understanding of the most important concepts and causalities of the concrete branch of science or professional field 	<p>demonstrate advanced or extensive knowledge and understanding, a part of which conforms with the most recent findings in the concrete branch of science or professional field and which provide the basis for creative thinking or research, inter alia, working in the interface of various fields</p>	<p>demonstrate that has knowledge of and understands most topical scientific theories and insights, has mastered research methodology and contemporary research methods in the concrete branch of science or professional field and in the interface of various fields</p>
<i>Ability to apply knowledge</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on the basis of analytical approach, to perform practical tasks in the concrete profession • demonstrate skills, allowing to find creative solutions to professional problems 	<p>by using the mastered theoretical foundations and skills, perform professional, artistic, innovative or research activity</p>	<p>use independently theory, methods and problem solving skills to perform research or artistic activities, or highly qualified professional functions</p>	<p>assess and select independently appropriate methods for scientific research, has contributed to the expansion of the limits of knowledge or given new understanding of the existing knowledge and its use in practice, by carrying out an original research of major scope, part of which is on the level of internationally cited publications</p>
<i>Analysis, synthesis, evaluation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss and provide arguments regarding practical issues and solutions in the concrete profession • select the necessary information and use it for solving clearly defined problems • participate in the development of the concrete professional field • demonstrate understanding of the place of the concrete profession in a broader social context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • obtain, select and analyse information independently and to use it • take decisions and solve problems in the concrete branch of science or profession • demonstrate understanding of professional ethics • assess the environmental and social impact of one's professional activities and participate in the development of the concrete professional field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • define independently and critically analyse complex scientific and professional problems, • substantiate decisions and, if necessary, carry out additional analysis • integrate knowledge of various fields • contribute to the creation of new knowledge, research or the development of new professional working methods • demonstrate understanding and ethical responsibility for the possible environmental and social impact of the scientific results or professional activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by performing independent critical analysis, synthesis and assessment, to solve significant research or innovation tasks • set independently research idea, to plan, structure and manage large-scale scientific projects, including projects in international context • assume responsibility for the ethical aspects of one's research activities

Communication	discuss and provide arguments regarding practical issues and solutions in the concrete profession with colleagues, clients and management	define and describe analytically information, problems and solutions in one's own branch of science or profession, to explain them and to provide arguments when discussing these with both specialist and non-specialists	provide arguments when explaining or discussing complex or systemic aspects of the concrete branch of science or professional field both to specialists and non-specialists	communicate both orally and in writing about one's own field of scientific activity (one's own branch) with wider research community and the general public
General skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with an appropriate degree of independence, to engage in further learning, improving one's competences • assess and improve one's own actions and those of other people • work in co-operation with others • plan and to organise work • perform concrete tasks in one's profession or to supervise such work activities, in which unpredictable changes are possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure independently one's own learning, to guide one's own and subordinates' further learning and improvement of professional qualification • demonstrate scientific approach to problem solving • assume responsibility and take initiative when performing individual work, when working in a team or managing the work of other people • take decisions and find creative solutions under changing or unclear conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guide independently the improvement of one's own competences and specialisation • assume responsibility for the results of staff and group work and analyse them • perform business activities, innovations in the concrete branch of science or profession • perform work, research or further learning under complex or unpredictable conditions, if necessary, change them, using new approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve one's scientific qualification independently • implement scientific projects, attaining achievements meeting the international criteria of the branch of science • manage research or development tasks in companies, institutions and organisations, requiring extensive research knowledge and skills
<p align="center">Formal aspects (Additional information, not part of the descriptor)</p>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • persons, who have acquired secondary education, are enrolled in programmes of 1st level professional higher education • persons, who have acquired the qualifications of the 1st level professional higher education are entitled to continue the studies in a relevant study programme for completing a full study cycle • the study programmes leading to the acquisition of the 1st level professional higher education comply with the particular occupational standard and comprise 120-180 ECTS credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all Bachelor's degree holders have the right to study in the second study cycle • persons are enrolled in bachelor programmes only after the acquisition of secondary education • bachelor study programmes comprise 180-240 ECTS credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • persons are enrolled in master study programmes after the completion of the first study cycle • all Master's degree holders have the right to study in the third study cycle • ensuring that the total number of credit points in the studies of the 1st and 2nd cycle is at least 300 ECTS credits, the master study programme may comprise 600/120 ECTS credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • persons are enrolled in doctoral study programmes after completing the second study cycle • the length of doctoral studies is 3-4 years or 180-240 ECTS credits

Compliance of the Referencing Process to the Criteria of the European Qualifications Framework and the Bologna Process

European Qualifications Framework criteria

1. **The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.**

The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), which is the leading state governance institution in the field of education and science, implements a unified state policy and development strategy in education, as well as designs projects of policy planning documents and laws and regulations in the field of education (Education Law, 1998). MoES ensures the recognition of professional competences obtained outside formal education (Vocational Education Law, 1999). MoES develops samples of general education programmes and arranges the development of general education content and methodology (General Education Law, 1999).

In 2008, MoES delegated the **Academic Information Centre (AIC)** to perform the functions of the National Coordination Point for referencing the national qualifications framework to the European Qualifications Framework. AIC is a foundation, which was established in 1994 by MoES and the Institute of Mathematics and Computer Science of the University of Latvia. The aim of AIC stated in the statutes is to ensure free movement of individuals in the field of education and employment. The functions and work tasks of AIC are determined by the agreement with MoES. There are the following functions of AIC:

- Latvian representative to the Council of Europe/UNESCO diploma recognition network ENIC and the European Union diploma recognition network NARIC;
- Information institution regarding regulated professions;
- Contact point for ReferNet network established by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP);
- National Europass centre;
- National Coordination Point for referencing the National Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework;
- In cooperation with MoES and other stakeholders, provision of attracting higher education students from the third countries.

The tasks of the **National Coordination Point** are as follows:

- To refer existing qualification levels in national qualification system to the European Qualifications Framework levels stated in the Annex II of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (23.04.2008) on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning;
- To ensure that transparent methods are applied to link the national qualification levels to the European Qualifications Framework, on one hand, facilitating their comparison and, on the other hand, ensuring that decisions related to this process are published;
- To prepare the Latvian self-assessment report concerning the referencing of the Latvian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning;
- To arrange discussions and consultation process among stakeholders about the development and referencing of the Latvian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning by ensuring access to necessary information for all participants;
- To inform regarding the results of consultation process (website, international conference).

In 2009, MoES established the **working group for referencing the Latvian education system to the European Qualifications Framework**, which is chaired by the deputy state secretary on policy issues of MoES inviting to the working group all stakeholders – education agencies, education quality assurance agencies, representatives of employers' and employees' organizations, students etc.. The working group evaluated materials and level descriptors prepared by experts and recommended directing the developed amendments of the Cabinet of Ministers (CoM) Regulations⁵ to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval.

⁵ Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 2 December 2008 No.990 "Regulations on the classification of Latvian education" (5.10.2010)

2. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or qualifications system and the European Qualifications Framework level descriptors.

The working group established by the Ministry of Education and Science for referencing the Latvian education system to the European Qualifications Framework approved education level descriptors for basic, general and higher education:

- When developing basic education level descriptors in Latvia, the state basic education standard was used. The standard is defined by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 1027 "Regulations on the state standard in basic education and in basic education study subjects' standards" (19.12.2006);
- When developing general secondary education level descriptors in Latvia, the state general secondary education standard, which is stipulated by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 715 "Regulations on the state general secondary education standard and standards of general secondary education study subjects" (2.09.2008), was used;
- When developing vocational education level descriptors in Latvia, the state vocational education standards were applied. The standards are stipulated by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 211 "Regulations on the state vocational secondary education standard and the state vocational education standard" (27.06.2000);
- When developing level descriptors for higher education, the European Qualifications Framework level descriptors, Dublin descriptors (2002-2004), as well as Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) was used.

These Latvian level descriptors were compared with the European Qualifications Framework level descriptors and it was evaluated, to which European Qualifications Framework level the particular level descriptor is the most corresponding.

3. The national qualifications framework or qualifications system and its qualifications are based on learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit point systems.

Since 1st June 1999, the Education Law clearly defines education as "a process of systematic acquisition of knowledge and skills and development of attitudes, and result thereof", i.e. a kind of learning outcomes has been defined in Latvia already for ten years. The application of learning outcomes in education is ensured by the state education and occupational standards, system of national exams, as well as by the accreditation of education establishments and programmes.

Speaking about general education the state basic and secondary education standards, as well as standards for study subjects stipulate the requirements for each study subject, also defining the necessary competences to be mastered in order to acquire accordingly basic or secondary education. Schools develop their education programmes and teachers – programmes for study subjects according to the state education standards. If an education programme provided by a school does not comply with the requirements of the state education standard, it may not be accredited. At the end on general basic and secondary education programmes, students have to take state centralized exams, which also are designed regarding the relevant state education standards.

The content of vocational education is stipulated by the state vocational education standards, occupational standards and education programmes. The state vocational education standards describe the strategic aims of education programmes, the mandatory content of education, and basic principles and procedure for evaluating the acquired education. The occupational standards define the basic tasks and obligations for the respective professional activities, the basic requirements of professional qualification, and the general and professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences needed to fulfil them. Vocational education establishments use the state education and relevant occupational standards to elaborate their education programmes; otherwise, the education programmes cannot undergo accreditation. Students demonstrate the acquired learning outcomes in state centralized final exams for general subjects (in vocational secondary education programmes) and state qualification final exams, which content is developed in line with relevant occupational standards.

In HE sector institutions tend to revise their study programmes to introduce learning outcomes to be able to undergo the process of accreditation. Additionally higher education programmes have to be developed in line with the relevant state education standards and/or occupational standards (for professional higher education programmes).

On 22 February 2011, the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 146 "Procedure how professional competence obtained outside formal education system is assessed" were approved. The Regulations stipulate the procedure how professional competence that corresponds to the Latvian professional qualification level 1-3, i.e. the LQF level 3-4, obtained outside formal education is assessed.

For higher education (LQF level 5-8), on 10 January 2012, the Cabinet of Ministers approved Regulations No. 36 "Regulations of recognizing the learning outcomes acquired in the previous education and professional experience" that were issued in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions (1995, amendments in force since 1.08.2011). These Regulations determine the procedures for the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes (for higher education level) obtained during the previous education or professional experience, as well as criteria for recognition.

In higher education credit points are used, which in Latvia are defined as the amount of one-week workload of full-time studies. The amount envisaged for one academic year of full-time studies is 40 credit points. Recalculating it into the ECTS credits, the amount of Latvian credit points has to be multiplied by 1.5.

4. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or qualifications system or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.

In Latvia the referencing of education system to the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area was started in 2009; the process was transparent and involved all main institutions. The process consisted of the following activities:

- 1) The establishment of a working group by the Ministry of Education and Science, i.e. referencing working group;
- 2) The establishment of expert groups for the elaboration of Latvian Qualifications Framework level descriptors (monitoring ensured by the referencing working group);
- 3) Drafting and approving the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations;
- 4) Advisory conference;
- 5) Elaboration of the Self-Assessment Report;
- 6) Consultation on the Self-Assessment Report.

In 28 September 2009, the Ministry of Education and Science set up a working group for linking Latvian qualifications system to the European Qualifications Framework in accordance with the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (23 April 2008) on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. This working group mostly performed the tasks of a supervisory group, reviewing and approving materials, e.g. level descriptors, prepared by the experts.

To prepare the descriptors of Latvian Qualifications Framework levels, Academic Information Centre and the Policy Coordination Department of MoES attracted specialists from the National Centre for Education, who using the state education standards, occupational standards and study subjects standards, elaborated the descriptors of education levels for:

- General basic education;
- General secondary education;
- Vocational basic education;
- Vocational education;
- Vocational secondary education.

The developed level descriptors were reviewed and approved by the referencing group to ensure comparability between education sectors and levels.

In 2009, the working group established by the Latvian Rectors' Council prepared the education level descriptors for all Bologna cycle qualifications.

On 14 February 2011, a national conference was arranged – discussions about the referencing of the Latvian formal qualifications to the Latvian Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Framework, in which representatives from ministries, national agencies, education governing institutions, education establishments, employers' organizations, trade unions, as well as from other institutions related to education participated. Furthermore, on 27 April 2011, an international conference was held, in which the draft of the Self-Assessment Report and consultation process results were presented.

The information on the referencing process and the possibility to express one's opinion and propose amendments was possible also via the website of the Latvian National Coordination Point (<http://nqf-latvia.lv>).

As result of the referencing process, 8-level Latvian Qualifications Framework was established and all formal Latvian qualifications from general, vocational and higher education sectors were linked to the Latvian Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Framework. This process was transparent since all stakeholders were involved either in the development or in the consultation process regarding the introduction of the Latvian Qualifications Framework. However, taking into account that education as a social phenomenon experiences constant changes, in Latvia the referencing process is organized in two stages. The Self-Assessment Report concludes the **1st phase (2009-2011)**. The **2nd referencing phase (2013-2015)** will include a larger range of qualifications taking into account possible amendments in legislation and several projects' results.

In the course of 2nd phase, the development of national qualification system is planned according to the Concept "Raising Attractiveness of Vocational Education and Involvement of Social Partners within Vocational Education Quality Assurance" (16.09.2009), on basis of the consent between the state and social partners reached prior the drafting of the new Vocational Education Law. The agreement stated that national qualifications system will be established comprising 8 professional qualification levels according to the Latvian Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Framework. The Employers' Confederation of Latvia in cooperation with the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia established Sectoral Expert Councils, which

include representatives from all professional associations and sectoral crafts unions. The Sectoral Expert Councils will develop sectoral qualifications structures corresponding to the national qualifications system.

5. The national quality assurance system(s) for education refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or qualifications system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines.

National education quality assurance system imparts the whole formal education system. The activities of the Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (HEQEC), the Higher Education Council and the State Education Quality Service in their functions are based on European principles and guidelines. HEQEC represents Latvia at the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education as a candidate member, the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, the Central and Eastern European Networking Association, the European Quality Assurance Network in Engineering Education, and the Euroasian Quality Assurance Network.

When licensing education programmes, the experts from the State Education Quality Service evaluate the correspondence of education programmes to the state education standards, occupational standards, occupational classifier, as well as to requirements of other legal regulations regulating education content and process, also making sure that the planned content of education programmes will allow students to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competences.

During the accreditation process, accreditation experts (including experts delegated from sectoral associations) evaluate the correspondence of education programmes to the state education standards, occupational standards and occupational classifier, as well as the correspondence of syllabi to study subject standards paying particular attention to evaluating relevance of education programme aims and objectives. Education programme content, implementation and provision of resources are also evaluated. Thus, in the accreditation process it is possible to obtain assurance that education establishment provides students with opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competences defined in standards, relevant to labour market and industry. Simultaneously during the accreditation process, experts focus on the correspondence of education programme content and outcomes to the relevant qualification level description.

6. The referencing process should include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.

In the working group for referencing the Latvian education system to the European Qualifications Framework all major quality assurance institutions were engaged, which involved actively in the referencing process and are listed below:

- The Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre – a foundation arranging quality assurance in higher education;
- The Higher Education Council – an institution monitoring higher education quality;
- The State Education Quality Service – an institution monitoring quality of basic, secondary and vocational education, as well as ensures the supervision of the state in education.

The representatives of these quality agencies as members of the referencing group reviewed the Latvian Qualifications Framework level descriptors providing their contribution in the field of their expertise. Prior introducing level descriptors in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations, the working group approved these descriptors. These agencies also participated in the consultation process by expressing their opinion and providing assent of the consultation process results. The representatives of the State Education Quality Service provided input for the Self-Assessment Report, as the placement of basic, general and vocational secondary education qualifications in the Latvian Qualifications Framework caused the most of discussions. Thus, the mentioned quality agencies were engaged in the referencing process from the beginning as full-fledged members.

7. The referencing process should involve international experts.

In the referencing process the international experts were involved in several its stages:

- 1) Consultation process – three experts participated in the national conference presenting the model of their country's qualifications framework and sharing their experience on referencing process:
 - Carita Blomkvist, Finnish National Board of Education;
 - Olav Aarna, Estonian Qualifications Authority;
 - Sean O'Reilly, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.
- 2) Self-Assessment Report – three experts also participated in the discussions on the Report:
 - Sean O'Reilly, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland;
 - Kulli All, Ministry of Education and Research of Estonia;
 - Luca Lantero, Italian ENIC-NARIC Centre.

When selecting the international experts, the following criteria were considered:

- Expert's experience in developing and introducing national qualifications framework;
- Expert's knowledge in education field;

- Expert's knowledge concerning the Latvian education system.

The experts represented one of the succeeding education fields:

- Vocational education;
- Higher education;
- Overarching framework.

The geographical location of countries the experts represented was also taken into account:

- One expert from a neighbouring country;
- One expert from a country with similar education system features;
- One expert from a country, which is not a neighbouring country.

The tasks of international experts were:

- Share their experience in conferences and meetings;
- Review and comment the Self-Assessment Report;
- Participate in discussions with the Latvian stakeholders.

According to the views of conferences participants, the social partners highly appreciated the involvement of the international experts in the referencing process.

As the international experts were involved in early stages of the referencing process, their experience and comments were taken into account when composing the Self-Assessment Report. In addition, the experts' comments expressed, during the consultation process were integrated in the Report.

8. The competent national body or bodies should certify the referencing of the national qualifications framework or qualifications system with the European Qualifications Framework.

The Self-Assessment Report was prepared by the Academic Information Centre in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science involving social partners. It was published and its electronic copy is available on the website of MoES (www.izm.gov.lv), on the website of the Latvian NCP (<http://nqf-latvia.lv>).

9. The official the European Qualifications Framework platform should maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports.

The Latvian NCP has launched website (<http://nki-latvija.lv> or <http://nqf-latvia.lv>), in which information on the referencing process is provided, as well as the electronic copy of the Self-Assessment Report is published. The Report was posted also on the EQF web portal (<http://ec.europa.eu/eqf>), on the Latvian ENIC-NARIC website (www.aic.lv), and on the EHEA website (www.ehea.info).

10. Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.

In Latvia amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 2 December 2008 No. 990 "Regulations on the classification of Latvian education" were drafted and approved in October 2010. To the table included in these Regulations outlining the Latvian education stages and the respective programmes a new column was added, referencing education programmes to the appropriate Latvian Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Framework level. All education institutions awarding education documents in Latvia will be able to use these Regulations to indicate precisely the relevant Latvian Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Framework level. The inclusion of reference to the Latvian Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Framework levels in all education documents in Latvia is planned to be introduced during the 2nd phase of referencing. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (23 April 2008) on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning has introduced a range of education reforms in Latvia. In order to ensure that reference to the Latvian Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Framework in education documents for Latvian inhabitants is included in the right way, the changes in the education documents are planned to be introduced after the approval of the Higher Education Law in *Saeima*, as well as after drafting and approving the new Vocational Education Law.

Criteria of the Bologna Process

The Bologna Process continues the reforms in higher education that were launched in Latvia already at the end of 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. The reforms in the Latvian higher education already dealt with the majority of aspects set in Bologna Declaration⁶, before it was signed. The Education Law of 1991 already envisaged the introduction of bachelor and master programmes. Currently in practice, the Latvian HEIs offer programmes of the three Bologna cycles. **The drafted Law on Higher Education, which is not approved in Saeima yet, includes a complete transition to the qualifications of three Bologna cycles**, and this Law would set out the qualifications framework for higher education.

⁶ Latvia in the Bologna Process. Latvian Rectors' Council. Academic Information Centre. Andrejs Rauhvargers. Riga, 2003

The qualifications framework of the Latvian higher education, as an integral part of the Latvian Qualifications Framework, aims at ensuring that qualification levels, which can be acquired in Latvia, are harmonised, understandable and comparable in the European Higher Education Area; thus, promoting international recognition of the Latvian qualifications. The qualifications framework for higher education defines the qualification levels that can be obtained through studies, the necessary amount of study work in ECTS credits and the learning outcomes to be attained. Higher education programmes may consist of study modules, study courses, practice training and final examinations.

The higher education qualifications framework will include three study cycles:

1. First cycle studies (basic studies), which are completed with a Bachelor's degree;
1. Second cycle studies, completed with a Master's degree;
2. Third cycle studies, completed with a Doctor's degree.

The short cycle studies are part of the first cycle for acquiring the higher education qualification. After receiving the qualification diploma of the short cycle higher education, a person may continue studies in a further stage of bachelor programme for completing the cycle. Graduating from higher education programmes leading to higher education qualification of a physician, a dentist, a pharmacist or a veterinary doctor, the degree of the second cycle is awarded.

Studies can be continued in the next cycle only after acquiring the appropriate degree completing the previous cycle. Each higher education programme (except doctoral programmes) envisages the possibilities for continuing studies in the next cycle or for completing the cycle.

If the completion of a higher education programme results in the acquisition of a totality of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which are needed to meet the requirements set in the occupational standard or requirements for employment in a specific field of professional activity, the title of the respective profession is written into the diploma issued to the graduate of the higher education programme.

ECTS credits and qualifications awarded for HE programmes

Cycle	Programme	ECTS credits and qualification
First	Short cycle higher education qualification programme	120-180 ECTS credits (at least two academic years); the short cycle higher education qualification is awarded in the relevant fields of professional activities.
	Bachelor programme	180-240 ECTS credits (at least three academic years); for successful completion of a bachelor programme the Bachelor's degree is awarded, which is awarded in a branch of science, interdisciplinary studies or a field of professional activities.
Second	Master programme	60-120 ECTS credits, taking into consideration that the total amount of studies in higher education programmes to qualify for a Master's degree, should be at least 300 ECTS credits, of which at least 60 ECTS credits are in the master programme; for successful completion of a master programme a Master's degree is awarded.
Third	Doctoral programme	180-288 ECTS credits; Doctor's degree is awarded.

In order to reference the Latvian higher education qualifications to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, **seven criteria** defined by the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks in 2005 were taken into account.

1. The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education.

Since the Self-Assessment Report is prepared for referencing the national qualifications both to the European Qualifications Framework and Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, the criterion is similar to the European Qualifications Framework criterion 1. **The Ministry of Education and Science** (MoES), which is the leading state governance institution in the field of education and science, is responsible ministry for higher education. In 2008, MoES delegated the **Academic Information Centre** (AIC) to perform the functions of the National Coordination Point for referencing the national qualifications framework to the European Qualifications Framework for all education levels. AIC is also the Latvian representative to the Council of Europe/UNESCO diploma recognition network ENIC and the European Union diploma recognition network NARIC.

In 2009, MoES established the working group for referencing the Latvian education system to the European Qualifications Framework, and which serves as working group for referencing Latvian higher education to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, as well. Working group is chaired by the deputy state secretary on policy issues of MoES inviting to the working group all stakeholders, also representatives from higher education – education agencies, education quality assurance agencies,

representatives of employers' and employees' organizations, students etc.. The working group evaluated materials and level descriptors prepared by experts and recommended directing the developed project of amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval.

2. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.

The new qualifications framework for the Latvian higher education, which belongs to the Latvian Qualifications Framework, includes all three cycles of the Bologna Process – bachelor, master and doctor. The cycle descriptors are based on the learning outcomes. In the elaboration of the cycle descriptors, so-called Dublin descriptors (2002-2004), Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) and the European Qualifications Framework descriptors (2008) were used, offering generalised definitions for learning outcomes, which are typical for the qualifications awarded at the completion of each Bologna cycle. Therefore, an evident link may be observed between the Latvian level descriptors and the descriptors for the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.

3. The national framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes and the qualifications are linked to ECTS or ECTS compatible credits.

The Latvian higher education framework, which is a part of the Latvian Qualifications Framework, is based on three Bologna cycles – bachelor, master and doctor. The cycle descriptors are oriented on learning outcomes. In the Latvian higher education credit points compatible to ECTS are used. In Latvia a credit point is defined as the amount of the workload of one-week full-time studies. The amount for one academic year of full-time studies is 40 credit points. Recalculating it into the ECTS credits, the amount of Latvian credit points has to be multiplied by 1.5.

4. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national framework are transparent.

The elaboration of the qualifications framework in the Latvian higher education started in 2004. To ensure that referencing process of higher education qualifications is transparent, all higher education stakeholders participated in the working groups, which developed cycle descriptors for higher education qualifications and specified their place in the Bologna three-cycle system and the European Qualifications Framework. The consultation process was organised during different development stages of HE framework from 2006-2010 including various seminars and conferences.

5. The national quality assurance system for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqué agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process.

This criterion is similar to the European Qualifications Framework referencing criterion 5. The Latvian education quality assurance system for higher education refers to the Latvian Qualifications Framework and is consistent with suggestions raised in Berlin Communiqué (2003), i.e. national quality assurance system includes a definition of the responsibilities of the involved bodies and institutions, evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results, a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, international participation, cooperation and networking.

The activities of the Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre, the Higher Education Council and the State Education Quality Service in their functions are based on European principles and guidelines.

6. The national framework and its correspondence to the European Higher Education Area are shown in all diploma supplements.

The Diploma Supplement has been successfully introduced in Latvia. Several Latvian HEIs started issuing Diploma Supplements already in 1999. Since 2004, the Diploma Supplement is mandatory both in Latvian and in English. Currently the content and issuing of the Diploma Supplement are regulated by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 656 "Procedures by which state recognized documents certifying higher education are issued" (02.10.2007).

The Diploma Supplement conforms to the model developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO/CEPES). The supplement is prepared to provide objective information and ensure the academic and professional recognition of the qualification documents.

The Diploma Supplement contains information about the substance, level, context, content and status of the studies successfully completed by the person. It does not contain references to the evaluation or equivalence of the qualification, nor suggestions regarding its recognition. Information is provided in all eight sections. If in any of the sections information is not included, the reason is indicated.

7. The responsibility of stakeholders involved in qualifications framework is clearly defined and public.

Responsibility of stakeholders involved in higher education qualifications framework is clearly defined. **The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES)**, which is the leading state governance institution in the field of education and science, implements a unified state policy and development strategy in education, as well as

designs projects of policy planning documents and laws and regulations in the field of education, including higher education.

The Higher Education Council (HEC) is an institution, which develops national higher education strategy, implements cooperation between HEIs, state institutions and society for developing higher education, supervises the quality of higher education, and ensures that qualitative decisions are taken regarding higher education. HEC consisting of 12 members is approved by *Saeima* on the basis of a proposal of the Minister for Education and Science. HEC includes one delegated representative of the Latvian Academy of Science, the Association of Art Higher Education Institutions, the Latvian Association of Education Managers, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Colleges Association of Latvia, the Latvian Rectors' Council, the Latvian Association of University and College Professors, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, the Education and Science Workers Trade Union, a representative of the Latvian Students' Association, as well as a delegated representative of institutions of higher education founded by local governments and other legal and natural persons.

Both representatives from MoES and HEC participated in working groups, which elaborated higher education qualifications framework.

Academic Information Centre –
National Coordination Point
for referencing
the Latvian Qualifications Framework
to the European Qualifications Framework

Phone: +371 67 225155

Fax: +371 67 221006

E-mail: nkp@aic.lv

<http://nki-latvija.lv>

Mailing address:

Valņu Street 2

Rīga LV-1050

Office address:

Smilšu Street 2 (3rd floor)

Rīga