

# Slovenian Qualifications Framework

Proposal by the Steering Committee Group on the Preparation of the National Qualifications Framework

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# **EXPLANATORY TEXT**

## **Introduction**

Successful national qualifications frameworks are adopted by consensus and thereby assure the feeling of “ownership” by all stakeholders. This is corroborated by a growing body of evidence from other countries (Cedefop 2010). This proposal is the result of the work undertaken by the appointed Expert Group in cooperation with the Steering Committee Group on the Preparation of the National Qualifications Framework. It was corrected and amended following a wide public debate.

## **Purpose and structure of the SQF**

When elaborating the proposal, we took into consideration the main purpose of the SQF: “Its objective is to integrate and harmonise Slovenian qualifications subsystems and enhance transparency, accessibility, progress and quality of qualifications by being mindful of the labour market and civil society” (Starting points for the Expert Group, 2010, p. 1).

The proposal attempts to consider national characteristics of the Slovenian education and qualification system, both in the number of levels set up as in the basic logic behind descriptors allowing for gradation. It is also in conformity with the EQF serving as the basic reference framework for the EU Member States. National Vocational Qualifications were also included in the framework as they might become increasingly important for complementing formal types of training and education in the future. With this in mind, the SQF “provides the reference level for resolving problems pertaining to inadequate cooperation between the VET system and certification system as well as for the assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning” (Cedefop, 2009, p. 79, 80).

Thus, the proposed qualifications framework in the first place pursues the objective of transparency of qualifications systems in the state by taking into consideration the national context, notably drawing inspiration from KLASIUS.

In the light of its position within the system and its application, the framework can also accomplish other tasks:

- a) better quality and performance of the education and training system;
- b) providing for international comparability of national qualifications and for assessment of international qualifications;

- c) improving transfer possibilities between different education systems, primarily between education systems and labour market;
- d) evaluating and recognizing learning outcomes in less formalized learning settings, especially if such a setting has a very positive influence on the level of acquired competences;
- e) enhancing regulation on work flexibility in respect of the social and economic situation, notably for retraining, adult learning and drop-outs;
- f) impacting migration flows inside and outside Slovenia.

### **Two types of frameworks and frameworks function in the national education system**

The development of national frameworks in the past period saw the emergence of two basic framework types in Europe.

1<sup>st</sup> type: FRAMEWORK OF COMMUNICATION

2<sup>nd</sup> type: TRANSFORMATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Ad 1)

Frameworks of communication rest on national educational programmes and educational institutions. Their aim is to reflect the education/qualifications system in a state, i.e. identify differences between education levels/qualifications and their interrelations. They take a more passive role. This framework makes it possible to address system deficits regarding harmonization, transparency and readability of the educational/qualifications system. In the context of frameworks of communication, sectoral laws regulate qualifications in different subsystems.

Ad 2)

The aim of the transformational framework is to change the qualifications system and thereby establish new relations between education levels/qualifications. This calls for the resolution of all ambiguities within the system and conflicts between all stakeholders, which is followed by the setting up of instruments, performing more interventions and increasing control. Thus, it plays a regulatory and active role.

These are two different framework types; however, actual national frameworks have the elements of both. The difference is in the importance they place on each framework. Regardless of this fact, it is completely impossible to talk about a completely passive role, and this is where the key difference between a qualifications *classification* and qualifications *framework* lies: a framework is “a qualification with a vision” (Bjornavlod, Coles 2010, p. 7, 30). In other words, we always intervene in a system!

Frameworks of communication are by definition less ambitious as they rest on educational institutions and leave them to strike the balance between different qualifications. As they respond to changes within the system, they employ dynamic instruments. Although institutions make use of outcomes-based language, they are not perceived as the elements that could be prescribed by anyone else falling outside the scope of these institutions (Allais 2007). When formulating the proposal, we started with the premise that Slovenia (in comparative terms) has a relatively well regulated and developed education system. Consequently, it is reasonable to establish the SQF as the framework of communication founded on learning outcomes. Its reform potential is therefore lower.

The analysis of European frameworks (Cedefop 2010) shows that current solutions in Europe are on the continuum between frameworks of communication and transformational frameworks. The differences can be attributed to the level of regulation pertaining to the framework by considering its “loose” or “tight/restrictive” character.

**These reflections were incorporated in the following proposals:**

1. **We propose 10 levels for the SQF.** We believe that 10 levels better strike an appropriate balance between the education and qualification system. Two main criteria were observed when determining the number of levels:
  - a. every level has specific rights to employment and
  - b. every level enjoys specific rights to further education.

We opted for these two criteria since levels of education are by definition linked to rights to further education, whereas qualifications relate to rights to employment. We need to point to the fact that the criteria served as an aid in setting up levels and their borderline cases, however the framework does not a priori acquire a regulatory role. These criteria were connected as it helped us harmonize qualifications/education systems so as to enable easier identification and recognition of informal and non-formal learning. This element marks *a reform character of the framework*.

The SQF model reflects the current and previous situation in the area of education and labour market in the Republic of Slovenia.

2. Next to **learning outcomes** descriptors, the SQF should in our opinion also include **exit and entry parameters** – similar as it has already been envisaged for KLASIUS. Such a solution is in conformity with a communication role of the framework. It can be seen as a temporary solution since with the use and further development of the SQF there might be a need to strike a different balance between both poles. At the outset, it is sensible to bear in mind warnings by foreign

experts and develop the SQF by considering observed (desired and undesired) effects that might stem from the differentiation between learning outcomes and educational programmes.

### **Structure of descriptors**

1. A descriptor for each level consists of three learning outcomes elements: **knowledge, skills** and **competences** (explanation of the terms can be found below).

Each education level and qualification placed within the framework will consist of all three elements, yet it is not necessary that all elements will be attributed equal weight in case of every qualification. To illustrate: learning outcomes in elementary school give greater weight to knowledge and skills, the same goes for grammar school education. On the other hand, vocational qualifications will most probably give greater weight to competences. This triple dimension attempts to “capture” the entire diversity – of what in terms of complexity are *comparable* – learning outcomes at individual levels acquired in different settings and for different purposes.

2. The framework is divided into two tables.

Table 1 SQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS contains the number of levels and learning outcome descriptors.

Table 2 QUALIFICATIONS IN RELATION TO SQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS includes a proposed education and qualification referencing.

3. In principle, every higher level also encompasses knowledge, skills and competences at lower level. This does not mean, however, that knowledge, skills and competences at lower levels do not contain or should also not contain higher level elements as a learning process aims to prepare learners for higher level, which cannot be achieved without the incorporation of higher level elements in the learning process. Thus, the learning process and education objectives (also standards of knowledge) contain knowledge and skills at higher complexity levels (higher levels of taxonomy by authors such as Bloom, Marzanov etc.) as well. The above mentioned basic criteria also determine at which qualification level an individual qualification is placed, the criteria are bound by the existing status of qualifications and education levels within the education system.

## KEY KONCEPTS

**NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK** is a tool for the development and classification of qualifications within a commonly agreed system. Qualifications are classified into levels in terms of learning outcomes and descriptors, interrelations between qualifications are displayed and possibilities for horizontal and vertical transferability between qualifications are revealed. Qualification frameworks contribute to increased quality, accessibility and recognition of qualifications at the labour market, both national and international.

**LEVEL** marks a structural element within qualification frameworks. It should be seen as a range of consecutive steps (development continuity) expressed as areas of generic results and serving as the basis for the classification of typical qualifications. Levels are an artificial and pragmatic entity developed in a long period of time.

**KNOWLEDGE** is the result of learning and acquisition of concepts, principles, theories and practices. It is obtained in different settings: in educational process, at work and in the context of private and social life.

**TASKS** refer to activities in different social situations gravitating towards work sphere as well as social life, which are exemplified by the context of lifelong learning.

**SKILLS** are in the context of the Slovenian Qualifications Framework described as cognitive (e.g. use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and/or practical (e.g. manual skills, creative skills, the use of materials, tools and instruments).

**COMPETENCES** pertain to the ability to use and integrate knowledge and skills in educational, work, personal and/or professional situations. We distinguish between generic and vocationally specific competences.

Against the backdrop of the SQF, competences vary in the light of their complexity, independence and responsibility for action.



**LEARNING OUTCOME** involves knowledge, skills and competences standardised at certain qualification level. It is a statement explaining what an applicant at a certain qualification level knows, can do and decide after finishing a learning period.

Learning outcomes can be formulated in connection with courses, programme units, modules and programmes. Learning outcomes in these connections lead to qualification or educational attainment.

**QUALIFICATION** is an official result of the assessment process and the recognition by a competent authority deciding that an individual achieved learning outcomes in line with defined standards. A qualification has currency in the labour market, formal education system and lifelong learning.

There are **three types of qualifications** in Slovenia:

#### EDUCATION

Publicly recognised education is obtained after successfully completing publicly approved educational programmes<sup>1</sup>.

#### NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

A national vocational qualification is defined as work related vocational or professional capacity required to perform an occupation at certain level of complexity.<sup>2</sup>

#### SUPPLEMENTARY QUALIFICATION

A supplementary qualification complements an applicant's competence. It can be

- common for a certain professional field (e. g. banking) or
- transversal and/or transferable to a number of professional fields (e.g. management of dangerous substances, project management) providing for better employability and promoting lifelong learning.

It is demonstrated by a certificate.

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<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to the following acts: the Organization and Financing of Education Act, the Elementary School Act, the Vocational Education Act, the Gimnazije Act, the Post-Secondary Vocational Education Act and the Higher Education Act.

<sup>2</sup> As laid down in the National Professional Qualifications Act.

***Meaning of abbreviations:***

KLASIUS – classification system of education and training

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

NHEQF – National Higher Education Qualifications Framework

SQF – Slovenian Qualifications Framework

## SQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

|                | <b>Knowledge</b>  | <b>Skills</b>  | <b>Competences</b>   |
|----------------|---|--|--|
|                | is the result of learning and acquisition of concepts, principles, theories and practices. It is obtained in different settings: in educational process, at work and in the context of private and social life.   | In the context of the Slovenian Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (e.g. use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and/or practical (e.g. manual skills, creative skills, the use of materials, tools and instruments).  | pertain to the ability to use and integrate knowledge and skills in educational, work, personal and/or professional situations. Competences vary in the light of their complexity, independence and responsibility for action. We distinguish between generic and vocationally specific competences.   |
| <b>Level 1</b> | Elementary general knowledge enabling continuing systematic learning.   | Basic literacy and the ability to learn data and facts. Demonstrating practical skills enabling to perform simple, repetitive task or a short sequence of simple tasks.  | Ability to operate in a specifically defined and highly structured setting   |
| <b>Level 2</b> | Basic general and applied knowledge with the understanding of the main social and nature related concepts, processes and laws. It serves as the basis for further learning and social participation.  | Basic literacy and demonstrating practical skills, including the use of basic tools, methods and materials. Performing simple, repetitive tasks, consisting of a small number of operations.   | Ability to engage in a restrictedly independent activity based on oral or written instructions and to acquire new knowledge and skills in a foreseeable and structured setting. Accepting limited responsibility.  |
| <b>Level 3</b> | Predominantly practical, life- and vocationally relevant knowledge with some theoretical basis, acquired primarily through the examination of examples, imitation and practice in the context of a specific discipline.   | Basic literacy and demonstrating practical skills, including the use of basic tools, methods and materials. Using well known solutions when resolving predictable problems within a limited scope. Performing transparent and standardised tasks.  | Ability to acquire new knowledge and skills in a structured setting and under appropriate guidance. Ability to engage in a restrictedly independent activity in a predictable and structured setting based on simple oral or written instructions. Accepting limited responsibility.   |
| <b>Level 4</b> | Predominantly vocational knowledge supplemented by the knowledge of theoretical principles, notably from the relevant discipline. Examination of examples, integration and application of knowledge take precedence over scientific systematization principles. | Applying knowledge in resolving different tasks and problems, also in less typical situations. Demonstrating skills which in terms of the scope of action are wide-ranging and specialized, including the use of appropriate tools, methods and different technology procedures and materials. Performing relatively transparent, less standardised tasks. | Ability to operate in a well known and less familiar setting with greater responsibility and independence. Assuming responsibility for quality of products/services linked to work tasks or work processes. Assuming responsibility for one's own learning. Acquiring new knowledge and skills in a controlled setting. This level is characterised by certain entrepreneurial orientation, ability to organise and be included in working groups. |

|                | <b>Knowledge</b>   | <b>Skills</b>   | <b>Competences</b>   |
|----------------|--|---|--|
| <b>Level 5</b> | General and/or professional knowledge acquired by getting to know different scientific and /or professional fields and theoretical principles. It serves as the basis for further learning and slightly in-depth understanding of the discipline. Learning proceeds primarily by way of analytical thinking. | Demonstrating skills which in terms of the scope of action are wide-ranging and can also be specialised, including the use of appropriate tools, methods, different technology procedures, materials and theories. Assessing and using information to take decisions and resolve different problems or atypical situations. Formulating solutions in connection with well defined abstract problems. Performing different and often non-standardised tasks. | Ability to operate in different and specific settings. Assuming responsibility for characteristics and quality of the work process and results, whereby independence and certain level of self-initiative is demonstrated. Assuming responsibility and initiative for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. This level is characterised by entrepreneurial orientation, ability to organise and be included in complex and heterogeneous working groups.  |
| <b>Level 6</b> | Professional and theoretical knowledge in the specific field as well as practical knowledge for resolving concrete professional tasks. Knowledge enables the resolution of more complex tasks in a specific field of the discipline.   | Performing complex operative and professional tasks linked to works in the pipeline and control of work processes, particularly when it comes to works pertaining to organisation and management of the work process. Tasks are complex in terms of the scope of action, normally specialized and involve abstract thinking and the use of appropriate tools, methods, different technology procedures, materials and theories.                             | Ability to operate in different and specific settings with elements of creativity. Independent activity characterised by taking on responsibility for the work of individuals, groups, material sources and information. Performing in numerous, complex and heterogeneous situations. In addition, it is required to have the ability to make basic connections and place issues in a general social context. Identifying one's own learning needs and providing for knowledge transfer in a work setting.          |
| <b>Level 7</b> | In-depth professional – theoretical and practical knowledge in a specific field backed by a broader theoretical and methodological basis.  | Performing complex operative and professional tasks which also involve the use of methodological tools. Managing demanding and complex work processes through the independent use of knowledge in new work situations. Diagnosing and resolving problems in different and specific work settings linked to the education and training domain. The basis for original findings and critical reflection.  | Ability to operate in different settings and functions as well as to articulate new knowledge. Assuming responsibility for determining and achieving one's own work results and/or work results of a heterogeneous group in defined work areas. Ability to participate in an argument-supported debate in specific work settings linked to the education and training domain. Identifying one's own needs for learning, assuming initiative for one's own learning, having ability to transfer knowledge in a group. |

|                 | <b>Knowledge</b>   | <b>Skills</b>  | <b>Competences</b>   |
|-----------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Level 8</b>  | In-depth theoretical, methodological and analytical knowledge with elements of research serving as the basis for very complex professional work.   | Managing highly demanding and complex work processes and methodological tools in specialized areas. Working situations are normally atypical. Planning and guiding work processes by way of creative resolution of problems linked to the education and training area. Ability to formulate original findings/creations and engage in critical reflection. | Independently and autonomously performing tasks in normally atypical settings, in wider and multidisciplinary settings. Ability to assume responsibility for one's own professional development. Assuming responsibility for decisions pertaining to activities, processes and management of complex and heterogeneous groups. Ability to independently, professionally and ethically guide one's own learning and learning of others in different settings. |
| <b>Level 9</b>  | In-depth theoretical, methodological and analytical work serving as the basis for original scientific/research/art work creating new knowledge/creations.  | Planning, guiding and performing the most complex works, including the participation in scientific and research/ premium art projects, and resolving theoretical and practical problems in special work situations. Ability to formulate original findings and make creations as well as engage in critical reflection.                                    | Autonomously performing tasks in atypical settings, system-wider or multidisciplinary settings connected to basic and/or applied scientific, research and art work. Ability to assume responsibility for one's own professional development and development of the discipline. Ability to independently, professionally and ethically guide one's own learning and learning of others in different settings.   |
| <b>Level 10</b> | In-depth knowledge for independent and original scientific, research/art work or development of a discipline at the highest level, which is also linked to scientific, professional and artistic recognition in the local and international environment. | Planning, guiding and performing the most complex tasks, including scientific, research and art projects as well as resolving the most complex theoretical and practical problems. Ability to engage in critical reflection, in-depth abstract thinking and synthesise new and complex ideas.  | Ability to prominently and autonomously/supremely create, interpret and search for answers to the most abstract and complex questions in the discipline, science and art. Ability to transfer knowledge between the discipline and science by engaging in a critical dialogue and ability to responsibly assess the impact stemming from the use of new knowledge in different settings.   |

## QUALIFICATIONS IN RELATION TO SQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

|                | <i>Education levels</i>  | <i>National Vocational Qualifications</i> |
|----------------|--|---|
|                | <p>A) Admission requirements (typical):</p> <p>B) Duration (typical or typical total duration in theory):</p> <p>C) Typical education:</p> <p>D) Transferability:</p>  |   |
| <b>Level 1</b> | <p><i>PROGRAMMES OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION (LOWER LEVEL)</i></p> <p>A) : age -6 years in a 9-year elementary school programmes or 7 years in a 8-year elementary school programmes</p> <p>B) : 6 years in a 9-year elementary school programme (1<sup>st</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade) or 4 years in a 8-year elementary school programme (1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> grade)</p> <p>C) : uncompleted elementary education</p> <p>D) : 6<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade of a elementary school programme corresponds to level 2 in the SQF; 7<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade for lower vocational education (level 3 in the SQF)</p> |   |
| <b>Level 2</b> | <p><i>PROGRAMMES OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION (HIGHER LEVEL)</i></p> <p>A) : (do not exist as education proceeds continuously and within a compulsory and uniform elementary school programme)</p> <p>B) : 3 years in a 9-year elementary school programme (7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grade) or 4 years in a 8-year elementary school programme (5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade)</p> <p>C): elementary education</p> <p>D): lower vocational, secondary vocational, professional and general secondary education (levels 3 – 5 in the SQF)</p>   | NVQ, level 2                              |
| <b>Level 3</b> | <p><i>PROGRAMMES OF LOWER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION</i></p> <p>A) : uncompleted or completed elementary school</p> <p>B) : 2.5 years</p> <p>C) : lower vocational education</p> <p>D) : secondary vocational education (SQF, level 4)</p>   | NVQ, level 3                              |
| <b>Level 4</b> | <p><i>PROGRAMMES OF SECONDARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION</i></p> <p>A): completed elementary school or lower vocational education school</p> <p>B): 3 to 4 years</p> <p>C): secondary vocational education</p> <p>D): secondary professional and vocational-technical education – master craftsman, foreman and shop manager examination (SQF, level 5)</p>  | NVQ, level 4                              |
| <b>Level 5</b> | <p><i>PROGRAMMES OF SECONDARY TECHNICAL, PROFESSIONAL AND GENERAL EDUCATION</i></p> <p>A): completed elementary school and secondary vocational school</p> <p>B): 4 – 5 years</p> <p>C): secondary technical and professional education as well as general education</p> <p>D): matura (nation-wide leaving examination)/vocational course, post-secondary vocational, higher vocational and university<sup>3</sup> education (levels 6, 7 in the SQF)</p>   | NVQ, level 5                              |

<sup>3</sup> Conditionally in case of a vocational matura examination.

|                | <i>Education levels</i>  | <i>National Vocational Qualifications</i> |
|----------------|--|---|
|                | <p>A) Admission requirements (typical):</p> <p>B) Duration (typical or typical total duration in theory):</p> <p>C) Typical education:</p> <p>D) Transferability:</p>  |   |
| <b>Level 6</b> | <p><b>PROGRAMMES OF POST-SECONDARY VOCATIONAL AND HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION</b></p> <p>A): matura or vocational matura (formerly final examination); master craftsman, foreman and shop manager examination with an additional test at the level of vocational matura</p> <p>B): 2-2.5 years</p> <p>C): post-secondary vocational and higher vocational education</p> <p>D): continuation at higher vocational colleges in line with transfer criteria</p>   | NVQ, level 6 <sup>4</sup>                 |
| <b>Level 7</b> | <p><b>SPECIALIZATION EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES FOLLOWING POST-SECONDARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (FORMER):</b></p> <p>A): completed post-secondary vocational education</p> <p>B): 1 year</p> <p>C): specialization following post-secondary vocational education</p> <p>D): -</p> <p><b>PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION (former and first Bologna cycle):</b></p> <p>A): matura, vocational matura, final examination</p> <p>B): 3-4 years</p> <p>C): professional higher education (first Bologna cycle)</p> <p>D): transfer to second cycle Bologna programmes (SQF, level 8)</p> <p><b>ACADEMIC HIGHER EDUCATION (first Bologna cycle):</b></p> <p>A): matura, vocational matura with an additional examination, final examination before 1 June 1995</p> <p>B): 3-4 years</p> <p>C): academic higher education (first Bologna cycle)</p> <p>D): transfer to second cycle Bologna programmes (SQF, level 8)</p> |   |

<sup>4</sup> The current NVQ system includes qualifications up to level 6. The SQF encourages the examination of additional options so as to enable the elaboration of NVQs at higher levels.

|                 | <i>Education levels</i>  | <i>National Vocational Qualifications</i> |
|-----------------|--|---|
|                 | <p>A) Admission requirements (typical):</p> <p>B) Duration (typical or typical total duration in theory):</p> <p>C) Typical education:</p> <p>D) Transferability:</p>  |   |
| <b>Level 8</b>  | <p><b>SPECIALIZATION AFTER PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION (FORMER):</b></p> <p>A): higher education degree testifying to the completion of a professional higher education programme</p> <p>B): 1-2 years</p> <p>C): specialization after professional higher education</p> <p>D): transfer to third Bologna cycle programmes (SQF, level 10)</p> <p><b>ACADEMIC HIGHER EDUCATION (FORMER):</b></p> <p>A): matura, vocational matura with an additional examination, final examination before 1 June 1995</p> <p>B): 4-6 years</p> <p>C): academic higher education (former)</p> <p>D): transfer to third Bologna cycle programmes (SQF, level 10)</p> <p><b>MASTERS EDUCATION (second Bologna cycle):</b></p> <p>A): in case of a uniform study programme matura, vocational matura with an additional examination, final examination before 1 June 1995; otherwise first Bologna cycle</p> <p>B): 1-2 years, a minimum of 5 years in case of uniform studies</p> <p>C): masters (second Bologna cycle)</p> <p>D): doctoral programme (third Bologna cycle, SQF, level 10)</p> |   |
| <b>Level 9</b>  | <p><b>MASTER OF SCIENCE – MSc (FORMER):</b></p> <p>A): degree testifying to the completion of university education and compliance with other criteria; in certain cases a degree testifying to the completion of professional higher education and compliance with other criteria</p> <p>B): 2-3 years</p> <p>C): master of science (MSc)</p> <p>D): transfer to third Bologna cycle programmes (SQF, level 10)</p>  |   |
| <b>Level 10</b> | <p><b>DOCTORAL STUDIES (third Bologna cycle):</b></p> <p>A): degree testifying to the completion of university education (former), degree testifying to the completion of MSc or second Bologna cycle programme and a specialization degree following academic higher education – professional education</p> <p>B): 3 years</p> <p>C): doctorate of science</p> <p>D): -</p> <p><b>DOKTORATE OF SCIENCE (FORMER):</b></p> <p>A): degree testifying to the completion of university education (former), degree testifying to the completion of a MSc programme and a specialization degree following university education</p> <p>B): 4 years following a university degree, 2 years following a MSc degree</p> <p>C): doctorate of science</p> <p>D): -</p>   |   |





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