



هيئة جودة التعليم والتدريب
Education & Training Quality Authority
Kingdom of Bahrain - مملكة البحرين

The National Qualifications Framework

CREDIT FRAMEWORK: THE GUIDELINES

Directorate of Academic Cooperation & Coordination
BQA | GDQ

Contents

GLOSSARY OF TERMS	2
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. CREDIT FRAMEWORK: THE GUIDELINES	5
2.1 QUALIFICATIONS' TITLES AND DESCRIPTION	5
2.1.1 HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS' TITLES AND DESCRIPTION	5
2.1.2 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING QUALIFICATIONS' TITLES AND DESCRIPTION	7
2.1.3 GENERAL EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS' TITLES AND DESCRIPTION	8
2.2 ALLOCATION OF QUALIFICATIONS ON THE NQF	9
2.3 QUALIFICATIONS' CREDIT DESCRIPTION	10
INDEX	13

Glossary of Terms

Credit Transfer	A process whereby the credits already earned by a learner in one qualification are recognised toward a new qualification.
Credit	The value assigned to the amount or volume of learning required to complete a unit of learning or achieve a qualification.
Institution	An educational or training provider, such as an organisation, company or collaborative partnership, which delivers learning programmes that culminate in specified standards or qualifications.
Learners	Those individuals who acquire knowledge, skills and competencies through formal, non-formal and informal learning.
Learners with Special Needs	In the context of the NQF, special needs are where the capacity of a learner to participate in or benefit from education is restricted or hindered due to having advantaged or disadvantaged physical, intellectual, social or emotional capabilities.
Level Descriptors	A set of progressive statements assigned to each level of the NQF, that describe the complexity of acquired learning in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.
National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	An instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved. It integrates and coordinates national qualifications sub-systems and improves quality, transparency, access and progression.
NQF Credit	In the context of the NQF, one NQF Credit equates to ten Notional Learning Hours. NQF Credits are used to reflect the volume of units and qualifications (See 'Credit' and 'Notional Learning Hours').
NQF Level	A class that indicates the complexity of a particular qualification placed at that level, on the basis of the qualification's intended learning outcomes and their fulfilment of the core knowledge, skills and competencies.
Pathways	The vertical and/or horizontal routes learners take to navigate through their learning experience, by building on their knowledge and developing their skills, competencies and life experiences through education and training.
Progression	A pathway that learners travel as they progress toward mastery in a subject/discipline.

Qualification	A package of units judged to be worthy of formal recognition in a certificate issued by an institution.
Stakeholder	An individual, a group or an organisation that has interest in, or can be affected by, the NQF operations.
Validation	The process to ensure that a qualification is credible and fit-for-purpose.

1. Introduction

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was designed as a comprehensive 10-Level framework to classify qualifications provided by all education and training providers in the Kingdom of Bahrain. National qualifications are placed on the NQF and get allocated with an NQF Level and NQF Credit. Each level reflects the complexity of learning that a learner will be able to demonstrate by the end of the learning processes – whether be it knowledge, skill or competence. Whereas, NQF Credit, reflect the time needed by an average learner to achieve a set of learning outcomes designed for a specific qualification and/or its comprising units.

As part of the qualification placement process managed by the General Directorate of National Qualifications Framework (GDQ) of the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), all qualifications are subjected to a validation process to ensure their fitness-for-purpose. During the pilot phase, a major observation during the validation process was the difficulty to determine the validity of a qualification against:

- ◆ the appropriateness of the qualification's title; and
- ◆ the appropriateness of the overall allocated NQF Level and NQF Credit.

Consistency in validating qualification is an obligation. Panels' decisions may vary due to several factors, some of which were anticipated during the design phase others were spotted during the pilot phase of the NQF. These are mainly due to limited guidelines and absence of a unified national system for credits.

In January 2015, the NQF Advisory Committee (NAC) recommended and agreed on the Credit Framework project proposal and the working group representation. The proposal discusses the development of a fit-for-purpose Credit Framework and supplementary guidelines through consultation by establishing a working group with education and training stakeholders. This is done with consideration to international good practice such as:

- ◆ Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF);
- ◆ Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF);
- ◆ Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) - UK;
- ◆ Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

In addition, the project also utilised:

- ◆ Surveys conducted in the NQF design stage.
- ◆ NQF Phase one documents.
- ◆ Research data and information used in the proposals presented to NAC.
- ◆ Published information and data.

2. Credit Framework: The Guidelines

Provided Guidelines shall not to be used in isolation of NQF Level Descriptors and Validation Standards.

2.1 Qualifications' Titles and Description

2.1.1 Higher Education Qualifications' Titles and Description

a) Diploma

The range of HE academic qualifications offered in the Kingdom of Bahrain¹ starts with **Diploma (Academic)** which sits on level 6 of the NQF and has a minimum duration of 120 NQF Credit. These qualifications can cover a wide range of subject areas while can also be focused on a certain discipline. Such qualifications are expected to be designed with appropriate linkage to National Occupational Standards² (NOS).

b) Associate Degree

Associate Degree replaces the title **Associate Diploma**. The **Associate Degree** is an academic qualification which provides learners with the opportunity to leave university/college with a recognized intermediate qualification (exit qualification) allowing them to rejoin a HE programme leading to a Bachelor's degree. This qualification sits on level 7 of the NQF and should have a learning volume extending to a minimum of 240 NQF credits. Such qualification should be designed to allow learners to continue education within a certain Bachelor programme by topping up to the reaming required credits. Hence, proper ties to possible further continuation of learning and other possible pathways –where applicable- should be considered in the design in addition to linkage to the NOS².

c) Bachelor's Degree

Within the scope of what is being offered in the market of qualifications it can be generalized that most bachelors come with specialization field such as Bachelor of Business, Bachelor of Law, and Bachelor of Engineering... etc. while the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science dominate the spectrum. It is well established within the qualifications system what is meant by a “Bachelor's” degree; yet the reflection of the title within the design of a bachelor's degree and how it should be aligned to the purpose of such degree remains a matter to be clarified.

In coming to the title of a bachelor degree and its effect on the design, it should be taken into account the differences of weight in focus in accordance with the type/title of the bachelor's degree. For instance, **Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.)** is

¹ HEC regulations

² Phase one of the NOS project produced standards up to level 5, however, it is anticipated there will be a second phase that may cover parts of HE. This is put here with consideration should there be NOS for HE in the future.

usually for technical and specific areas and comes with focus on the theoretical part of technical and practical aspects. This is usually offered in the fields of technical and scientific areas such as: natural sciences, business sciences, engineering sciences... etc. Such qualification requires more credits that are directly linked to the major/discipline while little exposure to external topics. **Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)** Providing more expansive education and giving room for exposure to liberal arts subjects. This is usually offered the fields of social sciences, humanities, linguistics, literature, history... etc. **Bachelor of Engineering (B. Eng.)** is usually more practically oriented. Although learners are introduced to main theories, the design comes with more focus and credits on applying theories and concepts. A Bachelor's Degree sits on level 8 of the NQF and have a minimum learning volume of 480 NQF credit, such qualifications should be designed with clear linkage to NOS¹ and market needs (especially professional bodies) while maintaining proper alignment to its purpose (B.A., B.Sc., B.Eng.... etc.).

d) Postgraduate Diploma

Postgraduate Diploma replaces the title **Higher Diploma**. Postgraduate Diploma is a continuation to the HE and requires learner to have a bachelor's degree. Postgraduate Diploma sits on Level 9 of the NQF and has a volume of learning of a minimum of 72 NQF credit. This provides an opportunity for learners seeking postgraduate education in a related field of study and should be designed to include competencies of mastery level to allow learners to specialize and build on skills acquired through a bachelor degree.

e) Master's Degree

Master's Degree, although may be requirement for career advancement, especially academically, it is also an opportunity to further specialize in particular topic or profession. Master Degree sits on level 9 of the NQF and should be a minimum of 120 NQF credit provided it must include thesis defense. Such qualifications should be designed to specialize in a particular discipline and provide in-depth knowledge higher level of application and autonomy.

f) Doctoral Degree

Currently there is very limited number of Doctoral Degrees offered in Bahrain. **Doctoral Degree** sits on level 10 of the NQF with majority of credits at level 10² of the NQF.

¹ Phase one of the NOS project produced standards up to level 5, however, it is anticipated there will be a second phase that may cover higher levels of the NQF. This is put here with consideration should there be NOS for higher levels in the future.

² This is governed by the Validation Standards

2.1.2 Vocational Education and Training Qualifications' Titles and Description

a) Bahrain Vocational Qualifications

Bahrain Vocational Qualifications (BVQs) will be tentatively allocated to NQF range of levels¹ as illustrated in figure 1. BVQs are competence based qualifications which are delivered and assessed in the workplace. During the design phase of the NQF, it was perceived that attributing notional learning hours to BVQs would be quite difficult given that the undertaken training and assessment are not working on an academic timetable. However, and in a counter argument, it may well be valuable to attribute a credit value for the purpose of including BVQs and Units onto the NQF. This is yet to be furtherly studied during the design of the BVQs.

b) Awards

According to current licensing regulations for the VET sector, MoLSD has a category for short courses entitled: “**Local Achievement**”. These have a duration -not exceeding- of 60 contact hours as per MoLSD regulations. the title ‘**Award**’ is introduced to cover the range of qualifications under this category, which will come at different levels of the NQF as illustrated in figure 1. In coming to dealing with NQF credit of the Awards, it is recommended that these Qualifications (Awards) shall remain to be expressed in contact hours as per the licensing regulations; however, in reaching to the overall NQF credit the breakdown will have to be clearly and accurately described and justifiable. Awards should be designed to develop skills and knowledge in the vocational and training sector.

c) Professional Awards

Professional Awards² are new category of qualifications, these sit at level 7, 8 and 9 of the NQF and have similar standards to those externally accredited. These are at higher level of a specific profession and come as part of a career path for the purpose of extending or broadening knowledge and professional skills. Such qualifications would have a minimum NQF credit of 12. These should be aligned to international standards relevant to the profession and national standards.

d) Certificates

Certificates¹ are a new category of qualifications, with the prospect to provide progression pathway/route. Starting at level 1 of the NQF as illustrated in figure 1 and flexible in terms of covering a wide range of disciplines. Certificate 1 & 2 would be advantageous specifically for special needs qualifications with the purpose of including them in the system and provide them with access to a progressive route. Furthermore, these must be linked to the NOS of Bahrain and directly related to a vocational discipline/area.

¹ This is subject to change in accordance with the BVQ project development

² These are yet to be developed

e) National Diploma

Currently there are several Vocational Diplomas being offered in the Kingdom some of which are externally accredited. **National Diploma (ND)** sits on level 6 of the NQF and typically has a duration of 120 NQF Credits. It is designed to provide learners with theoretical knowledge with emphasis on practical skills in a particular discipline/area in the vocational sector. Such qualifications should be linked to the NOS¹.

f) Higher National Diploma

Higher National Diploma (HND) extends the pathway for vocational qualifications HND sits on Level 7 of the NQF with a duration typically of 240 NQF credit. HNDs are a higher level to ND and are designed to provide learners with theoretical knowledge with emphasis on practical skills in a particular discipline/area in the vocational sector. Such qualification should be linked to the NOS¹.

2.1.3 General Education Qualifications' Titles and Description²

a) Access

In accordance with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain³, basic education (up to Grade 9) is compulsory, this is to combat illiteracy. The sole purpose of **Access** qualifications is to allow learners who require special education support and learners who have no formal qualifications to complete their learning across potential possible pathways. Access 2 sits on level 2 of the NQF. While Access 1, sits on level 1 on of the NQF.

b) Intermediate Certification Qualification

Intermediate Certification Qualification is defined as Grade 9 in accordance with Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum/system or equivalent in private schools' curriculum. Intermediate Certification sits on Level 3 of the NQF and designed to provide a stepping stone to School Graduation Qualifications and VET qualifications.

c) School Graduation Qualification

School Graduation Qualification; known as Grade 12 (Secondary School Certificate / Tawjihi Certificate), or equivalent in private schools, are the basic pivot to entering HE programmes. These are designed to provide general background in several disciplines to prepare learners to pursue further/tertiary education (most likely HE) and have a typical volume of 3 years of study to achieve Level 4 of the NQF.

¹ Phase one of the NOS project produced standards up to level 5, however, it is anticipated there will be a second phase that may cover higher levels of the NQF. This is put here with consideration should there be NOS for higher levels in the future.

² These are preliminary and provisional

³ Bahrain Constitution, Chapter II, Article 7

In addition, there are several tracks provided by MOE schools in the technical education sector –VET. These, **Advanced Apprenticeship**, are designed to sit on the same NQF level (Level 4) and provide the option to either peruse further education -be it vocational, professional or higher education- or directly engage in an occupation, such qualification may have an intermediate/exit qualification (typically two years of study - **Apprenticeship**) that does not allow for perusing HE qualifications but does allow for further vocational studies and involvement in occupations. Unlike Grade 12 (and equivalent) technical school curricula should be linked to NOS, given their nature of study and progression opportunities.

d) Advanced School Certificates

Advanced School Certificates are designed to include higher level specialized subjects at level 5 of the NQF providing one step further to entering Higher Education undergraduate programmes with a chance of exemption from year one equivalent subjects. Such early specialization may control/restrict learners’ choices of further/tertiary education specialized pathways. Advanced School Certificate sits on Level 5 of the NQF and has a typical volume of learning of 3 years from Grade 9 equivalent.

2.2 Allocation of Qualifications on the NQF

Figure 1 below demonstrates the allocation of Qualifications on the NQF.

Level	Academic	Vocational (inclusive of Special Needs)		
10	Doctoral Degree			
9	Master’s Degree Postgraduate Diploma	BVQs		Professional award L9
8	Bachelor’s Degree			Professional award L8
7	Associate Degree		HND	Professional award L7
6	Diploma		ND	Award L6
5	Advanced School Certificates		Advanced Certificate	Award L5
4	School Graduation Qualification		Certificate 4	Award L4
3	Intermediate Certification		Certificate 3	Award L3
2	Access 2		Certificate 2	
1	Access 1		Certificate 1	

2.3 Qualifications' Credit Description

Table 1 shows the credit framework/description of qualifications on the NQF. It is important to note that this description is to be used hand in hand with requirement of the Validation Standards. Specifically, standards 2, 3 & 5 (Qualifications Compliance, Appropriateness of Qualification Design, Content and Structure, and Appropriateness of NQF Level and Credit). The level of the remaining composite units and how it contributes to the design and the purpose of the qualifications will be subject to validation process judgment with consideration to progression between units as appropriate.

Table 1 Qualifications' Credit description¹

Qualification Title	Sector	Status	NQF Level	NQF Credit	
				Overall Credit	Credit Description
Doctoral Degree	HE	Currently Licensed at 45 USCS ²	10	—	Majority of Credits at level 10
Master's Degree	HE	Currently Licensed at 30 USCS	9	Min of 120 in total	At least 85% of total credits at level 9 or above
Postgraduate Diploma	HE	Currently Licensed at 18 USCS	9	Min of 72 in total	At least 85% of total credit at level 9 or above
Professional Award L9	VET	Proposed	9	Min of 12 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 9 or above
Bachelor's Degree	HE	Currently Licensed at 120 USCS	8	Min of 480 in total	At least 25% of total credit at level 8 or above Should not include more than 20% of total credit at level 5 ³
Professional Award L8	VET	Proposed	8	Min of 12 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 8 or above
Associate Degree	HE	-----	7	Min of 240 in total	At least 35% of total credit at level 7 or above Should not include more than 15% of total credit at a level below level 6
Professional award L7	VET	Proposed	7	Min of 12 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 7 or above

¹ These are general guidelines, while institutions remain to hold autonomy of distribution of credits within the specified guidelines, this may cover including credits from a higher level as long as proper progression is maintained within the design.

² United States Credit System

³ Any presence of credits below level 5 (i.e. level 4), will have to be clearly justified and evidenced.

Qualification Title	Sector	Status	NQF Level	NQF Credit	
				Overall Credit	Credit Description
HND	VET	Proposed	7	Min of 240 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 7 or above
Diploma	HE	Currently Licensed at 18 USCS	6	Min of 120 in total	At least 75% of total credit at level 6 or above
Award L6	VET	Currently Licensed at 60 hours	6	Max of 60 hours equivalent in NQF credit	At least 50% at level 6 or above
ND	VET	Proposed	6	Min of 120 in total	At least 75% of total credit at level 6 or above
Advanced School Certificates ¹	GE	Currently at 3 yr from G9 equivalent	5	-----	Min of 1 yr. at level 5 Should not include any credits at level 3 or below
Award L5	VET	Currently Licensed at 60 hours	5	Max of 60 hours equivalent in NQF credit	At least 50% at of total credit level 5 or above
Advanced Certificate	VET	Proposed	5	Min of 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 5 or above
School Graduation Qualification G12 and Equivalent ¹	GE	Currently at 3 yr from G9 or equivalent	4	-----	Max of 10% at level 5 Min of 80% at level 4 Max of 10% at level 3
School Graduation Qualification: Technical Education qualification (Advanced Apprenticeship) ¹	GE/VET	Currently at 3 yr from G9 or equivalent	4	-----	Max of 10% at level 5 Min of 80% at level 4 Max of 10% at level 3
School Graduation Qualification: Technical Education qualification (Apprenticeship) ¹	GE/VET	Currently at 2 yr from G9 or equivalent	4	-----	Min of 85% at level 4 Max of 15% at level 3
Award L4	VET	Proposed	4	Max of 60 hours equivalent in NQF credit	At least 50% at of total credit level 4 or above
Certificate 4	VET	Proposed	4	Min of 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 4 or above
Intermediate Certification and equivalent ¹	GE	Currently at 3 yr	3	-----	Max of 5% at level 4 Min of 80% at level 3 Max of 15% at level 2

¹ This is preliminary and provisional

Qualification Title	Sector	Status	NQF Level	NQF Credit	
				Overall Credit	Credit Description
Award L3	VET	Proposed	3	Max of 60 hours equivalent in NQF credit	At least 50% at of total credit level 3 or above
Certificate 3	VET	Proposed	3	Min of 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 3 or above
Access 2 ¹	GE	-----	2	-----	-----
Certificate 2	VET	Proposed	2	60 to 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 2 or above
Access 1 ¹	GE	-----	1	-----	-----
Certificate 1	VET	Proposed	1	60 to 120 in total	Max of 25% at level 2

Index

B

Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), 6
Bachelor of Engineering (B. Eng.), 6
Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.), 6
Bahrain Vocational Qualifications (BVQs), 7

G

General Directorate of National Qualifications
Framework (GDQ), 3
General Education (GE), 4

H

Higher Education (HE), 4
Higher National Diploma (HND), 8

M

Ministry of Education (MoE), 8
Ministry of Labour & Social Development (MoLSD), 7

N

Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), 3
National Diplomas (NDs), 8
National Occupational Standards (NOS), 5
National Qualifications Framework (NQF), 3
NQF Advisory Committee (NAC), 3

V

Vocational Education and Training (VET), 4