



هيئة جودة التعليم والتدريب

Education & Training Quality Authority

KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN مملكة البحرين

National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

General Policies

1. Introduction

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) General Policies, formulated by the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), establish the overarching principles that govern the operations of the NQF. These operations include Institutional Listing, National Qualifications Placement, and the Alignment of Foreign Qualifications.

2. Context and Goals

The NQF of the Kingdom of Bahrain is envisaged to:

- Provide a stronger basis for the understanding, comparison and recognition of national and foreign qualifications, thereby improving the understanding of employers, parents and learners of the value of qualifications.
- Provide fit-for-purpose qualifications that have stronger linkages with labour market and learner needs.
- Increase the accountability of education and training institutions towards maintaining high quality standards in their provisions.
- Improve the opportunities for mobility and progression of learners within and across higher education, vocational and general education sectors.
- Promote the concept of lifelong learning through the recognition of all types of learning: formal, non-formal and informal.

3. NQF General Policies

POLICY 1: Listing Institutions in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Register

Institutions¹ are required to be listed in the NQF Register prior to submitting their qualifications for placement on, or alignment to, the NQF.

Purpose

- To identify institutions that are eligible to have their qualifications placed on, or aligned to, the NQF.
- To ensure that institutions which provide qualifications placed on, or aligned to, the NQF have established suitable and transparent operational mechanisms to maintain the standards of their qualifications.
- To ensure that institutions are aware of their roles and responsibilities in the Institutional Listing process.

Policy Statements

¹ Institutions refer to local providers offering national or foreign qualifications in the Kingdom of Bahrain and do not include foreign awarding bodies.

1. Institutions must comply with eligibility criteria and Institutional Listing Standards in order to be eligible to have their qualifications placed on the NQF. Those criteria and standards must be clearly detailed and published by the BQA in the NQF Handbook.
2. The BQA must process all applications for Institutional Listing in a fair, transparent, and consistent manner that is fit-for-purpose and embraces international best practices.
3. Prior to submitting qualifications for placement on, or alignment to, the NQF, an institution must be listed in the NQF Register. An institution is deemed to become listed when:
 - it meets all Institutional Listing Standards,
 - it has passed its quality review conducted by the BQA, if applicable. However, newly established institutions that have not been reviewed by BQA may be listed solely against the NQF Institutional Listing Standards.
4. An institution maintains its status as being listed if it passes its institutional review conducted by BQA, including the embedded Institutional Listing Standards within the review framework.
5. Institutions have the right to appeal against the conduct of the Institutional Listing process in accordance with the BQA's policies and procedures.
6. The BQA will change the status of a listed institution, including its placed and aligned² qualifications, to archived if it does not pass its institutional review.

POLICY 2: Qualifications' Compliance with NQF Requirements

Qualifications placed on, or aligned to, the NQF must comply with the NQF and regulatory bodies' requirements.

Purpose

- To ensure that qualifications placed on, or aligned to, the NQF comply with requirements and criteria set by the relevant regulatory body, where applicable.
- To identify the qualifications that are eligible for placement on, or alignment to, the NQF.
- To ensure that qualifications placed on, aligned to, the NQF have common design criteria across education and training sectors, which promote lifelong learning and support progression of learners between sectors.

² Archiving of foreign qualifications applies only in cases where the institution is the sole provider of the qualification. Otherwise, the institution shall be removed from the list of providers.

- To ensure that institutions use quality-assured and fit-for-purpose processes for Mapping and Confirmation.

Policy Statements

1. An institution must ensure that any qualification submitted for placement on, or alignment to, the NQF complies with the relevant regulatory body' requirements and criteria, where applicable.
2. A qualification must comply with NQF eligibility criteria in order for it to be considered for placement on, or alignment to, the NQF.
3. Qualifications' eligibility and design criteria must be clearly defined and published by the BQA in the NQF Handbook.
4. Institutions must follow the qualifications Mapping and Confirmation processes declared within the submission for Institutional Listing, where applicable.

POLICY 3: National Qualifications Placement on the NQF

All national qualifications are placed on the NQF according to the Qualification Placement process. All qualifications placed on the NQF must be validated to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose and meet Validation Standards.

Purpose

- To ensure that qualifications placed on the NQF are fit for-purpose and meet the needs of learners or the labour market.
- To ensure that institutions are aware of their roles and responsibilities in the Qualification Placement process.
- To ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the BQA in the placement process are clear and transparent, and that the arrangements for placing a qualification on the NQF, or archiving it, are defined, transparent, and published.
- To set consistent methods for allocation and validation of NQF Level and NQF Credit.
- To ensure that validation standards, process, and the roles of the Validation Panel are defined and transparent.

Policy Statements

1. Institutions are required to submit all eligible qualifications to the BQA for placement on the NQF. The eligibility criteria must be clearly defined and published by the BQA in the NQF Handbook.
2. The BQA must process all Qualification Placement applications in a transparent, fair, and consistent manner that embraces international best practices.

3. Institutions are required to submit documentation and evidence to support their Qualification Placement applications.
4. The Level Descriptors, along with provided rationales, form the basis for allocating the NQF Level of each unit within any given qualification. The overall NQF Level of a qualification is determined by considering the NQF Levels of the comprising units.
5. The NQF Credit Framework Guidelines, along with the Level Descriptors and Validation Standards, form the basis for allocating the NQF Credit for the qualification and its comprising units.
6. The BQA must verify the proposed NQF Level and NQF Credit of a qualification and its comprising units, as well as verifying the qualification's compliance with the NQF requirements.
7. The BQA must ensure that all the qualifications submitted for placement on the NQF are subject to a validation process.
8. The Validation Panel consists of professionals and educators/trainers, and ensures that each qualification, including its comprising units, meets the Validation Standards.
9. The BQA is responsible for overseeing the validation process and the selection of Validation Panel members. Panel members must be selected in a transparent and objective manner.
10. The Validation Panel shall only judge the validity of a qualification using the Validation Standards detailed by the BQA in the NQF Handbook. The Panel assigns a Validity Period for every valid qualification.
11. Institutions have the right to appeal against the conduct of the Qualification Placement process in accordance with BQA's policies.
12. During the Validity Period, the BQA monitors all qualifications placed on the NQF. Accordingly, institutions must maintain the qualifications' content and standards and shall be responsible for communicating any changes to the BQA.
13. Placed qualifications will be archived if:
 - they are no longer valid (i.e. do not satisfy the Validation Standards);
 - they are discontinued and no longer delivered by the institution; or
 - their offering institution does not pass its institutional quality review.
14. Qualifications will be subject to re-validation when:
 - they have passed their Validity Period; or
 - any changes occur that might affect the NQF Level or NQF Credit verified for a qualification.

POLICY 4: Alignment of Foreign Qualifications

Alignment of Foreign Qualifications enhances the comparability between foreign and national qualifications.

Purpose

- To ensure that institutions and the awarding bodies are aware of their roles and responsibilities in the Alignment of Foreign Qualifications process.
- To ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the BQA in the alignment process are clear and transparent, and that the arrangements for aligning a qualification on the NQF, or archiving it, are defined, transparent, and published.

Policy Statements

1. Institutions, in coordination with the awarding bodies, are required to submit eligible foreign qualifications to the BQA for alignment to the NQF. The eligibility criteria must be clearly detailed and published by the BQA in the NQF Handbook.
2. The BQA must process all applications for aligning foreign qualifications to the NQF in a transparent and consistent manner that is fit-for-purpose and embraces international best practices.
3. Institutions and awarding bodies are required to submit documentation and evidence to support their Alignment of Foreign Qualifications applications.
4. The BQA shall depend on the comparison with other qualifications frameworks when evaluating a foreign qualification that is included in another framework. Otherwise, a Panel should be appointed to review the Alignment application.
5. The Alignment application should be judged using the Alignment Standards detailed by the BQA in the NQF Handbook. The BQA aligns foreign qualifications to the NQF if they meet the Alignment Standards. A Validity Period will be assigned for every aligned qualification.
6. Institutions and awarding bodies have the right to appeal against the conduct of the Alignment process in accordance with BQA's policies.
7. During the Validity Period, the BQA monitors the qualifications aligned to the NQF. Accordingly, institutions and awarding bodies must maintain the qualifications' content and standards and shall be responsible for communicating any changes to the BQA.
8. Aligned qualifications will be archived if:
 - they are no longer valid (i.e. do not satisfy the Alignment Standards);
 - they are discontinued and no longer offered by the institution; or
 - the offering institution does not pass its institutional review.

9. Aligned qualifications will be subject to re-validation when:
 - they have passed their Validity Period; or
 - any changes occur that might affect the NQF Level or NQF Credit.

POLICY 5: Enabling Learners with Special Needs

Enabling learners with special needs by integrating them within the education and training systems and recognising their achievements under the NQF.

Purpose

- To provide equal and suitable opportunities for the integration and access of learners with special needs within the education and training programmes, and recognition of their achievements.
- To encourage institutions to develop and place on the NQF, qualifications specifically designed for learners with special needs.

Policy Statements

1. Institutions should, wherever possible, provide learners with special needs with suitable support and resources and ensure their integration and recognition of achievements.
2. Institutions are encouraged to develop, where appropriate, qualifications specifically targeted at learners with special needs in order to expand their learning and increase their employment opportunities. These qualifications must also comply with NQF requirements.
3. The BQA must ensure that institutions provide learners with special needs with suitable support and resources for all qualifications.

POLICY 6: Promoting Lifelong Learning

Promoting the concept of Lifelong Learning, which aims to recognise prior learning and enhance progression pathways between education and training sectors.

Purpose

- To promote the concept of Lifelong Learning within the Qualifications System of the Kingdom of Bahrain, by enhancing progression pathways between education and training sectors and developing a common understanding of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the context of the NQF.
- To promote the value of prior learning achievement as being on equal terms with formal learning.

- To provide guidance to institutions in developing mechanisms for RPL in accordance with the current education and training regulations.

Policy Statements

1. The BQA will develop and promote a common understanding of RPL in the context of the NQF, alongside evaluating prior learning achievement on equal terms with formal learning.
2. The BQA must ensure that Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) is the mechanism used to recognise prior learning, ensuring that the outcome of APL meets the defined standards of the relevant qualification.
3. The BQA will provide guidelines for institutions to establish mechanisms for the recognition of knowledge, skills, and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, in accordance with current education and training regulations in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

POLICY 7: Communication and National Cooperation

Communication and national cooperation are essential for raising public awareness of the aims, benefits, and principles of the NQF, and for ensuring the readiness of institutions to implement it.

Purpose

- To raise public awareness of the aims, benefits, and principles governing the NQF, and promote its usage and application.
- To ensure that all policies, guidelines, and publications governing the NQF are available, accessible, and updated.
- To ensure the readiness of institutions for all NQF-related processes, particularly Institutional Listing, Qualifications Placement, and Alignment of Foreign Qualifications.
- To maintain an up-to-date NQF register (database) that includes all listed institutions along with all the qualifications placed on, or aligned to, the NQF.
- To engage and communicate with regulatory bodies and stakeholders, with the aim of implementing and improving the NQF.

Policy Statements

1. The BQA will develop initiatives to raise public awareness and promote and support the use and understanding of the NQF.
2. The BQA will provide appropriate support and capacity-building sessions to ensure the readiness of institutions to carry out NQF-related activities.

3. The BQA must ensure that all policies, guidelines, and publications governing the NQF are up-to-date, available, and accessible to all stakeholders.
4. The BQA will maintain and update the NQF Register, which includes listed institutions along with qualifications placed on, or aligned to, the NQF.
5. The BQA should engage with regulatory bodies and stakeholders with the aim of implementing and enhancing NQF operations.

POLICY 8: Referencing the NQF

Referencing the NQF is an activity that leads to international recognition of national qualifications.

Purpose

- To achieve international recognition of the NQF, including placed qualifications.
- To ensure that referencing mechanisms are set and defined between the organisations involved.
- To ensure that referencing reports are available and published.

Policy Statements

1. The BQA is responsible for facilitating referencing activities in collaboration with relevant national and international organisations, to achieve international recognition of the NQF, including placed qualifications.
2. As the scope and aims of the referencing activities may vary considerably, the BQA will identify suitable qualifications frameworks and key organisations and will determine the scope and aims of any referencing activities.
3. The BQA must develop and publish referencing guidelines that are fit-for-purpose and in line with international best practices.
4. The BQA must ensure that referencing reports are available and published.

POLICY 9: Continuous Quality Improvement

Continuous Quality Improvement will ensure the value and credibility of the NQF and its relevance to education and training requirements in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Purpose

- To ensure that the structure, typology, operations, and standards of the NQF are maintained and benchmarked against international standards.

- To ensure that Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is the backbone of NQF operations.
- To maintain the reliability and credibility of the NQF.

Policy statements

1. The BQA will maintain, benchmark, and continuously improve the NQF structure, typology, operations, and standards through the evaluation of international standards and adaptation to the developments of the education and training systems.
2. The BQA periodically reviews all NQF-related policies, processes, and procedures, taking into consideration the views of relevant stakeholders.
3. The BQA aims to continuously improve the quality of its standards in all aspects of the NQF operations and must ensure effective time management in processing applications through defined key performance indicators (KPIs).
4. Institutions listed in the NQF Register must ensure effective application of their internal quality assurance mechanisms in order to maintain their qualification standards and the credibility and value of the NQF.

4. Standards and Judgements

4.1. Institutional Listing

The Institutional listing Application is judged based on the five Standards comprising 27 indicators, which are clearly detailed and published by in the NQF Handbook. The standards are as follows:

Standard 1: Access, Transfer, and Progression - 6 indicators

Standard 2: Qualification Development, Approval and Review - 6 indicators

Standard 3: Assessment Design and Moderation – 9 indicators

Standard 4: Certification – 3 indicators

Standard 5: Sustainability and Continuous Quality Improvement - 3 indicators

The overall judgment for the institution is either 'Listed', 'Deferred for Condition Fulfilment', or 'Not Listed'. If the overall judgment is 'Listed', the report proceeds for approval to publish the institution's details on the NQF Register. However, if the outcome is 'Deferred for Condition Fulfilment' or 'Not Listed', the institution must either submit the required documentation to fulfil the conditions or reapply with a new submission, respectively as per BQA's procedures. Further details on the evaluation of the standards and the overall judgment are provided in the NQF Handbook.

4.2. National Qualifications Placement

The National Qualification Placement Application is judged based on five Validation Standards comprising 29 indicators, which are clearly detailed and published by in the NQF Handbook. The standards are as follows:

Standard 1: Justification of Need – 3 indicators

Standard 2: Qualification Compliance – 7 indicators

Standard 3: Qualification Design, Content and Structure – 9 indicators

Standard 4: Assessment Design and Moderation – 7 indicators

Standard 5: NQF Level and Credit – 3 indicators

The overall judgment for the qualification is either 'Valid', 'Deferred for Condition Fulfilment', or 'Not Valid'. If the overall judgment is 'Listed', the report proceeds for approval to publish the qualification's details on the NQF Register. However, if the outcome is 'Deferred for Condition Fulfilment' or 'Not Valid', the institution must either submit the required documentation to fulfil the conditions or reapply with a new submission, respectively as per BQA's procedures. Further details on the evaluation of the standards and the overall judgment are provided in the NQF Handbook.

4.3. Alignment of Foreign Qualifications

The Alignment of Foreign Qualification Application is judged based on four standards comprising 11 indicators, which are clearly detailed and published by in the NQF Handbook. The standards are as follows:

Standard 1: Qualification Compliance - 3 indicators

Standard 2: Justification of Need - 2 indicators

Standard 3: Quality Assurance - 4 indicators

Standard 4: NQF Level and Credit Alignment - 2 indicators

The overall judgment of the qualification is either 'Aligned, or 'Not Aligned'. If the overall judgment is 'Aligned, the report proceeds for approval to publish the qualification's details on the NQF Register. However, if the outcome is 'Not Aligned', the institution must submit a new application, as per BQA's procedures. Further details on the evaluation of the standards and the overall judgment are provided in the NQF Handbook.