



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

The National Qualifications Framework

CREDIT FRAMEWROK: THE GUIDELINES

Directorate of National Framework Operations
BQA | GDQ

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 process – whether be it knowledge, skill or competence. Whereas, NQF Credit, reflects 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 & National Examinations (GDQ) of the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), all qualifications are subjected to a validation process to ensure their fitness-for-purpose. Provided Guidelines shall not to be used in isolation of NQF Level Descriptors and Validation Standards.

2. Credit Framework: The Guidelines

2.1 Qualifications' Titles and Description

2.1.1 Higher Education Qualifications' Titles¹ and Description

a) Diploma

The range of Higher Education (HE) academic qualifications offered in the Kingdom of Bahrain² 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 Standards (NOS).

b) Associate Degree

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 remaining required credits. Hence, proper ties to possible further continuation of learning and other

¹ If the Degree includes a minor field of specialisation, the title should reflect the content of both major and minor fields

² HEC regulations

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.

In coming to the title of a bachelor's 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 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.)** is providing more expansive education and giving room for exposure to liberal arts subjects. This is usually offered in 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 NOS 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 is a continuation to the HE and requires a 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's degree.

e) Master's Degree

Master's Degree, although may be a requirement for career advancement, especially academically, it is also an opportunity to further specialize in a particular topic or profession. Master's 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 professional level of skills and autonomy.

f) **Doctoral Degree**

Currently, there is a small number of Doctoral Degrees offered in Bahrain. A **Doctoral Degree** sits on level 10 of the NQF with majority of credits at level 10³ of the NQF.

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 levels⁴ as illustrated in figure 1. BVQs are competence-based qualifications which are delivered and assessed in the workplace. This is yet to be furtherly studied during the design of the BVQs.

b) **Awards**

According to current licensing regulations for the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, the Ministry of Labour (MOL) has a category for short courses entitled: "**Local Achievement**". These usually have a duration -not exceeding- of 60 contact hours as per MOL regulations. Recently, MOL allowed also for long courses/programmes with more than 60 credit hours. These are provided with a pre-approval and cannot be offered until placed on the NQF, after which MOL will provide a final approval. The title '**Award**' is introduced to cover the range of qualifications under these categories, which come at different levels of the NQF as illustrated in figure 1. Awards should be designed to develop skills and knowledge in the vocational and training sector.

c) **Professional Awards**

Professional Awards are qualifications that 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**

Certificates are a 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 learners 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 and directly related to a vocational discipline/area. Certificates sit at levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the NQF, while the Advanced Certificate sits at level 5. Certificates 1 and 2

³ This is governed by the Validation Standards

⁴ This is subject to change in accordance with the BVQ project development

would have NQF credits between 60 to 120, whereas the others would have a minimum of 120 NQF credits.

e) National Diploma

National Diploma (ND) sits on level 6 of the NQF and typically has a minimum 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 NOS.

f) Higher National Diploma

Higher National Diploma (HND) extends the pathway for vocational qualifications. HND sits on Level 7 of the NQF with a minimum duration 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 NOS.

2.1.3 General Education Qualifications' Titles and Description⁵

a) Access

In accordance with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain⁶, basic education (up to Grade 9) is compulsory, this is to combat illiteracy. The 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 1 sits on level 1 of the NQF and Access 2 sits on level 2 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 is known as Grade 12 (Secondary School 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.

In addition, there are several tracks provided by MOE schools in the technical education sector –VET. These are designed to sit on the same NQF level (Level 4) and provide the option to either pursue further education -be it vocational, professional or higher

⁵ These are preliminary and provisional

⁶ Bahrain Constitution, Chapter II, Article 7

education- or directly engage in an occupation, Unlike Grade 12 (and equivalent) technical school curricula should be linked to NOS, given their nature of study and progression opportunities.

d) Advanced School Graduation Qualifications

Advanced School Graduation Qualifications 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. 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 Graduation Qualifications		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	

Figure 1: Allocation of qualifications on the NQF

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 the requirements of the Validation Standards and Level Descriptors. 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 the qualification placement judgement with consideration to progression between units as appropriate.

Table 1 Qualifications' Credit description⁷

Qualification Title	Sector	Status	NQF Level	NOF Credit	
				Overall Credit	Credit Description
Doctoral Degree	HE	Currently Licensed at 45 USCS ⁸	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	-----	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 ⁹
Professional Award L8	VET	-----	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	-----	7	Min of 12 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 7 or above

⁷ These are general guidelines, while institutions have autonomy on the distribution of credits within the specified guidelines, credits from a higher level may be included as long as proper progression is maintained within the design.

⁸ United States Credit System

⁹ Any presence of credits below level 5 (i.e. level 4), will have to be clearly justified and evidenced.

HND	VET	-----	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 50% 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 (can be more under licencing body specifications)	At least 50% at level 6 or above
ND	VET	-----	6	Min of 120 in total	At least 75% of total credit at level 6 or above
Advanced School Graduation Qualifications	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 (can be more under licencing body specifications)	At least 50% at of total credit level 5 or above
Advanced Certificate	VET	-----	5	Min of 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 5 or above
School Graduation Qualification G12 and Equivalent	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)	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)	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	Currently Licensed at 60 hours	4	Max of 60 hours equivalent in NQF credit (can be more under licencing body specifications)	At least 50% at of total credit level 4 or above

Certificate 4	VET	-----	4	Min of 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 4 or above
Intermediate Certification and equivalent	GE	Currently at 3 yr	3	-----	Max of 5% at level 4 Min of 80% at level 3 Max of 15% at level 2
Award L3	VET	Currently Licensed at 60 hours	3	Max of 60 hours equivalent in NQF credit (can be more under licencing body specifications)	At least 50% of total credit at level 3 or above
Certificate 3	VET	-----	3	Min of 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 3 or above
Access 2	GE	-----	2	-----	-----
Certificate 2	VET	-----	2	60 to 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 2 or above
Access 1	GE	-----	1	-----	-----
Certificate 1	VET	-----	1	60 to 120 in total	Max of 25% at level 2