A summary guide to the qualifications framework for the UAE, QFEmirates

World Class Qualifications for a World Class Workforce
To remain internationally competitive, a country must prioritise the development of skills and qualifications to keep up with emerging technologies, materials, systems and workplace environments, including new jobs. This helps to develop a nation’s social capital and improves a country’s wellbeing. There is an urgent and ongoing need for human (workforce) development of the UAE citizens (i.e. Emiratisation) and non-UAE residents. The country must address emerging skills shortages and gaps; increase labour market opportunities for individuals through education and training; and develop policies that improve economic, social and personal competitiveness.
A ‘National Qualifications Framework’ for the UAE

Many nations have recognised that a key step in realising a highly skilled and productive workforce is through a ‘national qualifications framework’ that encompasses all forms of learning. A national qualifications framework is simply a means of describing qualifications and the relationships between them to enable individuals to develop their skills, check their competency and progress.

In August 2010, President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan issued Federal Decree No. 1 Establish and maintain the National Qualifications Authority. The Decree sets out sixteen (16) aims and objectives, which the Board of the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) is to pursue. It includes the establishment of a United Arab Emirates Qualifications Framework (QFEmirates) that serves as the national frame of reference for qualifications and is internationally recognised.

The vision of the UAE National Qualifications Authority is to: ‘develop and maintain a qualifications system that values every individual’s learning and optimises access, transfer, progression and recognition of qualifications, leading to a skilled and knowledgeable workforce for a globally competitive environment.’

Benefits of the UAE National Qualifications Framework (QFEmirates)

The QFEmirates is a truly integrated system, enabling all qualifications to be described and compared, recognising achievement in learning from the most elementary task to the most complex, using recognised and agreed common titles. It includes formal structured learning, achieved typically in schools, colleges, universities and training centres and informal and non-formal (both structured and unstructured) learning achieved typically in the workplace or community. As a single, integrated system, the QFEmirates can be used by the country’s decision-makers to develop strategic education and training policies to improve the country’s economic, social and personal effectiveness and standing in the world.

The QFEmirates also:

- provides access to new learning opportunities for all citizens and residents
- creates new learning pathways and progression routes
- helps individuals to make decisions about what they want to do next and to continue learning while working or in their community
- improves opportunities for individuals to work abroad without having to repeat qualifications
- enables people to be recognised for the work they do in the workplace and communities as part of their development
- enables qualifications achieved abroad to be recognised as equivalent to UAE qualifications, encouraging international mobility
- uses a language to describe national and international qualifications that employers and learners can understand. Employers will be able to state clearly the education or training required when advertising jobs and candidates will be able to check whether they have the skills required to apply.
Design of the QFEmirates

Levels

There are ten (10) levels in the QFEmirates. Each of the ten levels represents a hierarchy of relative difficulty, complexity and depth. The higher the QFEmirates level, the greater the challenge and the demand expected of a learner in order to be awarded the relevant qualification. These levels are shown in the pictorial representation of the QFEmirates below.
Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are the common criteria used and define what a learner has learned and not what they have been taught. They are expressed in terms of:

- **knowledge** - learned from practical or professional experience as well as from formal instruction or study and can comprise description, memory, understanding, thinking, analysis, synthesis, debate and research

- **skill** - is the learned ability to perform a function that in some way responds to or manipulates the physical, informational or social environment. Skills may be cognitive (such as use of logical, intuitive, creative and conceptual thinking) and practical (such as manual dexterity and the use of methods, techniques, processes, materials, tools and instruments)

- **aspects of competence**, comprising three strands – autonomy and responsibility, role in context and self-development – the effective use of knowledge and skill in occupations and in social and civic life.

The ten levels and the five ‘strands’ of learning outcome statements define the Level Descriptors, indicating the complexity of learning for each level, the expected level of achievement for each level and how each level relates to occupations in the world of work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strands of learning outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level X</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strand 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aspects of competence

Credit

Credit is the term used internationally to identify the amount of learning that is required to successfully complete a qualification. ‘Credit value’ is used to identify the notional number of hours of learning required to achieve one credit. In the UAE a notional value of 15 hours (with additional study hours) equates to one (1) credit. This means that for a qualification with a value of 3 credits, a typical learner must successfully complete a notional 45 hours of learning to achieve the required standard.

It should be noted that credit only applies to the higher education and vocational education and training sectors.

Credits can be also be ‘accumulated’ to enable transfer to other qualifications offered by recognised education and training institutions within the UAE or abroad. This means, for example, that a learner may not have to repeat all learning if they move from one education provider to complete a qualification. Ultimately a system of ‘Credit Accumulation and Transfer’ will be developed in the UAE to enable this to occur consistently by licenced education and training providers.
Types of qualifications in the QF Emirates

There are three types of qualifications in the QF Emirates which are defined according to the volume and nature of the learning required:

| ‘Principal’ Qualification | are the major type of qualification with formal recognition at each level, and capture a typical achievements for the level including all five strands of learning outcomes. |
| ‘Composite’ Award | provide formal recognition for learners who achieve a set of cohesive learning outcomes including, in varying combinations, all five strands of learning outcomes. This may involve fewer learning outcomes and/or less complexity compared to a Principal Qualification. |
| ‘Component’ Award | provide formal recognition of achievement of a limited number of learning outcomes which may relate to all or only some of the strands of learning outcomes. |

Qualification types at each level will vary across the higher education, general education and vocational education and training sectors, according to demand, learner need and economic or social relevance. There are agreed conventions for titles for Principal, Qualifications and Composite and Component Awards. The NQA will agree with each of the relevant Commissions (MOE-GEC, CAA and the new VETAC) the precise qualification name based on content and level. Titles for general education and higher education will be familiar, but new titles are being developed for vocational education and training.

CoreLife Skills

Many countries have introduced ways to acknowledge the role particular ‘generic’ skills play in underpinning work, learning and life. The recognition of these skills is important because they underpin the ability of learners to learn throughout their lives and so promote lifelong learning.

To ensure that UAE citizens have the best foundation for learning, work and life, literacy and numeracy have been explicitly embedded within the learning outcome Level Descriptors for qualifications at levels one (1) to six (6) within the QF Emirates. In addition, seven CoreLife Skills have been introduced, as shown in the table.

CoreLife Skills - labels for the generic skills

| 1. Collecting, analysing, organising and applying information in a given context |
| 2. Communicating information, concepts and ideas |
| 3. Initiating and organising self and activities, including motivation, exploration and creativity |
| 4. Working with others in teams including leadership |
| 5. Solving problems including using mathematical ideas and techniques |
| 6. Applying information and communication technology (ICT) |
| 7. Participating in social and civic life including ethical practice |
Recognition of prior learning (RPL)

As well as being able to transfer credit to other recognised education and training institutions at home or abroad, the QFEmirates enables the recognition of prior learning (RPL) to take place. This involves the assessment of previously unrecognised skills and knowledge an individual has achieved outside the formal education and training system. RPL assesses this unrecognised learning against the requirements of a qualification in respect primarily of the learning outcomes to be achieved.

By removing the need for duplication of learning, RPL encourages an individual to continue upgrading their skills and knowledge through structured and informal learning and training towards formal qualifications and improved employment outcomes.

International qualifications within the QFEmirates

The UAE is a major receiver of qualifications and awards issued overseas. This applies to nationals that may have successfully completed a foreign qualification or award in another country, or in-country (UAE) and expatriates that are engaged in employment in the UAE.

An important benefit of the QFEmirates is that qualifications achieved in this way can be recognised as equivalent to UAE qualifications by formally mapping learning outcomes. This encourages the international mobility of learners, understanding of overseas qualifications through alignment with frameworks in other countries and enables the UAE to ensure that it is benefitting from those with the very best knowledge and skills to support its economic and social development.

The NQA has established processes in association with the three Commissions (MOE-GEC, VETAC and CAA) to identify equivalencies with and recognise international qualifications.

Implementation of the QFEmirates

The introduction of a new system of qualifications, such as the QFEmirates, can pose a challenge to education and training administrators and providers. It can impact on employability and recognition arrangements for qualifications issued prior to implementation. Issues and unintended consequences may arise from time to time. As a result the NQA is piloting many aspects of the QFEmirates prior to full implementation.

NQA will work with the three Commissions through the Awards and Accreditation Commissions Coordination (AACC) Working Group to facilitate and monitor the progress and use of qualifications and their component parts.

The NQA, and its Board, recognise that implementation of the QFEmirates will need to be led and managed with the involvement of all stakeholders. The NQA will take every step to smooth the implementation process and continuously review the impact of the QFEmirates, by working closely with Federal government, the three Commissions, recognised education and training providers, employers, and, of course, learners.