The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) is the federal authority that is responsible for the development of strategies, plans, policies, and standards in all education sectors in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In every possible way, the NQA supports the UAE Vision 2021 National Agenda to build a strong education and training system that helps to equip citizens with the qualifications, skills, knowledge, and attributes necessary to succeed in the world of work.

**NQA Mission**

To have a high-quality national qualifications system that meets the requirements of social and economic development by reinforcing the links between learning outcomes and the labor market; developing Recognition of Prior Learning policies; licensing vocational education and training programmes and institutions, and standards for the accreditation of qualifications; facilitating the transfer of individuals between the general, higher, and vocational education and training pathways; and supporting the concept of lifelong learning through the recognition of learning outcomes of each individual in the society.

**QFEmirates**

The QFEmirates is the national qualifications framework for the UAE that provides a frame of reference to enable all qualifications in the country to be described and compared nationally and internationally. This includes qualifications in:

- General education (schools)
- Technical and vocational education and training
- Professional and work-based education and training
- Higher education.

The QFEmirates also recognises learning acquired through work and life experiences, voluntary activities, and other informal and non-formal activities.

The QFEmirates consists of ten (10) levels (from Certificate 1 to Doctorate), related qualifications, and titles of qualifications. A qualification is a formal approval that recognises that an individual has been assessed as achieving learning outcomes related to a compete qualification. Correspondingly, the QFEmirates is based on what a learner has learned (learning outcomes), not what they have been taught. This differs from the existing and commonly used approach, which defines a qualification based on participation and time spent on a course or programme.

For details on the QFEmirates, please visit [www.nqa.gov.ae](http://www.nqa.gov.ae).
Global Reach: Mapping Qualifications Framework

Close cooperation with the Australian Qualifications Authority is another achievement of the NQA at the international level. Enhancing qualifications recognition opportunities in the UAE and Australia is of mutual benefit for both countries.

H.E. Dr. Thani Al Mehairi

Benefits of referencing international qualifications to the QFEmirates

- International mobility of learners and workers with no need for the formal processes of attestation and equalisation;
- Understanding of overseas qualifications makes the recruiting process easier and faster;
- Individuals can see what qualifications they need next to progress in their job or studies.

 Learner and labour mobility is seen today as an international phenomenon and a national priority across the globe to help achieve national and regional economic competitiveness. To this end, the national qualifications frameworks (NQF) have been established through different generations to fulfill national needs of aligning quality assured qualifications to better meet the 21st century labour market developments, work environment knowledge and digital requirements, and borderless education phenomenon, as well as promote the lifelong learning concept. Recognition of foreign qualifications is more than a technical process of authentication of learner achievement for the purposes of further studies or employment. It is a tool to build inclusive society that truly empowers its individuals.

- QFEmirates & AQF

The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) is the custodian of the QFEmirates, which is a qualifications framework for the United Arab Emirates (UAE). On October 26, 2016, H.E. Dr Thani Al Mehairi, Director General, NQA, and Mr. Arthur Spyrou, Ambassador of Australia to the UAE, signed a Letter of Intent in implementation of the NQA’s mandate of achieving mutual recognition of qualifications at the national and international levels and its strategic objectives of achieving international realisation of QFEmirates as a best practice.

The project was launched under the auspices of the 2014 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Higher Education, Vocational Education and Training, and Research Cooperation between the Government of Australia and the Government of the United Arab Emirates, which provides a framework for cooperation on mutually beneficial activities. Under the MoU, the Parties agreed to develop a number of actions including a joint technical report to map the level descriptors of the two countries’ national qualifications frameworks.

The mapping process compared similarities and differences between learning outcomes descriptors in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and QFEmirates in order to improve mutual understanding, increase transparency, and strengthen the relationship between the governments of Australia and the UAE. The outcomes of the mapping will enhance, at the first stage, recognition of Australian qualifications in the UAE and improve market access. The comparison of quality assurance systems, qualifications level linkages, and qualifications recognition will be left for the second stage of the project.

The working group agreed to adopt ‘international’ criteria to achieve the mapping, which require the legal establishment of the QFEmirates, the learning outcomes as the base for the development of all

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Status</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. UK (England, Northern Ireland)</td>
<td>Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)</td>
<td>Completed (June 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. GCC countries</td>
<td>Gulf Qualifications Framework</td>
<td>Level descriptors approved (May 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. New Zealand</td>
<td>New Zealand Qualifications Framework</td>
<td>To be completed in August 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. South Africa</td>
<td>South African Qualifications Framework</td>
<td>Underway (start: May 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Australia</td>
<td>Australian Qualifications Framework</td>
<td>To be completed in August 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. India</td>
<td>National Skills Qualifications Framework</td>
<td>Underway (start: late 2016)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Global Reach (cont.)

Qualifications, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, and the promotion of the concept of lifelong learning. The technical side also adopted UNESCO’s basic principles of ‘substantial difference’, which takes a broad approach to the framework comparison in order to minimise barriers.

The working group has made use of similar methodology applied in other successfully concluded referencing projects including the QF Emirates and the United Kingdom Qualifications and Credit Framework (UK QCF) and Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), and the AQF and the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) referencing project, both concluded in 2015.

Having finalised three versions of the mapping exercise, the working group is expected to have completed its work by the end of August 2017.

* QF Emirates & NZQF

In October 2015, the NQA and New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) started the mapping of QF Emirates and New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF). So far, three versions have been completed. In May 2016, the NQA and NZQA agreed to develop the final (fourth) version of the mapping between the two frameworks’ level descriptors. The focus of the technical meetings will be on the levels, in particular Level 3 and 4, which require further discussions. The project is scheduled to be finalised by the end of August 2017.

* QF Emirates & SAQF

In April 2017, the NQA and South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) agreed on the content and terminology of the mapping/comparing of the QF Emirates and South African Qualifications Framework (SAQF). The technical work, which is expected to start soon, as the two parties agreed on the formation of the two technical groups, will embark on a process, which will give effect to the equivalency and recognition of qualifications, particularly technical and vocational education and training qualifications. Initially, this will include a mapping of the learning outcomes levels of the two countries’ national qualifications frameworks, and the content verification and analysis, and validation of qualifications for recognition. The first version of the technical report should be completed during the fourth quarter of 2017.

The dynamic nature of NQFs and quality assurance systems present an additional challenge to the mapping/referencing process.

The addition of social dimension and national needs adds more credibility to the final outcomes of the project.

UNESCO’s Global Study on Level Descriptors

The NQA participated in the 6th expert meeting on the World Reference Levels of Learning Outcomes, which took place at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on June 29-30, 2017. The NQA has participated in the UNESCO Global Study on Level Descriptors over the last two years. The Expert Group continued their discussions on the results of a global comparative analysis of qualifications and of further conceptual research initiatives on level descriptors and progression, higher levels of complexity, and quality assurance of certification, in addition to the preliminary findings of two recent studies on the recognition of skills and qualifications in a digitised world and on developing effective learning pathways and transitions between technical and vocational education and training and higher education.

For details, please read this publication.

QF Emirates was one of the seven NQFs included in the UNESCO Global Study on Level Descriptors.
Comparative Study on Qualifications Cross-borders

The NQA participated in the UNESCO Comparative Study on Qualifications Cross-borders, which aims to provide an empirical basis supporting the understanding of how technical and vocational education and training qualifications are being defined, reviewed, and renewed and how these influence their profile and content. The comparative analysis of the profile and content of qualifications and its global scope will enable the identification of commonalities and differences, which in turn will inform the future development of guidelines for cross-country recognition of qualifications. The global study focuses on four qualifications profiles:
- Bricklayer/masonry
- Health care assistant
- Hotel assistant/receptionist
- ICT service technician.

The final report will be released along with the UNESCO Global Study on Level Descriptors.

UNESCO’s Expert Group on RVA

As a member of the Expert Group, the NQA participated in the UNESCO 3rd international expert meeting on Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation (RVA) of Basic Youth and Adult Education as a Foundation for Lifelong Learning, which was held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on November 3-4, 2016.

During the first and second meetings, the expert group defined issues to be covered in a background document on the RVA of Basic Youth and Adult Education. The group members reviewed RVA literature and policies and identified major trends, key issues, and challenges regarding RVA at the global, regional, and national levels. The third meeting examined the draft background document and outcomes of the previous meetings. Various practices of RVA across the world were reviewed.

The aim of the study is to examine the way in which non-formal youth and adult literacy and basic education can be better integrated into national RVA frameworks through policies, strategies, and mechanisms. The final report is scheduled for publication at the end of 2017.

Please find detailed information here.

Learning in the Digital Age

The NQA is participating in a UNESCO new study entitled Digital Credentials in the 21st Century: Implications for the Recognition of Learning. The study intends to highlight a number of key areas affecting new approaches to technology-based education. Among them are major developments in digitising learners’ records, credentials, and certificates in education and training as well as contexts and initiatives these developments are taking place in. The study aims to investigate what technologies are used and what issues related to compatibilities, interfaces, and interoperability the users face. The other concerns are the necessary conditions in which digital technologies can lead to better, fair, and transparent recognition of skills and qualifications within and across countries; safety challenges involved, and the existing and emerging solutions to protect individuals and prevent fraud.

On June 19, 2017, the NQA invited practitioners and stakeholders to participate in a discussion group and share their views about the topic. The responses were compiled into a report and sent to UNESCO. The discussion group was an initiative of the NQA’s Qualifications Framework Forum and NQA’s Qualifications Framework and Systems Community (NQA-QFSC).

Workshop at NQA on digital learning
International Pilot Project for Labourer Upskilling

The NQA is participating in the pilot project under the umbrella of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, an initiative launched to address development in temporary labour mobility in Asia, recognise the challenges, and influence practices and policies in the area of contractual labour for the region.

The project targets skills development, certification, upgrading, and recognition of construction workers coming from developing countries to work in the UAE. The NQA cooperates closely with the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, Abu Dhabi Quality and Conformity Council (QCC), Federal Demographic Council (FDC), and some construction companies.

The project is divided into three phases:

- **Phase 1:** Train and qualify construction workers in the origin countries (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) based on the NQA endorsed National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS). The NQA endorsed NOSS are related to the occupations of general construction worker, general mason, steel fixer, and carpenter.

- **Phase 2:** Conduct periodic testing and certification for upgraded skills and document their augmented skills throughout employment.

- **Phase 3:** Create agreements with participating countries on the mutual recognition of upgraded skills.

The NQA’s responsibilities in the project are the following:

- Check and accredit labourer training and assessment centres in the labour-exporting countries intended to participate in the project.

- Certify knowledge, skills, and competencies the labourers acquire upon the successful completion of the training and after six months or above of working in the corresponding field to measure their skills progress.

To consider the accreditation of three labourer training and assessment institutions to participate in the Pilot Upskilling Project, a delegation from the NQA visited the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka on May 22 to 25, 2017. The delegation, headed by Wafa Al Awlaqi, Director of TVET Department, NQA, examined the readiness of the training institutions to train and assess workers in the construction sector based on the UAE NOSS.

Previously, the NQA has accredited a number of training institutions in the labour-exporting countries, such as India (1 centre) and Pakistan (4 centres). More training institutions are likely to be accredited later this year in other Asian countries.

During the visit, the NQA’s delegation inspected the training and assessment facilities and logistics at the College of Technology in Kandy City, the College of Technology in Badulla, and the Technical College in Homagama. A number of meetings and interviews took place with trainees, trainers, and the management of the colleges. At the final meeting, the delegates were joined by senior officials of Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment and representatives of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) country office in Colombo. The meeting addressed the NQA delegation’s observations and comments on the training institutions, and channels of cooperation to enable the institutions meet the NQA accreditation criteria to be able to train, qualify, and assess labourers to participate in the pilot project.

The NQA is developing a Skills Passport to record knowledge and skills of workers in the UAE participating in the pilot project.

![NQA’s delegation in Sri Lanka](image)

Abu Dhabi Dialogue

The Abu Dhabi Dialogue focuses on developing four key, action-oriented partnerships between countries of origin and destination for development around the subject of temporary contractual labour, based on a notion of partnership and shared responsibility.

For details, please visit [https://www.iom.int/abu-dhabi-dialogue](https://www.iom.int/abu-dhabi-dialogue).

![Draft Skills Passport](image)

NQA has approved 8 overseas training centres.
Our International Activities

December 2016

♦ On December 6-9, 2016, the NQA participated in the 16th Asia and Pacific Regional Meeting held in Bali, Indonesia. The meeting was attended by government ministers, representatives of workers' and employers' organisations, and academics from 37 countries. The topics discussed addressed work-related issues, such as development of workforce skills, the laws regulating labour migration and challenges faced by labourers, particularly unemployment and the relationship with recruitment agencies.

In the margins of the meeting, the NQA representatives met with the Secretary General of the Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia, and other senior officials. Both parties discussed cooperation between the two countries in the supplying of qualified labourers to work in the UAE, possible accreditation of Indonesian training centres for skilled labourers, the use of Indonesian occupational skills standards, and opportunities for employment outside Indonesia. The meeting ended up with an agreement to draft an MoU to determine aspects of cooperation between the two countries.

March 2017

♦ On March 5, 2017, Dr. Thani made a presentation entitled QFEmirates: Experience and Achievements at the Saudi Arabia Qualifications Framework Forum. The presentation focused on the establishment and implementation of the qualifications framework for the UAE, known as the QFEmirates, and the projects resulted from this, such as Recognition of Prior Learning, recognition of foreign qualifications, Continuing Education Units, etc.

♦ On March 7, 2017, Kamal Ben Selama, General Education Expert, NQA, delivered a presentation entitled Celebrating and Protecting Innovation through NQAs at the Kingdom Education Innovation 2017 conference held in Riyadh, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The presentation explained close links between national qualifications frameworks and labour markets in assuring the quality of education.

May 2017

♦ On May 11-12, 2017, the NQA participated in the 13th International Conference in Morocco under the theme Innovative Universities for Smart Cities. The two-day conference was attended by numerous international universities and quality assurance organisations around the globe. On Day 1, Kamal Ben Selama chaired a panel discussion on the quality of higher education and the challenges it faces nowadays. The efforts exerted by the UAE government in order to improve the quality of higher education in the country were highlighted. On Day 2, Mr. Selama presented a paper on the importance of the QFEmirates in improving the quality of education and training in the UAE in line with the UAE Vision 2021 National Agenda.