Greetings from the Director General

Dear readers,

This is the first issue of the newsletter released by the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), a federal authority responsible for coordinating with relevant entities the development of strategies, plans, policies and standards for higher education, general education and technical, vocational and professional education and training in the UAE. The Authority takes a lead role in implementing the national qualifications framework, the QFEmirates. Due to the great importance the UAE government attaches to vocational education and training (VET) qualifications, NQA plays a significant role in developing the country’s VET sector. The newsletter includes information about the activities and projects we are currently working on. We hope it will become an important communication tool with our valuable partners and community members. We appreciate your support.

Best regards,

H.E. Dr. Thani Al Mehairi

Current TVET Department Projects

The Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Department at NQA is the operational unit responsible for national vocational qualifications and related matters. It is primarily concerned with establishing and operating a modern vocational education and training (VET) system in the country that supports and enhances the actualisation of national strategic objectives and UAE Vision 2021. Among its specialisations are providing technical and administrative support to the Vocational Education and Training Awards Council (VETAC) and VETAC Executive Secretariat, reviewing training providers’ registration requests, collaborating with the awarding bodies in developing processes and documents needed for the VET system applications, reviewing applications seeking VETAC approvals to establish committees for developing and promoting national qualifications based on national occupational skills standards (Q+NOSS) and many other areas. This article sheds light on the projects the TVET Department is currently involved in.

One of the projects the TVET Department is undertaking is concerned with developing and operating some of the subsystems related to the VET system in the country. The Department has been working with Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET) and Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), the two official awarding bodies in the country, in developing processes and guidelines for the recognition of qualifications, student and training provider certificate templates, registration process of training providers seeking to deliver national vocational qualifications, licensing assessors and verifiers and the fees to be charged on the services provided by NQA and the awarding bodies.

Another project is the support provided to the international pilot project under Abu Dhabi Dialogue umbrella and managed by the UAE Ministry of Labour in coordination with local and international partners. The TVET Department staff has recently visited a labourer training and assessment center in Sri Lanka to assess its potential and capability in training and testing construction workers to be hired by local employers for the project purposes.

Did You Know?

The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) was established by the UAE Federal Government in August 2010 to build a UAE education and training system that includes vocational education and training and improves the system’s relationship with the economy and labour market. The NQA is also responsible for developing and implementing a national qualifications framework for the UAE. Among the departments at NQA there are Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Research and Development (R&D), Qualifications Framework, etc.

Compiled by R&D Department, NQA
TVET Projects

The Skills Passport is one key outcome that the Department has almost developed and designed. It will be an official document that attests laborers’ skills, knowledge and competencies in an occupation.

In addition, the Department is now providing technical guidance and advice to organisations interested in developing national occupational skills standards and national vocational qualifications (Q+NOSS). The Department receives applications from awarding bodies and conducts a thorough review of the application as per the approved criteria. If an application meets all the requirements, it goes to VETAC Executive Secretariat to express opinion, and when approved, it is presented to VETAC Council for approval. If an application is rejected, the applicant is contacted to address the issues and make the recommended amendments until it becomes valid for VETAC approval. In May 2015, VETAC Council approved four applications.

The TVET Department is currently consulting organisations interested in developing vocational qualifications for certain occupations in various industry sectors. Five institutions have met the Department staff for this purpose. Consultations usually include presentations detailing the steps and procedures followed in developing a Q+NOSS product. Most meetings end up with the organisations’ willingness and consent to develop these products.

The TVET Department continues to be involved in the Teacher Standards Project. Two staff members of the Department are permanent members of the technical team responsible for developing standards for the education profession in the UAE. The team now is working on producing documents related to developing and activating the national registration and licensing system in the country. The documents to be approved soon are Job Descriptions and Evidences for Performance Indicators. The other nine team members represent key educational bodies in the UAE.

Did You Know?

The TVET Department is mandated to build a VET system that is responsible for developing and ensuring the quality of national vocational qualifications that meet industry criteria and labour market needs. It is also responsible for:

- setting basics of aligning levels of foreign vocational qualifications with appropriate levels in QFEmirates
- setting quality assurance criteria for involving industry in the development of Q+NOSS
- overseeing the exchange of data with awarding bodies in the process of developing, awarding and issuing qualifications
- endorsing an integrated system for licensing assessors and internal and external verifiers involved in the assessment process and the verification of outcomes achieved by learners
- maximising the use of labour market data and intelligence in the strategic planning process and in the development of qualifications in accordance with indicators of skills supply and demand in the labour market and in the light of geographic distribution
- building a modern and quality assured industry-led VET system, which is flexible and responsive to labour market needs and capable of managing the provision of advanced labour market data, developing training initiatives and implementing industry-led projects
- developing a skills and career pathways map in a manner that provides individuals with information about occupations, career pathways and future jobs in the UAE.

One more important area the TVET Department is working on is the requests of initial registration of training providers. The staff receives training providers’ data online, screens them and issues a registration number if all requirements are met. If the application is short of some evidence, the staff communicates with the applicant and requests provision of the required items. Five to ten applications are addressed and/or approved every day.

Training providers can access the online registration facility at www.nqa.gov.ae.
**MoU with the United Kingdom**

Since its foundation, NQA has established ties of cooperation with different countries for the purpose of measuring the quality of education in the UAE. One example of this cooperation was the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the government of the United Arab Emirates and the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain on 1 May 2013. Later, on 22 April 2015, an agreement was signed between NQA and the British Council to implement the objectives set in the MoU.

The UAE has a long history of collaboration and support with the UK. Over 100,000 British expats live and work in the country at the present time. Approximately 50,000 Emiratis visit the UK each year. In October 2009, the governments of both countries established the UK-UAE Joint Economic Committee, with an explicit target of increasing trade between both countries by 60% by 2015. Education and skills is one of five sub-groups that provide strategic advice to the UK-UAE Joint Economic Committee.

The key objectives for this collaboration are to:

- develop a labour market recognition system from school through to higher education
- determine future collaborative projects to develop new approaches to labour market development (such as internships, skills compacts) which support the development of nationals and non-nationals in the two respective countries
- work with the UK qualification systems to enable the UAE to access and contribute to European qualification systems.

The two nations will work together to:

- prepare a roadmap of the relevant government bodies, quality assurance agencies, and qualifications providers and the synergies between them
- share and exchange appropriate documents, such as a list of the accredited awarding organisations with relevant assurances, in order to further understand and pursue the partnership and roadmap
- encourage and support the relevant quality assurance agencies to work together to establish equivalency of the level of each qualification awarded by relevant, recognised awarding organisations and professional bodies
- notify each other in writing of any concerns regarding either contextualisation of a qualification or quality of delivery at the earliest opportunity
- notify each other in a timely manner of seminars, courses and exchange visits between both countries and, where practicable, consult with the other on the development of seminars, courses and exchange visits.

The British Council being the UK’s international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations will liaise the implementation of the project. The British Council works in more than 110 countries around the world. It works with governments, businesses, teachers, school leaders and civil society partners to improve the quality of school education through its global network of partners and experts.

The project is being conducted to develop a systemic alignment of the NQF and UK Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). The process will include consultation with NQA to address and resolve any points that may arise. The final output will include documented evidence of an agreed alignment between the frameworks.

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**Benefits of a Qualifications Framework**

Before starting to perceive the rationale behind establishing a whole qualifications framework and the benefits that it brings to the education system in the UAE, a clear definition of a ‘qualification’ should be given. A qualification is a formal approval that recognises that an individual has been assessed as achieving learning outcomes related to a compete qualification. The national qualifications framework is the integrated and organised structure for qualifications in the UAE, known as QFEmirates.

The main benefits of QFEmirates are:

- enhancing access to learning opportunities
- creating new learning pathways and arrangements
- helping learners to make informed decisions about education and career progressions
- facilitating lifelong learning
- improving the international mobility of learners and understanding of overseas qualifications through alignment with frameworks in other countries
- assisting in the recognition of informal and non-formal activities.

Overall, the QFEmirates was designed mainly to be the single structure and reference point through which all qualifications can be compared nationally and internationally.
R&D Department

NQA aims to create an evidence base that helps policy makers and practitioners make informed decisions about policy and program development. Research at the NQA focuses on a broad range of cutting edge and high-impact research in adult education and skills, UAE labour market participation, as well as in other areas of human capital and workforce development.

The Authority’s Research and Development (R&D) Department is responsible for:

- monitoring and evaluating the performance of UAE’s education and training system, in particular the system’s performance in meeting labour market needs and building a strong economy as well as the impact of the qualifications framework in developing an internationally competitive workforce
- analysing UAE’s labour market, including industry and occupational trends, current and future workforce needs, and skills gaps and shortages
- identifying any strategies and initiatives that would encourage more Emiratis to participate in education, training and work and provide them with the competencies and capabilities they need to contribute to the country’s well-being and social development.

QFEmirates

The national qualifications framework for the UAE, called the QFEmirates, is a means of facilitating the design of a coherent classification of qualifications. It has been designed to be the single structure and reference point through which all qualifications in a country can be compared nationally and internationally.

The QFEmirates consists of a number of levels (10 levels from Certificate 1 to Doctorate, see Picture 1), related qualifications and titles of qualifications. The framework covers school (general) education, vocational education and training, higher education, work-based training, and professional education and training. It also recognises learning acquired through work and life experiences, voluntary activities, and other informal and non-formal activities.

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 program.

The QFEmirates will help individuals to make decisions about what they want to do next and also to continue learning while working or contributing to their community. It will enable individuals to be recognised for the work they do in the workplace and communities as part of their personal and professional development.

The NQA will continuously update and ensure the quality of UAE qualifications keep pace with economic, technological and social progress, and are internationally recognised. For details, please visit www.nqa.gov.ae.

Picture 1: National Qualifications Framework