The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) is the federal authority responsible for coordinating with relevant entities regarding the development of strategies, plans, policies, and standards for higher education, general education, and technical, vocational, and professional education and training in the United Arab Emirates (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, the NQA plays a significant role in developing the country's VET sector.

**QFEmirates**

The national qualifications framework for the UAE, called the QFEmirates, is a means of facilitating the design of a coherent classification of qualifications. A qualification is a formal approval that recognises that an individual has been assessed as achieving learning outcomes related to a complete qualification. The QFEmirates has been designed to be the single structure and reference point through which all qualifications in the country can be compared nationally and internationally.

The QFEmirates consists of 10 levels (from Certificate 1 to Doctorate, see the picture below), 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.
QFEmirates (cont.)

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.

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.

For details on the QFEmirates, please visit www.nqa.gov.ae.

Alignment Agreement between NQA & UK

On June 30, 2015, the NQA signed an agreement to align the UAE national qualifications and standards systems with the United Kingdom (UK) qualifications, credit hours, and higher education qualifications system. The move represents the beginning of global development of the national qualifications system to match the best international systems. The UAE has a long history of collaboration and support with the UK. Over 200,000 British expats live and work in the country at the present time. Approximately 50,000 Emiratis visit the UK each year.

Among the main results of the alignment is the recognition of vocational and professional qualifications acquired by UAE citizens from British institutions, which have not been so far accredited, provided these qualifications and programmes are accredited in the country of origin, such as England or Scotland, and be within one of the aligned systems.

The alignment project between the NQA and the UK is the first of its kind in the region. It will be the beginning of the project to achieve the alignment with the European qualifications system, and the UAE will be the first country outside of the EU countries to do so.

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 labour market; developing recognition of prior learning (RPL) 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 society.
UNESCO Global Study on Level Descriptors

For the past two years, the NQA has participated in UNESCO’s Global Study on Level Descriptors. UNESCO initiated this study following the Third International Congress on TVET held in Shanghai in 2012. The study is exploring the feasibility of developing:

- international guidelines on quality assurance for the recognition of qualifications based on learning outcomes;
- a set of world reference levels that could facilitate the international recognition of TVET qualifications.

“Having such guidelines and world reference levels would greatly enhance the international mobility of UAE nationals who seek to work and study overseas and have their work experience and qualifications recognised when they return”, said Nourah Al Matrooshi, Executive Director of Qualifications Affairs, NQA.

Key benefits of having world reference levels, as stated in UNESCO’s 2015 report for the study, Level-setting and recognition of learning outcomes – the use of level descriptors in the twenty-first century, are as follows:

Reference point - the world reference levels can contribute by providing a common language and approach to the use of learning outcomes through peer learning and international comparative work;

Transparency tool - similar to regional qualifications frameworks, specifically the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the world reference levels could, in the future, make learning and the recognition of learning more transparent across countries and regions;

Facilitate recognition - ultimately, the world reference levels could impact directly on the recognition of qualifications and learning on a global level;

Normative - the world reference levels become a global standard against which countries and regions benchmark their systems.

The national qualifications framework for the UAE, the QFEmirates, was one of seven NQFs included in the study, which UNESCO described as “a cross-cutting sample of first, second, and third-generation frameworks”. As part of the study, the NQA submitted responses to a series of questions from UNESCO related to the use of learning outcomes in the NQF; drivers for the development of level descriptors; relationship between lifelong learning and level descriptors; recognition of formal, non-formal, and informal learning through level descriptors; and views about the advantages and disadvantages of having a set of world reference levels. UAE’s response to having world reference levels was positive, stating that the “use of meta-meta frameworks (world reference levels), meta frameworks (e.g., EQF), regional frameworks (e.g., Gulf Qualifications Framework), national frameworks, and local frameworks can all co-exist and be useful tools for relevant users in the education, training, and workforce development spectrum.”

The NQA also participated in UNESCO’s comparative study on qualifications cross-borders. This study involved comparing four similar qualifications across the world to identify similarities and differences in regards to their scope, profile and content. The NQA selected the UAE National Vocational Qualification, Diploma in Networking and Systems Support, which was developed for the Computer Networks and System Technician occupation. The exercise involved the NQA gathering information on how the qualification is described in terms of learning outcomes, the roles stakeholders play in this process, how the qualification is structured, and items/categories used for describing and presenting the qualification.

“The findings from this second UNESCO study will be very valuable for the UAE as it will allow us to compare our diploma qualification in networking and systems support to similar qualifications in other countries in the areas described above. The study will also provide us with insights about the qualifications that other countries have developed for the occupations of hotel assistant/receptionist, bricklayer/mason, and health care assistant”, says Nourah Al Matrooshi.
Mutual Cooperation with New Zealand

Following on from the UAE – New Zealand (NZ) joint committee meetings and a signing of MoU with New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) in December 2014, the NQA has hosted three further delegations in February, March, and May 2016, to discuss further areas of mutual cooperation. Representatives from key organisations in NZ joined the discussions on labour market needs and occupational standards across a number of priority employment sectors, such as hospitality, tourism, and retail. In addition, issues regarding the referencing of the QFEmirates to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) were discussed.

H.E. Dr Thani Al Muhairi, Director General, NQA, said “the 2021 Vision of the UAE is to move to being a knowledge economy, increase labour market productivity and competitiveness and cooperation with New Zealand in this key area will contribute to the work done by NQA and other local and federal government authorities to ensure institutes and qualifications prepare students for entry into the workforce”.

Building Strong Ties with India

In February 2016, H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, paid a state visit to the Republic of India in order to strengthen the relationship between the two governments in trade, investment, economic development, culture, security, international and regional cooperation, etc. During the visit, a Letter of Intent was signed between the NQA and the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship of India, which was followed by an MoU signed by H.E. Dr. Thani Al Mehairy, Director General, NQA, and H.E. Rohit Nandan, Undersecretary of the Ministry, on April 29, 2016.

The agreement addresses several areas of common interest, such as the development of a common framework for skills based on the basic principles and criteria for the national qualifications frameworks and related mechanisms, quality systems and outcomes, mutual recognition of qualifications and certification systems, etc. They all contribute to the development of human resources in both countries in terms of educational and vocational training and technical qualifications as well as quality control of the knowledge and skills of the workforce in the labour market.

H.E. Dr. Thani Al Mehairy praised the signing of the MoU and future cooperation aimed at the mapping of the national qualifications frameworks in two countries and creating the strategy and joint mechanism for the development of occupations matrixes and the standards of the skills and knowledge required for the labour market, which will have a positive effect on the match between the qualifications awarded and available job opportunities.

NQA aims to expand cooperation between the two countries and currently examines Indian qualifications in regard to the QFEmirates requirements.

MoU with Bahrain

The NQA signed an MoU with the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training in the Kingdom of Bahrain, in order to align the National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) of the two countries. The MoU aims to support and encourage cooperation in the education and training sector between the two countries.

A further aim of the MoU is to exchange expertise about developing and applying NQFs in order to best serve qualification holders in both countries, and to explore developing vocational skills standards and matching them to the requirements of the job market.

NQA signs an MoU with NZQA

NQA signs MoU with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship of India

NQA signs MoU with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship of India
Working Together with South Africa

H.E. Dr Thani Al Muhairi presented the NQA and the UAE at the 20th anniversary seminar of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) entitled Qualifications Frameworks (QFs): Agenda Towards 2030 held in Pretoria, South Africa, in May 2016. Dr. Thani focused on NQA’s role in the UAE, new QFs modernisation challenges and other global and regional recognition mechanisms designed to facilitate qualifications, student, academic, labour, and professional mobility.

Celebrating the 20th year of SAQA, representatives from qualifications authorities from all over the world came to share their experiences over the past two decades as well as their visions for the future of QFs.

At the same time as the conference, the NQA and SAQA took the opportunity to cement the relationship between the two countries by signing an MoU to promote the cooperation and advancement of understanding in the pursuit of the development of qualifications, skills, and qualifications frameworks comparison and mapping.

The UNESCO Experts meeting on World Reference Levels of learning outcomes took place after the conference and the NQA represented the GCC countries.

UNESCO's Expert Group on RVA

The NQA is a member of UNESCO’s Expert Group on Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of basic education for youth and adults as a foundation for lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is essential for building a sustainable society. The Expert Group aims to examine the way in which non-formal youth and adult literacy and basic education may be better integrated into national RVA frameworks through sensitive policies, operational systems, and supportive mechanisms. At a planning meeting of an Expert Group on RVA that took place in Paris (UNESCO headquarters) on February 18-19, 2016, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Pilot Project recently launched by the NQA was presented.

Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

In February 2016, the NQA-approved awarding body, Qualifications and Awards in Dubai (QAD) at the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), launched its Recognition of Qualifications Service. More than 70 individuals with vocational education qualifications earned internationally received their certificates.

The first phase of the service involves recognising qualifications from countries without a framework as well as professional qualifications. All credentials will be aligned with the QFEmirates.

The recognition of the foreign qualifications is considered by many as a positive start in keeping pace with the needs and requirements of different sectors of work at the national level, which enhances UAE’s position as a training and professional development destination.

The recognition service will help in the development of a nationally qualified workforce with a view to meet the growing demand for skilled labour, in line with the expectations of Expo 2020 Dubai.
Our International Activities

- Kamal Ben Selama, General Education Expert, NQA, presented the NQA at an international education conference entitled Salon Marocain de l’Education held in Morocco in April 2016, and addressed audience members from 15 different countries, as well as representatives from UNESCO and UNISEF. The NQA submitted two papers, one about the UAE’s education model and the other about future directions of general education in the UAE, as well as discussing the teacher licensing project and improvements for school leadership. The discussions highlighted the unique education system and how it is modelled to match the requirements of a knowledge economy and indicators of the UAE Vision 2021, UAE national agenda.

- On November 3-5, 2015, the NQA participated in a public education evaluation conference entitled Evaluation in the Kingdom: a Prelude to Education Quality and Development held by the Public Education Evaluation Commission (PEEC) in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The participation in the conference aimed at strengthening the bonds as well as exchanging expertise and successful experiences among specialists in education and training sectors from the Gulf and other countries.

Nourah Al Matrooshi, Executive Director of Qualifications Affairs, NQA, presented a paper entitled The Impact of Education on Economic Growth, which emphasises the importance of the national qualifications framework in order to meet the UAE’s labour market requirements and its role in building and developing the national skilled labour in response to the country’s wise leadership for achieving innovation and international competitiveness.

- In July and August 2015, a delegation from the NQA paid an official visit to Australia and New Zealand. The visit aimed at exposing the delegates to mechanisms of qualifying, registering, and licensing teachers and school leaders in the two countries, familiarising the members with the electronic systems employed by New Zealand Qualifications Authority in performing specialisations such as the development of national occupational skills standards and vocational qualifications, registration of training providers, verification of foreign qualifications, data entry of national exam results, and others.

Nourah Al Matrooshi delivered a presentation entitled Qualification Frameworks: Building International Bridges in the key panel session of the conference. The presentation emphasised that in the context of global growth and competition, nations are eager to develop workforces that are both skilled and mobile. National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) are an important tool in achieving this goal. Nourah highlighted the main obstacles usually faced while implementing NQFs.

- Going Global 2015, held in London, UK, on June 1-2, 2015, under the theme Connecting Cultures, Forging Futures, attracted over 1000 delegates from around the world. Going Global is an annual conference hosted by the British Council. It brings together leaders of international education to discuss issues facing the education and training community. The conference focuses on the creative connections established through bringing together diverse cultures, people and ideas, and how these connections could result in innovation.

Nourah Al Matrooshi delivered a presentation entitled Going Global 2015.