

Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE)
Accreditation and Quality Assurance
Commission (AQAC)

PALESTINIAN
NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS
FRAMEWORK (NQF)*

*Based on Arab Qualifications Framework (AQF) - ANQAHE Model 2012 and Palestinian NQF 2013

Introduction

Many countries have developed or are considering developing and implementing national qualifications frameworks. These developments have strong international implications, especially after the emergence of regional or transnational qualifications frameworks. Whereas the earlier qualifications frameworks were meant mainly to strengthen the linkages between qualifications within a single country, nowadays qualifications frameworks are being developed in order to strengthen links both nationally and internationally.

Palestine is developing a National Qualification Framework (NQF) to trigger mutual learning, to facilitate student mobility and mutual recognition, and ultimately to make progress in economic prosperity and social integration.

There is a large degree of commonality evident in the underpinning principles of qualification frameworks developed by different nations and awarding authorities. Differences between frameworks become evident in the detailed hierarchy of levels and the assignment of particular qualifications to the levels. The proposed NQF has been researched and developed with acknowledged input from the regional and international frameworks already published, or under development.

Overview on Palestinian Education and Training Systems

Since the Palestinian Authority took over responsibility for education in 1994, the educational system in Palestine has steadily improved. In spite of the harsh political and economic circumstances that the Palestinian people are living in as a result of the Israeli occupation, particularly in the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, as well as the Apartheid Wall that has segregated the Palestinian Territories and increased difficulty of access to educational institutions, the Palestinians have managed to offer quality education, to combat illiteracy and make education available to all.

The structure of the education system in Palestine consists of a two-year cycle of pre-school education, ten years of compulsory basic education, two years of secondary academic or vocational education after which the students sit for a General Certificate of Secondary Education Exam - Tawjihi. In addition to post- secondary higher education, there are non-formal education and training schemes.

Pre-school Education (kindergarten):

Education by pre-school kindergartens is provided for children aged between 4 and 6 years, and nurseries for children under the age of 4 years. The attendance of this phase is not compulsory.

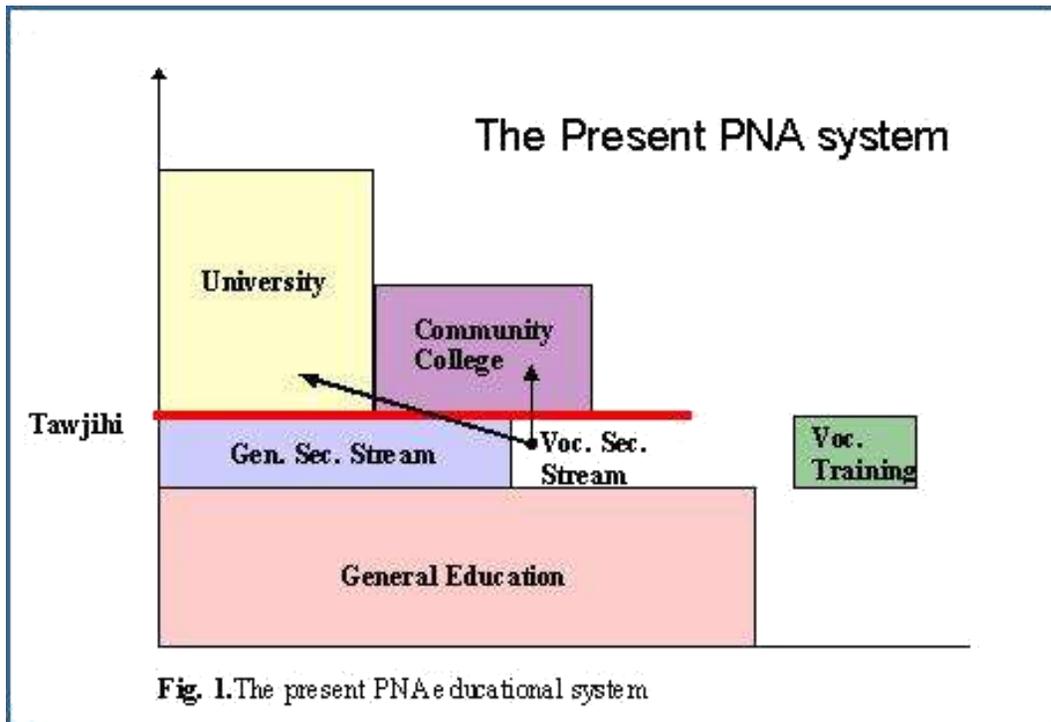
Basic Education:

Compulsory level of basic education begins at the age of six, when students enroll in the first step of the main stage, which lasts for ten years until the end of tenth grade.

Secondary Education:

After the completion of the basic level of compulsory education, the secondary education is divided into several sections, namely:

- i. Academic secondary education: Its duration is two years in both streams of Scientific and Human Sciences where the students must undertake a general examination - Tawjihi, after which they can join higher education.
- ii. Vocational secondary education: Its duration is two years and divided into the following branches: industrial, commercial, agricultural, home economics and hotel management. They prepare the students for Technical Tawjihi exams, after which students are enabled to enter the labor market in the learned vocation or to enroll in Community Colleges and Universities in certain professions.



Higher Education:

Students access higher education after finishing secondary education and pass the Tawjihi exam. Higher education is divided into two tracks:

- i. Education in University College, Community College, or Technical College: The students study for a period of two years. They get an **Associate diploma** certificate and sit at the same time for the comprehensive examination.
- ii. University education: The students study for 4 to 6 years to get a **Bachelor's** degree in science, education or humanities, engineering or medicine. Universities also offer post-bachelor's programs where they award **Higher diploma** for a one year period, **Master's** degree for a period of two years, and **doctoral** degree (in some disciplines) for not less than three years period.

Purpose of the NQF:

Qualifications Framework is: A reference structure as an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. It aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications' subsystems and to improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labor market and civil society.

The NQF is constructed in order to:

- Provide a single translational reference point to compare qualifications nationally, regionally and internationally
- Provide a regional benchmark of qualified graduates, defined in a common language
- Address the need for transparent mechanisms for assuring quality for the country, employers, community and students
- Provide guidance in designating and developing new qualifications
- Provide an instrument to maintain parity in the demands and expectations of qualifications set at the same level
- Help students make informed decisions about their education and training progression, mobility between levels, institutions, and in relation to employment opportunities;
- Serve as an indicator of occupational and employment relevance
- Provide an additional tool for implementation of standards through quality assurance agencies, ministries and the national authorities and regulators of higher education
- Indicate the outcomes required from programs/courses set at equivalent levels in national frameworks within the region

Structure of the NQF (Levels, Level Descriptors and Level Indicators):

LEVELS:

The Qualifications Framework comprises a number of levels each representing a hierarchy of relative complexity and depth of study. The Palestinian NQF consists of 8 levels, reflecting widespread international practice, thus aiding mutual recognition of qualifications between countries. The 8 levels provide sufficient range to accommodate the full range of distinctive levels represented in existing qualifications, and scope for future development of qualifications. The 8 level structures can be readily related to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Bologna Framework.

DESCRIPTORS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES:

The learning outcomes in the NQF are described in terms of 3 domains or strands; knowledge, skills, and competencies. The learning outcomes associated with each level of qualification are used to distinguish the levels within the framework.

Table 1: Qualifications Framework – Level Descriptors for NQF

Characteristics of the Qualifications Framework

The following grid includes learning outcomes at each of 5 Higher Education levels within the 8-level framework. These are grouped into 3 domains - Knowledge, Skills, and Competencies, and in each domain there is an increase in complexity of the learning that is expected at successively higher levels.

Note on reading *level descriptors*:

- The descriptor statements defining any particular level should be read concurrently across all three strands of outcomes to affirm a level.
- The level descriptors are cumulative: e.g. the descriptor for level 7 assumes the inclusion of all of the outcomes in the preceding levels 6 and 5.
- The level descriptors should be considered as threshold outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated by learners on successful completion of an academic or professional course or program
- If a qualification shares the same level as another qualification, they are broadly similar in the demands they place on the learner, but they may differ in terms of content and duration of study.

Level	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	COMPETENCE
8	<p>Doctoral Degree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new knowledge, as judged by independent experts, created through research or scholarship, that contributes to the development of a subject/ field of work or learning • a thorough understanding of a substantial body of advanced knowledge at the frontier of a field or discipline, and at the interface between different fields; 	<p>Doctoral Degree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a range of advanced and specialized skills and techniques, including synthesis, evaluation and reflection, required to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice or to contribute to new and original knowledge; • advanced skills in developing innovative solutions to critical problems in research using highly developed cognitive and creative expert skills and intellectual independence to the field of work or learning; • formal and informal leadership skills to enhance the effectiveness of teams; • highly developed expert communication and information technology skills to present, explain and/or critique highly complex and diverse matters to specialist academic and professional audiences. 	<p>Doctoral Degree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • substantial authority, creativity, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity in a sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes or systems in challenging and novel professional or academic contexts; • overall governance of high level processes and systems; • leadership in building and transforming socio-cultural norms and relationships; • critical analysis of the state of learning in a field and contribute to its advancement; • initiative and originality in managing complex professional processes; • sensitive handling of complex ethical issues leading to informed and fair judgments; • a capacity to lead and take full responsibility for the development and strategic deployment of professional teams and self.

Master:

- advanced knowledge and understanding of the main theories, principles and concepts in a discipline or field, and their current application to academic inquiry or professional practice;
- advanced knowledge of applicable research principles and methods;
- critical awareness of knowledge issues, as the basis for original thinking in the discipline and at the interface between different fields, encompassing appropriate and current processes of enquiry and knowledge production.

Masters:

- specialized skills required in research, analysis, evaluation and/or innovation of complex ideas, information, concepts and/or activities;
- planning skills to develop and execute a major project, with appropriately selected research methodologies, producing sound conclusions;
- advanced problem-solving skills applied to a specialist field and the integration of knowledge from different fields of work or learning to solve complex unpredictable and/or abstract problems;
- creative skills to analyze complex issues and develop conclusions and proposals relevant to an academic or professional field;
- highly developed specialist communication and information technology skills to present, explain and/or critique highly complex matters.

Masters:

- Independent responsibility for managing professional practice or work, processes or systems, or learning contexts, that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches and/or intervention or conceptual abstract solutions;
- overall governance of processes and systems;
- analysis and reflection on socio-cultural norms and relationships and act to build and transform them;
- development and implementation of further learning, consistently and sensitively in accord with ethical standards;
- initiative and management of professional activities, working autonomously or in close cooperation with others;
- responsibility for leading the strategic performance and development of professional teams and self.

Higher Diploma:

- a thorough knowledge and understanding of the main theories, principles and concepts in a discipline or field of professional practice, and their current application to professional practice;
- knowledge of current research and innovations in professional practice and the impact of these developments on accepted theory and practice;
- a critical approach to a systematic and coherent body of knowledge and concepts gained from a range of sources.

Higher Diploma:

- problem-solving skills required to develop new knowledge and procedures, and to integrate knowledge from different fields using highly developed cognitive skills;
- the ability to identify appropriate sources of information or analytical techniques to inform investigations that lead to conclusions and solutions to problems;
- the capacity to work effectively on an individual basis or in a team situation in a wide range of circumstances, including new situations requiring tact and sensitivity;
- highly developed communication and information technology skills to present, explain and/or critique substantively complex matters.

Higher Diploma:

- responsibility for developing and implementing new or creative approaches to managing complex work processes and organization, resources or learning, including leading and working within teams on a technical or professional activity;
- self-evaluation and responsibility for contributing to professional practice in complex and sometimes unfamiliar learning contexts;
- a high standard of ethical behavior in situations involving value conflicts and competing priorities;
- management of professional activities having a positive influence on others.

Bachelor Degree:

- a broad body of factual knowledge and an understanding of the underlying theories and principles and boundaries in a field of work or learning;
- an understanding of related knowledge and theories in other disciplines and, in the case of professional programs, other allied professional fields;
- in programs preparing students for professional practice, knowledge of relevant conventions, regulations and codes, and how these may be modified over time with changing circumstances.

Bachelor Degree:

- cognitive skills to critically review, analyze, consolidate and synthesize knowledge as a basis for life-long learning;
- skills to investigate relatively complex problems using a range of information technologies, quantitative techniques, and sources of knowledge, and to recommend creative and innovative solutions;
- initiative to identify issues requiring investigation and to address them on an individual or team basis with appropriate methods, procedures or techniques, leading to identified solutions;
- effective communication and information technology skills to present and explain complex matters to a range of audiences;
- Interpersonal skills to deal with ethical and professional issues with tact, sensitivity and respect for the views of others.

Bachelor Degree:

- responsibility for developing new approaches to evaluating relatively complex and unpredictable work procedures and processes;
- management of technical, supervisory or design processes in unpredictable contexts;
- self-evaluation and responsibility for contributing to professional practice, and undertake regular professional development and/or further learning
- autonomy in technical and supervisory contexts and adopt professional roles with minimal guidance;
- responsibility for the setting and achievement of group or individual tasks and outcomes, and for the management of the work of others or self in the context of study or supervised professional practice;
- participation in activities to keep up-to-date with developments in their academic or professional field to enhance their own knowledge and skills;
- a high level of ethical and responsible behavior and provide leadership in academic, professional and community environments.

4	<p>Associate Diploma:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge of important facts, principles and theories in a field of study and of regulations and operating procedures relevant to a professional field; • familiarity with important current developments in professional practice, and recent applied research. 	<p>Associate Diploma:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • technical, creative and conceptual skills, and, with some guidance, be able to solve routine problems and evaluate alternative solutions; • a comprehensive range of specialist cognitive and practical skills to demonstrate a broad understanding of knowledge and ideas with some depth in the discipline; • use of appropriate information retrieval tools and strategies associated with the field of work or learning; • ability to identify weaknesses in own knowledge and skills and plan for and take action to provide for continued learning; • capacity to think and act independently, but interact constructively in groups in pursuit of common objectives; • numeracy skills to apply in an assortment of contexts, which may be interrelated; • communication and information technology skills to make a clear and coherent presentation of knowledge and ideas with some intellectual independence. 	<p>Associate Diploma:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responsibility for developing appropriate approaches for managing work procedures and processes, and resources or learning, within a technical or professional activity; • within broad parameters, the ability to provide specialist advice and functions; • management of technical, supervisory or design processes in varied, unpredictable and unfamiliar contexts; • initiative to function independently and contribute constructively within teams; • behavior in accordance with sound ethical standards in the context of learning and the work place; • evaluation of own learning and identify learning needs in a familiar and unfamiliar environment; • adoption of professional roles under guidance.
3	Secondary School Certificate		
2			
1			

The Concept of Credit Hours:

The academic credit provides a basis to measure the amount of engaged learning time expected of a typical student. A credit, or credit hour, is a unit of measurement defining the student's overall effort towards attaining a qualification.

In the US system, which is adopted by Palestinian institutions, 1 semester credit equals approximately 1 hour of time in class per week over a semester of 15 weeks or longer. It is assumed that a student spends at least two hours outside of class in independent learning or specific course assignments for every hour in class. This implies that one academic credit equates to a 45 hour commitment to learning over a semester. For laboratory or studio-based courses, the allocation of credit differs; 1 semester credit normally is given for three hours of laboratory or studio time per week over a 15-week semester.

The UK system considers a single credit to be equal to 10 learning hours, of which approximately one-third may be class contact time, and the remainder divided between directed and independent learning. On this basis the normal full load for a semester is 60 credits.

Resulting from the Bologna Process in Europe, aimed at facilitating student mobility in higher education, the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) represents another alternative credit definition. In the ECTS system, 60 credits are allocated to the workload of a full-time academic year, 30 credits are normally allocated to a semester and 20 credits to a trimester. Qualifications that have formal programs lasting three full-time academic years in Europe are allocated 180 ECTS credits.

In the following sections of this NQF document the US system of credit hours will be used as a reference figure to which other credit awarding systems can be equated.

Characteristics of Principal Qualifications:

The following sections articulate the general characteristics associated with the levels and principal qualifications identified in the NQF (Table 2).

Level 3: Entry to Higher Education

The qualifications framework is based on the fact that students entering higher education must have completed a full program of secondary education and passed the national general secondary examination (Tawjihi) or equivalent, and acquired the knowledge and skill to participate effectively in their chosen field of study in higher education, including a good background in oral and written competence in the language of instruction, the ability to think creatively and apply knowledge and cognitive skills gained from study of relevant disciplines, and the ability to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning. It also includes any prerequisites

for study in different fields. Students who have clearly met these requirements at the level expected may proceed direct to the higher education programs described in the framework.

Level 4: Associate Diploma

This qualification requires a minimum of 66 credit hours (US credit hours system – see above definition) normally following two years of full-time study or equivalent in higher education. Associate diploma is designed to develop both the knowledge and skills for employment in an administrative or Para-professional field, and the foundation of general and theoretical knowledge that provides the basis for further studies leading to a bachelor's degree. Both these elements are important though the emphasis on general or professionally related study may vary. Where a diploma is awarded with a specific field descriptor relating to an occupational field there should be sufficient coverage of directly related knowledge and skill for employment in that field, normally involving at least at least 50% of the program.

Level 5: Bachelor

This qualification requires a minimum of 120 credit hours, normally following four academic years of full-time study or equivalent. There are differing expectations for length of programs in different fields of professional study and programs. The minimum number of 120 credit hours of studies applies to all bachelor's degree programs, but reference should also be made to professional study requirements for professional fields. Where longer programs are required for bachelor's degrees, as they are in certain fields, the level remains the same, but additional credits are given to recognize the greater amount of learning required.

A bachelor's degree program is designed to develop a comprehensive understanding of a broad field of study, with some studies taken to considerable depth and involving critical analysis of the latest developments and research. Students should be aware of relevant knowledge and theory in other related fields of learning.

A bachelor's degree is the basic qualification for entry to a number of highly skilled professional fields, and programs in these fields should develop both the knowledge and skill to practice in those professions, and the background in practical and theoretical knowledge and research to proceed to further study.

Level 6: Higher Diploma

This qualification requires a minimum of 30 credit hours, normally following completion of a bachelor's degree and taken over a period of at least one academic year or equivalent part time period of study. The programs are intended to provide advanced academic and professional studies beyond the level of a bachelor's degree for students who want to improve professional skill and knowledge but do not meet entry requirements for a master's degree, or do not wish to

undertake the research or major project work required for such a degree. Vocational post graduate diplomas normally involve advanced professionally related coursework and may require completion of a major or minor project.

Although intended as a final qualification, students completing a post graduate diploma may proceed to further study at master's level, but may be required to meet special admission requirements or complete additional theoretical or applied studies before doing so.

Level 7: Master's Degree

This qualification requires a minimum of 36 credit hours which may be made up of course work plus a thesis in a research degree program, or course work plus a significant project, or course work with embedded research methodology. Masters degrees normally involve at least one year and up to three years of advanced study following completion of a bachelor's degree.

Master's degrees are designed to provide very advanced academic and professional knowledge and skill for students who have completed a bachelor's degree with a high level of achievement, normally a GPA of 3.0 (good) or equivalent.

Master's degrees aimed at advanced professional expertise may involve a significant independent project applying learning gained to issues or problems in their field, together with advanced coursework.

Research master's degrees based on a thesis, are normally awarded with the title of MA or MSc. Professional master's degrees based on advanced coursework or coursework and major project are normally awarded with the title of MBus, MBA, MEd, MEng, or other field descriptor for the professional field concerned.

Level 8: Doctorate Degree

This qualification requires a minimum of 30 credit hours for advanced coursework plus a major thesis (about 18 credit hours) normally taken over three full-time academic years or equivalent following a Masters degree. An alternative program structure with greater concentration on independent research is available in selected fields at some institutions, depending on the Standards of the relevant Quality Assurance Agency.

Doctoral programs involve substantial advanced independent scholarship, mastery of the most recent developments in a major field of inquiry, and the creation, interpretation and application of knowledge in a way that adds significantly to the development of a subject, discipline or professional field. Programs may focus on independent research that results in a thesis adding to existing knowledge, or involve a combination of advanced coursework and thesis in a professional or applied field. Research doctorates are normally awarded with the title of PhD.

Qualifications Credit Matrix

The following Table 2 ‘*Qualification Credit Matrix for Higher Education*’ presents principal qualifications that are commonly found internationally and are likely to be represented within the existing portfolio NQF. Indicative credit hours (US credit hours system) are presented along with the indicative volume of learning in years following secondary education, although this may be subject to considerable variation in different educational environments. It should also be noted that the Qualifications Framework is based on the notion of Outcomes (*Outcomes or Learning Outcomes are the expression of the set of knowledge, skills or competencies that a learner has acquired and can demonstrate on successful completion of the course/module or program*), and to that extent should be considered as independent of any set time-frame. Indicative duration of study in Table 2 is expressed in relation to completion of secondary/high school education

Table 2: Qualification Credit Matrix for Academic Higher Education

Level	Academic Qualification	US Credits (Minimum)	Minimum Duration (Years FT)
8	Doctorate Degree	48	3 years post- Master’s degree
7	Master’s Degree	36	2 years post-Bachelor’s degree)
6	Higher Diploma	30	1 years
5	Bachelor’s Degree	120	4 years
4	Associate Diploma	66	2 years
3	Secondary	N/A	2 years
2	Basic	-	10 years
1	Pre-school	-	1 year

Implementation and Verification of the Qualifications Framework

The intended beneficiaries of qualifications frameworks generally are considered to be the learners/students, employers and developers/designers of curricula and training programs. The framework provides general descriptors corresponding to each level that requires interpretation and contextualization in the specific discipline field and program of study/training. Prior to the availability of such frameworks of reference, decisions regarding the appropriateness of qualification titles and levels was in the hands of experienced individuals e.g. external examiners, moderators, external reviewers and internal institutional staff with extensive educational expertise. Quality Assurance Agencies (QAAs) have generally required that international expertise is deployed to provide an opinion on the suitability of qualification titles in relation to the curriculum content, learning outcomes, rigor and assessment strategies used to measure the achievement of outcomes. The aim has been to judge the program of study against widespread international practice in the relevant field. The qualification framework now provides a transparent reference tool to be used by agencies and individuals in the program accreditation/validation exercises.

Quality Assurance Agencies can reasonably expect that the qualification framework is used within institutions to inform the design, delivery and review of its programs of study. Internal Quality Assurance Units would provide the guidance to departments and furnish the mechanisms for ensuring and monitoring that due attention is given to the framework in its reviews and reporting structures. This internal moderation might, and should involve an exercise in benchmarking of standards with other institutions nationally, regionally or internationally.

To complement and enforce the internal verification procedure would be the role of external Quality Assurance Agencies as appropriate for the national system. Agency staff and the reviewers used by the Agency must be trained and wholly familiar with the framework such that it can be used and referenced in making judgments of compliance with the level descriptors.

Using this NQF, it would be reasonable to expect programs to demonstrate that:

- program outcomes are expressed appropriately to reflect the relevant level in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies to be achieved by successful students;
- evidence can be produced to show that the standards of outcomes are realistically achieved by the graduating students;
- the title of the qualification is accurate, appropriate, and in accordance with the framework;
- the credit hours required to complete the qualification are within ranges indicated by the framework and in accordance with good international practice in the field of study.

The NQF specifically would be of primary use to AQAC in its task of ensuring international parity of standards for its qualifications. It is anticipated that alignment of individual national frameworks with the NQF would facilitate regional mobility of qualifications, and parity of

standards achieved across the levels and disciplines represented by the available range of qualifications.

Relationship between Academic and Professional Requirements

There is a significant difference between academic programs that focus on research and transmission of knowledge in fields that are not directly related to professional employment, and others that are designed to provide students with the high levels of knowledge and skill required for professional occupations.

The two categories are not mutually exclusive; academic studies should develop abilities that would be of great value in employment as well as in everyday life, and professional programs should involve thorough understanding of research and theoretical knowledge in the field of study and in related areas, and develop general thinking and problem solving abilities that are applicable in any context. However, there is a difference in emphasis that should be reflected in the detailed content of programs and in the titles of awards. The distinction has particular significance for programs that lead to the professional registration of graduates.

Completion of a higher education program at a licensed/accredited institution, and the granting of an academic award, frequently carries with it the right to practice in a profession. Consequently, it is important to consider not only the levels of knowledge and skill that programs are intended to develop, but also the particular knowledge and skill that is necessary for the professions for which students are being prepared. This involves both what is commonly included in comparable programs in other countries, and any particular requirements relevant to the country in which the program operates.

The NQF establishes levels and generic skill requirements for all academic awards. Further work is required to determine the special knowledge and skill requirements for various professional occupations. Palestine has already undertaken work to establish occupational standards of relevance to significant employment sectors in the country. Institutions must accept responsibility through their program development and evaluation procedures for ensuring that the requirements for professional practice are met, and criteria for accreditation will include the adequacy of those procedures.

Recognition of Prior Learning

In many cases students will commence higher education studies directly after completion of secondary (High School) education and will undertake full programs in higher education institutions that are consistent with the levels and credits described in the framework.

In other cases students may have developed important skills and knowledge through informal education systems or in employment, or have taken further studies beyond the level of basic education in technical training or other further education institutions.

In principle, students should not be required to duplicate learning they have already acquired or repeat work they have already completed satisfactorily elsewhere. They should be given ‘advanced standing’ (*Definition of Advanced Standing: credit for studies completed elsewhere, granted to a student by a college or university. This grant of credit may enable students to enter a program of study at a later point in the sequence of courses*) when it can be demonstrated that they have knowledge and skill relevant to their specific field of study that are substantially equivalent to the learning outcomes described in the framework, and be permitted to proceed to further studies in a flexible way. On the other hand it is of little benefit to students if they are expected to proceed with studies for which they do not have adequate background. It is also important that where institutions have identified special student attributes that reflect their particular mission and objectives, students admitted with advanced standing have the time required developing those special attributes.

Institutions should develop policies and processes to evaluate the background of students who might be considered for advanced standing towards academic awards, and provide counselling and guidance for those who are admitted in this way. They should also monitor the performance of these students and adjust the processes and criteria they use if required.

Definitions

Qualifications System: All aspects of a country activity that result in the recognition of learning. It includes the means of developing and establishing a national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, and quality assurance processes assessment and awarding processes, etc.

Qualification Types: At each level in the framework there is one, or several, qualification types which share common features.

Qualification Type Descriptors: a description of a class of qualifications which share common features on the same level.

Levels: The architecture of an NQF is based on levels. Levels are a series of sequential steps in the sense of a hierarchy of standards of knowledge, skills and competence.

Level Descriptors: Level descriptors are the full set of descriptions for all dimensions of learning outcomes on a certain level.

Level Indicators: Levels are specified by formal criteria, the level indicators. The indicators reflect an ordered indication of ranges of standards and are broad descriptions of learning outcomes at a given level in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.

Qualification: can be obtained through:

- (i) successful completion of a full educational program
- (ii) successful completion of a stage of an educational program; or

(iii) validation/recognition of acquired knowledge, skills and competences independent of participation in a formal educational program. The official confirmation, usually in the form of a document, certifies the successful completion of an educational program, a stage of a program or validates/recognizes acquired knowledge, skills and competences.

Learning Outcomes:

Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of learning process in terms of qualifications according to standards.

Knowledge: The cognitive representation of ideas, facts, principles, events or happenings. It can be learned from practical or professional experience as well as from formal instruction or study and can comprise description, understanding, thinking, analysis, synthesis, debate and research. In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as *theoretical and/or factual*.

Skills: The learned ability to perform a function that in some way responds to or manipulates the physical, informational or social environment of the individual. It incorporates the procedural knowledge required to carry out a task. Skills may be assessed directly or implied from performance. The NQF level descriptors refer to *cognitive* (use of logical, intuitive, creative and conceptual thinking) and *practical* (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, techniques, processes, materials, tools and instruments), *in the context of EQF*.

Competence: The effective and creative deployment of knowledge and skills, including general, social and civic, as well as specific occupational contexts. Aspects of competence also encompass the learner's ability to transcend these through further learning, practice and reflection. In the context of EQF, competence is defined in terms of responsibility and autonomy.