

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK- ANQAHE MODEL

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The proposed Arab Qualifications Framework (AQF) provides a common reference point for ANQAHE members engaged in developing or modifying Qualifications Frameworks for Higher Education. This presentation articulates the general characteristics associated with the Levels and principal qualifications identified in the qualifications framework model proposed for adoption by ANQAHE.

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.

The fact that so many countries are part of similar developments enhances the need for information and exchange of experience. The Arab countries, by virtue of their common language and geographical proximity, are developing an Arab Qualification Framework (AQF). The broad aims of the AQF are to trigger mutual learning from these developments, to improve the relevance of learning systems, and ultimately to make progress in economic prosperity and social integration.

As part of its mission and objectives, ANQAHE has taken the initiative of developing the Arab Qualifications Framework for higher education levels and qualification (hereafter referred to as the AQF).

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 AQF has been researched and developed with acknowledged input from the national frameworks already published in the region, or under development, namely those in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates; and also with cognizance of international frameworks such as the recently revised Australian framework, and reference to translational frameworks from Europe, namely the EQF and Bologna Frameworks.

The objective in developing the AQF model is to provide a common reference point and guidance for ANQAHE members engaged in developing or modifying qualifications frameworks, relevant to the qualifications awarded in their universities and colleges of higher education. The level of detail provided in the AQF goes beyond that required for a translational framework and thus it could be used to inform and guide the *de novo* development of national frameworks within the ANQAHE network. The common language and concepts used in the AQF, and the range of qualifications embraced within the levels, should facilitate easier alignment of national frameworks across the region. With introduction of the AQF an appreciation of the common characteristics of qualifications awarded in higher education will be helpful in creating an overarching framework to accommodate both similarities and differences within national systems.

Purpose of the Arab Qualification Framework (AQF):

The AQF 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, rigor and consistency of regional qualifications for the country, employers, community and students;
- provide guidance in designing 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 other 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 Arab Qualifications Framework:

The architecture of the AQF has structural features in common with many international qualifications frameworks and uses widely adopted terminology.

LEVELS: The Qualifications Framework comprises a number of levels representing a hierarchy of relative complexity of learning. The AQF covers 10 levels, reflecting widespread international practice, thus aiding mutual recognition of qualifications between nations. The 10 levels provides sufficient increments to accommodate the full range of distinctive levels represented in existing national qualifications present in the region, and scope for future development of qualifications. The 10-level structure can be readily referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Bologna Framework. Referencing exercises, such as those carried out with the Scottish and Irish Frameworks in relation to the translational EQF, will be necessary in future to precisely define the relationship between levels and qualifications in national Arab frameworks and those defined in the overarching AQF.

DESCRIPTORS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES: The learning outcomes associated with each level of qualification are used to distinguish the levels within the framework. The use of ‘outcomes’, now a widely accepted concept in international curricula, provides a common language to aid international alignments and mobility for individual learners.

The learning outcomes in the proposed AQF are described in terms of 3 domains or strands that align with the following broadly accepted definitions of Knowledge, Skills and Competencies:

- **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 the European Qualifications Framework, 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. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are defined as *cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)*.
- **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 the European Qualifications Framework, competence is defined in terms of *responsibility and autonomy*.

Table 1: Qualifications Framework – Level Descriptors for AQF

Characteristics of the Qualifications Framework

The following grid includes learning outcomes at each of 6 Higher Education levels within the 10-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.

Notes on reading level descriptors:

- The level 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 | Competencies |
|-------|--|--|---|
| 10 | <p>Graduates of a Doctoral Degree will have:</p> <p>a thorough understanding of a substantial body of advanced knowledge at the frontier of a professional field or discipline, and at the interface between different fields;</p> <p>new knowledge, as judged by independent experts applying international standards, created through research or scholarship, that contributes to the development of a professional field of work or learning.</p> | <p>Graduates of a Doctoral Degree will have:</p> <p>a range of the most 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;</p> <p>advanced skills in developing innovative solutions to critical problems in research using highly developed cognitive and creative expert skills with intellectual independence in the field of work or learning;</p> <p>formal and informal leadership skills to enhance the effectiveness of teams;</p> <p>highly developed expert communication and information technology skills to present, explain and/or critique highly complex and diverse matters to specialist academic and/or professional audiences.</p> | <p>Graduates of a Doctoral Degree will be able to demonstrate:</p> <p>substantial autonomy, creativity, authority, scholarly and professional integrity in a sustained commitment to the development of new ideas, processes or systems, in challenging and novel professional or academic contexts;</p> <p>overall governance of high level processes and systems;</p> <p>leadership in building and transforming socio-cultural norms and relationships;</p> <p>initiative and originality in managing complex professional processes;</p> <p>sensitive handling of complex ethical issues leading to informed and fair judgments;</p> <p>a capacity to lead and take full responsibility for the development and strategic deployment of professional teams and self.</p> |

| Level | Knowledge | Skills | Competencies |
|-------|--|---|--|
| 9 | <p>Graduates of a Masters Degree will have:</p> <p>advanced knowledge and understanding of the main theories, principles and concepts in a discipline or field of professional practice, and their current application to academic inquiry or professional practice;</p> <p>advanced knowledge of applicable research principles and methods;</p> <p>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.</p> | <p>Graduates of a Masters Degree will have:</p> <p>specialized skills required in research, analysis, evaluation and/or innovation of complex ideas, information, concepts and/or activities;</p> <p>planning skills to develop and execute a major project, with appropriately selected research methodologies, producing sound conclusions;</p> <p>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;</p> <p>creative skills to analyze complex issues and develop conclusions and proposals relevant to an academic or professional field;</p> <p>highly developed specialist communication and information technology skills to present, explain and/or critique substantively complex matters.</p> | <p>Graduates of a Masters Degree will be able to demonstrate:</p> <p>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;</p> <p>general governance of processes and systems;</p> <p>analysis and reflection on socio-cultural norms and relationships and act to build and transform them;</p> <p>development and implementation of further learning;</p> <p>initiative and management of professional activities, working autonomously or in close cooperation with others;</p> <p>responsibility for the strategic performance and development of professional teams and self.</p> |

| Level | Knowledge | Skills | Competencies |
|-------|--|--|---|
| 8 | <p>Graduates of a Post Graduate Diploma will have:</p> <p>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;</p> <p>knowledge of current research and innovations in professional practice and the impact of these developments on accepted theory and practice;</p> <p>a critical approach to a systematic and coherent body of knowledge and concepts gained from a range of sources.</p> | <p>Graduates of a Post Graduate Diploma will have:</p> <p>problem-solving skills required to develop new knowledge and procedures, and to integrate knowledge from different fields using highly developed cognitive skills;</p> <p>the ability to identify appropriate sources of information or analytical techniques to inform investigations that lead to conclusions and solutions to problems;</p> <p>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;</p> <p>highly developed communication and information technology skills to present, explain and/or critique complex matters.</p> | <p>Graduates of a Post Graduate Diploma will be able to demonstrate:</p> <p>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;</p> <p>self-evaluation and responsibility for contributing to professional practice in complex and sometimes unfamiliar learning contexts;</p> <p>a high standard of ethical behavior in situations involving value conflicts and competing priorities;</p> <p>management of professional activities having a positive influence on others.</p> |

| Level | Knowledge | Skills | Competencies |
|-------|--|--|---|
| 7 | <p>Graduates of a Bachelor Degree will have:</p> <p>a broad body of factual knowledge and an understanding of the underlying theories and principles and boundaries in a field of work or learning;</p> <p>an understanding of related knowledge and theories in other disciplines and, in the case of professional programs, other allied professional fields;</p> <p>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.</p> | <p>Graduates of a Bachelor Degree will have:</p> <p>cognitive skills to critically review, analyze, consolidate and synthesize knowledge as a basis for life-long learning;</p> <p>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;</p> <p>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;</p> <p>effective communication and information technology skills to present and explain complex matters to a range of audiences;</p> <p>interpersonal skills to deal with ethical and professional issues with tact, sensitivity and respect for the views of others.</p> | <p>Graduates of a Bachelor Degree will be able to demonstrate:</p> <p>responsibility for developing new approaches to evaluating relatively complex and unpredictable work procedures and processes;</p> <p>management of technical, supervisory or design processes in unpredictable contexts;</p> <p>self-evaluation and responsibility for contributing to professional practice, and undertake regular professional development and/or further learning;</p> <p>autonomy in technical and supervisory contexts and adopt professional roles with minimal guidance;</p> <p>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;</p> <p>participation in activities to keep up-to-date with developments in the academic or professional field;</p> <p>a sound level of ethical and responsible behavior and provide leadership in academic, professional and community environments.</p> |

| Level | Knowledge | Skills | Competencies |
|-------|--|--|---|
| 6 | <p>Graduates of a Higher Diploma will have:</p> <p>a broad and coherent theoretical and technical knowledge with some depth in one or more specialist areas related to professional practice;</p> <p>familiarity with current issues, trends, and recent applied research and its impact on professional practice;</p> <p>a knowledge of principles, regulations, codes and operating procedures relevant to the professional field.</p> | <p>Graduates of a Higher Diploma will have:</p> <p>technical, creative and conceptual skills appropriate to solving a range of problems associated with a field of work or learning and evaluate alternative solutions;</p> <p>the skill to identify relevant concepts and theories from the subjects studied and apply them outside the context in which they were learned, in both academic and professional contexts;</p> <p>ability to use appropriate investigative tools and strategies associated with the field of work or learning;</p> <p>the relevant mathematical and statistical skills to investigate problems and propose solutions;</p> <p>effective communication and technology skills to present and explain matters of relevance to professional practice.</p> | <p>Graduates of a Higher Diploma will be able to demonstrate:</p> <p>responsibility for developing appropriate approaches for managing work procedures and processes, and resources or learning, within a technical or professional activity;</p> <p>within broad parameters, the ability to provide specialist advice and functions;</p> <p>management of technical, supervisory or design processes in varied and unfamiliar contexts;</p> <p>initiative to function independently and contribute constructively within learning groups;</p> <p>an ability to evaluate own learning and identify learning needs in a familiar and unfamiliar environment;</p> <p>adopt professional roles under guidance.</p> |

| Level | Knowledge | Skills | Competencies |
|-------|---|--|--|
| 5 | <p>Graduates of an Associate Degree/Diploma will have:</p> <p>knowledge of important facts, principles and theories in a field of study and of regulations and operating procedures relevant to a professional field;</p> <p>familiarity with central current developments in professional practice, and recent applied research.</p> | <p>Graduates of an Associate Degree/Diploma will have:</p> <p>technical, creative and conceptual skills, and, with some guidance, be able to solve routine problems and evaluate alternative solutions;</p> <p>a range of specialist cognitive and practical skills to demonstrate a broad understanding of knowledge and ideas with some depth in the discipline;</p> <p>use of appropriate information retrieval tools and strategies associated with the field of work or learning;</p> <p>numeracy skills to apply in an assortment of contexts, which may be interrelated;</p> <p>communication and information technology skills to make a clear and coherent presentation of knowledge and ideas with some intellectual independence.</p> | <p>Graduates of an Associate Degree/Diploma will be able to demonstrate:</p> <p>responsibility for developing appropriate approaches for managing work procedures and processes, and resources or learning, within a technical or professional activity;</p> <p>within broad parameters, the ability to provide specialist advice and functions;</p> <p>management of technical, supervisory or design processes in varied, unpredictable and unfamiliar contexts;</p> <p>initiative to function independently and contribute constructively within teams in pursuit of common objectives;</p> <p>behavior in accordance with sound ethical standards in the context of learning and the work place;</p> <p>evaluation of own learning and identify learning needs in a familiar and unfamiliar environment;</p> <p>adoption of professional roles under guidance.</p> |
| 4 | Secondary School Certificate | | |
| 3 | | | |
| 2 | | | |
| 1 | | | |

The Concept of Credit Hours:

The academic credit provides a basis to measure the workload and 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 achieving the learning outcomes and attaining a qualification. The allocation of credit can be on the basis of the whole program of study and/or the individual courses or modules.

There are two approaches to the allocation of credits but both must engage the teaching team in considering the details of learning activities required to achieve the learning outcomes. A common approach is for institutions to standardize the volume of credit for each course/module (e.g. units of 3 or 5 credits per course). With this pre-determined credit value the teaching staff design the learning activities and appropriate contact time around the ascribed credit value. The alternative approach is for the teaching staff to estimate the workload necessary to achieve a pre-defined set of learning outcomes. This methodology will result in units with many different credit values and may create problems of articulation and student mobility within the context of joint or interdisciplinary programs. Whichever approach is deployed, the allocated credit should not be on the basis of contact time alone as this is only one element of the students' workload.

In the US system, which is adopted by many international 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 two 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 AQF document the US system of credit hours will be used as a reference figure to which other credit awarding systems can be equated.

GENERIC QUALIFICATION TITLES: The AQF is based on the generally accepted definition of a ‘qualification’ as

“a formally recognized certification confirming that, upon successful completion of an academic or professional program, a learner has achieved certain approved learning outcomes as prescribed by an authoritative body according to level and type”.

The AQF indicates the widely accepted international titles associated with 6 of the 10 levels, to cover principal qualifications considered to be in the higher education sector. Having a 10-level framework provides scope to represent a continuum of education and training from levels around high school education or starting levels in the workplace, to doctorates in higher education. The 6 levels within higher education span the range from completion of compulsory secondary education through to the highest level of academic or professional training. The list of titles is not exhaustive and in some national education and training systems there will be additional titles and alternative names for the same level of qualification. Any anomalies can be dealt with in the context of individual nations through accompanying footnotes to the AQF and supplementary publications produced in-country.

Characteristics of Principal Qualifications:

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

Level 4: Entry to Higher Education

The qualifications framework is based on an assumption that students entering higher education will have completed a full program of secondary education and have acquired the knowledge and skill to participate effectively in their chosen field of study in higher education. This assumed background includes 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.

Students may need to complete preparatory or foundation studies designed to ensure that they have the necessary language and study skills, and the academic background, to succeed in post secondary programs. Where foundation studies are required they precede, and are not part of the post secondary education program. Any credits hours that may be allocated for this foundation or preparatory work do not count towards a post secondary education award.

In other cases students may have completed advanced studies beyond the level of the 12th year of school which higher education institutions are willing to accept as equivalent to part of their academic program. This could be through specially designed equivalent programs offered in

cooperation with a higher education institution, or through a partially completed program at another post secondary institution. To avoid requiring students to repeat studies they have already done at an appropriate standard students who have completed programs of this sort could be given advanced standing with credit for equivalent studies when this can be reliably demonstrated.

Level 5. Diploma (Associate)

This qualification requires a minimum of 60 credit hours (US credit hours system – see above definition) normally following two years of full-time study or equivalent in higher education. Diplomas are 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. The term ‘Associate Degree’ is often used for this level of qualification, and may be used more frequently in the academic context rather than the vocational sector.

Level 6. Higher Diploma

This qualification requires a minimum of 90 credit hours normally following three years of full-time study or equivalent in higher education. A Higher Diploma signifies that holders have a broad theoretical and practical knowledge, including knowledge relevant to a particular field of learning or occupation. At this level, qualifications draw on experience of operational interaction in work or study including management of people and projects. The theoretical underpinnings of this qualification should equip students for advanced technical roles in the workplace or for progression to bachelor’s degrees in related disciplines.

Level 7. Bachelor’s Degree

This qualification requires a minimum of 120 credit hours, normally following four academic years of full-time study or equivalent. The duration of four years of study generally signifies what has traditionally been termed an Honours Degree but this designation has largely been dropped in many national systems. 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 apply 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 8. Post Graduate Diploma (Higher Diploma in KSA)

This qualification requires a minimum of 24 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 9. Master's Degree

This qualification requires a minimum of 30 credit hours beyond the bachelor's degree, 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 at least a GPA of 3.0 (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 10. Doctorate Degree

This qualification normally requires 30 credit hours of advanced coursework plus a major thesis (24 credit hours) normally taken over two 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. Professional doctorates based on advanced coursework and major applied thesis or project are normally awarded with the title such as DBA, EdD, DEng, or other field descriptor appropriate for the professional field concerned.

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 of qualifications of ANQAHE member nations. 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 of Post-Secondary Study (Years FT) |
|-------|---|-------------------------|---|
| 10 | Doctorate Degree (PhD, DPhil) | 30 – 60 post-Master | 8 (2 years post-Master degree) |
| 9 | Master’s Degree (MSc/MA/MPhil/Master of...) | 30 post-Bachelor | 6 (2 years post-Bachelor degree) |
| 8 | Post Graduate Diploma (Higher Diploma in KSA) | 24 post-Bachelor (Dip) | 5 |
| | Post Graduate Certificate | 12 post-Bachelor (Cert) | 4.5 |
| 7 | Bachelor’s Degree (BSc/BA/Bachelor of...) | 120 post-Secondary | 4 |
| 6 | Higher Diploma | 90 post-Secondary | 3 |
| 5 | Associate Degree/Diploma | 60 post-Secondary | 2 |
| 4 | K12 School Certificate (HE Entry Level) | N/A | - |
| 3 | - | - | - |
| 2 | - | - | - |
| 1 | - | - | - |

(Note: In some national education systems students may register for PhD studies following successful graduation from a Bachelor’s degree and the time frame for completion may be set at a minimum of 3 years.

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 were 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 frameworks adopted by nations now provide 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 adopted by national authorities is used within institutions to inform the design, delivery and review of its programs of study. Internal Quality Assurance (Institutional Effectiveness) 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.

With the generic information supplied within the framework 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 AQF specifically would be of primary use to the relevant national quality assurance agency in its task of ensuring international parity of standards for its qualifications. It is anticipated that alignment of individual national frameworks with the AQF 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 AQF 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. Some nations within the ANQAHE network (e.g. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) have 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.

The following Table 3 recognizes the parallel sequence of professional qualifications from Level 5 through 10 in the qualifications framework. The classification of programs as either professional or academic cannot be a precise allocation, and must ultimately depend on the defined outcomes and goals for the specific program.

Table 3: Qualification Credit Matrix Including Professional Training Stream

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|

| Level | Principal Qualification | | | US Credits (Minimum) | Minimum Duration of Post-Secondary Study (Years FT) |
|-------|---|--|------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| | Professional | Academic | General | | |
| 10 | Doctorate Degree (Professional Doctorate e.g. EdD, DBA) | Doctorate Degree (PhD, DPhil) | | 30 – 60 post-Master | 8 (2 years post-Master Degree) |
| 9 | Advanced Professional Diplomas and Certificates | *Master's Degree (MSc/MA/MPhil/Master of...) | | 30 post-Bachelor | 6 (2 years post-Bachelor Degree) |
| 8 | Vocational Post Graduate Diploma/ Certificate, | **Post Graduate Diploma/ | | 24 post-Bachelor (Dip) | 5 |
| | | Certificate | | 12 post-Bachelor (Cert) | 4.5 |
| 7 | Applied/Vocational Bachelor Degree | ***Bachelor's Degree (BSc/BA/Bachelor of...) | | 120 post-Secondary | 4 |
| 6 | Higher Diploma (Vocational) | ****Higher Diploma | | 90 post-Secondary | 3 |
| 5 | Diploma (Vocational) | Associate Degree/Diploma | | 60 post-Secondary | 2 |
| 4 | | K12 School Certificate (HE Entry Level) | K12 School Certificate | N/A | - |
| 3 | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | |
| 1 | | | | | |

Notes:

**Master's Degrees can be with or without dissertation/thesis and often differentiated by the title i.e. MSc/MA with a dissertation, and Masters of/in....., often being mainly a taught course program without a dissertation.*

*** The Post Graduate Diplomas and Post Graduate Certificates are both at the same level 8, and are only differentiated in terms of volume and required credit (see also note below on Composite Qualifications).*

**** Level 7 (Level 8 in Australian QF and Level 6 in UK) is considered as the Honors Bachelor's Degree level but in the UAE the Honors classification is no longer designated in the title. In the Australian Framework it should be noted that Graduate Diplomas and Certificates, and Vocational Graduate Diplomas and Certificates are set at this Level (8 in the Australian Framework) as they are opportunities for Bachelor's Degree students to specialize but not taking them to a higher level of outcomes. The positioning of the Post Graduate Certificate in Education is contentious.*

***** In Australia and UK the Bachelor's Degree without Honors (Ordinary/Pass Degree) would be at this level (6) i.e. one level below the Honors Degree (7). Also in the UK the Edexcel Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs) are placed at one level below the Bachelors Honors Degrees. This would be equivalent to Level 6 in the above scheme.*

Composite Qualifications:

In cases where the Principal Qualification has smaller units of learning subsumed within it, these may be recognized and qualifications may receive certification. Examples might be the Post Graduate Certificate subsumed within the Post Graduate Diploma. However, the exit award of Post Graduate Certificate should have its own set of program outcomes. Another example might be the Higher Education Certificate that recognizes 30 credits at Level 5 and is generally achieved within one year of full-time higher education.

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 to develop those special attributes.

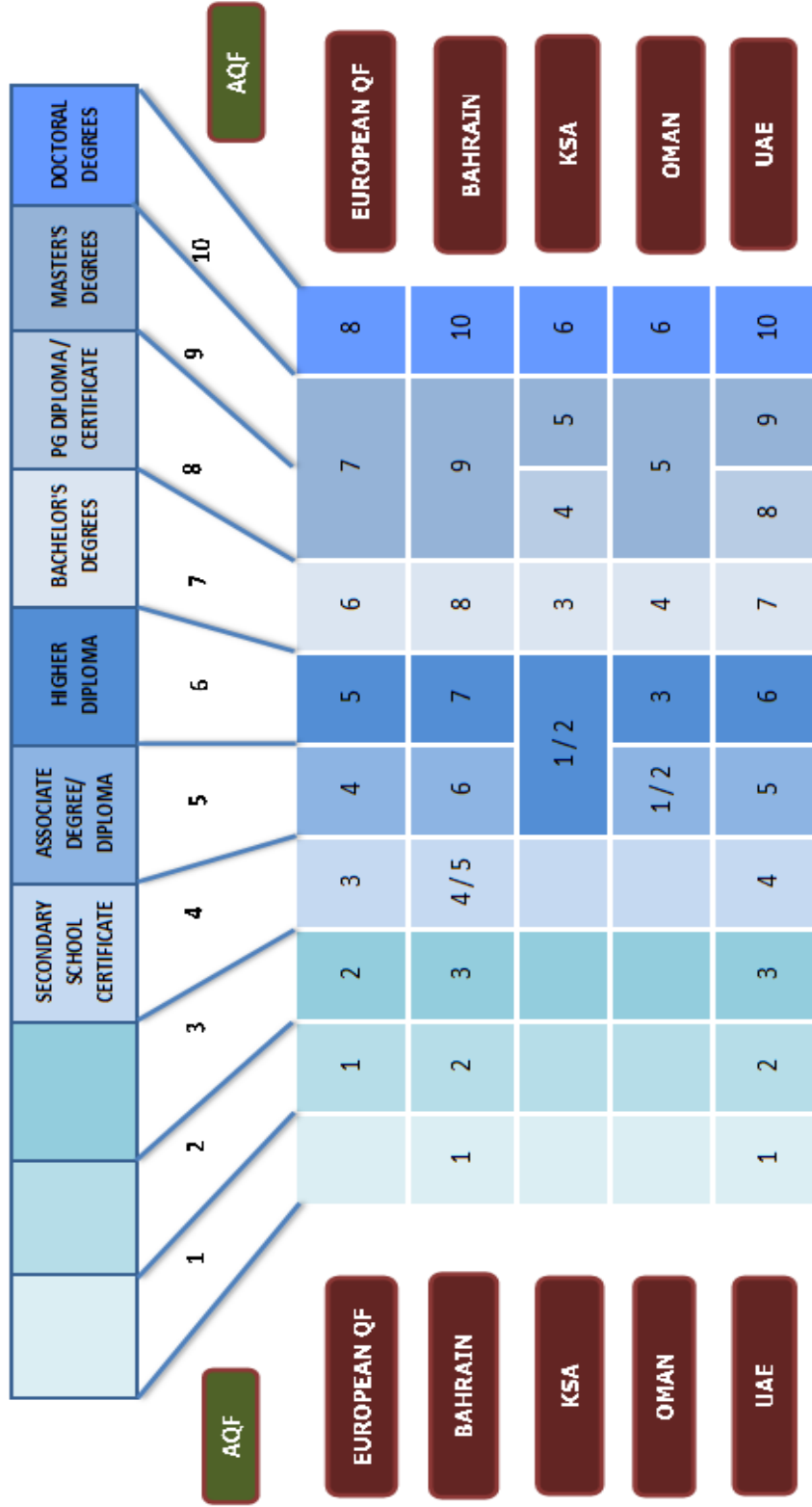
Institutions, with guidance from respective quality assurance agencies, should develop policies and processes to evaluate the background of students who might be considered for advanced standing towards academic awards, and provide counselling and guidance for those who are admitted in this way. They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

Alignment Across Regional Frameworks

Qualifications Frameworks are being developed by individual nations to reflect the internationally accepted qualifications used within the country's higher education system, but also to present the specific ways in which qualifications have become positioned and valued in the eyes of local stakeholders such as employers and local institutions of higher education. The AQF will therefore provide a central reference scale to which other national frameworks can be related and equivalence of qualifications can be determined.

The following chart demonstrates the alignment with the AQF of some of the regional frameworks that are in place or currently under development, and the widely referenced European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

ALIGNMENT OF PROPOSED ARAB QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK WITH OTHER SYSTEMS



QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK LEVELS

