

## Building a Coherent and Coordinated Qualifications System for Kenya



*Cabinet Secretary Dr. Amina Mohamed Meeting with the KNQA Council*

A national qualification framework (NQF) is an instrument used to classify a country's qualifications at different levels. Each level is defined by a set of learning outcomes expected at that level. NQFs are extremely useful tool when carrying out educational and training reforms as they are vital reference points for lifelong learning and comparing qualifications across different levels in the same country and across borders with other countries. The Kenya National

Qualifications Framework (KNQF) is an instrument that has been used to classify Kenya's qualifications at different levels. Each level is defined by a set of learning outcomes expected at that level. The Kenya National qualifications framework (KNQF) has been developed by the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA); in accordance with the Kenya National Qualifications Framework Act No 22 of 2014 under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, although its work cuts across to various other ministries where education and training is carried out.

The Sessional Paper of 2005 and the Policy framework for education of 2012 highlighted the urgent need both to better coordinate and clarify Kenya's qualification system. The current multiplicity of qualifications and awarding bodies (over 300) makes it difficult for employers to understand what competences they can expect the holder of a qualification to possess. The KNQF is intended to address this situation by establishing a common regulatory system for the development, assessment and award of qualifications.

The KNQF is a central register of Institutions that have been accredited to award Qualifications, the qualifications that they award and the learners that are awarded the qualifications. The Framework sets out clear criteria for all qualifications and aims at developing and implementing a harmonized National Accreditation, Quality assurance, assessment and examination systems to ensure that

qualifications awarded meet the national standard. The system is also used to develop and implement national policies on Recognition and equation of local and foreign qualifications (REQs), recognition of prior learning (RPL) and a credible and reliable Credit accumulations and Transfer (CATs) system; in order to create an efficient and effective training and education system that meets the needs and requirements of local and international employers as well as industry.

The KNQF needs to be understood in the context of on-going reforms in the education and training sector of the country. The objectives of the KNQF as set out in the KQF Act No 22 of 2014 are to (a) Establish the Kenya National Qualifications Authority; (b) Establish standards for recognizing qualifications obtained in and outside of Kenya; (c) Develop a system of competence, lifelong learning and attainment of national qualifications; (d) Align the qualifications obtained in Kenya with global benchmarks in order to promote national and transnational mobility of workers; (e) Strengthen quality assurance systems for national qualifications; (f) Support mobility and progression within the education, training and career paths (g) Develop National policies to support Assessment and examinations.

In accordance with this law, no institution may award national qualifications unless it is recognized or accredited in accordance with the KNQF act. The 10-level KNQF is aligned with the East African Community (EAC) qualifications framework. The EAC framework is part of the EAC common market protocol for mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications, to which Kenya and five other countries (Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan) in East Africa are signatories. The KQF acknowledges two separate sub-frameworks within this overarching framework: one for academic and the other for vocational qualifications. However, core generic competences involving the application of knowledge in practical situations are the same for both domains. These core competences include the ability to: (a) Analyze, synthesize and create; (b) Solve problems; (c) Organize, plan and communicate; (d) Use ICT; (e) Work in teams; (f) Engage in developing projects, research and innovations; and (g) Work autonomously.

KQF qualifications incorporate both theoretical knowledge and employable skills. Credits obtained through RPL are considered to determine which level of qualification an individual should work towards. The KNQF contains level descriptors at primary, secondary, tertiary, TVET and university levels. Descriptors are also provided for 'short cycles' linked to the main TVET levels and graded 'sub-cycles' for artisanal skills (See figure below).

KNQF Level	General and Further Education and Training Sub-Framework		+	Notional hours (minimum)
10	Doctorate Degree			3600 after KNQA level 9
9	Master's degree			2400 after KNQA level 7
8	Post-Graduate Diploma	Professional Bachelor's Degree	Professional Master Craft Person	1200 after KNQA level 7 or 6000 after KNQA level 2
7	Bachelor's Degree		Master Crafts Person –I or Management Professional	4800 after KNQA 2 or 2400 after KNQA level 6
6		National Diploma	Master Crafts Person –II Professional Diploma	2400 after level 2 or 1200 after KNQA level 5
5		National Craft Certificate National Vocational Certificate-IV	Master Craft Person III	1200 after KNQA level 2 or 600 after level 4
4		National Vocational Certificate-III/Artisan Certificate	National Skills Certificate –I GTT-I	600 after KNQA level 2 or 300 after level 3
3		National Vocational Certificate-II	National Skills Certificate -II (GTT – II)	300 after KNQA level 2
2	Secondary Certificate	National Vocational Certificate- I	National Skills Certificate -III Government Trade Test (GTT-III)	Depending to skills acquisition
1	Primary Certificate		Basic Skills/Skills for Life	

*Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF) recognizes both academic and vocational Training Skills and creates local comparability and mobility of students*

The KNQA also develops and reviews the interrelationships between national qualifications in consultation with stakeholders, professional bodies, relevant institutions and agencies. The authority maintains a national database of national qualifications and publishes associated manuals, codes and guidelines. Another important function of the KNQA is to advise and support any person, body or institution that is responsible for awarding national qualifications. It sets standards and benchmarks



*Creating a NQF requires a lot of consultation and work to ensure that it meets local training and employment needs*

for qualifications and competences including skills, knowledge, attitudes and values; defines the levels of qualifications and competences; and provides for the recognition of attainment of competences. It also aids linkages on credit transfers and exemptions, as well as vertical and horizontal mobility at all levels; this in turn enables entry to, return to, and

exit from learning programs. Given the importance of the international comparability of qualifications, the authority also establishes standards for harmonization and recognition of national and foreign qualifications and promotes the recognition of national qualifications internationally. It builds confidence in the national qualifications system that contributes to the national economy and provides pathways that support the development and maintenance of flexible access to qualifications. Recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways. One of the key goals of the KNQF is to recognize and assess the outcomes of learning in all settings, whether formal, non-formal or informal, including in the workplace. Several measures are being taken to pursue this goal. Progression pathways from primary to higher education in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector are being promoted through the TVET curriculum development framework (TCDF), which was established in 2010 according to KNQF occupation standards. This is helping to link youth polytechnics (YP) and vocational and industrial training (VIT) qualifications to formal TVET qualifications. The system allows several agencies to offer and award qualifications at various levels to young people and adults; if backed by a law. Universities and tertiary colleges now award a range of distance learning, evening, bridging and recognition of prior learning (RPL) courses; such courses were previously available only at the University of Nairobi. Complementary basic education (COBET) programs (non-formal programs equivalent to formal education) offer children and teenagers who have dropped out of school the opportunity to reintegrate into the formal system.

Three international standards guide the assessment of skills in Kenya: these are the International Labor Organization's ISCO 88 standard, UNESCO's ISCED 97 standard, and the ISO standard 9000 Series on education. In addition, the Kenya national occupation classification standard (KNOCS) guides the exemption and credits transfer system (ECTS), which is promoted through a combination of conventional testing and e-assessment for RPL. The KNQA intends to reform existing institutions for KNQF implementation within the country; with support from other Government agencies. In formal education and training, a national system of certification from primary through secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education already exists. In the informal learning sector, trade tests are used to certify artisans and craftspeople; the KNQF will continue to use these existing systems of certification.



*The Chairman of the KNQA Council Prof Bonaventure Kerre addressing Universities about the KNQF*

The EAC common market protocol for mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications has proposed a 10-level framework designed to accommodate all qualification types and levels in the region. This framework has emerged as a result of an audit of qualifications frameworks in the East African Partner States, which have agreed to harmonize the qualifications frameworks within the EAC. Other

qualifications frameworks that have 10 levels include those of Mauritius, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Australia. An exercise on harmonization of the East African education systems and training curricula is currently in progress.

The Kenya Government sees the KNQF as tool to aid accreditation, quality assurance, teaching and assessment in accordance with established national curriculum development practices and standards. The KNQF has already had several successes. For example, mutual recognition of Kenyan and international qualifications has been greatly helped by the KNQF. Foreign qualifications can now be much more easily assessed, which has resulted in an influx of foreign teachers and other workers to

Kenya. Kenya's development of the KQF highlights the importance of building on existing institutions and structures rather than importing models from outside the country.

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