

Draft Policy Statement – Multiple Qualification Types at the same NQF Level

Background

The Regulations for the NQF of Namibia allows multiple qualification types to be registered at the same NQF Level. NQF Certificates can be registered from NQF Levels 1 to 8. NQF Diplomas can be registered from NQF Levels 5 to 8. Thus, from Levels 5 to 8 there can be both NQF Certificates and NQF Diplomas registered.

NQF Degree qualifications can be registered from Levels 7 to 10. Thus, at Levels 7 and 8 there can be up to three qualification types registered.

The registration of up to three different qualification types at the same NQF Level was identified as being a source of confusion for some users of the NQF in Namibia. This policy statement discusses the rationale for multiple qualification types at the same level and looks at international practices.

Results

A consensus view emerged from stakeholders at the NQF Review Conference (held at Swakopmund in 2013) that the status quo with regard to multiple qualification types being possible at the same NQF Level be retained. This consensus view has been supported.

There is a need, however, for ongoing information and education regarding the structural devices of the NQF (especially the NQF Level system and the NQF Credit system). The ongoing information needs also extend to enhancing understandings of what specific qualifications represent when registered on the NQF.

Policy statement: Qualification types at NQF Levels

- a) The National Qualifications Framework of Namibia (the NQF) shall remain a unified and comprehensive register of quality assured qualifications.
- b) An acknowledged consequence of this is that, at some NQF Levels, qualifications of the same NQF type will be able to be registered. This feature is, however, not unique to the NQF of Namibia. Other national qualification frameworks (both of a unified or tracked – sub-framework - nature) also allow for different qualification types to be registered at the same NQF Level.
- c) Though different qualification types will remain able to be registered, the qualifications cannot be viewed as having the same qualities except that the broad abilities recognised by each qualification (as reflected in the relevant NQF Level Descriptor) shall be of the same demand. Differentiation in the nature of each qualification could arise because of:
 - a. different quantum of learner effort (as reflected as total NQF Credits) required to attain the qualification, and/or
 - b. the spread of these total credits across the structural levels of each qualification, and/or
 - c. entry requirements to programmes of learning leading to each qualification, and/or
 - d. pedagogical and/or assessment methodologies involved in each pathway to attaining each qualification, and/or
 - e. the purpose of each qualification, as evidenced in the specialised outcomes of learning to be attained and the progression from the qualification in academic, professional or career pathways.
- d) The NQF requirement that relevant stakeholders be actively engaged in and supportive of the development of each qualification, its structures and scope, prior to its registration will likely limit the possibility of different qualification types in the same subject area being placed at the same NQF Level.
- e) Certificate and Diploma qualifications registered from NQF Levels 1 to 7 will still be required to carry the respective NQF Level in the title of the qualification.
- f) It is proposed, however, that certificate and diploma qualifications registerable at NQF Level 8 shall, consistent with international practice, be differentiated using the prefix 'postgraduate' in the title of the qualification.

Rationale and Practice

1. The NQF of Namibia is a single, unified and comprehensive system of qualifications in that it encompasses qualifications relevant to all education, training and professional sectors on the same framework. This makes it a little different to other national systems where a national qualification framework can be viewed as related sub-frameworks (sometimes referred to as a 'tracked' system). The NQF in South Africa is an example of such a nationally agreed system made up of sub-frameworks. The NQFs of Mauritius and Malaysia can also be similarly viewed, as can the national systems of qualifications in the United Kingdom where there is a clear separation in qualifications between vocational and higher sectors.
2. It is interesting to note that, even within national systems with sub-frameworks, it is common for there to be more than one qualification type able to be registered at the same NQF Level within the same sub-framework. For example, the Higher Education Sub-Framework in South Africa allows for:
 - NQF Level 6 – Advanced Certificates and Diploma qualifications can be registered
 - NQF Level 7 – Advanced Diplomas and Bachelor degrees can be registered
 - NQF Level 8 – Bachelor degrees and Bachelor Honours degrees can be registered along with Postgraduate diplomas.
3. When the Sub-frameworks in South Africa (especially between Higher Education and the Occupational sector) are mapped against each other to represent the National Qualifications Framework coordinated by the South African Qualifications Authority, the registration of different qualification types at the same NQF Level (the descriptors for which are approved by SAQA) also becomes apparent. For example, at:
 - NQF Level 5 – Higher Certificates and Occupational Certificates (Level 5) can be registered
 - NQF Level 6 – Diplomas, Advanced Certificates and Occupational Certificates (Level 6) can be registered.

Qualification types beyond NQF Level 6 in the Occupational Sub-framework are still under consideration. There are also apparent duplications between the Occupational and the General and Further Education Sub-framework at NQF Levels 1-4. Though certificate qualifications are registerable at each Level, each certificate type is given a distinctive name¹ in the two Sub-frameworks.

¹Discussion of qualification nomenclature in Namibia is provided in a separate Policy Paper emanating from the NQF Review Conference.

4. Though not a system of Sub-frameworks, the New Zealand Qualifications Framework also allows for the registration of different qualification types at the same NQF Level. For example:
 - NQF Level 5 and NQF Level 6 – Certificates and Diplomas are allowed for
 - NQF Level 7 – Bachelor degrees and Graduate Diplomas and Graduate Certificates can be registered
 - NQF Level 8 – Bachelor Honours degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas and Postgraduate Certificates can be registered.
5. Though different qualification types are common at the same Level in many national qualification systems specification requirements agreed for different qualification types create clear distinctions between the types. These distinctions are often created through:
 - specifications of total credits
 - specifications for the quantum of credits at the exit level of the qualification
 - guidelines for the composition and structure of the qualification and/or associated learning pathways
 - guidelines or specifications related to admissions
 - guidelines or specifications related to assessment methodologies to be adopted
 - application of naming conventions (such as Fields, Subfields, Domains, Qualifiers and Designators²).

In general terms, the broad complexity of the learning required for each qualification is highly comparable (it aligns with the relevant Descriptor for each Level). What is different is the breadth of learning required for the qualification to be awarded. Often, the specific learning outcomes at the same broad level of complexity may also be quite distinctive.

6. The NQF Level Descriptors (or similar in systems not referred to as NQFs) represent generic and broad standards of required performance for a qualification type. More specific standards are usually reflected in the course or programme statements that are the pathways towards the award of a qualification. These specific standards, or outcomes of learning, are consistent with the broad, generic standards. For this reason, the specific standards are sometimes referred to (for example, in South Africa) as being *nested* within the broad statements of the Level Descriptors.
7. The Level Descriptors are, because of their inclusive nature, generally expressed in very broad and generic phraseology. They accommodate all qualifications. Thus, they do not distinguish between the different purposes of qualifications.

²Fields, Subfields and Domains are generally more applicable to certificate and diploma qualifications at the lower levels of the NQF in Namibia. In general, Qualifiers and Designators are more applicable to degree qualifications.

8. Broadly, there are three qualification routes: vocational and career; professional; and general and advanced academic. Each broad route and qualifications within each will likely have different interpretations and/or applications of the contextual or conceptual abilities (both cognitive and psychomotive). The appropriate type of qualification will, therefore, be influenced by the purpose for and use of outcomes of each qualification.
9. There are growing realisations in the international qualifications community that programmes and qualifications can give different orientations – general, vocational, academic, professional and career. In a broad way, different qualification types may be more commonly appropriate to different orientations. That is, Certificates and Diplomas are perceived as being more typical in general, vocational and career orientations. Degrees are perceived as being more typical in academic and professional orientations.
10. The international practices thus reflect the diversity of uses for which qualifications can be designed and registered. The practices represent what is possible to be registered. The practices do not suggest, however, that there may be multiple qualification types at the same level for each distinct qualification purpose or, perhaps, in the same cognate subject or career or professional field.
11. The contribution of relevant stakeholders to qualification design (and the design of related courses or programmes) becomes significant in determining the type of qualification required at any Level. In most national qualification systems there is a requirement for stakeholder engagement in design and support (or endorsement) for the registration of a qualification. Essentially, the decision as to what qualification type will be registered at a NQF Level rests with the relevant stakeholders. Thus, it is they who will significantly defuse any potential for confusion with different qualification types at the same Level. In their specific field, the stakeholders will likely not support different qualification types at the same Level.

Draft only

References

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